

3.

MEXICANIDAD

STUDY AND INFLUENCE

A fundamental concern of the artists was the search for *Mexicanidad* ‘Mexicanness.’ Such attempts to articulate a national and cultural identity can be found in many places throughout history. As a group becomes self-conscious, it seeks to define, negatively, its differences from others and, positively, its distinctive characteristics. The goal is to create a compelling and inspiring group image. Many disciplines contribute to this task. Historians provide a supportive background. Poets create a verbal image, like Virgil’s *Aeneid* for Augustine Rome and the Irish poets for an independent nation. Literature, art, and architecture create a French Renaissance, and music, dance, and language revival, a Hawaiian. Outsiders as well as group members can contribute, such as Matthew Arnold’s writings on Celtic literature to the Irish literary revival and the nineteenth-century missionary Lorenzo Lyons’ song *Hawai’i Aloha* to the image of a single Hawaiian nation. Such group images can become bases for action and creation. They can also be controverted and challenged with competing images. Later they can be academically criticized and reevaluated. But the moment when such images are developed is usually one of exciting and energetic cultural revival.

In Mexico, where historical monuments are powerfully present, attempts to form a national identity were almost always based on some vision of the past. This had been done in the Porfiriato and was explicit in the program of Vasconcelos and his artists. The problem was the richness and diversity of the historical and cultural material available: the many Indian groups, the languages, the Conquest period, the Colonial period, Independence, the Porfiriato, the local folk cultures, and the Revolution. Mexicans cultivated sensitivity to such variety—of landscapes, villages, clothes, and so on. Precolumbian art by itself, Tamayo stated, could support diverse tendencies (Mijangos 2000: 134). This problem was authentically native; gringos usually found everything indiscriminately Mexican, confounding neighboring countries in the mix. For Mexicans faced with this abundance, one solution was to narrow the base. The influential scholar and thinker Manuel Gamio (1883–1960) championed the use of Mexican Indian culture as the basis of a new esthetic, but rejected rural folk Christianity and Mexican liturgical art (Zavala 2001: 78 ff., 314 f.). Dr. Atl rejected the Colonial for the Precolumbian (González Mello 1995: 38 f.). Among the artists, the Nationalists privileged folk pottery decoration. Some later art historians have also narrowed the focus. For instance, Olivier Debrouse argues that the painters ultimately rejected folk arts and identified Mexicanidad with indigenes (1984: 23).

But inclusiveness accords better with a putative national art, and such inclusiveness was a goal of Vasconcelos’ overarching movement (Fell 1989: 395). The post-Revolution government was also extending the idea of the Mexican people beyond the middle class of the Porfiriato to “sectores campesinos y marginales” ‘rural and marginal sectors.’¹ This larger idea of the people had to be defined and, if possible, given an image (Pérez Montfort 1994: 139). Since almost all population groups had a visual culture, popular art would play an important role (139–143). The problem was how to be both inclusive and unified, hopefully like the nation being reconstructed after the Revolution. The solution—

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in which Charlot played a major role as scholar and writer—was to find common themes that united the apparent diversity and thus revealed the constant Mexican character:

This assertion would constitute a frightful commonplace if the forms that Mexican art has taken through the centuries were not so varied and at first contact so disparate that the search for, and the detection of, their common spiritual and aesthetic denominator needs a flair and knowledge above the average. In the early twenties, it became the serious sport of the group of early muralists in search of a racial aesthetic tradition.²

This was not the first time that commonalities had been noticed. In his *Les Anciennes Villes du Nouveau Monde*, which Charlot read in France, Désiré Charnay had written that the Catholic *autos-da-fe* “nous rappellent les sacrifices humains des Aztèques avec cette seule différence, que les prêtres catholiques ne dévoraient point leurs victimes” ‘remind us of the human sacrifices of the Aztecs with the sole difference that the Catholic priests do not eat their victims’ (1885: 21; also 51). The Virgin of Guadalupe replaced the Aztec goddess Tonantzin or Toci (1885: 29). (Charlot made both these points in conversation.) Quetzalcoatl had his cross (1885: 65 f.). The Indian was just as fanatic about his new religion as his old (1885: 267), and the earlier suppression of his old religion and the founding of new religious institutions “le plongent dans l’hébètement et le désespoir” ‘plunge him into stupefaction and despair’ (1885: 239). Saturnino Herrán had tried in 1914–1918 to express visually this religious commonality:

Precious to Mexican oneness, this dovetailing of allegedly incompatible cultures has been expressed by Saturnino Herrán in a painting, *Our Gods*, as well known as it is mediocre. It combines in a single composite figure Christ and Coatlicue.³

In his own work, Charlot divided Mexican art history into three periods—Prehispanic, Colonial, and the Mexican Mural Renaissance—and two transitional periods: the sixteenth-century transition from Indian art to a more Western style and the first attempts in the nineteenth century to create a national style, whose “gropings matured into an annunciation of the present period” (*AA* II: 4 ff.). This was the framework in which he wrote his *Mexican Mural Renaissance* (1967):

También, el libro tiene una parte retrospectiva, donde trato yo de averiguar de dónde surgió esta tradición, para poder probar que no se trata de ningún fenómeno irracional. Aquí es la sección en la cual puedo utilizar mis conocimientos arqueológicos, adquiridos estudiando el arte maya. Después sigo con la época colonial, desde los frescos de Actopan, que son del siglo XVI, hasta las témperas de Juan Cordero en el siglo XIX.

‘Also, the book contains a retrospective part in which I try to ascertain where this tradition emerged from, in order to be able to prove that we are not dealing with an irrational phenomenon. Here is the section in which I can use my archeological knowledge, acquired while studying Maya art. Then I follow with the colonial epoch,

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from the Actopan frescoes of the sixteenth century up to the temperas of Juan Cordero in the nineteenth century.’ (Charlot September 14, 1945)

As seen in the last quotation, Charlot often treats his second transition either positively—as an extension of the Colonial—or negatively, as a period of unMexican academism.

Some of the commonalities in these periods were the perennial practices of good art: the Indian love of material “paralleled our love for the lime and sand that is the stuff of fresco”; both for the Indian and the modern muralist, “architecture bosses whatever is painted on the wall” (Winter 1946: 4). Charlot found;

la sensación de volúmenes y planos y, sobre todo, ese juego de proporciones raras (el hombre, el asno, el árbol, por ejemplo), que es una de las características constantes del arte mexicano (September 27, 1925)

‘the sensation of volumes and planes and above all that play of rare proportions (the human being, the donkey, the tree, for example) which is one of the constant characteristics of Mexican art.’

Charlot describes José Guadalupe Posada as:

un artista cuyo intenso interés en lo humano nunca fue en conflicto con un interés también intenso en las abstractas e innumerables combinaciones que sabiamente supo combinar sobre el ilustre tema del blanco y negro (1945–1947)

‘an artist whose intense interest in the human was never in conflict with an interest, also intense, in the abstract and innumerable combinations that he knew how to combine expertly on the illustrious theme of black and white.’

Such commonalities demonstrated the universal art quality of whatever artists practiced them: “An appreciation of our own modern art has helped include within the range of our admiration the abstract and primitive factors that are an undoubted part of *mexicanidad*” (Charlot May 1951: 201). As Charlot stated often, all great artists think alike.

Commonalities even extend to subjects:

I always try to fortify our pride, I would say, in what is being done in Mexico by going back to sources. And of course, the skeletons, the *calaveras*, have quite a backlog: the *Dances of Death* of the Middle Ages. If we go a little further, the Romans, for example, used to have a *calavera*. (Charlot June 9, 1965)

Charlot himself had produced a colored woodblock *Skeleton* in 1916 or 1917: “Later in Mexico, I found the same thing done with Posada’s prints, some of which are hand-colored” (M2). On the other hand, some Mexican characteristics contrasted with other nations. The United States art market preferred rarity in prints; Mexicans, reproducibility (*AA* II: 136 ff.).

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Most important was to discover and articulate a “common spiritual and aesthetic denominator” of the temporal and regional diversity of Mexican art. Charlot summed up his view in his first article on Posada: “Mexico est une terre essentiellement plastique, tragique et surnaturelle” ‘Mexico is a land essentially plastic, tragic, and supernatural.’⁴ Posada showed that the Mexican people “n’ont pas perdu le sens du surnaturel, qu’ils sont très près des créatures spirituelles qui nous entourent et que nous méconnaissions” ‘have not lost the sense of the supernatural, that they are very close to the spiritual creatures that surround us and whom we do not recognize.’ This is true also of the Prehispanic Mexicans: “l’amour de la tragédie, du sang et de la mort, non point par cruauté sinon parce que les races fortes ne peuvent se nourrir que d’émotions fortes” ‘the love of tragedy, of blood, and of death, not at all because of cruelty but because strong races can nourish themselves only with strong emotions.’ Referring to the three main periods, Charlot writes, “the three styles are but masks that the one individual, Mexico, puts on at wish, or discards” (1966 Foreword: ix). Examples are easily found of this “unbroken tradition dating back a few millenniums”: “The skull *motiv* is equally dear to Aztec theogony, to the Christian hermit who fondles it lovingly in his cell, and it still runs riot today in those bitter penny sheets sold in the streets of Mexico on the Day of the Dead” (AA II: 12, 14). Charlot joined the above elements in his appreciation of the artist of “A death god in stone”: “his intelligent feeling for the material used, his peculiarly mathematical emotion, and the tragic core that underlies its ‘abstract’ veneer” (Charlot 1936 Death God: 13). The same qualities can be found in Charlot’s first mural, *The Massacre in the Main Temple* (1922–1923).

Again, Charlot may have been remembering phrases in Charnay, like “le tragique du paysage” ‘the tragedy of the landscape’ in his description of the *cenote* at Chich’en Itza (1885: 300). Similar descriptions can be found later among Mexican artists. Tamayo called Mexico “un país trágico” ‘a tragic country’ and found in Prehispanic art an element of *espanto* ‘terror.’⁵ Such qualities are not dominant in Tamayo’s work, but Charlot’s description fits much great Mexican art only too well.

For Charlot, appreciation of the past carried over into the present. In the Occupation, his study of German art helped him appreciate the Germans he was meeting. In the same way, studying both the ancient and the modern Maya “gives us a knowledge of and a respect for both” (AA II: 38). After studying a mural at Chich’en Itza, Charlot wrote:

here was a scale of four points of view that had been all crowded up in one picture with perfect logic by the Indian artist. I just took my hat off to him and decided he was a great man. (Disney Lectures 5)

Similarly, depreciation of Indian art could inspire negative views of Indian religion, as in Pedro Calderón de la Barca’s *La Aurora en Copacabana*:

Dirá la objeción que ¿cómo
no auía arte donde auía
estatuas de tantos dioses?
Y hallaráse respondida
con saber que eran estatuas

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tan toscas, tan mal pulidas,
tan informes y tan feas...

‘The objection will be made as to how
there could have been no art where there were
statues of so many gods?

The answer will be found
when one knows that the statues were
so rough, so badly polished,
so formless and so ugly...’ (Calderón de la Barca 1994: lines 3020–3026)

Fortunately, native statues are miraculously replaced by a statue of the Virgin in European style with:

de su rostro y de su cuello
la blancura. (lines 4088 f.)

‘the whiteness
of its face and neck.’

Contemporary artists could be best understood against their historical background: “This work of Orozco defines this similarity [to the Italian Renaissance] strikingly, and yet it possesses a specific quality of Toltec and Aztec art as well as a marked Mexican spirituality: inherent tragedy” (Charlot May 1928: 27).

The cultural rootedness of Mexican art does not limit its reach:

Affirmer que la peinture mexicaine est nationaliste n’est pas nier la portée universelle
de l’élément humain qui en est la source et que tous peuvent assimiler avec fruit.

“To assert that Mexican art is nationalistic is in no way to deny the universality of the
human element from which it springs and which is assimilable for all.” (Brenner-
Charlot 1928: 68)

Art differentiates itself through time and space, but all great art emerges from a universal human need of and capacity for expression. In my opinion, cultural rootedness increases universality because—through its training in the means of expression—it enables the artist to draw more deeply from the common human power. Charlot uses the language of sacramental theology when he describes the Mexican skull theme as “but the outward sign of a mood of deeper significance” (*AA* II: 14). A sacrament is a material sign that conveys God’s immaterial grace: a particular artwork is great insofar as it expresses a human emotion. The very diversity of expression reveals the richness of the human being and the universe: “Considering the world today, so cruelly different from the optimistic world of yesteryear, the art of Mexico at its most severe scores a prophetic point...” (July 1940: 443).

This image of Mexicanidad was useful for the artists’ self-understanding and provided points of continuity with the past, which the artists could use to legitimize their work as authentically Mexican. Indeed, their search for Mexicanidad was inextricably involved in the explorations of their own art

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making. Some questions of subject and style—discussed later in more detail—need to be anticipated in this chapter. Any such group image can be criticized as “invention of tradition,” but the continuities in peoples, arts, and practices in Mexico have struck many artists like Edward Weston (1961: 169). Charlot experienced the joining of Precolumbian religion and Christianity in the pilgrimage to the festival of Chalma. He understood the living Maya workers at Chich’en Itza as the descendants of the original pyramid builders.

Although the Maya civilization has disappeared long ago, Maya art is still a living reality for Maya people. Hunters in the bush still make offerings of deer at the foot of carved stelae and burn copal in wooden spoons.

As to the well-nigh atheism of the priesthood and their love of astronomical calculation, I once got a striking reflex of it through an exchange of remarks between Yucatecan workmen; they were masons with antique Maya profiles, busy restoring the columns of one of their fallen temples. Such people in such a setting had erased from my mind the centuries elapsed since the Spanish Conquest, and only as an afterthought did I marvel at what they said.

“How many gods are there?” one asked.

And swiftly the answer came: “How many gods? Ask this to the Moon.” (Charlot 1928 *Maya Esthetic*)

Charlot lived with Luz Jiménez’ family in Milpa Alta and felt that what he learned from them was unique:

So, it’s simply, I would say, as far as is possible with the differences of race, perhaps, to an extent, and background, being part of the family. That was a tremendous thing for me. It gave me an inkling, an inside view, of Indian Mexico that I would certainly never have had with even all the studies I could make of archeology, ethnology, or language, which I did at the Museum of Ethnology. (Interview August 7, 1971)

It’s not any question of teaching. It’s just a question of seeing things from the inside, and I suppose being able in my paintings to give somewhat of that inside view rather than an outside view of Indian life and Indian thought. (Interview August 7, 1971)

To this first-hand experience and artistic sensibility, Charlot added a linguist’s study of Náhuatl and an historian’s research. For Charlot, Mexican culture was a discovery, not an invention: “I have lived with Indians myself and I know very well that they have had that great culture, that they are still part of that great culture.”⁶

Finally, as will be discussed below, historical art continuity had a sociological and political dimension: the recognition of the Mexican Indian. In folk arts, the idea of the anonymity of the folk artist enabled people to “rendir homenaje a los objetos de arte y seguir despreciando al artista autor de ellos” ‘render homage to the objects of art while continuing to depreciate the artist, the author of those objects’ (Charlot November–December 1926). In Precolumbian studies, ruins had been dated too early in

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order to deny a continuity with living Indians (Snead 2001: 128–131). The reconnection of Precolumbian civilization with the descendants of its creators supported a more positive view of living Indians (Snead 2001: 162). The new group of archeologists were rectifying the received views in ways that were important for Charlot. Charlot confused Gamio with Alfonso Caso, but the two did agree on the point being made:

Caso was a very wonderful fellow, and he was doing at the time a big thing, I think in three volumes, on Teotihuacán, and it was nearly an idea of genius to ask Goitia to do pictures of contemporary Teotihuacán without strings attached. He just knew that Goitia was living so close to the people himself that what he would do would have ethnological value, and those things that Goitia did are really of great worth. The book is both archeological and ethnological, and goes from Prehispanic Teotihuacán to today. It was a very important book to suggest to people that they shouldn't think of past or present, but try to follow in time what happens to people as people, something that I greatly admire. (Charlot Interview June 12, 1971)

Charlot's work must be seen in this context: Mexican art was created by Mexicans, and that art could lead to a greater understanding and appreciation of Mexican Indians themselves. This attitude was widely shared among the artists and the archeologists:

There was definitely an affinity, shall we say—I told you that already—between the group of archeologists and the group of muralists. It was easier to talk with them, and I think they understood better what we were doing than any other group. (Interview June 12, 1971)

Charlot's art appreciation formed his attitude towards the policy question—debated since Colonial times until today—of whether the particular Indian cultures should be maintained or whether the culturally diverse Indians should be assimilated into a modernizing, *mestizo* culture, for their own sakes as well as for national unity.⁷ Opponents in the debate were often called, respectively, *Indigenistas* or *Hispanistas*.⁸ The former appreciated the Indians as they were and judged amelioration schemes by native criteria. The latter most often considered the contemporary Indians inferiors in need of radical acculturation (e.g., Rutherford 1971: 222–235). The Revolution, in which Indians had played a prominent part and expected to be rewarded, made the debate practical and urgent.⁹

Gamio used a multi-disciplinary approach—*integralidad* 'integrality'—to achieve a holistic view of an area that revealed its cultural continuity from Precolumbian times, thus supporting an attitude of respect for its contemporary Indian inhabitants and an argument for supporting their needs. Others adopted sometimes surprising positions. As Vasconcelos started his cultural project, he had *indigenista* sympathies, but he moved towards an extreme, assimilationist Hispanism.¹⁰ Orozco was "Creole and rabidly anti-Indian."¹¹ His famous 1926 fresco *Cortès and Malinche* is frank: the Spanish conqueror kills the man and takes the woman, initiating Mexican *mestizo* culture. Charlot was predictably *indigenista*: Mexican cultural continuities and commonalities were strong enough to include variations. Indeed, he argued that the different kinds of Mexican art had to be studied together: he criticized those who "fail to

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indicate how both [Indian and Colonial] cohabit in their common heir, the Mexican of today" (AA II: 73).

Characteristically, Charlot pushed further into the positive:

la belleza del indígena, su equilibrio mental, su poder contemplativo; tal parece que al lado del "redimir al indio" de los políticos, Mérida nos propone, en correspondencia, la redención del blanco por el indio. (1928 "Carlos Mérida")

'the beauty of the indigenous, its mental balance, its contemplative power; thus it appears that besides the politicians' "redeeming the Indian," Mérida proposes to us, in correspondence, the redemption of the white by the Indian.'

"To bellowing politicians whose platform is to civilize the native, the artist offers an alternative of equally instant necessity, a redemption of the white man by the Indian, who can well teach him physical and moral nobility, and over all contemplative peace." (AA II: 350)

Charlot recalled that Mérida and others distrusted the *Indianismo* of politicians (January 28, 1971; December 5, 1971).

Although in this chapter I will focus on Charlot's writings on art, he was also studying Mexican languages and literature (see my discussion in Chapter 1.). He savored Mexican Spanish and wanted to write on the language of street literature. As it was, he collected and translated many examples for his art studies. He seems to have been widely read in Mexican literature. At various times, he mentioned Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (whom he quoted) and Mariano Azuela. He created an original print as a cover for José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi's *El Periquillo Sarniento* (M456) and pen and ink drawings for Gregorio López y Fuentes' *El Indio* (1940).

Charlot had started studying Náhuatl in France and continued with Luz Jiménez in Mexico, whose Milpa Alta dialect was considered exceptionally pure.¹² Luz would eventually be recognized as one of the most important modern Náhuatl authors (Farfán Caudillo 2008: 221227). In the 1930s, Charlot worked with Robert Barlow on classical Náhuatl (A. de León-Portilla 1988: 179). When Charlot learned a language, he always started reading the literature, and his readings in Náhuatl can be traced in part. He did mention Indian sources on the Conquest and knew Sahagún.¹³ He planned to publish a collection of Náhuatl materials on Our Lady of Guadalupe and collected several books for that purpose (he mentioned to me the good style of one). Zantwijk emphasizes the indispensability of language in understanding Aztec philosophy and religion: "Conocimiento del náhuatl evidentemente es una condición necesaria para la transmisión de muchos pensamientos filosóficos autóctonos" 'Knowledge of Náhuatl is obviously a necessary condition for the transmission of many indigenous philosophical thoughts' (1960: 50; also 49 f., 55, 60, 79). Finally, at Chich'en Itza, Charlot learned some Maya, which he was able to use in his art studies (Chapter 9). In Hawai'i, study of the language was essential to his study of the culture.

My discussions in Volume 1 and below permit an appreciation of Charlot's general view. There are different cultures with their esthetics, but they rest on the same human basis, which makes cross-cultural sympathy possible. As Charlot said of his attitude towards the Germans during the Occupation,

an appreciation of a people's art leads to an appreciation of the people. That is, art helps us feel our common humanity, enables us to reach a depth of human contact.

3.1. CHARLOT'S PERSONAL SEARCH FOR MEXICANIDAD

For Charlot, the general search for Mexicanidad was also a particular search for himself as a Mexican artist: "amalgamated with love to the Mexican school, exploring Mexican beauty" (Brenner January 22, 1928). As I have already discussed, Charlot felt that art was created from the very identity of the artist (Volume 1, Chapter 8, section 8.3.2). One could not be a religious artist without being religious. One could not be a good artist without being good. Thus if Charlot were to be, not a French, but a Mexican artist—"if my mural work was to shoot valid roots in this new soil"—he had to be "literally born again" (Charlot March 8, 1972): "style is a thing of his bones, of his craft and of his birth" (*AA I*: 64). He had to purge his art of much he had learned in Europe and absorb as much as he could of his new home, Mexico. Charlot's racial background—Mexican-Spanish and Aztec—undoubtedly influenced his thinking: he was indeed part Mexican and, like a normal Frenchman, believed in atavisms.¹⁴ Full blooded Indians like Guerrero and Mérida had only to close their eyes to contact their Mexicanidad. Charlot had to search among his various heritages to contact his own.

At the time in the same building, there was the collection of paintings, and I was extremely interested in the old, colonial paintings in Mexico. I've always been looking for roots—go and search in the past—and much of my time was either with the Museum of Archeology or with the museum of paintings in San Carlos, so that I was known, certainly, in the corridors of the school. (Interview June 12, 1971)

Asked whether he had studied Mexican folk arts on his first trip to Mexico, Charlot answered:

I don't think directly. I think the main thing was really Prehispanic and, of course, just seeing Mexico itself and the people themselves and dipping again in what I consider some of my racial roots. But there was no organized thing. (Interview May 14, 1971)

Charlot's own Aztec family background, he felt, was an advantage in studying Aztec, but not necessarily other Indian arts:

the Aztec and the Mayan are nearly antithetical. It gave me another facet, so to speak, of Indian culture. The Aztec is a little more complicated because I always come back to Gauguin and his Peruvian blood. I mean, I had the Aztec in me besides having it around me. The Maya was more of a discovery, and of course, I had to dig into it very strongly by copying hundreds of *bas-reliefs*, getting at least the sound of the language, befriending, again, some of those people who came from the village of Pisté, which was rather a purely indigenous village. (Interview May 18, 1971)

Charlot would not use the same language of his life and work in Hawai'i. Mérida said acutely:

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a través de los desarrollos de su obra, él se ha manifestado siempre una tendencia en él a rebuscar cosas perdidas, cosas idas que traen a cuento sus hilos mexicanos, sus hilos que lo atan a nuestro mundo latinoamericano. (Interview 1971)

‘across the developments of his work, he always revealed an inner tendency to keep searching for lost things, distant things that brought up his Mexican ties, his ties that bound him to our Latin American world.’

As a young man, Charlot had undergone changes and chosen between options. At one time, he thought of himself as a Breton-type polychrome sculptor. At another, he considered living the life of a poet. He tried unsuccessfully to be an accountant and a businessman and was conscripted into the army where he succeeded in being promoted to officer. To all these changes and options, Charlot brought his characteristic intensity. When he failed—accounting and business—he failed badly. Success revealed a genuine compatibility with the task.

Charlot’s willed change from a French artist to a Mexican one was the most radical of his life. In his mind, he was not adding Mexicanness to Frenchness; he was rejecting his French artistic identity in order to create his Mexican. He was leaving his French home forever and settling in a new, permanent home. This rejection of an old identity and assumption of a new reveals, I argue, how traumatic the move to Mexico was for Charlot, perhaps more than he consciously realized and certainly more than he ever expressed. Evidence of this is his stylistic rejection of his *Chemin de Croix*, which the Mexicans themselves found inspiring. To the end of his life, he felt that work an esthetic failure. Charlot’s first large composition in Mexico, *La Théologie Régulatrice des Arts*, he scraped off the canvas unfinished. These last works of his French period were rejected for the new esthetic he was already creating. But perhaps Charlot also felt too much pain in holding on to them.

Charlot had a very strong will and was trained by his religion to use it to dominate his emotions. In his biggest life changes, I suspect he was doing violence to himself. For instance, when he decided to marry my mother, he destroyed almost all of his previous correspondence. But changes of nationality after Mexico were less dramatic and emotional. In the United States, he spelled my sister’s name *Ann* instead of *Anne*—and mine *John* instead of *Jean*—although they were family names. When as a child I asked him why, he said we were the American generation.¹⁵ Charlot was also happy with any continuities we children maintained, like calling our schoolbags by the Mexican word *mochilas*.

Charlot was not the only person to identify so deeply with Mexico. He admired Maximilian’s success:

Started perhaps as a political expedient, his *Mexicanismo* grew to be so sincere as to reach heroism. After being drilled by the shots of the firing squad and before receiving the *coup de grâce*, the mortally-wounded Habsburg managed to mutter his last word in Spanish—“Hombres!”¹⁶

The trajectory of Ramón María del Valle Inclán curiously resembles Charlot’s own (Lima 1988: 23–29). Arriving in Mexico in 1892, he was greatly impressed by his experience of Veracruz. Moving to Mexico

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City to work as a writer, “Valle began to find his identity in Mexico” (24). He developed his special style in Mexico: “It was here that I began to find my true path, that is, the literary one,” finding “in Mexico the ideal setting for his imagination” (25). He recalled an ancestor who had come to Mexico: “I sought to lose myself as he had in the vastness of the ancient Aztec empire.” He visited villages to experience the past and was “Impressed by the mystic quality” (27). He returned to Spain in 1893, having felt strongly the impact of Mexico. Later, he saw the beginnings of the mural movement and wanted the Spanish government to initiate one itself (Vasconcelos 1982 *Memorias* 2: 167). Others, despite a close relationship to Mexico, did not feel an identification. Angelina Beloff wrote to Charlot on October 20, 1947, when he was encouraging her to apply for a Guggenheim:

je ne suis pas mexicaine. Ma nationalité [*sic*] par naturalisation est française et je me considère comme telle, car j’ai reçu en France une grande part de ma vie consciente et émotive. En réalité je me suis formée en France et ne croyais pas quitter ce pays, qui m’est très cher. Aucun intérêt matériel ne me guidait lorsque j’ai pris la décision de changer de nationalité [*sic*]. Mon voyage pour le Mexique devait durer 6 mois et cela n’a pas dépendu de moi ne pas avoir pu rentrer en France après 6 mois. Je ne suis pas ingrate et reconnais tout ce que le Mexique m’a donné généreusement, mais je ne peux pas devenir Mexicaine car je ne peux pas changer de nationalité [*sic*] comme de chemise quelque avantage que je puisse obtenir par ce changement.

‘I am not Mexican. My nationality by naturalization is French, and I consider myself such because I received in France a great part of my conscious and emotional life. In reality, I formed myself in France and did not think of leaving that land, which is dear to me. No material interest guided me when I took the decision to change nationality. My voyage to Mexico was supposed to last six months, and it wasn’t due to me that I was unable to return to France after six months. I am not ungrateful and recognize all that Mexico has given me generously, but I cannot become Mexican because I cannot change nationality like a shirt, whatever advantage I could obtain from that change.’

From the other side, the printmaker Emilio Amero worked for years in the United States and began to feel a double identity (Zuñiga 2008: 34 f.).

Charlot felt a genuine affinity with Mexico. In his life and especially in the war, he had felt the tragedy he found in Mexican culture and history. When old, he stated:

the same situation of precarious, we could say, survival in relation to the other world. That may be the deepest key perhaps to the representations I make...the precariousness of human life as Westerners understand it, that life in our body and so on, gives a sense of humility and a sense of frailty to people. (Interview April 24, 1978)

His *Chemin de Croix* was recognized by his Mexican colleagues as a model for their own expression of the Revolution.

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As a witty Frenchman, Charlot appreciated the grim Mexican humor: arresting communists at a meeting on the charge that they were assisting at a religious ceremony, inviting Manuel Hernández Galván's family to identify his body after he had been autopsied, Pancho Villa crying just before he shot people, and other stories too distressing to repeat.¹⁷ Charlot laughed when Zalce wrote him that the director of the Museo de Chapultepec told him that he wanted no more of those *muertitos* 'little dead ones' (June 24, 1970). This appreciation of a specific Mexican humor helped Charlot understand Mexican art. He wrote of Posada:

algo como un tribunal de justicia adonde el pueblo decreta el castigo de sus opresores. Holbein, en el Viejo Continente, hizo suya la voz popular con una seriedad algo germánica. Posada, con igual hondura, pero con una sonrisa de malicia... (1923 "Posada Grabador")

El relato cómico es más bien aquí algo excepcional y su buen humor se nos antoja cruel, un grotesco despiadado con matices de indignación.

esta risa feroz

'something like a tribunal of justice where the people decrees the punishment of its oppressors. Holbein, in the Old Continent, assumed the popular voice with a somewhat Germanic seriousness. Posada, with equal depth, but with a smile of malice...

'The comic narrative is also here something exceptional and his good humor feels cruel to us, a grotesque pitilessness with shades of indignation.

'that ferocious laugh'

On the other side, Mexicans appreciated Charlot's French humor. Zalce described it:

In 1931, Jean was like he is now: serene, quiet, "*equanime*." But with a very nice sense of humor, very sharp. He could be philosophical and then say something very sarcastic. But one didn't expect it because he was so quiet. He speaks so soft and slow, and suddenly he said terrible things. I liked that. Then he continues to be very serious. The objects of his humor were commands, pretentious people.¹⁸

When I asked Zalce whether Charlot was Mexican, he replied:

In some ways. He was like me. He didn't look very Mexican, but there was something in his character. We're both *mestizo*, mixed. In those days, people used more the racial (Tamayo was a pure Indian, and so on). But I was completely out because I looked like a Spaniard.

