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Marionettes and Metaphor:
Political Satire in the Photographs of Tina Modotti

Lara Tomaszewska

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

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To Tania, Monika and Mirek

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

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Entitled: **Marionettes and Metaphor:**
Political Satire in the Photographs of Tina Modotti

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Art History)

complies with the regulations of the university and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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Abstract

Marionettes and Metaphor: Political Satire in the Photographs of Tina Modotti

Lara Tomaszewska

Recent scholarship on Tina Modotti (1896-1942) has regarded her photographs as relatively straightforward social and political constructs. This thesis shall investigate Modotti's placement within Mexican post-revolutionary political and social drama and consider her cultural and aesthetic production as expressions of class, gender, national and artistic identity. The focus of the study is Modotti's series of marionette photographs produced in 1929. The thesis examines her strategic use of marionettes as symbols of Mexican folklore and also as a traditional device of political commentary. An analysis of Modotti's photography will reveal this little-studied series as representing a shift *back* to formalist concerns of photographic quality and subtlety, and *toward* heightened political subversiveness, complexity and metaphoricity. Feminist and postcolonial studies provide a theoretical framework within which Modotti's photographs may be conceived of as symbolic cultural signifiers. In particular, notions of difference (sexual, cultural, national) and identity (hybrid and nomadic) ground this study within North American cultural discourse. The marionette photographs are studied with reference to Marxist ideology and Mexico. Also, the metaphoric quality of puppets is examined and the marionette series is conceived of as complex metaphorical constructions. Lastly, the marionette photographs are positioned as a new narrative strategy and are analyzed in terms of content and technique.

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INTRODUCTION

The de-mystification of Tina Modotti (1896-1942) has resulted in the acknowledgement of her photographs as social and political constructs. Until recently, biography has been the favoured method of authoring Modotti's career in Mexico which took place between 1924 and 1930. As a result, Modotti's production has been relegated to the private domain of individual life history and stripped of its political import. Jean Franco's book Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico, confronts the conflicting claims of national, ethnic and gender identity. Franco's intention is not to focus on existing and separate female traditions in Latin America. Rather, Franco hopes to "trace those moments when dissident subjects appear in the social text and when the struggle for interpretive power erupts."[1]

This thesis has similar aims in as much as it seeks to investigate Tina Modotti's placement as an American within Mexican post-revolutionary politics through a consideration of a specific part of her artistic production as expressions of class, gender, national, and artistic identity.[2] In 1929, in association with puppeteer Lou Bunin, Modotti made a number of photographs of marionettes. It is unclear how many such photographs were taken, but I have to date identified twenty-four marionette images. Most of the photographs represent specific scenes from Bunin's production of Eugene O'Neill's The

[1] J.Franco. Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico (Columbia University Press; New York, 1995), p.xii

[2] Modotti was born in 1896 in Udine, Italy to a family belonging to the lower working class. In 1913, she immigrated to San Francisco where she worked in the garment industry. By 1917, Modotti was active in the Italian community as an actress. In 1919, she moved to Los Angeles with her husband, anarchist writer Robo Richey. Until 1923 when she moved to Mexico City, Modotti worked in Hollywood as a silent film actress. For a biography of Modotti, see; S. M. Lowe. Tina Modotti: Photographs (Harry N. Abrams; New York, 1995). The final part of this introduction indicates why I have not chosen to include a "capsule" biography of Modotti.

