4. SUBJECT AND STYLE

The early 1920s offered a wide variety of options for creating a national style. The most visible art was still that of the folk and of the past, as seen above. The most evident recent monumental works were those of the Porfiriato, part of an early program of globalization. To promote progress and development, national assets were sold to multinationals. The growing gap between rich and poor required an ever more authoritarian regime, which used force to repress dissent and propaganda to win assent. Nationalistic rhetoric—even a national patriotic religion (Krauze 1997: 228)—included monumental sculpture like the 1887 statue *Monumento a Cuautémoc* by Miguel Noreña (1843–1894) on the Paseo de la Reforma. Porfiriato art and architecture remain popular today and, though disdained by the 1920s artists, presented at least an unconscious challenge.

Although largely forgotten, the painting of the late Porfiriato has been revealed as surprisingly interesting by Fausto Ramírez (1991). I have found no discussion of that period by the muralists and their colleagues, but a number of the Porfiriato painters could be considered their forerunners.[1] Influenced by Courbet and Realism, the painters dressed their models in regular clothes and strove to connect genre or *costumbrista* painting to historical painting: "la categoría del cuadro histórico de costumbres contemporáneas" 'the category of the historical painting of contemporary customs' (Ramírez 1991: 38; also 31 f.). Rather than just reporting their "tipos locales" 'local types,' they invested them with symbolic value:

> rodeados de signos de identidad ambiental y social, material y espiritual, que resultaran una suerte de depositarios o representantes del 'alma' del terruño. (40)
>
> 'surrounded by signs of environmental and social, material and spiritual identity, they became sort of depositories or representatives of the "soul" of the native soil.'

Inspired by nineteenth-century French paintings of peasants left behind by progress, Porfiriato artists depicted peasants and urban workers realistically in order to expose their social deprivation (Ramírez 1991: 43 ff., 47). They continued the conventional historical themes (33 f.) and searched for specifically Mexican allegory and symbolism (36). The Porfiriato painters also explored the landscape option, discussed below, and the portrait (48–63). In all these projects, the Porfiriato painters faced the same problems of subject, style, and artistic identity as the artists of the 1920s.

Allied with Porfiriato art—and well behind the best of it—were the aging academics at the San Carlos Academy. Siqueiros admitted that some of its alumni were good, but condemned their academic teachers as a whole:

> Rebull, Velasco, Orozco y Clausell produjeron obras aisladamente muy fuertes, pero que no pudieron, sin embargo, crear una etapa trascendental que justificara las enormes cualidades artísticas de nuestra raza, en el terreno intelectual.[2]

> 'Rebull, Velasco, Orozco, and Clausell produced isolated works that were very strong, but they nonetheless could not create a transcendental state that would justify the enormous artistic qualities of our race in the intellectual field.'

The 1911 student revolt, described above, installed Ramos Martínez at the academy and led to the Escuelas de Pintura al Aire Libre (EPAL), which provided a base for the young artists, but did not guide them into the style they were seeking:

> At the time of his election, Ramos Martínez' style of painting, courting Whistler and the post-Impressionists, carried for the young students all the impact of a revolutionary manifesto. Regardless of a style that the artist himself would shed, it proved of crucial importance for the generation of Siqueiros that the new Director thought in terms of a Mexican art, and strived to put his students in daily contact with Mexican subject matter.[3]

> I don't remember exactly when I met Ramos Martínez, but he was the director of the San Carlos School in the city, in the town, and he, too, was so interested in French art, maybe in a slightly antiquated way—his most modern master was Cézanne—but he was in very good faith. (Interview May 14, 1971)

Many individualists could also be found in the art scene, several of whom, like Orozco and Goitia, were important in themselves and in their impact on the general search for style and subject.[4] Some of these were appreciated by and personally close to the muralists, like the Impressionist Joaquín Clausell (1866–1935), the sculptor Manuel Martínez Pintao (b. 1875), and the naïve artist Abraham Ángel (1905–1924).[5] The muralists were happy to recognize quality beyond ideology. Charlot recounts a visit he and Orozco paid to Clausell:

> chez Clausell. magnifique peinture. Orozco dit : à côté c'est comme si nous étions syphilitiques. il me donne 4 peintures. (Diary September 19, 1927)
> 'at Clausell's. magnificent painting. Orozco says, "Next to him it's as if we were syphilitics." He gives me four paintings.'

> Te mande un cuadro de Clausell "de mi colleccion" porque lo fui a ver con Jose Clemente y nos dio cuadros y no habia apparecido Lozano. Es un pintor muy grande En todo el impressionismo frances tiene Pissaro y Seurat…eguales, nada mas. (JC to AB "No escribes y me pongo triste")
> 'I sent you a painting of Clausell "from my collection" because I went to see him with José Clemente, and he gave us pictures, and Lozano hadn't shown up. He is a very great painter. In all, French Impressionism has Pissarro and Seurat…equals, not more.'

Charlot wrote appreciatively of Clausell and included him in an exhibition (December 23, 1927). Similarly, Charlot appreciated and helped publicize the work of the anti-muralist Manuel Rodríguez Lozano (1896–1971).[6]

Thus the Mexican Mural Renaissance was started on a crowded scene and was not immediately remarkable. From the elevated perspective of history, which Charlot adopted in his *MMR*, the movement began with Vasconcelos' commissioning the Nacionalistas. But their works were as much private as public, like decorations of Vasconcelos' office, and how much they were known to the young artists is unclear. In his 1921 reconnaissance trip and in early 1922, Charlot's impression was that "There was nothing very much going on" (Interview May 18, 1971). Mural commissions needed to expand before they reached the younger artists: "it's only when Vasconcelos decided to put the walls at the disposition of the people that murals for a group, anyhow, became possible" (Interview August 7, 1971). Although his recollection in our interview was historically inaccurate, it conveys the situation as perceived by the young artist:

> And in fact, when I arrived in Mexico the first time—that was before the return of Rivera, before Vasconcelos had been able to whip together his group of painters—there was really rather little going on. (Interview October 18, 1970)
>
> There was a very nice going-on in the graphic arts, so that my first art, if you want, in Mexico, was not mural, because there was no more mural possibilities than there were in France. (Interview October 18, 1970)

In any case, the younger artists never found the Nacionalistas' work an attractive option, and if the Mexican Mural Renaissance had merely continued the works of the first stage, its importance would be purely historical and local. The movement was elevated by the arrival of a recognized great artist, Diego Rivera, whose work was truly absorbing and inspiring to the young group of artists described earlier. As they joined the mural movement, sometimes working with Rivera, sometimes on their own, the second stage began that would include the creation of artworks of worldwide significance.

The result of this sequence of events is that, from the beginning, the mural movement comprised competing tendencies. Fell sees three groups: "folklórica y decorativa" 'folkloric and decorative' with Best, Montenegro, and Ledesma; the "grupo Rivera-Orozco-Charlot-Siqueiros, y sus ayudantes y discípulos" 'the Rivera-Orozco-Charlot-Siqueiros group and their assistants and disciples'; and the neo-academism of Ramos Martínez (1989: 401). Orozco saw three currents: indigenist, historical, and political propaganda (1955: 81). Subgroupings are possible, as will be seen below.

The problem for the art historian is defining the similarities and differences within the general movement, like the continuity and the rupture between the two stages described above (e.g., Coleby 1999: 15 ff.). The artists of the second stage strongly felt and articulated their opposition to those of the first stage, as seen in previous discussions. As a historian, Charlot did justice to the Nacionalistas, but as an artist, his negative reaction to their work was strong:

> Well, again, read my book [*MMR*]. I have a chapter there now, and I think it was called "*Nacionalistas*," and they were people who were trying to adapt the designs on the *bateas*, on the gourds, and the most colorful folk costumes, to their art; and men like Montenegro, Adolfo Best Maugard, and so on. The thing that bothered me, or

> would have bothered me about them if I had looked at their thing very much, was that there was a sort of elegance, what for me seemed like a false elegance: elongations and sophistication. I don't know exactly where they got that from, but I think it was in the case of Montenegro the tail end of Aubrey Beardsley. That didn't leave me indifferent. It repulsed me horribly, so that I couldn't look at their things very much. So their intentions were good, that is, making use of Mexican folk motifs in fact, but the results were so refined, decorative, and sophisticated that they couldn't appeal to me, that I couldn't hang on them. (Interview May 18, 1971)

Many more examples of such criticisms can be presented than I will here.[7] For the younger artists, those of the first stage appeared old, and an intergenerational dynamic is present, I would argue, in the rejection of their subjects and styles. Personal differences played a part as well. Tamayo felt Montenegro was jealous of his success (Mijangos 2000: 193 f.). Charlot thought Montenegro was the one who slandered him to Leal, leading to a long break in their friendship. Beyond such gossip, historians have agreed that the second stage generally replaced the first in subjects, style, and view of their mission.[8] The same problems of subject and style arose between Rivera and the young group of artists to which Charlot belonged, as will be seen below. Nonetheless, the continuities between the first and second stages must be defined, as I will attempt below (Coleby 1999).

As the second stage of the mural movement began—despite all the earlier work and discussion on subjects, on murals, on national art, including Rivera's and Siqueiros' conversations in Paris, the *Tres Llamamientos*, and so on—no consensus was generally established on the problems of subject and style: "Come 1920, the revolution was top-dog, mural painting was in the air, but not yet on the walls" (*AA* II: 338). Arriving at solutions would be agonizing:

> Similar oversimplifications, intended to bolster Rivera's posture in art history, fail to explain the telltale *volte-faces* that stamp his early frescoes with an unrest close to greatness. Those who worked with and near him at the time of his return to the *patria* remember still the fierce inner conflicts—exploding at times into outward crisis—that marked his conversion to fresco and to Mexico.[9]

Siqueiros sometimes writes about this period using the later *Tres Grandes* perspective:

> Nosotros estábamos luchando—Rivera y yo, particularmente, con frecuentes intervenciones de Orozco y de los más jóvenes—por encontrar el lenguaje apropiado. (1996: 468)
>
> 'We were struggling—particularly Rivera and I with frequent contributions by Orozco and the youngest ones—to discover an appropriate language.'

In fact, the younger group of artists would prove to be the pioneers in and largely the creators of the mural movement's subjects and styles, despite art historical prejudices and expectations:

> We witness here the illusion bred by uncertain dating, that the works of a recognized master, aggressively visible now and of vast bulk, must have somehow influenced

> works less publicized and less exposed, and done by very young men. Checking on dates proves that there was instead a give and take, and that, if Rivera's example was a spur, in exchange some of the essential lines along which the renaissance grew were stated first by the maligned Dieguitos. (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

Similarly, Charlot will find himself again in a leadership role: in his *Traité de Peinture* of 1920, he anticipated many of the discussions of 1921.[10]

4.2. THE IMPORTANCE OF SUBJECT AND STYLE

Subject and style were fundamental concerns of the muralists, as seen in the many citations above (Acevedo 1986: 179). Charlot had already discussed their distinction and interrelationship in his 1920 *Traité de Peinture*:

> La beauté plastique n'est pas inhérente à l'objet mais à la conception que s'en fait le peintre. Un œil bien éduqué découvre la beauté plastique dans les objets les plus humbles.
>
> 'Plastic beauty is not inherent in the object but in the conception the artist makes of it. A well-educated eye discovers plastic beauty in the humblest objects.'

Indeed, distinguishing between subject and style was crucial in the muralists' understanding of their own project. Basically, a work was Mexican first because of its style, not its subject:

> Presque toutes ses gravures traitent de drames, du paroxysme d'un drame, et quoique la lecture en soit aisée, la composition est si équilibrée, l'épuration des traits accessoires si complète, qu'il n'y a rien là de pittoresque. Il est la meilleure justification de cette loi : que le pittoresque ne réside pas dans le sujet mais dans la façon dont on le traite. (Charlot August 30, 1925)
>
> 'Almost all [Posada's] prints depict dramas, the paroxysm of a drama, and even though reading it is easy, the composition is so balanced, the purging of the accessory traits so complete, that there is nothing there of picturesque. It is the best justification of this law: that the picturesque does not reside in the subject but in the fashion in which one treats it.'

The task of the viewer is to "autopsier les éléments de la Beauté" 'to autopsy the elements of Beauty.'

> Esta atracción de la pintura no está especialmente ligada a los objetos representados; lo que atrae es, ante todo, la línea y el color y por esto le importa al dueño que sus paredes estén plásticamente bien cubiertas. La buena calidad de la pintura, como la del pulque, es para él un elemento de éxito. (Charlot October 1926)
>
> 'This attraction of the painting is not especially tied to the objects represented. What attracts is above all the line and the color and because of this what is important for the

> master is that his walls be plastically well covered. The good quality of the painting, like that of the *pulque*, is for him an element of success.'
>
> La unidad de su obra no solamente reside en los asuntos representados, sino, sobre todo, en su plástica muy personal, la cual fusiona armoniosamente ingenuidad voluntaria y sabiduría humilde. (Charlot November–December 1926)
>
> 'The unity of the work resides not only in the subjects represented, but above all, in his very personal plastic, which fuses harmoniously willful ingenuity and humble knowledge.'
>
> Su obra es más medularmente americana que la de tantos otros pintores que confundieron "asunto mexicano con plástica mexicana", al uso de los turistas, pero su falta misma de pintoresco superficial lo hará perdurar y apreciar de los amantes de la buena pintura, cuando tantas otras obras, actualmente en una cumbre de publicidad algo forzada, hayan sido reducidas a más justas proporciones. (Charlot December 9–12, 1927)
>
> 'His work is more American to the marrow than that of so many other painters who confuse "Mexican subject" with "Mexican plastic," for the use of tourists, but his very lack of superficial picturesqueness will make him endure and be appreciated by the lovers of good painting, when so many other works, now at the height of a somewhat forced publicity, will be reduced to more just proportions.'
>
> Posada trató, por profesión y más por gusto, asuntos escalofriantes, dramas tremendos, teniendo que crearse, para no dejar de ser artista, un lenguaje plástico todavía de mayor fuerza que el tema.[11]
>
> 'Posada treated, because of his profession or even more by taste, bloodcurdling subjects, terrifying dramas, having to create, so as not to abandon being an artist, a plastic language still more powerful than the theme.'

This priority of style was recognized even by an artist as focused on message as Siqueiros: "A nadie puede ocultarse la fuerza de la gráfica satírica o simplemente de la plástica, como arma social" 'The power as a social weapon of satirical graphic or simply of the plastic [esthetic], can be hidden from no one' (Siqueiros 1996: 40); even without explicit political content, style itself can express the dramatic struggle of the present (94; also 322).

Conversely, in his depictions of the poor of London, Gustave Doré revealed an unusual social consciousness for his generation, but his poor style weakened his artistic impact. All agreed that subject matter did not justify bad style, a point that Tamayo made his own.[12] The muralists rejected and denounced Soviet Social Realism as poor academism, and Moscow criticized the muralists for sacrificing

realism to "las leyes abstractas de la composición" 'the abstract laws of composition.'[13] Charlot also provided a positive model for younger artists, as Zalce stated:

> Subject matter is not so important, but how it's treated. Herrán is very picturesque; a *charro*, all superficial things. Like Zuloaga with a bullfighter and a dancer with castanets. But what Jean said was true. Those who liked Herrán didn't like Jean. Herrán would do an Indian girl who was thin and sexy, not fat, strong, and true. It was a different ideal: calendar art.
>
> Mexican subjects done by Herrán were the *tapatío* dance, a girl with a *rebozo* and an apple. Tourist stuff. Really very bad. Calendar art. Very superficial. Touristic. You don't feel the true. Jean's was completely other. For me it was a shock because I was in the Academy when all said Herrán was the best artist. When I saw Jean's work, the other really disappeared for me and for many of my generation. I and my friends made many commentaries on Jean's things.
>
> Jean influenced me more than anybody. When I go to Yucatán, I have in mind more than anything else what Jean did in Yucatán. I felt lucky to have seen Jean's things before I went to Yucatán so many years later. (Zalce July 27–28, 1971)
>
> Ultimately, style made a work authentic art, not subject. Weston wrote emphatically:
>
> Rivera's frescoes, if they live, will not live because of their revolutionary character,—they may interest a historian from that angle: nor have they aesthetic value because he depicts an Indian woman rolling out tortillas, they may have future value to an ethnologist,—they will not live as art. (1966: 24)

As a liturgical artist, Charlot knew only too many cases of style being inadequate to subject:

> Before serving the Catholic flock or its pastor, the artist must give obeisance to God: he must not break the rules of sound aesthetics under penalty of ceasing to be a good man.[14]

For Charlot and others, this reasoning protected the autonomy of art as fulfilling its own limited but authentic end (Eder 1991: 76 f.). The cleric could not order the artist to sin against his work for some supposed higher purpose, like edifying the congregation through bad taste. In philosophical terms, bad art betrayed art's essence. In religious terms, bad art insulted God, its first viewer. For such reasons, Charlot would never compromise his art for his audience, be it peasants, children, or critics. One of the achievements of the mural movement was to prove that good art could reach the masses.

Once priority has firmly been accorded to style, the question of subject matter can safely be raised. Among the Mexican artists of the time, Tamayo stood out by denying the importance of subject matter, thus allying himself with the school that continues to be ascendant in Western art.[15] As discussed below, the muralists had to accord more importance to subject matter because of their view of their

mission and their place as artists in the community at a particular moment in its history. First, however, purely esthetic reasons for the use of subject matter should be briefly acknowledged.

A subject can inspire emotions in an artist that add to the quality of the work. The intensity of Rivera's interest in a person can always be gauged from his portraits. When he adopted the subjects pioneered by the "Dieguitos"—like workers—his painting itself improved. In Volume 1, Chapter 8, Section 3.1.1, I argued that Charlot was more inspired by the subject of his *Bullet* than his *Music*. Charlot was interested in Braque's surprise on realizing that he was painting differently those still lifes that contained a human skull:

> He had a human skull in the studio and organized the still lifes very much in the same way that he had organized the still lifes of bottles and dishes, but with a skull, let's say, instead of Cézanne's apple. And when he was painting those things, he had a certain mood, a certain gravity that was different from his mood when he was painting bottles and dishes. And he told to Father Couturier, he said, "You know, there is really a greater responsibility on the part of the artist when he paints a skull than when he paints an apple."[16]

Even if the specific Marxist message of an artwork is forgotten:

> Truly felt emotions leave lines, values and colors etched all the more deeply to match a warfaring purpose. The war over, win or lose, lines, values and colors keep imprisoned the vibrant heat of the message long after its topical meaning is lost. (*AA* II: 144)

Such art can also continue to influence peoples' views. In the 1960s in Rome, sitting on the Spanish Steps, I heard a Midwestern American tourist say to her husband, "It almost makes you love the Pope."

Charlot had emotional relations with his subjects. As seen in Volume 1, Chapter 8, Charlot's Planist *Bullet* was better than his *Music* because of its basis in wartime experience and its narrative character; his relative lack of interest in music makes the latter gouache more of an exercise. Charlot described working on a subject as if he were having physical contact with it (Volume 1, Chapter 3, Section 3.1). He once talked about painting an ear, moving his fingers as he described tracing its rounded forms with the brush. The act gave him a feeling of joy, and he pitied non-representational painters who lacked that experience. To Zohmah Day in a letter received May 14, 1932, he wrote that he felt like he was patting her back as he painted it. Discussing his lithograph *Mexican Kitchen*, Charlot wrote:

> 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. (1949 Statement)

Copying an artwork, Charlot felt he entered into the mind of the artist. Similarly, his portraits of people are sometimes alarmingly psychological. Charlot thus had an intense and multifaceted relation to his subject, a relation that required energy and effort. He was annoyed when I suggested people ask him to do their

portraits and when I asked for a portrait towards the end of his life. Charlot's relation to his subject was the same as his relation to life.

Certain subjects normally excite specific emotions: a crucifixion, a crying child, a mother with her newborn baby. The viewer's empathy adds to the effect of the artwork. Clemente Orozco V. told me that an admirer of his father's had said: "I don't need Orozco to tell me that there is poverty in the world and suggest solutions to it. I need Orozco to make me feel that poverty, so I'll do something about it."[17] The power of the subject is such that the artist—if for any reason he does not want to activate it—must work against it with style.

Art with subject matter communicates a view, a way of looking at things. It the viewer already adheres to that view, he can recognize it and feel more strongly the regular emotions it evokes. If he finds the view unfamiliar, he can experience a range of negative and positive emotions. Art with such subject matter also raises questions of truth, as seen early in Western history. Pindar teaches that beauty is from the Graces and truth from the Muses (Bowra 1964: 26–33). The better, enduring poem has both. As the recipient of the Muses' inspiration, the poet has a special responsibility for truth (33 f., 39 f.).

The above considerations reveal that for artists like Charlot the subject was an important factor in the total emotional effect of the artwork: "la valeur de l'œuvre d'art n'est que la valeur de l'émotion et de la qualité d'émotion qu'elle suscite" 'the value of an artwork is only the value of the emotion and the quality of the emotion that it arouses.'[18] The subject can operate in a synergy with the other elements of the work. That is, natural objects embody so many emotions and associations that they enjoy an intrinsic interest that must be somehow handled in the artwork: the artist thus moves between the two poles of the intrinsic interest of the object and the particular value given to it by the artistic treatment. A point in the Araujo articles seems directly taken from Charlot's *Traité de Peinture*:

> que todos los "asuntos" o "motivos" escogidos no tienen valor plástico aisladamente: son complementarios en la realización de un conjunto armónico, siendo ésta la más alta finalidad del CLASICISMO en su parte plástica.[19]
>
> 'that all the chosen "subjects" or "motifs" have no plastic value in isolation: they are complementaries in the realization of an harmonious combination, this being the highest finality of CLASSICISM in its plastic part.'

This is true for themes and ideas as well as objects: "L'idée en tant que belle sera donc instrument dans 'harmonier une surface'" 'The idea, inasmuch as it is beautiful, will indeed be an instrument in the "harmonizing of the surface."'[20] The search for such ideas, subjects, and motifs is an important part of Charlot's work as an artist. On the other hand, a subject could hurt a stylistically fine picture, as Charlot felt Ingres' 1848 *François Ier Recevant le Dernier Soupir de Léonard de Vinci* 'Francis I Receiving the Last Breath of Leonardo da Vinci' was diminished by its "ridiculous" subject matter.

Despite the priority of style over subject, the two tend to fuse in practice. Through emotions and cultural expectations, certain subjects call for certain styles: the funeral of a worthy person demands a solemn style. A battle scene on a large wall will usually be treated monumentally. In the Western

tradition a hierarchy of subjects, settings, and media was established that provided a useful guide for the artist in matters of style.[21] That hierarchy was now under attack:

> In the orderly pigeonholes of the seventeen-century French academy, the painters of historical subjects stood higher than the portrait painter, who in his turn, towered over the still-life and the landscape artist. Things were reversed in our generation. Even portraiture, with its implied quota of objectivity, was considered an impure genre. Meanwhile, paintings of apples and bottles rated in Paris the top rung of the scale. Still lifes alone were deemed fit to untap the flow of subconscious idiosyncrasies that were praised as the gist of art. As to "peinture d'histoire," fallen from its former eminence, it lay sprawled and seemingly dead.
>
> The mural artist of the twenties needed to revise drastically contemporary relative estimates of subjective and objective if he were to champion objectivity in paint at a time when the best informed critical opinion, indeed the best gifted artists, praised only subjectivity. The example of the old masters should have been sufficient. They had validly solved similar problems of uniting nature and esthetic investigations, but had done so in a society different from ours. Our acutely contemporary social consciousness would have felt ill at ease—in period clothes, as it were—if it had relied on their example exclusively.[22]

In Charlot's view, the battles against academism had been won and the artists of his own generation had inherited an unusual freedom of choice:

> Mais pour lui, venu après la guerre, l'enthousiasme serait anachronique. On lui a laissé, comme rôle tout spécial, la *liberté redoutable du choix*. (February 1924)
>
> 'But for him, arrived after the esthetic war is over, enthusiasm would be anachronistic. As a completely special role, he has been left with the *redoubtable liberty of choice*.'

Welcome as such liberty was, the young artist left with a "Problème quasi-insoluble dans lequel patauge la jeunesse depuis 10 ans déjà" 'Quasi-insoluble problem in which for already ten years the young generation flounders.' Unable to support themselves on the conventional props, the muralists were forced to be creative.

This fitted their task as they conceived it: creating artworks that fused subject and style to express their new situation. Discussing the religious tapestries of Lola Cueto, Charlot wrote that the artists of the Middle Ages knew Roman art:

> Pero el arte antiguo, a pesar de su buen dibujo, de su correcta anatomía y de su apegamiento a la belleza física, no les parece adecuado para expresar sentimientos nunca experimentados por los paganos. Por ello, descartando una tradición comprobada por frutos espléndidos pero ya inservible, los artistas de la Edad Media prefirieron hacer arte moderno, entonces como siempre el único adecuado para decir

> nuevas verdades. (October 13–20, 1945)
>
> 'But the art of antiquity, despite its good drawing, its correct anatomy and its attachment to physical beauty, did not seem to them adequate to express emotions that had never been experienced by the pagans. For that, discarding a tradition proven by fruits that were splendid but already unserviceable, the artists of the Middle Ages preferred to make modern art, then as always the uniquely adequate to express new truths.'
>
> "we are born in a moment when the only thing we can paint is modern art." Anything that is not modern art, or was not modern at the time it was produced, is not art at all; it is a gross distortion of the very nature of art.
> "The only art fit for the decoration of a Church in any age has been modern art," he says. ("*Art*: The Work of Jean Charlot" 1949)

In Siqueiros' words, what was needed was "obra de forma y contenido, contenido y forma revolucionarios" 'work of form and content, revolutionary form and content.'[23]

Style is prior to content, but style is neither isolated nor absolute. Already in France, Charlot had argued that different styles like Impressionism and Cubism could be justified by their advantages against their disadvantages: "Les résultats s'équilibrent" 'The results balance each other out' (19181923 Notebook C: "Note sur l'Impressionnisme"). Basically, all styles could be *good*, but what made a style *right* depended on factors like purpose, setting, intention, and so on: "otras razones primordiales de función social y espiritual" 'other primordial reasons of social and spiritual function' (Araujo July 26, 1923). Charlot wrote that Galo Galecio rejected styles like abstract art because:

> no pueden enunciar el mensaje que Galecio ideó como otra característica esencial de la obra de arte. Él quiere hablar, y hablar con elocuencia, no solamente del hombre sino de su lote terrestre, de sus trabajos, de sus penas, de las injusticias sufridas. (1946 Galo Galecio)
>
> 'they could not enunciate the message that Galecio had in mind as another essential characteristic of the work of art. He wanted to speak, and speak with eloquence, not only of the human being but of his earthly lot, his work, his pain, and the injustices he suffered.'

Charlot and his colleagues greatly admired Carlos Mérida's semi-abstractionism, which was influenced by his land and culture,[24] but Mérida's development of the style entailed his ceasing muralism. Leal wrote that abstract art required more literary explanation and justification than any other, a disadvantage for a public mural.[25] The muralists felt themselves in a new cultural, historical, and social situation that required a new art. Despite all earlier work and models, that art did not yet exist. It had to be created.

Charlot was always interested in artists and patrons like David and George IV who changed the prevailing art style and formed the esthetic of a new period. Art, especially public art, thus influenced society and the public's perceptions and views:

> Another very important factor in painting is what comes to us, not through our natural spectacles, but through our philosophy of life. Of course the philosophy each person has to have to go on living is purely abstract. There are no shapes in it. But every such philosophy corresponds to certain figures that are its equivalents in the world of mathematics or geometry. For Giotto, all the world obeyed the philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas, in which everything is done in orderly relation to everything else. In Giotto's paintings, each volume is very defined, but is also placed in a relation to the others that I would call pyramidal. This typical figure of Giotto's is related to his philosophy, which begins at the top and expands to any natural order. (Disney Lectures 4)

The muralists needed to change the earlier images of Mexico. For instance, Herrán had feminized Indian bodies so they were no threat to European dominance (Debroise 1984: 19 f.). A stronger image was needed, as shown in Siqueiros' *Nuestro Imagen Actual* (1947). A muscular male thrusts his hands forward in an imploring gesture. His head is an uncarved stone. He seems to be pleading: "Carve me a face."

Despite all their differences, the muralists wanted to change the perceived face of Mexico. This would require a new art: "Each school of art may be summed up in a single aesthetic canon."[26] When I visited Rivera's Detroit murals in the 1950s, my father said, "You see, these things really work." A whole program of great murals could achieve something beyond an easel painting: it could give an image to a nation and the world. The muralists succeeded: "sometime throughout the years 1920–1925, an ideal Mexican type was evolved that has already become a classical art form…this brown man clad in white" (*AA* II: 10). The art historical significance of the movement is still being absorbed:

> La iconografía nacionalista rebasó fronteras como lo quería el Secretario, fue americanista y en consecuencia universal, como lo deseaban los mismos pintores, ya que como Carlos Mérida anotó: "Para que el arte sea universal, debe ser antes local." (Guadarrama Peña 2010: 43)

> 'The nationalist iconography crossed frontiers as the Secretary [Vasconcelos] wanted, was Americanist and in consequence universal, as the painters themselves desired, and as Carlos Mérida already notes: "For an art to be universal, it must first be local."'

4.3. INTENTIONS AND CONDITIONS

The Mexican artists accorded priority to style as the element by which an artwork was judged or even considered a work of art. Style can also be recognized as chronologically prior to subject in their careers. Because they all reached the early 1920s with part of their working lives behind them, they were in fact artists before they were Mexican artists. That is, they had all created artworks before they accepted the task proposed to them by Vasconcelos. Moreover, the modern art world they knew was more international than national. Both the above factors—style and subject, international and national—would be crucial for the artists as they consciously initiated a Mexican movement.

An important characteristic of Vasconcelos' whole movement was its high estimation of the population's capacity to respond to culture. Torres Bodet published the Classics—Plato, Plotinus, and so on, in cheap editions—so as to penetrate "en el más pobre y oscuro rincón de México" 'the poorest, most obscure corner of Mexico": "Nunca he creído que deba darse al pueblo una versión degradada y disminuida de la cultura" 'I never believed that a degraded and diminished version of culture should be given to the public.'[27] Just like the young painters, Torres Bodet was working with a feeling of exaltation:

> Y ésa, si no me engaño, era la actitud espiritual que correspondía a la época que vivíamos: época de fervor y de don total, sin discrepancias y sin reservas, en que el patriotismo—para muchos de nosotros—se llamó juventud tambien. (Torres Bodet 1961: 278)
>
> 'And if I am not mistaken, this was the spiritual attitude that corresponded to the epoch in which we were living: epoch of fervor and total dedication, without discrepancies and reservations, in which patriotism—for many of us—was called youth as well.'

As far as I know, the idea of talking down to the people was never broached among the artists. They respected their own artistic integrity and also the esthetic sensibilities of the Mexican people, many of whom the considered colleagues in art making. Folgarait is the only scholar, as far as I know, who has questioned this decision. Finding Charlot's *Massacre in the Main Temple* "a fairly difficult image to make out, either up close or from across the stairway" (1998: 47), he writes:

> These problems of formal legibility may block any clear access to the subject of the mural to a viewer not accustomed to the syntax of European modernism, therefore also obscuring the deduction of its message as either pro- or anti-Conquest: a curious risk for Charlot to indulge in given the inherently clear anti-Conquest content I propose. (1998: 48)

I myself have never met anyone who was confused about the bad guys in the *Massacre*. A characteristic of Charlot's whole output is a confidence in the in-born esthetic sensibilities of his audience, as seen clearly in his illustrations of children's books.

The muralists thought that the hostile portion of the audience was the bourgeoisie with its corrupt taste. Defending Rivera's *Creation*, Charlot identified bad taste in art as the cause:

> Enfin et surtout, elle fera bouillir d'indignation, parce qu'elle est une *création*, ceux qui sont incapables de créer pour la simple raison que les châtrés détestent la fécondité des puissants. (July 1924)
>
> 'Finally and above all, because it is a creation, [good painting] makes those people boil with indignation who are incapable of creating for the simple reason that the castrated detest the fecundity of the potent.'

> To be complete, a painting must be a channel for an idea, as language itself should be. But we know by past experience that whether it is hated by its public does not depend on the ideal expressed, but precisely on whether it is a good painting. (*AA* II: 194)

Despite the opposition of the bourgeoisie, the muralists seem to have felt comfortable with and supported by the people whom they regarded as their target and ultimate audience.