Jean had an *accent*. But it's difficult to say what's Mexican. Pablo Higgins is blond and has the misfortune of having such a non-Mexican name as *Higgins*. But if you live with him, you see he's very Mexican. All his friends are Mexican. I never thought of him as a foreigner. Between artists, nationality doesn't mean anything.

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The important thing is what the people *do*. Higgins did a lot for Mexico. Many still think of Jean as Mexican, as a pioneer in the Mexican movement.¹⁹

I noticed in 1971 that when my father conversed with Mérida in Spanish, he spoke more loudly, emphatically, and vigorously. He became more haptic, giving *abrazos* and standing with his arms around his friend. Most discussions of Mexicanidad conclude with the admission that there are “many Mexicos.”

For Charlot, the proof of his Mexicanness lay in the character of his art:

However, my paintings themselves speak perhaps more strongly than even those facts in favor of my being classified with the Mexican school of painting, whatever my nationality. (Quoted in Jewell 1930)

His study of Mexico had the purpose of inspiring his own Mexican art. All his colleagues would be using their study of Mexican art as a basis for their own work. Charlot added the purpose of finding his personal identity. Exploring Mexican images helped him contact cultural emotions and views. As in France (Volume 1, Chapters 3, 5), copying and depicting artworks was not only a part of Classical training but enabled Charlot to penetrate the mind of the artist:

you go to the Louvre or to the Metropolitan Museum and you copy the Old Masters. You don't pretend that you are an Old Master. But by repeating the lines, the proportions, and so on, you gather something that the guys who did the things—it may be Titian, it may be Poussin, it may be the old Hawaiian—had I wouldn't say in mind, but the very rhythm, the very rhythm of their hand, of their wrist, and so on, is repeated as you copy the petroglyphs.

If you copy the petroglyph in the same sense of respect, if you want, that you copy a Poussin, you gather something—maybe through the very physical motions in the tracing, for example, that I made of many petroglyphs—of what the old Hawaiians were about, of the old artists, if you want to call it that, of Hawai'i were about, were doing.²⁰ (Interview March 26, 1978)

This is the context in which Charlot's many archeological copies and depictions of folk arts can be understood, as discussed below.

Charlot used the commonalities discovered in his study as a criterion of his success in achieving Mexicanidad in his own work:

At times the search proved rewarding, as when a painter-turned-archeologist would unearth fragments of murals buried for centuries and find between them and his own still-fresh frescoes reassuring similarities. (*AA* II: 3; also 135)

The search was not simple but a multidimensional exploration, as Charlot explained in an interview with me:

JPC:

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You said that it took a struggle and a bit of time for you to get rid of your classical ideals, if you want, and sort of look fresh at the Indian body and work out an Indian esthetic, which then coincided with the actual one that was in the Indian's head. When do you think you achieved it? Do you think you achieved it before that series of nudes of Luz?

JC:

Well, I haven't achieved it yet. That is, it's sort of a monumental idea. And given that it is not in anatomical terms, that idea of Indian esthetic doesn't remain inside or skin-deep with the form of a body but pervades, or should pervade, everything around. And it is such a sort of nearly encyclopedic affair that I have been working for it, well, pretty much a lifetime, and I still feel that I could work for it another lifetime and not get to the end of it. It's not a question of saying, "Eureka!" It's just a question of following and finding in things—say the shape of trees or the ears of a mule or any such thing—the same esthetic qualities which I felt are part of the Indian world. (Interview August 7, 1971)

As Charlot achieved an esthetic point, he was happy when a discovery validated it. An important example was the statuette of a *Tortillera* 'Tortilla Maker' that was given to him by Panduro VII, the living master of a famous potter family in San Pedro Tlaquepaque:

Well, I think it was a sort of a security for me that those series of drawings and woodcuts of the nude had been on the right line, because that little statue is, of course, a sort of a praise of the feminine body, but in terms that certainly are untouched by Greek and Roman classical beauty. Between the bulk, for example, of the body and the limbs that are represented not for the muscle formation but for the rhythm of the work, and the relation of the small head on the large body, all those things are for me a sort of a pleasant reminder that what I had found on my own was something that also existed in the head of the Indian artist, of the Indian potter.²¹

Charlot makes clear that he had already reached this design, and the statuette confirmed it rather than inspiring it. I myself had such an experience when I saw in the ruins of Mayapán the recently revealed mural of a Maya Snake Dance: masked dancers holding snakes in their mouths. The Maya muralist had geometrized the form of the writhing snake as  [a crossbar needs to be added at the top], just as Charlot had done in his 1951 fresco *Hopi Snake Dance*.²²

An influential Precolumbian artwork was a two-figure ceramic statuette of a woman delousing another's hair:

The subject is the same as the great Tarascan terracotta I had of two women, one delousing the other one. They didn't allow me to take it out of Mexico, so I exchanged it with Diego Rivera for another beautiful one (a man using a sling that I have here). But that first group is one of the things that really formed me.²³

I.2 Mexicanidad: Study and Influence 15.

As should be clear from the above discussion, neither Charlot nor the other artists wanted simply to copy earlier artworks and styles. Indeed, Charlot felt that this was impossible. The style of one epoch cannot be reproduced in another. He was always amazed that Renaissance artists thought they were returning to classical art and the English Preraphaelites thought they were returning to the Italian ones. The differences are so clear today. Simple reproduction is impossible for the authentic artist. The purpose of copying was to understand better the work of another artist, which enabled the copier to individuate himself from the object of his study (compare Siqueiros 1996: 182).

The above considerations dominate Charlot's work in Mexico. He did suffer in the artistic move from France. On the other hand, he was impelled to deepen his art down to its cross-cultural foundations. That is, by leaving much of what was specifically French, he was able to reach his universal compositional base in geometry.

In my opinion, the question of Charlot's Mexicanness is ultimately not one of either-or, although he himself saw it thus at the time. Charlot remained visibly an outsider, a Frenchman. But he entered more than most foreigners ever have into Mexican life and culture, and this was due—I agree with him—to his family connections with that country and the sympathy and understanding they inspired. I argue that Charlot is best understood as a true insider-outsider, and this rare perspective helps explain his unique role—his peculiar power and value—in the Mexican movement. Charlot saw Atget as occupying such a position: “it is a conviction with me that Atget was English, or half-English, and I have him linked with Meryon as a kind of displaced person.”²⁴

Charlot's idea of being reborn as a Mexican artist is connected to his participation in the general interest of the time in children's art.²⁵ Indeed, children's art along with other non-Western-traditional forms and genres was being used as an aid in breaking out of a conventional mindset, which fit Charlot's purpose. Charlot did discuss children's art in this perspective:

arte no vale nada sin el espíritu vital. El artista, buscando este espíritu de vida, se despoja de todos los prejuicios anteriormente adquiridos, pues habiendo partido de una pista falsa quiere renacer, ser niño de nuevo. (July 23, 1925)

‘art is worth nothing without the vital spirit. The artist, seeking this spirit of life, divests himself of all his previously acquired prejudices, then, having left the false path, wants to be reborn, to be a child anew.’

Similarly, Charlot can praise Lola Cueto for “este espíritu infantil y sabio, inocente e irónico, cínico y amoroso de Guignol” ‘this infantile and knowing spirit, innocent and ironical, cynical and loving of the Guignol’ (1947 “Aguatintas”).

Charlot's more technical analysis of children's art differs somewhat from the above view (John Charlot Volume 1, Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1. “Charlot's View of Children's Art”). Children have “*une excellente idée du beau*” ‘an excellent idea of the beautiful,’ have undulled sensations, unprejudiced views, a good sense of materials, and see beauty everywhere. However, children see objects in isolation and lack the life experience necessary to relate them together in an over-all view:

Pour moi, il me semble que si l'innocence technique pouvait être jointe à une expérience relativement longue de la vie qui communique à chaque objet, et spécialement aux êtres, la plus-value d'une longue chaîne de souvenirs et permet d'établir entre eux de fructueuses relations et comparaisons, la perfection serait bien près d'être atteinte.

'For me, it seems that if the technical innocence could be joined to a relatively long experience of life, which communicates to each object, and especially living beings, the extra-value of a long chain of memories and permits one to establish between them fruitful relations and comparisons, perfection would be very near to being attained.'

When Charlot describes being born again as a Mexican artist, he is speaking more emotionally than when he analyses children's art in his articles on the subject. In the former perspective, children's art is more than "technical innocence." Charlot is applying the religious language of rebirth to the emptying of the mind necessary before authentic artistic creation. However, his own art experience as a child was broader than either of those views, as seen in my Volume 1. Charlot never lost the ability to project himself back into his childhood and call up the sensations and emotions he felt at the time. The child's fresh look, unprejudiced view, and impression of universal beauty were basic to Charlot throughout his life and must have been especially important as he was receiving his first impressions—and having his first experiences—of Mexico.

3.2. CHARLOT AS TEACHER

The outreach of the Mexicans to non-Western art was part of a general movement to revitalize Western art through new sources: indigenous and primitive arts, children's art, automatic art, art of the insane, and so on. Such widely divergent practices and views would loosen the bonds of tradition and suggest innovation (Debroise 1984: 34). Moreover, the war had awakened an interest in the differences between nations and their arts. What was real French art as opposed to German? Such discussions were an influence on postwar avant-garde Classicism. The Mexicans who had studied and worked in Europe were aware of these trends, as was Charlot (Volume 1). Manifestoes and the correspondence of the artists and Vasconcelos demonstrate their agreement on the need to create a contemporary national art based on the Mexican art of the past. Rivera returned to Mexico in July 1921, and proclaimed his intention to inaugurate a new period in his work by studying folk art and ruins. At this time, Precolumbian and even folk arts were a new subject for him.²⁶ A good deal of preparatory study was necessary, and Charlot would be a leader in the effort as seen in his writings and in reports by his colleagues.

In the United States, Charlot would prove to be a good teacher, but he did not remember teaching in Mexico and laughed at the idea of all the artists sitting down in rows like students: "And as far as I know, I didn't go into any theoretical discussions of art. I've never done it in my life unless it was as a professor speaking to students. So I don't know that there was very much going on."²⁷ He could not understand how the Paris school painters spent so much time talking: "So it was just young artists getting together; nothing I think like what was going on in Paris where Picasso and Braque and all those people

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seemed to have been passing all their lives talking to each other. I can't believe it, because at the same time they were working very hard" (Interview May 18, 1971). He felt he himself could not have created so much art if he had spent his time in discussion. He thought it was funny when I told him the New York Abstract Expressionists had discussed, "When is a painting finished?" (June 19, 1971). In a talk, he compared that problem to a *New Yorker* cartoon: a woman leans out a tenement window and asks her neighbor, "How can you tell when sauerkraut goes bad?"

Charlot credited Rivera with providing instructive conversation and even lectures on various aspects of art.²⁸

Rivera, when he came, was much more, we could say, garrulous than I was. He liked to talk, had wonderful, long conversations, café style or Parisian-café style, with the younger painters. He was very desirous to give of his own, to give of his own knowledge. And in Paris, he really had been an absolute part of the Cubist movement. You find him in the French books on early Cubism as a very important part, so that he had been a colleague with, perhaps not Picasso and Braque, but with Juan Gris, Metzinger, and so on, or poets like Apollinaire. (Interview June 12, 1971)

Rivera would go and visit. He was very faithful in that sense, visiting all the places where there was any art being done, and he wrote—and I think I quoted a thing in my book—he wrote that Coyoacán was such a lovely place and so isolated from the world that he felt he was in an asylum. He didn't quite say "insane asylum," but an asylum, and really for him it must have been a fantastic sight, coming back from the aesthetic, epic battles of Cubism, to find people who were working so hard on the revolution of art that would result in Impressionism. He was very nice about it and little by little somehow introduced in either formal lectures—and people would go to his lectures—or just in conversation and showing photographs and so on, what at least the art in Paris was at the time, which came as a complete revelation to people.²⁹

Emily Edwards remembered Rivera's lectures as inspiring, and raucous memories were recorded of Rivera's *peyote* or marijuana lecture for the artists at the Amphitheatre.³⁰ Charlot recalled:

"For a while, Diego Rivera experimented with the Mexican equivalent of opium, peyote, or to give it its proper native name, **peyotl**.

While the jag lasted, evenings he would wax eloquent, describing with what dynamic draftsmanship, what dazzling colors, he had painted that day.

A visit to his mural work the next morning disclosed none of the qualities he attributed to his spiked achievements.

Part of the magical frescoes had to be destroyed and repainted under normal conditions.

The artist is also an artisan, one of a very special sort.

The art object is crafted by hand and should be built to last. As artisan, the artist must have able hands and steady fingers. (August 16, 1967)

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In one set of lectures, Charlot translated for Rivera, with mixed results, as Edwards remembered: “Once, I remember Diego was perfectly furious with Jean. Diego thought he didn’t translate accurately, that he omitted something about an ancient god banned by the Catholic Church. Jean is a Frenchman, but he speaks Spanish very well” (Fenstermaker 1980). At times, Charlot seems to have had a hard time getting a word in: Siqueiros remembered an early group discussion on fresco with Charlot “interrumpido constantemente por Rivera” ‘constantly interrupted by Rivera’ (1977: 188). On one occasion, Charlot was not invited to the class party (Diary August 23, 1926). On the other hand, Rivera sent Pablo O’Higgins to Charlot as the best person to initiate him into the current art situation and get him started on his own work (O’Higgins March 21, 1974).

Charlot appreciated Rivera’s views and was grateful for Rivera’s helping others understand his own work:

It’s only, really, when Diego Rivera came back and gave some lectures—and he had photographs of Cubist things, his own among others, of course—that they could, if they want, relate my own things to what Rivera had done and was showing them. But by then I think they had forgotten those early paintings of mine. (Interview May 18, 1971)

In contrast, Alva de la Canal found Rivera unhelpful with fresco technique and problems of perspective.³¹ Leal was told by Mérida that “Diego had forbidden him to reveal the secrets of his technique” (quoted in *MMR* 168).

Most of the art discussion was in groups:

Políticamente el grupo se había colocado a la vanguardia y más pintores así como intelectuales se agregaron. Casi todos los días el grupo se reunía para planear y cambiar ideas, algunas veces en una de las oficinas de la Secretaría de Educación, en otras en la casa del mismo Rivera y frecuentemente se daban cenas y banquetes a funcionarios públicos. (Amero 1947)

‘Politically the group placed itself at the vanguard, and more painters as well as intellectuals joined it. Almost every day, the group gathered to plan and exchange ideas, sometimes in the offices of the Ministry of Education, in others in the house of Rivera himself, and frequent dinners and banquets were given for public functionaries.

Alma Reed described a later conversation between Charlot and Orozco in New York city:

Although we had known Charlot and enjoyed the friendship of his art-conscious mother in Mexico during the Renaissance days, it was not until 1929, when he became instructor of mural painting at the Art Students League of New York, that we fully appreciated his true intellectual and spiritual stature. A frequent visitor to our “Ashram” studio apartment, where Orozco often worked and kept his paintings on view, we were privileged to sit in on profound discussions of aesthetic, social and

political problems between the two great painters, who were intimate and devoted friends.

At that time the young Charlot might have been the ideal model for a composite portrait of the “archetypal aesthete.” Delicate-featured and of slender build, reticent but self-assured in manner, with a voice that was low-keyed yet richly modulated, he seemed to dominate even the noisiest group with a certain mystic authority. His quiet command of situations could be traced, perhaps, to his blue eyes, which looked out through their bifocals with an expression that ceaselessly questioned hypocrisy and with a penetration that disturbed fatuous complacency. He shared this quality, on a less pronounced scale, with Orozco... (Reed 1960: 69 f.)

Mérida stated:

luego todas las discusiones que se tenían con respecto al arte, él siempre fue consultado, sus opiniones aceptadas, porque se consideraba, y eso se hacía palpable, de que él sabía muchísimo más que nosotros; sobre todo los artistas mexicanos que nunca habían viajado por Europa. (Interview 1971)

‘at that time, all the discussions that were held about art, he [Charlot] was always consulted, his opinions accepted, because it was considered, and it made itself palpable, that he knew much more than the rest of us; especially the Mexican artists who had never traveled to Europe.’

La influencia de la pintura de Jean sobre los otros artistas, puede que haya sido más intelectual, es decir, no de en cuanto al estilo de este notable pintor, sino en cuanto a las prédicas de él, lo que se le oía hablar, la manera como, tan lógica, desarrollaba su mente, como desarrollaba su conciencia artística, como desarrollaba sus conocimientos que iban nutriendo todos los cerebros nuestros hacia la consecución de lo que nosotros estábamos o tratábamos de hacer. Ese es propiamente la influencia de Juan dentro de los otros en el movimiento. No es el estilo de dibujo o el estilo como él trató su dibujo, más bien era una influencia intelectual la que él ejerció desde el primer momento.

‘The influence of the painting of Jean on the other artists—it could be that it was more intellectual, that is to say, not so much from the style of that notable painter as from his verbal lessons, that which he was heard to say, the way, so logical, he explained his mind, expounded his artistic conscience, developed his fund of knowledge that was to nourish all our brains up to the successful realization of we were doing or planning to do. This is properly the influence of Jean on the others in the movement. It is not in the style of drawing or the style with which he treated his drawing. Rather it was an intellectual influence that he exercised from the first moment.

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The artists along with the general public learned from Charlot's writings of the time: "Juan fue siempre un gran escritor sobre arte. Él tiene una clarividencia extraordinaria para definir, para juzgar y para escribir" "Juan was always a great writer on art. He had an extraordinary clairvoyance for defining, judging, and writing."³² But Charlot's publications were not the only writings of his that were being used at the time. The most obvious example was his 1923 "Aide-Memoire Technique," a report on what he had learned about technique from painting his first fresco. He added to his 1920 *Traité de Peinture* in 1922, indicating that he was using it at the time. In his 1918/1923 Notebook C are "Mexique," "Fresque. couleurs," "exercice sur les lignes," and "exercices sur les valeurs," all but the second of which were known information for him but useful for his colleagues (*TF*). Later, Octavio Paz would complain about the neglect of Charlot in Mexican art historiography, including among several points: "nor is any mention made of his theoretical works, which played a decisive role at the very beginning of the movement" (1993: 133).

Besides his writings, Charlot brought to Mexico whatever he had kept of his French period, the major holdings of the Jean Charlot Collection, which O'Higgins remembered seeing (O'Higgins March 21, 1974). The *Chemin de Croix* is an undisputed influence, but I believe other traces of Charlot early styles can be detected.³³ Charlot's work in Mexico itself was certainly instructive—as recognized in the case of his woodblocks—and Charlot planned a series of lithographs explicitly as models³⁴ Indeed, Charlot portrays himself as an instructor in the *Massacre*.

Charlot tended to forget his leadership functions. For instance, he had to be reminded of how much he had done with the Estridentistas, including being with Maples Arce on the two-man Comité Directivo (official stationery). Nonetheless, evidence exists of Charlot's role as a more formal teacher among the artists. In fact, Charlot was also lecturing at a Roman Catholic organization, the Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Française (AJCF), and giving private courses in French, although he did not remember these later.³⁵ Charlot had a European training that qualified him to help his colleagues in techniques and general art information.³⁶ For instance, he has always been recognized as the one who taught woodblock printing to the young artists at EPAL (e.g., Prignitz 1992: 19).

Charlot apparently knew more than his colleagues about Precolumbian culture and the Aztec language from his long study of the Goupil and other family collections, like that of his uncle Aristide Martel, with whom he was living for a time in Mexico City (Interview May 14, 1971; Volume 1, Chapter 8).

I mean the Prehispanic things are the obvious thing. I told you that one of my uncles, Aristide Martel, was one of the greatest collectors in Mexico of Prehispanic things. I told you that my uncle [*sic*: grandfather] Louis Goupil had been the brother of the greatest collector in France of Prehispanic things. So of course, Rivera and so on, Orozco, whatever you want to say, were people who were impressed, of course, by tradition, by Prehispanic tradition, but in a way they were more new to it than I was. It sounds a little wrong because they were Mexicans and I wasn't, but I had been under very unusual conditions while I was growing up surrounded by most important

Prehispanic items, manuscripts and so on, that nobody else perhaps could be familiar with. So, the Prehispanic is probably the first thing and a very important thing that gave me strength, if you want, to look into the modern Indian world. And I was, as I said, more accustomed, more familiar with Prehispanic forms than, I *think* I can say, all of my colleagues. (Interview August 7, 1971)

the most important thing was really that when I went to Mexico, I already was soaked, so to speak, into all the things I was going to meet there. There was—I always come back to Ozenfant and his pre-forms—there was a pre-meeting with Mexico long before, long before I met Mexico, so that makes things pretty difficult. They were already assimilated, so to speak, even at the very moment that I discovered them. (Interview May 18, 1971)

Charlot later worked professionally in archeology at Chich'en Itza:

Charlot is unique in that he is the only well known artist of his era in Mexico who worked directly as a member of scientifically conducted archaeological expeditions. As a result of his experiences he could speak and write with an authority and understanding of art, archaeology and ethnology beyond that of any of his peers.³⁷

The artists were already visiting the archeological museum,³⁸ but Orozco credited Charlot with leadership:

[Charlot] used to go along with us to the Museum of Archeology, where the great Aztec sculptures are on view. They impressed him profoundly and we would talk for hours of that tremendous art, which comes down to us and outstrips us, reaching out into the future. Pre-Cortesian art influenced him to such an extent that his painting is still saturated with it. (Orozco 1962: 87)

The word *saturated* indicates the interiority of Charlot's process, which Orozco was able to appreciate. Warning the young Ida Rodriguez Prampolini against the conventional view of Rivera as the teacher, Orozco declared: "It's Charlot, the Frenchman. He was the one who took us to the National Museum and showed us the archeological works. We learned to see Mexico through the eyes of Charlot."³⁹ Later, while working as an archeologist at Chich'en Itza, Charlot reported to his Mexico City friends on the expedition's discoveries. These were among the few occasions Charlot remembered in which he could be described as playing a pedagogical role: "I held a unique position" as both a muralist "and, since my early teens, an archaeologist [*sic*]:

When I returned to Mexico City [from Chich'en Itza] I would bolster my friends' hopes by telling them tales of ancient Yucatán and assuring them that they were—that we were—on the right track. (1974 "Artists of Hawaii": 45)

Orozco remembered these occasions:

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He visto, por ejemplo, las obras de Jean Charlot, quien copió mucho de los frescos mayas; y he visto todas las copias y en varios de ellos se conserva una pintura potentísima, toda de dos dimensiones, muy importante.⁴⁰

‘I saw, for example the works of Jean Charlot, who copied much from the Maya frescoes; and I saw all the copies and in some of them a most powerful painting was conserved, all in two dimensions, very important.

Members of Charlot’s group learned much from him about fresco, and Leal reports Charlot offering advice on composition, which he rejected (*MMR* 168). Mérida stated:

Juan fue una especie de *director* de lo que se hacía técnicamente en el momento en que se inició el movimiento del Renacimiento Mexicano. Fue el primero que trabajó el fresco, fue el primero que inició cómo debía hacerse aquello porque él traía una seguridad técnica que no era muy propia en las condiciones en que nosotros estábamos para desarrollar un trabajo que implicaba el conocimiento de un cierto muralismo que iba ya más allá de las posibilidades técnicas nuestras.⁴¹

‘Juan was a sort of *director* of what was done technically at the moment that the movement of the Mexican Renaissance was initiated. He was the first who worked in fresco, the first who started that as it should be done because he possessed a technical security that didn’t really belong in the conditions we were in to develop a work that involved the knowledge of a certain muralism that went certainly beyond our technical possibilities.’

In conversation before the interview, Mérida told me that Charlot was “el solo” ‘the only one’ who knew how to put a painting on a wall, the only one who knew Uccello. Orozco had one of the most difficult walls in the Preparatoria and did not find a good solution. More than Rivera or any other, Charlot was the real intellectual of the movement, according to Mérida.

Younger artists like Tamayo would ask Charlot to critique their work. Charlot was possibly the only person whose advice Amero, a close friend, would take (Zuñiga 2008: 26 f., 38 f.). Zalce provides a description of the experience:

We had long conversations, and he gave me lots of advice on printing. On one print, I signed with ink inside the lithograph. He told me to use pencil inside and then outside the image. He told me why: museums don’t receive ones done the other way. His criticisms about my work were valuable. He liked the different ways I tried to express myself with techniques and textures. The things he approved was great advice, very useful.

I was very young. He had experience and prestige. He was very famous. I knew him only by name. Jean was the first of that group that I met.

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Also, Jean was one of the best critics of art. He was a very famous writer. I knew his articles in *Forma*. I read those. So Jean was very important.

I saw Jean often then. He still gave me good criticisms. When I did my Yucatán portfolio, he did the preface. He did a very good criticism of my work; it was very much in favor of me. I don't want to say if it was accurate, because he said such positive things about me. But other people liked it too. Jean understood my work better than I did.

We were a little more than one year together. We saw each other almost every week. I was painting, and he gave me advice.

It was wonderful to work near him, so alert, so much sensibility. What he says is such intelligent advice, so orientated. (Interview 1971)

An older artist like Mérida also remarked on Charlot's understanding of his work:

Juan fue siempre un gran escritor sobre arte. Él tiene una clarividencia extraordinaria para definir, para juzgar y para escribir. Y como yo lo dije antes, Juan era en este "trait", en este camino, en esta condición, uno de los directores del movimiento con más capacidad y con más influencia por el hecho de que era un culto europeo capaz de discernir, de definir, de enseñar, de modelar, de explicar todo lo que nosotros hacíamos y que nosotros conociésemos exactamente por qué y cuándo aquello se hacía.

'Juan was always a great writer on art. He had an extraordinary clairvoyance for defining, judging, and writing. And as I said before, Juan was in this trait, in this path, in this condition, one of the directors of the movement with more capacity and influence because of the fact that he was a cultivated european capable of discerning, defining, teaching, modeling, explaining all that we others were doing so that we ourselves knew exactly why that was being done and at the very time it was being done.'

The emphasis on Charlot's European background reveals another factor in his influence. As a cultured, up-to-date Frenchman, he could validate what the Mexicans were doing.⁴² Moreover, his support was effective because of his impressive understanding of the culture and the individual artists. If he was interested in *pulquería* painting, there must be something to it. If he encouraged a painter, it carried weight. Charlot was supporting their appreciation of their own culture in contrast to the foreigners who looked down on the natives.

Finally, Charlot gained his position among the artists by his character and capacity. Despite Charlot's youth, Orozco describes him as more than a teacher, but as a mentor for others and for himself:

Charlot, con su ecuanimidad y su cultura atemperó muchas veces nuestros exabruptos juveniles y con su visión clara iluminó frecuentemente nuestros problemas. (1942: 12)

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‘With his equanimity and culture, Charlot often tempered our juvenile outbursts and with his clear vision frequently illuminated our problems.’

Ricardo Martínez repeated emphatically to me that Charlot was important through his broad culture. Mérida emphasized the same point:

La personalidad de Juan se hizo notar porque él, como europeo, tenía una cultura de la cual carecíamos todos nosotros. Él, desde luego, impuso un estilo que ha mantenido personal hasta este momento. (Interview 1971)

Él fue pues un maestro, desde el principio, y su opinión, su filosofía, su técnica, su saber sobre el arte de la historia fue de una ayuda inconmensurable en el desarrollo del Movimiento Mexicano, aunque eso pues no ha sido reconocido sino por cierto sector intelectual mexicano, que ha logrado colocar a las personas que elaboraron en ese momento en su verdadero sitio. (Interview 1971)

‘The personality of Charlot was notable because he, as a European, possessed a culture that all of us others lacked. He certainly imposed a style which he has kept his personal one until this moment.’

‘From the beginning, he was a master, and his opinion, his philosophy, his technique, his knowledge of art history was an immeasurable help in the development of the Mexican movement, even though this has not been recognized since then except by a certain Mexican intellectual sector, which has succeeded in placing in their true place those who creating in that time.’

Mentorship created its own personal responsibilities. For instance, Charlot helped younger artists like Zalce and Martínez with their careers as well as their art: Zalce “was so outstanding that Jean Charlot sent some of his lithographs to the Metropolitan Museum of Art” (Reed 1960: 147). Ricardo Martínez wrote Charlot and his wife Zohmah on December 21, 1949, that he missed “the paternal guidance of Jean” and described his recent wedding:

In the absence of my father, I would have liked to have you Jean, as a ‘padrino’. To think of it was good anyway and to know that you would have accepted, was enough to make me feel that you would always be near.

A key to Charlot’s leadership is that it arose from self-confidence. Mérida stated:

Su estilo de vida en ese momento era muy dado a su trabajo, nunca pomposo, mantenía sus condiciones espirituales muy cabales...nunca hizo alarde de su capacidad, de su esto, de su lo otro. Él mantuvo y como ha mantenido hasta ahorita un tipo de vida que es muy ajeno a la pomposidad, muy ajeno al autobombo, muy ajeno a las condiciones ostentarias de que son muy afectos los pintores de ahora. (Interview 1971)

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‘His style of life at that moment was very devoted to his work, never pompous, he was keeping his spiritual conditions very secret, never making a show of his capacity, of his this or his that. He maintained as he has up to now a type of life that is very free from pomposity, very free from self-praise, very free from the ostentatious conditions that are very affected by the painters of today.’

Charlot had no difficulty in considering himself a team member and did not seek an open leadership position like Rivera and Siqueiros, although he had been a successful officer in World War I. In Hawai‘i, he was upset when a magazine article was published with the title “The ‘Charlot School’ of Fresco Buono” (Sparks 1956), feeling it would turn his students and other artists against that medium. Charlot himself was unhappy when described as dependent on Rivera. Charlot felt that working quietly and giving proper credit to others accomplished more good. Mérida recognized this quality in him:

Juan fue desde luego un maestro en su capacidad técnica como lo ha sido siempre. Su influencia sobre los otros consistía no en imponerse, por una u otra razones, sino en manifestarse dentro de su capacidad técnica, cultural, que él trajo a América de Francia sin que ello implicase que él hiciera una especie de exhibición de toda esa labor que él logró traer de Europa.