Hairy Ape, several are character studies, and a few are unrelated to the play and do not belong to a larger grouping.[3]

Although Modotti's marionette photographs (to which I will refer as her marionette series) have been collected by archives and have been acknowledged as part of her artistic output, there has been very little scholarly literature exploring their circumstances of production. The Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona holds twenty-one prints from what I have called Modotti's marionette series, and the most extensive archive on Lou Bunin in specific reference to his marionette production in Mexico. However, I have been unable to locate Modotti archives which relate directly to the marionettes and their photographic production. Authors Liz Chilsen, Michel Frizot, Margaret Hooks and Michael Newman have all made brief references to the marionette series. In each case, the author introduced no more than three of the marionette photographs, identified their year of production, and at the most, linked them to O'Neill's satire The Hairy Ape.[4] Sarah M. Lowe, through her thorough archival research, identified the marionette photographs as forming a group of work, named Lou Bunin as co-producer, and provided excellent avenues of research through providing archival references. Lowe's scholarship on Modotti is comprehensive and provides sources and analysis for Modotti's entire artistic career. However, due to her survey approach and wide range of research, the marionette photographs were solidly introduced but little

[3] Appendix I provides a listing of the marionette images and identifies them as narratives, still-lifes, or character sketches. Figures 1- 18 represent most of the marionette photographs which I have identified to date.

[4] L.Chilsen, "Synthesis of Art and Life: Tina Modotti's Photography in Mexico and the building of a Mexican National Identity." Photo Review. Vol.19, No.1; Winter 1996, pp.2-15; M.Frizot,, "Once Upon a Time There was a Revolution." Beaux Arts Magazine. No.115; 1992, pp.99-103, 141-2; M. Hooks, Tina Modotti, Photographer and Revolutionary (Pandora Press; London, 1993); and, M. Newman, Art in America Vol.71; April 1983, pp.161-169. S.M. Lowe, Tina Modotti: Photographs (Harry N. Abrams, Inc; New York, 1995) and Tina Modotti's Vision: Photographic Modernism in Mexico, 1923-1930 (City University of new York; New York, 1996)

analyzed. This thesis intends to investigate Modotti's marionette series and, elaborating on certain of the notions suggested by Sarah M. Lowe, proposes to open up discussion around this set of photographs.

My research strategy has been two-fold; part archival in nature and part interpretive. Firstly, guided by the Index to American Photographic Collections, I have, to my knowledge, located all the marionette images in public institutions. Also, I have used archival documents which relate to the photographs' circumstances of production. My second axis has been multi-layered in an effort to examine as many facets as possible around the production of the marionette images; for example, I look at O'Neill's drama, traditions of puppetry, and symbolic and functional aspects of marionettes. This thesis serves as a first in-depth attempt to read the marionette series. I do not contend that my theoretical parameters and points-of-view are the only ways to view Modotti's marionette series. This is simply one method which hopes to address my particular concern for art histories which maintain that art is no less complex a cultural product than its maker.

Chapter I includes a brief historical review of post-revolutionary politics and art in Mexico. A history of puppetry in Mexico and Europe establishes the medium of the puppet theatre as a traditional device of entertainment, social commentary and satire. The specific role of puppets in early twentieth-century Mexico is explored in order to begin to locate Modotti's marionette images. Modotti's decision to deploy marionette imagery is investigated and her photographs, through an historical appreciation of puppetry, are highlighted as provocative and powerfully derisive.

Chapter II functions as a direct and focussed approach to the marionette series. It introduces puppeteer Lou Bunin and addresses the specifics of The Hairy Ape

marionettes. O'Neill's play is examined and viewed within the context of both American and Mexican leftist politics and within the wider rubric of Marxist philosophy. The second chapter also incorporates postcolonial theory and the writings of the Subaltern Studies group in an effort to formulate a theoretical approach to Modotti's artistic production. Marxist politics, both in art historical practice and in the context of revolutionary Mexico, is analyzed in terms of notions of class-consciousness and social transformation. Lastly, marionettes are explored in terms of metaphor and are considered performance vehicles which act in metaphorical narratives. Puppetry embodies double-ness found in its placement within both low and high art, and also in its function as a dramatic and parodying form of expression. The notion of metaphor in art is expanded to consider metaphoricity as a symbolic quality of national identity. For this concept of nation as narration, the theory of Homi K. Bhabha is introduced.