For centuries, artists have created great art for the people, confident that authentic style was a factor in effective communication. Charlot wrote of Posada:

> 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.[28]
>
> 'an artist whose intense interest in the human was never in conflict with an equally intense interest in the abstract and innumerable combinations which he knew how to combine knowledgeably on the illustrious theme of white and black.'
>
> To the Paris painter, still fresh from café talks of subject matter versus pure plasticity, this Sistine Chapel of the Americas [the Temple of the Tigers at Chich'en Itza] acted as an Indian reminder of the classical postulate that both ingredients may blend to perfection. (*MMR* 134)

An undeniable technical genius like Alfred Hitchcock can dismiss the idea that he chooses his subjects for their commercial rather than their storytelling attraction:

> No, no. The commercial attraction to me comes out of the fact that I'm a believer that film belongs to the masses….There's always that feeling that *commercial* or *box office* are dirty words, and it's nothing to do with it. It's to do with telling a story with the widest possible appeal but still applying all the artistic techniques and manner of storytelling without degrading yourself at all to what is vulgarly called the commercial. I think it's axiomatic that if you take into consideration the elements that interest wide audiences, then you can tell your story as imaginatively as you like, as long as you make it clear to them. (Hitchcock 1966)

Hitchcock uses great craft to create his effects, but the viewer is not distracted by the technique—is indeed oblivious of it. Rather the viewer is entirely absorbed in the power the craft produces. François Truffaut described watching Hitchcock's 1938 *The Lady Vanishes*:

> sometimes I see it twice in one week. Since I know it by heart, I tell myself each time that I'm going to ignore the plot, to examine the train and see if it's really moving, or to look at the transparencies, or to study the camera movements inside the compartments. But each time I become so absorbed by the characters and the story that I've yet to figure out the mechanics of that film. (Truffaut: 1983: 116, 118)

Similarly, in a 1922 interview, Rivera was asked about *Creation*:

> "Then you have not forgotten cubism?"
>
> "Of course not! But after it is finished nobody will believe that it is there." (*MMR* 139)

Charlot himself wrote: "As to artistic creeds I believe that they should be seen but not heard—that is, that a picture should carry its meaning to the layman directly through subject matter."[29] For Charlot, geometric composition satisfied the needs of abstractionism: indeed, Maya artists used "a more radically abstract language than any of those used by modern artists" (*AA* II: 44).

4.3.1. A NATIONAL ART

The young artists and muralists wanted to create genuine art, but they also wanted to make a Mexican art, a national art: "The group of pioneer Mexican muralists was set on creating an art language to fit the needs and moods of their shaken PATRIA."[30] Some contemporaries, like Goitia and folk artists, seemed to do so spontaneously. The muralists could also look back on millennia of models in Mexican art history. But they could find also many failed attempts and were acutely aware of the problems they faced.

A national art is connected to a national or ethnic consciousness. After the Porfiriato and the Mexican Revolution, questions of Mexican identity and image were pressing. From the outside, such concerns are easy to underestimate and even mock, but for the participants, they were emotionally important, arising from personal needs and involving their image and understanding of themselves. Often the efforts of the people involved can be criticized from an outside perspective. Ideas of the past can be demonstrated to be inaccurate. Charlot's uncle, Aristide Martel, was amused at the distance between *The Massacre in the Main Temple* and a more archeological approach. Nonetheless, such efforts need to be understood as part of the process of self-discovery in which mistakes can be meaningful. Similarly, the art historian can criticize the muralists' declarations of stylistic independence from Europe, pointing out the many similarities and parallels. This does not negate the fact that the artists themselves thought they were rejecting European dominance and breaking new paths. Their intention and self-understanding are historically important even when some later perspective can minimize their claims. Finally, because the artists were drawing from emotional and creative wells, their process was not always logical. Charlot perceived unseen currents at work—group dynamics—that, for instance, moved Orozco's art from Classical allegories to Mexican historical subjects, even against the professed intentions of the artist. In sum, the emotions of the moment cannot be ignored, and the history of the mural movement cannot be understood without an awareness of the constant, illogical promptings of the artists' inchoate needs and desires.

An example of an overly logical view of the 1920s movement is to see it as a simple reversal of the image of the Porfiriato. That period was culturally dependent on Europe; the artists would declare their independence. The Porfiriato honored progress and the middle class; the artists would focus on peasants and workers. The Porfiriato image covered only a small minority of society; the artists would

portray the majority that had been ignored. Yet none of the artists' express in their writings such a tit-for-tat procedure. Their decisions were more emotionally involved and complex.

A major consideration was the relation of local art to international art. The Mexican artists' were acutely aware of the School of Paris and its growing international dominance and felt the need to justify their own local focus, as discussed above. Besides his more polemical writings of the 1920s, Charlot discussed the problem in art historical perspective. I will present the problem in my own words, connecting points to Charlot's views. The terms of the discussion—and they are disputable—are the individual, the local culture, and world or "universal" culture, that which speaks to all human beings. The basis is the work of the individual human being, which can be accepted as valuable by an ever widening audience. The work of individuals can be grouped into schools that are received in the same way. The process of recognition is mysterious, but seems infallible in the passage of time to posterity.

Indisputable, however, is the weakness of certain international styles. Works that have been grouped under the rubric International Gothic are weaker than local Gothic. The results of the spread of Renaissance art to the Northern countries were weaker than the local arts they overlaid. Both those movements standardized and generalized representations, often petering out into vague allegories and symbolisms. For Charlot, Pieter Bruegel (ca. 1525–1569) was the prime example of an artist who remained great because true to his tradition and resistant to the international style that fills the museums in which his few masterpieces shine: he "needed to make the trip to Italy to know that his roots were north" (Writings Related to *MMR*; Appendix III). Bruegel is remembered because he did *not* become Italian: "his task was inverse. It was to remain true to race and to country. Breughel returned to his Northern *patria* more consciously Flemish than when he left it" (1966 Foreword: x).

Similarly, as seen above, French Renaissance art established itself only after it rejected the leading role of Italy embodied in the visiting genius Bernini. The paradox is that the local and particular was more "universal" than the international. The solution is, I argue, that "universality" should not be confused with extension or generality either of subject or style. The criterion of great art—and thus "universal" art—is intensity that communicates itself to the viewer. Although philosophy strives for generality, art emerges from particularity.

For the single artist, intensity emerges from his very individuality. He expresses primarily himself, not some general gender, citizenship, or period. As a subject, Hamlet is more, not less, intense because of his place and time and the extreme particularity of his situation. Similarly, a school or a national or ethnic tradition is "universal" because of its distinctiveness, its difference from others, its special expressions. Charlot believed that each school represented "a single aesthetic canon," as seen above, and each should be cherished. Charlot felt the development of a distinctive United States style had been cut short by the Armory Show of 1913. Attention turned to European artists and their American followers, and artists like John Sloan were neglected. Each school or tradition brings to light human capacities that would otherwise be unknown.

Each culture lives through its capacity to impress and express human beings. Each culture is an expression and continuing expansion of the infinite human capacity for living. Over generations, each

culture has developed means of expression—images, symbols, genres, and so on—that have proved their effectiveness. The particular arts gather and innovate their means of expression—and attendant power—from their base culture. Moreover, the individual artist is supported and inspired by the culture in which he has been reared and educated. He feels more intensely the culture that has been implanted and cultivated in him since infancy. Local images evoke long-felt emotions. His expressions arise from a greater depth than if he were drawing them from an outside source.

How then does this particular intensity communicate itself to a "universal" audience? Again, the artist is an individual human being, and cultures differ among themselves. An artist from a widely-known culture does enjoy the advantage of familiarity in a wider audience. But the ultimate commonality—the connection that makes communication possible—is basic human experience. On a stylistic level, the brain works in certain ways that can be recognized and understood across cultures: representation, geometric composition, and so on. Genuine art is based on that fundamental level of brain activity. On a subjective level, human beings share emotions and experiences, which vary across individuals and cultures without becoming unrecognizable. A mother may hold her child differently in one culture, but someone from another culture recognizes what she is doing and feels a similar emotion. Indeed, the very unfamiliarity of the gesture might draw attention more forcefully to the action. In no case are emotions identical or communication perfect. But this is true of individuals in the same culture as well. That is, the problem ultimately reduces itself to that of human interaction, with all its complexity and mystery. One of the roles of art is to make the viewer aware of that mystery, of the resonance of our experience. Charlot praises the paintings of Xavier Guerrero as "the essence of a nature more finely attuned than most to that which is of wide human worth in a given heritage and locale" (*AA* II: 346).

The Mexican artists were insistent that their national art was also "universal" art. This was true first and foremost because the art they were creating was authentic and thus *per se* "universal."[31] As with all subject matter, nationalism and ideology could not be used as criteria for artistic value (e.g., Mijangos 2000: 99). Even Tamayo, the most internationalist, stated: "la pintura es un lenguaje internacional con acento nacional" 'painting is an international language with a national accent.'[32] Siqueiros felt that nationalist characteristics would appear inevitably in their work:

> We must reject theories postulating the relativity of a "national art" and become universal! Racial and local traits will stamp our work none the less. (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

The point seems demonstrated by Orozco's movement from a vehement rejection of localism in favor of universalism to his great depictions of the Revolution (Orozco 1971: 137–140). Charlot saw himself as an affirmation of the universal character of the movement:

> 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. Cette hypothèse est justifiée par l'exemple de Jean Charlot, d'origine française et d'affinité mexicaine.

> "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 [*sic*] for all. This hypothesis is justified by the instance of Jean Charlot—French in origin and Mexican in affinity." (Brenner-Charlot 1928: 65)

On the other hand, the Mexican artists fiercely defended the particularity of their art: "This stubborn attitude in the face of outside pressures is what saves Mexican art as an entity, a self that takes many forms and yet always remains itself" (Charlot 1966: x). Mexican art was a challenge to the idea that modern art could be narrowed to the modernism of the School of Paris: "a cardinal sin in 1920 would indeed have been a didactic painting with historical subject matter."[33] Mexican art expanded our vision not only of art but of humanity:

> the best of Mexican painting remains impervious to the uniqueness of the sun-drenched locale. It is concerned rather with man alone, its somber hues keyed to the Indian skin. (*MMR* 318)

4.3.2. MEANING, MESSAGE, AND NARRATIVE

The Mexicans' attitude to articulating meaning in art—the communication of a message—has been the object of criticism since the second stage of the movement. At first, criticism was directed at the kind of subject matter treated. In Paris, the reaction to World War I had been to try and forget it. Cocteau described the Neoclassical movement as "the discovery of a middle-of-the-road solution attuned to the taste for luxury and pleasure," a Classical style emptied of its noble purpose and put to Rococo uses.[34] Luxury and pleasure required avoiding depictions of the war and its aftermath: "Romanticism seemed gross, with its accent on experiences shared by all men—passion and pain and death" (1966: x). These were the subjects that the German Expressionists and the Mexicans felt morally obliged to address.

Cocteau described accurately the Neoclassical product, which has engendered progeny for the super-rich beyond even his hopes. Later developments in art practice also ignored the role of art as the communicator of serious message. Subject matter was minimized—like Jasper Johns' *Flag* (1954–1955)—so as not to distract the viewer from admiring the painterly technique. Subject matter was eliminated in non-representational art and held up as a target to irony and scorn by such successes as Alex Katz. Marcel Duchamp complained in a 1962 interview:

> The entire art scene is on so low a level…is so commercialized—art or anything to do with it is the lowest form of activity in this period. This century is one of the lowest points in the history of art, even lower than the 18th Century, when there was no great art, just frivolity. Twentieth century art is a mere light pastime, as though we were living in a merry period, despite all the wars we've had as part of the decoration.[35]

As Charlot wrote: "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" (*AA* II: 23).

The depreciation of subject matter has reduced and even eliminated many functions of art. Avant-garde artists were baffled at the beginning of World War I: "Advanced modernist abstraction soon proved an inadequate starting-point for developing a viable approach to the conflict" (Cork 1994: 9). Non-representational artists found they could not use their work to protest the Vietnam war. The style of Keith Haring's *Crack Is Wack* series differs little if at all from his advertising work; that is, he cannot respond with his art to the subject and produces a celebrity endorsement with his unmodified signature style. Haring spares himself the anguish that inspired John Singer Sargent's singularity, *Gassed* of 19181919 (Cork 1994: 219222). Most important, the super famous New York City artists—Warhol, Basquiat, and so on—could not rise to the subject of the AIDS epidemic, which killed so many of their friends and colleagues. Although they felt the tragedy and spoke of it eloquently, they could not express their feelings within the chosen limits of their art.[36] Just as it had failed humanity after World War I, Cocteau's pleasure and luxury participated in the bread and circuses that provided an excuse for a denial that contributed to the disaster of World War II. Artists have become the interior decorators of the fiddling chambers above the burning world. The relevance of Mexican art for the United States of the 1930s is applicable today: "with the depression a blatantly novel ingredient added to American standards, the cruel unbalance of the Mexican episodes acquired meaning over the border" (*MMR* 315). Art organizer Nato Thompson stated: "There are artists who don't want to be the entertainment…During a crisis of vast inequity they don't want to be the side-show, off to the side juggling" (Kennedy 2013). As the German expressionists—and the Mexican muralists—realized, to ignore the terrible realities was to become complicit in them: "cloud-wandering tendencies of so-called sacred art, whose adherents mused on cubes and gothic while the generals painted in blood" (Hoobler and Hoobler 2009: 313).

The need for the social functions of art has never disappeared. Women, African-Americans, Chicanos, and others have continued to emphasize content against the fashions of their times. Such artists are impelled to communicate their message. Art is playing a role in dealing with the trauma of the Pinochet regime:

> "The dictatorship marked the low point of Chileans' coexistence. We were in the abyss," says Ricardo Brodsky, director of the Museum of Memory in Santiago. "There is an increasing will to know and discuss what happened and art provides a way of approaching it."
>
> ….
>
> Art helps to facilitate the process by "conceptualizing" traumatic experiences in a more useful way than direct debate, she said, adding that "art connects people."
>
> …. "We try to manage the emotions of visitors, especially kids, so that the experience is useful and not simply paralyzing," Brodsky said. "We have to serve as a bridge between feelings and a commitment to certain values like tolerance and respect for diversity."
>
> Said Nicholls: "A work of art should help you recognize what happened and ask why. It should make the past more intelligible so that those who experience art somehow

> emerge with a better defined sense of human rights and a determination not to let abuses happen again." (Kraul 2011)

Whether an artist assumes such a responsibility depends on how he views himself as an artist and a human being. In confronting this view, the Mexicans initiated "un nuevo cuestionamiento sobre las relaciones artista-universo, artista-sociedad, artista-público y artista-técnica" 'a new questioning about the relations artist-universe, artist-society, artist-public, and artist-technique' as well as past-future and tradition-avant garde (Fell 1989: 406). In his over-all plan, Vasconcelos was striving to close the distance between artists and popular viewers, the intelligentsia and the people. Despite differences of taste, the muralists were anxious to comply and worked towards that end (Fell 1989: 392, 431 f.). Charlot had been exploring these questions since he was a child and had concluded by assimilating the good artist to the good human being. He described the Ecuadorian artist Galo Galecio as "uno de los artistas más penetrados por la misión humanista del arte y por la responsabilidad inherente en su don estético" 'one of the artists most penetrated by the humanistic mission of art and by the inherent responsibility of his esthetic gift' (1946 Galo Galecio). Human compassion was a fundamental motive in the Mexican movement:

> The Mexican muralists, Orozco, Rivera, et al [*sic*], felt passion, emotions, inspiration, at the sight of the plight of the proletariat. They felt horror at the hellish hedonism of the capitalist. Sincerity was their salvation as artists. (August 3, 1966)

The artists' feeling for the community elevated their themes, which added strength and esthetic character to their work.

As the rich get richer and the poor poorer, which side does an artist choose? Such choices influence style. Whatever the message, style must be genuinely artistic:

> el buen artista tampoco se olvida de que las palabrerías del orador son enemigas de la meditación, sin la cual las líneas y los colores no pasan de ser más que líneas y colores.[37]
> 'nor does the good artist forget that the orator's wordinesses are the enemies of meditation, without which the lines and colors do not succeed in being more than lines and colors.'
>
> technical excellence and human values are interdependent. (*AA* II: 155)

But the artist as human being must be able to feel his situation:

> It marks one of these rare moments in the life of an artist when problems of style, of composition, of fashion, are all thrown to the winds because of an inexorable inner pressure to state what one has seen, what one has felt and sorrowed about. (April 13, 1966)

In such a situation, the message assumes an importance that demands the proper means—a style that is right as well as good:

> An artist aiming at a clear and forceful expression should be humble enough to renounce the more esoteric nuances of *l'art pour l'art*, a lesson that was not lost on us. (*AA* II: 3 f.).

This sensitivity to the needed message was essential to the Mexican artists, who strove for the best means to communicate the best message:

> Leur grandeur, comme artistes, c'est d'avoir remis à leur place accessoire, utilisées ou méprisées suivant l'œuvre à faire, les théories touchant le dessin, la couleur, la composition, pour exalter la qualité humaine, épique, historique, l'Idée si vous voulez. "L'art pour l'art," dit Rivera, "est une bourde esthétique; l'art pour le peuple un postulat d'un sentimentalisme inconsistant. L'art appartient au peuple. II n'est ni une conception abstraite ni un véhicule intellectuel de propagande."
>
> "The greatness of these men as artists lies in that they have relegated to an accessory place, used or despised as the case may dictate, all theories as to drawing, colour and composition—in order to exalt the quality which is human, epic and historic : the Idea, if you like. 'Art for art's sake,' says Rivera, 'is an aesthetic sham ; art for the people is merely the postulate of inconsistent sentimentality. For art belongs to the people. It is neither an abstract conception nor an intellectual vehicle for propaganda'."[38]

As the Germans occupied France in World War II, artists drew closer together to face the moment, and their work moved in unwonted directions, as Jean Arp wrote: "The tragic hours during which these lithographs were conceived compelled modesty, the sacrifice of all vanity, the effacement of any overtly individual expression."[39] Stylistic ostentation, emphatic originality, can distract from the needed message. Boris Pasternak huffed: "Great poets have no time to be original." Michael Files wrote from the viewer's standpoint: "[Art] is meant to inspire, not make you feel dumb" (Sherreit 2007: 8).

The Mexican movement arose at an abnormal moment in art history. Art had traditionally been used to convey a meaning and a message, and only recently had that purpose been considered to compromise its authenticity: "sometimes in the history of art, we speak too much of style and we forget that problem of communication."[40] Charlot described Galo Galecio as an artist who struggled with the relation of style to message: "Ser artista en nuestra época es experimentar dos tendencias antitéticas" 'To be an artist in our time is to experience two antithetical tendencies'; "esta lucha entre forma y contenido, sin la cual su obra perdería su auténtico sello vital" 'this struggle between form and content, without which his work would lose its authentic vital stamp'; "éxito significa un ascenso vertical con la acompañante negación de tanto que tantos confunden con el éxito" 'success means the vertical ascension [of content] with the accompanying negation of so much than so many confuse with success' (1946 "Galo Galecio"). Galecio's art is authentic in that it provides "esta delectación íntima, la cual siempre coexiste con el verdadero arte" 'this intimate delectation, which always coexists with true art.' Charlot recalls here his use of Poussin's use of *delectation* as the special quality of art (Volume 1, Chapter 8, Section 1).

The Mexicans assumed that struggle because of their emotional commitment to the causes they embraced. Haya de la Torre stated:

> Rivera, como esos pintores del Renacimiento, pintó grandes carteles de propaganda. En el Renacimiento no había revistas, ni cinema. Para ayudar a la imaginación el Veronés y Rubens pintaron aquellos cuadros inmensos. Rivera se propuso un muralismo así.[41]
>
> 'Rivera, like those painters of the [Italian] Renaissance, painted large propaganda posters. In the Renaissance, there were to magazines or movies. To help the imagination, Veronese and Rubens painted those immense pictures. That is how Rivera intended muralism.'

Charlot saw the same motivation the early works of Van Gogh, when he was striving to make people realize the desperate situation of the impoverished Walloons:

> So he decided, and he wrote to his brother, that he was going to preach in paint. If you can think of anything less artistic for the art lover than that formula, I don't know of any. He was going to preach in paint. (June 9, 1965)

Similarly, disturbed by the increasing and unaddressed social problems of his time, Manet painted *The Execution of Emperor Maximilian* (1867):

> a picture that should be understood for what it is. It is a manifesto. It is a communication to the people. And Manet is not simply an artful art fellow. He had things to say, and things to say to the non-artists. (June 9, 1965)

Art in Mexico could be useful:

> Dans un pays où les 80% ne savent pas lire, la peinture conserve en effet l'utilité de *propageuse d'idées* qui la fit naître et durer au long des siècles. Il retrouva ainsi, chose que tous avaient oubliée, *l'utilité et finalité* de l'art, comprit qu'*une peinture, comme une phrase, était bonne si elle exprimait, concise et claire, une idée*. Parce qu'il avait des idées à exprimer, il se remit à peindre, sans aucune préoccupation accessoire.[42]
>
> 'In a land where 80% of the people do not know how to read, painting keeps in effect the utility of being a *propagator of ideas* that gave birth to it and lasted through the centuries. It rediscovers thus, something all had forgotten, the *utility and finality* of art, understood that *a painting, like a phrase, was good if it explained, concise and clear, an idea*. Because [Siqueiros] had ideas to express, he set himself again to painting, without any accessory preoccupation.'

Charlot regarded Siqueiros as a model: endowed with a superabundance of brilliance, he focused on his mission:

> Or, cette peinture-ci émotionne. Elle dit clairement ce qu'il faut dire. Ses exemples et ses conclusions sont nés de la race et pour la race. Elle est donc belle, belle d'humilité voulue et de simplicité sérieuse; elle est fruit de cette saine discipline que s'imposa le peintre d'être *homme* plutôt qu'être *homme célèbre* et de méditer avant de discourir. (February 1924)
>
> 'This painting does inspire emotion. It says clearly what it should say. His examples and his conclusions are born of the race and for the race. It is thus beautiful, beautiful with willed humility and serious simplicity. It is the fruit of this healthy discipline that the painter imposes on himself to be a *man* rather than a *famous man* and to meditate before discoursing.'

Besides arguing that the communication of emotion was an essential of art as such—as seen above—the muralists felt that that function was especially important in moving their viewers to action (Fell 1989: 419). Araujo writes: "si la finalidad de la obra es ideológica, psicológica o doctrinaria, el crítico debe indicar hasta qué grado el pintor ha llenado su objeto" 'if the finality of the work is ideological, psychological, or doctrinaire, the critic should indicate to what degree the painter has reached his objective' (July 11, 1923). Charlot had established his own views in France as a liturgical artist. Alma Reed reported Charlot describing his own aims: "deriving, he explains, his 'artistic motivation from a concern with religion as a force, and art'—which he considers as one of the few essentials of human nature—'as a means.'"

> Given this commitment to communication, the chosen style had to be right for the task:
>
> …eager to rehabilitate didactic painting. They considered that public walls should receive themes of public import, clearly expressed, and their inspiration was willingly groomed to toe the mark of a party line. (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

The point was made in the first draft of constitution of the artists' syndicate:

> 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.[43]

Again, I emphasize that according importance to subject was never used as an excuse for bad art. Although the muralists were rejecting the School of Paris, they could build on Old Masters like Giotto and David, who were equally committed to substantial subject matter.[44] The artists could criticize each other if they felt someone lapsed into bad art, as Leal criticized Rivera (Leal 1990: 208).

Nor should the Mexican artists' position be oversimplified. For instance, they accepted as one of their own an artist superficially as different as Edward Weston. Charlot was amazed that people did not understand that Weston's work was as relevant socially as that of the muralists. For Charlot, Weston was working at the basis of perception, of seeing, and nothing could be more revolutionary. Indeed, although

Weston rejected simplistic socialist attempts to make art useful, he could understand why he was being grouped with his Mexican associates:

> And now I have been adopted by the left wing!—though my work has no trace of political propaganda. But it is none the less radical,—it predicates a changing order: and that is why it is so disturbing to the bourgeoisie—I have watched them—who fear change. (Weston 1966: 211; also 210, 243)

The Mexicans could even praise artists like Mérida who refrained from social messages:

> Si ce fait que la révolution mexicaine n'est pas essentiellement politique nécessitait encore une preuve, nous la trouvons dans l'œuvre de Carlos Merida**.**
>
> "If yet another example were required to prove that the Mexican Revolution is not essentially political in character, such proof might be cited in the work of Carlos Merida" (Brenner-Charlot 1928: 64 f.).

The Mexicans compounded their scandal by choosing to paint historical or narrative subjects. This type of art had also been practiced since the cave murals and was a major genre in Mexico since the Precolumbian period. Charlot described in detail how a geometric style—"a masterly game of geometry"—was used to tell a story in a twelfth-century Maya mural (*AA* II: 47–57). Yet brilliant as the composition was, "all calculations efface themselves to let us enjoy the vivaciousness of the story-telling" (*AA* II: 53 f.). Posada's style resembled Giotto's: "at the same time so monumental and so story-telling" (June 9, 1965). Even Picasso, in a moment of almost Mexican emotion, had painted the narrative *Guernica*: "American and European art lovers, who knew that Picasso could do no wrong, were led to reassess the esthetic potential of historical painting."[45] Such painting was, however, against the current. Pierre Matisse told Anita Brenner in 1928:

> that Mexican art illustrates history and he doubts whether they can get away from that…Question: where (if any) has the idea of art independent from social or religious factors been developed? Is this a thing of our time… (Glusker 2010: 568)

For Charlot and most of his colleagues, telling their story was a duty that inspired their art as art:

> On the other hand, those young people, of course, consider me like, what I am, a much older man. But they also consider that my insistence on story telling in art is a certain sort of disaffection from purely subjective approach to art, is old fashioned. Of course, they prefer people who in their opinion are more progressive than myself. I speak purely from their point of view. I don't consider myself as an old fogey in the least, and I believe that story telling in art is nearly an obligation of great art. I think that anybody who has visited the museum realized that, anyhow, story telling is nothing against art. In my opinion they go together. (August 18, 1961)

By persevering in painting with meaning and message—by insisting on telling their story—the Mexicans revived and kept alive ancient and major functions of art that were being actively suppressed elsewhere

although they were much needed: “The uniqueness of Mexican art comes from its refusal to merge unquestioningly in the international picture of the moment, of any moment” (1966 Foreword: x). An important part of the muralists’ mission to world art was to fight against art’s diminution in scope and purpose.

4.3.3. THE RULES OF ART

The muralists had received an academic art training and were imbued with intellectual traditions of art according to which certain laws of practice could be articulated. In this Classical tradition, art making was both “an art and a science,” as Johann Sebastian Bach stated for music. Art should engage the whole human being, including the rational faculty, as discussed in Volume 1, Chapter 8, Section 1.2. For Charlot and others, this Classical tradition was not antiquated. Cubism was the most valuable achievement of modern art and also the prolongation of the great tradition of geometric composition.[46] Charlot admired especially Rivera’s extensive learning and magisterial intellectuality, as seen in his Cubist career.[47] Siqueiros and Charlot included this Classical view as part of their statement of principles in the Araujo article of July 26, 1923:

> época de olvido absoluto de los valores inmutables que rigieron las mejores manifestaciones de la Antigüedad; época en que se perdió hasta la finalidad misma del Arte, creyéndose que las Artes Plásticas eran asunto puramente de ÓPTICA, y así la estética CLÁSICA o ARQUITECTURAL fue substituida por la FOTOGRÁFICA o ACADÉMICA, en su primer tiempo, y, después, por el LIRISMO-ANÁRQUICO, ambos igualmente graves.
>
> La estética CLÁSICA o ARQUITECTURAL establece esencialmente: que la SUPERFICIE a pintar (cuadro o pared) tiene importancia matriz y que por lo mismo sus proporciones y formas geométricas determinadas deben ser inevitable y matemáticamente conocidas; condición sin la cual es imposible organizar un EQUILIBRIO PLÁSTICO, y que, estando regida en su parte material por leyes físicas inamovibles, hay que conocerlas y respetarlas si no se quiere correr el peligro de ver la obra destruida, como sucedería con una casa en la que el Arquitecto no se hubiera preocupado de la “resistencia de materiales”.
>
> [This is an] ‘epoch of absolute forgetfulness of the immutable values that rule the best manifestations of Antiquity; an epoch in which even the finality itself of Art is lost and it is believed that the Plastic Arts are a subject purely of OPTICS, and the CLASSICAL or ARCHITECTURAL esthetic has been replaced by the PHOTOGRAPHIC or ACADEMIC at first and since by the ANARCHIC-LYRICAL, both equally grave.’
>
> The CLASSICAL or ARCHITECTURAL esthetic establishes essentially that the SURFACE to be painted (easel or wall) has the importance of a matrix and that for the same reason its set proportions and geometric forms should be inevitable and

> known mathematically. Without this condition, it is impossible to organize a PLASTIC EQUILIBRIUM. Also, since the work is ruled in its material part by unmovable physical laws, one must know and respect them if one is not to run the risk of seeing the work destroyed, as would happen to a house in which the architect did not preoccupy himself with the "resistance of materials."'

Siqueiros could make the point more bluntly: "Either you conform to the dictates of the architecture or you rape it."[48]

Knowing the architectural rules of art was especially important for muralists, as Charlot detailed in his "Public Speaking in Paint" (*Charlot Murals in Georgia* 23–40; *AA* I: 105–123). Most recently, the muralists who had learned geometric composition from the Cubists now applied Cubism to the Mexican walls:

> …equipped to do mural work. Cubist geometry dovetailed easily with architecture. The horizontals, diagonals and verticals that scaffold cubist easel pictures seemed more proper even than on canvas once enlarged on the walls of colonial buildings, where they echoed floor levels, staircase slants and the upward thrust of columns. To adapt the cubist grammar to Mexican patios and arcades meant to work on another scale, but did not require an essential change of orientation.[49]

Even the work environment helped: the scaffold in front of the wall provided a convenient visual grid.[50] As seen in Volume 1, Charlot thought that the Mexicans had fulfilled the mural promise of Cubism. Indeed, Rivera changed his scale and adapted to the complex wall shapes of Colonial architecture, but "the geometric principle remained the norm."[51] Lacking a first-hand knowledge of Cubism, Orozco responded to his colleagues' work with his characteristic mixture of disparagement and defensiveness, falling back himself on older models and unmural cartooning.

Charlot used the word *legibility* for the goal of using and inventing devices to communicate the image clearly to the viewer: "those are some of the problems that we use in mural painting, and the interesting thing is that even though the solutions are very complex and rather esoteric, the desire of the painter is to make things easy to the onlooker."[52] The good artist fused the technical and the expressive, which Charlot considered a specialty of French art:

> Tal tradición es la de la vía media. El francés agarra la vida por ambos cuernos, emoción y racionalidad, y no la suelta. Su emoción nunca llega al desorden selvático del "gefuhl" [*sic*: *Gefühl*]; su racionalidad no alcanza al perfecto racionalismo, tan perfecto que de ponerlo en práctica se acabaría el mundo. (August 1945)
>
> 'Such a tradition is that of a *via media*. The Frenchman grasps life by both horns, emotion and rationality, and does not let it go. His emotion never goes as far as the jungle disorder of *Gefühl*. His reasonableness does not attain perfect rationalism, so perfect that to put it in practice would bring an end to the world.'

Charlot found the same tendencies and laws of composition in earlier Mexican art, like a twelfth-century Maya mural: the artist emphasized "the architectural quality of the houses," "a proof that the artist made his story-telling subservient to its architectural surroundings" (*AA* II: 52). This chaos of battle has been organized into "this ideal pyramid which is the hidden goal of the artist":

> All those diagonals surging upwards from the outside towards the center bring a compositional order the more admirable for using as its means the very excess of action depicted.

Charlot does not draw the parallel to his own *Massacre in the Main Temple*. The Maya artist's use of Golden Sections is "a unique proof of the universal aesthetic appeal of this venerable proportion" (52 f.).

Charlot and the muralists never reduced their art to a formula, geometric or other. They felt emotion and inspiration as they worked and could be surprised by their products and directions:

> Through the last lectures, I have tried to present painting in logical form, which sounds rather like mathematics and is in fact mainly geometry. Those who have never painted, who don't know what the problems of painting are to the painter, might be tempted to think that painting is a science and that, when you know its rudiments, you are a good painter. That would be, of course, very false. *Painting* is not all geometry, nor can all problems of painting be stated or solved by logic.
> There is an element, a percentage, of mystery. Today, I would like to correct the impression that I made the subject all too clear -- at least I hope I have been too clear -- by being a little more obscure, by treating of things that muss up that really beautiful picture of painting as a logical science.[53]

In the 1920s, the intellectual character of art was accepted by most and used as a challenge by those who wanted to emphasize art's non-intellectual dimension. Since then, the intellectual and technical sides of art have been increasingly depreciated and even ignored. Thought and training have often been considered damaging for art, the artist acting as a pure conduit from his inner inspiration to his outer production. The ideal is to dash something off.[54] Thus Allen Ginsberg can think that jazz is just playing what you want. Milos Forman's 1984 *Amadeus* depicts one of the greatest intellectuals of all time as an idiot savant. Fortunately, boxing remains a sweet science, and architects have to pass tests. This new view of art hinders the appreciation of the muralists, whose works are comparable to symphonies and operas rather than impromptus and require equivalent study.

4.3.4. CRAFT, MEDIA, AND WALLS

Mural painting is a different genre from easel:

> A mural painting is far from being an enlarged easel painting. Critics agree that there is a mural style, that it involves a composition, a drawing, a modeling and a color that may be called specifically mural. (*AA* I: 103)

As a result, painting a mural is a different experience from painting a canvas: "The actual scale is the one that the painter experiences in the course of painting, and its size reacts on the mural style" (*AA* II: 117). Anyone who has faced a wall–-as I have assisting my father—is struck by its sheer bigness, which imposes an emotional and mental state: "these noble seasoned buildings dictated a task vaster than a display of personality" (*AA* I: 9). Siqueiros wrote that "fueron los muros, que fueron las paredes las que nos inspiraron" 'they were the walls, that they were the wall surfaces that inspired us' (1996: 441). Vasconcelos felt strongly the difference from easel painting, desiring to "liquidar el arte de salón para restablecer la pintura mural y el lienzo en grande" 'liquidate salon art to reestablish mural painting and painting surface in large scale.'[55] Charlot makes the point, describing Juan Cordero:

> Cosa curiosa, Cordero tiene dos personalidades, la de caballete, que dicen es muy relamida, y la de pintor muralista, que es de una personalidad grande, en fin, algo heroica. Mirando la fotografía de *Jesús entre los doctores,* no se puede apreciar el enorme tamaño, tan grande como cualquier mural pintado en nuestro tiempo.[56]
>
> 'Curiously, Cordero has two personalities, that of the easel, which they say is very polished, and that of the mural painter, which is that of a big personality, in the end, something heroic. Looking at the photograph of *Jesus among the Doctors*, the huge size—as big as any mural painted in our time—cannot be appreciated.'