Las relaciones desde luego con los demás compañeros fueron muy cordiales, porque Juan tiene la virtud de ser amical, de no ser ostentoso, de ayudar a los demás, y luego todas las discusiones que se tenían con respecto al arte, él siempre fue consultado, sus opiniones aceptadas, porque se consideraba, y eso se hacía palpable, de que él sabía muchísimo más que nosotros; sobre todo los artistas mexicanos que nunca habían viajado por Europa. (Interview 1971)

‘Jean was certainly a master in his technical capacity as he has always been. His influence on the others did not consist in imposing himself, for one reason or another, but in manifesting himself in his technical, cultural capacity, which he brought to America from France, without that implying that he made a sort of exhibition of all the work that he succeeded in bringing from Europe.’

‘Certainly his relations with the other companions were very cordial, because Juan had the virtue of being friendly, of not being ostentatious, of helping the others, and then in all the discussions that were held about art, he was always consulted, his opinions accepted, because it was thought, and this became palpable, that he knew very much more than we did, especially the Mexican artists who had never traveled to Europe.

Charlot’s leadership could pass unnoticed because it was so low-key as to be surprising. Ben Norris, a colleague from Hawai‘i, described it from observing Charlot later in life:

Charlot was a most remarkable person. He presented himself as a somewhat timid and retiring little man, almost insecure. But then, for example, if he was speaking to a

new group, or moving into any role of leadership, his authority and his commanding power would rise up quietly and unexpectedly around him, to place him in a position of total control of his situation. If he was addressing a group of businessmen, he would appear as an almost needy little man, who would begin speaking in a quiet, almost apologetic voice, and who would then metamorphose right before their eyes into a totally confident, fascinating, and powerful speaker, a very real leader. (2009: 97)

Despite his self-effacement, Charlot was appreciated. A later Honolulu friend, Bess Luquiens, had attended a party in Mexico City in 1926 or 1927 that was attended by a large number of artists like Rivera and O'Higgins. She was struck that they all talked constantly about a young Frenchman whom they considered a genius and who was off doing archeological work (Tabletalk, early or mid-1970s). Similarly, at the same time, Modotti wrote Weston: "There is one more *important* person whose opinion I know you anxiously await. Charlot—he is due in a day or two—" (Stark 1986: 27.5, July 4).

Despite the above, Charlot produced an ambivalence in many Mexicans. A knowledgeable foreigner can be perceived as a threat by penetrating further into a local culture than is comfortable for the locals, who cannot use their usual criteria for judging his motives and intentions. He can also acquire gradually an authority that rivals the local experts, an authority that increases the longer he stays. Because Charlot was so self-assured and morally secure, he was slow to recognize that others could feel threatened. For instance, he expected Rivera to assume a mentor role for the young artists and was surprised when he attacked them. Later in New York City, he was shocked that Orozco blocked his exhibition at the Delphic Studios, although he had done much for Orozco and continued to do so. Siqueiros was the exception with his supreme self-confidence, and he and Charlot enjoyed a life-long, trusting friendship.

3.3. EUROPEAN BACKGROUNDS

All the artists had received a European art education, which formed the background of their thinking and practice: "our Greek-fed routine taste" (*AA* II: 70). But the experience of that education differed between those who had traveled to Europe or the United States and those who had studied only in Mexico, like Orozco. Charlot thought that as a result Orozco had little perspective on Mexico until he moved to New York City and that he was impressed by the originals of great non-Mexican art too late in his life to assimilate them.⁴³

In Mexico itself, the latest trends in European art arrived only after a significant delay, permitting earlier ones to survive as influences long after they had been exhausted in Europe, like Rodin and Impressionism.⁴⁴ In October 1920, Vera de Córdova describes the young artists of EPAL proclaiming "El impresionismo es el último grito, la última palabra en la verdad pictórica" 'Impressionism is *le dernier cri*, the ultimate statement of pictorial truth' (1920b). Even the Nazarenes were still being promoted by teachers at San Carlos, "unmindful of what incongruities resulted from the shift of locale" (*San Carlos* 112; also 140)! Charlot felt he was stepping back in art historical time, when he arrived in Mexico:

And when I went to Mexico, I had physically the feeling that I was suddenly around 1890, and I enjoyed all that. I thought it was wonderful that those people were so disconnected from what was going on in Paris, and I wasn't thinking at all of being an apostle of what I considered contemporary literature. I just enjoyed all the things they were doing. In the same way, I thought that the Impressionism that they were doing in the 1920s was very good as far as painting goes. There was just an extraordinary *décalage* in time. (Interview June 12, 1971)

I had a feeling, I didn't analyze it, but that nothing very much was going on in Mexico at the time. It wasn't quite true. Some of the very young men, again Revueltas, I would say, or Fernando Leal, were probably doing some things that were relatively interesting, but the thing that would not have made it interesting for me is that they were learning in a way the language of Impressionism, not even of Post-Impressionism, and of course, coming from Paris where I had already sort of dipped into Cubism, it was a little hard to get interested in that. There was nothing suggesting even that there would be a mural movement that would come very quickly—in fact, one year after my first arrival in Mexico. (Interview May 14, 1971)

what I would have found were people who were all excited about Impressionism, and it was too difficult for me to consider that as, shall we say, even contemporary art because of my rather stiff training in what I considered the modern language of Cubism. (Interview May 14, 1971)

The delay led also to some confusion about and incomprehension of the new introductions (Charlot February 2, 1924). Even then, most artworks were known only through photographs, which in Charlot's opinion, improved by reduction the images of such artists as Zuloaga.

dichas influencias presentaban la agravante de haberle sido comunicadas por medio de los grabados incoloros de las revistas, lo que le da a su obra un aspecto arqueológico artificial. (Araujo July 26, 1923)

'said influences had the further aggravation of being communicated through the medium of black and white reproductions in the journals, which gave to his [Brangwyn's] work an artificial archeological character.'

For example, one artist, Herrán, was so influenced by the Spaniard Zuloaga. I remember Jean said, if Herrán saw one original of Zuloaga, he wouldn't be influenced by him, because they're horrible. He said also that Herrán had better quality than Zuloaga, but admired Zuloaga because he was foreign.⁴⁵

Commercial art has been revealed as an important source for European trends in the 1920s, with significant influence on Montenegro and Best Maugard (Ortiz Gaitán 2003: passim, 349). Indeed, many artists worked for the illustrated press (184).

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As a result of this situation, the artwork being created in Mexico was behind the European times: “That a diluted impressionism could still cut a revolutionary figure at that date in Mexico only makes clear the continued iron grip of academism on official art” (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut). The very recent revolution of Mexican Impressionism had been made against the academic art embodied in the Academy of San Carlos, a battle long won in Europe: “Mexico’s academic art was a much more vital product than its European counterpart, due in part to the magic *décalage* in time that qualifies Mexican styles” (*AA II*: 364). San Carlos was thus a genuine opponent both in its academic past and *retardataire* present.⁴⁶

Arriving from Europe, his head filled with the latest trends and new plans for a Mexican art, Rivera found that students, established artists, critics, and the general public had to be brought up to date.⁴⁷ Just where in European art the muralists looked is a question important for evaluating the movement. The muralists certainly based themselves on Cubism, on the muralism of the Italian Renaissance, and the great masters of later classical art.⁴⁸ Valle-Inclán reported of Rivera: “Beyond ‘the Cubist adventure,’ Rivera has become convinced that no other painting exists but that of our Goya and of the primitive Italians” (Lima 1988: 129). Charlot always drew a straight line between the Italian and the Mexican Renaissance.⁴⁹ In doing so, he ignored the Neoclassicism that had emerged shortly before he left for Mexico. The importance of contemporary Neoclassicism for other artists is revealed in the Siqueiros-Charlot Araujo articles, where it is proposed as the basis for the new Mexican art, in all likelihood, by Siqueiros:

Su importancia capital reside en la suplantación de las malas influencias por las buenas y en la transformación del sistema individualista por la acción colectiva. El último movimiento pictórico de Europa, volviendo a su gran tradición clásica (despedazada a fines del siglo pasado por el falsamente llamado arte moderno, en una multiplicidad de fórmulas individualistas-anárquicas), se ha reflejado en nuestro ambiente de una manera lógica y saludable, mostrándonos la fuente inmejorable de nuestra tradición nacional. (Araujo July 11, 1923)

‘Its capital importance resides in the supplanting of bad influences by good ones and in the transformation of the individualistic system by collective action. The latest pictorial movement of Europe, returning to its great classical tradition (dilapidated at the end of the last century by the falsely named modern art into a multiplicity of individualist-anarchistic formulas), is reflected in our environment in a logical and healthy manner, showing us the unbettable source of our national tradition.’

Opponents of this tendency were attacked:

ACADÉMICOS o ANARQUISTAS, que no han reaccionado hacia las nuevas orientaciones de vuelta al CLASICISMO (Araujo July 26, 1923)

‘ACADEMICIANS or ANARCHISTS, who have not reacted to the new orientations of the return to CLASSICISM’

The Araujo article of July 29, 1923, bears the title:

“Aspectos Comparativos de la Orientación al Clasicismo de la Moderna Pintura Europea y Mexicana.”

‘Comparative Aspects of the Orientation to Classicism of the Modern European and Mexican Painting.’

In my opinion, contemporary European Neoclassicism was important both for showing Rivera the way to his post-Cubist style and for supporting him psychologically in the effort. Charlot has been criticized for minimizing the influence of contemporary trends on the muralists:

in spite of his foreign background and training, his attitude to painting outside Mexico is as fiercely chauvinistic as that of any Mexican xenophobe. This is a pity, because although Mexican mural art is largely a thing apart, its true originality will only become evident when eventually it is related to other developments in early twentieth-century art. (1964 *Revolution on the Walls*)

I will discuss this subject in the next chapter.

Faced with a great new problem—creating a national art—the muralists naturally fell back on their training and the art they knew best. The inchoate problem was how much they would keep of their European education and how they would use it. Just adding Mexican stylistic elements to a European base or subjecting Mexican subjects to a European style resulted in artworks that lacked stylistic unity and national character. Charlot wrote of Siqueiros:

While he was in Europe, Siqueiros had insisted with the longing of an exile on a return to native sources:

We must come closer to the works of the ancient settlers of our vales, Indian painters and sculptors (Mayan, Aztec, Inca, etc., etc.); our climatological identification with them will help us assimilate the constructive vigor of their work; their clear elemental knowledge of nature will be our own starting point.”

But, returned to his own milieu, cradle of Indian culture, Siqueiros looked back perversely to Europe:

Our pictorial mural tradition is mostly colonial. In Mexico, all decorable buildings are built in the occidental architectural style. It follows that the mural painter should subject himself to the great Italian tradition as his colonial predecessors wisely did. It is granted that racial particulars are bound to tinge his work unconsciously.

By striving to create an autochthonous style, the muralist would cut himself from the main European current that molds the very material on which he means to work, marring the results. (Writings Related to *MMR*; *Passages Cut*)

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At this point in his thinking, Siqueiros was arguing in favor of current foreign influence to be supplanted by a superior national achievement:

las influencias de las civilizaciones preponderantes tienen fuerza de expansión universal inevitable; cuando los pueblos influenciados, con sus aportaciones locales mezcladas a las extrañas, producen momentos pictóricos superiores, tienen a su vez fuerza expansiva universal. Estos cambios de jerarquía de un continente o de un país a otro han tenido siempre lugar de una manera cosmogónica (Araujo July 11, 1923)

‘the influences of the dominant civilizations have a power of inevitable universal expansion. When the influenced peoples, with their local contributions mixed with the foreign ones, produce superior pictorial moments, they also in their turn have a universal expansive power. These hierarchical changes of one continent or country to another have always taken place in a cosmogonic manner.’

Each muralist thus formed his own relationship to European and Mexican art. At the least, Mexican art helped free the artists from dependence on Europe. Charlot writes of Siqueiros:

Il fut saisi fortement, dès son retour, par le caractère *original* qui se dégage de l'archéologie et de l'ethnographie mexicaines, soit des musées et de la vie de tous les jours. Les notions acquises en Europe ne pouvaient servir absolument à rien parce qu'ici tout est différent. Et il eut la grande sagesse d'oublier. (February 1924)

‘He was seized strongly, from his return, by the *original* character that emanates from Mexican archeology and ethnography, both of museums and everyday life. The notions acquired in Europe were absolutely useless because here everything is different. He had the great wisdom to forget.’

Charlot generalized this idea to the movement itself:

Es muy fácil explicar las causas de este movimiento, que no es solamente un capricho de artistas a la caza de originalidad, sino fuertemente razonable: es que los pintores, cansados de complejidades y de condimentos rancios que marcan los últimos periodos del arte, se sienten atraídos, para depurarse hacia manifestaciones más sanas: han observado con ojos amorosos los retablos, los ex-votos, los objetos populares y encontrado en estas obras la savia siempre fresca que poco a poco se había alejado del viejo árbol académico (July 23, 1925)

‘It is very easy to explain the causes of this movement, that it is not just a caprice of artists on the hunt for originality, but strongly reasonable: it is that the painters, tired of complexities and rancid condiments that mark the latest periods of art feel themselves attracted to healthier manifestations to purify themselves: that have observed with loving eyes the retablos, the ex-votos, the popular objects and found in these works the always fresh sap that little by little distanced itself from the old academic tree.’

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In his own artistic production, as discussed below, Charlot continued several lines of his European work. On his first visit, he filled a notebook with copies or analyses of a print series by Boucher and others (Volume 1, Chapter 8). Returned to Mexico, he continued his study of nudes begun in France and produced a gouache and two woodcuts that were Cubist analyses of works by El Greco (M38, 39). The studies of El Greco may have been intended to provide a baseline for Colonial art just as the reading of Góngora would have for Charlot's understanding of Sor Juana de la Cruz. In Mexico, he was given a copy of Pierre Reverdy's *Pablo Picasso* (1924), in which he found an illustration of Picasso's 1903 painting *La Soupe* (17), which influenced the relationship of the mother to the daughter in his own *First Steps*.⁵⁰ Charlot also marked the text and did some compositional exercises in the book as he did in Cocteau's *Picasso* (1923). Charlot had in his collection a number of early-1920s booklets on French artists like Matisse, de la Fresnaye, and Rouault, which might have been sent him by his sister, Odette. In his diaries, he mentions his study of Velazquez, Matisse, Cézanne, Dufy, and Chinese painting (1924: June 16, August 30, September 29, October 14, November 11).

Nevertheless, to become a genuine Mexican artist, Charlot felt that he had to purge himself of his Europeanism as did the other artists: "A youth passed among American archeological specimens eased the process somewhat, but my plastic experience remained mostly European" (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut). He described himself arrived in Mexico: "Alors qu'est-ce qu'il reste de moi, peintre parisien : un petit garçon bien étonné de tant de beauté nouvelle découverte" 'So what is left of me, the Parisian painter: a little boy much astonished by so much newly discovered beauty': "Aussi remisant mes idées préconçues et mon pittoresque à la Gauguin" 'Also, putting aside my preconceived ideas and my picturesqueness à la Gauguin' (October 1922 "Mexico"). Charlot praised Siqueiros because: "il eut la grande sagesse d'oublier" 'he had the great wisdom to forget':

Si la peinture ne se soutient pas par des raisons ethniques, tirées du pays même, elle est mauvaise, elle est comme un arbre, racines coupées : elle meurt d'elle-même. Qu'on soit savant en histoire de l'art, en connaissances des secrets et des règles du métier, je crois, pour juger, qu'il faut oublier tout cela. La beauté d'une peinture n'est autre chose que l'émotion qu'on en ressent. (February 1924)

'If painting does not support itself through ethnic reasons, taken from the land itself, it is bad, it is like a tree with cut roots: it dies of itself. That one is a scholar in the history of art, in knowledge of the secrets and rules of the craft, I believe, to judge, it is necessary to forget all that. The beauty of a painting is nothing other than the emotion that one feels from it.'

Charlot addressed the subject in more detail in his article on Rafael Yela Gunther (September 27, 1925). Some artists arrive with "un largo bagaje de conocimientos europeos" 'a large baggage of European knowledge.' Some such people introduce theories that don't fit. Others try to adapt themselves, proposing theories that reveal an "adaptación muy semejante al mimetismo animal, las cuales han ayudado a crear un arte 'que tiene todas las cualidades de un arte de transición'" 'an adaption very similar to animal mimetism;

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theories that have helped create an art “that has all the qualities of a transitional art.” Still others base themselves on popular arts and arrive at a sort of Orientalism.

Charlot’s references can be identified. As seen below, those who base themselves on popular arts and develop a Mexican Orientalism are clearly the Nacionalistas: Montenegro, Best Maugard, et al., whom I will discuss below. The “transitional” artists who develop a “picturesqueness à la Gauguin” are the painters and sculptors who reproduced a European *fin-de-siècle* exoticism with Mexican subjects. Saturnino Herrán was and continues to be the best-considered transitional artist, and his subjects have been considered pioneering.⁵¹ For Charlot, Herrán’s work was hopelessly compromised by his dependence on Frank Brangwyn (1867–1956):

Brauguien [*sic*: Brangwyn] y muchos de los pintores ingleses mediocres de su época ejercieron sobre él influencias evidentes, que ocultaron por completo sus aportaciones individuales y raciales (que indudablemente hubieran sido grandes porque era hombre de talento).⁵²

‘Brangwyn and many mediocre English painters of his epoch exercised on him [Herrán] visible influences that obscure completely his individual and racial contributions (which undoubtedly would have been great because he was talented.)’

On the other hand, Charlot recognized a transitional element in the early works of the muralists:

Transitional works have a fascination of their own. Rivera disgorged, on arrival, stiff Byzantine treasures. My own first mural was a geometrical gloss concerning Uccello. Siqueiros ushered in his Mexican period under the aegis of Masaccio. (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

In the Araujo article “El ‘Nacionalismo’ como Orientación Pictórica Intelectual” (August 2, 1923), Charlot and Siqueiros asserted that the combat at least against nineteenth-century Mexican Orientalism had been won:

si los pintores tenían aún que recorrer un largo camino depurativo en el terreno estético, psicológicamente se habían despojado de la indumentaria exótica y fatal de sus antecesores académicos.

‘if the painters still have to travel a long purgative path in the esthetic terrain, they have already divested themselves psychologically of the exotic and fatal clothing of their academic predecessors.’

The two Araujo authors here group together the exoticists and the Nacionalistas, and Montenegro and Best are indeed arguably closer to Herrán than to Rivera. The fault of the premuralists and pre-Rivera muralists was maintaining a European esthetic for subjects that demand their own, an authentic esthetic that had already been created by previous generations of Mexicans and needed only to be discovered. The creation of a genuinely national style required a personal journey through European

art until a self-confidence was achieved that enabled one to free oneself from dependence on that great tradition. As Charlot wrote of Siqueiros:

An all-round itinerary of that sort was needed before this strong temperament could feel humble enough, and provincial enough, to fresco the archaic-looking brown giants of 1924.⁵³

3.4. EXPERIENCE OF MEXICO

Mexico is immensely impressive to the culturally sensitive observer, and its impact even on the Mexican artists was noted. Méndez described how artists sent to Europe during the Porfiriato were “shocked” on their return during the Revolution to discover the contrast between “las multitudes domesticadas vestidas de gris” ‘the domesticated multitudes dressed in gray’ that they had known and the new revolutionaries, “llenos de color y de movimiento” ‘full of color and movement’:

Ha sido un feliz descubrimiento el de ese pueblo que tiene como ninguno, una gran concepción artística y un espíritu de creación muy completo. (Méndez 1926: 45)

‘It has been a happy discovery of this people that possesses as none other a great artistic concept and a very complete spirit of creation.’

Siqueiros described his experience of the varied Mexican landscape and archeological sites during his travels as a soldier in the Revolution and how it inspired him to attempt a genuine Mexican art (1977: 128–131, 156). When Vasconcelos felt Rivera was still too tied to his European past, he sent him to Tehuantepec, which converted him to a more Mexican sensibility.⁵⁴ Rivera was impressed differently by his experience of Guanajuato:

Rivera started to decorate the Ministry with the handicrafts of Tehuantepec as subject matter, but came back from his trip to Guanajuato with sketches of miners and industrial workers already international in scope, prototypes of the Detroit murals of Ford factories. (Writings Related to *MMR*; Appendix III)

The idea behind the use of native models, flora, and artifacts at EPAL was that contact with “la realidad del país, deben teóricamente producir el nuevo arte indispensable en una sociedad nueva” ‘the reality of the country should theoretically produce a new art indispensable in a new society’ (Debroise 1984: 41 f.).

Charlot was aware of the importance of his first impressions of Mexico, writing them down at the time.⁵⁵ Once installed with his well-to-do relatives in Mexico City, he sneaked out of that social cocoon early in the morning to experience the Mexico of the streets, an experience he used for his first article published in Mexico.⁵⁶ Just walking was study:

I made many drawings from many people and so on. I think perhaps after Luz as a model, the most important thing was what I would see—people in the street. I made many drawings of people in the street. Not directly from the people, but as soon as I saw something of interest, I would put it down, and many of my pictures are based on

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those glimpses of street scenes, again of having the Indian that was not watched, that worked with his own motions and ways. (Interview August 7, 1971)

In the streets, he would find folk life and art, *pulquería* painting, and Posada: “The output of folk artists is so varied as to be unclassifiable, so cheap as to be despised, so thrust under everyone’s eyes as to become invisible” (*AA II*: 124).

Well, it was very hard to avoid those things because they were all around one. Of course, the open-air *puestos* were something taken for granted. In the Alameda, for example, it was full of those open-air *puestos*, with the Indian women selling the pots and so on that had been made in the family. You saw that all over the place. If you went to the Guadalupe, there were always some dancers in their dancing costumes, feathers and whatnot. It was really nineteenth-century Mexico that I contacted rather than Mexico today. So, even if I hadn’t looked for it, of course, I was based in all the folk art and folk dances and folk music of the Mexican Indian. (Interview May 18, 1971)

At first, Charlot and the others were absorbing everything without discrimination. As Charlot told me, some of it was good, some bad, but it was *all* Mexican.

Moreover, the artists could be directly caught up in the artistic activity around them. Walking in the street with Emilio Amero, they saw a lithograph in a shop window, entered, and began the revival of lithography in Mexico (Amero 1947). Charlot recounted another such experience with Siqueiros:

In the 1920s, Siqueiros and I were journeying together through Puebla. We admired the freshly painted sign of an inn, and, after asking for the address of the artist, went to pay him our respects. We found ourselves in a quiet, clean, cubical house and were received by a modest, ascetic, nut-brown Indian shuffling silently in *huaraches*. (April 1949: 139)

The experience of Mexico—“le vrai visage de cette terre secrète et classique” ‘the true face of this secret and classical land’—exploded Charlot’s previous ideas and threw him back on the art history of the West, Asia, and Mexico to attempt to understand the esthetics of his new sights.

Charlot regularly refers to his experience of whatever subject he is discussing (e.g., *MMR* 21). Writing about Charlot’s 1942 oil mural *Cotton Gin*, a reporter stated:

Charlot’s inspiration for the painting reveals much of his general attitude toward people and their land. He made a great point of making it known that Oct. 9, 1941, was the date when he first “held live cotton in his hand.” (Burnett 1979: 2-E)

Charlot analyzed his later response to India:

But there are two ways of knowing. One way, we know the facts, we find them in books or by experience. The other way of knowing is what I would call “shock knowledge.” It comes to us in a kind of inspiration.

In shock knowledge it is not so much the rational part of our mind that is at work...

Shock knowledge as a first impression is not to be disdained. Then after many days, and nights too, we acquire factual knowledge.

...

Strangely enough, the artist's point of view comes closer to that of the resident than to that of the tourist.

An artist should not look for perfect sights. It is the job of the artist to create beautiful things rather than to look at beautiful things.

....

An artist has to create his own beauty. The beauty that is ready made, that is chewed up and already digested is not for the artist but for the art lover.

[riding an elephant] ...I for a moment felt in a creative mood. It was not a visual experience...It was close to a musical experience, though soundless...

Through such non-visual experiences, if I stayed long enough in India, I could come to paint something meaningful. Not through any sightseeing, however beautiful the sights.

I felt for an instant that I was going through the same motions as the ancient artists went through before they could abstract out of the visual disorder of India great ordered symbols, such as those of the Wheel and the Dance.

An artist is never satisfied simply by looking...

...

This Sanscrit saying sums up both the wisdom of past artists and the more personal feelings that I, as an artist, experienced in my very short stay in India. "Beauty renews itself every moment." (December 12, 1968 "Dynamic")

Just as in India, Charlot's "shock" experience of Mexico was as much sensual as visual. He could be inspired to develop the subject *Chalma Procession* by being shoved against a wall in a narrow street.

Charlot describes his experience of a place as he does his experience of nature. He first has a direct, culturally unmediated experience, for which he must empty himself of preconceptions:

Es que en efecto todo es bello a nuestro alrededor. Para ver esta belleza, basta con depurarnos mentalmente, simplificándonos hasta la inocencia verdadera, y quedaremos entonces deslumbrados por el espectáculo cotidiano que hasta entonces nos había permanecido oculto a causa de nuestro orgullo de "ARTISTAS" y de nuestros prejuicios de hombres "CULTIVADOS".⁵⁷

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‘The fact is that in effect everything is beautiful around us. To see this beauty, it is enough to purge ourselves mentally, simplifying ourselves as far as true innocence, and then we will be dazzled by the daily spectacle that up till then had remained hidden to us because of our pride as “ARTISTS” and of our prejudices of “CULTIVATED” men.’

Charlot must first look at Mexico before he can express Mexico in artworks. He is not studying secondary sources or basing himself primarily on Mexican art. He is looking at the place, the people, and the way of living as a whole. From that experience—visual and nonvisual—he must construct his new image of Mexico, which will be different from the one he had in Europe. The subtle colors of Mexico demand that he change his palette from the gaudy ones he brought with him from Paris. The intense religiosity Charlot perceives in the Indians praying in church inspires new images of religion: brown seems more religious than white; short and stocky more than tall and attenuated. The vivid liturgical life of the Indian parish inspires Charlot to develop his own “religion of the parishioner,” as opposed to his French mystical leanings. His meetings with folk artists prompt him to “deanonymize” them, to write of them as individual artists rather than a nameless mass. Charlot distills such experiences into his subjects, themes, images, and meaningful symbols: Work and Rest, Mexican Kitchen, *Cargador*, *Malinches*, and so on. His artwork proceeds from his experience—as all true artwork should. This process of observation, digestion, and creation can be long but results in subjects that bear endless exploration: “most of them were created ten or twenty years after being observed in nature by the artist” (1947 Charlot’s Paintings Done Years After He Observed Scenes). The role of Charlot’s study of Mexican artworks will be discussed below.

My experience of my father was that he would often look at something and become silent. When in the early 1950s, we visited an ancient cliff village in Arizona, he became very thoughtful and looked down. When we watched the first television projection from the moon, he was struck by the “slanting” light, so clear and hard-edged “because there’s no atmosphere.” He had more ideas than he could gestate into subjects.

His process of gestation was various. It could be instantaneous, as with the *malinche* dancer inspired by George Vaillant’s comic dancing, discussed below. In Guatemala and Barquisimeto, Venezuela, he worked quickly, probably because of the Indian element in the subjects. The process could be broken. When a painting of a Javanese sculpture was stolen, Charlot stopped working on the subject, either because the line of thinking was disconnected or because he regretted the loss. Charlot could simply lack the time to experience the subject, as in Tahiti.

Finally, throughout the development of subjects, other influences are felt. Observation of daily life reveals the importance of an activity. Sayings and poems reveal the thoughts and emotions Indians attach to it (1949 Statement). All experience and learning are important, but observation is the basis of any personal vision.

Charlot’s first experiences were largely urban—Veracruz and Mexico City. That city had been growing since the late nineteenth century, a growth accelerated by peasants moving from the country after the Revolution, almost tripling the city’s physical size between 1918 and 1928.⁵⁸ In 1921, the city held

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615,367 out of the 906,063 people in the district (Espinosa López 1991: 122 f.). Many newcomers moved into old houses in old neighborhoods (128), where Charlot could observe them close to his relatives' middle-class homes (*AA* II: 99). But the city administration was unprepared, and poor, crowded sections developed with bad water, drainage, and sanitation, resulting in widespread sickness and flooding (Espinosa López 1991: 108 f., 132 f., 142). The city thus came to resemble the country as a whole—an urban island in an ocean of rural Indians. As in the country and in history as a whole, the modernizing, urban Mexico seemed to threaten the peasants, especially with its increasing number of automobiles (113, 133 f., 136). Charlot writes:

Quand leur famille fuit devant l'automobiliste qui ricane, il me semble que recommence le massacre d'adolescents danseurs par Alvarado. (October 1922)

'When their family flees before the driver who laughs at them, it seems to me to begin again the massacre of the adolescent dancers by Alvarado.'

This allusion to his first fresco, *The Massacre in the Main Temple*, reveals what Charlot means when he writes: "Our only secret in working is to see nature with emotion" (March 1926). The same emotion permeates Charlot's urban subjects, like *cargadores* 'burden bearers,' newsboys, and the poor confronting the rich, sights that can be experienced in Mexico City today. Positively, the Mexico City of the early 1920s enjoyed a limpid, smog-free atmosphere with a light that both spread a glow and distinguished details. Also, most buildings were kept low by law (Espinosa López 1991: 113, 142).

As a newcomer to Mexico, Charlot was experiencing vividly what was most often commonplace to his colleagues. Writing, I believe, primarily of Orozco, Charlot found that "My Latin American artist friends, immune to the sights of their native lands, find New York extremely picturesque in their turn."⁵⁹ Although Orozco spoke against such sources for his art, Charlot felt that artist received half his education at San Carlos and the other half in the streets (November 1947). Similarly, Charlot wrote to Brenner:

Estoy seguro de que N. Y (la ciudad) te puede interesar tanto o mas que Mexico, empleando el mismo metodo de busca que en mexico. Es decir stick to 100% americans y estudialos. Sera esto de provecho. (JC to AB 2-2-25)

'I am sure that New York (the city) can interest you as much or more than Mexico, using the same research method as in Mexico. That is, stick to 100% americans and study them. This will be profitable.'