Chapter III introduces the marionette series as a new narrative strategy that rests on metaphor and allusion as opposed to blatant expressions of radical politics.[5] It surveys Modotti's Mexican production with particular focus on the force of American, German and Mexican photographic trends. Modotti's photographs taken between 1924 and 1928 are discussed in terms of their potency as propagandistic art and as documentary photography. Possible reasons for Modotti's switch to marionette narratives are posited and several marionette photographs are analyzed in terms of their specific engagement with Mexican politics and culture. Finally, the marionette series is recognized as rigidly formalist with regards to photographic technique and the photographs are discussed in terms of their sharp and supposedly 'un-manipulated' rendering.

[5] Sarah M. Lowe's brief analysis of Modotti's marionette series refers to them as metaphorical expressions. This thesis expands, elaborates and deepens the role of metaphor in the marionette photographs.

Before commencing with the main body of text, I would like to outline my general art historical approach to 'writing' an artist and her art production. Assuming historical accuracy and assigning intentionality to a work of art in effect works to diminish that art's cultural and historical agency. Therefore, when 're-visiting' historical women and their production, the question becomes one of subjectivity, and notions of difference and identity within subject-hood. However, identity is not an ascribed description 'from above' in the present, rather, it is an open-ended and on-going process. The project of 'Modotti as Subject' is introduced here with one of her poems written in 1923:

PLENIPOTENTIARY

I like to swing from the sky
And drop down on Europe,
Bounce up again like a rubber ball,
Reach a hand down on the roof of the Kremlin,
Steal a tile
And throw it to the kaiser.
Be good;
I will divine the moon in three parts,
The biggest will be yours.
Don't eat it too fast. [6]

Modotti's subjectivity can only be established when the specificity of her context is questioned. For example, it is imperative that her position as a foreigner and artist in post-revolutionary Mexico be examined. The particular scenario of Mexico in the early twentieth-century can be re-conceptualized by postcolonial theory. Postcoloniality re-works Euro-American Imperialist discourse and approaches de-colonized/de-colonizing societies as containing fluid and fluctuating spaces. The notion of difference is integral to the understanding of the postcolonial subject as well as a key point of feminist

theorization. Sexual difference as a discursive feminist strategy, refers to the differences not only between men and women, but more importantly, to differences among women, thus avoiding the homogenous implication of the blanket term 'woman'. Difference works to de-stabilize any fixed notion of identity and addresses the complexity of layers of experience.[7]

The importance of postcolonial and feminist theory to this study of Modotti's photographs and artistic production cannot be over-stressed. To realize Modotti's work as having political and cultural agency, her subjectivity must be established. Sexual difference and identity function to establish subjectivity. In Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art, Griselda Pollock suggests:

> Difference is not essential but understood as a social structure which positions male and female people asymmetrically in relation to language, to social and economic power and to meaning...Sexuality, modernism or modernity are organized by and organizations of sexual difference. To perceive women's specificity is to analyze historically a particular configuration of difference.[8]

The present project is, in part, concerned with analyzing the structuring of Modotti's identity within Mexican politics, economics and *Mexicanidad* culture. Modotti as Subject depends on embracing the complexity of her difference and identity. Rosi Braidotti offers a critical theory on feminist subjectivity in "Sexual Difference as a Nomadic Project." Her project involves both the critique of existing definitions and representations of women and also the creation of new images of female subjectivity. Braidotti recognizes the acquisition of subjectivity as a process allowing for the admission of a multiplicity of