The mural mentality is so powerful that it can form styles in other genres. While they were painting murals, Siqueiros and Guerrero also made prints: "As a result, there is a bigness in them that no later work by these same men could quite recapture" (*AA* II: 153; also 154). Later Mexican artists would find their stylistic identity by reacting negatively to the size of murals: "The young artists took refuge from the very big in the very small" (*AA* II: 154).

> The wall imposes itself on the artist's consciousness and thus on every aspect of the task:
>
> The basic composition is dictated by the architecture…more varied and complex than the rectangular flat surface of an easel picture. (Charlot 1967 Fresco: 194).
>
> the solution of these physical problems impinges upon esthetics: architectural habitat and multiple points of view call upon the painter to geometrize, impose on his work a style. (*AA* II: 117)
>
> The trade of the muralist makes him cater, by reason of location, to a less exquisite public than that of the easel painter. The responsibility of covering public walls impels the artist to great subjects, meant to spur the onlooker on to an appreciation of heroic feats and moral fortitude. (Writings Related to *MMR*; Appendix III)

The wall as an esthetic and technical challenge participates in the necessary creativity of the artist: [the young painters moved from] "easel-painting Mexicanism like that of Herrán to a publicly projected and monumentalized nativism that was to be converted into a Revolutionary form of expression."[57] A wall is big and requires monumental art:

> In spite of the complex subject matter the muralist must preserve in this total view a certain simplicity, for complexity can be absorbed by the human eye to saturation, but past that point becomes confusion. Simplicity is somewhat automatically preserved by the fact that the smaller elements become invisible at the distance from which the wall may be comprehended as a unit. The handling of the brush that plays a vital role in easel painting lacks carrying range in murals. (*AA* II: 118)

Bigness does not entail a neglect of detail:

> A little corner of the carpentry shop, which shows the mallet and some tools. I represent a carpentry shop usually in pictures of St. Joseph, but here it is the building of the first Benedictine abbey in Kansas. I like to show you because it's a still life, and it shows you that you have to be careful even of small details in such a large work as that. (March 8, 1972)

A wall in a public building is part of the ordinary world, and a painting on that wall is seen by the public. The mural has inevitably a social function. Moreover, the walls of the early murals were in Colonial buildings, so Araujo argued: "el pintor de muros deberá, por lo mismo, sujetarse a la gran tradición italiana, como lo hicieran sabiamente sus predecesores coloniales" 'the painter of walls should subject himself to the great Italian tradition as his colonial predecessors wisely did.'[58]

Finally, walls can be painted securely only with certain media. After much experimentation, the medium used by most of the muralists was fresco: "Aesthetic considerations blending with technical ones led to the rebirth on a large scale of true fresco."[59] Fresco is a medium with strict requirements; for instance, a palette restricted to earth colors works best (*AA* II: 119 f.). Fresco requires much craft, which became one of the emphases of the muralists:

> los que se encierran en el sentimentalismo individualista de "ARTISTAS" ajenos por completo a toda actividad social y que no saben que la pintura y la escultura son oficios técnicos que mucho tienen de la albañilería, de la orfebrería y bastante de la mecánica y de la arquitectura, requiriendo, por lo mismo, del conocimiento de las leyes claras y concisas establecidas por la experiencia de muchos PUEBLOS y de muchas EDADES.[60]
>
> 'those who close themselves into the individualistic sentimentalism of "ARTISTS" alienated completely from all social activity and who do not know that painting and sculpture are technical occupations that have much in common with bricklaying, goldsmithing, and enough with mechanics and architecture, requiring, for the same reason, knowledge of clear and concise laws established by the experience of many PEOPLES and many EPOCHS.'

By emphasizing craft, the muralists disconnected themselves from the current image of artists: "Unlike other procedures, fresco cannot be improvised in the heat of inspiration" (Charlot 1967 Fresco). They also connected themselves with the urban workers and village artisans whom they admired:

> The painter who dons overalls, climbs a ladder, sits on a plank and paints, elbowed by masons busy with hod and trowel, seems to acquire some of their common-sense manual approach to the craft. To compose, the muralist must read a spirit level, use a plumb line, swing a compass, string a ruled line, slacken a catenary line…By the time the drawing is transferred to the wall it has exchanged the qualities of spontaneity and impromptu for a dose of impersonal monumentality. (*AA* II: 119)

Even more important, they considered craft essential to the relation of the authentic artist to his materials:

> Loin de vouloir fausser la matière et lui faire rendre plus qu'elle ne peut, il s'y soumettra humblement, joyeusement, et de cette collaboration entre le vouloir humain et les lois de la matière naîtra l'authentique œuvre d'art. (Charlot 1924–1925)
>
> 'Far from wanting to falsify the material and make it give up more than it can, [the artist] submits himself to it humbly, joyously, and from this collaboration between the human will and the laws of the material will be born the authentic work of art.'
>
> It is necessary in any case to be a good craftsman first. (Charlot Lecture Notes)

Indeed, the muralists' experience with learning fresco convinced them that media had informed their style. Charlot wrote of Guerrero:

> He helped shape the medular marrow of its [the Mexican Mural Renaissance] works by evolving most of the unusual techniques that did as much towards defining national forms as the painters' personalities. (*AA* II: 336)

The muralists varied as to their craftsmanship. Rivera was very good, and Orozco very bad. But the ideal was, as Charlot described Guerrero, that "En él, el buen artesano y el buen artista se juntan en uno" 'In him, the good artisan and the good artist join themselves in one.'[61] The artist brought such qualities as emotion and spontaneity, which the artists were conscious of needing for their best work. Linda Downs told me that working on the Detroit frescoes, Rivera let the mortar dry almost completely before he started painting to force himself to work with impetus (personal communication). Orozco would make many preparatory drawings of the whole and details on paper, but would only mark areas on the wall with x's, so that he would be painting the image directly onto an almost blank wall (Clemente Orozco V., personal communication, April 5, 2006). Orozco would also set himself the task of painting unusually large surfaces to insure that he would work quickly. Charlot enjoyed immensely the direct painting on the wet mortar and used the detailed preparation on paper and the incised lines on the wall to free his mind from other preoccupations. Probably after some theoretical discussions with students and helpers, he painted the head of the potter in *Visual Arts, Drama, Music* (1942) with preparation on paper but not on the wall. He told me he was unhappy with the experience and the result.

Charlot was emotional about good craft and honored people who did their job thoroughly, whatever it was, even the less interesting parts. He was angry at a caterer who did not clean up the kitchen after cooking in it. Bad craft insulted the job and the people it was being done for. The bad

craftsman was not only sloppy but falsely proud; as my mother described them: “People who feel they are better than their jobs.”

Charlot felt a great deal for the wall, just as he did for the lithographic stone and the other media he used. Thus he disliked Rivera’s not painting on the real walls for some of his National Palace panels but having a false wall built that could be removed—“true fresco on false walls”—which gave him the impression of “a show of easel pictures.”[62] Later Mexican muralists would put murals on walls in visible frames like paintings or build more or less free-standing panels in front of walls. Charlot seemed to view buildings as stable, part of the continuity of history, with the painting participating in its solidity. But modern buildings are often considered vulnerable or even throw-aways, making removability desirable.[63] Siqueiros at first preferred painting directly on the wall but changed his mind in favor of transportable and reproducible works (1996: 66 f.). Charlot’s small 1953–1954 panels, *Four Still Lifes*, would have benefited from being painted on mortar in shallow metal troughs; they were reduced to fragments when removed during a redesign of the restaurant they were in.

Murals—just like the great *machines* of nineteenth-century European art—are capable of an effect unlike any other. As I wrote above, when I was looking for the first time at Rivera’s murals at the Detroit Institute of Arts, my father said to me, “You see, these things really work.”

4.3.4.1. GENDERED DESCRIPTIONS OF STYLE

The description of mural style—big, monumental, complex but geometrically organized to appear simple, subordinating details to the whole, and generating an intensity that communicates strong emotions and ideas—has been called virile or manly and applied to other genres as well. The feminine style has been described as its opposite: small, ornate with details, without a strong organizing composition, and creating a pleasant or gracious impression without an important message. To give just a few examples, Maurice Denis argued that there were two kinds of religious art, a sentimental, the feminine, and that based on number and mathematics, the masculine: “l’art classique était donc mâle et généreux !” ‘Classical art was thus male and generous!’ (Denis 1912: 32 f., 216). Meier-Graefe called Cézanne the “männlichste Künstler Frankreichs” ‘the manliest artist of France’ (1920: 8). The contemporary French muralist Isabelle Bonzom describes fresco as virile, for instance, “Il faut toujours penser à l’ensemble et évacuer l’anecdote” ‘One must always think of the whole and eject the anecdote’ (2010: 37, 108).

This discourse is based on gender stereotypes and is not necessarily related to actual gender. For instance, David’s portrait of Madame Récamier is considered virile whereas François Gérard’s is usually condemned as feminine. Nor is a feminine style necessarily connected to homosexuality. Michelangelo’s work is considered extremely virile, and Sergei Eisenstein’s was revered by muralists. Moreover, the work of a woman artist can be praised as virile (Torres Bodet: 1961: 275), and Frida Kahlo’s escapes the dichotomy. Mexican society was sexist (O’Malley 1986: 133 ff.), but women found in art and intellectual circles ample room for agency (e.g., Rashkin 2009: 146149). With his mother an painter, Charlot never had a problem with accepting a woman as a fellow artist.

In the early 1920s, the polemical use of gender stereotypes was primitive in Mexico altogether, including art and literary circles in Mexico City. The general machismo was an incentive for homosexuals to move to the capital, where they could find anonymity and more sympathizers. Nahui Olín stated, "Every other man in Mexico is homosexual" (Weston 1961: 30). Many homosexuals were prominent in art and intellectual circles, such as Salvador Novo, Montenegro, Xavier Villaurrutia, Rodríguez Lozano, and Rivas Mercado.[64] In some intellectual circles, an attempt was being made to rethink traditional, negative views of homosexuality (Irwin 2003: 116–186). But this new thinking did not influence the early muralists. Governmental discourse continued to identify hygiene and health with heterosexuality, with implications for the whole society.[65]

The situation was aggravated by the historical accident that the second group of muralists were heterosexual and sometimes aggressively macho while some earlier muralists they rejected—especially Montenegro—and prominent artists who opposed muralism were homosexual. The gender description of style could, therefore, be applied ad hominem.[66] Orozco's 1924 illustration for *El Machete* depicts his targets as flamboyant homosexuals.[67] Siqueiros refers to Salvador Novo as *varón*, a word that implies manliness.[68] In the memorial volume for Abraham Ángel, Rivera developed at length the image of the young artist's older mentor, the painter Rodríguez Lozano, planting the seed of artistry in him (Rivera 1924 Abraham Angel; 1979: 47 f.). Charlot told me he found the joke reprehensible.[69]

The same division and rhetoric were found among the poets. The Contemporáneos were reputedly homosexual while the Estridentistas were considered homophobic (Irwin 2003: 160–165). Just as the second group of muralists rejected the Beardsley style of their immediate predecessors, so the Estridentistas refused to think of themselves as *enfants terribles* or *poètes maudits*. They were not retiring from society but fighting to reform it. They thought of themselves as extensions of the Revolution with its violent machismo. List Arzubide wrote of "sus batallas con los fifíes de San Francisco" 'his battles with the *fifis* of San Francisco.'[70] List Arzubide praised my father to me by saying he was "*muy sano*" 'very healthy.'

Curiously but characteristically, despite their polemics, most of the artists and intellectuals maintained friendly personal relations. A broad spectrum attended the unveiling of Charlot's first fresco. Rivera used Novo as his mouthpiece. Everyone liked Ángel. Charlot disliked the baiting and teasing of homosexuals and did not write about the sexuality of the opponents of the muralists. Charlot had the view of a Roman Catholic of his time that homosexuality was a moral disorder and its practice sinful. On the other hand, he felt homosexuality could not be "cured" and cited the example of Nijinsky going mad when his wife tried to do so. I had the feeling that my father thought it would have been better to leave Nijinsky as he was. My father's impression of the homosexuals he knew was that they lived a sad life, which may have been true in their historical situation. But he did not think that homosexuality had a positive or negative influence on their art and did not connect homosexuality with a feminine style.

In the 1920s, Charlot did use another sexual expression in his writings on art: *châtré* 'castrated.' The use can be found in Classical criticism: *effractus* means effeminate, emasculated, and is used for a style that is trivial and over-decorative. The word is conventional in French art discourse, such as

Cézanne's "Je n'admets pas la peinture de châtré !" 'I won't accept castrated painting!'[71] The contrast is not with feminine; a castrated male is not a woman. The contrast is between complete and incomplete: the castrated artist is missing something. In Charlot's writings, he is missing productivity: "les châtrés détestent la fécondité des puissants" 'the castrated detest the fecundity of the potent.'[72] Charlot also shades the image towards artists incapable of creating good art:

> ces MESSIEURS du Conseil fédéral voudraient nous empêcher de peindre. Il y a parmi eux des peintres. Qu'ils MONTRENT ce qu'ils ont fait. S'ils n'ont rien fait, qu'ils se TAISENT ! MORT aux EUNUQUES ! (1922–1923 Notes)
>
> 'these GENTLEMEN of the Federal Council would like to stop us from painting. There are some painters among them. Let them SHOW what they have done. If they have done nothing, let them BE SILENT. DEATH to EUNUCHS!'

Charlot's use of such a term reveals the emotionalism of the polemics of the time.

4.4. SUBJECTS

Mexico has always provided a rich selection of subjects, most of which had long been used by artists, sculptors, and photographers. Besides most of the text, Charlot provided the illustrations for Claude Blanchard's September 16, 1922 article "La Jeune Peinture Mexicaine," listed below in order and as published:

> Best Maugard : Tehuana (Femme de Tehuantepec)
> Cano : Promenade
> F. Leal : Halte dans la Montagne [*Campamiento Zapatista*]
> Bolagnos : L'India Rouge
> Jean Charlot Portrait [CL 4 *Indian Woman with Orange*]
> Revueltas : La Maison de mon Oncle
> Les Glaciers de l'Ixtazti-hualt [*sic*], par Atl
> Diaz de Léon : Le Popocatepelt [*sic*] vu d'Ozumba
> Dessin de Ribéra [soldiers during Revolution]

These items include Best Maugard's *costumbres* subject in Nacionalista style; Bolagnos' and Charlot's portraits, possibly *costumbrista* but in a new style; Cano's popular image based on folk painting; Leal's pioneering *costumbrista* image turned into a historical painting; Rivera's drawing of a historical subject; and three landscapes. These were examples of the most important options of the movement at this early stage.

In view of this common store of available subjects, they cannot be used by themselves to define an artist's historical place. Nineteenth-century artists produced much *costumbrista* painting, which used many of the same rural and village subjects adopted by the 1920s artists, but the young artists disdained those earlier, picturesque works to such an extent that *costumbrista* became a dirty word. Saturnino Herrán painted some workers, but the muralists did not consider him a precursor, much less one of their

own. The distinguishing factor for the muralists was style. They were free to adopt any subject as long as they treated it according to the artistic principles described above. Similarly, one cannot criticize the general use and repetition of the same image. The quality, not the quantity, of Renaissance Madonnas is important.

The artists' adoption of some subjects and rejection of others must be understood against this background. For instance, the figure of a woman of mixed racial background, a *mestiza*, had been used to represent national unity in a multi-ethnic nation.[73] This image was prized by Vasconcelos and used by Rivera and Siqueiros, and Charlot recognized that Julio de Diego devised a *mestizo* esthetic.[74] But he himself did not use the image probably because of his appreciation of distinct Indian cultures and preference for cultural multiplicity.

The artists' found many older subjects that they accepted and developed. One of Charlot's preferred themes became the woman grinding corn for tortillas, the *molendera* or *tortillera*, which is found in numerous Precolumbian statuettes (e.g., Glusker 2010: 239). Similarities can be found between earlier treatments of subjects and those of the 1920s. For instance, a number of Charlot's seated *cargadores* 'burden bearers' resemble *The Walker* of 1910 by Francisco de la Torre, as his sitting Indians resemble Alberto Garduño's *El Sarape Rojo*.[75] If Charlot knew those works—his sketchbooks reveal that these were sights he drew in the streets—he strengthened their composition with a clearer geometry. He did this also with the picturesque nineteenth-century *tortilleras* he knew from France. That is, Charlot and others were anxious to revalorize images that had been debased into touristic sights, turning them from commercial art into fine. Charlot continued to do this throughout his life. In his 1942 mural *Visual Arts, Drama, Music*, a rustic figure is based on a Disney dwarf from *Snow White*. In his 1953 *Commencement*, he solidifies the tourist image of a Hawaiian lei-seller. Charlot would also try to revalorize words, like *humilde* in Spanish and *chromolithograph* in English.

The artists also developed new subjects. Charlot produced the first nude studies of the Aztec female body and made the *malinche* dancer a major subject. Siqueiros pioneered more industrial subjects. With such new subjects, the artist was not bound by a tradition.

Rural, peasant subjects dominate the common view of the 1920s movement and even later Mexican art. However, as seen in several of their manifestoes, artists and writers shared in the modernist fascination with machinery and were impressed by the considerable industrial progress of the period (e.g., Gallo 2005: 4–7). Following Futurism, Siqueiros called for the depiction of the new age.[76] Maples Arce and the other Estridentistas were focusing on this kind of subject and esthetic.[77] Charlot created his most recognizably modernist woodblocks for Maples Arce's *Urbe* (M57–63).

In fact, the artists addressed a large number of urban subjects. Charlot himself depicted street-vendors and newsboys. His *cargadores* seem more urban than rural. Indeed, most of his subjects were first observed and sketched in the streets of Mexico City, in which city-dwellers jostled the villagers flowing in from the countryside.[78] Such sights had not changed much since Posada's prints and earlier newspaper and magazine illustrations and can be seen today. Mexican artists were always intrigued by the incongruities of their changing society. Most general judgments of the 1920s movement are based on

a small selection of artworks, and a more comprehensive view—including, for instance, Charlot's urban subjects—will qualify them.

> The muralists were turning their attention to industrial subjects as well as rural ones:
>
> 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. Rivera started to decorate the Ministry with the handicrafts of Tehuántepec 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. Siqueiros in his 1921 Manifesto praises what is a United States cityscape rather than a Mexican one. (Writings Related to *MMR*; Appendix III)

Rivera, Siqueiros, and others would later do murals with most modern, urban, industrial subjects. In a takeoff of Vasconcelos "raza cósmica" 'cosmic race,' Rivera would even urge that "the two races [Mexico and the United States] mingle to produce a greater race" (Weston 1961: 147).

Even with machine-age subjects, choosing subject matter did not determine style: "But because we deal with art, the skyscraper, the furnace, the airplane could only suggest a subject matter, while Mexican plastic form could be fructified only by an esthetic" (Writings Related to *MMR*; Appendix III). Charlot reported that Edward Weston helped the artists with their stylistic assimilation of industrial subject matter and that he in turn could profit by working in Mexico:

> Professionally I think you can do better work here than in the States. Many tried to get by photograph the spirit of mecanic modern life, but you would be the first to try the spirit of simpleness and primitiveness by this medium. You last things (birds, horse) were full of promise. Think of that twenty minutes and see that I am right. (Charlot to Weston March 27, 1925; Andrews 2011: 22)

Indeed, although the literary intellectuals of the late Porfiriato disdained modern developments, the artists of the same time made a more urban and industrial choice of subject matter than the 1920s artists: machines, factories, and so on.[79] The Porfiriato was proud of its progress, and such art expressed that sense of achievement without neglecting to refer to some of its dangers. Stylistically, these works derived from French Realism, which had many of the same social views and sympathies. Compared to these works, the subjects of the muralists could seem *retardataire*.

This progressive image of Mexico continued through the 1920s in newspapers and journals, both in stories and advertisements (Ortiz Gaitán 2003). This image was predominantly urban, up-to-date, and affluent: openings of stores, industrial fairs, shopping streets, cinemas, and so on. Progress was praised and conspicuous consumption encouraged. Some aspects of this advertising art influenced the

Estridentistas in designing their publications (Rashkin 2009: 55). The popular press in Mexico conformed to the still-existing gap between urban and rural, rich and poor. The rural poor might have been living in a different country, and the urban poor seemed to disappear into the shadows of the *barrios*. Gallo states that modernity did not replace an earlier lifestyle, "it merely coexisted with it" (2005: 232).

The muralists were producing, not the dominant image of Mexico, but an alternative, even oppositional one, a counter image: rural, traditional, and poor (e.g., Fell 1989: 424 f.). This was a triumph of art over commercial art. This image was unfamiliar especially to urban elites whose rural experience consisted of vacations at the *hacienda*. Any contact with the rural or urban poor merely reinforced their prejudices. A positive portrayal of *los de abajo* 'those below' was truly revolutionary. But these were people who had fought for the Revolution and were the target of its reform programs. Would they be forgotten now? Would they be left out of the economic recovery of the nation? Today the same problems confront once third-world countries like China as they move successfully into the world economy, and Chinese filmmakers focus on those who are being left behind. The choice of subject matter can itself be the message. That the muralists' image now dominates is a triumph of art over commercial art.

The problem is always forgetting the poor, whether in the villages of Mexico or inland China. That the muralists refused to do so reveals, not that they were antiquarian or romantic, but that they were observant of the problems of the post-Revolution, Reconstruction period. For instance, the rural migration to Mexico City was causing enormous problems, including a growing population of homeless and street people. Charlot called attention to them in his drawings and prints. His modernist woodblocks for *URBE* depicted an urban landscape of outsized skyscrapers and overpowering machines, different from the human scale he was depicting in his village-scapes. Charlot described Zalce's print *Mexico Is Becoming a Large City*:

> it is a plea for the people not to think just in terms of cement, of concrete, of skyscrapers, but to make Mexico a bigger city in terms of catering to the humans. After all, a city is made for human beings. (June 9, 1965)

Charlot's admiration for the traditional ways of village life inspired him to depict them as models contemporaries could learn from.

The Mexican population was seventy per cent rural and "90 per cent if one includes the lower classes of the provincial towns" (Meyer 1976: 193). An art focused on the modern age "se separa de la realidad, aún esencialmente rural, de México" 'separates itself from the reality, still essentially rural, of Mexico' (Debroise 1984: 90). Most of the fighters in the Revolution had been from rural areas. As the muralists began to create an image of the Revolution, they made *campesinos* and *obreros* their dominant figures rather than the generals and politicos, the conventional choices in the history of art. Rural problems were the oldest in Mexico and the most urgent. Murals of land distribution, rural education, and so on, made people aware of the efforts to solve them. Such themes have not lost their actuality. Finally, the Indios of the rural areas were still at the bottom of the socio-economic scale and the objects of much negative stereotyping and prejudice. For many of the urban elite, they were the shame of the nation, one

cause of the national inferiority complex. Creating a positive image for them was pulling the national image up by its bootstraps.

That the second-stage muralists and some of their colleagues chose to devote themselves to the most needy was neither necessary nor inevitable. The first-stage muralists had chosen exotic subjects they could treat luxuriously. Guillermo Bonfil states much too optimistically: "El México profundo mostró por un momento su presencia real y no fue posible cerrar los ojos ante él" 'Deep Mexico showed for a moment its real present and it was not possible to close ones eyes before it' (Eder 1991: 69). Most viewers and even important artists did close their eyes. Choosing the poor as the subject of fine art has always been a minority position. The poor as subjects of monumental art are almost non-existent. For the artists concerned, their choice distanced them from the modernism, Futurism, they had practiced and launched them in a new direction where they would find little guidance and support.

The main reason the artists made that choice was their fellow feeling for those in need. Serving in the Revolution, the mostly bourgeois artists had been impressed by rural peoples and places, just as Charlot had been in World War I. Professedly, they were fighting to provide justice for the weak and powerless. The artists did not betray their experiences with the coming of peace, but were determined to plead the people's case. The Revolution had been fought against Díaz and the *científicos*, who were imposing a multi-national modernity that benefited the rich at the expense of the poor. The machines and factories of the Porfiriato had been oppressive and could not be simply celebrated. The problem for the government—and for governments today—was to devise fair reforms. The problem for the artists was to provide a supportive, instructive image of this effort. The Marxist artists started with a basic distrust of capitalism.

Besides compassion, Charlot and others felt respect and admiration for the Indian cultures of Mexico and wanted to make them better known. Moreover, the search for Mexicanidad precluded the adoption of an international style such as modernism was becoming. Although Futurism was new and exciting in Mexico, it had already passed into art history for Charlot. He himself was excited by what distinguished Mexico from the world rather than by the way Mexico imitated foreign countries, by the traditional poor rather than the modern rich:

> There is very simple English that you find in the Gospel about the lily of the field being more beautiful than Solomon in all his glory. That is, Solomon in all his glory was the work of man tending to make things beautiful, and the lily was there. I think nature untouched is by nature beautiful, as far as I see it, and the nature of man untouched is also by definition beautiful. It is more difficult… in fact I really touch the question, for example, what we call the beautiful people, the jet set thing, which could be corresponding to Solomon and all his glory. I don't know what it is even, I don't practice those things, but anything that is in creation that is untouched is beautiful, as far as I know, and that includes a certain type of people who haven't been too worked out by artificial things. Now that is clear in the murals. I use—that will be mostly when I was in Mexico—Mexican Indians, rather than high-class

> people and, now that I am in the Pacific, Pacific Islanders, rather than the people who colonize the islands. A very simple thing. (Early 1960s Jean Charlot Interview)

The muralists discussed the use of modern subjects and differed among themselves. Brenner and Siqueiros agreed that "the position of idealizing or representing modernity—labor, the peasant, etc. smacks of opportunism, which is Diego's privilege and Orozco's abomination" (Glusker 2010: 84).

Once the muralists and their colleagues had made the above decisions, they had to deal with the political character of their artwork or how to communicate their social message. I repeat that for Charlot "It is necessary to have a social stand (not necessarily political)."[80] As seen from the quotation below, he seems to use the word *political* for timely party solutions to problems, which he distinguishes from timeless sympathies, views, and so on. Charlot saw two problems with political art, first:

> the danger of the left-winger in art is that the value of his painting and message will pass as quickly as the decade in which he lives. Art must be timeless—showing results of struggle rather than methods obtaing [*sic*] those results. (Charlot Lecture Notes)

As seen above, the artwork can communicate the emotion that inspired it long after the particular subject has been forgotten (*AA* II: 144).

The other problem was how overtly the artist should express his political message. Charlot wrote of William Gropper (1897–1977): "fine painter but he needs a platform" (Charlot Lecture Notes). More subtle methods were possible, for instance, the subject need not be overt. Against the Surrealists' use of subject matter, Charlot wrote:

> to represent things nearer to thought it isn't necessary to use object. Chinese, for example, used a mountain to express thought, philosophy, etc. (Charlot Lecture Notes)

Non-political objects can make a social or political point. Pieter Bruegel depicted the novel subjects of village life to show them respect and also to criticize their disturbance by Spanish troops: he "really painted political subjects (his way of making political speeches)" (Charlot Lecture Notes). In 1849, Courbet painted his monumental *Stone Breakers* to honor the poor and make their sufferings visible.

The muralists depictions of rural life and workers have a similar social or political purpose: to honor and support. There were many in the government who felt differently: "these leaders, who hated the old Mexico and despised its traditions, looking down on both its customs and its faith" (Meyer 1976: 31). Government modernizers were attacking the Catholic Church, and village customs were under an actual and considerable threat. In this perspective, positive depictions of rural life assume a political character. The 1923 viewers of Fermín Revueltas mural *Devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe* would not have forgotten that the miraculous image was painted on the banners of the Zapatistas; it later adorned those of the Cristeros. Charlot's view of social relevancy was wide. As seen above, Charlot thought criticisms on social grounds of Weston's formalism were incomprehensible. Weston taught people how to see.

In sum, Mexico provided the artists of the 1920s with an overabundance of subjects. Leal writes of indigenous and Colonial art:

> Las formas bellas parecen fluír pródigamente, como algo inherente al paisaje, como el agua que baja de las montañas. Hasta las artes populares, las bellezas de la naturaleza y el drama de nuestra historia, han contribuido a formarnos una predisposición imaginativa y por consiguiente, a facilitar el desarrollo de un movimiento pictórico cada vez más definido.[81]
>
> 'The beautiful forms seem to flow prodigiously, like something inherent in the landscape, like the water that flows down from the mountains. Inclusively, the popular arts, the beauties of nature, and the drama of our history have contributed to forming in us an imaginative predisposition and in consequence to facilitating the development of a more and more definite pictorial movement.'

Landscape, customs, and history are broad categories of the options available.

4.4.1. LANDSCAPE

The dramatic, variegated landscapes of Mexico have been inspirational since the introduction of Western art. In the nineteenth century, landscape painting along with *costumbres* subjects were used to explore and articulate the identity of the new nation: "The diverse landscape echoed the human diversity presented in this popular geography" (Beezley 2008: 23; also 20). Certain features were used as national symbols—like the volcanoes Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl—while others symbolized regions, following the pre-contact tradition of using place glyphs. The resulting "collage of national and local community symbols" depicted the unity with diversity of the Mexican nation (Beezley 2008: 22 f.). Similarly, German and French artists had used their local landscapes to differentiate their own Renaissance movements from the Italian (Zerner 2003: 398 f.).

The vigor of landscape painting continued into late Porfiriato painting, enriched by new symbolism and estheticism (Ramírez 1991: 48-56). The greatest of the nineteenth-century landscape painters, José María Velasco, was Rivera's influential teacher at the Academy of San Carlos in 1903.[82] Throughout his long career, Dr. Atl, the mentor of the young artists, pursued landscape painting with a nationalist purpose, inspired also by his scientific interest in volcanology.[83] Landscape painting continued to be important at the Academy of San Carlos and also at the new EPAL and children's art schools, perhaps with less nationalist purpose.[84]

The experience of the Revolution added a new stimulus to interest in landscape, when the young, enthusiastic, mostly urban artists were deployed throughout a country that was new to them. Siqueiros recalled "el fervor orgulloso del primer combate como soldados rasos" 'the proud fervor of the first combat as simple soldiers' (1977: 102; also 96 f.). He remembered vividly how he was torn from his urban art classes to troop around a country whose varied and astonishing landscapes he had totally ignored.[85] Leal describes the young artists as "turistas en nuestra propia tierra" 'tourists in our own land',

inspired by "El deseo de pintar los nuevos paisajes entrevistos y la vida mexicana recién descubierta" 'The desire to paint the new passages encountered and the Mexican life recently discovered.'[86] Similar experiences were reported by Charlot and other veterans of World War I.

As Leal's words show, landscape was inseparable from culture, *costumbres*. In Siqueiros' view, just as each landscape transformed the plants and animals that inhabited it, so the peoples differed among the varied regions in their languages and arts.[87] Leopoldo Méndez called the people "hijos del paisaje robusto" 'children of the robust landscape' (Reyes Palma 1994: 158). The 1919 Congreso de Artistas Soldados called for "el retorno a la geografía de nuestra tierra" 'the return to the geography of our land' and to the "fuentes culturales" 'cultural sources' (Siqueiros 1977: 164). Siqueiros theorized "sobre equivalencias plásticas de la geografía y la etnografía" 'about plastic equivalences of geography and ethnography' (1977: 210; also 1996: 29). Indeed, most landscape painting in Mexico contains elements of human culture, sometimes to the point of being better described as village-scapes. This long connection between landscape and culture—manifest in the EPAL program (Reyes Palma 1991: 43)—facilitated the later transition to primarily human subjects.

Nearer to the beginnings of the mural movement, landscape painting was one of the options in the discussions of Rivera and Siqueiros in Paris, with the latter contributing "descripciones entusiastas particulares del paisaje mexicano, del hombre mexicano, de las artesanías mexicanas, etcétera." 'enthusiastic detailed descriptions of the Mexican landscape, the Mexican man, Mexican crafts, etc.'[88] In the 1922 article signed by Blanchard but largely by Charlot, landscapes provide three of the nine illustrations. As the Renaissance was underway, Araujo called for a primary observation of "nuestros espectáculos naturales o geográficos" 'our natural or geographic spectacles' as a basis for a revolutionary style appropriate to the new murals' revolutionary content, that is, building a style from the ground up (August 2, 1923).

Despite all this interest in landscape painting, the genre ultimately had little place in muralism despite Vasconcelos' own preference for it (Fell 1989: 384). The Nacionalistas did produce landscapes (*MMR* 58). Atl's early murals in San Pedro y San Paolo, now destroyed, included landscapes.[89] Landscape provided Rivera with a transition from his figure-dominated *Creation* to his later work. The landscape of the androgyne niche was inspired by his trip to Tehuantepec, and later, on Vasconcelos' recommendation, Rivera painted a landscape with figures, apparently untitled, in the stairwell of the Ministry of Education. The emphatically local landscape may have helped him develop a type of human figure less dependent on European painting. Rivera soon concentrated on figure-centered subjects (Debroise 1984: 57), which is true of the murals in the first court of the ministry despite their landscape backgrounds. Much later, Pablo O'Higgins produced mural panels of landscapes for the new Museum of Archeology. Orozco was reportedly interested in using landscapes in murals (González Mello 1995: 43, 82), but his murals are definitely figure-centered.