This is the simplest meaning of Orozco's statement that he and others "learned to see Mexico through the eyes of Charlot."

Moving out of the city to rural Mexico required effort as it does today. Charlot was able to experience—with unusual intimacy—Aztec village and family life through Luz Jiménez, his lifelong model and collaborator.⁶⁰ On May 28, 1922, she took Charlot, Rivera, Leal, and others, to her village. Milpa Alta was known to be especially conservative, speaking a near classical form of Náhuatl and preserving social, religious, and literary traditions.⁶¹ Charlot's efforts to learn the villagers' language must have proved his seriousness and supported their cultural pride, especially since they used their

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difficult, agglutinative dialect as protection against outsiders for their internal cultural world (Zantwijk 1960: V f., 23 ff., 79 ff.). Charlot was accepted into Luz's family. Her mystical grandmother Juana Manuela shared her religious knowledge with Charlot, and they established a relationship that was as important as the one he had had with the mystic Mademoiselle Marchais in Paris.⁶² Charlot was also invited to be the *padrino* 'godfather' of Luz's daughter, Concha, a position charged with family obligations, which he honored until the end of his life:

rentre vers 7 h au Mex. de Milpalta à S Gregorio à cheval. sur le chemin on baptise l'enfant de Luz dans village. Anita et moi parrain et marraine. pour moi grande joie. Anita triste. (Diary September 23, 1925)

'return around 7:00 AM to Mexico City. From Milpa Alta to San Gregorio on horseback. On the way, the infant of Luz is baptized in village. Anita and I godfather and godmother. For me, great joy. Anita sad.'

In the early twentieth century, no government transportation linked Milpa Alta to Mexico City, which helped preserve its character through isolation (Espinosa López 1991: 112). Pablo O'Higgins described the trip to the village:

What happened was that, after we'd met, Jean had to be the godfather of Luciana's first boy, or something, little boy. And we had to go to the villages up here in the mountains, to go on horseback. It was the only way you could get there. So we... she invited us to go, and he would go to the village. That was the character of Jean. So we started out. I think Luciana came for us, and we got as far as Ytapalapa and started walking... You've never been to these places? They're beautiful. [*inaudible*] in Mexico and up in the mountains. Called Milpa Alta. And Luciana sat down and said that "We cannot go further on because it's dark. And we can't sleep here because it's raining. So we'll go to Xochimilco. I have friends there, and we'll sleep there." So we went to Xochimilco and spent the night there with a friend of hers. Then we took the streetcar to another village further out. And that was the San Gregorio, where the line stops--that's on the ancient route--early in the morning. And we got on horseback and started on horseback to San Pedro.

Then we got on the horses again and went on the horses with Jean up to Milpa Alta, where Luciana lived. Very beautiful trip. That's where they're always making these tortillas, exactly like that in her own home. You see? I mean, these are the things that Jean painted and loved so much.

Another trip that Jean and I made was on the train to Cuernavaca, because he wanted to see one of his very fine friends in Cuernavaca, who was in an Indian family that lived in a village near Cuernavaca. It was not a village exactly, but on the outskirts of Cuernavaca. And we slept there for three days on *petates*, he talking in Náhuatl. (March 21, 1974)

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O'Higgins kept happy memories of the trip: "Te acuerdas cuando fuimos tu y yo, con Luz, a caballo?" "Do you remember when you and I went with Luz on horseback?" (Pablo O'Higgins to JC April 27, 1943).

In Mexico City, Charlot had depicted Indians in an urban setting, struggling with a foreign social and economic context. At Milpa Alta, Charlot experienced Indians in their own setting:

He noted the abysmal gap between city and village, so he went to the village, which represents the great majority of the people, and which contains the real character, the real power, of the nation. (Brenner 1930: 1)

Living with Luz's family and accompanying them on their pilgrimage to Chalma provided Charlot with access to the Indians' own inner world:

the house with Luz, which was at the time a typical Indian house with a floor of beaten earth and very dark, especially the kitchen. And the mother of Luz, who was at the time, I think, ninety years old when I knew her, passing really all her life in that darkness and coolness, I must say, of the kitchen, doing tortillas and so on other things that were part of the everyday life of the Indians (Interview September 28, 1970)

The experience inspired of a major subject, *Mexican Kitchen*:

It is a scene that I have treated a number of times in different mediums... Besides the close-knit composition, I enjoy the feeling of power that comes in drawing and painting a fire that seems to really warm us up. (Charlot 1949 Statement)

Jésus Villanueva Hernández, Luz's grandson and art historian, speaks of the warmth of the Aztec hearth, *hogar*, an indigenous self-understanding radically opposed to the stereotypes. Experiencing family and village life could be impressive, as Weston wrote: "Of simple peasant people I knew nothing. And I have been refreshed by their elemental expression,—I have felt the soil" (1961: 190). In his art, Charlot was bringing the viewer into the Aztec home and, at the same time, into the Aztec self-image, into the Aztec's own world.

Similarly, Charlot memorialized in paintings and prints the moment when an Aztec girl, having watched her elders for years, picks up a lump of *masa* and makes her first tortilla. Tortilla-making, laundering, caring for children, teaching them to dance—the daily life of the village woman—revealed for Charlot the religious, artistic character of Aztec culture: "the good life":

I always come back to that; it may be the most essential one. But the Indian is very religious, very spiritual person. And I have also worked on the subject of pilgrimages and so on, which for me are truly a part of Indian life. (Interview September 28, 1970)

Ultimately, at this deep level, Indian life connects with all human life, making their ways humanly transparent and meaningful:

But I think there was no jumping from one theme to another, but from the beginning up to now, the themes have enlarged around the same things: the very few costumes and accessories and the very few motions of the housework, for example, of the women, and that has been sufficient to guide really my whole art. Not so much perhaps as subject matter: as a general statement about—maybe not pleasant life,—but good life as I understand it and summed up in the life of the Indians. (Interview September 28, 1970)

The Indian's world view and religion were inseparable from the physical Indian. That inner view permeates every aspect of Indian life:

it's just sort of atmosphere that pervades or should pervade the different things I do about Indians. For example, perhaps for me the most striking thing in retrospect perhaps are the series of nudes I did which are not tainted, I would say, by the idea of a classical Greek or Roman nude, and as such I think go rather deep into the point of view of the Indian. The whole point of the pictures was to put things in form and color that have not or cannot be put into words. (Interview August 7, 1971)

Charlot praised Alfredo Zalce's lithographs of Yucatán:

In this album, Alfredo Zalce, in true artist fashion, does what the scientist fails to do, reconstructs whole breath-taking vistas from the one legible modern glyph, the Indian body, naked or swathed in white, busy at rustic activities or relaxed in rustic leisure. (Charlot January 1946)

A major subject of this theme is Charlot's depictions of the *temascal* 'sweat bath,' described by Brenner:

Luz, her mother, and another woman bathed in it and I tried to get some pictures. It was a marvelous sight—great, golden brown limbs in the dark, and feathery green branches of pepper tree, rather, twigs, with which they beat themselves gently. (Glusker 2010: 365)

Being jostled bodily against a wall in Chalma by a flowing crowd of pilgrims inspired *Chalma Procession*. The pilgrimage on foot along age-old Indian paths inspired Charlot's many depictions of the *Flight into Egypt*. Seeing the pilgrims bathe naked in the river before entering Chalma gave Charlot a social setting for the Aztec nude. Approaching a village towards the end of the night and seeing a grandmother dancing with her granddaughter in a field, Charlot conceived of the subject *Young and Old, Dance at Dawn*. Charlot's artistic eye could focus on details too familiar to the inhabitant and too minor for the tourist. The microscopic fan flicks of a woman *In Church* are caught by the almost invisible lines of lithographic pencil (M121). Charlot is fascinated by the women's constant adjustments of their *rebozos*, little gestures that fold individually the heavy cloth over head and shoulders like a monumental sculpture. In sum, Charlot's subjects and themes were developed from his experience, as he writes of Zalce, by "the subtle process of osmosis by which the artist came to learn all by refraining from asking specific questions" (January 1946). That experience was important also in his religious development. The art-filled devotion of the Indian

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parish moved Charlot towards his own “religion of the parishioner.” Other artists like Revueltas spent time in Milpa Alta, but none were as influenced by the village as Charlot.

Charlot’s basis in the living culture of Mexico explains a number of his views and attitudes. He tended to agree with some of the “mythological” views of Mexican history; for instance, he spoke always of the few young cadets killed at Chapultepec fighting the Yankees in 1847—*los niños héroes*—even though they were outnumbered by the seasoned Mexican troops and were almost all evacuated before the end. He thought Mexican Spanish pronunciation older and more beautiful than any other. Till the end of his life, he was defensive and protective about Mexico. Emotionally, Mexico was his adoptive country.

Mérida, who knew Charlot well at the time, described the impact Charlot’s experience of Mexico and study of folk art had on his feelings and work:

Él trató sus sujetos de acuerdo con una especie de, más bien, de tendencia o de gusto por la pintura popular, por los tipos populares, sin que esto implicara que era una pintura de compromiso como lo fue desde un momento la pintura de Rivera o la pintura de Siqueiros o la pintura de otros más que siguieron las huellas de Rivera. Él se interesó por la conquista a través de sus lecturas, él se interesó por las Malinches, por las tortilleras, por los cargadores, porque esto le producía a él, más bien, simpatías plásticas como pudo haberle interesado la flora o le pudo haber interesado los animales locales o cualquiera otra historia de esta naturaleza. Él se interesó desde luego por el arte folklórico, lo sentía por la parte mexicana que él tiene en su sangre. Su pintura popular de pulquería, Posada, Manila, Cordero, la academia de San Carlos, fueron sus materiales primeros de trabajo y siguen siéndolo a pesar de todos los años, así es que no es una cosa que él tenga como añadida o como se le haya añadido, en su momento aquel, sino porque él sentía estos motivos más en consonancia con su fino espíritu, su amor por la humanidad, su amor por la gente, su sentido positivo de vivir. En otros pintores del momento estos tipos que fueron pseudo-revolucionarios, llegaron a un clímax, que ya era una especie de intento directo de hacer un arte así sin que aquello tuviera un sentimiento hondo o perfecto como en el caso de la pintura de Juan Charlot, que era una cosa sensitiva, que era una cosa humana, que él llegó a eso por su sentimiento íntimo de las cosas más intensas de lo que pueda tener el arte de un pueblo, como es un folklore, como son sus tipos raciales, como son el modo de vivir, etc. (Interview 1971)

‘He treated his subjects in accord with a sort of—rather—of tendency or taste for popular painting, for popular types, without this implying that it was a painting of compromise as the painting of Rivera was from a certain moment or the painting of Siqueiros or the painting of others who followed in the footprints of Rivera. He interested himself in the Conquest through his readings; he interested himself in the Malinches, the *tortilla* makers, the burden bearers, because this produced in him, rather, plastic sympathies as the flora could have interested him or the local animals

or whatever other history of this nature. He interested himself from then on in folkloric art; he felt it with the Mexican part that he possessed in his blood. His popular *pulquería* painting, Posada, Manila, Cordero, the Academy of San Carlos, were his primary work materials and continue being so despite all the years. So it is that it isn't something that he has as an addition or as if he had added it to himself, in that moment of his, but because he felt those motives more in consonance with his fine spirit, his love of humanity, his love of the people, his positive sense of living. In other painters of that moment, those types that were pseudo-revolutionary reached a climax, which was already a kind of direct intention to make an art in that way without that having a deep or perfect sentiment as in the case of the painting of Jean Charlot, which was something sensitive, which was something human, that he reached through his intimate sense of the most intense things that an art of the people can have, the way they form a folklore, the way they are its racial types, the way they are its way of life, etc.'

3.5. POPULAR ART

In basing himself primarily on observation and experience, Charlot differs from artists like Picasso and, to a certain extent, Rivera who start their process from existing artworks. Charlot always started from a study of nature:

Influence comes from the world itself. Well, there are a few exceptions. I think a man like Picasso, for example, remains in that strange twilight of having an art, making an art influenced by art. But that is a great exception. That is, he uses already the chewed-up solutions of other artists. I was very impressed looking at the three hundred or so etchings that he did in six months in 1968. I was looking at those things that he did when he was nearly ninety, well, not exactly, but pretty close, and all those bookish, we could say, influences are there, and he doesn't seem to have done what painters do who work and are taught by nature. There is always a sort of a synthesis toward the end of their life that can be translated as a sort of increased wisdom. I found in those Picassos a tiredness using the same formulas, and it's like he had lived a very long life without having learned very much while living his long life. It's a little frightening. But as I say, artists influenced by art more than by nature are a great exception. (Interview November 12, 1970)

As comedian Eddie Brill stated: "If you have your base in reality, then you can have fantasy and be silly. But if your base is fantasy, then it's really hard to have a reality" (January 12, 2012). Artworks are, however, a factor in understanding and creation, as Charlot writes of Rafael Yela Gunther:

De dos fuentes se ha servido Yela para la consecución de su obra: de la observación directa de los espectáculos naturales y de esos mismos espectáculos observados por los indígenas en los objetos de arte popular. (September 27, 1925)

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‘Yela used two sources for the construction of his œuvre: direct observation of natural sights and these same sights as observed by the natives in popular art objects.’

Indeed, Mexican art is a major component of the experience of Mexico and thus an artistic influence.⁶³

Charlot studied Mexican art in Mexico in the same way he had studied Western art in Europe. He restarted his art education on a different historical basis: he viewed, analyzed, copied, and felt the impact of Mexican works of art. And just as in Europe, at the moment of his own artistic creation, he emptied his mind of previous art images. Charlot always differentiated between his study copies and his creative depictions of artworks—both folk objects and archeological ones—which, besides recording, also expressed his own emotional response to the portrayed work. In France, the basis of his first print, *Head of Christ*, “was probably a Spanish sculpture” (M1), and his *Poèmes Ecphrastiques* (1918) were prose-poem descriptions of artworks. In Mexico, Charlot portrayed artworks from all different periods, “the things that really formed me.”⁶⁴ After Mexico, he continued to create what could be called portraits of artworks, sometimes coupling examples from different cultures. One of his last oils is *New Guinea Still Life* (May 1978, CL 1367), two sculptures from his collection. This process of observation, analysis, and creative response can be found throughout Charlot’s work (John Charlot 1976).

Once his own creative artwork was finished, Charlot could compare it to those in Mexican art history. That is, Charlot did not begin by copying Mexican artworks. The consonance of Charlot’s work with other Mexican art is due, not to copying, but to their common artistic process from a basis in direct observation. Charlot and the Mexican artists have been impressed by the same objects. They have all experienced the places that inspire their local arts. The great changes undergone by Charlot in Mexico can be related directly to his powerful experiences of that land. He was finding his Mexican heritage inside himself. He was learning to be Mexican from the ground up.

Charlot thus approached Mexican art as an artist, which formed his thinking on the subject. This is most evident in his writing about folk arts, a diverse and flourishing field from Precolumbian times until today. Indeed, folk painting and pottery had been factors in keeping local cultures alive (Beezley 2008: 32). On returning to Mexico in 1921, Rivera was impressed with the amount of art in the streets (Fell 1989: 392). Although the San Carlos students in 1911 scorned the Vanegas Arroyo penny-sheets, fine artists had long been aware of folk arts:

The interest of artists in folk forms was no novelty. Valid germs of recognition between folk and fine arts fill the lithographic albums of mid-nineteenth century, *México y sus Alrededores*; *México Pintoresco*. Such beautiful graphic works might have ended by creating a true national art but for the hiatus of marbleized neo-Greek and gilded rococo that followed.⁶⁵

Charlot himself became identified with the study of folk arts.⁶⁶ As mentioned above and in Volume I, Charlot had known Mexican folk arts since his infancy through family collections that dated back into the nineteenth century. For instance, he first encountered *papeles picados* ‘paper cutouts’ in France and later informed Lola Cueto about them.⁶⁷ At one point, there was a folk art section in the

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Labadie's business, the Droguería de la Profesa (Tabletalk December 6, 1978). Indeed, when Charlot arrived in Mexico, he felt he was watching the family's folk figures spring to life.

When Charlot arrived in Mexico, a broad folk art revival was in progress. The Nacionalistas had been reviving and revalorizing folk arts, which were a major influence on their own art.⁶⁸ Dr. Atl had recently brought folk arts to the fore both in Mexico and internationally with a famous 1921 exhibition and catalogue.⁶⁹ He proposed folk arts as the basis for the nation's image and Mexican art (Reyes Palma 1991: 45 f.). Folk art was in fact made an important part of the national image, the image of the people.⁷⁰ Siqueiros remembered, "Una manía etnológica nos envenenaba a todos" 'An ethnological mania poisoned all of us' (1977: 210).

The influence of the Revolution can be found in the appreciation of folk arts in the early 1920s. The disruption of the established taste in art permitted an artist like Posada to be adequately appreciated: "Posada necesitaba del consumo de la Revolución para lograr la plena justificación de sus asuntos y de su estilo" 'Posada needed the destruction of the Revolution in order to win the full justification of his subjects and his style' (Charlot 1945–1947). *Calaveras* were particularly appropriate for Revolutionary subjects (Charlot 1964 Posada's Dance of Death: 3). *Retablos* had been especially popular during the Revolution, and Rivera, Charlot, and others called attention to their artistic merit: "Before the contemporary Mexican renaissance, critics found *retablos* laughable" (April 1949: 141; also 140; *MMR* 33 f.).

The complication of the cultural diversity of Mexican folk arts was solved by privileging a small number: the *charro* in the costume of the Porfiriato *rurales*, the *china poblana* women's costume, and the dance, the *jarabe tapatío*.⁷¹ This tendency reached a high point in a much-discussed 1918 ballet by Ana Pavlova, for which Best-Maugard designed the décor and costumes.⁷² The project was influential: "Tórtola Valencia y Ana Pavlova fueron los espíritus precursores del 'Mexicanismo' en pintura" 'Tórtola Valencia and Anna Pavlova were the spiritual forerunners of "Mexicanism" in painting'; "The view represented by Best in *Noche Mexicana* dominated the first part of the 1920s."⁷³ The recognition, reappraisal, and use by the Nacionalistas ensured that folk arts would be prominent in the modern art movement. Vasconcelos waivered in his views on folk arts, but ultimately felt they were important for his whole educational and cultural project and because they could lead to higher tastes.⁷⁴ Indeed, he commissioned the Nacionalistas to create the first murals of his program, so Rivera and the later murals had to react negatively or positively to their work.

Much positive can be said about the Nacionalistas.⁷⁵ Best Maugard's attempts at a Mexican aesthetic were pedagogically important and influential on several younger artists.⁷⁶ At a certain level of abstraction, the Nacionalistas' project can be described as parallel to that of the muralists. In order to develop a modern Mexican style, they wanted to join modern European art with compatible Mexican elements. Unfortunately, their idea of the latest European style was the work of Aubrey Beardsley (1872–1898) and Frank Brangwyn (1867–1956): "Siqueiros' *Vida Americana* manifesto was directed against Beardsley-style art, and Beardsley was an influence on the "Nationalists," Best-Maugard, etc."⁷⁷ The Nacionalistas' then found folk decorations—like Petatillo decorations—whose elongated figures seemed

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to the Western eye to match the *fin-de-siècle* Beardsley style they favored, thus providing a bridge to the most modern style they knew well (Reyes Palma 1991: 49). As a result, the Nacionalistas could use their chosen folk motifs “sin cambiar fundamentalmente sus estilos propios” ‘without fundamentally changing their own styles’ (Debroise 1984: 42).

However, the post-Nacionalista muralists attacked their predecessors’ actual art production as reductive, picturesque, trivializing, and even touristic.⁷⁸ The muralists found the Nacionalista style unsuitable for murals. The criticism of Charlot and others was that the Nacionalistas based themselves almost exclusively on surface decorations in the minor popular arts, especially ceramics, and used them in monumental projects for which they were inappropriate and for which more suitable models were available.⁷⁹ Charlot later wrote:

Bent on painting walls as eloquent as colonial plastic sermons, as architectural as Aztec carvings, the muralists were partial to what within each tradition suited best their purpose. Of the pre-Hispanic output, they picked the gigantic rather than the delicate, extracted out of the colonial arts the exalted and the bloody from under a silt of petit point, snuffbox, and potpourri.⁸⁰

Charlot’s own taste favored mass and form, in ceramics of other cultures as well as Mexican.

The second criticism, important for Charlot, was that the Nacionalistas missed the emotional depth and power of Mexico and its art. In the French draft of his first article on Posada, made less personal in the Spanish version, Charlot called attention to that printmaker as a representative of a much stronger tradition:

Je ne sais pourquoi ceux qui parlent d’art nationaliste basé sur l’art populaire n’étudient pas cet art populaire. S’ils sont peintres ou sculpteurs, qu’ils étudient *la peinture et la sculpture* populaire et non l’art purement décoratif (décors de vases ou de *jicaras*) auquel ils se sont attachés jusqu’ici. Ils apprendraient là quelques vérités et que Mexico est une terre essentiellement plastique, tragique et surnaturelle, et qu’après tout ni Anna Pavlova ni Best Maugard ne furent les plus légitimes représentants d’un art indo-américain.⁸¹

‘I do not know why those who speak of a nationalist art based on popular art don’t study that popular art. If they are painters or sculptors, let them study popular *painting and sculpture* and not purely decorative art (decorations of vases or cups) to which they’ve attached themselves up to now. They’ll find there some truths: both that Mexico is an essentially plastic, tragic, and supernatural land, and that after all neither Anna Pavlova nor Best Maugard were not the most legitimate representatives of indo-american art.’

In his diary for April 28, 1925, Charlot wrote: “soir : Pavlova. horrible” ‘evening: Pavlova. horrible.’⁸² Charlot detested the tendency to make cultures cute. In Hawai‘i, he found the native culture reduced to children’s games at the Kamehameha Schools, founded to educate Hawaiian youth. During the United

States bicentenary, he was horrified to see Archibald MacNeal Willard's *The Spirit of '76* (ca. 1875) played by Disney characters. In Mexico, he felt, a nadir of cuteness was reached with Elizabeth Morrow's *the Painted Pig* (1930), with illustrations by René d'Harnoncourt.

In sum, for the urgent needs of the social situation, the Nacionalista style was a dead end, incapable of achieving either the monumentalism of murals or the intensity of Goitia's easel paintings and the *El Machete* prints.

3.5.1. RETABLOS AND EX-VOTOS

Accordingly, Charlot was more interested in a genre like *retablos* or *ex-votos*, pictures of grateful recording of religious favors. These had been produced in Mexico since Colonial times, but were especially popular during the nineteenth-century wars and then the Revolution (Charlot April 1949: 140). The modern art movement was the first to take *retablos* seriously as art: "Before the contemporary Mexican renaissance, critics found *retablos* laughable."⁸³ Charlot credited "Diego Rivera [as] the first to speak respectfully of those little pictures"⁸⁴ This genre attracted other artists and thinkers as well.⁸⁵

Indeed, Charlot felt that *retablos* had strongly influenced Rivera and other muralists "in regard to mood and social content":

Anathema to Orozco, this sweetened representation appealed to Rivera, matching as it did his preference for gentle colors and round forms. Partly because his aesthetic was preconditioned to it, partly because he relished its tranquil mood, Rivera thus became the painter of a world in which revolution has triumphed already, a Utopia from which the worker has shooed away the bourgeois, where sweat is unknown, where overalls are the badge of distinction, where one parades through the cleansed landscape only to oppose the scarlet of banners to the azure of the skies.

A puzzling thing in this would-be Marxist paradise is the religious attitude of the folk who hold guns and machetes as if they were holy candles, and finger sickles and spanners as if they were rosaries. Such thanksgiving, somewhat incongruous in revolutionary pictures, stands as a reminder that the famed mural universe created by Rivera is blown to architectural scale from the tiny world of the *retablo*.⁸⁶

Muralists found in *retablos* "the wants of the people," subjects, mood, and style:

Our respect for folk art corrected the penchant that painters often indulge—to look at the people from the outside and, moved by both propaganda and pity, to place them with the best of intentions amidst garbage cans or their Mexican equivalent. The folk and their artists have a better opinion of themselves. (Charlot April 1949: 142)

Folk artists portray the folk as dignified inhabitants of well-kept surroundings: "All men wear immaculate white, or brand new overalls, all women layers of petticoats, a throwback to the eighteenth century. Rags are strictly reserved for the villain—" (142). The folk artist portrayed his subjects and clients as worthy of respect, without imposing an alien point of view:

Los pintores que no son del pueblo o que no se han hecho del pueblo (conozco ese caso único) lo pintan como un pretexto (enalteciéndolo o denigrándolo), al desarrollo de sus elocuencias egoístas. Solamente el pintor que es del pueblo lo pinta en sí, como se retrata a un hermano; y logrando el parecido, sin saberlo, hace obra social. (November-December 1926 “Manilla”)

‘The painters who are not of the people or who have not made themselves of the people (I know this unique case) paint the people as a pretext (exalting or degrading them) as they develop their egotistical eloquence. Only the painter who is of the people paints them as such, as a brother is portrayed; and achieving the likeness, performs a social work.’

Charlot himself painted a series of small oils in which he explored the esthetic of these folk painters.

For Charlot, *retablos* were an example of artistic continuity through the periods of Mexican history (April 1949: 139). God and Mary take on different forms as in Indian polytheism (April 1949: 141). In style, “Some are raw picture writing, the last survival in action of the pagan hieroglyph” (May 1955: 81). They display the tiered hierarchy of Medieval mystery plays (April 1949: 141) as well as the intermixing of the natural and the supernatural worlds. The *retablo* painter exemplified the ideal of the humble Medieval liturgical artist: “The little panels are painted selflessly, as gothic cathedrals were built” (May 1955: 81). The *retablo* painter could teach the modern artist humility, mental discipline, and community responsibility. For Charlot, all these were religious virtues: “in art as elsewhere man may lose himself to find himself.”

While visiting the Galleria dell’ Accademia in Venice, my father and I stopped before Titian’s *Pietà*.⁸⁷ I pointed to the right bottom corner, where Titian had painted a small, traditional ex-voto; he wanted the viewer to be clear that his own grander painting was in fact just such an offering. When I discussed this later with my father, he said, “You always come back to the ex-voto as the best way to talk to God” (Tabletalk October 15, 1978). Charlot’s emotional connection to such popular art is revealed in his 1976 CL 1351 *Mother and child, yellow background* to which he added the note: “MEXIHKANANTLI as title part of pix.” Painted less than three years before his death from cancer, the painting is a clear ex-voto, stripped down to its barest essentials and using the folk device of an included title as he had done in the 1922 paintings CL 27 *El Cargador* and CL 30 *Pilgrims, with curtains*: “Jean Charlot 1924.” Charlot, I believe, was asking for God’s help with all the innocence, sincerity, and power he recognized in the folk artist.

3.5.2. PULQUERÍA PAINTING AND OTHER FOLK ARTS

The muralists were naturally interested in public wall paintings, and the relevant folk genre was found on the walls of *pulquerías*, the numerous *pulque* bars; by one count, one *pulquería* for every 359 inhabitants:

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The calling of *pulquería* painters had many points of contact with what we ourselves wished to do, and Siqueiros hired one of them to garnish the walls of the first flight of stairs with make-believe twisted columns, false stonework and fake perspectives.⁸⁸

Again, Rivera played a leading role, and Weston provided photographs to illustrate articles by him and Charlot.⁸⁹

Promoting *pulquería* painting was certainly a way to *épater le bourgeois*. Weston reports Charlot losing his temper at a middle class man who accused them of deriding Mexico while they were photographing street side *pulquería* murals (1961: 193). Some writers and critics were and continue to be offended.⁹⁰ Even some artists were divided or wavering on the subject. Siqueiros could write against such folk art and then hire a folk painter to work on his wall.⁹¹ Orozco was characteristically conflicted (González Mello 2002a: 320, 334, note 119).

As with *retablos* and other folk genres, Charlot related *pulquería* paintings to fine arts:

In much of the Mexican fine arts survives a toughness and roughness mistaken by outsiders for provincial primitivism. But that it is rather racial genius is shown in the case of Cordero, who starts painting in a refined Italian manner, to let go in his maturity in the biggest and maddest *pulquería* painting of them all, the dome of Santa Teresa. (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

As will be seen below, Charlot saw in Cordero a forerunner of the 1920s muralists down to small details. Foreigners and cultured Mexicans criticized him for using the cheapest hardware store colors instead of expensive oils:

Esto muestra que Cordero tuvo cierto deseo de usar no solamente el estilo que llamé, de modo muy irrespetuoso, pero muy claro, pintura de pulquería, sino también los medios técnicos que se empleaban en su tiempo en la pintura popular. (“Juan Cordero)

‘This shows that Cordero had a certain desire to use not only the style named—in a very disrespectful but very clear way—*pulquería* painting, but also the technical means used in his time in popular painting.

Using himself characteristically as a foil, Charlot expressed his admiration of the *pulquería* painter, who “hace pinturas tan genuinamente indígenas, como no son las representaciones de indios que yo mismo me obstino en crear” ‘who makes such genuinely indigenous paintings, as are not the representations of Indians that I myself obstinately persevere in creating.’⁹² That *pulquería* painting moves the viewer to action can be observed: “El hecho de que más gente entra a beber en las pulquerías mejor pintadas prueba lo útil del arte” ‘The fact that more people enter to drink in the better painted *pulquerías* proves the usefulness of the art’ (Charlot October 1926).