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[6] S.M. Lowe. Tina Modotti's Vision: Photographic Modernism in Mexico, 1923-1930, p.63
[7] For a discussion of difference in feminist theories, see; R. Braidotti, "The Politics of Ontological Difference." Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis (Routledge; London, 1989), pp.89-105
[8] G. Pollock, Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art (Routledge; London, 1988), p.56

variables: race, class, age, sexual preference, and lifestyle.[9] The starting point is the "politics of location" which stresses the accountability and positionality of the subject while critiquing the dominant identities and power-formations. Braidotti insists that this implies "not only the recognition of differences among women but also the practice of de-coding," and she formulates three levels of sexual difference: differences between men and women, differences among women, and differences within each woman.[10] The levels are not categorically distinct but rather function as tools to name the various facets of one complex phenomenon. Braidotti calls her theory nomadic because feminist subjects live simultaneously between and within the three levels of difference. Braidotti also posits nomadism as a postmodern, postcolonial myth. In an effort to resist established modes of thought, her theory acts as a political fiction which urges the thinker to move mentally across coded categories of gender politics. The female subject who inevitably drifts between and within the three levels of difference is enacting 'nomadic shifts.' These movements "designate a creative sort of becoming; a performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction of experience and of knowledge."[11]

Postcolonial discourse also addresses the need for the 'politics of location.' However, here it refers to collective cultural identity and not only female subjectivity. On the postcolonial stance on contemporary global relation, Arif Dirlik writes: "Attention needs

[9] R. Braidotti, "Sexual Difference as a Nomadic Political Project." Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory (Columbia University Press; New York, 1994), p.156
[10] Ibid., p.168
[11] R. Braidotti. Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory. p.6

to be shifted from the national origin to subject-position; hence a 'politics of location' takes precedence over politics informed by fixed categories."[12]

It is important that my paper's usage of difference, subjectivity and identity be clear. The idea that difference both shapes and is shaped by cultural relations is, in my view, crucial in understanding any art production. Furthermore, the notion that sexual difference does not function in the same way with all women everywhere is vital. Difference must be analyzed in the specificity of a determined configuration. For example, the study of Victorian women writers will demand a distinct comprehension of the precise social and political variables unique to that historical moment in order to apply the 'politics of location.' The study of women in Latin America during the same period requires the assimilation of an entirely different set of variables. Having perceived the distinctive culturally-specific variables in a given time and place, let us say Mexico City in 1920, difference must then be understood as a social structure which crystallizes relations in contradistinction. In other words, it is not enough to say, for example, that women in Mexico were confined to the domestic realm and barred from political activity, or that politics was polarized between the right and the left. Braidotti's three levels make it impossible to assume an individual's belonging to a larger homogeneous group. The ease with which historical subjects are categorized disappears and subjectivity becomes not a definition of identity but rather an exploration of the multiplicity and contrariety contained within identity. Therefore, Tina Modotti is established as a volitional and complex subject in harmony and tension with men, other women and within herself. By examining her photographs with sensitivity to politics, gender, class and ethnicity, these

[12] A. Dirlik, "The Post-Colonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Capital Globalism." Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufi, Ella Shohat, eds.

harmonies and tensions will ground her photos as cultural signs and not just representative of "women's art."

Chantal Mouffe's article "For a Politics of Nomadic Identity" succinctly synthesizes the 'politics of difference' in an effort to determine identity. Mouffe argues that every identity is relational and that the affirmation of a difference is a pre-conception for the existence of any identity. The 'other' signifies the relational aspect of another's identity which you do not possess.[13] When forming a collective identity, the difference, or differences, are what marks the distinction between 'us' and 'them'. Two main ideas in Mouffe's theory are hybridity and nomadism. Braidotti's notion of multiplicity and Mouffe's hybridity affirm the nomadic quality of every identity. The following quote relates to both the ambivalence of post-revolutionary Mexico and the feminist project of becoming-subject:

> We might argue that not only are there no 'natural' and 'original' identities, since every identity is the result of a constituting process, but that this process itself must be seen as one of permanent hybridization and nomadization. Identity is, in effect, the result of a multitude of reactions that take place inside a space whose outlines are not clearly defined.[14]

The notion of identity as a constituting process is one which will become increasingly important to this thesis, both in the consideration of Modotti as Subject and in the understanding of her *Mexicanidad* context. That Modotti's work and Modotti herself crossed different locations of meaning can be seen reflected in her artistic production. The above poem, *Plenipotentiary*, reveals Modotti as self-consciously nomadic and deliberately political. The title of the poem refers to a diplomatic agent who has full

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(University of Minnesota Press; Minneapolis, 1997), p.506

power and authority to represent a government. In the poem, perhaps Modotti envisions herself as a plenipotentiary; however, the government for whom she works is unclear. Modotti expresses her identity in shifting and hybrid terms. Similarly, the marionette photographs cross contexts of meanings in their portrayal of an American play and with the usage of a traditional form of popular performance art.