One reason for the lack of landscape murals is that, at the time, they were being painted in an Impressionist style that was less appropriate for murals than geometric composition. Charlot wrote of Revueltas early landscapes:

> For such a gift, the moment was scarcely propitious, the trend being to stress, not the pulp and bloom of optical nature, but rather the intricacies of the dry skeleton of the Universe.[90]

In Charlot's view, the artist uses geometric composition to explore the structure of the universe, penetrating the optical surface to reveal the geometric foundations of nature. In the early 1920s, the muralists were trying to understand the forces at work under their recent history and their current social problems. A geometric style was a good analytical and expressive tool for this task. Important as this reason was for Charlot, even more powerful factors were at work.

Charlot's work exemplifies the primacy of the figure in murals. In France and later in Hawai'i, landscape was a major interest. In Mexico, he drew and painted some landscapes and especially city- and village-scapes. He occasionally noted landscapes in his writings (e.g., March 1926: 17), but did not describe them at length like Anita Brenner. Charlot's first mural, *The Massacre in the Main Temple*, has only the most marginal landscape background, almost the whole painted surface being occupied by figures. Leal describes the mural curiously as a "paisaje historico" (1990: 175), which recalls a peasant's description of a Xavier Guerrero mural as a "paisaje del trabajo" 'landscape of work.' Charlot's *Lavanderas* has only enough landscape background to define the activities of the figures. In his *Cargadores*, landscape does play a larger role in the narrative, but is accorded only the necessary space to do so. Interestingly, as discussed below, the edifice at the top of the hill is based on a land feature Charlot sketched; Charlot has turned landscape into structure.

When I asked my father about the long gap in his landscape work, he stated:

> Well, I think it's just a quota of people against nature that were in the different places where we were… The First World War, of course—nature was annihilated. Those trenches and those landscapes were absolutely barren, and the question of life and death came into the fore. And in Mexico the social upheavals were so tremendous, and I was mixed up in those…atmosphere at least, or sometimes the actual acts of revolution, so that I couldn't very well enjoy nature then. So it is, and I think you need a certain amount of relaxation to try and see things from nature's point of view rather than from man's point of view…
>
> I really think that I did live at least the first part of my life in extremely tense conditions, starting with the war and going on with the Revolution. I went to Mexico when the Revolution was very much going on. I had friends that were shot down and murdered and whatnot, and those things are tragic. Maybe they would be better expressed in a sort of a Greek drama sort of things. Maybe words should be the medium. But as long as I was a painter, those things had to imbue themselves, embed themselves in my pictures. And I couldn't look at the relaxed nature, shall we say, because people were so different. And I could not do what Van Gogh did, which seems to me rather impertinent as far as nature goes, that is, look at nature and find there his own mood. He looked at fields, for example—some of his last pictures with

> the black ravens over the fields—you feel the storm and whatnot, you feel that the fields are going to commit suicide. I have always remained different, or an observer, if you want, trying to be objective in a sense rather than subjective when I do landscape. (Interview October 31, 1970)

On another occasion, Charlot told me that the human events of the early 1920s in Mexico were so overwhelming that they imposed themselves as subjects. I will discuss this further below.

Despite the predominance of human subjects in the mural movement, landscape easel painting remained a respected part of the art production of the period, such as that of Atl and Clausell. Muralists themselves often produced easel landscapes, such as Alva de la Canal and Fermín Revueltas, whose delicate washes are arguably as important as his murals:

> Revueltas es, entre nosotros, el único y muy digno representante de la tradición del paisaje mexicano, tal como la crearon los grandes pintores Velasco y Clausell.[91]
>
> 'Revueltas is, among us, the unique and very worthy representative of the tradition of Mexican landscape painting, such as created by the great painters Velasco and Clausell.'

Charlot joined him and Clausell on an outdoor painting expedition: "été avec Revueltas et Clausell peindre en plein air" 'was with Revueltas and Clausell to paint *en plein air*.'[92]

4.4.2. SYMBOLS

Faced with the challenge of the walls, the earliest Mexican muralists, the Nacionalistas, resorted to a Beardsleyesque exoticism. More traditional and serious mural devices were symbols and allegories. Mexico had long developed "standardized emblems of Indian activities"—the *sarape* had been used thus since the War of Independence (Fane 1996: 49, 129)—but touristic exploitation had trivialized them. Rivera's *Zapatista Landscape* (1915) is a Cubist compendium of such images, a Cubist *costumbrismo* that anticipates the artist's life-long interest in clothes. Symbolism needed to be revalorized by serious innovation.

Symbols tend essentially to the abstract, like Montenegro's tree of life in his eponymous mural and Rivera's geometric figure at the apex of *Creation*. A more robust solution also drew from tradition: large symbolic or allegorical figures.[93] Such could be found abundantly not only in church art, but in the secular public art after independence into the Porfiriato.[94] Vasconcelos was happy with both these directions: "Todo estaba envuelto en simbolismos de carácter universal" 'All was covered in symbols of universal character' (1982 *Memorias* 2: 233).

Symbolic figures were a major, appreciated subject early in the mural movement and continued to be so to the end. In early murals, Atl painted large, Michelangelesque, allegorical nude figures.[95] Such figures were perpetuated by Orozco in his first, destroyed murals in the Preparatoria; only *Maternity* survives.[96] This tendency continues into *Omniscience*, his mural in Sanborn's. Although the form of the figures changed, symbolic figures are prominent in Orozco's final, surviving Preparatoria murals. For

instance, the historical figure of Cortes is made symbolic by depicting him in conventional nudity. Orozco would create such historico-symbolical figures increasingly to the end of his life.[97] The Cortes of the Hospicio Cabañas is part portrait and part destructive machine. As such, he resembles the target of a political cartoon, loaded with the emblems of his villainy. Indeed, Orozco's career reveals a grammatical similarity between classical symbologizing and cartooning. Orozco devised non-historical symbolic figures as well.

Another line of figure symbolism descends from the nineteenth-century use of an Indian or *mestiza* woman to represent Mexico as the figure of Marianne did France; her racial identity provided the contrast with the white woman representing Spain. Charlot discussed the continuing importance of the figure:

> Now "the Indian" is a term that is so vast that it can be taken in many ways. In Mexico we could speak of the Indian as a reality when we speak of the Indian as a myth, as representing Mexico as such, sometimes even in opposition to Spain and sometimes in opposition to France, that is, the France that had sent Maximilian to Mexico. Mexico is represented even in Colonial times as an Indian girl dressed up in rather romantic feathers and feathered skirt, as opposed to the Spanish lady that represented Spain. Sometimes, most times, they are quite friendly, the one to the other. At other times of stress, certainly, the Indian woman becomes the image of independence—future independence, of course, before Mexico becomes independent—but at times a fierce connotation: just to see the Indian woman is to make you see red as to any form of invader. Some of the best cartoons of the 1860s, of the time of Maximilian, used that Indian woman as the representation of Mexico independent, Mexico fighting the invader. And naturally the Indian as a myth was the natural image that came to the painters when they had to personally find, after the Renaissance began, not only the political independence of Mexico but the cultural independence of Mexico. That explains how we have so many Indians in the Mexican murals. They may not have the same ideological content for nonMexicans that they do have for Mexicans. (May 11, 1960)

Herrán and his generation expanded the use of Indian figures as "genuinos símbolos culturales" 'genuine cultural symbols' to represent the "alma nacional" 'national soul,' ideas, and personal states (Ramírez 1991: 36). Exhibiting nineteenth-century as well as twentieth-century traits, Montenegro's mural *Árbol de la Vida* presented twelve female figures of uncertain symbolism lined up on either side of a nude male. That male was initially effeminate, but was later repainted clothed and then armored, making him manlier each time.[98] One female figure is a pure Indian, while the others exhibit degrees of lightness or darkness, although it is not clear whether this is connected to degrees of racial mixture. Above the figures is an abstract or schematic tree, the eponymous tree of life. Rivera based his first mural, *Creation*, on Montenegro's latest, *Árbol de la Vida*: a nude androgyne (a stronger figure than Montenegro's effeminate male) with symbolic female figures at the side, the whole topped by a geometric figure.[99] Both murals were based on Vasconcelos' ideas and accorded with his spiritualist, symbolic, universalist tastes.[100] Rivera extended the

racial element of in the figures: their emphasized facial features represent various races or race mixtures, the diversity included in Mexican identity. The figures thus do double duty as symbols and as racial types. Rivera later emphasized this device verbally in order to connect *Creation* with his socially themed murals, but he may initially have chosen his models more through friendship or acquaintance.[101] In any case, Rivera later used ethnic bodies for symbolic figures as did Fernando Leal in his *Apotheosis of Simon Bolívar* in the vestibule of the Anfiteatro Simon Bolívar (1930–1933). The muralists' use of Indian figures should be understood at least in part against this historical, nationalistic background.

Symbolic figures continued to be expressive devices that were appreciated even by modern critics. For instance, Laurence Schmeckebier preferred to Charlot's *Massacre* Tamayo's purely symbolic 1964 treatment of the Conquest, *Duality*: a fight between a feathered serpent and a tiger.[102] Figures could be used in ways along a spectrum of conventional to innovative. At the conventional extreme, are Leal's hovering Indian females in his *Apotheosis of Simon Bolívar*. At the innovative extreme are such works as Amado de la Cueva's large, hieratic figures along with other symbols in his murals in the assembly hall—now the Biblioteca Ibero-Americana—of the University of Guadalajara (1924–1926; *MMR* 309–312).

Rivera continued to use symbolic figures, a language in which he was fluent. In *Creation* as in Christian Baroque compositions, the pure light at the top is refracted through different virtues (or saints). In the Detroit murals, the minerals of four colors represented at the top by female figures—black, red, yellow, and white—are used by the human races of the same colors to construct the modern world. For Rivera, the line between a symbolic, allegorical style and a realistic one was permeable. Tina Modotti could model for a nude symbol at Chapultepec and a figure in the crowd in *Distributing Arms* in the Ministry of Education. Rivera could depict history either with narrative art or by posing historical figures in groups by epoch or party, placing historical personages in the positions conventionally used for symbolic figures or choirs of angels.[103] Historical figures were used like symbolic counters in comparing and contrasting, mixing and matching. When Rivera's patrons objected to his Lenin figure in the Rockefeller Center mural, he offered to balance it with one of Abraham Lincoln.

Siqueiros was more searching and in the end more original. The development of his first ideas reveals the difficulty of the problem. His first mural was a symbolic female figure on the ceiling of a small stairwell in the Preparatoria: *The Spirit of the Occident Descending upon the Americas* (*MMR* 202; Illustration 30). At the time, Siqueiros was criticizing *Creation* for not fulfilling the plans for a Mexican national art that he had discussed with Rivera in Paris and claiming that he himself was inventing his own symbols in revolt against the School of Paris (Siqueiros 1977: 194 f.). However, *The Spirit of the Occident* is not convincing in the role assigned, and Siqueiros considered redoing it (he was later reconciled to it). Some months later, Siqueiros started another mural with a figure in a Phrygian cap representing *Democracy* or *The Republic*. This image coincides with a traditional French representation (*MMR* 205; Illustration 31) and shows that Siqueiros had still not created an original figure (he would, however, later use this figure for a panel in the Palacio de Bellas Artes). The surviving figures of this period appear less derivative but are so vague as to be uncommunicative. Siqueiros admits that people found his symbols unclear, and he would have had to explain that the fire in a planned panel with a

Prehispanic couple was "como un impreciso adelanto del fuego de la Revolución" 'like an imprecise anticipation of the fire of the Revolution' (1977: 194, 197).

More seminal are "'los amarres' plásticos" 'the plastic "attachments"' that Siqueiros placed around the figures: abstracted plant and shell forms.[104] Siqueiros described them: "no fueran precisamente de carácter figurativo, ni simplemente ornamental, sino constructivistas" 'they were not precisely of figurative character, nor simply ornamental, but constructive.' He contrasted them to Rivera's and Orozco's derived symbols and connected them to his views on landscape: different lands produced different plants, animals, and people. He, therefore, sought "equivalencias plásticas de la geografía y la etnografía" 'plastic equivalents of geography and ethnography' (1977: 210). Their forms provided a basis for a Mexican esthetic from the ground up. Siqueiros' *amarres plásticos* were certainly original and heralded the great work in symbolism he accomplished later. But they were still obscure to his viewers and without a clear relation to his anthropomorphic figures. They could not replace the conventional, now tawdry minor emblems of Mexicanness.

In sum, underlying the efforts described above was the desire to create a Mexican symbolism that would not be a derivative of Europe. To do this successfully, both ends of the generalityspecificity spectrum needed to be included. David G. De Long describes the challenge in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright:

> Consistently he thought in terms of universal ideals and architectural prototypes. These were not ideals or prototypes of an incorporeal sort, dealing with concepts of pure form detached from worldly place. Instead universality was sought through linkages of humankind to place, and place to cosmos, so that patterns implicit in specific sites were made into visible components of the grander order they supported. (2003: 78)

Symbolism of itself tends towards the general, so the more difficult challenge was to indicate specificity —"patterns implicit in specific sites"—or Mexicanidad, the basic problem facing the muralists. In the early Renaissance, Siqueiros seemed to be the muralist most attuned to this problem of symbols, and he ultimately created some of the most interesting symbolism of modern art.

The muralists had been reared amid Christian imagery, especially Colonial art, which filtered apparently unconsciously and sometimes incongruously in their work:

> 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.[105]

Christian imagery was certainly helpful in making the murals comprehensible to the Mexican people. But Bertram Wolfe disliked Rivera's *Creation* because he felt its symbolism was too Christian (Tabletalk undated, mid-1970s). Siqueiros complained that the Taller de Gráfica Popular was disseminating Catholic images (Prignitz 1992: 157). Curiously, Charlot, the practicing Catholic, did not use Christian imagery,

with the exception of his mural *St. Christopher* in the Preparatoria (Debroise 1984: 56). Siqueiros reported later in life that he had early contemplated creating a *St. Christopher*, but seems to have forgotten that Charlot had already painted one (1977: 197). As a liturgical artist, Charlot was too knowledgeable about such imagery to allow it to slip unconsciously into his work. Moreover, as a liturgical artist in France, he had been working towards a modern liturgical style based more on Gospel events than general symbolism. However, the religious works he brought from France may have had some influence on the symbolism of his colleagues.

Recently, Renato González Mello and others have emphasized Masonic and other esoteric imagery in the murals (Eder 2002: 236 ff.). The Masons were numerous in Mexico at the time and included top government officials (Meyer 1976: 25–30). Siqueiros found Masonic imagery in Orozco's work, but he also made clear that those who thought they found it in his own were mistaken.[106] Indeed, esoteric imagery is only too easy to imagine, and claims of its presence are best supported by literary evidence. Attempts to find such imagery in Charlot's work are vain. As a Catholic, Charlot would not have consciously used such imagery. Moreover, Charlot's father was a Mason, and—since Charlot could study specific Masonic imagery from the books in his father's library (some of which are preserved in the Jean Charlot Collection)—no Masonic symbols could have slipped unconsciously or through ignorance into his work. Charlot was an overt Catholic, not a crypto-Mason.

Throughout his career, Charlot himself used Classical symbolic figures sparingly; in fact, with one exception, only in two rare situations. The first was when they were especially appropriate as in the 1942 mural *Visual Arts, Drama, Music,* on the ante-bellum façade of the Fine Arts Building in Athens, Georgia:

> As to subject matter, columns and pediments suggested a Greek atmosphere that matched in turn the very name of Athens. Granted the uses to which the building is put, ladies in cheese cloth symbolic of the arts became imperative, though held in ill repute by progressive minds. (*Charlot Murals in Georgia* 73)

Another Classical figure, in *Time Discloseth All Things,* connects the two panels of his 1944 corridor in the Journalism building of the same university. The Classical figures in Charlot's own 1934 panel, *Head, Crowned with Laurels*, at the Straubenmüller Textile High School for the Humanities, provide a generalization of all the art periods depicted in the larger work by other artists, *The Art Contribution to Civilization of All Nations and Countries*. The two Classical figures in his 1967 *Inspiration, Study, Creation*, at the East-West Center, Honolulu, are motivated by their representing Occidental art as opposed to the Asian of the Indonesian Affandi in the opposite stairwell of the building.

A second reason to use a Classical figure was when he lacked time to develop a local subject as in the 1956 mural *Inspiration of the Artist* in DesMoines, Iowa (personal communication). However, as far as I know, no such reason existed for the 1944 figures on the pylons of the New Studies Building at Black Mountain College. Charlot certainly had occasions when he could have used Classical symbolic figures and did not, as in his 1955 *Fourteen Panels Symbolizing the Fine Arts*, St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana, or in his 1958 ceramic tiles panels for St. Francis Hospital in Honolulu.

However, along with other Christian iconography, Charlot did often use the equivalent of Classical figures: attendant angels carrying significant emblems. As seen above, Charlot's 1924 panel *Saint Christopher* employed a traditional symbol of bringing Christianity to the New World. Charlot also used fire as a symbol in his 1956 *The Fire of Creation* at St. Mary's College and in the East-West Center *Inspiration, Study, Creation*. In sum, Charlot used conventional symbolism much less in his murals than did his colleagues. He did create an original symbolism for his first mural, *Massacre in the Main Temple*: symbolic figures, not as principles hovering over the action, but as participants in the historical event depicted (John Charlot 2001). Similarly, historical saints with accouterments could be used to represent a profession, as in *Fourteen Panels Symbolizing the Fine Arts*. I will discuss this below along with the type of symbolism he developed for the rest of his work.

Contrary to the popular image of the Mexican Mural Renaissance, symbolism was used roughly as much as the more familiar social and historical subjects. Symbolism was not, however, without problems. Many of the national symbols like the *mestiza* and Popocatepetl had become routine and subjects of bad art and needed to be revitalized. Just like social and historical subjects, symbolism needed to be Mexicanized to be appropriate for a national art. Symbolism had also to be created as genuine art, a problem that arose elsewhere with Surrealism. For instance, the use of symbols encountered the problems of style. The danger of symbols is that they can be made so interesting in themselves that they can be presented in a retrograde, illustrative style and still be thought artistic. The symbolism makes a serious impression and pleases the critics while the old-fashioned style is popular and saleable, as seen in the work of Salvador Dali, René Magritte, and M. C. Escher. The achievement of the muralists—as well as other artists like Max Ernst—was to express interesting symbols in a genuinely artistic style, each reinforcing the other: "these are subjects commonplace in words, that art alone can make new" (Charlot August 5, 1971). Familiar symbols were revitalized and reinterpreted by the individual artist's style. New symbols were conveyed in new style.

Moreover, the continuing interest in symbolism was part of the muralists' mission of conveying a message with their art. That continuing interest helped insure that social subjects would not degenerate into the bad sense of *costumbrismo*, that is, picturesque depictions. Social subjects needed to convey a point beyond themselves.

4.4.3. HUMAN BEINGS

The Mexican Mural Renaissance encompassed a variety of subjects and genres. Besides those discussed above, the muralists continued the late Porfiriato interest in portraiture (Ramírez 1991: 56–63). Depictions of historical events required them, and Rivera even used clusters of portraits as a novel form of narration. Portraits or depictions of children are frequent.[107] Charlot would portray his colleagues and friends as another form of the historical record he was collecting on the movement.

The popular stereotype of the mural movement reduces its variety to social and historical subjects. Those subjects were, however, initially problematical. The early and continuing preference for symbolic subjects and allegorical figures reveals that the muralists had a traditional European idea of

what was appropriate for a large wall. Also admissible were historical subjects, which conventionally included legendary, heroic, or noble figures. How well the cast and events of Mexican history—especially the Revolution—would fit into murals was an unanswered question. Social subjects—ordinary people in their everyday life—belonged to a different art form: small-format genre scenes. Such scenes were popular in Mexican art, but using them as mural subjects was unprecedented, as far as I know. The social and historical subjects of the movement were, therefore, not simply given as the obvious option. They were in fact contrary to the tastes and plans of Vasconcelos. The shift towards them is an event that requires explanation.[108]

Siqueiros confirms the attachment of the young artists of the nineteen-teens to the traditions of Velasco and Impressionism. He also acknowledges the influence of Saturnino Herrán and Francisco de la Torre towards local subjects (1977: 85). But Siqueiros credits Orozco's 1917 exhibition with interesting the young artists in the possibilities of human figures as opposed to pure landscape. This was Orozco the cartoonist and depicter of schoolgirls and bordello scenes, not Revolutionary events, but these *were* Mexican scenes, "tipos mexicanos" 'Mexican types,' and "pintura de carácter" 'painting of character.'[109] Orozco's experience of the Revolution at the time was not appearing as subjects in his art, a process that would require some years.[110] But Siqueiros and the other young artists were reacting to Orozco's expressive use of the human body, indeed his main means of expression:

> Orozco expresa todas sus concepciones, por diversas que sean, antropomórficamente: el hombre es aparentemente el asunto único de su obra; lo rodean sus complementarios, su arquitectura, sus instrumentos de trabajo. Los elementos naturales, el paisaje por ejemplo, casi nunca aparecen y si lo hacen es reducidos a elementos sencillísimos, para sostener la significación del tema mayor. (Charlot June 1928)
>
> "Orozco expresses his concepts anthropomorphically: man reigns in his work, his tools, his architectures; landscape appears only in shorthand version, to strengthen by contrast the theme." (*AA* II: 241)

Indeed, the human body is an especially emotive subject for artists as Charlot had written in his *Traité de Peinture* of 1920:

> L'objet le plus riche d'idées (et donc fréquemment désigné) c'est l'homme.
> Et donc *l'étude du corps humain présente un intérêt particulier*.
>
> 'The richest object in ideas (and thus frequently drawn) is the human being.
> And thus *the study of the human body presents a particular interest*.'

Human beings—or at least human figures—had usually been the main subjects of murals, much more than landscape. The muralists could find in Maya art the same "focusing on man" (*AA* II: 54). Indeed, indigenous art provided a millennial figure tradition in painting and sculpture that could be used to develop a genuinely Mexican style. Charlot later credited Siqueiros himself as being "the first to erect a naked

Indian body as removed from picturesqueness as a Greek naked athlete, a figure of universal meaning within its racial universe" (*MMR* 207).

Many more reasons can be found for this shift towards historical and social subjects. Leal wrote: "El pintor de la ciudad se ve solicitado más por los personajes que por los paisajes" 'The city painter is drawn more towards people than landscapes' (1990: 85). In fact, most murals are set outside the capitol.

Siqueiros credited the Sindicato with redirecting the muralists from symbolism and folklore to social subjects, arguing that the subjects of the illustrations in *El Machete* were more Revolutionary than those of the murals.[111] This view seems more ideological than historical. The Sindicato was founded between September and December 1922 (*MMR* 242). Leal had already painted his *Campamiento Zapatista* (1921-1922), and the young group of artists had already chosen their subjects and started work on their Preparatoria murals. Discussions in the Sindicato may well have helped Siqueiros in his personal quandary (Siqueiros 1977: 196 f.), but his memory minimizes the contribution of the young artists in this stage of the movement.

The muralists believed their art should convey a message. Symbols conveyed general messages—and needed verbal explanations to be particularized—but the muralists had *particular* points to make about their society, history, and the problems of reconstruction.

But the most important reason for the shift in subjects was, I believe, the one Charlot articulated when explaining his neglect of landscape during his Mexican years: the tremendous human events the artists were witnessing and even enacting. The early murals with social and historical subjects have a special intensity that reveals their connection to the strongest emotions of the artists—their experiences of the Revolution and their hopes for the future. The muralists did not start with such themes. They began with more traditional allegorical and symbolic mural subjects. But once the way was shown to them, the group dynamic drew the individual artists to the subjects that would inspire a high point in their own art and that of the world.

Because he arrived late on the scene, Charlot missed entirely the Mexican artists' transfer of emphasis from landscape to human subjects. His first watercolor in Mexico is a landscape, *Puerto Mexico*, discussed in Volume 1 Chapter 8, and he continued to do landscape sketches and occasional paintings. But in his early sketchbooks, the human subjects dominate as they do in his murals throughout most of his career. Already in his Paris mural project, *Processional*, the main expressive device is human beings, and he was knowledgeable about historical paintings with Mexican subjects. By example and most likely in discussions, Charlot's weight was thrown behind using human beings as subjects.

4.4.3.1. THE MEXICAN HUMAN BODY

As seen above, Mexico had been represented in the nineteenth century by the figure of an Indian or mestiza woman, a practice that continued into the early murals. Indian physical traits were most often confined to a few facial features while the rest of the body was based on European Classicism. This continued into the late Porfiriato, for instance, in Herrán's *La Leyenda de los Volcanes* of 1910. As Zalce

said, "Herrán would do an Indian girl who was thin and sexy, not fat, strong, and true" (Zalce July 27–28, 1971). In Montenegro's *El Árbol de la Vida*, the Indian figure is distinguishable only by her costume and dark skin; her proportions are the same as the other figures. That is, no attempt was being made to canonize the Indian body as a basis for a new esthetic. Nonetheless, a work like Jorge Enciso's 1910 *Anahuac*, a life-size figure with both symbolic and ethnographic characteristics, demonstrated the potential of the subject. In his research notes for the *Mexican Mural Renaissance*, Charlot translates a remark by Enciso from an interview: "And in 1910 there was "Anahuac", a big Indian two meters high. It shocked people accustomed to musqueteers [*sic*: musketeers]and odalisques" (unpublished note for *MMR*).

The use of Indian models in San Carlos, EPAL, and the children's schools maintained the practice of direct observation of the human body, but with an important limitation: the Indian models were clothed. Until Charlot started working with Luz Jiménez, all the nude models were either European or *mestizo*, whereas the Indian models were clothed, usually picturesquely.[112] As a result, the changes in the depiction of the Indian body were often superficial. Neoclassical artists whitened the Indian skin whereas the muralists were criticized for making it dark brown (Zavala 2001: 68, 355). Also, since Indians were not identified easily with a standard physical type, accouterments became unusually important, encouraging *costumbrismo*. Charlot and others wanted to move beyond costumes to "the supple and strong quality of the human beings that people unobtrusively this beautiful land."[113]

The study of Mexican Indian art—for which the human body was a dominant subject—was crucially important for the muralists. They were faced with numerous examples of native figures depicted in various styles, all free of European influences. Studying those figures enabled the viewer to arrive at the basic human experience of the artist:

> Man, be he B.C. or A.D., his eyes closed and just feeling from inside what the world is about, finds himself reduced to the irrevocable denominator of his own naked body and its contact with what woven stuff swaddles it…
>
> The Amerindian artist, with eyes closed, also took stock of himself as the one basic subject matter of art…the body remained the norm. (*AA* II: 67)

For Charlot, the great contrast was between the squat Aztec figures and the elongated Maya ones in which "The 'canon' of human proportions is similar to the late Greek" (*AA* II: 57). For the Maya, indeed Indian artist, the body was the main means of expression:

> The artist, as the Greeks had done before him, attempts to summarize his philosophy in the choice proportions of the male form, and stakes all on the human body. But in these works palpitates a spirituality that clashes with the Greek athletic ideal that gave such a rustic health to both men and gods. (*AA* II: 41)

The Aztec artist was radically different:

> Having tasted Indian humility at the sight of these geometrically defined human figures, their folded bodies inscribed in the cube or seemingly gathered back into the sphere of the womb… (*AA* II: 149)

Such sights can be seen today:

> In Mexico the Indian sits on the ground, not on a chair. Man gathers his knees to his chin, folds his arms over them, conceals the gathered limbs and body under a sarape [*sic*] too tough of texture to break into folds. Thus seated, man duplicates the sign "tepetl" the Aztec glyph for a mountain. Woman kneels, feet under her eggshaped [*sic*] bulk, like an Aztec sculpture that retains the shape of the matrix stone. (Charlot March 1945)

Both Aztec and Maya penetrated beyond the idea that "The human form is at its loveliest skin-deep" (*AA* II: 149):

> The Aztec, immune to the sight of religious autopsies performed with a sacrificial knife, preferred to observe the same human body piecemeal—a necklace of steaming hearts, or a basinful of blood, or a hill of skulls. Unnice as is death in its plastic manifestations, it has nevertheless inspired great art. (*AA* II: 149)
>
> Fascinated by death, the Indian preferred to probe surgically into self, aware of the inner organs stacked within the cage of ribs…
>
> Man must be quite a spiritual animal after all to make beauty out of reeking carnage. (*AA* II: 67 f.)

The depiction of the human body is thus an expression of a view of life:

> It is true that the plastic arts deal perforce with bodies, with what constitutes the visible world. It is also true that, unlike the ethics of cattle shows and leg contests, bodies are not in art the aim, but signposts that point to concepts.
>
> Mexico adds its own version to enrich this gigantic concordancy. It carves and paints a human body shaped by the acceptancy of daily tasks, life givers in their humbleness, cooking, washing, teaching a child to walk. Hemmed in between powerful natural forces and overpowering spiritual strains, man appears heroic enough as he stays upright, resists awhile the pull of gravity towards earth's center. (Charlot March 1945)

Charlot could see both Maya and Aztec influence in some of his work, as he described his 1933 lithograph *Cargador at Rest*:

> It is a mixture of things, actually, because the subject is from the plateau of Mexico. The *cargador*, the sugarcane, and so on, all that is from the plateau. But I was still mixed up with the Mayans as far as the profile goes, though the body and gestures are typical of the Aztec people. (M207)

Different artists responded differently to the challenge of native art (*MMR* 12). Charlot felt that Mérida created a style that integrated Indian esthetics into a unified whole.[114] He found in Julio de Diego's work a struggle between Spanish elongation and squat Indian proportions; the ultimate blend expressed the artist's own *mestizismo* (May 1940). Charlot praised Alfredo Zalce's lithographs of Yucatán: "in true artist fashion, [he]…reconstructs whole breath-taking vistas from the one legible modern glyph, the Indian body"; the *huipil* 'dress' places the woman's body "into the severe realm of geometrical forms" (*AA* II: 183, 185).

Orozco followed his characteristically conflicted trajectory through this problem. He had earlier developed a style for his schoolgirl and brothel scenes and especially for his cartoons. Turning to murals, necessarily serious and monumental, he adopted a style based on the Italian Renaissance, which—probably under the influence of his education and the example of Atl—he considered the perennial Classicism:

> The human body is to be his only subject matter, stripped of all racial tags, stripped of clothing, stripped even of those nondescript drapes that most classic masters were too prudent to shun. (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

His *Omniscience* in the Casa de los Azulejos was "The climax of his classical period, it is also an important statement on esthetics" (*AA* II: 251). This work—along with his first, destroyed murals in the Preparatoria—was marked by "the gigantic scale that he affected as a mural beginner…[and] an earlier pride in craftsmanship and anatomical display" (*AA* II: 252). Although he polemicized for this style as the only one appropriate for murals, a series of cartoon-like murals erupted from a different dimension of his artistic personality. He was also drawn, seemingly despite himself, into his great murals of the Revolution and historic Mexico. Among these, Charlot wrote, was a:

> masterly fusion of ancient and present plastics and emotions in the Indian squatting before a blood-soaked *teocalli*, frescoed in 1926, in the main staircase of the Preparatoria. It was in the same year and in the same place that he blasted Indianism.[115]

We can include also the great female Indian nude in *Cortès and Malinche*. Orozco soon moved towards his later fusion of his cartoon tendencies and overt symbolism under the influence of German Expressionism. The project of an esthetic based on a study of the Indian body was never a primary interest for him.

Siqueiros also started with a Renaissance style and European symbolic figure and then turned towards an art "primordialmente mexicano por su etnología" 'primordially Mexican through its ethnology' (Siqueiros 1977: 199; compare 190). He states that he did this to treat Revolutionary subjects, but used for this "dos enormes figuras de indudable raza india mexicana" 'two enormous figures of undoubtedly Mexican Indian race' (Siqueiros 1977: 199). That Siqueiros was still using symbolic figures rather than historical painting shows how difficult the problem was. Then—being drawn as were others by the peculiar group undercurrent of the movement—he painted his great, but unfinished, *Burial of a Worker* (1923–1924), a subject within the category of the social, historical subjects pioneered earlier. His

depiction of the men carrying the coffin was widely praised as a breakthrough in the portrayal of Mexican Indians. Siqueiros wrote that all of his colleagues—Charlot is mentioned by name—"aceptaron que en aquellas pinturas abría yo la expresión etnográfica que hasta ese momento le había faltado a nuestras obras" 'recognized that in those paintings I opened up the ethnographic expression that until that moment had been missing from our works' (Siqueiros 1977: 199). The work was indeed greatly admired by Rivera and Charlot, whom I have already quoted above:

> Siqueiros was the first to erect a naked Indian body as removed from picturesqueness as a Greek naked athlete, a figure of universal meaning within its racial universe.[116]

Siqueiros felt that, unlike Rivera in *Creation*, he had sought and found "el tipo racial clave" 'the key racial type" (1977: 200). The only colleague Siqueiros acknowledged as making the same search was Charlot: "En Charlot hay una preocupación racial mexicana, pero que a ningún o de nosotros le pareció resuelta con eficacia" 'In Charlot there is a preoccupation with the Mexican race, but it appeared to none of us to be resolved with efficacy.' However, Alfredo Zalce stated in an interview:

> Mexican subjects done by Herrán were the *tapatío* dance, a girl with a *rebozo* and an apple. Tourist stuff. Really very bad. Calendar art. Very superficial. Touristic. You don't feel the true. Jean's was completely other. For me it was a shock because I was in the Academy when all said Herrán was the best artist. When I saw Jean's work, the other really disappeared for me and for many of my generation. I and my friends made many commentaries on Jean's things.
>
> Jean influenced me more than anybody. When I go to Yucatán, I have in mind more than anything else what Jean did in Yucatán. I felt lucky to have seen Jean's things before I went to Yucatán so many years later. (Zalce July 27–28, 1971)

In *Creation*, Rivera had revitalized the *mestiza* figure in the nude of Guadalupe Marín. As to pure Indian figures, Charlot praised Rivera:

> who showed great understanding in his 1923 kneeling figures, often women seen from the back, where legs and arms press close to the ovaloid of the torso, with an economy of shape that suggests a carving out of a glacier-smoothed matrix. (*MMR* 12).