Charlot discussed other folk arts as well. On arriving in Mexico, he had been struck by the fine, subdued colors of the Indian clothing, especially *serapes* (October 1922; March 1926: 16 f.). He was

happy to make a friend of Leon Venado, whose “severe Indian taste” he greatly admired: “his serapes displayed a splendid range of grays sharpened by a of velvet black shot with the lightnings of thin white streaks” (April 1949: 140; *MMR* 31 f.). Charlot keyed his new palette to such combinations. He had known *papeles picados* ‘paper cutouts’ in France and was able in Mexico to make his own and to help Lola Cueto revive the genre as a fine art (Charlot May 9, 1946). *Papeles picados* were an example of an art form with its subjects and styles that came from Precolumbian times, were popular in the Colonial period as a good cheap medium, and were still important in folk art. *Papeles picados* could decorate streets, *pulquerías*, and fiestas, and were also connected to sorcery and magic. The same characteristics could be found in Indian dances along with their characteristic esthetic: “ce goût du beau qui réside dans la proportion et qui donne à leur meilleures œuvres cette allure de *passion mathématique*” ‘this taste for a beauty that resides in proportion and which gives their best works this allure of *mathematical passion*.’⁹³ Charlot not only studied and depicted Indian theatre but wrote two plays in Náhuatl.⁹⁴

3.5.3. THE MURALISTS AND POPULAR ARTS

As mentioned above, the Mexican artists of the time differed in their attitudes and views on folk art. Leal was strongly positive (1990: 75, 77 ff.). Tamayo argued that dependence on folk art led to a superficial picturesqueness and that high art had to be universal rather than local like folk arts.⁹⁵

Orozco was the most voluble on the subject. He could write formally against the blurring of the line between popular art and fine art and the use of the former in the latter for nationalistic purposes (Orozco 1971: 135 ff.). He could also express his low opinion of the people and dislike of folklore (Orozco 1971: 136 ff.). On the other hand, he could be neutral or even positive about folk art.⁹⁶ Indeed, as a cartoonist, Orozco could have claimed to be the only muralist who had practiced what could be considered a folk art or certainly a street art. Charlot had experienced Orozco as a working cartoonist:

he didn’t want especially to paint murals. He made his living at the same time like he had done before by doing cartoons for magazines. Then we would walk with him from the Preparatoria to the place where he had done those cartoons, and there was a little, I remember, there was a little glass case outside the printer’s in which the magazine just off the press was shown. So we would just go and see how the layout of his cartoon had been, and if it was well reproduced, and so on, so forth. (Interview May 18, 1971)

However, as Orozco started his mural career, he was anxious to renounce his cartoonist past as unworthy of his status as a fine artist, and he could become furious when others reminded people of his earlier career.⁹⁷ This raised problems for Charlot, who saw Orozco’s cartoons as important in themselves and for understanding Orozco and his place in Mexican art history:

At the time, of course, he was something that for me tied up—he was the only one of us who tied up with the folk art of the, well, of Posada—to come back to Posada—and the nineteenth-century Mexicans. In fact, he was the only one actually who was in direct line with the nineteenth-century illustrators and cartoonists. He wasn’t

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interested in the fact, but everybody else had forgotten those people. So I knew Orozco as a comrade, we should say, and as a cartoonist for perhaps two years before he went to the walls and started painting walls himself. (Interview May 18, 1971)

Orozco's cartoons connected him to an authentic Mexican tradition: when Europeanized art was in vogue, "cartoonists kept alive the quota of dynamism and unnicety without which Mexican art would quickly wither" (*AA* II: 151). In sum, Orozco's views on folk art had psychological and biographical consequences for him. Charlot felt that Orozco had received a double art education: half at San Carlos and half in the streets (November 1947: 259). The two influences created tensions in his work: "Under its fierce unity, his thundering eloquence hides stylistic sources far-ranging in their eclecticism," like Ravenna mosaics and penny-sheets (Charlot July 22, 1956). Those tensions, I argue, included his self-image as an artist. Charlot seems to have felt that Orozco became more positive about Mexican folk art once he lived in New York and became interested in United States folk culture. Orozco had simply been taking Mexican folk culture for granted because he had never been away from it. Orozco may also, I believe, have been influenced by the positive views of his New York patrons and friends, as he was in the case of his image of Emiliano Zapata. González Mello argues from the timing of Charlot's publication on Posada and Orozco's first use of a *calavera* image that Charlot influenced Orozco positively towards Posada and folk art in general.⁹⁸ In any case, in the United States, Orozco arrived at an inclusion, if not an integration, of the two sides of his artistic personality—street art and fine art—in one artwork, rather than the juxtaposition of those two sides in separate works, as he had done in the Preparatoria (Rub 2002: 19).

As to the general influence of folk arts, Charlot asked: "Do the paintings of the muralists show as great an influence from folk painting as their enthusiastic endorsement in words would lead us to suppose?" (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut). He finds the influence of folk arts harder to measure than those of Precolumbian and Colonial. The similarity of subject matter is easy to see, but "more important than subject matter... is the absorption of a mood and of a style":

The Rivera frescoes of 1923–24 are painted with a certain innocent awkwardness. They share with the *retablos*, penny pamphlets, and *pulquería* murals a lack of preoccupation with artistic sciences, anatomy, perspective, "good drawing." (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

Revueltas' "fat easy stroke and splendid coloring-pattern" in his Guadalupe mural "renew the *pulquería* palette and style to fit the size and mood of the gigantic *retablo* that was his mural." Siqueiros hired a *pulquería* painter to fill sections of his wall. Officially, probably in the words of Siqueiros, the Sindicato condoned folk art but, with the Nacionalistas in mind, condemned the "descriptive picturesqueness that pretends to express the essence of a region by its puerile exterior aspects and folk customs" (Charlot Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut).

Another aspect of the folk arts movement was that the government was promoting them as an economic resource for local communities, which was creating problems of maintenance, commercialization—especially for tourists—and standardization.⁹⁹ Charlot was aware of these issues:

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Montenegro and the nationalist painters accepted the handicraft state of folk art as a desirable esthetic set-up as had Ruskin and Burne-Jones in England. They approved of the retrograde economic arrangements of Indian potters and weavers that gives their work, even in Mexico, a mediaeval flavor. The muralists stated instead that a world where small crafts thrived legitimately was no longer possible, and they hailed the machine age. (Writings Related to *MMR*; Appendix III)

In his notes on his 1942 fresco, *Visual Arts, Drama, Music*, Charlot described a section: “There is also the potter and near him a potter’s wheel of archaic type, a hint of future industrialization and machine-made art” (1942 “Fine Arts Façade”).

Rather than addressing those problems directly, Charlot focused on two issues that would have repercussions on them (Chapter 1). First, he wanted to identify the folk artists rather than treating them as anonymous:

Yo creo que, con alguna buena voluntad, podríamos “despopularizar” una buena parte de las obras plásticas mexicanas y dar, al fin, a sus autores los elogios y el respeto que merecen.¹⁰⁰

‘I think that with a little good will, we can “depopularize” a good part of the Mexican artworks and give, finally, its authors the praise and respect they deserve.’

Second, he wanted to study their work as authentic art: “Basta verlas como pinturas y no como curiosidades folklóricas” ‘They should be looked at as paintings and not as folkloric curiosities.’¹⁰¹ Folk artists felt as much the “anguish of creation” as fine artists (April 1949: 139). These points were important as antidotes to the commercialization and even industrialization of folk arts.

Even today, the idea of the anonymous artist is imposed on primitive art, African art, and so on. In his “Arts d’Afrique” of 1914, Apollinaire writes of “de grands artistes anonymes” ‘some great anonymous artists’ (1991: 744). Charlot saw behind this attitude not only snobbery but prejudice:

No se podía menospreciar su producción misma, por ser excelente. Entonces se inventó el truco del “arte popular”, gracias al cual se podía rendir homenaje a los objetos de arte y seguir despreciando al artista autor de ellos (November–December 1926)

‘His production itself could not be underestimated, because it was excellent. So the trick of “popular art” was invented thanks to which one could render homage to the objects of art while continuing to depreciate the artist, the author of those objects.’

Dr. Atl himself was against the idea of the individual folk artist; he reproduced Posada’s work, but mentioned his name only once.¹⁰² Posada would be the most famous example of Charlot’s rescuing a folk artist from anonymity.

Working in France as a liturgical artist, Charlot had accepted the historically incorrect view of the anonymous Medieval craftsman-artist. But he had learned to give names to popular and folk artists

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like Honoré Daumier and François Georquin of the Images d'Épinal. He connected this background to his work in Mexico:

We are going now to France in the nineteenth century, and we are again seeing here what was literally a penny-sheet; that is, you could buy this beautiful color woodcut for a penny. It is called "Image d'Épinal." And so many people like folk art, but they don't like the folks. That is, they don't realize that those things are done by people. Actually, the man who did this was a man called Georquin. He signed very proudly his woodcuts, and he didn't know he would be simply merged in the idea of folk art. He thought he was—and he *was*—a very original artist. So I think those two slides are a good preparation for looking now at the work of Guadalupe Posada, who was a maker of penny-sheets.¹⁰³

Charlot could not meet Medieval cathedral builders, but in France, he did visit the publishing house of the Images d'Épinal and worked with a printer in the small town of Chaumontel. In Mexico, he could get to know folk artists whose work was still being presented without attribution. Anonymous in the art world, they were famous in their communities, like the Panduro family and Amado Galván.¹⁰⁴ Charlot made research trips with O'Higgins, Siqueiros, Weston, and Brenner.¹⁰⁵ In rejecting the European idea of the "anonymous folk artist," Charlot was adopting the village way of recognizing and honoring its creative artists. His experience of meeting the artists—like a sculptor at Teotihuacán (Diary May 20, 1923)—helped form his view.

The greatest artist Charlot rescued from anonymity was José Guadalupe Posada, about whom he wrote prolifically. Charlot connected that achievement to his earlier appreciation of French folk art:

So there has been there a long series of contacts since I was a small boy with popular engravings. And of course, being aware of that business of popular sheets, images—pilgrim images we could say—when I was in Mexico, very quickly I looked for the similar thing, and that is the way, of course, I got very much interested in the publishing house of Vanegas Arroyo, who are the people who had printed the work of José Guadalupe Posada. And it is really not through an accident but through that pre-form so to speak by which I was acutely aware of folk engraving that I was, we could say discovering, rediscovering, anyhow publicizing, the work and the name of José Guadalupe Posada. (Interview October 22, 1970)

Characteristically, Charlot found Posada's artworks in the street. A newsboy was selling some illustrated sheets, and Charlot asked where he had got them. The newsboy directed Charlot to the family firm of Vanegas Arroyo, and Charlot quickly became a friend.¹⁰⁶ Charlot interviewed family members, like the wife of the firm's head, Antonio Vanegas Arroyo.¹⁰⁷ In the 1920s and 1930s, Charlot also went through the workshop's holdings and observed the firm at work (1979: 35 f.). Charlot's understanding of Posada's

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subjects and style was aided by this familiarity with the business and the audience: “ojos todavía más adeptos a descifrar pictogramas al estilo prehispánico que las letras del alfabeto” ‘eyes still more adept at deciphering pictograms of a prehispanic style than the letters of the alphabet.’¹⁰⁸

Charlot’s first mention of Posada may have been in his interview with Rafael Vera de Córdova, published June 1, 1922.¹⁰⁹ Charlot was comparing the woodcuts he and Leal were making to European avant-garde prints:

Leal el mexicano, y Charlot el francés, preparan la edición de un álbum de grabados en madera iluminados a colores por el procedimiento de “Pochoir” y con cien tipos nacionales. Sin embargo, de este seguro éxito editorial, ya recordamos que en nuestra niñez habíamos visto algo parecido en los cuentos de a centavo que editaba el señor Vanegas Arroyo.

‘The Mexican Leal and the Frenchman Charlot are preparing the edition of an album of woodcuts illuminated with colors by the “Pochoir” procedure and with one hundred national types. However, about this sure publishing success, we remember having seen in your childhood something similar in the penny-sheet tales published by Mr. Vanegas Arroyo.’

In all his later recollections of the early 1922 woodcuts (as also Leal’s), Charlot mentions his awareness of Posada’s work and his hope that it along with his own prints would clarify each other to the Mexican audience. Charlot and Siqueiros included Posada, with misspelled name, in a list of different types of artists in the Araujo article of July 11, 1923: “Arte popular en general (Posadas [*sic*], Panduro, etc., etc)” ‘Popular art in general (Posadas [*sic*], Panduro, etc., etc).’ Charlot started his first major article on Posada in French (1925 Guadalupe Posadas), and the version that brought Posada recognition was published in Spanish, “Un Precursor del Movimiento del Arte Moderno, El Grabador Posadas” (August 30, 1925). Charlot wrote extensively on Posada throughout his life (Chapter 1). Indeed his last completed article was “José Guadalupe Posada and his successors” (1979), published posthumously.¹¹⁰

Penny-sheets, such as those illustrated by Posada, were generally despised, even by art students, but Charlot felt that at the end of the nineteenth century, Mexican art could be found more in “opposition sheets that featured cartoons which were in themselves a living art more valid than most academic performances of the period” (*San Carlos* 137, 156). Moreover, penny-sheets were a popular genre like murals and apart from their content “can also help people see beauty” (August 5, 1971). As stated above, Charlot had already been interested in European penny-sheets while in France and knew that a great artist like Daumier could work in the medium.¹¹¹ He was, therefore, ready to recognize a great artist when he met him on the streets: “para el artista la revelación de una de las más fuertes personalidades artísticas que el mundo ha conocido” ‘for the artist, the revelation of one of the strongest artistic personalities that the world has ever known’ (Charlot 1926 Prólogo).

For Charlot, Posada’s art was characteristically Mexican in being both esthetically rigorous and excitingly narrative. Posada’s strong interest in subject matter provided a balance against those who were

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more interested in style (Tabletalk July 19, 1971). He succeeded in reaching the people with subjects that were shocking and tragic, revalorizing images and themes that could be traced back into Precolumbian art. He depicted the natural and supernatural occupying the same space: “we have the devils and the holy personages taking part in the doings of the people”; “the mixture of the two worlds, the other world and this one, is typical of the subject of the pennysheets” (Charlot June 9, 1965). Charlot described:

Inventa con regocijo mil nahuaques y demonios, los echa despiadadamente encima de algún miserable, alumbrando infiernos inauditos para su castigo. Así vemos, en el paradójico drama social del “Rico que se suicidó por envidia”, cómo los siete monstruos salidos de la elegante chaqueta acometen, ávidos, en contra de su futura presa. (1928 Posada Grabador)

‘He invented with enjoyment a thousand flying Aztec sorcerers¹¹² and demons, tossed them pitilessly on top of some miserable person, lit unheard-of hells for his punishment. Thus we see in the paradoxical social drama of the “Rich man who killed himself out of envy” how the seven monsters coming out of his elegant jacket attack avidly their future prisoner.’

The description recalls Charlot’s childhood puppet theatre set of a demon-filled hell. Charlot’s 1924 print, *Los Ricos en el Infierno* ‘*The Rich in Hell*’ (M56) is certainly a homage to Posada.

Posada was not anonymous. He knew who he was and also his community loyalties:

él era perfectamente consciente de su valor. Pero no por eso se quiso desligar de sus obligaciones de clase, en las cuales encontró, bien al contrario, su mejor razón para obrar. (1928 “Posada Grabador”)

‘he was perfectly conscious of his value. But not for this did he want to unbind himself from his class obligations, in which, quite to the contrary, he found his best reason to work.’

Posada deserves to be appreciated for himself, not just for his historical position:

Es exacto considerar a Posada como el precursor del movimiento presente de arte indoamericano, pero esto, en justicia, no basta. Hay que citarlo también como uno de sus más altos exponentes. (1928 “Posada Grabador”)

‘It is right to consider Posada as the forerunner of the current movement of indo-american art, but this, in justice, is not enough. He should be referred to also as one of its highest exponents.

Charlot argued that Posada was in many ways a model for the muralists and other contemporary artists:

[Charlot] positioned him as a touchstone for the nascent Mexican mural movement. In articulating Posada’s retrospective importance to the muralists, Charlot sought to anchor their efforts to build a new concept of modern Mexican culture in the wake of the 1910 Mexican Revolution: the creation of an art that was socially relevant;

popular and accessible; and authentically Mexican in style, theme, and means. The Posada portrayed by Charlot served this purpose well. Artists such as José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera incorporated him and his oeuvre into their personal artistic mythologies as well as their artwork, and the valorization of the printmaker as a forefather of modern Mexican art spread across the border...¹¹³

The influence of Posada has continued to grow, and Charlot's image of Posada has been so influential that criticisms and modifications are only beginning to appear.¹¹⁴

Posada retained a strong personal attraction for Charlot:

JC wanted to do a catalogue raisonné of Posada. This was the first big scholarly work he was tempted to do. So he was very sad when it was pulled out from under him; especially in such a bad job. He still doesn't like to look at Toor's Posada Monograph because it hurts too much. (Tabletalk early to mid-1970s)

Charlot went to Chich'en Itza with much of the research done and plans for publication by Frances Toor in the format of *Mexican Folkways* (Charlot to Brenner "No he recibido nada tuyo todavía"). Toor then wrote him that she was pursuing the project with Rivera as writer and editor. Charlot wrote Brenner that he did not want them to use his work:

I stop doing the V.A. number. Diego sabia que yo lo hacia y tenia material reunido y el gran misterio es que quieren aprovechar me pobre trabajo.¹¹⁵

'I stop doing the Vanegas Arroyo number. Diego knew that I was doing it and had material gathered, and the great mystery is that they want to profit by my poor work.'

Offended by her letters, Charlot broke with Toor but worried about his relationship with Vanegas Arroyo.¹¹⁶

As seen above, Charlot stated that Posada's prints helped the other muralists understand his own woodblocks and those of Leal.¹¹⁷ As Charlot was working on his last Posada article (1979), I told him I thought he was moving the emphasis from Posada's work towards his... When I hesitated, my father completed my sentence with, "I *identify* with him more."

Charlot also worked on the earlier printmaker Manuel Manilla. The resemblance of the titles—"Manuel Manilla, Grabador Mexicano" (November–December 1926) and "José Guadalupe Posada, grabador mexicano" (1928)—suggests that Charlot was planning a larger series.¹¹⁸ Again, Charlot analyzed Manilla stylistically as he would a conventionally regarded fine artist:

La composición mezcla hábilmente elementos geoméricamente simétricos y elementos desimétricos, pero equilibrados por masa, la relación de los unos y los otros, siendo de gran efecto dinámico. (November–December 1926; also *AA* II: 160 f.)

'The composition skillfully mixes symmetrical geometric elements with asymmetric ones, but balanced through mass, the relation between the ones and the others creating a great dynamic effect.'

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Charlot particularly appreciated a monumental quality in Manilla's art, achieved despite the small size of the prints.¹¹⁹ Although Manilla has not been accorded great fame, he has earned an honorable place by name in the history of art.¹²⁰

Charlot's second point was that folk arts should be studied as fine arts. He rejected the idea of a hierarchy with oil painting at the top and folk arts at the bottom, "como si se trataba de clases sociales en un medio subfeudal" 'as if it concerned social classes in a sub-feudal environment' (1946 Galo Galecio). The tourist saw folk arts as cheap curios, the ethnographer as artifacts. Charlot wanted to look at their esthetics and power of communication. He did this not only in his writing, as discussed above, but in his art.

This aspect of Charlot's activity can be compared to the work of Edward Weston at the same time. Weston was buying folk arts as well as photographing them, especially for Brenner's *Idols Behind Altars*.¹²¹ Charlot was also collecting pieces for himself and helping visitors find quality work (e.g., Diary January 3, 1928). Some of Weston's work is primarily recording. The object is usually presented by itself, complete, and straight-ahead as a sort of ethnographic illustration.¹²² Other photographs are more like portraits of the artwork. The figure is often isolated, not complete, and seen from an indirect angle; one or other aspect of the object is presented dramatically and thus emphasized.¹²³ However, as a great artist, most of Weston's photographs combine both emphases: they provide a complete portrait of the object along with the artist's intense impression of its character and quality.¹²⁴

Charlot was also working with Brenner on the same project and provided a number of straight copies.¹²⁵ He also created portraits of artworks (Glusker 2010: 23, 200) and works that combine the two emphases (226). The Tortillera statuette (566), given him by Panduro VII, became one of his main subjects.

I think with Siqueiros, and we were running around in places like San Pedro Tlaquepaque. I think San Pedro Tlaquepaque is the place where that figure comes. And there are families of potters that for generations have done not only pots but what would be called statuettes. Most of those that they sell are heavily polychromed. That is, that is the style of the small Indian statues like those that my grandfather had that date from the 1860s or before. Some are polychromes, some have actual clothing on them. But in this case, we had been visiting with one of the Indian potters, and we were in his, well, we could say house; it was an Indian house that could maybe have been called a hut by tourists, and on top of a sort of a chest of drawers that was there, there was that little statue, and the first thing that attracted me to it was that it had not been painted. Of course, it hadn't been clothed in real clothing. It was really a terracotta statuette, and I had already done portraits of Luz and so on with gestures of making tortillas, and I recognized, of course, the gestures I had seen in Luz in the little statuette. And I just said to the man, rather casually, because in Mexico you have to be casual about things, I said that I thought it was a lovely thing. And Indians are very polite people, and he went and took it and gave it to me. And I felt rather bad

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because I realized that it was a family portrait, probably the portrait of his own wife or of his own mother, but of course, I couldn't very well refuse. So just between what I considered the beauty of the sculpture and the anecdote full of a combination of my own lack of discretion, I would say, and that terrific Indian politeness, I *have* treasured, it's quite true, that little thing through life, and I like to use it now as I would nearly a live model. (Interview August 7, 1971)

Charlot also produced free creations in folk style (Glusker 2010: 212, 511) and also began assimilating folk techniques into his painting (737).

To emphasize the art character of a folk object, both Charlot and Weston focused on the individual piece, indeed often the same one (e.g., CL 69 *Toy Horse*): "Same toy photographed by Weston."¹²⁶ Their styles can be compared in their portraits of the statuette of a bull (Glusker 2010: 23). Weston places the bull perfectly in profile against a textile pattern, which enables the viewer to feel the forward thrust of the bull from its high rump curving down towards its neck and horns. Charlot faces three quarters towards the bull and looks at it from a low angle, emphasizing its bulk, aggressive color, and fierce bellowing. The bull is monumental and alive. From his childhood bed, Charlot had gazed at a similar angle on a statuette of a horse by Barye.

In accord with this focus, Weston would photograph one ceramic horse rather than a whole shelf of horses at a market stall. James Oles has criticized this as decontextualizing the object:

The intense formalism of *Tres Ollas* leads the viewer to concentrate on the interplay of the circular vessels and their shadows, to the exclusion of deeper cultural or ethnographic meanings.... Although found in regional markets or in use among rural populations, the folk art Weston photographed is almost never shown in context. (1993: 113)

In fact, Weston could make a magnificent composition of a multitude of bowls displayed for sale.¹²⁷ But in isolating an object, Weston's point was to focus on it so intently that the viewer had to face it as a work of art. Weston discussed the problem of object and context in his photograph of a toilet, *Excusado* (1925). At first he was upset that he had not removed a quarter inch of the cover that showed at the top. On reflection, he wrote: "To take off the toilet's cover... would make it less a toilet, and I should want it more a toilet rather than less" (Weston 1961: 135). Context should be provided to the extent that it strengthens the presentation of the object. Although Western artworks are normally presented as single objects, a debate is still in progress about whether this is appropriate for artworks from other cultures, especially those termed folk, primitive, tribal, and so on. Charlot saw in this difference in presentation "the paternal condescension with which the civilized appreciates any savage culture, since Parisian aesthetes started the Negro art fad" (*AA* II: 39 f.). Although Charlot and Weston did not deny the value of context for all artworks, they also wanted to recognize folk art objects as worthy of a primarily esthetic attention; thus they presented them within the conventions used for Western fine arts. Showing the art quality of such works demonstrated that the Mexican people enjoyed the full range of artistic creativity and thus of humanity.

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Folk art helped Charlot understand perennial Mexican themes by immersing him in undoubted and still vital Mexicanidad. Moreover, Charlot could experience immediately the indomitable artistic energy of the Mexican people. The muralists did not need to revive Mexican art:

No se trata para nadie ni de crear ni de resucitar el arte mexicano, que nació hace mucho tiempo y siempre ha gozado de muy buena salud.¹²⁸

‘It is not a question for anyone either to create or to resuscitate Mexican art, which was born long ago and has always enjoyed very good health.’

The modern artists had only to see the art of the people around them—“a mass startlingly, mediocrally alive, intensely religious, and intensely creative” (Brenner 1930: 1)—feel themselves a part of that artistic community, and draw from that power: The muralists lived among a people of artists and art lovers, who provided an expert audience. Charlot would later apply his Mexican lessons to the popular culture of the United States.

3.6. COLONIAL ART

Colonial art is as ubiquitous as folk art in Mexico and immensely impressive. Charlot knew the European art from which Mexican Colonial was derived, but he was struck by how Mexicans had made it their own. In his diary for June 18, 1922, he wrote: “petites églises. azulejos et sculpture part est lo del corte part des Indiens. magnifique” ‘little churches. Azulejos and sculpture part is of the court part of the Indians magnificent.’

Just like folk arts, Colonial art was in close continuity with Mexican art history from Precolumbian times, and its innovating creation could be traced in detail during the first transition period of the sixteenth century:¹²⁹

Pero América Latina es también Indoamérica y el arte de grabar venido de Europa adquiere aquí un sentido misterioso que no tiene en su origen. Sin que los propios artistas sean conscientes de ello, en sus grabados y en sus litografías hay algo de la fuerza y la robustez del arte indio prehispánico. Hay también un sentimiento racial de la sangre y de la muerte en muchos grabados populares y cultos, modernos y antiguos. Algo que relaciona los frescos mayas de los sacrificios humanos de Chichén Itzá con los vasos aztecas para guardar los corazones de las víctimas humanas, los Cristos escuálidos por cuyas costillas descarnadas resbala la sangre y las estampas políticas de hoy en que un tirano cualquiera hinca su bota sobre un montón de cadáveres de un realismo que va mucho más allá de la figura retórica.

“Latin America is also Amerindia, and print making, even though originally imported from Europe, takes after a while a more mysterious countenance than it ever had at its source. Unknown to the wood engraver or lithographer, some of the sturdy, stocky quality of pre-Hispanic Indian aesthetic creeps into his composition. There is a racial accent on blood and death in many prints, ancient or modern, popular or sophisticate.

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The same streak links Mayan frescoes of Chichen Itza, depicting human sacrifices, the Aztec tiger vessels made to receive the hearts of human victims, the flagellated Christs skinned to naked bloody ribs, and today's cartoons that pile corpses under the boot of some local dictator with a realism that makes of the subject matter more than a figure of speech." (1946 Introduction/Introducción)

Colonial art stood next to Indian: "the chance meeting of violently contrasting aesthetics—does in fact plague the inner eye of all Mexican artists" (*AA II*: 148). Charlot analyzed their interaction, for instance, in the work of the nineteenth-century artist Pedro Patiño Ixtolinque:

Patiño's nationalist stand was reflected more clearly in his choice of themes than in an evolution of his esthetics... And yet the craft of an Aztec hand is suggested by the directness of the carving, of a stockiness that bespeaks respect for his material—a local yellow stone...Patiño's technique, unlike his esthetics, still showed some awareness of the pre-Hispanic tradition, of the unclassical—but true—worth of statues kept close to the original boulder shape.

Tame as they seem now, such mild attempts at Mexicanismo mark the first stirrings of a national art, concurrent with the birth of the nation itself. (*San Carlos* 71 f.)

Patiño's subjects could also provide links, such as his *Cargador* or *Burden-Bearer* with its "mood dramatic enough to make this drawing a worthy Colonial link between pre-Hispanic renderings of the 'slave' theme and modern ones, fraught with social-conscious undercurrents" (*San Carlos* 58). Charlot could apply such an analysis to the work of his colleague Siqueiros:

While the deep modelings of the lower ceiling are propped on Masaccio, a native Indian tang imbues what remains of the "St. Christopher," regardless of the colonial subject matter. It blossomed even more freely in the Indian figure, which has now disappeared, in which subject and style synchronized. (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

Colonial art provided abundant examples of a leitmotiv of Mexican art history: physical pain, death, and the skull (*AA II*: 14). Moreover, Colonial art, suffused with perennial Mexican art values, "did not shy at using such bastard means, this art that broke all the rules of good art in its desire to stir, to expostulate, and to convert" (*AA II*: 17). Most important, Colonial art, just like Precolumbian, was essentially religious, and art was prayer and propitiation (*AA II*: 18 f.). This powerful art was the opposite of Yankee "sugar-saints...sporting their sanctity as a kind of social accomplishment" (*AA II*: 18). Mexican religious art was given its highest sanction by the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe—the image that forms the center of Mexican devotion:

On this day—the Feast of the Indian Virgin—we artists should apprehend with devotion the lesson taught by the miraculous image. Its aesthetic, conceived in Heaven, in its linear purity so close to geometry, in its flat hues so delicate and yet so

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pure, has little in common with photographic realism, and even less with the lessons taught in art academies. (AA II: 373)

Besides admiring greatly the image—which he said no painter of the time could have created—Charlot would develop a particular devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe and depict her often, for instance, in his illustrations for Helen Rand Parish's *Our Lady of Guadalupe* (1955), in his 1959 mural *Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Four Apparitions* in Atchison, Kansas, and in two ceramic statues in Honolulu, Hawai'i: *Madonna and Child* of 1959 at St. Francis Hospital, and *Mary Our Mother* of 1978–1979 at Maryknoll Grade School.

Charlot refers to Colonial art often in his writings, but his fullest study of a single Colonial artwork is on the mural of St. Christopher in the church of Santiago Tlatelolco, a subject of interest to himself as a muralist (he would paint a fresco of the subject in 1924).¹³⁰ Charlot provides the European background and an account of the subject in Mexico:

Como tantas otras costumbres implantadas por los conquistadores, el culto de San Cristóbal adquiere matices distintos en el Nuevo Mundo. El más importante es el paralelo que se establece entre la vida del santo y el de su tocayo, el descubridor de las Américas. (1945 El San Cristóbal)

“As happened in the case of many another custom transplanted from Europe, the cult of Saint Christopher acquired a distinctive flavor in the New World. A parallel came to be drawn between the Saint and his modern namesake: the discoverer of the Americas.” (AA II: 78)

In the Spanish publication, Charlot uses the Aztec word *tocayo* for *namesake*. Charlot explains the local meaning of the subject: Christopher carrying the Christ child across the river represents the bringing of Christianity across the ocean to the New World. Moreover, the almost forgotten motif of the European subject—that Christopher had been a servant of the devil—could be revived in Mexico and applied to the indigenous religion. Charlot then turns to an analysis of this “true mural”—technical, iconographical, and stylistic—in fact, a description of the three styles of the creation and reworkings of the mural in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Charlot concludes by relating the mural to the artists and art of his time:

Pero el Santo es hoy acreedor a nuestro especial cariño, puesto que lo vemos como precursor inconsciente de la escuela mural mexicana de la época actual. (1945 El San Cristóbal)

“Yet our twentieth century feels a special gratitude towards the Saint Christopher of Tlatelolco, a precursor that unconsciously embodies some of the characteristics of modern Mexican murals.” (AA II: 85)

In this essay, Charlot provides a model of art-historical study of Mexican Colonial art with its many facets. Charlot's biographer, Lewis Andrews, feels he had a special feeling for the St. Christopher symbol because of his own voyage across the ocean to Mexico.