[13] C. Mouffe, "For a Politics of Nomadic Identity." Traveller's Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement. George Roberson ed. (Routledge; London, 1994), p.107
[14] Ibid., p.110

CHAPTER I

POST-REVOLUTIONARY MEXICO: POLITICS AND THE ART OF PUPPETRY

TRADITION AND CHANGE IN MODERN MEXICO

1910 marked the beginning of the Mexican Revolution. Brief historical reviews such as the one contained in this chapter, oversimplify the role of peasant politics, hegemonic processes, and revolutionary nationalism.[1] However, the violent uprisings were most certainly the result of spontaneous and direct reactions against the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz (1877-80, 1884-1910), in an effort to bring about immediate change.[2] The basic motivations may be stated as;

> The need for a political system that provided easy access to and control of executive positions for the upper middle classes; the right of the peasant farmers to own and cultivate land based on ancient pre-Columbian traditions of collectivism, and the antipathy toward foreign domination that denied native values and exported the natural riches of the country – this last partly based on a reaction to a long history of conquest and exploitation by foreigners.[3]

In 1920, after over one and a half million deaths, Alvaro Obregon was elected president, marking the 'end' of the Revolution. However, the following decades in no

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[1] See F. Mallon. Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru (University of California Press; Los Angeles, 1995). Chapters 1 and 3 define hegemonic processes in Third World development as a "set of nested, continuous processes through which power and meaning are contested, legitimated and redefined at all levels of society." (Mallon, p.6) Hegemony, the end point of hegemonic processes, is therefore a balance of contested forces. This notion is important when considering the role of peasant politics in revolutionary uprisings. Also, see G. Joseph and D. Nugent eds., Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico (Duke University Press; Durham, 1994), Chapter 1, for a discussion of populist and revisionist interpretations of the Mexican Revolution.

[2] Independence from colonial rule at the end of the eighteenth century introduced a new Mexican republic. Despite independence, Native Mexicans continued to be exploited by the government and 'campesinos' (Indian peasants) were economically and geographically displaced by the government's feudal colonization of the countryside. For an economic and social history of Mexico from the conquest to the twentieth-century, see UNESCO. Race and class in postcolonial society: A study of ethnic group relations in the English speaking Caribbean, Bolivia, Chile and Mexico (UNESCO; Paris, 1977).

way fulfilled revolutionary objectives but instead were wrought with intense social, economic, and political unrest and a remarkable search for national and cultural identity.

Claudia Schaefer addresses the issues of subjectivity, sexuality and identity in Latin America in Textured Lives: Women, Art and Representation in Modern Mexico. She comments on the ambivalent state of post-revolutionary Mexico as caught in a tension of integration between tradition and change, national and supranational interests, and between the individual and the collectivity. She writes: "In the aftermath of the violence of the Revolution came the natural obligation to construct a new society after centuries of subjection to cultural, social, and economic imperialism as a colony of both internal and external forces."[4] The 1920s embodied disunity, found in the revolutionary debris of cultural and geographic disharmony, as well as unity, found in the search for a national identity.