However, Rivera placed those figures into an Italian perspective:

> Our earlier pre-Hispanic borrowings suffered from a pictorial obeisance to Renaissance tenets, and especially to those of Italian perspective, space-creating and surface-denying. When Rivera represented squatting figures he intended to absorb the peculiar proportions found in Aztec codices, but the post-Renaissance factors—soft modelings learned from Renoir and a fullness of spatial landscaping—minimized or neutralized the archaic intent.[117]

That is, Rivera did not extend his understanding of the Indian esthetic of the body to the whole picture, creating a unified style. That was Charlot's particular achievement.

4.4.3.2. COSTUMBRES

Subjects of folk or indigenous life were called *costumbres* 'customs,' with *costumbrista* as the adjective and *costumbrismo* as the practice of using such subjects. Such depictions were usually picturesque and even touristic and thus became a by-word for the kind of bad art the muralists wanted to avoid, as seen, for instance, in the arguments of Leal and Siqueiros' frequent criticisms of Rivera.[118] Nonetheless, such subjects, themes, and decorative traits were used frequently in murals and other genres and have in fact provided the stereotype of the Mexican Mural Renaissance:

> Montenegro had used patterns from Michoacán lacquers in "potting" the nave of San Pedro y Pablo, *jarabe* dancers and a macaw vendor in its stained-glass lunettes. Revueltas based his mural on the fat stroke and candent color of *pulquería* painting. Leal elaborated on Indian festivals in the staircase of the Preparatoria. Rivera was now unloading a picturesque folk-cargo on the first panels of the Ministry. In the second court of the same building, de la Cueva would start in July his frescoes depicting an Indian ritual dance and village fireworks. And I was painting in the same court a "Ribbon Dance" that featured a Maypole and masked Indians.[119]

Prehispanic art used domestic subjects frequently, like *molenderas* and *tortilleras*, and genre paintings were popular since the arrival of European art, even developing unique subjects like *casta* paintings, depictions of different racial mixtures and their social places. William H. Beezley has shown that "Mexicans, after independence, developed a fascination with the people of their country" (2008: 32). Far from being initially a product for foreign tourists, *costumbrista* works were designed to satisfy "the widespread curiosity held by Mexicans about themselves and their country."[120] Aware and proud of their own distinctive regional traits, the scattered Mexican populations wanted to learn about others and spread the knowledge of their own. A variety of artistic forms was used, including drama and puppet theatre, in which local practices were reenacted in regional costumes and with the appropriate music (Beezley 2008: 7, 18, 37). Popular audiences were more interested in the variety of their new nation than in a unifying symbol, but gradually certain local figures— like the China Poblana, the Tehuana, and the *charro*—were accepted as more widely representative.[121]

Many *costumbrista* artworks were created by Indian artists and can thus be classified as genuine folk art. Charlot was familiar with his family's collection of very fine nineteenth-century figurines, which helped form his early image of Mexico, an image reinforced after moving there:

> But you have seen in my sister's little place some of the remnants of the figures and figurines that my grandfather had collected. Those were not Prehispanic things; they were folk art, but they were folk art of the mid-nineteenth century, which is pretty hard to get by nowadays. And because I was little, I would look very intently, especially at the lower shelves. It was more difficult for adults than for me, and it was

> my own little world at the level of my eyes. Quite a number of those representations are of Indians at their work, and those Indians at their work are the very same people that I found at their work when I went to Mexico and the very same people that I painted at their work with the same gestures that those wax figures were using. The most obvious things were the women working at their *metates* with their children on their back, wrapped in a *rebozo*. We have that in that collection; even now there are a few of those figures: the women walking on the way with a child or so wrapped in the *rebozo* at their back; the men getting the sap out of the maguey for the *agua*, milk, to make the *pulque*; and the *chinampas*—the flat boats, bringing the vegetables on the canals that at the time went right into the heart of Mexico, with the women dressed up in the their village costumes. Nowadays I think it's only on certain occasions, and fiestas, and so on, but in those days each village had special costumes, just as it is today in Guatemala. And some of those women were dressed up actually in the same hand-woven and hand-dyed costumes of the region of Milpa Alta where Luciana, Luz, who had been my model for all the Indian women that I painted, came from. And Luz herself was dressed up in that beautiful skirt, which is wrapped up in a rather elaborate way with folds, that is a very dark blue, indigo blue, with black lines at the bottom and at the top creamy white, and all the folds are gathered together into a hand-woven and embroidered belt, which is a rather stiff belt of white and purple red. Now those colors before I saw them on her, before I saw them on her mother, and so on, when I visited the village, I had seen already in those miniature wax figures. And the way the folds folded, the way the arms in action worked, either giving the breast to the child or working with the stone, hand on the stone *metate* with the maize flour, I was ready for all that because I had seen it already in those little tableaux. There is a change of scale, I would say, from the child to the adult, that the child can see small things as big, and for me those little figures were really life-sized as I looked at them. So my eyes were really ready for the Mexico that I found. Of course, that was the Mexico of 1920, which, again, may be quite different from Mexico of today. 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)

In Mexico, Charlot collected newer works and was given the statuette of a Tortillera by Panduro VII— a famous potter of San Pedro Tlaquepaque—that remained a confirmation and inspiration throughout his life.

Costumbrista subjects were largely disdained by fine artists but did make rare inroads.[122] Encouraged by French pictures of peasants like those of Courbet, late Porfiriato artists, including Ramos

Martínez, again anticipated the 1920s by using *costumbrista* subjects to call attention to socially deprived peasants and urban workers (Ramírez 1991: 42–45, 47, 82). They also elevated *costumbrismo* to historical painting and to allegorical descriptions of multicultural Mexico (Ramírez 1991: 38, 40, 47). However, in 1904, students of the San Carlos Academy, including the young Rivera, protested when they were forced to use Indian models dressed in their ordinary clothes and asked that they be ordered to put the customary European historical costumes back on (*San Carlos* 149 f.).

A major innovation was Ramos Martínez insistence that the Indian models at EPAL be dressed in authentic Mexican costumes and in poses of normal activities.[123] Charlot remembered:

> Well, the open-air school, of course, existed, was nearly a survival of the Impressionist times of the Academy of Art, and Ramos Martínez had worked out that idea of having the models pose in what they call natural surroundings, very different from the Academy, of course, which had everything with a stand and a model posing. So he had the people in Mexican, more or less regular peasant clothes or Sunday clothes, perhaps, with a little more embroidery and so on than everyday things, posing, the men with their serapes and sombreros and the women in their village clothes, and they posed usually with a sort of semi-esthetic arrangement. The women could perhaps hold a pot on their shoulders and so on. I had rather little relations with most of them. The one I knew best was Luz, Luciana Perez. (Interview August 7, 1971)

The young artists had been impressed by the beauty of Indian costumes. Charlot stated:

> Luz herself was dressed up in that beautiful skirt, which is wrapped up in a rather elaborate way with folds, that is a very dark blue, indigo blue, with black lines at the bottom and at the top creamy white, and all the folds are gathered together into a hand-woven and embroidered belt, which is a rather stiff belt of white and purple red. (Interview September 28, 1970)

The everyday clothes of both men and women had a classic simplicity that reminded Charlot of Greek art.[124] In paintings and drawings, Charlot contrasted such clothing with the imported bourgeois frillery, bristling with bad taste: “damas bien, escondiendo su horrenda calva bajo importados *chapeaux*, amontonamientos de flores, de encajes y de plumas de avestruz” ‘society ladies, hiding their horrendous baldness under imported *chapeaux*, heapings of flowers, lace, and ostrich feathers.’[125] Charlot captioned a caricature of such contrasting clothing:

HONRA LA MUJER MEXICANA

PORQUE?

TU MUJER	LA MUJER
SU HIJA	GRINGA
SON	SU HIJA

	`SON
BELLA	FEAS
Y	Y
BIEN VESTIDAS.	MAL VESTIDAS.

HONOR THE MEXICAN MOTHER

WHY?

YOUR MOTHER	THE GRINGA
HER DAUGHTER	MOTHER
	HER DAUGHTER
ARE	ARE
BEAUTIFUL	UGLY
AND	AND
WELL DRESSED.	BADLY DRESSED.[126]

He depicted such badly dressed rich people in oils, in his 1924 woodblock *Los Ricos en el Infierno* (M56), and in his illustrations for Anita Brenner's *The Timid Ghost* (1966). Similar images can be found in Daumier, in nineteenth-century Mexico, and in the Casasola photographs.[127] In contrast, Posada's dark-skinned peasants in their classic white shirts and trousers maintain their timelessness today.

This practice at EPAL was a major influence on the young group of artists, who would prove thematic pioneers of the new movement.[128] Their developing interest in costume brought them into closer contact with the Indians who wore them, increasing their knowledge of and sympathy for village cultures (Leal 1990: 176). Guadarrama Peña rightly emphasizes the importance of this group, contrasting Leal's Mexican subjects, based on his EPAL background, to Rivera's more generalized *Creation* (2010: 32, 36, 40). He writes of these young artists:

> colaboraron no sólo en la construcción de este muralismo característico de México, sino también jugaron un papel muy activo en el impulso de otras propuestas modernas en esa década. (2010: 29)
>
> 'they worked together not only in the construction of this muralism characteristic of Mexico, but also played a very active role in the pushing of other modern propositions in this decade.'
>
> ellos fueron quienes pintaron las imágenes que después se repetirían incesantemente. Por todo lo anterior, debe considerarse a estos jóvenes como los fundadores del muralismo mexicano. (2010: 37)

> 'they were the ones who painted the images that were repeated incessantly since. Despite all done earlier, these youths must be considered the founders of Mexican muralism.'

The young artists "crearon nuevos signos y formas de abordar los temas, similar a las vanguardias europeas, e igual que ellas, lograron escandalizar" 'created new signs and forms to undertake their themes, similar to the European vanguards, and just like them, succeeded in scandalizing' (2010: 43). Debroise also sees the young artists as "los verdaderos creadores" 'the true creators' of the Mexican school and Leal as "el primero en recurrir a las formas que caracterizarán un estilo 'riveriano' y que se volverán los estereotipos de una manera de pintar mexicana" 'the first to resort to forms that would characterize a "Riveran" style and that will become stereotypes of a manner of Mexican painting.'[129] Again, due credit can be given to an individual muralist: in his encaustic *Homage to the Virgin of Guadalupe* (1923), Fermín Revueltas "first used the hieratic, white-clad Indian and the women wrapped in stylized rebozos that soon because the accepted ciphers of a Mexican mural alphabet."[130]

The interest of the young artists in *costumbrista* subjects went against the taste and plans of Vasconcelos.[131] Their interest was, however, in tune with Obregón's project of incorporating previously marginalized groups—*obreros*, *campesinos*, and *indios*—into the reconstruction of the country.[132] Whereas the Porfiriato had used *pueblo* 'people' for the bourgeoisie, the word would now be used to privilege the hitherto neglected groups, who would provide a new image of the real Mexico (Pérez Montfort 1994: 139). To differentiate them from the newly marginalized bourgeoisie, the artist had to portray them in their characteristic clothes. That is, the esthetic problem of *costumbrismo* was inescapable.

The artists seem to have accepted *costumbrismo* as much as an inspiration as a challenge. Far from being a mere display for tourists, the richly varied clothing of Mexico is an impressive feature of its cultural life. Moreover, Indians had been assimilating European items into their ceremonial costumes, which provides precious evidence of their encounter with the introduced culture. *Costumbres* in themselves are worth recording—a legitimate function of art. Rivera's enormous production of *costumbrista* artworks reveals his interest and displays his old-fashioned descriptive talents. His archeological and ethnographic images have proved useful in posters and labels of museum displays. Moreover, recording them on a monumental scale accorded them an unprecedented respect. Rivera was especially interested in doing this in his murals, although it invited criticism. Carlos Mérida maintained his early interest in native costume throughout his life, for instance, in his 1941 *Dances of Mexico* and his 1940–1949 *Trajes Indígenas de Guatemala*. Charlot himself had been interested in folk costumes and workers' clothing in France in his childhood and adolescence, when the bourgeois homogenization of clothing had not yet been adopted and folk costumes were an important part of the maintenance of local cultures. A French writer of the time lamented the fact that the workers were no longer wearing their loose white blouses and baggy blue pants, but were putting on cheap versions of bourgeois clothing (the worker's costume survived as the stereotypical one of an artist). In Mexico, Charlot completed a series of formal drawings of folk costumes, of which five large 1923 line drawings are known, now in the JCC. In Hawai'i, in his *Choris and Kamehameha*, Charlot studied the varied clothing and its significance during

the transition period of Kamehameha's rule.[133] Related works are his drawings and writings on Maya costumes at Chich'en Itza, discussed below.[134]

Depictions of daily living as well as of the Revolution and reconstruction demanded that the dramatic personae be portrayed realistically, that is, in customary dress. That dress instantly made individuals socially recognizable and thus facilitated visual storytelling, in photographs and cinema as well the older visual arts.[135] The people as newly defined were also the target audience for the muralists, who wanted them to recognize themselves in the murals.

Most important, *costumbres* were meaningful, as seen in the use of clothes to express identity: race, regional and even village membership, social rank, and occupation. The muralists themselves adopted workers' clothes as a sign of solidarity. During the Colonial period, common Indians were prohibited by law from wearing Spanish clothing.[136] During the Porfiriato coronation of Our Lady of Guadalupe, people dressed in Indian clothing were not admitted until the second day (Beezley 2008: 90). European clothing was pressed on government employees and even their wives (Beezley 2004: 127; 2008: 97 f.).

Clothes are mentioned often in reports of the Revolution, a handy way of identifying the combatants, as can be seen in the Casasola photographs. Porfiristas and *científicos* were resplendent in their top hats and formal wear. *Yaquis* and other Indians maintained their traditional clothing. To Southern Mexicans, those from the North seemed dressed like *gringos* (Rutherford 1971: 206 f.), but when Villa raided Columbus by night in 1916, the U.S. soldiers started a fire to identify their attackers by the back-lit silhouettes of their clothing. Zapatistas were identified by their peasant costume: "Propiamente no hay más uniformidad que la de los enormes sombreros, y la indumentaria de manta" 'In fact there was no more uniformity than the enormous *sombreros* and the clothing of a blanket.'[137] With two massed armies sharing Mexico City, "Parece que veinte regiones han enviado sus representantes en colorido, en costumbres, en lenguaje, en todo" 'It looks like twenty regions have sent their representatives in coloring, *costumbres*, language, in everything' (López y Fuentes 1949: 97). I myself heard from an eyewitness how amazed the residents were by the variety among the soldiery of Obregón and Zapata when they marched into Mexico City. In art as in life, clothing could identify the members of a variegated crowd: workers, urban Indians, the many types of village Indians, mestizos, and so on. Posada's subjects are urban folk.

A master of the code of clothes, especially as a cartoonist, Orozco also innovated by introducing ambiguity. For instance, in the 1926 Preparatoria third-floor sequences *Mujeres…La bendición* and *Trabajadores…Revolucionarios*, are the men without uniforms prisoners, conscripts, or irregulars? Are those in uniform Carrancistas or Obregonistas? The ambiguity expresses Orozco's changing the message from the conventional triumph of good over evil to the universal beastliness of war.

Clothes became part of the articulation of the Revolution. For instance, the general Felipe Ángeles complained about the widespread view that "to be cultivated, to be properly dressed, or to have material wealth were characteristics of all enemies of the revolution and in this way in the vague popular conscience the revolution of 1913 became a class war" (Katz 1998: 684). Probably referring to Porfirista

policies, Obregón argued, "We gain nothing by giving felt hats and shoes to those who wear straw hats and sandals" (Bailey 1979: 86). Indeed, Porfirista-type bourgeois clothing had become risible (e.g., Vasconcelos 1982 *Memorias* 2: 262).

Clothes themselves even became a means of political expression, like dressing in mourning (Meyer 1976: 183). When Villa and Zapata met in Mexico City:

> They also spoke of hat styles, of Zapata's broad sombrero and Villa's pith helmet. Zapata indicated that "wouldn't be found in a hat other than the kind he wore."[138]

Calles was being extremely provocative when he applied the law against wearing clerical garb in public. In sum, *costumbres* were an important and worthy subject for the artists of the 1920s as well as an expressive device that communicated efficiently to the intended viewers. The very meaningfulness of *costumbres* was a basis for Charlot's use of them for a special kind of symbolism, discussed below.

With Orozco and Siqueiros depreciative of *costumbres*, they remained a subject of contention (e.g., Debroise 1984: 53 f., . Several solutions were found to the problem of picturesqueness. As always, the main one was style. Any subject can be treated artistically, and *costumbres* were not a picturesque or trivial subject in themselves. Much of the work of the 1920s artists can be recognized as revitalizations of subjects that had become depreciated and additions of new historical, revolutionary connotations to older subjects. An important innovation was treating as monumental subjects hitherto confined to small-scale genre scenes. Charlot's *Lavanderas* 'Washerwomen' (1923) took on a new seriousness when projected on a wall larger than 16 by seven feet. No banner or rifle was needed to shock the bourgeois viewer. Such murals were expressions of the muralists' respect and admiration for Indian life.

Another solution was to reduce the picturesqueness and exoticism of a subject, as Araujo wrote:

> Llamo BELLEZA LOCAL a los aspectos naturales nativos como espectáculo visible. Los MEXICANISTAS han preferido especialmente lo llamado pintoresco, o sea, lo que más nos particulariza del extranjero, escogiendo los espectáculos excéntricos como más genuinos, lo que muestra su mentalidad de turistas. Lo bello y lo excéntrico son incompatibles; en efecto, lo excéntrico, o lo raro, es esencialmente anormal o monstruoso y lo bello es esencialmente normal o general o universal. (August 2, 1923)
>
> 'I call local beauty those natural native aspects as visible spectacle. The MEXICANISTS have preferred especially what has been called picturesque, that is, that which particularizes us most from foreigners, choosing the eccentric spectacles as the most genuine, which shows their tourist mentality. The beautiful and the eccentric are incompatible; in effect, the eccentric or the rare is essentially abnormal or monstrous, and the beautiful is essentially normal or general or universal.'

Charlot discussed this solution at length:

> it's very picturesque, and they have crowns of flowers on their heads, of poppies usually, on the day of Santa Anita, and so on, but it becomes a thing of a fiesta, that is, a thing that is not everyday stuff but slightly artificial even for the Indians, even discounting the many tourists who go to see the Indians on the fiesta day. A day of fiesta is an unusualness, and that's why it is like that. And my own tie, if you want, with the Indian is in his everyday affairs, and especially I was speaking of visiting in Milpa Alta and 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. That, for me, had more value. I wouldn't say that I was against picturesqueness, but I would accept only what picturesqueness was part of the makeup of the everyday life of the people, and I've never been awfully fond of the unusualness of fiesta days, that is, when all the tourists go in to see the Indians dancing and singing and whatnot. That's not false, if you want, but it's unusual, like the Kermess of Flanders, which is not typical certainly of the everyday life of the Flemish peasant. So I used things that I considered only deeply engrained. Some of them, for example, are the kitchen chores. I always come back to that; it may be the most essential one.[139]

> the studies I made of Luz dressed up in her costume of Milpa Alta, perhaps more picturesque than I used to paint her later on, but it's a first step. (Interview May 14, 1971)

> There was, perhaps, a certain uncertainty about the new accessories, paraphernalia. For example, the serape that the man with the cigarette has on is not something that I would choose later on because it's something which is a little bit touristic by the standards acquired when I knew more about serapes. Actually, the large hat of the man, the sombrero, also is something that later on I used less and less as I looked at Indians in their daily life, in their home and so on. So there is a certain uncertainty or surprise about the subject matter that disappears later on. (Interview May 18, 1971; also Interview September 28, 1970)

Charlot and others appreciated artists who made cultural aspects look normal. Mérida was "the first of this group to cleanse his work of the picturesqueness of folklore" (*AA* II: 352). Goitia wanted to depict the Revolution, and "the life and costumes of the people" were included as part of that scene (Glusker 2010: 310). Charlot wrote of the work of Manuel Martínez Pintao:

> todos los detalles son observados de espectáculos cotidianos…y sirviéndose de estos elementos, sin buscar ni lo exótico ni lo raro, compone sus pequeños cuadros con una emotividad tan profunda y simple. (August 5, 1923)

> 'all the details are observed from everyday sights…and using these elements, without seeking the exotic or the rare, he composes his little pictures with such a profound and simple emotivity.'

Charlot praises Emilio Amero's photographs for focusing not on pretty costumes but on "the supple and strong quality of the human beings that people unobtrusively this beautiful land" (January 1935). All the above—with the addition of absorbing *costumbrismo* into social and historical painting, discussed below—helped to overcome the dangers of the genre. But the main solution was the emotion that such subjects themselves drew from the artists, an emotion that inspired the most intense works of the early mural movement.

4.4.3.3. SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL PAINTING

Historical painting had escaped the stigma of *costumbres* and thus remained a respectable and even appreciated form through the late nineteenth century and the Porfiriato (Ramírez 1991: 33). Historical painting could, therefore, assimilate and justify *costumbres* as a means of expressing the historical event depicted. Similarly, social themes like those of current problems and reconstruction could assimilate *costumbres* as historical painting of contemporary subjects. Both historical and social painting had a long history, and the muralists could return art making to more important subjects than still lifes: "El hombre ha sido siempre el tema fundamental del arte" 'Man has always been the fundamental theme of art' (Siqueiros 1996: 440; 439). Historical and social painting were compelling forms in the muralists own historical situation: "In truth, in that place and at that time, bullets were of more concern to us than apples" (Charlot 1977 Foreword: xvii). Historical painting could record recent events. Social painting had an equally important task:

> As does a time capsule, fine arts are crafted to project into the future.
>
> A parallel occurs as Mexican murals enter history in their turn. Present-day Mexico, oil rich and politically stable, could easily look with disdain on the Mexico we knew and loved, crisscrossed by illiterate chieftains leading unwashed peasants to slaughter. Were it not that our painted walls document this yearning for justice that made today's Mexico a reality.[140]

Charlot's 1923 mural *Cargadores* exemplifies the absorption of *costumbres* into social painting. Clothes are used to identify immediately the figures as peons. But the burden bearers are not posing to display their costumes or performing some traditional activity. Nor are they engaged in some actual historical event. Rather the mural is revealing their social situation by using a symbol: the "dark satanic mill" on the mountain towards which the peons strain and stumble under their burdens. Their clothes become ancillary as the viewer is struck by their effort and their plight, as he is led "to see nature with emotion" (Charlot March 1926). The work stimulates in the viewer the "yearning for justice" that inspired the Revolution. The "social-conscious undercurrents" (*San Carlos* 58) invest the mural with a seriousness and thus intensity that transcend genre painting.

The artists were conscious of their own historical role in reconstruction, considering their work a contribution to the larger movement. In his first mural, *Massacre in the Main Temple*, Charlot depicted himself along with Leal, Rivera, his mason, Luis Escobar, and a child representing the future. On the completion of Rivera's *Creation*, he prophesied "lay processions, guidebook in hand, gaping in awe at the Old Master."[141] Charlot started collecting documents and artworks related to what he considered an important art historical movement. Rivera portrayed himself with colleagues at the top of the stairwell in the Ministry of Education.

In adopting historical and social painting, the muralists were consciously opposing the School of Paris:

> Respectful of Paris, we were reluctant in the 1920s to defy its reigning artistic idols, originality and personality, and even less eager to commit the then cardinal sin of telling stories in pictures. (April 1949: 142)

In January 1928, Pierre Matisse, then running a gallery in New York City, said to Anita Brenner: "that Mexican art illustrates history and he doubts whether they can get away from that" (Glusker 2010: 568). The question, as discussed above, remains.

The 1920s connection between *costumbres* and historical painting can be traced to its origin in Fernando Leal's *Campamiento Zapatista* (1921-1922): "Con esta obra, Leal se anticipó a los 'tres grandes', al introducir la temática popular en los muros y al conferle un seso de denuncia" 'With this work, Leal anticipated the Three Greats in introducing the popular thematic on the walls and conferring on it a sense of denunciation.'[142] Leal wrote that he had become dissatisfied with little landscapes done from nature and began to be interested in problems of composition (Leal 1990: 173). Charlot was working closely with Leal at this time and recalled:

> What he was doing was beginning to compose, we could say, in an artificial way with bodies, and that also was something different from the impressions that the other people were painting. I come back to his picture, which I think is called *The Zapatistas*, in which…and I realize now that he was right. At the time, he told me how bold he was in making those artificial constructions of bodies. Of course, for me that was, seemed natural, but compared with the things around him that were more like direct impressions, he certainly was standing, anyhow, to something that would have a certain, what I would call classical, monumental quality. (Interview May 18, 1971)

Leal picked a large canvas and created a composition with multiple figures. He was using the regular EPAL models who appear in Charlot's woodcuts of the time—including Luz and Trinidad—in their folk costumes. Luz is in her Sunday best and in a typical EPAL pose holding a pot. But these were real people, not generalized Mexican Indians (Debroise 1984: 53). The scene could have been merely *costumbrista*, of peasants at rest. Since Zapatistas wore ordinary clothing, their enemies found them hard to distinguish among the rural population. In López y Fuentes' *Tierra*, an army officer is unsure although "Ellos tienen

toda la facha de los zapatistas: enormes sombreros, blusa y ancho calzón" 'They had all the appearance of the Zapatistas: enormous sombreros, blouse, and wide trousers' (1949: 89; 96). By adding *Zapatista* to the title, Leal turned a *costumbrista* subject into a historical one and endowed it with a new and powerful set of emotions, associations, experiences, and ideas: "En aquel momento, era yo el primero que pintaba una escena de la Revolución" 'At that moment, I was the first who was painting a scene of the Revolution' (Leal 1990: 174). The title also transforms the image into narrative: the Zapatistas are camping while on a campaign.

Charlot supported Leal's claim of priority:

> he was at the time working on a large picture connected with the Revolution of Zapatistas, that is, the men and one or two women. It was always the same model, Luciana, who was posing for Bellas Artes, for the School of Fine Arts. And that picture again, in retrospect, has become an important thing because it's the first picture on a revolutionary subject of any importance, really, and it is now in the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City as a sort of a pioneer picture. All the pictures, and all the frescoes, and all the murals representing the Revolution—that came later on. Rivera and the others came after that rather large oil painting by Fernando Leal. (Interview October 18, 1970)

> Leal had done that before I came, and that is…I think he is perfectly right when he says he was the first to do a picture of any importance based directly on the Revolution. I think that's quite true. And when I saw that picture, which he had nearly finished in the studio at the time that I entered his studio—I saw it in '67, was it? in my retrospective there at the Museum of Modern Art—I realized that he had been quite right. That was the first thing that was with an affinity and a certain sympathy for the Revolution. He was not, of course, as theatrical as either Rivera or Orozco—but the first steps are always a little hesitant—but there it was. (Interview May 14, 1971)

Although his contemporary colleagues criticized the work, its influence was immediate. Even before it was finished, Vasconcelos saw it on a visit to EPAL and invited Leal to paint a mural of his choice of subject and technique in the Preparatoria (Leal 1990: 174 f.).

A sentence from Charlot's interview of May 14, 1971, is surprising in light of the stereotype of the mural movement: "That was the first thing that was with an affinity and a certain sympathy for the Revolution." That is, the artists' positive images of the peasant Revolution and especially of Zapata should not be taken for granted. Perhaps the earliest published description of Leal's painting, Charlot and Blanchard's "La Jeune Peinture Mexicaine," preserves an impression of the time:

> *Fernando Leal*, qui est peut-être le plus intéressant pour nous, car il nous raconte la vie des rancheros et des brigands. Halte dans la montagne (reproduction), corps au

> repos moirés de la sueur des combats, groupes barbares que raie l'arabesque cuivrée d'un corps de femme fauve. (Blanchard-Charlot September 16, 1922: 18)
>
> '*Fernando Leal*, who is perhaps the most interesting for us, because he describes for us the life of ranchers and brigands. *Halt in the Mountain* (illustration), bodies at rest, glistening with the sweat of combat, barbaric groups crossed by the bronze arabesque of the body of a tawny woman.'

Brigands and *barbaric* express the common impression of the contemporary man-in-the-street, especially in Mexico City, not far from the sites of the reported and alleged Zapatista atrocities.[143] When the Zapatistas entered Mexico City, my relative, Antonio Martínez del Campo, then a little boy, poked his head above the roof balustrade to watch, and a Zapatista rider pulled out his revolver and shot at him.[144] People who had belonged to groups opposed to Zapata—like Vasconcelos and Orozco—continued their hostility. Charlot wrote of Orozco:

> The painter of the famous picture, *Zapatistas*, now in the Museum of Modern Art and of the equally formidable *Zapata*—that Alma Reed extolls as the heroic portrait of a hero—contacted his models only as they were brought in daily as prisoners, and shot.[145]

In the early post-Revolution period, obtaining accurate information on Zapata and the Zapatistas required research.[146] Leal's painting was truly pioneering.

The appraisal or reappraisal of Zapata demanded an interpretation of the Revolution as a whole, a process that required time and mental distance. From such a vantage point, Zapatismo was clearly a major factor. The Revolution had been fought more by rural peasants than by urban or industrial workers (Rutherford 1971: 186 f.). Zapatismo had ideals and a political and social platform—including the redistribution of land—that was being realized successfully as part of reconstruction under Obregón.[147] Zapatismo thus appeared more responsible than Pancho Villa, who began to represent the violent willfulness of a warlord.[148]

The immediate motivation for the positive reappraisal of Zapata was that Obregón needed Zapatista political support (Bailey 1979: 88). The means of reappraisal was to follow the Mexican practice of canonizing heroes for local and national identity: "The metamorphosis which turned into heroes men hunted as outlaws only a short while before was in progress, and art provided a potent vehicle for patriotic propaganda."[149] Zapata had been assassinated on April 10, 1919. The rehabilitation program began in 1921, on the second anniversary of his death, and culminated on his being declared a national hero in 1931.[150] The problems were considerable:

> The propagandists needed to make Zapata seem admirable and likeable "as a person" in order to overcome the prevailing negative image of him. Only in Morelos and adjacent areas did Zapata have a strong following and real popularity… (O'Malley 1986: 47)

Zapata was romanticized (using the screen image of Valentino) and surrounded with religious imagery. However, the rehabilitation was only partially successful: "Despite the long effort to make Zapata a part of the official hagiography, he is still a vital and unfixed political symbol."[151]

Rivera had lived through the Revolution in Paris and thus had no experience of Zapata as a living menace. His 1915 *Zapatista Landscape*—a title assigned later— reveals its distance from its subject by its use of conventional touristic objects (Oles 2016). Rivera had no difficulty painting five positive images of Zapata to support the program of his rehabilitation (Brunk 2008: 5963, 81, 180).

Orozco's difficulties with the subject of Zapata and Zapatistas reveal the freshness of the Revolutionary wounds. Orozco had been a participant:

> So this is a revolution seen by a man who has made the revolution. And again, that is very much a Mexican point of view. So when we look at the revolutionary pictures of the Mexicans, they are so different from what people think a revolution is like…
>
> they carry the flag, but the flag has nothing about it heroic.[152]

Moreover, Orozco had been a Carrancista and thus an enemy of the Zapatistas. Depicting his former enemies could involve not only digesting sights but changing sympathies, seeing Zapata and his followers in a positive light. Many Carrancistas like Germán List Arzubide made the transition (Brunk 2008: 76 f.). Orozco never managed this and came late to his famous Zapatista subjects. The soldiers in his moving Preparatoria murals wear regular army uniforms. He first abords Zapatista subjects in his *Horrores* 'horrors' of war series that were prompted by Brenner's tricking him with a pretended Yankee collector.[153] His subsequent oils and prints were concessions to the positive opinion of Zapata in the United States.[154] But although his images of Zapatistas can be arguably neutral—as *Las Soldaderas* (1926) and *Parade of Zapatistas* (1931)—his *Zapata* himself (1930) is horrific. The viewer cowers before him as do his frantic victims.

Orozco had experienced the horrors of war, and this may be the reason he took so long to depict them, working first through a long series of symbolic subjects. Those who have endured battle are notoriously reticent about what they have experienced, and combat and atrocity scenes were comparatively rare in the Mexican art of the early 1920s, although films and photographs were full of them. Muralists focused on the social causes of the Revolution and the subsequent reconstruction. The Revolution itself was often depicted in marginal incidents like saying goodbye to family, marching, and so on. Combat and atrocity seemed too painful to depict, especially when so many Mexicans had vivid, real images in their memories. The same phenomena can be found in Vietnamese cinema. But once Orozco started to depict that trauma, the result was a long series of unusual power. The viewer feels the pain the subject caused the artist. Again, a particular set of subjects inspired works of exceptional intensity.