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Just as Charlot identified with Posada, so he felt a special closeness to Juan Cordero (1824–1884), who was strictly speaking after the Colonial period but placed by Charlot roughly in that context (*MMR* 23 ff.). Curiously, Charlot had painted a fresco on a wall panel in the Escuela Preparatoria, now the San Ildefonso museum, that had earlier held a tempera mural by Cordero (1945 Juan Cordero). As Charlot studied Cordero during his mid-1940s stay in Mexico, he was struck by the similarity of Cordero's story to that of the muralists. Charlot was working on his book *The Mexican Mural Renaissance* (1963) and revisiting with a certain nostalgia the sites of his youth (*AA* II: 385–397). Born in Mexico, Cordero studied art in Mexico City and earned his living by selling various small goods and artworks. In this way, like the muralists, Cordero became more Mexican through more intense contact with the Mexican people:

Con esta carga iba de pueblo en pueblo, andando, y de feria en feria, y así lo hizo Juan entre temporadas de estudiante de arte. Esto fue un punto importante para la formación estética del pintor, porque en ese tiempo, deambulando de feria en feria, Juan se acercaba al arte popular, el de los santos, el de las danzas y el de la poesía de los corridos y alabanzas, aunque en su pintura nunca pintara estos motivos. Algunos amigos míos, muy inteligentes por cierto, miran la pintura de Juan Cordero y me dicen: “pero realmente esto no es mexicano”, y lo que quieren decir es que no se ve en su obra a los inditos que hoy se miran en la pintura moderna. Y ¿en qué consiste el mexicanismo? ¿En el asunto folklórico o más bien en cierta forma plástica? En esto último me parece que la época de Juan Cordero tuvo razón, pues fue menos inocente que la nuestra. (1945 Juan Cordero)

‘With this baggage, he went from village to village, on foot, from festival to festival, and Juan did this between times of being an art student. This was an important point for the esthetic formation of the painter, because in this time, wandering from festival to festival, Juan approached closer to popular art, the art of the saints pictures, of the dances, of the poetry of the popular songs and praises, although he never painted these motifs in his painting. Some of my friends, certainly very intelligent, look at Juan Cordero's painting and say to me: “but really this is not Mexican,” and what they want to say is that the little Indians are not seen that are in modern painting. But in what consists Mexicanism? In the folkloric subject or better in certain plastic form? In the last point, the epoch of Juan Cordero seems to me to have been right, because it was less innocent than ours.’

Cordero then studied abroad and returned with plans for a national art. Back home, he met resistance from the government, academia, and the public, which favored foreign art and foreign artists. When Mexicans saw Cordero's work, they asked him what foreigners would say of it:

Semejantes palabras fueron repetidas al pie de nuestros andamios por gentes que hacían gestos furiosos cuando pintábamos los primeros murales modernos por el año

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de 1920. Como se ve, a pesar de algunas diferencias superficiales, la época de Cordero es muy semejante a la nuestra. (1945 Juan Cordero)

‘Similar statements were repeated at the foot of our scaffolds by people making furious gestures when we were painting the first modern murals around 1920. As one sees, despite some superficial differences, the epoch of Cordero is very similar to our own.’

Another similarity was that Cordero painted the above-mentioned mural in the Escuela Preparatoria:

While Vallejo had decorated the sacristy of the school chapel, a place of devotional quiet, it was imperative that the Cordero mural “to impart the light of science to the most remote horizons” be painted in a public place. The chosen spot was the top landing of the main staircase, which makes Cordero the first of the foolhardy phalanx of muralists who defied to their grief the ebullient traffic of youthful students.

...The fossil elements of the older school joined them...Men who ignored the admirable Velasco, and who thought that they followed the great master Rebull by turning out vile religious pot-boilers. All attacked... (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

Cordero’s mural was hailed by a perceptive writer as opening “un nuevo campo a la estética mexicana” ‘a new field for Mexican esthetic.’ Unfortunately, just as in the 1920s, the students disliked the artwork and damaged them: “estaba tan arruinado el mural como lo están en nuestros días las obras de Orozco y de Siqueiros” ‘the mural was as ruined as are in our days the murals of Orozco and Siqueiros’ (1945 Juan Cordero). Cordero persevered, becoming ever more Mexican, to the degree that his work could be compared to *pulquería* painting, as seen above.

Charlot identified certain of his contemporaries especially with Colonial art. Manuel Martínez Pintao, he felt, was “in direct line of spiritual descent from those Colonial artisans” (*AA* II: 384; also August 5, 1923). Lola Cueto drew from both folk arts and Colonial art, especially in her religious spirit (October 13–20, 1945).

But he felt that altogether Colonial art was a major influence on muralism and the modern movement. Many of the murals were painted in Colonial buildings, whose grandeur with their immense, simple shapes inspired the muralists to monumentality.¹³¹ The artists were moved to realize an equal mental and esthetic bigness. Vasconcelos believed “ahora pintan como se pintaba en la Colonia, bien o mal, pero en grande” ‘they paint now as was painted in the Colony, good or bad, but big’ (Fell 1989: 412). Moreover, Colonial art provided an example of art with a message and social function:

Unlike the self-contained, self-sufficient, Indian form, colonial frescoes and statues remain synonymous with public plastic elocution. How well had the colonial craftsman solved the problem of preaching from walls, and of loud-speaking from ceilings, that were attempted anew in the 1920’s by another group of Mexican artists! In truth, colonial art proved braver than ours. Whereas we skittered in a dilemma

between pure form and pragmatic purpose, hoping somehow to save both, the colonial artist rode firmly to function. For him it was axiomatic that what is sculptured or painted must be of use to the people. (Charlot May 1955: 80).

The message may have become Marxist but the expression was derived from religious art:

The head was willing enough to nod to Marxism, but the hand, being that of a true artist, would lapse into the traditionally pious vocabulary of *reredos* and *retablos*. Certainly a claim that religious forms of art were the models best suited for the new murals would have met with coolness in the radical circles that sponsored the work. How could politicians distinguish style and function from content when, as we have seen, the artists themselves could hardly do it either? That they could neither acknowledge openly nor throw overboard colonial influences explains the near *lapsus linguae* found in the first draft of the constitutions of the artists' syndicate, as they themselves had written it:

The Syndicate of Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors and Engravers of Mexico advances the following principles on style: make art for the delectation of the people; technique should conform to this aim; produce a plasticity understandable to the masses, Indians and peasants, in a style as simple and clear as a good Christian sermon, which is like a good Marxist lecture.¹³²

For Charlot, the influence of Colonial and especially Christian art was an indication of the deep, unconscious spirit that was animating the group:

Perhaps the best proof that the painters acted not unlike mediums is the fact that, regardless of their leftist mouthings, they produced such masterpieces of religious art as Orozco's series on the life of Saint Francis, or Revueltas' *Devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe*, fit expressions of their people. (AA II: 9)

Rivera's *Creation* resembles Baroque and Rococo ceiling compositions in which the pure light of God is refracted into the varying virtues of the attendant saints, except Rivera replaces God with an abstract, philosophical symbol. In his Detroit murals, the four colors of the elements—white, black, red, and yellow—are reflected in the different races that use those elements to construct the modern world. Rivera portrayed Revolutionary victims as Christian martyrs—like his saintly Felipe Carillo-Puerto in the Ministry of Education—and invoked religion to sanctify the distribution of the land (*MMR* 25 f.). Orozco's idea of classicism was basically Colonial art, and he worked through a Colonial style and subjects like St. Francis to arrive at the final versions of his first murals (*MMR* 228–237). In Siqueiros' first mural, *The Spirit of the Occident* descends from the ceiling like an avenging angel. His 1932 *América Tropical* is centered on a crucified figure, and his Polyforma Cultural is designed like a chapel with people processing down the walls of the nave towards the traditional site of the altar. Revueltas' Guadalupe mural, Alva de la Canal's *The Erection of the True Cross in the New World*, and many more examples can be found.¹³³ That Colonial art was the *main* influence on the early mural movement is arguable. Debroyse writes that the muralists:

recuperan, si no el formalismo académico, sí la teatralización característica de la pintura historicista decimonónica. Las grandes composiciones frontales de Charlot [and others]...liberadas del clasicismo académico y formalmente expresionistas, proponen no obstante una pintura anecdótica, *mises-en-scène* exaltadas de la Historia, visiones ideologizadas marcadas por su proselitismo. (1984: 56)

‘recuperated, if not the academic formalism, in fact the theatricalization characteristic of nineteenth-century historicist painting. The large frontal compositions of Charlot [and others]...liberated from academic classicism and formally expressionistic, propose nonetheless an anecdotal painting, exalted *mises-en-scène* of History, ideologized visions marked by proselytism.’

For Charlot, this particular influence of the group spirit revealed the fundamental religiosity of the Mexican artists beyond any early exposure to Colonial and Christian art or even to Mexican Indian art, that is, beyond any merely unconscious images. I myself have been impressed by the religious spirit of my Vietnamese communist friends. Some people are religious even against their will.

The artist least influenced by Colonial art was Charlot himself.¹³⁴ In his *Massacre in the Main Temple* (1922–1923), he based his Indian costumes on Colonial depictions in order to fit them into the Colonial building.¹³⁵ In a related 1924 panel, he used the Colonial theme of *St. Christopher* as a symbol of carrying Christianity to Mexico. He also made portraits of Colonial artworks. But Charlot’s European influence came from Europe, and his Mexican came more from Indian and folk art.

Finally, the San Carlos Academy was founded in the Colonial period and has continued as the main art school until today. Charlot studied in detail the varying periods of San Carlos, helped by his own experience at the Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris and focusing on San Carlos’ support or suppression of national characteristics and native students and faculty (*San Carlos*). As seen above, in the early twentieth century, San Carlos represented stale academism and drove the students to a revolt that resulted in a new administration. In 1921, Charlot first encountered San Carlos at a positive moment in its history.

3.7.

PRECOLUMBIAN ART

Aztec art and architecture had fascinated Europeans since the earliest descriptions of Hernán Cortés (Keen 1971). Amateur excavations, copying, and collecting were common among both Mexicans and foreigners, including Charlot’s forebears (Volume 1, Chapter 2). The emperor Maximilian interested himself in Mexican antiquities with the assistance of Charlot’s grandfather, Louis Goupil. Charlot’s great-uncle Eugène Goupil had donated the Aubin-Goupil Collection of Mexican codices and other works to the Bibliothèque Nationale, and he and other family members had donated artworks to the Trocadéro Museum in Paris. As a child, Charlot was able to study these materials as well as family collections. In Mexico City, he stayed for a time with an uncle, Aristide Martel, who owned an extensive and choice collection of Mexican antiquities. Although raised in Paris, Charlot wrote, Precolumbian arts “were also my A.B.C. of modern art” (Winter 1946: 4; *MMR* 10).

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Charlot and his family were closely connected to the *Mexicanistes* or *Américanistes*, the French scholars of Mexican Indian culture and arts.¹³⁶ Indeed, French scholars and writers—like Montaigne, Rabelais, and Ronsard—had been working on Aztec culture since the sixteenth century, and artists like Gros and Gauguin were impressed.¹³⁷ Charlot learned from the Mexicanistes the value of archeology, the appreciation of Indian arts, and language study. Charlot also imbibed a positive attitude as opposed to the prejudiced, negative use of *aztèque* for an uncultured person (Génin 1923: X–XIV). The Mexicanistes tended to be militant supporters of Mexican Indian reputation: Génin describes himself as pro-Aztec and anti-Conquistador (1923: 24). Indeed, the sins of the Conquistadors were listed in detail. Charlot illustrated this attitude in his first fresco, *The Massacre in the Main Temple* (1922–1923). Charlot thus came to Mexico with an unusual and extensive background in Precolumbian art.

When Charlot arrived, a new, professional group of archeologists and ethnographers had been forming, including great figures like Manuel Gamio (1883–1960) and Alfonso Caso (1896–1970), with both of whom Charlot became friends.¹³⁸ Charlot felt an affinity with the archeologists that was reciprocated:

They probably, I would say, the archeologists had a better understanding of what the muralists were doing than any other group, because the painters as such—not speaking of the group of muralists, but the painters as such—were doing things so very different, easel painting, paintings of flowers, paintings of ladies, that we were very far away from them. There was no way of getting together with the established painters, but the archeologists recognized, I would say, the things we were doing—quite a number of things that they knew and that they knew very well in the archeological items: not only the big sculptures, but I think perhaps maybe the codices—those sort of squatty figures in Aztec codices, which were in fact for my art one of the very sources of my art since Paris where I had known the codices of my Uncle Goupil. So there was there a rapport. I don't think we ever talked very much together about it, but it was easier to talk with the archeologists than it was with artists. (Interview June 12, 1971)

There was definitely an affinity, shall we say—I told you that already—between the group of archeologists and the group of muralists. It was easier to talk with them, and I think they understood better what we were doing than any other group.¹³⁹

Charlot himself did not adhere strictly to archeology, for instance, in his *Massacre in the Main Temple*:

Well, it isn't exactly a fantasy. What it is—and it's a rather complicated idea—is that I was working in a building—the Preparatoria was built around 1750 or so—so I looked for the idea that the colonial painters of the 1750s had of Indians, Indian manners, Indian costumes. And you can still find, in fact I saw it when I was there in '67, in the museum, the very eighteenth-century colonial paintings that were a basis for my fantastic *indumentaria* and so on for the Indians. Now, of course, even now I consider that's a little complicated, but I thought that I would get a better tie between

the building and the pictures if I didn't flaunt the modern idea of archeology and instead tried to find the colonial spirit in relating the Conquistadors to the Indians. The wheels of feathers, for example, on the heads of the people are copied directly from those paintings in the Academy. (Interview June 12, 1971)

But when I asked him whether the archeologists had criticized him, he replied:

No, of course not. I am sure that they knew very well what I was doing. I mean, a colonial building and colonial knowledge of Prehispanic things was a very obvious thing when you know about it, and they *did* know about it. (Interview June 12, 1971)

In 1909–1910, the Escuela Internacional de Arqueología y Etnología Americanas was established, and students from San Carlos copied paintings excavated by archeologists (Ángel Fernández 1988: 141, 145). In the Mexico City of the 1920s, the major study site was the old museum of antiquities in the Casa de Moneda, El Museo Nacional de la Calle de Moneda or El Museo Nacional de las Culturas de la Calle de Moneda.¹⁴⁰ Originally inclusive of all national subjects—archeology, history, technology, botany, and so on—the natural history materials were separated in 1907. The Revolution stopped the construction of a dedicated building, so the museum that Charlot and the other artists knew in the 1920s was a nineteenth-century grab bag with multitudes of items stuffed into vitrines:

the museum for us had a tremendous attraction, probably more than the museum of painting that was in San Carlos, because the museum of painting wasn't very well arranged, and some things that are now displayed were not. And when you think of the Museum of Ethnology, you must not imagine the present day one, which is a superb thing as presentation goes. There were so many good, good things, but they were all piled up, really, like the stones that they were. But I am sure that Siqueiros went to look at the thing. I am sure I went to look at it very often too, because those things were beautiful and related to the art that we were, I wouldn't say dreaming of, but already doing.¹⁴¹

The study of Precolumbian art was not merely academic, as seen above. Besides sociological and political ramifications, Mexico's Indian past had long been recognized as distinctive and thus important for the national image and identity. Justo Sierra stated in 1909:

Para ustedes, hombres de las finanzas y de los fiscos, esto de la arqueología es asunto baladí y de poca importancia; pero para nosotros es lo único que caracteriza la personalidad de México ante el mundo científico: todo lo demás es lo mismo que existe en otras partes y está realizado por extranjeros.¹⁴²

'For you, gentlemen of finance and the exchequer, all this archeology is a trivial subject of little importance. But for us, it is the uniqueness that characterizes the personality of Mexico before the scientific world: all the rest is the same that exists in other parts and is created by foreigners.'

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Charlot was well aware of this aspect of Precolumbian studies: “In times of unrest the Indian quota shoots upwards, more for a symbolical pennant than as a true racial claim” (Charlot Winter 1946: 1). Interest in Indianism increased with Benito Juárez, retreated under Díaz, and rose again with Madero and Obregón, who emphasized his Indian blood (Charlot Winter 1946: 1 f.).

Public monuments and public ceremonial decorations used Mexican subjects and properties.¹⁴³ These were, however, always in Western style (Keen 1971: 378, 461 f.), an esthetic imperialism that kept the Indians firmly in their place. The separation of Precolumbian art from its Indian creator paralleled that in folk arts with the idea of the anonymous artist. Díaz could glorify the Precolumbian artists at the same time that he suppressed their descendants.¹⁴⁴ Writing before the 1910 Revolution, Auguste Génin lamented that no revolution had bettered the Indians’ condition.¹⁴⁵

This is important in understanding the context of the artists’ investigation of Precolumbian esthetics, which was part of a larger and older search for self-identity. As José Martí stated: “Our Greece must take priority over the Greece which is not ours” (Flores 2013: 45). The two Mexicanistes with whom Charlot had the most contact had a generally positive view of Aztec art. Charnay wrote: “Ces Indiens étaient de grands artistes” ‘These Indians were great artists.’¹⁴⁶ He had valuable insights:

Chez eux comme pendant la bonne antiquité, au dire de Viollet-le-Duc, la peinture ne dut jamais être séparée de l’architecture. Ces deux arts se prêtaient mutuellement secours, et ce que nous appelons le tableau n’avait qu’une importance très secondaire.¹⁴⁷

‘With them as during the good antiquity [Greece and Rome], according to Viollet-le-Duc, painting must never be separated from the architecture. These two arts lent each other mutual help, and what we call the easel painting had only a very secondary importance.’

Charnay also appreciates the archaic simplicity of some Indian art (1885: 71 f., 183). Génin also found great value in Aztec civilization (Génin 1908–1910: 108, 133 f.; 1923: 21–24).

But neither Charnay nor Génin could appreciate Indian esthetics on their own terms. Despite his intelligent appreciation of Indian dance, Génin felt it could not “rivaliser avec les ballets de l’Opéra” ‘rival the ballets of the Opera’ (1912: 309). Indian music was good only insofar as it resembled Western (1912: 316 f.). For all Charnay’s admiration of Indian art—above all, its craft—he finds some of it “d’un goût douteux” ‘of doubtful taste.’¹⁴⁸ He dislikes its hieratism (21 f., 41) and finds statues of gods “monstrueuse,” “effroyable,” “hideuses,” “monstrous,” ‘frightful,’ ‘hideous’ (41): “l’horrible figure à la langue pendante” ‘the horrible figure with the hanging tongue’ and the “tête monstrueuse” ‘monstrous head.’¹⁴⁹ Charnay’s criterion of good art is Western: it should be “parfaitement ressemblant” ‘perfectly resembling’ (30): thus he criticizes some figures from Palenque as “toujours la même incorrection...les poses les plus forcées...rien d’artistique” ‘always the same incorrectness...the most forced poses... nothing artistic’ (196). In contrast, Charnay praises a “buste admirablement proportionné” ‘admirably proportioned bust.’¹⁵⁰ Both Charnay and Génin were examples of the position Gamio would later

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criticize, appreciating Indian art only insofar as it resembled Western: “As long as such standards reigned, the painters who favored Mexican plots told them in the manner of their European teachers. Indianism meant a choice of subject matter.”¹⁵¹ Charlot and his generation would inherit the task of appreciating Indian art on its own stylistic terms.

Manuel Gamio has been recognized as a key figure in initiating the search for Indian esthetics, a project essential to the modern Mexican art movement: to replace the Western canon with an indigenous one in order to create a national identity and help with social renewal and national unification.¹⁵² Using Western descriptions of a number of Precolumbian artworks, Gamio demonstrated that Western art standards were being unconsciously applied.¹⁵³ Gamio’s work was important for Charlot’s studies as well as his art. In his “Art and Archaeology” (1949), Charlot used Gamio as the basis of an attempt to deal with the problem of subjectivity in art judgment and proposes an objective control:

if we can discover a point of view that accepts and appreciates more of those objects, and rejects fewer of them, that point of view will be closer to the original point of view of the pre-Hispanic artist.¹⁵⁴

After Classicism and Romanticism, Western art had developed wider sympathies that enlarged the understanding and appreciation of non-Western arts:

To bear stylistic fruits, the lessons incipient in Indian art had to wait for a post-cubist age... That the new standards fitted so much better than the old ones was proof that we were on the right track. Cocksure, we pitied what had gone on before us in the field of amerindian aesthetic, never understanding that the luck we experienced now was not of our doing, but potluck... the wind had changed, international art currents now eddied close to the prehispanic shores... Into this mold of a pre-hispanic art understood in terms of a plastic present were poured whatever human meanings were dominant at the social moment. Which meant that political Indianism was the breath that gave life to plastic Indianism. (Winter 1946: 10)

An appreciation of our own modern art has helped include within the range of our admiration the abstract and primitive factors that are an undoubted part of *mexicanidad*.”¹⁵⁵

Indeed, the study of non-Western canons has been an important factor in the widening of the Western mind.

Gamio’s work and the subsequent discussion made the artists aware of the problem of conflicting canons and unconscious imposition. They were freed from the danger of continuing the mistaken practices of their near predecessors. They were also faced with the problems of understanding Mexican Indian esthetics and using them in their own artwork. A great step forward had, however, been taken with the general acceptance of the high quality of Mexican Indian art and architecture.¹⁵⁶

Artists turn first to artworks for study. Siqueiros had used his military travels to view Precolumbian sites (1977: 129). Charlot records visiting Colima and Teotihuacán with Siqueiros and Guerrero: “magnifique journée” ‘magnificent day’ (Diary April 4, 1923; also May 20). The artists visited

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museums, and Rivera, Montenegro, Enciso, Atl, and Tamayo made important personal collections (Ángel Fernández 1988: 206 f.). Charlot recognized Mérida as a true expert. Despite his magnificent collection and inspiration from Precolumbian art, Rivera never became an authority on the subject.¹⁵⁷

Most artists were enthused by Precolumbian art well ahead of Mexican critics and historians (Keen 1971: 516 ff.). Charlot showed Weston an Aztec duck head with the words, “They were greater than the Egyptians” (Weston 1961: 43). Edmondo O’Gorman expressed a preference for Aztec over Western classical art (Keen 1971: 518). Rivera, Siqueiros, and Charlot argued for the quality of Precolumbian art by comparing it to the latest achievements in the School of Paris (Keen 1971: 515 f.). Rivera argued further that the origin of Cubism was Aztec art (Mijangos 2000: 122). In opposition, from his 1926 *Cortès and Malinche* to his late work like the cycle in the Hospicio Cabañas, Orozco used Indians as symbols of savagery requiring civilization.¹⁵⁸ Negative about folk arts, Tamayo was more positive about the influence of Precolumbian art on his work, but he depreciated the quality of Precolumbian murals and argued that the Mexican mural tradition started from foreign introductions.¹⁵⁹ This was a curious lapse for Tamayo. In the early 1920s, the murals of Teotihuacán were not yet uncovered, but Charlot was able to demonstrate the mastery of those in the Temple of the Tigers or the Temple of the Jaguar in Chich’en Itza and their connection to the muralists: “The artist has engineered a masterly game of geometry”; “This battlepiece plays a role in the formative period of our movement. Rivera was deeply impressed when, fresh from Europe, he saw it as he toured Yucatan in December 1921.”¹⁶⁰ Rivera learned a more general lesson as well:

To the Paris painter, still fresh from café talks of subject matter versus pure plasticity, this Sistine Chapel of the Americas acted as an Indian reminder of the classical postulate that both ingredients may blend to perfection. (*MMR* 134)

Charlot’s archeological work reinforced his views on continuity:

It was an enlightening experience thus to dig at the roots of a Mexican art that I had helped to some of its newest buds. There were moments when my previous faith in the validity of our mural style was rewarded; when similarities between ancient and modern forms justified post-facto our instinctive attempts at reviving a Mexican tradition. (Writings Related to *The Mexican Mural Renaissance, 1920–1925*. Chapter XXV Conclusion)

Two life-size copies of polychrome bas-reliefs capture the thrill of Chichen-Itza and its ruined temples. Chichen-Itza allowed me to tie together in orderly fashion the contemporary murals of my wild, pistol-toting colleagues with Mexico’s most ancient traditions. (April 6, 1966)

But actually the sculptures in that more ancient temple were beautiful and were intact as color goes, while those of the larger temple, having been exposed for centuries, the colors were gone. It was a great discovery, a great pleasure, to copy those ancient

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works, and, of course, to tie them up with the things we were *trying* to do in what has come to be known as the Mexican Mural Renaissance. (Charlot March 8, 1972)

I could check, so to speak, our brand of Mexican art with what the Mayan Indians had accomplished four or five hundred years before. (1974 Artists of Hawaii: 45)

Charlot had a pioneering role in explicating Precolumbian art as art. Characteristically, he emphasized style. As a liturgical artist, he had seen Christianity's greatest scenes, subjects, symbols, and themes turned into bad art. Style and craft were the criteria of genuine art: "Though these glyphs can still be deciphered they are interesting also as pure designs" (Charlot November 1930: 139). Indeed, Precolumbian esthetics could be transferred to Christian subjects:

la fuerza de la plástica prehistórica sigue animando estos dibujos, que demuestran la poca o ninguna importancia del "asunto típico" para definir las características de un arte racial. (Charlot November–December 1926 "Asimilando")

'the power of prehistoric plasticity continues to animate these drawings, which demonstrates the small or nil importance of the "typical subject" to define the characteristics of a racial art.'

Characteristically, Charlot reveals and admires the contribution of Precolumbian art to the distinctive Mexican Colonial. Faced with European devotional images, the Indian artist simplifies them and strips them of their sentimentality to fit his sterner religiosity:

el genio de abstracción plástica del indio y, al mismo tiempo, su obstinación en no aceptar a nuestros dioses sin antes darles ligeros retoques (Charlot November–December 1926 Asimilando)

'the genius of the Indian's plastic abstraction, and at the same time, his obstinacy in not accepting our gods without first giving them some light retouchings'

Indian craft accorded with Indian style. Because of the difficulty of carving stone, the artist:

was forced to use a great economy of means. Many sculptures still show the shape and texture of the original rock. Modern artists in their flight away from Renaissance standards, have seized eagerly on the style of those works. (July 25, 1942)

Thus style and craft united in the work: "his intelligent feeling for the material used, his peculiarly mathematical emotion, and the tragic core that underlies its 'abstract' veneer" (June 1936: 13). Indian art fulfilled very much Charlot's own ideals:

A similar process was to invade progressively the field of monumental plastics, for the Mayas have in common with other American Indians a gift for creating abstractions and an urge to use it for religious purposes or sheer plastic delight. (1928 Maya Esthetic)

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Just like Colonial art, Precolumbian never abandoned its function as communication. The Aztecs' straight lines may link them to Cubists; "Their art, however, never ceased to be representational" (November 1930).

Charlot understood the Mexican Indian artist as a kindred spirit, as Anita Brenner saw clearly: "his zeal for clarity and deep aesthetic and spiritual need of order" (*Idols* 312). In his own work, Charlot "portrays [Indians] in complex, mathematical, closed, and abstract compositions."

Because Precolumbian art was art, it could and should be discussed as part of world art, as Charlot did regularly.¹⁶¹ Rather than being condescending, one should "approach Mayan art in the same way that a learned Occidental studies Chinese ink paintings or Japanese poetry, considering it as something more subtle than the similar products of our own present-day era" (*AA* II: 40). Indeed, a solid background in world art enables the student better to understand Mayan: "Its stylistic cycle follows the universal scheme," archaic to classical to baroque to "a reaction of purism or neo-archaism."¹⁶²

Most important for Charlot, a worldwide perspective enables the researcher to triangulate, as it were, to the foundational principles of art:

But if we were to approach Aztec sculpture, let us say, from the point of view of Cezanne—according to his saying that nature must be interpreted in terms of the sphere and the cone and the cylinder, bringing into that appreciation a knowledge of the cubists and the value of the cube—we will find that we can admire a very great quantity, a very great majority, of Aztec pieces of sculpture. It gives us a certain security that there is a coincidence between this point of view and the *x*, which is the ideal of the pre-Hispanic artist.¹⁶³

Charlot repeated that all great artists thought alike, no matter from which era or culture (*Idols* 312). The basis of great art was geometry: "Prehispanic and Cubism go together very well, and what there is of Prehispanic in Indian modes urged me, so to speak, to use my Cubist means" (Charlot Interview August 7, 1971). This insight made possible not only a deep understanding of Precolumbian art but also provided a connection that enabled the muralists to use it: "Mexicans have their own classical tradition, that of Indian cultures."¹⁶⁴ In France, Charlot had enriched his French geometric tradition with others—Medieval art, Grünewald, and German art—and could now use that experience with non-Western, but geometric traditions. Ultimately, such a cross-cultural geometric basis was more inclusively human and enabled the development of a more universal means of expression.

Basing modern Mexican art on Precolumbian was part of the program of the movement.¹⁶⁵ Charlot interpreted Siqueiros' painting of a peasant wearing an Aztec mask—*Ethnography (The Mask)* 1940—as "illustrating the way in which the ancestral instincts of the Indian rose to the surface, as stark and fierce as in pre-Spanish days, to become one of the guiding forces of modern Mexico" (February 3, 1943: 1). Some projects were illustrative, like Rivera's depictions of Prehispanic Mexico City and the similar works by Juan O'Gorman.¹⁶⁶ These created an idealized picture of the past that became an image of the mural movement itself:

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The projection of a glorified pre-Columbian world onto contemporary popular culture generated a true aesthetic revolution in Mexico. This is true not only at the level of appreciation (i.e., in the elevation of pre-Hispanic sculpture and popular crafts to the status of universal art) but also in artist production itself. (Lomnitz 2006: 342)

Such murals came at least close to what Vasconcelos wanted to avoid: *criollismo* and *culto arqueológico*, Creolism and the archeological cult, a picturesqueness for the scholarly.¹⁶⁷ In Eder's words, Rivera became "el inventor de lo clásico-indígena" 'the inventor of the classical-indigenous' (1986: 80), creating "una visión disneylandesca de lo que pretendía ser la Grandeza Mexicana" 'a Disneyland vision of what claimed to be the grandeur of Mexico.'¹⁶⁸ Clemente Orozco V. told me Carlos Pellicer had said of such works of Rivera: "Esta pintura tiene mucha alma... mucha almanaque!" 'This painting has much soul [*alma*]... much almanac!' Such paintings sometimes resemble nineteenth-century historical paintings: Indian subject matter in Western style.