The overthrow of the Diaz dictatorship and the ensuing decade of revolutionary coalitions inaugurated a socialist struggle for class equilibrium and collective well-being. The Partido Obrero Socialista (POS) had been established in 1911, and was joined in 1919 by the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM) and its political wing, the Partido Laborista (The Labour Party).[5] The PCM established firm roots in the countryside creating several regional peasant leagues. It urged peasants to seize and occupy lands and not to turn over their weapons received during the revolution. Membership in the PCM was not limited to peasants and workers, but also included artists and the intelligentsia

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[3]L. Folgarait. So Far From Heaven: David Alfaro Siqueiros' The March of Humanity and Mexican Revolutionary Politics. p.11

[4]C. Schaefer. Textured Lives: Women, Art and Representation in Modern Mexico (University of Arizona Press; Tuscon, 1992), p.6

[5]B. Carr. Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico (University of Nebraska Press; Lincoln, 1992), p.16. See Chapter 1 for a cohesive history of the Mexican Communist Party in the first half of the twentieth-century. Also included is the impact of the Russian Revolution, European Social Democracy and American Imperialism.

who saw themselves as workers in need of improving labour conditions. Intellectually driven, these artists and activists were working towards a national unity seemingly promised by communist policies. The Revolutionary Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors, formed in 1922, represented this group of political revolutionaries.

The 1920s in Mexico have become known as the 'Mexican Renaissance,' a time of vigorous cultural and artistic activity prompted by a desire to recall pre-Columbian and Indian tradition. There was a new interest in the 'oppressed', which referred to the historical condition of the indigenous population, as well as a search for *Mexicanidad.* Started in the nineteenth-century and carried into the twentieth, *Mexicanidad* embodied a philosophical, intellectual, and emotional interest in Mexican-ness and was particularly concerned with the essence of Mexico as being linked to pre-Columbian and Aztec culture.[6] *Mexicanidad* was not an organized cause. It was a multifaceted movement which penetrated social and cultural rituals, making evident the link between modern Mexico and its pre-Columbian past.[7]

ART AND *MEXICANIDAD*

A major force behind the cultural re-birth of the second decade of the twentieth-century was the Ministry of Public Education and its director, from 1921- 1924, Jose Vasconcelos. Philosopher, writer and teacher, Vasconcelos implemented a nation-wide program to encourage an awareness of cultural history and to foster national pride. While

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[6] C. Schaefer. Textured Lives: Women, Art and Representation in Modern Mexico. p.9

[7] L. Chilsen, "Synthesis of Art and Life: Tina Modotti's Photography in Mexico and the Building of a Mexican National Identity," Vol.19, No.1 (Winter 1996), p.3. See also the following sources for explanations of Mexicanidad: C. Schaefer. Textured Lives: Women, Art and Representation in Modern Mexico, pp.9-11 and D. Rochfort. Mexican Muralists (Chronicle Books; SanFrancisco, 1998), pp.15-21

educating the masses, Vasconcelos promoted a vision of a unified Mexican people. Shared by many of his contemporaries, this vision was inspired by his idea of a liberal utopia

> founded on the principles of education and economic well-being to forge ahead to a goal of beauty, freedom, and global social accord. His theory rests on the promise of a universal *spirit* setting the *material* free. Since Vasconcelos regards the surrounding environment, which had been an impediment to this evolutionary process, as having been 'liberated' by the Revolution, his ideas express faith in nature or in the 'natural' state of things.[8]

In his 1948 essay, *The Cosmic Race*, Vasconcelos explains his notion of the utopian act of 'setting free' wherein a future 'universal human being' is the expression of the natural state of things. Vasconcelos is referring directly to the *mestizo*, or racially mixed descendent of many cultures, as the ultimate Latin American identity.[9] Such a race would exemplify the *Mexicanidad* desire for peaceful conciliation of cultures and an authentic expression for the peoples of the American continent: "Poverty, defective education, the scarcity of perfect models, the misery that turns people ugly, all these calamities will disappear from the future social state."[10]

Vasconcelos' national education project included an elaborate mural painting scheme designed to adorn the National Palace and the government ministries housed within. The commission of the mural project by Vasconcelos initiated the formation of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors. Informed by Marxist concern for production and labour, the Syndicate established itself as an organized manifestation of political and radical artists. El Machete, the communist popular newspaper founded by