4.5. STYLE

Style has been mentioned often above as it is inseparable from subject and purpose. As such, style presented a daunting challenge to the muralists. Charlot described Rivera's "fierce inner conflicts—exploding at times into outward crisis—that marked his conversion to fresco and to Mexico" (1952 Ramos: 139). Siqueiros wrote that he was "positivamente paralizado" 'positively paralyzed' in searching for an appropriate style.[155] Of Orozco, Charlot wrote: "As dynamic as the pyrotechnics of Mexico's revolutions with which Orozco's name is linked, the story of this intimate esthetic drama remains to be told" (July 22, 1956).

For Charlot, the search for style was a fundamental to the movement as he wrote in his "Plans for Work" in his prospectus for *MMR*:

> 3, Ch. XIV, Educ, 2nd patio: "Importance of this work for the formation of the Mexican style."
>
> Ch XXIII "Characteristics of the Mexican Style"
>
> "Regardless of different moods and personalities, the artists of the movement had much in common. An attempt at defining this common denominator, known today as the Mexican style."
>
> Ch XXIV "Mexican Apport to Modern Art"
>
> "The painters acknowledged their debt to Europe, to the School of Paris in particular. They in turn proposed new values that transcended the national frontiers. Technical and esthetic forms in the art of today that can be traced to them."
>
> Ch XXV "[Mexican Art Today, Its Future] Epilogue"
>
> "The same artists in their present evolution. Stylistic and iconographic prolongations and departures." (Writings Related to *MMR*; Short Writings)

Style was important also in Charlot's archeological work, from such basic tasks as dating and establishing historical sequences to understanding the Maya worldview.[156]

4.5.1. INDIVIDUAL STYLES AND PROBLEMS

As will be discussed below, a style or a set of styles eventually developed that became recognizable and influential in all of Mexico, Latin America, and the United States.[157] At the time, viewers were struck more by the general novelty of this national or communal style than by the artists' individual differences. Charlot's woodcuts could be mistaken for Leal's and his mural *Cargadores* for Rivera's work (*El Democrata*, March 2, 1924, Clipping 14a). Indeed, Tamayo and others could complain of a stylistic dictatorship.[158] The next generations would confront the mural movement itself as an almost overpowering stylistic influence, as Brenner wrote of Máximo Pacheco: "he began a la Diego, but now has gotten his stride and is himself" (2010: 503).

But just as time and distance enabled viewers to differentiate the artists of the Italian Renaissance, so the individuality of the Mexican artists eventually became recognizable. Each artist followed his personal trajectory expressive of his inclinations, each faced the perennial problems of style in his own way, and many differences erupted into arguments.[159] Carlos Mérida moved from hieratic *costumbrista* figures to a more abstract style that prompted him to decline mural work.

In the second court of the Ministry of Education, Amado de la Cueva painted two masterful frescoes—*El Torito* (ca. September 1923) and *Los Santiagos* (September 1923)—in the national or communal style. He then changed his style radically to decorate the assembly hall of the University of Guadalajara, finished in 1926:

> Amado bravely returned to pre-Hispanic spatial and perspective conventions. Amado used painted objects as a kind of pictorial alphabet, to be mentally rearranged into syllables, words, and phrases. (*MMR* 311; 309–312).

Amado decorated the walls of the former chapel as if it were a secular church with communist symbols replacing Catholic ones. The large, stocky figures in elegant, dark earth colors line the walls like saints, sometimes turning slightly towards the former rear location of the altar. Their geometrized, hieratic figures are quickly absorbed as realistic by the viewer, who supplies mentally the background depth implied by the frontal depictions. The whole is animated by a social fervor as intense as the religious one for which the chapel was originally built. Amado's death the day after the scaffold was dismantled destroyed a promising future.

Fermín Revueltas had perhaps the most varied stylistic career. In 1921, he produced vanguard works of "geometrismo" 'geometrism' and "cubofuturismo" 'cubofuturism' (Zurián 2002: 22 f.). In contrast, for his 1923 encaustic *Homage to the Virgin of Guadalupe*, "Revueltas based his mural on the fat stroke and candent color of *pulquería* painting" (Charlot Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut). Next, Revueltas was influenced by Siqueiros' "'amarres' plásticos" 'plastic "attachments,"'—discussed above—in his 1923–1924 symbolic mural at the Escuela de Ferrocarrileros, which survives only in photographs.[160] In his two oil murals of 1932— *En Defensa de la Patria* and *Morelos en Apatzingán*— Revueltas successfully created monumental historical painting in a distinctive modernist style, which could have been developed as a strong alternative to the styles of the other muralists.[161] Curiously, in his 1934 fresco *Alegoría de la Producción*, Revueltas reverted to a style that is almost a parody of Dieguismo.[162] He also designed a most impressive stained glass window.[163] Charlot admired and promoted Revueltas' work and regretted the alcoholism that impeded his production and eventually destroyed him.[164]

Orozco started as a cartoonist with an extreme style and much variety of subject matter and genre detail.[165] Commissioned as a muralist, he adopted a style that he considered Classical but was in fact idiosyncratic.[166] After a hiatus, Orozco returned to his walls with historical subjects treated in a more realistic style.[167] Finally, in the United States and Mexico, he combined the three strains of his previous work in stylistically disunited works with symbolic subjects.[168]

Siqueiros, like Rivera, started with a mural that was Classical both in subject and style. Based on Masaccio's Brancacci Chapel, *The Spirit of the Occident Descending upon the Americas* (finished July 1923) featured a female allegorical figure of European type.[169] On the left wall, Siqueiros then painted a file of Mexican women moving in profile, resembling the Greek women of classical art to whom they are often compared in the literature. Siqueiros then began to feel the stylistic and thematic pull of the group dynamic: "the strong and slow current that swept the artist back from Florence to Teotihuacán" (*MMR* 205). The result was the same as with Rivera, described below: "Having unloaded in his first panel an accumulated European baggage, Siqueiros turned, in the second half of 1923, toward Mexican sources" (*MMR* 204). The ultimate result was his first great mural, *Burial of a Worker* of 1924.

Rivera's stylistic development is of primary importance for the history of the mural movement. I provide only a personal sketch here. Rivera was a prodigy, and his early works impressed officials and patrons sufficiently to send him first to San Carlos and then to Europe. I find his surviving paintings from this period hard to study because of over cleaning. Around 1912, Rivera became a Cubist and a contentious figure within the movement.[170] Appraisals of his Cubist artwork range from positive to negative: formulaic, deft, with "no signs of an original vision."[171] The consensus then and now is that Rivera was a solid Cubist of the second rank.

My own impression after studying a number of Rivera's Cubist paintings was that he was not comfortable or fulfilled in his Cubist work. He was able to deploy his intellectualism and geometric composition, but his cool blues and grays, spikey straight lines, and spare content appear emotionally constrained, the work of a good jobber. This is particularly clear when his brush warms up to pinks and oranges, soft curves, and profusion. In some drawings, he even rounds his forms with a little shading at the edges. All these traits can be found in his previous and later work.[172] Like Picasso, Rivera could paint anything, but he painted certain subjects in certain styles with more comfort and enjoyment, and thus effect. Similarly, his brush warms up when he is responding to the person whose portrait he is painting. Anita Brenner was only partly right when she wrote of Rivera's execution: "there is no trance. It is all worked out mentally beforehand and the execution of it is pure craft."[173] Craft does not exclude emotion.

By 1921, Rivera had moved deliberately through a number of styles, including San Carlos academism, Spanish moderns, Impressionism, Cézanne and Post-Impressionism, and Cubism.[174] He was now leaving Cubism and also, I would argue, that movement's almost exclusive preoccupation with style and esthetic exploration.[175] For instance, Rivera had strong social sympathies, but Siqueiros found his Paris work completely separated from social problems (1996: 115). Leaving Paris for Mexico, easel painting for murals, an elite audience for a popular one, involved a reinvention of himself as an artist. Thus he needed to touch his bases: Italy and the previous art history of Mexico up to the latest murals.

The stakes were high, and Rivera could not play them with the brashness of youth. In 1926, Brenner reported, the middle-aged Rivera "Says he has only at the most ten years left in which to paint and wants to paint what he knows and what he is" (Glusker 2010: 129). Also, by moving to Mexico, Rivera risked disappearing from the primary world art scene. He was well aware how quickly in Paris the

unfashionable becomes the inadmissible; how unforgiving orthodoxy is of the unsubmissive. Thus his personal difficulty in being the leader in fields required by the situation but forbidden by Paris: "his cubist-trained conscience could hardly stomach, at times, the resurrection of didactic painting that surged as an aftermath of the Revolution" (*AA* II: 235). His dilemma was how to meet the Mexican situation without completely alienating Paris.

Rivera's Mexican trajectory began with one of his greatest accomplishments. In *Creation*, he demonstrated the relevance of Cubism and Parisian experimentation to muralism. He then worked with his industrious eclecticism—using everything he found in Mexico—towards a style that was not so much original as comfortable and handy. In accord with his Mexican task, his interest shifted from stylistic exploration to communication with a large audience. This played to his strengths; his personal preferences—warmth, roundness, and profusion—were attractive and helped create an accessible style. A second-rank Cubist, perhaps, but a first-rate artist, Rivera needed the right situation to bloom. Like Vasari and the Carraccis, his genius was to absorb the experiments of others and apply them to monumental commissions to which he applied himself with admirable diligence. Rivera was the Le Brun of the Mexican Renaissance, not the Poussin.

Largely because of its eclecticism, Rivera's developed new style was marked by stylistic disunity. Rivera was certainly capable of a unified style, as seen in his Cubist works. In Mexico, beside his regular style, Rivera did continue to pursue specific stylistic problems on a small scale. For instance, his illustrations of the *Popol Vuh* are much more unified stylistically than his use of codex-style figures in his Ministry of Education murals, as seen above (Morales 2000: 124–141). But his new disunity was a sign that style was no longer his main preoccupation. He adopted a rough and ready approach and used stylistic shortcuts that worked for him and his monumental tasks. As seen above, Charlot described Rivera's placing of Aztec-based figures in an Italian perspective.[176] In his 1930–1931 Cuernavaca fresco, *History of Cuernavaca and Morelos*, Rivera posed the figure of Zapata in the communal style next to a horse based on Uccello. Rivera's untitled stairwell mural in the Ministry of Education, finished in 1925, has long been used as an example of stylistic disunity and borrowing. On April 10, 1926, Brenner wrote in her journal:

> It seems to me, however, that he has descended since the Preparatoria. From the splendor of geometry to the sentiment of the picturesque—Cubism to Gauguin. (Glusker 2010: 129)

Charlot listed some borrowings:

> Next came the sea islands, with neoclassical females strangely reminiscent of Puvis de Chavannes' "Vision Antique." One entered the diagonal of the stairs with scenes of Tehuantepec, bathers, and a boar hunter. In a jungle, of which the *cueva* of the auditorium was the prototype, sat Xochipilli, God of Flowers, a loan, as it were from the National Museum of Archaeology… (*MMR* 297)

That is, Rivera used the Aztec statue just as he had the figures he derived from codices, as described above: it is placed in stylistic isolation from the rest of the picture.

Rivera was aided in his stylistic disunity by his facility in imitating styles, his "alarmante mimetismo" 'alarming mimetism.'[177] Indeed, disunity can already be seen in Rivera's Cubist *Retrato de Ramón Gómez de la Serna* of 1915, with its realistic woman's head in the top left corner and realistic revolver on the bottom edge. Rivera was always comfortable with eclecticism.

Creation, discussed below, initiates Rivera's Mexican work in a disunited style. Like the African-based faces in Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the niche section announces Rivera's new stylistic direction after his trip to Tehuantepec.[178] Because of its borrowings from early liturgical artworks that Rivera saw in Italy, several writers have described *Creation* as Byzantine: "de gusto clásico, pero añadiendo aureolas y fondos dorados, de gusto bizantino" 'of Classical taste, but adding haloes and gilded backgrounds of Byzantine taste.'[179] There was a movement called Neo-Byzantine, which Charlot knew from its use in Paris churches (e.g., Pupil 2000: 41). Charlot himself does not use the term pejoratively of *Creation*, but sees Byzantine influence as a bridge towards Rivera's later subjects:

> I said Rivera's *allegorical* subject matter most important for him, but has been largely ignored. People only look at *work* subjects, etc. JC agreed. He said Rivera was most impressed by Byzantine subjects; that was his turning point from pictures done for *no* audience (Cubism) to ones done for mass audience. (Tabletalk June 19, 1971)

Because Rivera appropriated many elements from his colleagues, he was often accused of plagiarism.[180] Brenner and Orozco looked at "Giotto copies and saw how amazingly and cleverly Diego has swiped the compositions."[181] Orozco was a recognized target of Rivera's borrowings.[182] From Charlot's *Massacre*, Rivera took the spears of the attacking Spaniards for his National Palace stairwell (Schmeckebier 1939: 140). From Charlot's murals in the Ministry of Education, Rivera used a number of elements as well.[183] Colleagues and contemporaries recognized Rivera's practice. To Orozco's son, Carlos Pellicer said of Rivera, "Esta pintura tiene mucha alma…mucha almanaque!" 'This painting has much *alma* 'soul'…much almanac!' (Clemente Orozco V., April 7, 2006, personal communication). Some of Rivera's colleagues were indignant at his borrowings. Charlot's attitude is explained, I believe, by his comments on Raphael's plagiarizing Michelangelo: Michelangelo need not have worried—his style was his own and he could not be hurt by Raphael.[184]

Rivera's first mural *Creation* has generally been judged poor, especially in comparison with his later work in the communal or national style of the movement.[185] Even Vasconcelos was disappointed. He arranged a trip outside of Mexico City to repatriate Rivera mentally and urged him to consider less universal and more nationalist subjects.[186] Rivera had intended to please Vasconcelos with the hierarchical, Neo-Platonic subject of *Creation* and with its connection to Montenegro's *El Árbol de la Vida*, as discussed above. Happy now to follow Vasconcelos' latest views, Rivera followed his direction in his next works.

Creation should, however, be judged on its own merits, and its stylistic difference from the later communal style should not obscure the impact and influence it had on the other artists. What impressed them immediately was the hefty monumentality and three-dimensional solidity of the figures, a marked contrast to the work of Montenegro and the other Nacionalistas. Moreover, with its brilliant encaustic and gold leaf, *Creation* made a splendid proclamation to the public. *Creation* was the first mural that felt like one. Secondly, *Creation* was a truly mural composition, with compositional devices that placed it solidly into its surroundings, as Charlot analyzed in his fifth lecture of *Pictures and Picture-Making* (Disney lectures). As such, *Creation* was a model as well as an inspiration for the other muralists. Charlot defended Rivera's work when it was attacked and wrote a long eulogy of it, *XX Proses Suivant la Psychoplastie de D. M. Rivera A L'usage des Aveugles et des Gens Du Monde 1923*.[187] Siqueiros argued forcefully that although other murals may have been done earlier, *Creation* was the first in a truly mural style.[188]

The style and sources of *Creation* have been much discussed. Indeed, its achievement is recognized more easily by looking backwards to its historical lineage than forwards to the future of the mural movement. Rivera's Cubist past was recognized and confirmed by the artist: "'If I was a Cubist then,' he has said, 'I am ten times as much a Cubist to-day.'"[189] At the time *Creation* and Rivera's later frescoes were painted, they represented a synthesis of previous art experimentation. Walter Pach wrote: "They are of great importance as being the first works of large scale to be done by a man who has run the full gamut of the modern evolution."[190] He felt, as did Charlot, that *Creation* realized the mural potential of Cubism: "Constructive art…initiated by Cezanne, made possible the great decorations for which the preceding generation hoped in vain."[191] By demonstrating that monumental, didactic painting could be legitimate according to the strictest standards of the last European generations, Rivera had inaugurated a new period in art history and a new possibility for the young artists:

> when he was instrumental in welding together cubism and mural painting on a vast scale, when he adapted the borrowed means to their forgotten function, and especially when he joined anew abstract means and didactic ends, Rivera was truly a pioneer. (*MMR* 136)

Contemporaries also saw the similarities between the style of *Creation* and early twentieth-century Neoclassicism, the successor of Cubism.[192] Art historians have continued to relate *Creation* to that movement.[193] Siqueiros as Araujo used Neoclassicism as a validation of the early Mexican murals. I myself believe that Rivera might have found emotional support in the idea that he was considered part of a European movement.[194] Nonetheless, Charlot maintained that Rivera and the other muralists were Classical rather than Neoclassical.[195] In a set of unpublished notes on the importance of *Creation* in its modern art context, Charlot developed his view:

> The Amphiteatro was well received. That Maples Arce, a "futurist" poet was chosen as one of the speakers, shows that people were impressed by the extravagance of the whole works, as compared to natural appearances, rather than by the discipline it bespoke. "Excelsior" voiced the average feeling "….muerto de risa"

~~The first~~ The relationship of the pix with Parisian esthetic is obvious—and this connotation was lost on Mexicans who knew ~~cubism through~~ cubism only be [*sic*] hearsay. The first original cubist works had been show [*sic*] only — months before by Walter Pach, well-chosen prints by Villon, Picasso, – – – – Revueltas had painted a few pictures of cubistic filiation.

But the picture rooted deeply in the esthetic discussions of Paris—is an important witness in what Salmon has baptized "l'affaire Rivera." At that very moment, certain cubists were cautiously attempting a return to subject-matter. Léger was troubled by the dilemma of ~~cubist~~ geometric means to represent non geometric bodies, human bodies that he arranged in "classical" pyramidal compositions. Picasso ——

The most definite sommersault [*sic*] and closer to Rivera's own trend was that made by Severini both towards clear reading of subject-matter and towards mural painting —His article on fresco – – –" "…housepainter."

Though his neo-cubist decorations in the swiss churches of — — , was [*sic*] not to come until — he had already decorated in 1921 the "Salon des masques" — — — — — ~~in true fresco~~.

Those pictures, however important in their true fresco technique, were small and cluttered w. details and more a renunciation of the cubist language than the later ones —

~~As mural paintings~~, their small scale ~~and~~ close pt of view and indifferent subject matter weakened their importance as signposts towards monumental ptg.

Rivera's A. in scope is such that it matures and 'makes click' the different trends that floated somewhat aimlessly outside the orthodox cubist doctrine.

The most important is this return to "peinture d'histoire" to a carefully chosen, intellectually complex didactic content. It raises sharply the old distinction between still-life and peinture d'histoire. Cocteau, as apologist of the cubists, said that the painting of today — between chair molding and table, that is that 'still-life', a neutral subject matter, was the peak of true art.

R. rejoins here Davi[d] through Ingres, proposes dictatorial principles of nobility in the subject-matter of art, reminiscent of a Lebrun [sic]. The language itself, derived of the cubist — shows puristic means that do not yield or weaken for descriptive purposes.

To find in France, an affirmation of similar scope and strength along the same lines, ~~one ha~~ a decade will elapse, with the "Biological Life" of Ozenfant begun 1931.

Orozco once remarked sharply that art and the history of art are two distinct phenomena. Let us say that the A., however awkward, is of extreme importance as an

> historical landmark, a transition works, hung between those incompatible — the pic. as an organic entity answerable to itself only in the cubist way and the pic. as a didactic exposition w. moral implications and teaching responsibilities.
>
> earlier version: Let us say that the A. is of extreme importance as an historical landmark, that its very awkwardness is the true mark of the transition…

This statement clarifies Charlot's note in his unpublished 1939 "Schmeckeb. errors": "R. after Picasso and Severini in neo-classic figures—p. 49." Schmeckebier had written that Creation was "directly related to the contemporary monumental neoclassic figure style of Severini and Picasso" (1939: 49). Charlot's objection was that the works of those artists had been too weak to be real precedents:

> It was not until the next decade that the School of Paris produced a didactic work complex enough to meet the Mexican challenge of 1922, with Amédée Ozenfant's "Vie Biologique," dated 1931–36. (*MMR* 138)

Indeed, no European Neoclassical works achieved the strength of the Mexican muralists. Rivera had contacted his Classicism directly from his study at San Carlos, from his long experience of Colonial art, from his vast knowledge of art history, from his trip to Italy, and even from its reflection in popular arts like *retablos*.

Moreover, Rivera's work in *Creation* and later had none of the distance, irony, obliqueness, playfulness, pastiche, and merely surface decorativeness of Neoclassicism.[196] As seen in Volume 1, Charlot's attitude towards art was the antithesis of the Neoclassicist pose, which he detested.[197] Pastiche was characteristic of the bad church art Charlot and his fellow liturgical artists were opposing. An elitist, superior attitude was inhumane. Frivolity was a deliberate ignoring of the experience of World War I and the duties it imposed on the survivors. In Mexico, artists took seriously their responsibilities in Post-Revolution reconstruction.

Charlot himself related his work to Classical art from his own experience of it without any need of mediation by Neoclassicism. Moreover, his idea of Classicism was not to take an already developed style and apply it to novel purposes. Classicism was the perennial idea of building a style from the foundations of experience:

> The Greek aesthetic canon—the body naked or draped—marks the limits of this basic haptic world, permanently opposed to the passing visual one made, then as now, of variety, particularities and disorder.
>
> The Amerindian artist, with eyes closed, also took stock of himself as the one basic subject matter of art. (*AA* II: 67)

Charlot was practicing this kind of Classicism in his new stylistic search in Mexico.

Similarly, as seen above, the Siqueiros/Araujo description of "La estética CLÁSICA o ARQUITECTURAL" 'The CLASSICAL or ARCHITECTURAL esthetic' is more Classical than Neoclassical. Indeed, the emphasis on perennial Classical laws could include the latest Neoclassicism, so

similarities between that school and the muralists work could legitimately be drawn. The Araujo articles reflect the discussions of Siqueiros and Charlot. If other writings and interviews are also reflections, the muralists were discussing Classical artists like Giotto, David, Cézanne, and so on, more than Severini. These discussions were serious enough to create in 1923 temporary parties of Classicists—Siqueiros, Orozco, and Alva de la Canal—and "the addicts of Indianism"—Rivera and probably Leal and Revueltas.[198] Charlot was amused by the view of Classicism that produced works indistinguishable from those of their opponents:

> After reading Orozco on classical canons, contemporaneous descriptions of the frescoes come as a surprise. To the eye of most outsiders, the ground floor was filled with giant rust-red freaks that a reporter deemed "Apocalyptic monsters" that "breed terror." Professional critics concurred: these figures "make knees buckle with fright." (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

Indeed, in 1926 debates a few years later, Rivera was identified as the Classicist and Orozco as the revolutionary (Glusker 2010: 204)! Rivera's Classicism resulted in his being accused of academicism by those who disliked his later work or indeed all his work.[199]

> Charlot was not eclectic himself but admired the quality in Rivera:
>
> Among the figures of the first rank in contemporary art, Rivera stands out as the more objective master, meaning perhaps that his head consistently retains a priority over his heart. This also explains why Rivera is unashamedly an eclectic, who backs his own style with chips out of a history of art that he knows and appreciates better than many a scholar. (*AA* II: 231)

Charlot admired artists who knew their art history.[200] He also knew that some great artists like Raphael had been more stylistic borrowers than innovators (Tabletalk August 12, 1978). Eclecticism was just a facet of Rivera as a particular type of great artist. As stated earlier, Charlot proposed to the Time-Life art series that he write a *World of Rivera* in which he would use the established format to illustrate Rivera's pictures along with black and white marginal illustrations of their sources (Tabletalk 1974?). Rivera's use of sources made him a particularly interesting subject for study: "If any young man is looking for someone to spend his life studying, it should be Rivera" (Tabletalk Mid-July 1971). Rivera's developed style allowed for his eclecticism: "Rivera, so promptly dismissed today as a mere story teller, will come into his own as a stylist."[201] Charlot felt that Rivera had the capacity and energy to pull his sources together, and he admired his powers of absorption, as he wrote of the figure of Science in *Creation*:

> Elle se suffit à soi-même
> Ramenant d'un geste sur sa poitrine,
> assimilant pour sa plénitude
> le spectacle renouvelé des mondes et la réalités des essences.
>
> 'Science suffices for herself,
> Gathering with a gesture to her bosom,

Assimilating for her fullness,
The ever renewed spectacle of worlds and the reality of essences.[202]

Rivera's power of absorption was matched by his capacity for production. Charlot appreciated the old-fashioned qualities of Rivera as an artist (March 1952). Rivera was colder and more studied than sizzling (Tabletalk early 1970s). But he was a model of "hard work, good craft and common sense."[203] Charlot told me:

> Rivera's great discovery was that an artist could be a plodder, could go to work twelve hours a day, could keep working hours. This was a great thing and a good model for the younger artists. It also helped JC go on with same ideas he had in Paris: artisanship.[204]

In working in a non-unified style, Rivera was following a contemporary European practice. Picasso was the most famous proponent of eclecticism and stylistic disunity (Silver 1989: 133 ff.). He even went so far as to display his repertoire in a version of an Enlightenment gallery painting, except that all the depicted paintings were his in his different styles (Silver 1989: 317). Klimt juxtaposed hyper decorative flat sections and realistic, three-dimensional flesh. Francis Bacon posed spatially indeterminable fleshy blobs inside a strict Italian perspective. In Disney and Japanese cartoons, two-dimensional figures cavort in front of lush, painterly backgrounds.[205] Disunity has become standard, and we are less sensitive to it than Charlot and his generation, who were formed by artists like Cézanne and Cubism. One of the worst results of this insensitivity is the destructive restoration of paintings by conservators with no cultivation in esthetic unity. Disunity has, however, proved a career advantage. Kenneth Silver reveals the calculation behind Picasso's stylistic decision: "committed to both his earlier aesthetic discoveries and to his own well-being, the only solution was to hedge his bets and play all ends against the middle" (1989: 135; also 144 f., 148, 310, 318 f., 352 f.). As seen above, surrealism attracted two audiences by using a conventional style for unconventional content. Unconcerned by stylistic unity, an artist can use both conventional and unconventional styles: Bacon's blobs attract esthetes and his Italian perspective reassures buyers.

A disunited style does have esthetic disadvantages. Very basically, the disunity can break the mood. In Picasso's 1907 *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the two faces on the left, based on African art, project a different mood than the one created by the two faces in the center. This reveals a second disadvantage: if the artist cannot provide the visual bridge between the two pairs of faces, the viewer certainly cannot. As a result, the viewer focuses on one pair of faces and marginalizes the other. As the viewer shifts from one pair to the other, the stylistic difference requires two antithetical mental adjustments; the brain shifts gears, as it were, to take in the different image. The viewer's immediate experience is thus as fragmented as the image, the degree of experiential fragmentation corresponding to the degree of stylistic. For instance, in Rivera's Cuernavaca fresco, described above, the viewer focuses either on Zapata or on his horse. Either way, the rest of the mural blurs into peripheral vision.

A good artist can use these "disadvantages" as "advantages." In *Demoiselles*, Picasso is making the point that each single painting of his is actually in a state of transition from his previous style to his

next. The stylistic disunity anticipates the difference between the contiguous periods. The viewer should, therefore, study his whole, changing career—the autobiographical through-line—rather than the single works that comprise it. Faced with the vast expanse of the stairwell wall of the National Palace, Rivera used problems of focus—caused by changes in style and scale—to divide it into sections for individual viewing. The whole does make an impression, but the viewer quickly focuses on the sections. The experience is similar to looking at a wall covered with small photographs.

Nonetheless, stylistic disunity does prevent the artist from exploiting certain virtues of a unified style: the mood is not broken and all the parts of the painting work together to intensify the final effect. Charlot strove to enable the viewer to perceive the whole mural in its setting before moving closer to the details. When he did compose a wall in discrete sections, like his 1953 *Commencement*, his reason was that the wall was placed so as to make total viewing difficult; the viewer had to pass along the wall to see it. Also, as seen through the history of art, a unified style can very well be used to depict conflict. Charlot's *Massacre* reveals such a style's advantage: the contending forces are pressed together without easy, stylistic release into separate spaces. They are fighting in one world to fill and dominate it.

The popularity of a disunited style is partly due to its expressiveness of certain world views that deny the possibility of defining a unified reality or even the existence of such a reality. The use of different styles expresses the varied, always partial and factitious images or models human beings devise for their understanding. Since that activity is arguably based in power relations, the different styles express also those contending forces. As described in Volume 1, Charlot's philosophical view was different: God created a unified world and the artist strives to understand and express that unity. Like a physical scientist, the artist is discovering an order through observation and reporting what he sees, making visible in his artwork what is ordinarily invisible. The artist endeavors to incorporate as much as he can into his vision, the spiritual dimension as well as the material. Maturing from childhood art with its unconnected objects, the artist seeks the connections between all things, the hidden geometric structure of the universe. Unity of style is based on the unity of reality. As a student of science as well as art, Charlot was aware of the mental activity that produced theoretical models and artistic styles. But the use of eclecticism, pastiche, and stylistic juxtapositions in one work made only the one point: the arbitrariness and artificiality of any style imposed by an artist on a subject. This ego-centered position needed to be balanced by an acknowledgment of the reality of the nature with which the artist and scientist works:

> in general, I think that nature remains the great instructor of the artist, and if we do without nature, the chance is that we're going to fall on our nose. That is what happened to some of the greatest names in modern American painting. So, it's always a sort of a security to hug a little closer nature and natural sights, rather than get away from them. There is a little vertigo when you leave natural sights, and well, I don't specially want to fall on my nose, that's all.
>
> …
>
> Yeah, that's a factor, but it's not a different factor from what I was saying. That is, you can make the portrait of a person or of a dog or of a tree. Each one is a mystery in the very real sense of the word. I don't think you have to go into theology for that,

> but simply the complexity of each one as a construction, and of course when it gets into motion, reasons, and so on, each one is a universe, and I don't want to summarize that particular universe into a few lines for the glorification of the artist. It seems to me I would lose so much, again, if I didn't hug very closely the natural, call it, phenomena. (Interview August 7, 1971)

An artist with this interest in the object, like Braque, creates a style, commits to it, and explores it. Art is, however, always exceptional in that it is never superseded and discarded like scientific theories or judged for quality by its content.

Beyond his own stylistic development, discussed below, Charlot appreciated aspects of style that he saw emerging in the group of muralists and their colleagues, as Anita Brenner recorded:

> Jean thinks, and I, that we are getting close on to a time of producing great art, because we are reaching, by our own social road, the ideal of simplicity—painting casting off its old molds and writing images, which are false. (Glusker 2010: 493; 495)

Simplicity accorded with his view of Classicism: "un cuadro de Poussin carece de todos los rasgos extremos que el *bourgeois* atribuye, quizás malévolamente, a la obra genial" 'a painting by Poussin lacks all the extreme traits that the *bourgeois* attributes, perhaps malevolently, to the genial work' (August 1945). Simplicity was also basic to his idea of artistic creation:

> when at work an artist should be absolutely simple and totally naive. To him, the lily of the valley must appear truly clothed in more splendor than Solomon in all his glory. (December 14, 1966)

As discussed above, the simplicity Charlot means is that achieved after a difficult path through complication.

Similarly, Charlot preferred quiet, unostentatious, balanced works. He felt he found this quality in the best work of the colleagues of his generation. That generation was benefiting from the battles won by the previous generation on behalf of stylistic freedom. That is, Charlot and his contemporaries were free to choose their style and type of art:

> Et ce choix, fait à froid, n'a pu être que raisonnable. Il nous a fallu opter pour la mesure, pour ce juste milieu qu'il est si facile de confondre avec la médiocrité. C'est ce qui explique que les bons tableaux qu'a pu jusqu'ici réaliser la jeune génération se ressemblent tous par une tenue presque sévère, par une façon de parler à mi-voix qui les distingue à première vue des coups de gueule de leurs aînés. Certes, il y a des manques, des inexpériences, des inhabiletés, mais l'essentiel même est reconquis, *cet esprit d'équilibre* qui fait ressembler ces œuvres à des gens bien portants de corps et d'esprit. (1924–1925)

> 'And this choice, done cold, could only be reasonable. We had to opt for measure, that just measure that is so easy to confuse with mediocrity. This is what explains that the good pictures that the young generation has been able to produce up to now all resemble each other by an almost severe bearing, by a way of speaking in a half-tone that differentiates them immediately from the full-throated cries of their elders. Certainly there are wants, inexperiences, awkwardnesses, but the essential itself has been reconquered, *this spirit of equilibrium* that makes these works resemble people healthy in body and mind.'

> 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…

> Para escapar de las obras de hábil oficio, pero sin espíritu (academismo), se cayó en las obras llenas de alma, pero sin oficio ("fauvismo"). "En arte, como en todo, la perfección debe residir en el equilibrio". Este fue el descubrimiento de los jóvenes actuales, que, cansados de las oscilaciones de sus mayores, se lanzaron hace muy poco tiempo a la busca de ese ansiado equilibrio, que siempre ha sido el legado de los períodos llamados "clásicos". (July 23, 1925)

> 'the painters, tired of the complexities and rancid condiments that mark the last periods of art, feel themselves attracted to healthier manifestations in order to purge themselves...

> 'To escape works of facile professionalism but without spirit (Academicism), they fell into works full of soul but without professionalism ("Fauvism"). "In art, as in all, perfection must reside in equilibrium." This was the discovery of the young artists of today, who, tired of the oscillations of their elders, launched themselves just a little while ago into the search for this longed-for equilibrium, which has always been the legacy of those periods called "Classical."'