The same criticism applies to paintings in which native artworks are used as props, also a nineteenth-century practice. The best known example is the statue of Xochipilli inserted—"a loan, as it were, from the National Museum of Archaeology"—by Rivera into the stairwell sequence of the Ministry of Education (*MMR* 297):

In the early murals we painted, the pre-Hispanic factor is not as decisive as contemporary opinion implied, though our good will did result in transporting some archeological data from Museum to wall. In 1924 Rivera installed Yoloxochitl, god of flowers, in a jungle where he seems as little at home as Yagdiva and her sofa in Rousseau's. (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

Rita Eder likened the inclusion of the Aztec image to Gauguin's similarly unassimilated use of Polynesian and Southeast Asian figures:

Rivera tiene una manera de colocar al dios pagano dentro de la pintura a la manera de Gauguin el inventor del primitivismo romántico, quien no adopta los principios formales de las culturas primitivas, sólo hace una referencia visual anecdótica a los dioses nativos. (1986: 78 f.)

'Rivera has a way of sticking the pagan god into the painting in the manner of Gauguin, the inventor of romantic primitivism, who did not adopt the formal principles of primitive cultures, but only made an anecdotal visual reference to the native gods.'

According to Eder, Rivera was slow to consider indigenous esthetics: "No es sino hasta unos años más tarde que Rivera mirará con interés los valores lineales y planos de los códices" 'Only some years later did Rivera look with interest on the lineal and planar values of the codices' (1986: 79). For Charlot, the most important element was style:

Of more import are a few forms where pre-Hispanic and post-cubist aesthetics fuse organically. First in date, even though they are not murals, are the pictures that Carlos

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Mérida painted about 1919. They put to new creative uses the heraldic colors and unbroken outline found in codices.¹⁶⁹

Indeed for Charlot, the muralists' *Indianismo* was a challenge of style: "But whereas the term could be questioned in its social usage, debunked even as a political myth, its meaning remains impeccable on the aesthetic plane."¹⁷⁰ Rivera based his depictions of kneeling figures on ovoid Indian sculpture.¹⁷¹ Siqueiros and even Orozco evinced Precolumbian influences. Amado de la Cueva "bravely returned to pre-Hispanic spatial and perspective conventions. Amado used painted objects as a kind of pictorial alphabet..." (*MMR* 311). Returning from Spain, Julio de Diego fell under the spell of Indian art: his humble subjects "regain perennial dignity, chum anew with ancient godlings that nestle in their lap, at ease within the stately folds of the reboso" (May 1940).

As discussed below, the two artists who most thoroughly developed an Indian-based esthetic were Mérida and Charlot himself. Charlot wrote of Mérida:

Leaving the contemporary scene for a voyage into timelessness, he chose to commune further with his ancestral art. Not to duplicate...but rather forge a key that would unlock their abstract secret. At that, his colleagues, social-conscious that they were, bid him an amicable adieu. (January 28, 1971)

Charlot used Aztec art to transform his style from that of his later French period to what became his best known Mexican one. He went through the same process during his concentrated study of Maya art at Chich'en Itza. In his archeological work, Charlot was looking forward to some artistic influence:

For me my center of interest is now Yucatan. Archeologie is very absorbing as a job, but aside it [aside from that] I enjoyed esthetic contemplation of first hand material and this I hope with benefit in my own work. Art is aside [beyond] chronology: for me Maya art becomes a post-cubistic movement.¹⁷²

Mérida detected such a new influence in Charlot's work:

La obra arqueológica de Yucatán la conozco yo poco, porque él se relacionó con arqueólogos de fama continental, y me parece a mí, que lo que él buscaba era encontrar los orígenes de un tipo de trabajo que a la larga habían de influenciar su estilo, como así ha sucedido. Si primero las influencias fueron directamente del tema popular, más tarde tal vez, él fue influenciado directamente por sus trabajos yucatecos. (Mérida Interview 1971)

'I know little of the archeological work in Yucatan because he connected himself with archeologists of continental fame, and it appeared to me, that what he sought was to discover the origins of a type of work which in the course of time had to influence his style, as indeed happened. If the influences were first directly from popular themes, perhaps later he was influenced directly by his Yucatecan work.'

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Maya figures, with their “elegant, over-refined gestures, their slim bodies elongated to the utmost.” was in many ways the opposite of Aztec squatness: “Their tastes were antithetic.”¹⁷³ Discussing his 1926 oil painting *Mestiza with Orange Fan* (CL 121), Charlot stated:

I told you that the Mayan Indians are so different from the Aztecs as to be nearly the opposite. There were, there had been, many wars from the ones and the others before the Spaniards came. This is, for example, a typical Mayan *mestiza*, as they are called, though she’s a pure Mayan Indian. You can compare her with the portrait of Luz to see that there is no relationship between the two races. In the back, a classical temple with a classical molding, which is one of the most beautiful that I know, representing something that has been tied and gives at the place in the center where it is tied.
(March 8, 1972)

Aztec art had helped free Charlot from the thin, spiritualized forms he had used at the end of his French period. Now he was faced with an Indian art close to the style he had rejected:

...Mayan culture confronted by the Aztec, that latecomer on the Mexican scene. For there showed to be more in common between the Aztec and the Spaniard, when the latter landed, than there had been between the two rival Indian cultures. The Aztec was squatty, the Mayan filiform, of green gold contrasting with the Aztec’s dark copper, metaphysically inclined whereas the Aztec was military. The Mayan had a beak nose, bulging eyes, and a brain that shot its skull backward, unlike the snub-nosed, slit-eyed, round-topped Aztec. Of course, the Aztecs conquered the Mayans; though the latter fought hard with hand-propelled javelins, the former sprang on them a superior type of mechanized warfare, to wit, the bow and arrow. (Charlot Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

the Mayans were over-fond of astronomy, mathematics, and religion. They were not interested as much in weapons. Their most efficient one was the Atl-Atl, a kind of javelin thrower, propelled by hand. Towards the end of their history, the Aztecs, who were a soldiery folk, attacked the Mayans with a powerful weapon that they lacked, the bow and arrow. And all the Mayan philosophy could not stop their mechanized thrust. (July 25, 1942)

The Mexican transformed his model into a new form that retained only a few points of contact with natural appearances. In Chichen, on the contrary, a most exact love of nature predominated. (Morris, Charlot, and Morris 1931: 343)

A different Maya influence—supported by Aztec art—was the relation of figure to ground. Unlike Classical art with its alternation of solids and voids, Maya art abhors a vacuum. This is obvious in Maya hieroglyphs in which the glyph presses against its border to the point of threatening to overflow it. Charlot identified his style with this source—just he identified Raphael with circles and Poussin with pyramids:

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Charlot, mayan shape from hieroglyphics, basic form is square with curves as near as possible to angles, thereby getting the strength of a right angle and the softness of a curve in one. Also uses a spiral shape based on square. (Charlot Lecture Notes)

Good examples of this pressing of the image to its borders are the 1952 lithographs *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* and *Flight into Egypt* (M556, 557). Zalce appreciated this feature:

I was especially impressed by the plastic language. It gave me an artistic impression; for example, the way he used space. He occupied the whole space with one figure. He had little figures lying down, occupying the whole picture. In the corners was sky, a little tree or a town. (July 27–28, 1971)

In contrast, when Charlot showed Amédée Ozenfant the cartoons for his 1944 Black Mountain murals *Inspiration* and *Study*, he noticed and criticized the difference from the European esthetic. Charlot wrote in his diary of August 16, 1944: “I show the cartoons to Ozenfant. His criticism: not enough space for the volumes” (1943–1944). Another Maya device adopted by Charlot, discussed in Chapter 9, was the use of “a single limb, optically, to correspond to two different bodies” in order to make a glyph feel less crowded (Morris, Charlot, and Morris 1931: 316).

Style was perhaps the most important factor of Precolumbian art for Charlot the artist. But as seen above, subject matter and themes were also important for his attempts to define Mexicanidad, the constants of Mexican identity through the changes of Mexican history. At Chich'en Itza, he carried his esthetic intellectual concerns into a new cultural area—Maya as opposed to Aztec—and into a new academic field. He quickly saw that his own talents could make a new contribution.¹⁷⁴ The study of Maya art had been “left wholly to the taste of scientists” (AA II: 39):

[Charlot] refers to “the archaeologist, innocent of aesthetic training” looming as a dictator, and imposing his taste for the later “rococo” manifestations of Maya art at the expense of the classic manifestations of Mayan art “less luxurious but wealthier in human values,” and guided by a “sober taste.” Charlot counts the fresco paintings of Chichén Itzá with this classic expression which “palpitates a spirituality.”¹⁷⁵

Maya art could not be understood without studying it as art, and this was important for a broader understanding as well: “art becomes the common denominator of the many pursuits of man in any highly evolved culture” (AA II: 62). Indeed, art education is necessary at the most basic level of archeological analysis:

the maze of evidence through which the researcher wades before attributing a date to a stela, interpreting a codex, or rebuilding a ruined temple, is mostly a conglomerate of art objects. (AA II: 58, 60)

Art education became ever more necessary as one interrogated artworks as to meaning and significance:

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This method of using a work of art as merely an accumulation of descriptive data fails to reveal or define its most individual feature, which is style. (Morris, Charlot, and Morris 1931: 319)

En vano pretenden etnólogos abrirse paso entre las complejidades de la cultura maya con métodos lógicos, midiendo ángulos faciales, comprobando metabolismos, acumulando estadísticas. Pero en donde fracasa el cientista, el artista logra el gol, sin saber cómo y casi sin anhelarlo, sustituyendo con la intuición estética al conocimiento razonable. (Charlot January 1946)

‘Ethnologists pretend in vain to open a path among the complexities of Maya culture with logical methods, measuring facial angles, observing metabolisms, accumulating statistics. But where the scientist fails, the artist reaches the goal without knowing how and almost without wanting to, substituting esthetic intuition for reasonable knowledge.’

in true artist fashion, does what the scientist fails to do, reconstructs whole breath-taking vistas from the one legible modern glyph, the Indian body. (AA II: 183)

For the artist but not always the scholar, the continuity between the ancient and contemporary Maya was clear. Moving into the Maya esthetic, the artist was “acercándose al punto de vista indígena” ‘nearing the indigenous point of view’; “The technique used is symbolical of the subtle process of osmosis by which the artist came to learn all by refraining from asking specific questions” (AA II: 187). The artist finds a *campesino* is a descendant of a royal house. The women think ancient thoughts as they go about their daily tasks. The artist lives among the people. Charlot’s subject is Alfredo Zalce, but he is describing himself as well:

Charlot as an artist constantly played back and forth between archaeology and ethnology. Not only was he acutely aware of continuities in form between builders ancient and modern, but he also observed the same continuities in daily life. In 1946 he wrote [AA II: 183], “The scenes sculptured and frescoed on ancient monuments are enacted daily in Indian huts and Indian fields. In Chichén Itzá, in the Court of the Thousand Columns, a stuccoed name glyph shows a hand kneading dough over a stone metate. In nearby huts... living hands perform the same task daily.” (McVicker 1999)

Charlot demonstrated his composite analytical methods in his sections of the final report on the Carnegie Institution work in Chich’én Itza:

Knowing the solutions found by Maya artists enables us to reconstruct their problems with some security. Furthermore, the very hesitations of the artist at work and his successive changes or improvements can still be seen by comparing the final version with the preliminary sketches which are often visible, and thus one may follow the artist’s shifting mental attitude. As a craftsman, the sculptor had to deal with the

constant factors involved in working in hard material. He had also to develop a style suited to the greatly limited space of the columnar panels. The mental aesthetic ideal and the material conditions of work are the two elements whose successful union produces an original art style. Both are considered in this study in the light of the writer's experience, during the past ten years, as a creative painter and sculptor. (Morris, Charlot, and Morris 1931: 233).

Artistic considerations would also dictate low relief...the sculptures on the columns should have remained as they do, merely decorative; that is to say, they adorn the surface without destroying or distorting it. A wish to avoid bulging masses such as would be made by faces or feet seen in full front is probably at the root of the convention of depicting all the heads and feet of the figures in profile. This technical limitation, which might seem a drawback, really led to the striking use of a processional movement, oriented toward the altar, which was the central point of interest. (Morris, Charlot, and Morris 1931: 340 f.)

I will look at just a few aspects of Charlot's work in Morris, Charlot, and Morris 1931 and will use only a few examples. Charlot takes pains to recognize individual artists by their styles (321-326; also 1927 Report: 247 f.):

“the insistence on a squarish outline with extremely short fingers is characteristic of the popular peasantlike tendencies of this particular artist.” (Morris, Charlot, and Morris 1931: 324)

The best artist of a group “enjoys working out interesting abstract forms without feeling any special responsibility toward descriptive accuracy.” (325)

That a certain artist was original is denied by some “because of a confusion between subject-matter and style” (343)

From this type of study, Charlot can move to larger developments:

[A stylistic development] from pure Maya style to pure Nahua style...by a series of imperceptible transitions (302)

a fusion of Maya and Mexican traits [in the Chac Mool Temple] (302, 304)

new qualities appear, one of the most conspicuous of which is an emphasis on character which in some cases reaches caricature. This intensity, however, is not the result of comic intent, but of an eager desire to record, in their original strength, the features of the model. (342)

But with the fading out of the stiff theocracy that commissioned the works, the personal message of the artist is released from its official bondage in a purer form than before. (AA II: 62)

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Such study of content and style can be a basis for dating (Charlot 1927 Report: 247). From more general developments, Charlot can extrapolate to historical circumstances and particular developments:

The style of the Warriors Temple bas-reliefs could be summed up as follows: it possesses dignity and a certain tiresomeness due to excessive repetition; some of the minor problems are solved in an extremely sophisticated way; and the elegant proportions and tendency to artistic theorizing point to a stage of development at which this art grows more distant from life and actual observation, but one which, nevertheless, has not yet reached the point of decadence. Two of the contributing facts to the definition of the style may be the momentary uneasiness with which the artist met the unusual size of the shafts and also his restraint, due to a too close collaboration with the priests. The study of the art-style of the Northwest Colonnade reliefs will point also indirectly to these modifying factors. Altogether the Warriors Temple style contrasts strikingly with that of the Chac Mool reliefs, which are so richly descriptive and impetuously youthful. (321)

The relations between creative artist and authoritarian priest vary according to the power of the priesthood at a particular time:

This sustained collective impersonal style points also to sacerdotal or aristocratic pressure on the artisan, and, in turn, to a rigidly organized social régime. (342)

The artist was more interested in character and regalia. He evidently enjoyed his work and was tumultuous [*sic*], ingenious and shrewdly observant. Apparently he suffered no pressure from the priests, nor was he overwhelmed by uneasiness or awe of his task. (342 f.)

Ultimately, art has to be appreciated for its own sake. The variegation and complication of Maya art forbid oversimplification: "Mayan art defies any label" (AA II: 54).

At the least, Charlot's work demonstrates the potential utility of art education for archeologists. Indeed, aspects of ancient life may be accessible only to art analysis. Similarly, most American anthropologists are handicapped in Polynesian studies by their ignorance of poetry. Charlot's work was certainly appreciated by colleagues such as J. Eric S. Thompson:

We are, accordingly, fortunate in having the aid of Jean Charlot in bringing to life this vivid concept. He has captured its qualities of mysticism and striking beauty in the frontispiece of this volume (1960: 61).

Interestingly, Charlot's work was also appreciated by another important outsider in Maya studies. Linda Schele, who initiated the latest period of Maya archeology, wrote that her interpretation of the Temple of the Warriors complex drew "heavily upon the skill and brilliance of Jean Charlot, an artist and iconographer" (1990: 502).

3.8. NINETEENTH-CENTURY AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY MEXICAN ART

In the early 1920s, Charlot and the other artists seem to have paid little attention to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Mexican art.¹⁷⁶ The latter has been left mostly to later scholars, but as the twentieth century has progressed, nineteenth-century art has been better appreciated (e.g., Leal 1990: 110 f.). Charlot argued against neglecting nineteenth-century Neoclassicism on principle:

This new approach is, in its way, as ruthless as the old. Whereas ultra-baroque was the *bête noire* of Revilla, neo-classicism is in its turn ostracized, and Elizabeth Weismann relegates Tolsa's undoubted masterpiece to the limbo of scarcely two lines in a note. (May 1951: 201; also 200)

[18241843] this wrongly-despised period is the only one before our time when faculty and students felt free to strive toward the elaboration of a national art. (*San Carlos* 68 f.)

Just as his Mexican colleagues considered the art world of their youth full of potential, so Charlot saw fruitful stirrings in the earlier century: "Such beautiful graphic works might have ended by creating a true national art but for the hiatus of marbleized neo-Greek and gilded rococo that followed" (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut). As seen above, Charlot felt especially close to Juan Cordero, whom he attached also to Colonial art, and he did write his *San Carlos*. Charlot had unrealized plans to write on mid-nineteenth-century Mexican art (Tabletalk early to mid-1970s).

One reason for the neglect of nineteenth-century Neoclassicism was the negative influence of the teaching at the Academy of San Carlos in the youth of Charlot's colleagues. Their revolt against their old-fashioned teachers was discussed above. Certainly, Porfirista art and architecture offered much to despise, like the Palacio de Bellas Artes (Leal 1990: 111 f.). Nonetheless, the nineteenth-century artists pioneered Mexican subjects and perpetuated European practices, like Classical allegory and symbolism, that reinforced Colonial devices and can be recognized in the muralists. Again, Charlot himself was untouched by this influence, which depended on the impressionability of youth.

¹ Pérez Montfort 1994: 114; also 115 ff. Gaitán Rojo 2010: 18.

² AA II: 3; also 135. Charlot recognized the same method in Hawai'i:

To better understand her beloved Hawaii, Madge [Tennent] searched for the spirit of the race threading its way undisturbed through the many phases of Hawaiian history. (July 12, 1967)

Olivier Debrouse argues that Charlot had such a Romantic notion of Precolumbian Indians (2001: 76). My opinion is that Charlot was protected from Romantic views by his first-hand experience of Indians and his professional archeological work. (The most important expression of a Romantic view is Rivera's stairway frieze in the Ministry of Education, depicting ecological and cultural changes from the seashore to the volcanoes.) Charlot's scholarly character was irritated by Gauguin's erroneous primitivism in Tahiti with its use of Asian art objects for Tahitian. For Charlot, such mistakes impinged on the quality of the artwork.

³ Writings Related to *MMR*: Passages Cut. *Tabletalk* February 15, 1972:

I didn't know it at the time. Saw a reproduction some time later. It was a brave painting for the time. Diego copied it exactly for one of his frescoes: a Christ with a machine behind. Why would it have any influence on me?

Keen 1971: 514.

⁴ Charlot August 30, 1925. Brenner-Charlot 1928: "Toute création indigène n'est qu'un tissu serré de satire et de douleur" "Every native creation is but a closely woven tissue of satire and suffering." Compare Fell 1989: 390, in 1923, Dr. Atl speaks for "toda la trágica inquietud del país" 'all the tragic restlessness of the land.' Glusker reported on Goitia:

He speaks of the revolution, which interests him as a subject more than any other, and whose spirit is his constant theme—He tells of the ball in the rebel camp, before the battle—That frantic gaiety on a somber, tragic background—Pain, pain, is his constant and variously expressed emotion—"For this is above all a land of pain." (2010: 29)

Palavicini in Pérez Montfort 1994: 117. AA II: 14, "Through the course of Mexican aesthetics, a subjective *leitmotiv* recurs, linking together the three great epochs, pre-Spanish, Colonial, and Modern, in spite of outward differences."

⁵ Mijangos 2000: 135, 146. Pérez Montfort 1994: 117, "el pueblo mexicano se inclina más a lo trágico que a lo vulgar" 'the Mexican people inclines more to the tragic than the vulgar.'

⁶ Charlot May 11, 1960. In his 1928 "Note on Maya Esthetic," Charlot almost unconsciously changes from past to present tense.

⁷ E.g., Lewis 2006: 192 f. Torres Bodet 1961: 241, Antonio Caso, "No existe el pueblo...sin la homogeneidad de la cultura" 'A people does not exist without cultural homogeneity.'

⁸ E.g., Keen 1971: 469 f. León-Portilla 1988: 154, 164.

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- ⁹ Keen 1971: 513 f. Eder 1991: 69, quotes Guillermo Bonfil.
- ¹⁰ Vasconcelos 1982 *Memorias* 1: against Indianismo, e.g., 531, 625 f., 693, 782, 796, 799; anti-Aztec, 422 f., 432, 433 f., 447 f., 674, 771; Spanish culture superior to Mexican, 503 f. 865; 1982 *Memorias* 2: against Indianismo, e.g., 131 f.; against Indian culture, 106 ff.; assimilationist, e.g., 93, 123 f.; pro-Spanish, 291; 2003: assimilationist, XVII, 12 f., 27 ff. Charlot Winter 1946: 13. Keen 1971: 486 f. Fell 1989: 646 f. Krauze 1999: 231 f., 238 f. Lewis 2006: 179 f.
- ¹¹ Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut; Winter 1946: 11 f. Orozco 1962: e.g., 120. Keen 1971: 530–533, 538. Mello 2002a: 35. Lilia Roura Fuentes 2012: 350–354.
- ¹² Karttunen n.d. Farfán Caudillo 2008: 216 f., 221 f., 241 f. See below for further discussion.
- ¹³ Several editions of Sahagún are in the JCC. Charlot stated that he had an early edition:
- JC got Sahagun in Mexico at the time he was doing the walls. It was given to him by the Archeological Museum. They asked, “Do you want that?” Pop said, “Sure.” So they gave it to him. They must have known he couldn’t pay for it. (Tabletalk February 12, 1972)
- The JCC holds loose plates of the Ruffoni publication from Florence, 1905–1910; the verso of the last plate, number 27, has the stamp of the Museo N. de Arqueología y Etnografía, Departamento de Publicaciones. The Ruffoni Sahagún has a complicated bibliography that has not yet been fully established. See bibliography Sahagún 1905.
- ¹⁴ Mérida 1971 had similar beliefs, “Su [Charlot’s] mexicanidad estaba situada dentro de su familia méxico-francesa y su francesismo de él” ‘His Mexicanness was situated inside of his Mexican-French family and his Frenchness came from him.’
- ¹⁵ My middle name is French because I was named for Pierre Claudel. However, our youngest brother’s name is Peter.
- ¹⁶ *San Carlos* 130. Tabletalk December 6, 1978, “Like Maximilian saying something very Mexican, ‘Hombres,’ when the first volley of the firing squad failed to kill him and he was about to receive the *coup de grâce*. He probably meant, ‘Hombres! How could you miss me?’”
- ¹⁷ Arresting Communists: Glusker 2010: 428. Charlot said one really had to be afraid when Villa cried in sympathy because it meant he felt he had to kill someone. Katz 1998: 384 f., 533. Compare Charlot 1945 Juan Cordero, “Representó al Dictador...por cierto,” in the context of Santa Anna’s magnificent 1842 state funeral for his severed leg, at which the general was moved to tears by the speeches made in its praise. Grisliness continues to be found in Mexico. In the Museum of the City of Veracruz is displayed the table on which Venustiano Carranza’s autopsy was conducted.
- ¹⁸ Zalce interview 1971. Vera de Córdova June 1, 1922, describes Charlot as “más irónico, más francés” ‘more ironic, more French.’ Weston 1961: 72.

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¹⁹ Zalce Interview 1971. Siqueiros 1977: 189, Guerrero stated that Charlot had “un acento hablado por las narices” ‘a nasal accent.’ Appendini 1972: 3, speaks of “su mal español” ‘his bad Spanish.’ Baciú 1982: 8, describes “un extraño acento, como una mezcla de mexicano y francés” ‘a strange accent, like a mixture of Mexican and French’; 9, Charlot always spoke softly, never raising his voice and giving “la primera impresión de finura y dulzura” ‘the first impression of refinement and gentleness.’ Baciú 1982: 1, 15, 26, 28 f., argues that Charlot was and continued to be primarily a Mexican artist.

²⁰ Interview March 26, 1978. In 1942, Siqueiros 1996: 182, acknowledged the value of copying works of others, which in antiquity, was the way to find one’s individuality.

²¹ Interview August 7, 1971. Conger 1992: 462/1926.

The founder of the family, the famous Pantaleón Panduro, (July 27, 1847–August 8, 1909), was mentioned in the guidebooks of the time and participated in the Exposition Nationale de Paris in 1889. The family maintains its workshop today and sells its products through different stores. M95, a photograph of the statue discussed.

²² Thompson 1963: 249 f., on the Quiche Maya Snake Dance.

²³ M234. Illustrated also in Brenner September 1925: 132 f.

²⁴ Charlot, n.d., letter to Beaumont Newhall.

²⁵ John Charlot Volume 1, Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1. “Charlot’s View of Children’s Art.” Vasconcelos 1982 *Memorias* 2: 18. Acevedo 1986: 182. Charlot wrote about children’s art throughout his life, but the major articles of this period are 1924 “Graveurs sur Bois” and 1925 “Grabadores en Madera.” Siqueiros 1978: 74 f.; 1996: 53 f., 469, recognizes the utility of children’s art as that of other untraditional ones, but argues that it cannot provide an adequate basis for adult work. Debroise 1984: 32 f., Ramos Martínez’ view of the artist as child.

²⁶ Debroise 1984: 47. Acevedo 1986: 180 ff.; 210 [Ramírez].

²⁷ Tabletalk May 22, 1997. Interview May 18, 1971. Charlot had an excellent reputation as a teacher:

Charlot is a good teacher. He talked simply and understandably, with a soft accent that made one wish he would say words like “Veergin” more often. (“*Art: The Work of Jean Charlot*” 1949)

Lamar Dodd praised Charlot as “a superb teacher”:

“He was one of the most delightful speakers we ever had on the campus. He could hold an audience spellbound, and you could hardly get into the place when he would speak. And his broken accent, which he kept hanging onto, the French accent, plus his knowledge of the English language, made him delightful.” (Burnett 1979: 2-E)

- ²⁸ Covarrubias 1940: 139. Siqueiros 1977: 161 f.; 1978: 51. Fenstermaker 1980, provides a detailed description of Rivera's unpaid "classes" or "long discourses": they were given in his home to six or a dozen people, artists like Charlot and Pablo O'Higgins attended, and geometric composition was emphasized, like the Golden Section rediscovered by Cézanne. Rivera spoke in Spanish, and Charlot translated into English. Charlot mentions these lectures in his Diary 1925: July 31 ("cours composition Diego" 'composition course Diego'), August 3 ("classe composition Diego" 'composition class Diego'), 6, 11 ("cours Diego. sur Cézanne" 'course Diego. on Cézanne'), 12, 18, 20, 22 ("conférence Diego" 'conference Diego'), 27, 30 ("perspective italienne" 'Italian perspective')?, September 1.
- ²⁹ Interview May 18, 1971. Charlot 1966 Foreword: xiv.
- ³⁰ Edwards 1966: 203. Siqueiros 1977: 204–208; 1996: 80, "Diego Rivera hablaba ya como un dueño de la verdad" 'Diego Rivera was talking like a proprietor of truth.' Scherer 1996: 80 f. Charlot August 16, 1967.
- ³¹ *MMR* 175 f. Guadarrama Peña 2010: 32.
- ³² Mérida 1971. See also Zalce 1971.
- ³³ E.g., Fermín Revueltas, *The Tree*, 1921; Flores 2013: 99; *Modernidad y Modernización en el Arte Mexicano* 1991: 6 f., dates the work ca. 1922. The anomalous figure of *La tempérance ou continence* in Rivera's *Creation* is based, I believe, on Charlot's French liturgical work and contains a joke at the expense of Charlot's avoidance of extra-marital sex.
- ³⁴ M48–55. Díaz de León's *Indian Women on Market Day*, 1922 (Flores 2013: 271), I argue, reveals the influence of Charlot's oils CL 2–7 in the stylistic difference between the faces, hands, shawls, and head coverings from the Impressionistic background.
- ³⁵ Diary 1923: July 16, August 23, September 4, October 10, 24 ("français" 'French'), December 12; 1924: March 8, October 17; 1925: July 8, September 17 ("leçon français" 'French lesson'), 19 ("leçon français" 'French lesson'), October 1 ("leçon français" 'French lesson'), October 3 ("français" 'French'), 5, 8.
- ³⁶ E.g., Montellano 1931: 263 f. Baciú 1966: 78. A "colloque fresque" 'fresco colloquium' is mentioned in Diary December 11, 1927, but I have no information about it.

³⁷ McVicker 1999. One result of Charlot's extended knowledge of Indian art was that he could not make facile statements:

Well, I don't know. I mean, I can't tell you. There are so many things. Schmeckebeier was blessed by a bookish knowledge of things. That is, he had a more simplified idea; he was going by books on the history of art of Mexico and so on, but when you are with the things themselves, it's pretty hard to say, for example, the underlying art, the prehistoric art of the Mexican plateau, which is all mixed up with Aztec. What we call now Olmec has completely that skull and nose that he saw mostly as Mayan. I am a little too close to things, so to speak, to have a very clear image of things. (Interview May 18, 1971)

³⁸ Lomnitz 2006: 342. Also, e.g., Charlot April 17, 1969. Zuñiga 2008: 30 f., Emilio Amero was studying Indian art before Charlot.

³⁹ Personal communication February 10, 1986. John Charlot 2005 "From France to Mexico."

⁴⁰ Orozco V. 1983: 307. González Mello 2002a: 333, n. 109, argues that Orozco's later work was influenced by Charlot's copies of Chich'en Itza artworks.