Returning to Mexico in the 1940s, Charlot disliked the commissions in the Palacio de Bellas Artes, "pleno del trueno plástico de grandes murales mexicanos" 'full of the thunder of big Mexican murals'; "*Los tres grandes*" scream at the top of their lungs in a contest to see which can outshout the others."[206] Quiet works revealed an artist sure enough of himself to dispense with display (Tabletalk August 2, 2000). He once referred to the definition of a good actor as one who could walk past a window without breaking it. On October 21, 1933, Weston complained in his journal:

> Perhaps if I had selected the Chicago show, more of the hard, stronger items would have been included. Jean's tendency was to select the more subtle work. Did I mention that Jean selected this show? (1966: 278; also 276)

Fell argues that some muralists "abandona la serenidad italiana y evoluciona hacia un expresionismo cada vez más violento" 'abandoned Italian serenity and evolved towards an increasingly violent

expressionism' (1989: 424). But Charlot's *Massacre* is already violently expressionist, and he evolved towards a more subtle presentation. His description of his colleagues' work sounds more prescriptive than descriptive (see my discussion in Chapter 1).

Unity of style was essential for Charlot's work, which differentiated him from Rivera. For Charlot, stylistic disunity was a point for criticism as in the nineteenth-century Clavé school at San Carlos: "the admixture of Roman, German, and Catalan undercurrents brand it a potpourri of eclecticism" (*San Carlos* 112). Indeed, stylistic problems had resulted in disunity since early in the movement: "Montenegro siempre oscila de una tendencia a otra buscando quizás un sincretismo que no alcanza" 'Montenegro always oscillated between one tendency and another, searching perhaps a syncretism that he did not reach' (Debroise 1984: 36). Disunity continued in other artists besides Rivera: Tamayo's Picasso-style figures cuddle realistic watermelons; Gerzo's "abstract" planes are covered with realistic textures like marble.[207]

Besides Rivera, Orozco was for Charlot an important example of disunity: "Under its fierce unity, his thundering eloquence hides stylistic sources far-ranging in their eclecticism" (Charlot July 22, 1956). Charlot admired the individual unity of Orozco's three distinct modes—cartoon, symbolism, and Classical realism—while they were kept separate. He felt that Orozco's encounter in New York with a large number of new artworks came too late in his life to absorb them. Orozco's efforts to "modernize" his prints resulted in poor work. In my own opinion, Orozco's attempt in his New Social School murals to absorb those influences resulted in a simplistic unity that drained his art of its usual power. Having learned this lesson, Orozco developed an eclectic style whose elements were held together primarily by his great energy. Orozco's late work can be described and admired in the same terms as the eclectic styles of other modernists. For Orozco certainly the clash of styles expressed the conflicting forces he depicted; the use of nineteenth-century realism for rich people and devotional art for ecclesiastics comments acerbically on the history of art, and so on.

Charlot considered Orozco his opposite also on the problem of appropriateness. Whereas Charlot always sought the appropriate subject and style, Orozco regularly sought its opposite:

> I don't have a sense of social responsibility towards a public, at least in the way you put it. That is, in that sense I am not democratic. I wouldn't go to the public and ask them what they think of that thing and if it is correct for them or incorrect. I have that sense of responsibility in my desire to make things fit—a building or an occasion. That sense of fitness is something that is very strong in me, and I have a certain humility in relation to making the thing for the occasion, the thing that would fit. It's rather interesting that one of the things that bothers me in the work of Orozco is the contrary quality, that is, his desire to do something that is unfit. I was looking in Pomona, for example—I had the occasion of having a lunch or dinner in the dining room—and that monstrous gentleman flaunting his genitals at the diners was something absolutely unfit. And for Orozco, I am sure that was *his* idea of good art or great art—was unfitness. For me it's the other way around. It has to be fitness.

> There that means a lower voice than Orozco would use, certainly. It means an ultimate responsibility for the place in which the thing is put and the reason for the thing to exist at all. But I'm sorry to say, *not* in that democratic sense of asking the people what they think of it. In fact, I've never in my whole life, I think, asked anybody what they thought of what I was doing. I went, myself, through some mental conniption to answer the question of fitness, but when that is decided, I forget to ask the people if I'm right or wrong. I take it, in fact, as a fact that I must be right, having thought of it so much. So it's not quite that question of, let's say, doing, if I paint a bank, things so that the people who come to deposit their money will enjoy it and so on. It's another point of view, maybe, on a slightly higher level.[208]

Charlot described his own 1960 mural, *Village Fiesta*, in the dining room of Shaw Dormitory, Syracuse University:

> So I said, "I accept if I have the right to do just what I want and choose the subject matter that I want." So I went there. He said, "All right." I did a Mexican fiesta. For a long time I had wanted to do one of those village fiestas with girls dancing that I'll call malinches or *malintzins* in Indian with their little wooden swords and their rattles and so on. I have done many of these pictures of the subject but I wanted to do a mural of it. And I put it there on the wall of one of the dining rooms to the great astonishment of everybody concerned who asked me what relation there was between those little girls dancing and the University of Syracuse. Well, it was the dining room for the girls whose dormitory adjoined. So, I said that there were girls in the dining room and there were girls on the walls, and that was fine. Everybody like it-it has nice colors and is a pleasant thing to look at. (1961 Interview with Lesley and Hollis)
>
> They are perfectly right in saying that Orozco's work is more dramatic, but I just wanted to try for a little drama. I don't want people to cry while they are eating. Here in the dining hall, I like things to be appropriate. (1960 *Village Fiesta*: 5)

After visiting Hawai'i, Orozco's son Clemente wrote me:

> I specially appreciate the visit to your parents tomb and then his most poetical and revealing art, like a soothing balm or like a prayer. Alas if life were pure joy! Jean Charlot would have been its perfect interpreter. (April 14, 2006)

Fortunately, there are mansions for both appropriate and inappropriate artists in the heaven of art.

For Charlot, appropriateness had a broad range of application. Very basically, the medium had to be physically appropriate. For this reason, Charlot criticized Tadashi Sato's mosaic on the floor of the Hawai'i State Capitol: when people walked on it, the little tesserae broke or were dislodged, so that eventually the mosaic had to be restored at great cost and fenced off for its own protection. Charlot himself had proposed large tiles in his submission for the commission.

The subject had to be appropriate, as seen in Charlot's remarks on *Prometheus* above. Similarly, when I ridiculed the painting of loincloths on Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, Charlot retorted, "But some of them were very naked."

As a muralist, Charlot had strong feelings about the relation of an artwork to its place. To take a small example, as a child stamp collector in the early 1950s, I was preferring odd-shaped items, like triangles, to rectangular ones. My father said that they did not fit the envelopes as well. I remember the occasion as the first time I realized I should not evaluate an object in isolation but in its intended context. Similarly, Charlot disliked the Japanese garden at the Imin Center of the East-West Center, Honolulu, because it was designed to mask the beautiful Mānoa stream behind it. He said it was a mortal sin simply to impose a foreign decoration rather than to relate the building to the land and its history, both sources of power in Hawaiian thinking.

Whether natural or architectural, places are physically organized. An appropriate artwork will connect to that organization and engage it in the impact of the work. An inappropriate work will isolate itself and make itself the sole object of the viewer's focus. Charlot always used his geometric compositions to integrate his murals into their architectural context.[209] For instance, the spears in the *Massacre* reflect the angle of the stairs in front of them, so that the viewer will relate his effort of climbing or descending to the event in the fresco. Charlot could go further. His 1974 mural *The Relation of Man and Nature in Old Hawaii* is on a wall stretching from east to west: Charlot connected the eastern rising of the sun with birth and its western setting with death. Charlot thus treated the placement of a wall with the same respect with which he treated his materials: their proper use adds to the impact of the finished work. Besides its physical organization, a place has social, historical, and cultural connotations that influence the viewer's perceptions and expectations and thus his response to the artwork. Churches are religious, public buildings are social and historical, homes are domestic. An artist of Charlot's type will enlist the whole context—physical, emotional, and mental—in producing the impact of his work. Ultimately, for Charlot, appropriateness meant creating a mural to speak to its time and place.

Like Charlot's other preferences in style, appropriateness can be related to his philosophical view. Orozco's inappropriateness of subject and style was his expression of individualistic protest against the existing social order. Charlot's quest for appropriateness was part of his search for God's cosmic order. Appropriateness made visible the otherwise invisible harmony of nature and culture, which he sought in Mexico and Hawai‘i. When the setting and occasion were right—like those of the *Massacre* and *The Strike in Nu‘uanu* (1975) on the façade of the UPW union building—depicting the disturbance of order was appropriate.

4.5.2. THE NATIONAL OR COMMUNAL STYLE

Despite the strong, individual personalities of the artists, a national or communal style emerged in the early 1920s. The conditions or factors involved have been discussed in these last chapters. The time, the setting, the task, and eventually the medium, fresco, all pushed towards a communal style: "the better defined the personal idiosyncrasies of the artist, the more restricted the public that the art work

reaches" (*AA* II: 156). All these factors helped create a group spirit that impelled the artists to work together, contribute to the common effort, and learn from each other.[210]

Such a process is difficult to describe, and many historians of the Mexican movement and other group phenomena simplify the task by choosing a protagonist and grouping his colleagues around him. Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros have all been assigned such a role by their admirers. But each artist had to follow his own trajectory within a group movement, within a complex of problems and proposed solutions, and they did not move together or at the same pace. Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros all started with some brand of Classicism and then had to catch up to the thematic and stylistic pioneering of the younger artists. Each had to go through his individual development, his gestation of themes and style.[211]

Not all the influential artists were members of the group or proponents of the communal style. Mérida was an early model of rigorously uniting Indian subject matter to a Prehispanic-based style: "Merida was the first to bring to the Americas an esthetic which was wholly forged in our century."[212] Goitia, another pioneer, was revered for his knowledgeable use of Mexican subjects and emotional power (*MMR* 77–80). Edward Weston's work had an impact on Rivera, Charlot, and others.[213] Weston reported:

> A letter from Jean Charlot… "I have learned much from you about painting and if you want to send me from time to time some bad prints of your best negatives, I could still learn something." (1966: 7)

Besides Weston's influence on Rivera's recording of textures, Charlot described a deeper influence:

> Weston was very important for Rivera. He helped convince Rivera that reality was important; to accept *all* of reality. He helped break Rivera's tie to the Cubists and French influence. (Tabletalk mid 1970s?)

Sergei Eisenstein probably had an influence on Rivera's later work in the Soviet Union (Tabletalk mid 1970s?).

The historical event of the Mexican Mural Renaissance is clearly complex. Basing myself on the previous, detailed discussions, and anticipating future ones, I now sketch the general lines as I see them. Since the late Porfiriato, artists like Dr. Atl made plans for a national art that could be used in murals. These ideas were communicated to a group of young art students who militated for a more progressive education. Although the Revolution interrupted any public art projects, the artists maintained their ideas into the reconstruction period. On October 12, 1921, José Vasconcelos was appointed head of the Secretaría de Educación Pública and included public, monumental art as part of his broad program of educational and cultural reconstruction.

The many artists mentioned in the Araujo articles reveal how big and varied the Mexican art scene was in the early 1920s. But for the mural movement, two groups are relevant. The first is the Nacionalistas—Montenegro, Enciso, and Best Maugard—who were the earliest commissioned by Vasconcelos to paint murals. Although they can be credited with using Mexican subjects and stylistic motifs, they "made but a marginal contribution to the formation of a communal Mexican style" (*MMR* 107).

The second group was composed of young artists most of whom had begun working together around 1910, just before the outbreak of the Revolution. This group had learned to exercise its power, forcing a change in art instruction with their strike of 1911 and installing Alfredo Ramos Martínez as head of the first modern art school at Santa Anita, nicknamed "Barbizon." After their military experience in the Revolution, they again used their power in the founding of EPAL and the installation of Ramos Martínez as reform administrator of San Carlos. Over the years, this group had worked together, exchanged ideas, and planned projects. Charlot summed up the convictions of the young group just before the first commissions were offered:

> Thus, various threads came to weave a picture that resembled the Mexican renaissance even before its inception: a desire to reach the masses instead of drawing room or museum; an insistence on artisanship as opposed to artistry, on collective discipline as against individualism; a stress on guild recipes as a complement to inspiration, on monumentality over arabesque; an awareness of American achievements. The main departure from the Parisian current stylistic fashion was the unashamed acceptance of story-telling as a kind of didactic core around which the physical picture could be ordered. (*MMR* 80 f.)

Stylistically, the Mexican members of the group were working through Impressionism and beginning *costumbrista* work, using EPAL Indian models in their regular clothes and village costumes. Leal wrote in his "The Gospel of Mexican Mural Painting":

> What was being painted there was an impressionism *sui generis*, which branched into strange groups and subgroups: Divisionism Pointillism, Luminism, Chromatism, Naturalism, Folklorism, Postimpressionism, Neorealism, Paroxism, etc. I felt such an enthusiasm for these nearly mystical intents of impressionism that I asked to be allowed to paint too. To my intense surprise I was given an enormous canvas on a stretcher over a meter square and a set of colors, minus black and the blacklisted earth-colors which I learned to appreciate much later. (Charlot Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

Charlot apparently started the use of black, which marked the emergence from Impressionism to the more constructive compositions that would be used in muralism, as discussed in Chapter 6.

This young group seems to have had little if any relation to the mural work of the Nacionalistas and even later would show scant interest in their work or style. A new stage begins when Diego Rivera returns from Italy in July 1921, Vasconcelos commissions *Creation*, and Rivera starts work on it probably in early 1922. From a movement of local interest, the Mexican Mural Renaissance attains the level of genius.[214] The young artists are impressed and even inspired by *Creation*, but Rivera does not accede to Vasconcelos' request to recruit younger artists for mural work. Only when Vasconcelos appoints Leal to the task, are four found bold enough for murals: Leal, Charlot, Revueltas, and Alva de la Canal (Cahero soon drops out).

At this point, a major decision is made for the history of the movement. The young artists do not follow Rivera in his traditional symbolic subject matter. As Charlot wrote, "Murals still implied allegories of females wrapped in cheesecloth, cut to suit official taste the world over," but "for a few painters, mural painting had already become less polite, darker, and sturdier than in 1920."[215] Instead, they use their experience at EPAL with native models to develop subjects that are Costumbrista (Revueltas), Costumbrista-historical (Leal), historical-symbolic (Charlot), and historical (Alva de la Canal).[216] These choices will become programmatic for the movement.

Stylistically, the young artists assimilate convincingly what they have learned from Colonial and popular arts. Most clearly, Revueltas demonstrates that the achievements of *retablos* and *pulquería* painting can be projected onto a mural scale. Charlot uses Colonial depictions of Indians to accommodate his mural to the wall of the Colonial building. Leal creates the most definitive package. Like his *Zapatista Camp*, his *costumbrista* subject is connected to an event and thus becomes historical painting. His style is the straightforward description he has developed at EPAL. This combination of subject and style will serve him for the rest of his career and provide a model for other artists (as emphasized by Debroise 1984: 53). In assimilating these sources, Charlot especially demonstrates the value of geometric composition.[217] This had been started in *Creation* with its Cubist background. Finally, Charlot and Alva de la Canal demonstrate the value of fresco as a medium for the great tasks at hand.

The achievements of the young artists were recognized immediately, at least by their fellow artists, and by some later historians.[218] Indeed the young artists could be watched as they made their preparatory drawings and started work on their public walls. A group accomplishment, they created the "the strong and slow current" that drew the other artists—Montenegro, Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco—to the subjects and style that would characterize the Mexican Mural Renaissance. Although some European forebears can be found—like Courbet's *The Stone Breakers*—the new subjects, themes, and style were created in a particular time and place and for a particular task. They articulated the experience of the Revolution, the sympathy for the people, and the sense of mission the artists felt as participants in the great work of reconstruction.[219] The other artists would all follow their own trajectory into the new subjects, themes, and style, and make their own contributions to them, with Siqueiros' *Burial of a Worker* as a salient example.[220] As Charlot wrote:

> the Dieguitos exerted a lasting influence both on the form and on the content of the Mexican mural renaissance. The complete rerouting of Rivera's talent after his first mural…In fact the nude or draped allegories brusquely gave way in Rivera's next work to folk themes steeped in Mexicanism, or rather in Indianism. This abrupt turnabout within a few months was made plausible by the spadework of the younger painters… (*MMR* 154)

Charlot lists the later works of which the Preparatoria murals served as prototypes. But the intrinsic interest and originality of these early murals must be recognized as well as their later influence, for instance, in the United States. The young artists had created "un mode nouveau de beauté" 'a new mode of

beauty,' as the murals of Mexico were "*uniques au monde dans la période actuelle d'art*" '*unique in the world in the current period of art*' (Charlot July 1924). The new style attracted non-Mexican artists who shared their ideals. O'Higgins stated:

> And I was *very* impressed to see such a contrast…now that you've seen those murals, you can see why. It's a strong contrast to European characteristics. You know what I mean? That's what I was trying to say. And I was so happy to see something rather unusual and different. And very well done, it seemed to me. And so I wrote to Diego…he wrote back and said that it would be very fine for a young painter to know what we're doing here and the character of the Sindic[ato]… how do you say? our group of painters working on walls or something like that. (March 21, 1974)

Rivera felt O'Higgins needed to learn not only about the Mexicans' art but about their context.

The next project for the young artists was the second court of the Ministry of Education. On February 18, 1923, Charlot, Amado de la Cueva, and Xavier Guerrero closed the workshop where they had been assisting Rivera on *Creation* and moved to the Ministry of Education both to make preparations for Rivera and to start their own murals in the second court, called the Court of Labor and Festivals (*MMR* 252–279). The subjects were themselves a tribute to the young artists' success in the Preparatoria (John Charlot 2008 Patrocinio: 101 ff.). Charlot was the only member of the original group to make the move. Revueltas and Alva de la Canal were still busy on their Preparatoria walls, which would be inaugurated with a party on June 24, 1923 (*MMR* 160). Mérida and Amero would be working in other parts of the building (*MMR* 269 ff.).

The new and compatible group conceived of themselves as a team:

> The plan of work was patterned after the closing tenets of the program of the Painter's Syndicate, which had up to then remained untried: "The Syndicate is in favor of collective work. It desires to destroy all egocentrism, replacing it by disciplined group work, the great collective workshops of ancient times to serve as models… To practice these postulates…it will also elaborate a communal plan for the application of the principle of work in common."[221]

Accordingly, they developed a common plan for "an equal number of panels on each theme"; "Before we began its south wall, we planned a working diagram that alternated both subjects and painters" (*MMR* 271 ff.). From their work itself can be deduced that they made other decisions based on the experience in the Preparatoria, the "laboratorio del muralismo" 'laboratory of muralism' (Dávila Jiménez 2010: 85). Whereas two of the Preparatoria murals had been in encaustic and two in fresco—creating difficulties especially with the conjunction of Charlot's and Leal's—all the murals would now be in fresco. Fresco colors would in themselves unite the color schemes. Finally, all the painters would use the same scale, avoiding the difference between Revueltas and Alva de la Canal's facing murals. The three artists set to work with great enthusiasm, and their murals are the fullest and most intense realizations of the national or common style at that time. The stopping of their work and the destruction of one of Charlot's murals by

Rivera are, in my opinion, a tragedy for art. It was also a defeat for the idea of communal work. Siqueiros called Rivera the "Saboteador del trabajo colectivo" 'saboteur of collective work' (Prignitz 1992: 28).

Both pulled by the attraction of the beginning national style and pushed by the negative reaction to *Creation*, Rivera moved quickly away from his first work in Mexico. The jungle passages in the recess of *Creation* were a first response to the experience of Tehuantepec. As early as the inauguration of the Ministry of Education on July 9, 1922, Rivera announced that he would decorate the new building with *costumbrista* subjects, starting with women of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, a state politically connected to Vasconcelos.[222] Rivera had adopted the subjects pioneered as murals by the young artists of the Preparatoria:

> In contrast [to *Creation*], the Ministry frescoes allow for a leisurely description of folk types and customs, and include a wealth of local details—from sombreros to sandals—set in localized surroundings.
>
> Mexican roots affirm themselves at last. The subject matter is all-Indian… (*MMR* 261)

Charlot and his mason Luis Escobar assisted Rivera with his first frescoes. Charlot emphasized to me the importance of Escobar's contribution, which I myself can understand from working as a mural assistant alongside a mason. Rivera learned fresco with difficulty relieved by theater, but eventually became a great master of the medium (*MMR* 257–260). Rivera made his own way into the national or communal style. Both Charlot and Siqueiros describe him depending strongly on the Italian Renaissance to do so.[223] With all "the flounderings and stutterings that mark Rivera's first encaustic and his first frescoes," he developed his own attractive version of the style, for instance, warming the colors and reducing the portraiture in Leal's figures to an Everyman generality (Debroise 1984: 57 ff.). As he continued in the Ministry of Education, "a steady betterment of the fresco technique, an increasingly complex planning, was to replace the first breath of inspiration" (*MMR* 303). With the dismissal of the young artists and the destruction of some of their work, the national or communal style came to be identified with Rivera's version of it. He argued—and has been believed—that he was its creator and the others were his followers, the Dieguitos 'Little Diegos.'

[1] García de Germenos 1991: 82 f., Social Realism had an influence especially on Ramos Martínez.

[2] Araujo July 26, 1923. The differences of these passages from Charlot's *San Carlos* suggest that their author is Siqueiros. Charlot would not confound Impressionists with Academicians, though there was some connection between them in Mexico. He would not simply accuse Academicians of being uninterested in "aspectos geométricos y materiales" 'geometric and material aspects.' From his own experience, Charlot had some appreciation of Academic teaching methods. See my discussion in Chapter 1.

[3] *San Carlos* 159; also 160. Dr. Atl, who replaced Martínez, disliked the "rainbow hues that Ramos Martínez favored" (*San Carlos* 162). Fell 1989: 396 f.

[4] Echavarría 1969: 8. Ramírez in Acevedo 1986: 212.

[5] Fell 1989: 388, seems to have missed him. Charlot showed Henrietta Shore his work (Diary December 19, 1927).

[6] Tabletalk mid-1970s?: "Lozano had big role. He made the concept of fine arts survive, vs. art for the people. The second generation of easel painters come from him." Helm 1941: 130–133. Charlot mentions Lozano often in his diaries: e.g., 1924: February 7; 1925: March 14 ("Lozano me donne livre A Angel" 'Lozano gives me book on A Angel'); 1926: November 9 ("R. Lozano ici et revoit mes peintures" 'Lozano here and inspects my paintings'), 10 ("vu Lozano. jolies choses" 'saw Lozano. pretty things'), 12 ("mené Anita chez Lozano" 'took Anita to Lozano's'), 15; 1927: December 15 ("8 h vernissage ex Lozano. avec Miss Shore" '8:00 PM opening Lozano show. with Miss [Henrietta] Shore'), 19 ("Lozano avec Shore matin œuvre Abraham Angel puis exp Lozano" 'Lozano with Shore morning work of Abraham Angel then Lozano show'), 21, 23, 29 (lunch with Shore and Lozano); 1928: October 9.

[7] E.g., Araujo July 26, 1923, against Ramos Martínez. Acevedo 1986: 204, Rivera criticized Montenegro's murals in Vasconcelos' office.

[8] E.g., Debroise 1984: 41, the older artists had ideas for subjects and themes but not for style. Echavarría 1969: 13. Ramírez in Acevedo 1986: 212. Rosales 2005: 2.

[9] Charlot 1952 Review Ramos: 139. Charlot is writing against Ramos' view that Rivera on his return was "already with complete awareness of his stylistic aims" (140). Siqueiros sometimes writes as if all were clear and decided at the beginning and at other times writes of the general uncertainty and need to explore; e.g., 1977: 155, 167, 186, 190; 1996: 468. Historical evidence heavily favors the latter view.

[10] See my Volume 1, Chapter 8, Section 1.2., which contains relevant information that I will not repeat here.

[11] Charlot 1928 Posada grabador. See also, e.g., Morris, Charlot, and Morris 1931: 343. Leal 1990: 33, "la novedad está en el modo de mirarla" 'the novelty is in the way of seeing it'; 34, 38, they want to create a Mexican art "pero nada más por los asuntos pintorescos empleados, sino por sus cualidades plásticas intrínsecas" 'but in no way through the picturesque subjects used, but by its intrinsic plastic qualities.' Orozco complained:

> …my show was thoroughly misunderstood. A public unaware of the new trends embodied in these works dismissed them as caricatures. As usual, public curiosity focused on the subject matter and even on the private life of the author, sidestepping technical and esthetic angles. (Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut)

See also Acevedo 1986: 180. Ramírez in Acevedo 1986: 211 f.

[12] Goldwater 1947: 21. Mijangos 2000: 112, 128, 133, 144 f. Charlot January 28, 1971: "the Mexican murals spawned many, too many, well-meaning pictures, stronger on social consciousness than on art."

[13] Fell 1989: 422. Prignitz 1992: 72 f. Fauchereau 2013: 149, 206 f.

[14] *AA* I: 310. Compare Siqueiros 1996: 322.

[15] Schmeckebier 1939: 136 f. Mijangos 2000: 102. Orozco occasionally spoke in similar terms. Glusker 2010: 492, the silly subject of a good picture "Proves, says Orozco, that the subject doesn't matter, and even the colors—it's the *painting* of it—*puritita pintura* [pure art]."

[16] Interview October 1, 1970. See also Adhémar 1971: 141.

[17] Similarly, the Mexican novelists of the Revolution described it and its causes without necessarily promoting a political plan or theoretical solution. The picture they created was the call to action.

[18] Charlot 1924–1925. Also September 27, 1925: "no desde el punto de vista arqueológico, sino desde el estético, el cual, más allá de las teorías enfadosas y de las consideraciones técnicas, *la emoción* que se desprende de la misma" 'not from the archeological point of view, but from the esthetic, which is, beyond annoying theories and technical considerations, *the emotion* that emanates from it.'

[19] Araujo July 26, 1923. Siqueiros maintained this view (1996: 323).

[20] Charlot *Traité de Peinture*. See the longer discussion in Volume 1. Siqueiros 1978: 104 f., 120, 126, 213, wrote in the same way about art with a political message.

[21] Martin Charlot remembered his father speaking against this hierarchy of subjects towards the end of his life.

[22] Writings Related to *MMR*: Appendix III. For the Mexican artists around 1910, see Ramírez 1991: 31 f.

[23] Siqueiros 1996: 108. See also Echavarría 1969: 25 f., quoting John Canaday.

[24] *AA* II: 347–352. Charlot himself wrote positively about abstract art in France but wrote more negatively in Mexico. Later in the United States, perhaps because of his admiration for Josef Albers, he returned to a positive appraisal, e.g., ca. 1971 Charlot.

[25] Leal 1990: 52. Compare Siqueiros 1996: 474 f.

[26] *AA* II: 10. Compare Vasconcelos' views on civilizations (Fell 1989: 387 f.).

[27] Torres Bodet 1961: 276; also 277, 285 ff.

[28] Charlot 1945–1947. Also October 1926 on better *pulquería* painting selling more *pulque*, discussed above.

[29] Charlot Spring 1938. Also *AA* II: 356.

[30] Charlot January 28, 1971; 1977 Foreword: xvi, "Both our groups violently broke loose from orthodox modern styles"; "a different language had to be forged to plead Mexico's case before the world. It took a touch of heroism to swap the much that Paris had to offer for a totally uncertain future. Our refusal to toe the line angered critics"; *AA* II: 394, "Rivera doggedly pursues his way to a conclusion that may mean a truly American style." E.g., Leal 1990: 32, 38 f. Acevedo 1986: 189, Revueltas claimed to have started the true national style. Fell 1989: 397.

[31] E.g., Fell 1989: 381 ff. Leal 1990: 121. Baeza Flores 1962: 25 ("Rivera y Orozco alcanzaron planos de universalismo no superado" 'Rivera and Orozco reached unsurpassed levels of universalism').

[32] Mijangos 2000: 182. See also 137, minor arts can be local, but high arts must be universal; 150, he wants to join Mexican forms and colors in a modern, international unity; 169, Mexican painters became too nationalistic; 176 f., an artist must be universal. Mijangos 2000: 100, calls Tamayo "El indio más universal de este siglo" 'The most universal Indian of this century.'

[33] *AA* II: 235. Flores (2013) has argued successfully that the artistic and literary Mexican movements of the early 1920s provided a new model of socially engaged modernism.

[34] Silver 1989: 126. See Volume 1, Chapter 8, Section 1.1.

[35] Tomkins 1996: 418 f. I am reminded of a classical music conductor stating, "Basically, we're in show business."

[36] Honorable exceptions include the set designer Paul Harvey, who produced portraits of AIDS victims, Act Up in New York City, and Visual Aid in San Francisco. Documentary and feature film makers also produced moving work. To his credit, Haring produced work for AIDS campaigns, but the same stylistic criticism can be made as above.

[37] Charlot 1972 Xavier Guerrero. Also January 1935, Emilio Amero "combines the utmost technical refinement with a humane point of view."

[38] Brenner-Charlot 1928: 66. Fell 1989: 405 f., on Rivera.

[39] Spotts 2008: 79. Tomkins 1996: 419, Marcel Duchamp asked, "Why should artists' egos be allowed to overflow and poison the atmosphere? Can't you just smell the stench in the air?"

[40] Charlot June 9, 1965. *MMR* 316. *AA* I: 53–64.

[41] Baeza 1962: 174. *MMR* 77, "In reaction against the current boycott of significant subject matter, we upheld a return to didactic art"; 136, "In his first mural Rivera emerged cautiously from cubism into didactic painting."

[42] Charlot February 1924. The Spanish version in Charlot (with Anita Brenner) November-December 1926 Siqueiros. Fell 1989: 420.

[43] Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut. Also Fell 1989: 392, 407. When Duchamp distinguishes between the freelance artist with "no bonds" and the one who "deals with society, who is integrated with society," he is referring to high society, not the population meant by the Mexicans.

[44] *AA* II: 356. Myers 1956: 27. Fell 1989: 390.

[45] Charlot 1966 Foreword: x. Siqueiros 1978: 70, 102, 104, *Guernica* is close to the work of the Mexican muralists and refutes view that art should have no political purpose.

[46] Charlot May 11, 1960. Eder 1991: 76–79. Tomkins 1996: 57, Cubists sought "an art that would engage the mind as well as the eye."

[47] *AA* II: 367; May 11, 1960. Fell 1989: 424 ff.

[48] Charlot August 5, 1971. Many relevant passages can be found in Siqueiros' writings, e.g., 1996: 17 f., 127.

[49] Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut. Charlot November 1947: 260, because Orozco had not received "Parisian training," he "could not validly lean in his mural work against the architectural tenets that ruled the modern art of the 'twenties"; "neither was he eager to learn", but disparaged the geometric concerns of other artists. Fell 1989: 421 f.

[50] Charlot November 1947: 260. Lew Andrews reminded me that Rivera depicted his scaffold in his 1931 *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City* at the San Francisco Art Institute.

[51] Charlot November 1947: 260. *MMR* 261, "Muralist Rivera did not have to change his point of view, only the scale of his work."

[52] Interview September 17, 1970. See my Volume 1, Chapter 8, Section 1.2. Fell 1989: 421. The emphasis on legibility is classical French criticism (e.g., La Bruyère 1975: 40 f.).

[53] Disney Lectures 4. Also, e.g., Charlot February 4, 1952: 16 f., 19–25, 29 f.

[54] Siqueiros 1996: 58, writes against the sketchiness of Matisse and other French artists.

[55] Fell 1989: 418. See also *Monografía* 1926: 18.

[56] Charlot 1945 Juan Cordero. Also *AA* II: 345, Xavier Guerrero's "surprisingly intimate easel pictures that contrast with his public style."

[57] Myers 1956: 28. Fell 1989: 421.

[58] Araujo August 2, 1923. Debroise 1984: 56. Of the muralists, Tamayo was the only one, as far as I can see, who denied or at least devalued the difference between mural and easel painting (Mijangos 2000: 141, 167 f., 175).

[59] *AA* II: 10. Siqueiros 1996: 441. Gallo criticizes the choice of fresco, describing Rivera as "mired in the contradiction between his subject matter—modern technology and its positive effects on society—and his choice of artistic technique—fresco painting, which was an art form of the past" (2005: 7 f.). Gallo argues that new subjects should be expressed by new means, such as photography (2005: 47–50, 55 f., 65). Compare Weston 1961: 147. Concentrating on the connotations of fresco, Gallo ignores its practicality for the task at hand. Similarly, he ignores the reproducibility and ease of distribution of prints, arguably modern factors. Moreover, as new media have been adopted by artists, they have not abandoned the old. Nor have art historians ceased discussing new media and subjects in bound books and printed articles.

The muralists were open to and appreciative of new media and art forms, like Eisenstein's films. Charlot was intrigued that Paul Renoir's son Jean would turn to film for his own expression. Charlot himself patented a rotary press process and argued that his process prints should be appreciated alongside his "fine arts" or "original" ones. He explored the esthetic possibilities of process prints, enjoying the special grainy quality of the pencil stroke on the rough plastic sheet, which he contrasted to the greasy stroke of lithographs. He was intrigued by color printing on newspaper sheets.

[60] Araujo July 26, 1923. Fell 1989: 421.

[61] Charlot 1972 Xavier Guerrero. See Rosales 2005: 2, praise of Alva de la Canal's simple, monumental style and restricted palette as appropriate for fresco.

[62] *AA* II: 393. I am not discussing portable frescoes here, which are meant to be moveable, but panels large enough to be considered a wall. Charlot appreciated portable murals—"masterpieces in the difficult genre of chamber murals" (*San Carlos* 130)—and produced a number himself.

[63] E.g., Oles 2002: 190. Luna Arroyo 1952: 169, Dr. Atl was driven by bad experiences to use removable panels for large works; he also painted portable frescoes.

[64] Debroise 1984: 102. Wolfe 1939: 277 note 1. Villaurrutia was generally considered homosexual, but never came out if he was. Torres Bodet is usually considered homosexual, but he uses the stereotyped language, 1961: 242, "la varonil entereza" 'the manly integrity'; 247, "la sombra de ese varón" 'the shadow of this manly person.' Charlot usually spoke of homosexual "circles," which implies several recognized groups. He felt MacKinley Helm was too influenced by Lozano, which led to his odd perspective on the muralists (Tabletalk undated, mid-1970s).

[65] Zavala 2001: 229. Rashkin 2009: 148.

[66] E.g., Flores 2013: 284, 300; 38, 139, 152, on general machismo and sexist attitudes. Also Rashkin 2009: 146–149.

[67] Illustration in Orozco 1974, facing page 48. *MMR* 249 f. Tibol 1996: 82 f.

[68] Siqueiros 1977: 202. Siqueiros expresses himself often in this gendered language, e.g., 1977: 155; 1996: 27, in the Syndicate are found "todos los pintores y escultores viriles de México" 'all the virile painters and sculptors of Mexico'; 29, "del hombre viril obra viril" 'from a virile man virile work'; also 27–31, 35, 259 f.

[69] Charlot January 28, 1971, can make a joke—"Despite their manly content"—on the art world.

[70] List Arzubide 1927: 42; 22, "ante la infecunda protesta de los fifíes" 'before the impotent protest of the *fifis*.'

[71] Vollard 1919: 104. Jacques and Schwartz 2001: 130. See also Leal 1990: 8, a bad artist is called "un eunuco del arte" 'a eunuch of art.'

[72] Charlot July 1924; August 1924. Compare the image of masturbation for bad art (Tibol 1996: 78).

[73] Ramírez 1991: 36, race mixture represents the "fundamento y expresión de la nacionalidad" 'foundation and expression of nationality': 2005: 31, Herrán represents "el alma nacional" 'the national soul' by a *mestiza*. *San Carlos* 70. Zavala 2001: e.g., 19, 405–410. Compare Beezley 2008: 67 ff. See my discussion in Chapter 2.

[74] E.g., Coleby 1999: 31. Guadarrama Peña n.d.: 2 f. Charlot May 1940, "a true plastic equivalent of this mestizo race."

[75] de la Torre: Rivera 2007 *1886–1921*: 83; García de Germenos 1991: 75 f. Garduño: Oles and Ramírez 2005: 65.

[76] *MMR* 72 f. E.g., Siqueiros 1977: 165; 1996: 18, "amemos la mecánica moderna que nos pone en contacto con emociones plásticas inesperadas" 'let us love modern mechanics, which puts us in contact with unexpected plastic emotions.' Zurián 2002: 44, Revueltas was particularly interested in machines, Futurism, etc. On Amero's interest, see Zuñiga 2008: 40 f.

[77] Baciu 1968: 68 f. Debroise 1984: 92 f.

[78] Only late in the Cristiada did a similar influx occur in "provincial capitals like Guadalajara and León" (Meyer 1976: 179).

[79] Ramírez 1991: 19–63. Gallo 2005: 4 f.

[80] Charlot Lecture Notes; all references in this section are to one set of Charlot's lecture notes on composition. I will refer mostly to these notes at this point, but have discussed this subject with further references elsewhere.

[81] Leal 1990: 33. Compare Siqueiros 1977: 156, his conversations with Rivera in Europe.

[82] *San Carlos* 142. On Velasco, see Beezley 2008: 25.

[83] Oles and Ramírez 2005: 196 (Dafne Cruz Porchini). Argüello Grunstein 2010: 49.

[84] Siqueiros 1977: 84 f. Leal 1990: 82. Reyes Palma 1991: 43. Oles and Ramírez 2005: 126 (M. Velázquez).

[85] Siqueiros 1977: 105 f., 128–131. Leal 1990: 32, 38, 119, had the same experience.

[86] Leal 1990: 38; 81, 119. Atl moved the Academy to Orizaba, where the students could watch Zapatistas being executed by Carrancistas (*San Carlos* 1962: 164).

[87] Siqueiros 1977: 19 f., 156 f., 190, 198; 129, art is based more on geography even than race.

[88] Siqueiros 1977: 156; 179, another list of the options. Scherer 1996: 49.

[89] Illustrated in Rodríguez Prampolini 2012: 10 f. Espejo 1994: 30. *MMR* 101–104.

[90] Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut. Compare Leal 1990: 173.

[91] Charlot December 9–12, 1927. Leal 1990: 82. Argüello Grunstein 2010: 60, on Alva de la Canal. Leal 1990: 84 f., attributed the perceived lack of landscape production to the lack of demand and to the urban origins of the painters.

[92] Diary November 2, 1927. Charlot can remark on the blue color of the mountains at the horizon (March 1926: 17) and use the color himself (e.g., M142, CL 94).

[93] Ramírez 1991: 33, allegorical, symbolical, Classical, neoromantic (medieval and oriental subjects). Coleby 1999: 17 ff., allegorical, decorative, and occidental themes. Argüello Grunstein 2010: 49, universal, abstract, spiritualist, or theosophical.

[94] Ramírez in Acevedo 1986: 209. Orozco 1955: 81 f.

[95] Illustrated in Rodríguez Prampolini 2012: 8 f. Luna Arroyo 1952: 167 ff. Orozco V. 1983: 120. Leal 1990: 94. Espejo 1994: 30. Coleby 1999: 18. Guadarrama Peña 2010: 28, "Enormes imágenes de estilo neoclasicista, cercanas a los cánones *miquelangelescos*" 'Enormous images in neoclassical style, close to *Michelangelesque* canons.'

[96] E.g., Siqueiros 1977: 197 f. Debroise 1984: 55.

[97] Orozco V. 2001: 124, goes so far as to say that "los motivos son meros pretextos simbólicos" 'the motifs are mere symbolic pretexts.'

[98] Coleby 1999: 22–29. Guadarrama Peña 2010: 25, 28.

[99] Schmeckebier 1939: 48, Rivera apparently told Schmeckebier that the androgyne in *Creation* was emerging from the tree of life, *el árbol de la vida*. This point reveals an even greater closeness between the two murals than usually thought. On the Neo-Platonist symbolism of the androgyne and its recent use by Gustave Moreau, see Lucie-Smith 1972: 63. On a possible Colonial parallel or source of the tree, see Glusker 2010: 709.

[100] E.g., Keen 1971: 526. Leal 1990: 91. Coleby 1999: 29–32. Compare Fell 1989: 408 f. *MMR* 135, Vasconcelos assigns the subject "with a universal theme."

[101] Siqueiros 1977: 199 f. Lilia Roura 1999. The need for caution in judging Rivera's statements about his own murals is clear. For instance, he articulated a Vasconcelista interpretation of *Creation* as depicting a racial hierarchy from the indigenous at the bottom to the pure Spanish at the top (Ortiz Gaitán 1999: 103). In fact, the races are not arranged hierarchically; most obviously, the blonde modeled by Nahui Olin is in the center of the group on the right. Lupe Marín, the model for the nude at the bottom, was mestiza. Coleby 1999: 32, argues for continuity between *Creation* and the Preparatoria murals.

[102] Schmeckebier 1939: 167 f. Compare Goldwater 1947: 31.

[103] Charlot felt an incongruity in the results of this practice: *AA* II: 391, "The many careful portraits, pyramiding like apples on a tray, the skimpy bodies hiding behind loquacious streamers and slogans…"

[104] Siqueiros 1977: 198. Compare Guadarrama Peña n.d.: 2 f.

[105] *AA* II: 9. See, e.g., Orozco 1955: 80 f.

[106] Siqueiros 1977: 194, 228; 218, he praises the illustrations in *El Machete* for their lack of "misticismo simbólico tipo masónico" 'Masonic type symbolic mysticism.' Eder 2002: 236.

[107] E.g., Oles and Ramírez 2005: 112 (M. Velázquez). Rivera's more commercial oils of children were, I believe, influenced by the similar subjects of Carolus-Duran: the point of view is from up down, the child is standing, is dressed picturesquely, and looks directly at the painter (e.g., Weinberg 1991; 66).

[108] E.g., Fell 1989: 384, 423; 392, argues that Rivera's Italian journey convinced him of the "continuidad entre el arte y lo cotidiano" 'continuity between art and the quotidian.' Folgarait 1998: 69–73.

[109] Siqueiros 1977: 85 f., 182; 1978: 32 f., an even broader crediting; compare 1977: 189 f. Siqueiros is most probably projecting backwards when he says the young artists also started on this occasion to discuss the problems of the people. However, the connection of Orozco's anti-government cartoons to later mural themes is interesting (Siqueiros 1996: 34). *AA* II: 260.

[110] *AA* II: 259 f. *MMR* 217. Compare, e.g., Lilia Roura Fuentes 2012: 343.

[111] Siqueiros 1977: 216 ff. Coleby 1999: 36 f., 38. Both Siqueiros and Coleby underestimate the pioneering role of the younger artists, for instance, Charlot's early prints, which antedate the first number of *El Machete*: March 6, 1924.

[112] John Charlot 2007. The exception I know is Rivera's nude of Amado de la Cueva in *Creation*.

[113] Charlot January 1935. Leal 1990: 176, depicts Indians "sin occidentalizarlos" 'without occidentalizing them.'

[114] *MMR* 12. I believe Charlot preferred Mérida's indigenous-based work to Tamayo's because he considered the latter's base to be international art.

[115] *MMR* 12. Siqueiros 1977: 190.

[116] *MMR* 207, also for Rivera. *Idols* 266 f.

[117] *MMR* 311. Compare Morales 2000: 144, the squat woman drawn from the back in ink in *Mercado de Tehuantepec*, 1920, used by Charlot as an illustration, *AA* II: 21.

[118] E.g., Leal 1990: 32, 38, 120 f. Siqueiros 1950: 31; 1996: 115. Weston 1961: 66, 81, faced the same problem as a photographer. See Torres Bodet 1961: 275, on *costumbrista* literature.

[119] Writings Related to *MMR*; Passages Cut. *MMR* 226, "the mural group still relied heavily on folk art for their aesthetic and on folk ways for their subject matter." Leal used *costumbrista* language to discuss his first mural.

[120] Beezley 2008: xi; see also x, xiv, 17, 25, 30, 109 f., 135 f., 144.

[121] Beezley 2008: 11, 110 f. The *charro* costume was originally developed by the *rurales*, the Porfiriato enforcers, but became popular with the Zapatistas and thus representative (Rutherford 1971: 242).

[122] *San Carlos* 75. Ramírez 1991: 39.

[123] Fell 1989: 397. García de Germenos 1991: 82 f. Guadarrama Peña 2010: 29, "costumbrismo y paisaje, donde aparecía el indígena y su entorno" 'costumbrismo and landscape, in which appeared the indigene and his environment.' Debroise's view that the EPAL schools were uninterested in a national art must be qualified by recognizing the nationalizing dimension of Ramos Martínez' new rule (Azuela 1986: 231).

[124] John Charlot Volume 1, Chapter 3, 3.2 "Sensitivities and Views"; Chapter 8, 8.1.3.1. "Commercial Art."

[125] Charlot 1928 Posada grabador. Compare Weston 1961: 15 ff., 21. Siqueiros 1996: 30. Blasco Ibañez 1918: 265–268.

[126] Notebook A 18692, ca. December 1922. Also Clippings 23, *The Arts*, September 1925: the contrast is between Indian and Bourgeois.

[127] E.g., Delteil 1969: Volume VII, Number 2585. *El Ahuizote*, Volume 1, Number 2: 4. Similar contrasts in clothing could be found in other countries like Russia (Lincoln 1983: 326).

[128] Fell 1989: 398. Coleby 1999: 32–34 (Coleby is mistaken in saying that Charlot was a student at EPAL).

[129] Debroise 1984: 42, 53, 56. Myers 1956: 28, 37, "Rivera finally enters the arena of social-minded art." Flores 2013: 72.

[130] *MMR* 154. Edwards 1966: 179. Acevedo 1986: 189. Zurián 2002: 81 ff., sees vanguard influence in the bright colors and simplified forms. Flores 2012: 119–122. Lilia Roura Fuentes 2012: 209, credits Leal's *Campamiento*, not Revueltas' *Guadalupe*, with this accomplishment, but I believe Charlot was referring to murals. The sight of Indians in their normal clothes was common (e.g., Charnay 1885: 263, 274).

[131] E.g., Fell 1989: 383, 641, Vasconcelos was against *criollismo* 'creolism,' as well as a strong basis in archeology and Prehispanic art.

[132] Eder 1986: 73 f., 76. Ramírez in Acevedo 1986: 209 f. Pérez Montfort 1994: 114 ff.

[133] Charlot 1958. Tabletalk April 19 or 20, 1978, Charlot was surprised to learn that Louis Choris had published on Russian peasant costumes and was working on Mexican costumes when he was killed; "I don't know how the guy could do so much in so little time."

[134] Charlot Spring 1937. Morris, Charlot, and Morris 1931, e.g., 233, 238 ff., 242, 253–256, 296, 300. See my discussion in Chapter 1.

[135] In his Mexican movie, Sergei Eisenstein has the young middle-class woman arrive at the hacienda in fussy city clothing, and later change to upper-class equestrian clothing.

[136] Lynch 1973: 301. Lilia Roura Fuentes 2012: 173 f., 346 f.

[137] López y Fuentes 1949: 72; also 89, 96.

[138] Brunk 2008: 21; 22, "his clothing demonstrated that he would not forget his core constituency."

[139] Interview September 28, 1970. As far as I know, Charlot and his colleagues depicted only authentic *fiestas*, not their proposed "high class" replacements, like the bicycle parade: "This tradition was an imitation of the flower parades held in Nice and brought from France by travelers," Beezley 2004: 115; also 129.

[140] Charlot 1977 Foreword: xvii. Charlot applies this lesson directly to the street artists of the 1970s: "For the very reason that your murals document strictly contemporary attitudes, they deserve to last and enter history, as medieval shrines did, as Mexican murals do."

[141] *AA* II: 191. Charlot made the same joke in his 1921 *Grande complainte de la gard-barrière et de son amant…*:

> Quelque jour, comme d'Héloïse
> et d'Abélard, ce mausolée
> saura les amants désolés
> qui dans le Baedecker les lisent (1920–1924 Civil)
> 'Some day, like that of Heloise
> and Abelard, this mausoleum
> will know desolated lovers
> who read them in their Baedecker.'

[142] Argüello Grunstein 2010: 60. Debroise 1984: 53. Lilia Roura Fuentes 2012: 208 f. Flores 2013: 61–65.

[143] O'Malley 1986: 20 f., 81 f. Brunk 2008: 28 f., 3235, 38.

[144] Personal communication. Compare Torres Bodet 1961: 218 f.

[145] *AA* II: 318. Vasconcelos 1982 *Memorias* 1: 531, 693.

[146] Glusker 2010: 506–510. Accurate information is still hard to find. Brenner reported that Zapata could read and write (vs. Womack, 508).

[147] Krauze 1999: 191, 256–262. Brunk 2008: 2, 29 f.

[148] Charlot told me that Zapata fought for a program, but Villa fought to fight. Katz argues that Villa did have reform goals and implemented them well (1979; see also 1998: 592 f., 808 f.). Katz seems to temper this view in his later 1998: 286, "Of the three major leaders of the Mexican revolution after 1913, Villa had the least interest in ideology…"; 464, "Villa's northern government never showed itself capable of elaborating a national agenda or a national policy"; also 636. Katz reports that in his last years, Villa descended morally into brutality (623). This is the Villa Charlot was hearing about in the early 1920s, especially in Obregonista circles. On Orozco and Villa, Cervantes and Mackenzie 2010: 135.

[149] *San Carlos* 77. Charlot June 9, 1965, since "the Mexicans are naturally religious and mystical," heroes are made like *santos*; Zapata is made into "a canonized revolutionary hero"; in his depiction of Zapata's death, Posada used a heroic gesture "to impress the people, to force a mythical Zapata on the people"; similarly, David's Marat was "a chance for David to do his job, which was to make heroes, to canonize the heroes of the Revolution." Beezley 2008: 25 ff. Brunk 2008: 520, 31 f.

[150] Bailey 1979: 88, "In 1921, on the second anniversary of Zapata's death, cabinet ministers and federal deputies attended ceremonies at the grave in Cuautla. The Zapata myth had been securely launched, and Obregón shared its aura." O'Malley 1986: 42–70. Brunk 2008: 6387. In general, see Rutherford 1971: 148–152.

[151] O'Malley 1986: 70. Brunk 2008: e.g., 72.

[152] Charlot June 9, 1965. Brunk 2008: 178–180. Cervantes and Mackenzie 2010: 36, 136 ff., 202, 301, 318 f., 545.

[153] Charlot 1949–1950. González Mello 1995: 26 f., 29, 31, 63, 67 f., 71 f.

[154] González Mello 2002a: 52, 56, 81, 83. Reed 1956: 192 ff.

[155] Siqueiros 1977: 186. Debroise 1984: 41. Guadarrama Peña n.d. Charlot was amazed that his son Martin developed his style without the struggles the Mexican artists had undergone in the early 1920s.

[156] E.g., Charlot in Morris, Charlot, and Morris 1931: throughout. Charlot 1926 Report; 1927 Report; 1928 Report Sculptures.

[157] E.g., Charlot 1925 Prólogo, "el movimiento actual se extiende de México a todo el país y de las artes mayores a las menores" 'the present movement extends itself from Mexico city to the whole country and from the major to the minor arts.' Debroise 1984: 108, Eisenstein and his director of photography Alexandrov were influenced by the style. Weston 1961: 99. Delpar 1992.

[158] Mijangos 2000: 118 f. Fell 1989: 401. The problem was often personal; e.g., Glusker 2010: 250, Goitia wants to hold his own place against Rivera.

[159] In 1939, Guerrero was working with Siqueiros in Chile when the town was destroyed by an earthquake. The responses of the two artists revealed the contrast "between two stylistic temperaments" (*AA* II: 344). Siqueiros painted the disaster while "Guerrero, with selfless respect for a people sated with tragedy, painted symbols of reconstruction and hope."

[160] Siqueiros 1977: 198. Zurián 2002: 77, 84 f. Flores 2013: 116 f.

[161] Rodríguez Prampolini 2012, Volume 3: 70 ff.; the titles assigned are *El Congreso de Apatzingán* and *El fusilamiento de Gertrudis Bocanegra*. Compare Zurián 2002: 90.

[162] Rodríguez Prampolini 2012, Volume 3: 142–145. Compare Zurián 2002: 97–100.

[163] Rodríguez Prampolini 2012, Volume 3: 167–170. Zurián 2002: 109–125.

[164] Tabletalk February 17, 1971. Charlot mentions Revueltas in his diary: 1923: June 24 (unveiling of murals by Revueltas and Alva de la Canal), September 4, 5, 8, October 16; 1924: 1924: March 18, June 6, July 9, October 9; 1925: January 10, 12, June 16; 1927: October 31 ("11 h Revueltas pour aller chez lui vu ses tableaux. bonnes choses de Tehuantepec" 'met Revueltas to go to his place. viewed his pictures. good things of Tehuantepec'), December 9 ("puis exp Revueltas : personne et fort jolis tableaux" 'then to Revueltas exhibition: nobody there and very pretty pictures'), 21 ("trouvons Paine lui présente Revueltas" 'we find [Frances Flynn] Paine present Revueltas to her'); 1928: January 5 ("exp. Revueltas" 'Revueltas exhibition'). Charlot wrote the statement for the 1927 exhibition of Revueltas (December 9–12, 1927).

[165] Charlot wrote more on Orozco than on any other individual muralist (e.g., *MMR* index; *AA* II: 237–319).

166 *MMR* 204; 226, Orozco "shied away" from his cartoonist path "to create a classical elocution to meet on equally dignified terms the impersonality of the imposing eighteenth-century walls"; 227; *AA* II 249 f., 388 f. Debroise 1984: 54. González Mello 1995: 87.

González Mello 1995: 40, 43, 45, 47, 58, emphasizes the geometric composition of Orozco's Classicism in which he sees Charlot's influence. Charlot November 1947: 260, minimizes Orozco's geometry. Orozco maintained his interest in Classicism, as seen in his *Prometheus* and early plans for Greek mythological subjects for Dartmouth (Bars 2002: 149 f., 156 ff.). Orozco's Classical murals have been criticized on the same grounds as Rivera's *Creation* (e.g., Echavarría 1969: 11, 13).

167 *AA* II: 250 ff. This change has been studied by several art historians (e.g., González Mello 1995: 48–54; Tibol 1996: 78 ff.). I emphasize group spirit more than either writer.

168 Siqueiros 1977: 226, criticized these works.

169 *MMR* 198, 202. Siqueiros 1977: 160 f., characterizes his earlier work as brief Cubist experiments leading to representational art with solid geometric construction. Guadarrama Peña n.d.: 2.

170 E.g., Cooper 1971: 100. Salmon 1929: 157 f., 268.

171 Positive: Favela 1984. Negative: Cooper 1971: 111, 129.

172 E.g., Morales 2000: 19, *Paisaje* of 1913, Cézannesque but with more curves; 22, 38, shading creates a more realistic effect; 85 f., preparatory drawing with shading contrasted with final, flat painting; 82–84, *Paisaje* of 1914, curves, color, and profusion. Charlot May 1955: 81, "this sweetened representation appealed to Rivera, matching as it did his preference for gentle colors and round forms."

173 Glusker 2010: 359. Charlot could describe Rivera in a similar way:

> Rivera did not have a *unified* style. He took elements from all over. No real synthesis. *All* done was done *completely consciously*. No unconscious impulses. Very interesting for that. Like Le Brun or Vasari, could cover any amount of surface. (Tabletalk early 1970s)

174 Haya de la Torre stated, "Rivera pasó por muchos estilos" 'Rivera passed through many styles' (Baeza Flores 1962: 175).

175 Compare Charlot 1965 Articles for *EJB*: "Rivera": "In his murals, Rivera was first to break sharply with the artists of the School of Paris, who remained involved in experimental styles. Therein lies in Art History his unique position."

176 *MMR* 311. In contrast, Amado de la Cueva's "learning never took the form of eclecticism" (*MMR* 313).

[177] Echavarría 1969: 11. *Idols* 279 f. Charlot March 23, 1963, discusses artistic facility:

> The craftsmanship may be attended after all by too large a dose of craftiness.
>
> Such agility with the brush is more than sufficient to require content. Or else painting remains a five-fingers exercise that shuttles to and fro along the range of values and colors.
>
> …Now to work with a purpose!

Charlot certainly thought that Rivera had purpose.

[178] *MMR* 142–145. Sylvia Orozco noted that the stylistically anomalous figure of *Continence* resembles Charlot's French liturgical art, perhaps a little joke of Rivera's on Charlot's waiting for sex until marriage. Fernández 1964: 55, argues that *Creation* is not eclectic, but a true stylistic synthesis. Fell 1989: 408, mentions also as sources Italian art and Puvis de Chavannes; Rivera's symbolism is Classical and erudite. Lucie-Smith 1990: 23, 29, 104, Italian Mannerism, Le Douanier Rousseau, and Art Deco.

[179] Charlot 1972 Xavier Guerrero; *MMR* 261, the figures' "geometry edged toward the balanced semi-abstractions of Byzantium"; 262. *MMR* 198; *Idols* 281 f., Rivera had been particularly impressed by Ravenna on his Italian trip. Siqueiros 1978: 51, Rivera's admiration for Byzantine, Etruscan and other murals advanced the movement.

[180] E.g., *Idols* 280. Also, e.g., Charlot 1952 Review of Ramos: 139; *MMR* 143. Glusker 2010: 316. González Mello 1995: 85.

[181] Glusker 2010: 354. Tabletalk April 1978.

[182] Glusker 2010: 359, 459. Edwards 1966: 179, 181, plate 155.

[183] Schmeckebier 1939: 123. Charlot's *Cargadores* was used by Rivera in his 1923–1924 *Market (El Tianguis)*.

[184] Tabletalk August 12, 1978, and personal communication. See also Tabletalk Early 1970s?, "One shouldn't take Orozco's esthetic criticisms of Diego very seriously. Rivera *was* eclectic. He did get ideas from others; but that's the way he was, like Raphael."

[185] E.g., Gruening 1928: 640. Myers 1956: 28, 35. Echavarría 1969: 10 f., 13. In general, see Debroise 1984: 36 ff. Acevedo 1986: 188 f., 193.

[186] Vasconcelos 1982 *Memorias* 2: 27, 88; also 105. John Charlot 2008: 33.

[187] Charlot March 1923; 1923 XX Prose. Similarly Charlot admired Orozco's often depreciated *Omniscience* in Sanborn's; *Idols* 275, "He sighed when it was finished and blissfully wrote that here was the most beautiful wall ever painted in America."

[188] Siqueiros 1977: 179 ff.; compare 1996: 401.

[189] Pach 1925: 100. Pach is referring to Rivera's murals in general, rather than specifically to *Creation*. He finds Rivera's style possesses "a unity even severer, more organic" than his earlier stages when "working with purely abstract form"; a term like "Post-Cubist" is needed (99 f.). Charlot November 1947: 260. Oles 2002: 202 f., 355, note 70, Orozco opposed the use of Cubism.

[190] Pach 1925: 99; also 95, 100. Glusker 2010: 572, records Pach's praise. Compare Gruening 1928: 640.

[191] See also *MMR* 148; 126, "Though cubism itself failed to follow its mural promises to total fulfillment, it did point the way for the Mexican artist."

[192] Siqueiros 1977: 160, speaks of being in Paris as Picasso and other Cubists were starting the Neoclassic movement. Araujo July 19, 1923, criticizes "los que no han respondido a los últimos movimientos de vuelta al clasicismo" 'those who have not responded to the latest movements of return to Classicism'; July 29, 1923, a drawing by Rivera. More generally on Rivera, Siqueiros 1977: 160, 185. Perhaps Leal 1990: 61. *Idols* 284, Brenner does not use the word *Neoclassical*: "Rivera is a modern who passed with Picasso into 'realistic' monumental abstraction." Megaloni and Govan 2016. Greet 2016.

[193] Schmeckebier 1939: 49, the Cubism of *Creation* is unlike Charlot's *Massacre*, but more in the "neoclassic figure style of Severini and Picasso." Lucie-Smith 1990: 29, "In style it is close to the classicizing wing of European Art Deco and one notes the undoubtedly classical figure of Dance…"; 106, artists used a "Weighty, rounded classicism" with flat color areas. González Mello 1995: 33–38.

[194] González Mello 1995: 35, opines that Rivera must have been unhappy with the revelation of "el peso que tenía sobre sus obras el nuevo clasicismo internacional. A nadie le gusta que le digan copión" 'the weight that the new international Classicism had on his works. No one likes to by called a copycat.' Unfortunately, neither González Mello nor I have yet found a text to ground our speculations.

[195] See my discussion in Chapter 1. Charlot does use the word *neoclassical*: *MMR* 261, "its symbolical figures were nude or clad in vaguely neoclassical drapes." He may, however, be referring to an earlier movement of the same name.

[196] E.g., Lucie-Smith 1990: 12, 15, 110, 143. Siqueiros 1996: 18, rejects "'motivos' arcaicos" 'archaic "motifs"' or pastiche for constructive, sincere Classicism; also 1977: 165, the artist should consult Antiquity, not rely merely on "motivos" 'motifs'; 1978: 60; 1996: 18.

[197] Mijangos 2000: 105, 131, Tamayo also disliked Neoclassicism.

[198] *MMR* 204. Charlot did co-author the classicizing Araujo articles, but I have argued in Chapter 1 that the relevant sections are due to Siqueiros. González Mello 1995: 33–40, places Rivera, Charlot, and Orozco, in the Classical group and describes the work of Leal, Cahero, and Revueltas as "nacionalismo colonialista" (33). Rivera at the time described the difference as similar to the nineteenth-century European one between Classical and Romantic (*MMR* 204); a later reference, 1986: 374. Rivera's jibe against Charlot as Wagnerian shows that he found Charlot more Romantic than Classical (González Mello 1995: 39). Fell 1989: 390, sees Vasconcelos' veneration of Classical art as an influence on the early mural movement. Tamayo seems to have remained outside this controversy, but his work is Indianist (Debroise 1984: 207).

[199] Fell 1989: 404, 433. Mijangos 2000: 109 f., 112, Tamayo felt that the early works of the muralists were good; 113, 129, 133 f., 136, 143 f., 160, but that they lapsed into an academic style similar to Soviet Realism, which they were content to repeat. Compare Zurián 2002: 76 f.

[200] For instance, he appreciated the Hawai'i artist John Wisnosky's nightscape *Seghers' Sky* for its reference to Hercules Pietersz Seghers (1589/90–ca. 1638).

[201] *AA* I: 145. Charlot was a constant supporter of Rivera's reputation as an artist (John Charlot 1997). Emily Edwards, author of *Painted Walls of Mexico* 1966, wrote to Charlot about his foreword: August 12, 1964, "I am grateful to you for giving Diego priority"; May 28, 1965, "I am sorry that Diego is being downgraded. It makes your Foreword of added significance."

[202] Charlot 1923 *Psychoplastie*. Charlot praised a Chich'en Itza artwork for solving "the problem of welding multiple heterogeneous elements into one plastic unit and at the same time achieving a clear representation" (Morris, Charlot, and Morris 1931: 326). Siqueiros 1996: 20, admired Rivera's "energía sintética" 'synthesizing energy,' but not some of the uses he put it to, like his archeological reconstructions.

[203] Charlot March 1952: 139. Compare *Idols* 277.

[204] Tabletalk early to mid 1970s. *MMR* 298, Weston's description of Rivera's capacity for work. Siqueiros 1977: 161.

[205] Charlot's recommendation of a more graphic style to the Disney studios would have avoided the stylistic gap between foreground and background. He proposed creating a cartoon of Melchor G. Ferrer's 1940 *Tito's Hats*, which would have achieved the effect he wanted. Current three-dimensional animation solves the problem as well.

[206] Charlot August 1945. *AA* II: 391.

[207] Mijangos 2000: 150, 185, Tamayo's efforts to join different elements.

[208] Interview August 7, 1971. *AA* II: 392. Cordero 2002: 116 f., on the stir caused by Prometheus' genitals. Cervantes and Mackenzie 2010: 157.

[209] Orozco 1955: 82, discusses a mural's conserving or destroying its architectural setting.

[210] *AA* II: 10, "sometime throughout the years 19201925, an ideal Mexican type was evolved that has already become a classical art form…this brown man clad in white…"; *MMR* 226. E.g., Schmeckebier 1939: 50. Fell 1989: 406. González Mello 1995: 87.

[211] Charlot emphasized Orozco's need for gestation, which explained the time gap between his war experiences and his depictions of the Revolution (e.g., November 1947: 260). Siqueiros 1996: 459.

[212] Charlot January 28, 1971. Siqueiros 1977: 179.

[213] Weston 1961: 109, Charlot appreciated especially Weston's more geometric compositions. Charlot "Edward and Mexico" in Writings Related to *MMR*. Debroise 1984: 106, Weston's photographs supported the Mexican style.

[214] E.g., Siqueiros 1977: 179; 1978: 47, Rivera was the "*primer hombre importante de sus fundadores*" '*first important man among its founders*.' Compare Myers 1956: 33. Fell 1989: 404. González Mello 1995: 33. In the French-language "Mexico" of October 1922, Charlot gives credit for a new movement to Rivera without mentioning his predecessors.

[215] *MMR* 99 f. Siqueiros was not in Mexico at the time of this decision, but later wrote negatively of *Creation* (1977: 181; 1978: 52). However, Siqueiros own first mural *The Spirit of the Occident* was closer to *Creation* than to those of the younger artists in the Preparatoria.

[216] Guadarrama Peña 2010: 32 f., argues that all these murals are connected thematically. Leal and Charlot coordinated their facing murals, and reportedly Revueltas and Alva de la Canal separately planned to. But I believe a conscious thematic coordination on a larger scale was accomplished only in the plans for the second court of the Ministry of Education.

[217] Siqueiros 1996: 65, criticized the style of these murals as too dependent on European ones; 443 f., 459 f., argued that the early works were composed merely as "cuadros grandes" 'large easel paintings' without true mural composition—for instance, allowance for a moving viewer; also 1977: 184, he himself was the first to take the architecture into account. Followed by Rosales 2005: 2 ff. This is easily refuted by an examination of the preparatory drawings of Leal and Charlot as well as Charlot's writings on the subject.

[218] E.g., Myers 1956: 28. Echavarría 1969: 11, 13. Keen 1971: 526 f. Rosales 2005: 2. Rashkin 2009: 69. Flores 2013: 118.

[219] Besides my previous discussions, Chapters 1 and 2; see, e.g., *AA* II: 44, 64.

[220] Charlot always wrote most positively about Siqueiros' contribution, as seen above. A passage in Charlot-Brenner November–December 1926 may, however, be from Brenner, since it does not appear in Charlot's earlier French version February 1924: "ahí vieron, la poca luz que hay, las primeras indicaciones de un arte nuevo, colectivo, mexicano, ligado en significación con la obra nacional de los antiguos americanos" 'there [in the stairwell] they see in the little light there is the first indications of a new, collective art, connected in significance with the national work of the ancient Americans.' On Orozco's individual reasons for change, see González Mello 1995: 32, 48–57. For general points, see Fell 1989: 425.

[221] *MMR* 271; 272, they had "a great good will to do communal mural work"; "team work."

[222] *MMR* 253–257. Compare Siqueiros 1977: 181 f.

[223] *MMR* 262. Siqueiros 1996: 457 ff.