⁴¹ Mérida Interview 1971. Vargas 1999: 153, "The father of the Mexican mural movement, the French-born Charlot..."

⁴² Compare the use of Elie Faure and Philippe Soupault as validators (Siqueiros 1996: 202, 382, 385).

⁴³ Compare Debroise 1984: 55, Orozco had "un cubismo mal asimilado" 'a poorly assimilated Cubism.'

⁴⁴ E.g., Fell 1989: 381, 394 f., in 1918, Rodin had given his *L'Appel aux Armes* to the San Carlos Academy, and the interest it aroused in some artists prompted a polemic against *rodinismo* in others. González Mello 1995: 77. Flores 2013 has found numerous Mexican newspaper articles on modern art and literature, so the artists and poets had instructive sources at their disposal. But reports of contemporaries and the artworks produced at the time support Charlot's impressions. The young Mexicans probably needed a live representative and teacher to help them absorb new trends they might have read about.

⁴⁵ Zalce July 27–28, 1971. Compare Tamayo in Mijangos 2000: 111. Charlot found Zuloaga's paintings better when reduced in photographs and illustrations. He compared them to Norman Rockwell's magazine covers with the difference that Rockwell had painted his image for reduction and Zuloaga had no intention of profiting by the process.

⁴⁶ Araujo July 19, 1923; July 26, 1923. Because Ramos Martínez became head of San Carlos, Rivera among others seems to identify his Post-Impressionism with academism (Fell 1989: 399 f.; also 400 f.). Araujo clearly distinguishes between the end of academism at San Carlos and the beginning of Post-Impressionism with Ramos Martínez.

⁴⁷ Leal 1990: 90 f. Compare Edwards 1966: 172.

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⁴⁸ Siqueiros 1978: 117; 1996: 386. Scherer 1996: 125, mentions Giotto, Uccello, and Massaccio. Mijangos 2000: 169 f., Tamayo says that Cubism was an early influence on his work. Baciú 1968: 68, the artists knew Futurism but not Dada. Futurism is recognized as a major influence on Siqueiros. *AA II*: 356, although against the School of Paris, the muralists returned to the Old Masters like Giotto and David when they needed to treat substantial subject matter on a monumental scale.

⁴⁹ E.g., Charlot May 1928: 27, “By a strange coincidence, many of the pictorial manifestations of modern Mexico have similar characteristics to those of the First Renaissance—magnitude of concept, powerful muscular expression, sobriety of colors.”

⁵⁰ I myself would not have guessed this influence, but I have not seen the nearest Charlot compositions with mother and daughter facing each other as in *La Soupe*. These must have been drawings, and Charlot described them as few and rare. On March 16, 1926, the pioneer collector Francisco Sergio de Iturbe e Idaroff sent Charlot a photograph of a Picasso work from Paris:

Paris 16 mars 1926.

Cher Monsieur

Je vous ai envoyé la photo du “Mercure” du Picasso, un peu en retard peut-être, mais je vous prie de m’excuser ayant été fort occupé.

J’espère que vous viendrez un peu du côté, et que j’aurai le plaisir de vous voir à Paris.

Bien sincèrement à vous.

F. S. Iturbe

Charlot listed “Francisco Iturbe, Paris and Mexico” as the collector of CL 76 *Eucharistic Congress (Church Interior)*.

⁵¹ Araujo July 26, 1923:

Tomaré como Arque-tipo de pintor de obra académica muy apreciada a Saturnino Herrán, cuya labor es la más significativa de su tiempo, siendo también la más próxima a nosotros y habiendo merecido que sus críticos contemporáneos lo llamaran el “mexicano más pintor y el más mexicano de los pintores.”

“I will take as archetype of a painter with much appreciated academic work Saturnino Herrán, whose *œuvre* is the most significant of its time, being at the same time the nearest to us and having merited that his contemporary critics called him the “Mexican who is most painter and the most Mexican of the painters.””

Zavala 2001: 96–101. Herrán’s students considered him a genius, but Tamayo felt he taught them only to copy (Mijangos 2000: 194).

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⁵² Araujo July 26, 1923; also *MMR* 60. Compare the study of Debroise 1984: 19, “los temas predilectos de los estetas finiseculares y de los orientalistas europeos, adaptándolos a México” ‘the favorite themes of the fin-de-siècle esthetes and the European Orientalists, adopting them to Mexico’; “adornos pseudo-aztecas” ‘pseudo-Aztec adornments’; “la iconografía orientalista” ‘Orientalist iconography’; 20, Herrán is important for subject matter, but “no aporta formalmente ningún cambio” ‘formally, brought no change.’

⁵³ *AA* II: 367. Compare Charlot on Orozco at San Carlos: Orozco “remembers with gratitude the conventional grind that forced him to take stock of his innate mastery”; “a thorough knowledge of perspective and anatomy was the one safe way eventually to throw both overboard” (November 1947: 259). Schmeckebier 1939: 171, argues that the Mexicans assimilated European influences and made them Mexican.

⁵⁴ *MMR* 143 ff. John Charlot 2009: 33.

⁵⁵ John Charlot *Memorias* 1: 8.2; 8.3.2. Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut: “My first impressions of the capital are preserved in ‘Mexico of the Poor’” (*AA* 99–106).

⁵⁶ Charlot October 1922; March 1926; *AA* 99–106 Mexico of the Poor. See also Interview May 14, 1971.

⁵⁷ Charlot August 5, 1923. Also February 1924.

⁵⁸ Espinosa López 1991: 106. Compare Flores 2013: 22 ff., who emphasizes the daily contacts with Indians in the city.

⁵⁹ *AA* II: 143. John Charlot 2005. My mother disliked the Southern culture of Athens, Georgia, but wrote her friend Prudence Plowe that:

It doesn't bother Jean at all, he likes it immensely, except the art students are too polite to be serious. Really they seem more like highschool (*sic*) students. He says he is reminded of Mexico and he loves the manners. He says I must consider it like a foreign country, that after all they wanted to be another country.
He has lists of questions he asks me to see that I answer them properly.
What is the war that happened about 1860 called? A. The War between the States.
What kind of town is this. (not small) A. A University town.
This goes on in the same vein for quite a while. (DZC to Plowe October 21, 1941)

⁶⁰ John Charlot 2007. E.g., Interview May 18, 1971.

⁶¹ Farfán Caudillo 2008: 214217, 220 ff., 241 f. Zantwijk 1960: V f., 5 f., 14, 16, 26, 30 f., 36–39, 46–50, 53, 60, 73 f., 81 ff. I do not discuss the rival classicizing and demotic factions in the village, nor the prejudice against speaking Náhuatl (Zantwijk 1960: 79).

⁶² Volume I, Chapter 3, Section 7. Luz herself had native religious beliefs, Glusker 2010: 59. I will discuss this topic further in Chapter 5.

⁶³ Flores 2013: 162–167. Compare Debroise 1984: 33 f., 42 f.

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- ⁶⁴ M234. McVicker 1999.
- ⁶⁵ Charlot Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut. *San Carlos* 156.
- ⁶⁶ E.g., Fernández Ledesma 1924, “su afición y cariño por los elementos autóctonos de nuestro país” ‘his affection and tenderness for the autochthonous elements of our nation.’ Montellano 1931: 264. Le Clézio 1993: 194.
- ⁶⁷ M560–562. Volume 1, Chapter 3, Section 3.4.3. Dorothy Zohmah Charlot to Prudence Plow, March 29, 1946. At the time of writing, this letter has been misplaced.
- ⁶⁸ *MMR* 64 ff. Debroise 1984: 41 ff., writes positively about the Nationalists’ use of folk art.
- ⁶⁹ Dr. Atl 1921. Siqueiros 1977: 157. Acevedo 1986: 177 f. Fell 1989: 452–455. López 2006: 30–39. Apollinaire 1991: 669 ff., 674, wrote favorable notices of Atl’s exhibition and book in Paris. On the influence of the exhibition in the U.S., see Fane 1996: 21 f.
- ⁷⁰ Pérez Montfort 1994: 139–143; he sees Brenner and Charlot’s work in this context, 140 n. 4, on 155, as well as Rivera’s *tehuanas*, 1999: 197. Siqueiros wrote both for and against this project: 1978: 23 f.; 1996: 468.
- ⁷¹ Pérez Montfort 1994: 118–128; 1999: 183. Génin 1912: 319 f.
- ⁷² Pérez Montfort 1994: 120. Zavala 2006: 104. López 2006: 25–30. Compare Gallo 2005: 210, a 1000-couple dance of the *jarabe tapatío* at the opening of the Mexico City stadium.
- ⁷³ Araujo July 26, 1923. López 2006: 40. Fell 1989: 422.
- ⁷⁴ E.g., Vasconcelos 1982: pro: *Memorias* 1, 559, 709; *Memorias* 2, 66; con: *Memorias* 2, 66, 169 f.; promoting: *Memorias* 2, 208, he goes to Tlaquepaque to inaugurate an exhibition of Indian arts that had been advised by “los artistas de la Secretaría” ‘the artists of the Secretariat.’
- ⁷⁵ E.g., *MMR* 54–66. See my study of Charlot’s work on the Nacionalistas in Chapter 1. García de Garmenos 1991: 74.
- ⁷⁶ Charlot Winter 1946: 9 f. Debroise 1984: 24–31, argues strongly in favor of the Best Maugard’s pedagogical achievement and influence on younger artists like Tamayo, Lazo, Covarrubias, and Ruis.
- ⁷⁷ Tabletalk undated mid-1970s. *MMR* 61. Fell 1989: 399 f.
- ⁷⁸ E.g., Siqueiros 1996: 53 ff. Leal 1990: 94, Montenegro is just decorative. Mijangos 2000: 135 f., against the picturesque and superficially Mexican. Debroise 1984: 36, Montenegro is part of “la bohemia finisecular afrancesada” ‘the frenchified, fin-de-siècle bohemia’; 37, Mexico is a “país exótico” ‘exotic land’; “presenta una visión mítica, alegórica del México criollo inventado por José Vasconcelos” ‘presents a vision mythic, allegorical of creole Mexico invented by José Vasconcelos’; 53 f., Orozco is against the “nacionalismo de moda” ‘modish nationalism’ and picturesque, touristic subjects. Fell 1989: 390, 398 f., 422 f., 455. Pérez Montfort 1994: 204 f. Later President Lázaro Cárdenas would reemphasize the diversity of Mexican folk culture (Pérez Montfort 1994: 129).

⁷⁹ Araujo August 2, 1923. Orozco wrote:

To confuse one type of art with the other is a grave mistake; to apply to the one the laws that guide the other is a lamentable equivocation that uproots, disorients and upsets the collectivity, causing a slump in its esthetic progress. (Charlot Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

Acevedo 1986: 181 f. The Sindicato declaration on folk arts, probably written by Siqueiros, provided a historical, political background to this position:

The Syndicate recommends that folk art be considered, adding however that this expression is a decadent manifestation, produced by folk nuclei and enslaved races; the product of people who created extraordinary monumental works in other social conditions and are potentially able to create them in the future, given different human circumstances. (Charlot Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

⁸⁰ Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut. Also, e.g., :

The muralists had judged the Nationalist style superficial because of its lineal surface qualities. In turn, the problems of geometric bulk that the Mexican muralists had worked on, under the spell of cubism and of Aztec carvings, appeared superficial compared to Weston's approach. He dealt with problems of substance, weight, tactile surfaces, and biological thrusts which laid bare the roots of Mexican culture. (Writings Related to *MMR*; Appendix III)

⁸¹ Charlot 1925 Posadas. Araujo July 26, 1923; August 2, 1923.

⁸² Charlot's use of *horrible* reveals the strength of his feeling when facing bad work: e.g., "soir : avec maman festival art populaire horrible" 'evening: with mama to folk art festival horrible' (Diary September 17, 1927).

⁸³ Charlot April 1949: 141; Writings Related to *MMR*, Passages Cut: "The growing understanding of *retablos* is gauged by the following quotations."

⁸⁴ Charlot April 1949: 142. *AA* II: 130. *MMR* 33 f. Charlot provided an incomplete reference to Rivera's early article: *Azulejos*, January 1922. An original of that edition has been located in Mexico, but efforts by the ICAA website and myself to obtain a fuller reference and photocopy have been unsuccessful. The article has apparently never been republished. See also Rivera 1925 *Retablos*. Fell 1989: 446, n. 242. Charlot thought *retablos* and *ex-votos* important influences on Rivera's style.

⁸⁵ Fell 1989: 446, Toussaint; 448, Lozano. Weston 1961: 165.

⁸⁶ Charlot May 1955: 81; also *MMR* 38. Toor 1940: 51.

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- ⁸⁷ Ca. 1575. I thank Lew Andrews for identifying the painting.
- ⁸⁸ Charlot Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut: “Between March and July Siqueiros directed house-painter Vasquez to cover the ceiling with a motif suggestive of thorns and corkscrews, while he painted, in the wall space.” *MMR* 204 f. Siqueiros 1977: 195, mentions an assistant named Mendoza, who was a *pulquería* painter. Fell 1989: 391. Espinosa López 1991: 109. López Orozco 2012: 104.
- ⁸⁹ Scherer 1996: 121, Siqueiros recalled Rivera’s interest during their early conversations in Paris: “su primer centro de trabajo serían las pulquerías y su inspiración el pulque” ‘his first center of work would be the *pulquerías* and *pulque* would be his inspiration.’ Fell 1989: 430. Lozano 1999: 78. Weston 1961: 161, 188.
- ⁹⁰ See my discussion in Chapter 1. At a conference in the 1990s, I heard a young critic and art historian draw the line of good taste at appreciating *pulquería* painting, explicitly in disagreement with Charlot.
- ⁹¹ Siqueiros 1977: 195. González Mello 1995: 35 f.
- ⁹² Charlot October 1926. Pérez Montfort 1999: 200, criticizes this sort of statement.
- ⁹³ Charlot April 1925; also August–September 1925; *AA* II: 108–113. Génin 1912, probably read by Charlot, also emphasizes the continuity of Indian dancing from Precolumbian times as well as its connection to religion. López y Fuentes 1949: 30 f., the description of the dance resembles Charlot’s. I will discuss this subject below.
- ⁹⁴ Charlot 1946 *Mowentihki*. See also Karttunen n.d.
- ⁹⁵ Mijangos 2000: 135 ff. On negative attitudes, see Pérez Montfort 1999: 204 f. Brenner felt that much negativity was based on prejudice against the people themselves (Glusker 2010: 745).
- ⁹⁶ Glusker 2010: 485. Orozco 1971: 117.
- ⁹⁷ E.g., Debroise 1984: 54. See also Leal 1990: 93.
- ⁹⁸ González Mello 1995: 67. Charlot saw more general influences at work (November 1947: 259).
- ⁹⁹ Fell 1989: 449–452, 455. Vasconcelos 1982 *Memorias* 2: 169 f. Weston 1961: 27, 110, 166, 184 f., 193. On the nineteenth-century government protection of folk arts, see *San Carlos* 50, 52 f.: “With hindsight, we may appreciate now how much folk art, art that we treasure by modern standards, was saved from extinction by this stand taken by a plain bureaucrat against the devotees of neo-classical canons” (53).
- ¹⁰⁰ 1926 “Manuel Manilla, Grabador.” A shorter English version in *AA* II: 157 f. Other passages are easily found, e.g., Charlot July 1940: 404.
- ¹⁰¹ Charlot 1926 *Pinturas Murales*. This point is recognized in Charlot (e.g., Velarde Cruz 2008: 26).
- ¹⁰² Reyes Palma 1994: 23. López 2006: 38 f. However, Espejo states that Dr. Atl knew Posada in 1904 and was prevented from promoting him by his editors (1994: 16, 122). Charlot is mistaken when he said that Dr. Atl did not publish Posada’s name at all.

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- ¹⁰³ Charlot June 9, 1965. Charlot compared certain characteristics to the French Guignol, which he had admired as a child: “este espíritu infantil y sabio, inocente e irónico, cínico y amoroso de Guignol” ‘this childlike and wise spirit, innocent and ironical, cynical and loving of Guignol’ (1947 *Aguatintas*).
- ¹⁰⁴ *MMR* 30 ff. Goldschmidt 1927: 116–132, may be based on Charlot, as his comments on *rebozos*, 123, and dance, 141–146, appear to be. Weston 1961: 128, 189 f. Two pieces by Galván in the Museo del Cerámico, Tlaquepaque, have expanding, artfully irregular forms and are painted exquisitely in lines and daubs.
- ¹⁰⁵ Weston 1961: 162–187, 189 f. O’Higgins March 21, 1974. Fauchereau 2013: 109.
- ¹⁰⁶ On the family, see López Casillas 2005: 44, note 11. Reyes Palma 1994: 23.
- ¹⁰⁷ Charlot ca. 1923. Glusker 2010: 141, Brenner remembered “fat old Doña Sra. de Antonio Vanegas Arroyo—sitting behind the glass counter full of ballads, prayers in verse, riddles, psalms, etc.” Brenner’s journals are full of references to work on Posada.
- ¹⁰⁸ Charlot 1945–1947. Of his last article on Posada, 1979, he said that he was proudest of the part on Vanegas Arroyo’s business (Tabletalk February 19, 1979).
- ¹⁰⁹ I thank Lynda Klich for sending me a clear copy of this article.
- ¹¹⁰ Tabletalk February 19, 1979; “Reading it, no one will be able to tell I wrote it sitting on my fanny.” See my discussion in Chapter 1.
- ¹¹¹ Charlot June 9, 1965. Charlot related Posada to his own tastes in France, e.g.: “Este corrido canta como cantó la voz plebeya de Villon, del cual Posada, sin haberlo leído, es el mejor ilustrador” ‘This popular ballad sings the way Villon’s plebeian voice once sang, of whom Posada, even without having read him, is the best illustrator’ (1928 Posada Grabador).
- ¹¹² Charlot defined the term: “Nahuaques are Aztec flying sorcerers” (M109).
- ¹¹³ Miliotes 2006: 4 f. See also, e.g., Reyes Palma 1994: 23. Prignitz 1992: e.g., 12 f., 21, 108, 221.
- ¹¹⁴ Charlot 1979 Posada Successors. See my discussion in Chapter 1.
- ¹¹⁵ Charlot to Brenner “Recibi tu carta estúpida Francis.” See also “Just receive strange card Francis,” “It seems that we would take only the boat,” “Nothing from you since a long time.”
- ¹¹⁶ Charlot was apparently not offended that O’Higgins helped with the Toor book (Charlot to Brenner “This is from”).
- ¹¹⁷ Personal communication. In Interview May 14, 1971, he says Posada could have helped others understand his prints, but they were not considering him.
- ¹¹⁸ Charlot’s 1926 Nota may be notes for the prologue to a portfolio. Velarde Cruz 2008: 26 f., states that Charlot planned a large work on Manilla in 1969.
- ¹¹⁹ Charlot November–December 1926. López Casillas 2005: 18 f.

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¹²⁰ López Casillas 2005: 10. Velarde Cruz 2008: 24 ff., 99 f., an excellent critical discussion of Charlot's work on Manilla. Velarde Cruz corrects Charlot's death date for Manilla (24). She feels Charlot underestimates Manilla's influence on Posada and relies overmuch on Manilla's imagery to define his personality. She argues that more work needs to be done on Manilla's background, workshop, collaboration with his son, and audience.

¹²¹ Brenner 1970. Weston 1961: 38, 105, 107, 130, 172 f., 193 f. Weston was working with Tina Modotti at the time, and they share credit for a number of photographs.

¹²² Glusker 2010: 19, 67, 79, 90 f., 93 f., 104 f., 114 f., 162, 173, 183 f., 196, 200, 218 ff., 232, 250, 274, 452, 456, 462 f., 477, 485, 521, 593, 611, 621, 641, 657, 704, 706, 709, 713, 764, 766, 769 f., 773 f. I have not listed all of Weston's photographs of contemporary artworks.

¹²³ Glusker 2010: 23, 81, 95, 136, 190, 369, 501, 519, 527, 551, 743, 763. The best known example is *Cabellito de Cuarenta Centavos* (Conger 1992: 139/1924).

¹²⁴ Glusker 2010: 110, 113, 119, 154 f., 186 f., 191 f., 234 ff., 239, 256 f., 262, 267 ff., 298, 300, 316, 371, 459, 474, 476, 480, 483, 535 f., 545, 600, 602, 616, 619, 630, 686, 719, 722, 755, 767, 771, 775.

¹²⁵ Glusker 2010: 369, 703. Also Charlot November–December 1926 *Asimilando*.

¹²⁶ See also CL 143 "Photograph of same object by Edward Weston." Weston 1961: 93–94, 99. Glusker 2010: 23.

¹²⁷ *Tres Ollas*: Conger 1992: 200/1926. *Heaped Black Ollas*: Conger 1992: 268/1926; Weston 1932: illustration 31. Glusker 2010: 474. For objects with context, see also 76, 103.

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¹²⁸ Charlot October 1926. The importance of this statement for Charlot is seen in his several attempts to formulate it in different contexts:

Es exacto considerar a Posada como el precursor del movimiento presente de arte indoamericano, pero esto, en justicia, no basta. Hay que citarlo también como uno de sus más altos exponentes. Meditar su caso será quizás útil cuando se habla de resucitar el arte mexicano, el cual todavía goza de muy buena salud. (1925 Posadas)

‘It is exact to consider Posada the precursor of the current movement of indoamerican art, but this, in justice, does not suffice. It is necessary to refer to him also as one of its highest exponents. To contemplate his case will be perhaps useful when people discuss the resuscitation of Mexican art, which still enjoys very good health.’

A mis queridos compañeros con los cuales quisimos *crear* arte mexicano—Esta prueba de que tal arte ya nacido desde siglos goza siempre de muy buena salud. (1925–1926)

“To my beloved companions with whom we wanted to create Mexican art—This proof that such art, born centuries ago, enjoys always very good health.’

A mis queridos compañeros con los cuales quisimos resucitar el arte mexicano, el cual nunca necesitó de Thaumaturgos.

‘To my beloved companions with whom we wanted to resuscitate Mexican art, which never needed thaumaturges.’

Compare Brenner-Charlot 1928. Compare also Orozco’s famous question—why make art for the people when they make their own art? (Orozco 1971: 141; 1974: 92).

¹²⁹ E.g., Charlot November–December 1926 *Asimilando*. *MMR* 14–27.

¹³⁰ Charlot 1945 El San Cristóbal; *AA* II: 77–84. On the Tlatelolco project, see León-Portilla 1988: 178 f.

¹³¹ Vs. Rosales 2005: 1, who feels the Colonial architecture was an impediment to the artists.

¹³² Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut. Mijangos 2000: 145, Tamayo felt that religious subjects did inspire artists, but social ones did not.

¹³³ *MMR* 25 ff. Paz 1993: 138, agrees with Charlot on the religious character and Colonial roots of these early murals.

¹³⁴ Debroise 1984: 56, states that Charlot was the only artist not to use a deliberately Christian subject, but he is unaware of Charlot’s *St. Christopher*, whose author was unidentified in 1983. Paul Claudel gave the caption “Crucified to the Stone” to the lithograph *Cargador* (M127). Charlot’s original French caption does refer more indirectly to the cross. His later English caption refers to the Revolution.

¹³⁵ John Charlot 1976: 31; 2001 First Fresco. For Colonial examples, see, e.g., Smith 1968: 162, 183, 193.

¹³⁶ Keen 1971: 55, 311 f., 313 f., 337–346, 414 f., 436–441, 498, 608.

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¹³⁷ Keen 1971: 55, 149 f., 15–172, 436, 457, 510.

¹³⁸ Keen 1971: 412 f. Torres Bodet 1961: 241, on Caso's influence.

¹³⁹ Interview June 12, 1971. Charlot made a drawing of Caso: "I made a portrait of him, which was a pencil drawing that is published in *Mexican Folkways*, one of the *Mexican Folkways*; very badly reproduced, but it's a portrait of him" (Interview June 12, 1971).

¹⁴⁰ Ángel Fernández 1988: 138, 147. Keen 1971: 321, 413, 466 f. In his time, Charnay found it exhibited many fakes, reportedly still a problem in some provincial Mexican museums (1885: 37 f.). Also Beezley 2008: 94.

¹⁴¹ Charlot Interview May 18, 1971. Ángel Fernández 1988: 150. Lomnitz 2006: 342. Mijangos 2000: 149, Tamayo was influenced by his work at the Museum of Archeology. Charlot February 1924 reports Siqueiros being inspired by his visits. Modernization began in 1930 (Ángel Fernández 1988: 190) and the present Museo Nacional de Antropología was opened in 1964 (201, 220). The Mexican section of the old Musée de l'Homme in Paris had the antique look when I visited it.

¹⁴² Ángel Fernández 1988: 150. Compare the statements by Carlos Pellicer:

No se puede ser verdaderamente mexicano si no se conocen las antiguas culturas de Mesoamérica. Y no se trata de hablar otra vez Náhuatl, ni se van a construir otra vez pirámides, pero es muy importante tener conciencia histórica de esas culturas que son un orgullo para todos los americanos. (Ángel Fernández 1988: 200)

'One cannot be truly Mexican if one does not know the ancient cultures of Mesoamerica. It is not a question of speaking Náhuatl again, nor are pyramids going to be built again. But it is very important to have a historical consciousness of these cultures which are a source of pride for all Americans.'

Compare the remarks on primitivism in Fell 1989: 409.

¹⁴³ Keen 1971: 191 f., 299 f. Charlot May 11, 1960: 19.

¹⁴⁴ Keen 1971: 417 ff. Krauze 1997: 30.

¹⁴⁵ Génin 1908–1910: 131, 135. See also Vasconcelos 1982 *Memorias* 1: 256.

¹⁴⁶ Charnay 1885: 21; also 51–54, 195, 323, 325, 335 f., 348 f., 383 f., 392, 395, 408 ff., 412. Also Keen 1971: 426.

¹⁴⁷ Charnay 1885: 325; 324, the exterior painting "devait simplement ajouter à la sauvage magnificence des édifices" 'was intended simply to add to the savage magnificence of the buildings.' On Viollet-le-Duc's appreciation of Indian art, 448 ff., 453.

¹⁴⁸ Craft: Charnay 1885: e.g., 170. *Gout*: 1885: 21. Bernal 1977: 35.

¹⁴⁹ Charnay 1885: 211; also 356, 384. For Humboldt's negative evaluation of Mexican Indian art, see Keen 1971: 322 ff.

¹⁵⁰ Charnay 1885: 384. Also Keen 1971: 457, 461.

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- ¹⁵¹ Charlot Winter 1946: 9. E.g., Keen 1971: 514 f.
- ¹⁵² Eder 1986: 73 ff., 76. On Gamio's career, see Keen 1971: 470 ff. Those approaching Precolumbian art on its own terms are praised by Keen 1971: 522 (George Vaillant), 523 (J. Fernandez).
- ¹⁵³ Keen 1971: 514 f.; also 543 f., on Pérez Martínez. Charlot Winter 1946: 8 f., with examples from his own work. Zavala 2001: 78 ff.
- ¹⁵⁴ Charlot 1949 Art and Archaeology: 51. Also, e.g., Charlot Winter 1946: 3 f.
- ¹⁵⁵ Charlot May 1951: 201. Charlot made the same point in his study of Indian dance (*AA II*: 113).
- ¹⁵⁶ Keen 1971: 509, 534 ff. For linguistics, literature, and music, see Keen 1971: 534–542, 558 ff.
- ¹⁵⁷ Lozano 1999 Reinterpretaciones: 75. Ángel Fernández 1988: 206, on Rivera as a great collector.
- ¹⁵⁸ E.g., Orozco 1955: 43 f. Keen 1971: 530–533, 538.
- ¹⁵⁹ Mijangos 2000: 140 f., 148 ff. On the contrary, Charlot wanted to understand Tamayo from his Zapotec heritage (*AA II*: 368).
- ¹⁶⁰ Charlot Disney Lectures 5. Winter 1946: 7; also 5 f. *MMR* 4 f. Acevedo 1986: 181 f.
- ¹⁶¹ E.g., Charlot 1927 Modelado; 1928 Maya Esthetic; January 1928. *Idols* 312.
- ¹⁶² *AA II*: 40; also 61. Charlot 1926 Report: 6.
- ¹⁶³ Charlot 1949 Art and Archaeology: 51. *MMR* 8. Compare Siqueiros 1996: 19.
- ¹⁶⁴ Charlot 1965 Articles for *EJB*: "Mexican Painting." Other references can be found (e.g., *AA II*: 142). Siqueiros 1977: 470, national art can be made universal through geometric composition.
- ¹⁶⁵ *MMR* 1–13. See also, e.g., Fell 1989: 409–412. Snead 2001: 160 f. Zuñiga 2008: 75 f. The influence of Indian art extended beyond the borders (e.g., Barker 1931: 449, John Sloan; Keen 1971: 511, Henry Moore et al.).
- ¹⁶⁶ Keen 1971: 527, 529 f.; on Rivera's depictions of Cortes, 481, 528.
- ¹⁶⁷ Fell 1989: 383; also 641. Similarly, Siqueiros argued against primitivism and archeologism (Keen 1971: 533).
- ¹⁶⁸ Eder 1986: 81. Compare the equally vivid criticisms of Siqueiros (e.g., 1977: 210, 212, 491). Braun 1993: 186–249, for an unpolemical discussion.
- ¹⁶⁹ Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut. *MMR* 70 ff.
- ¹⁷⁰ Charlot Winter 1946: 3; 1, similarly, despite the earlier ups and downs of interest in Indians and their art, "the Indian remains a potent stylistic factor." Compare Siqueiros 1996: 55.
- ¹⁷¹ *MMR* 12. Charlot Winter 1946: 12 f.
- ¹⁷² Charlot to Weston, September 1928. Andrews 2011: 62.
- ¹⁷³ Charlot Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut. Also, e.g., Charlot November 1930: 139; July 25, 1942; *AA II*: 41. See my discussion above and in Chapter 9.

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¹⁷⁴ Charlot March 17, 1929, is a heavily edited and paraphrased survey of the results of his study for archaeology.

¹⁷⁵ McVicker 1999. *AA* II: 40.

¹⁷⁶ An exception is Weston 1961: 173 f.