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[8] C. Schaefer. Textured Lives: Women, Art and Representation in Modern Mexico. p.30
[9] Ibid., p.30
[10] J. Vasconcelos. La Raza Cosmica: Mission de la raza iberoamericana (Espasa-Calpe Mexicana; Mexico City, 1948), p.30

muralists and communists David Alfaro Siqueiros and Xavier Guerrero, printed the Syndicate's manifesto in 1924:

> The Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors directs itself to the native races humiliated for centuries; to the soldiers made into hangmen by their officers; to the workers and peasants scourged by the rich; and to the intellectuals who do not flatter the bourgeoisie. Our fundamental aesthetic goal must be to socialize artistic expression and wipe out bourgeois individualism. We *proclaim* that at this time of social change from a decrepit order to a new one, the creators of beauty must use their best efforts to produce ideological works of art for the people...[11]

The muralists, the most prominent being Diego Rivera, Siqueiros, and Jose Clemente Orozco, were active founders of the Syndicate as well as major contributors to the PCM. The murals exude *Mexicanidad* in their glorification of Aztec culture and portrayal of a triumphant *mestizo* race. They also espouse the ideals of the revolutionary government which was embracing Marxist and communist philosophy in order to instill a sense of collective peace.[12] Although the mural movement is the most well-known example of the politicization of twentieth-century Mexican art, it is by no means representative of the scope and diversity of the cultural production of the epoch.

To many foreigners, the so-called Mexican Renaissance embodied the romance of the revolutionary spirit and exoticized the political dissident and artist-as-genius. Leftist thinkers seeking closer party affiliation and artists seeking 'freedom' flocked to Mexico

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[11] D. Rochfort. Mexican Muralists, p.39

[12] The relationships between the individual muralists and the PCM were complex and shifting as various governments came into power. As the government became progressively right-wing in the late 20s, artists were redefining their relationships to both the mural project and the Communist Party. International communism also played a role in the shaping of Mexican communist practice. For a comprehensive discussion of the muralists' work, see D. Rochfort. Mexican Muralists. Also, see B. Carr, "The Fate of the Vanguard under a Revolutionary State: Marxism's Contribution to the Construction of the Great Arch," in Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico, G. Joseph and D. Nugent eds. Carr discusses the various traditions of communism and Marxism in Mexico, in particular relation to the role of the PCM, as well as the muralists.

City.[13] Tina Modotti arrived in Mexico City in 1923 and almost immediately became involved in the *Mexicanidad* movement. Her work as a photographer and political activist were inexorably wrapped up in the unity and disunity, as well as the oppression and utopia of Mexican cultural nationalism during the 1920s.

Modotti's involvement in *Mexicanidad* is affirmed by her role in American writer Anita Brenner's book Idols Behind Altars. Brenner's text, published in 1929, presents Mexican history and art and was illustrated entirely by the photographs of Modotti and Edward Weston. The photographers travelled through Mexico for four months taking pictures of Mexican architecture, crafts, and objects of ritual in an attempt to "place the past in the present and to update the indigenous by revealing its presence in the everyday life of Mexico."[14] Similarly, the muralists recognized Modotti's commitment to communist ideals and commissioned her to document the installation of the grand murals. Rivera also included Modotti in the murals, along with various other contemporary personages, as a figure involved in the Mexican movement for independence. Rivera's mural, *Distributing Arms* (Figure 19), at the Ministry of Education, shows Modotti in the far-right corner holding a bandolier. In 1927, Modotti officially joined the Communist Party, an example of her political activism which also included membership in various organizations such as International Red Aid, the Ant-Imperialist League and Hands-Off Nicaragua.

[13] The allure of Mexico for foreigners may have as much to do with promised financial freedom and independence secured by Euro-American imperialism as with the desire to be involved in an international political and artistic movement.
[14] L. Chilsen, "Synthesis of Art and Life: Tina Modotti's Photographs in Mexico and the Building of a Mexican National Identity." p.5

PUPPETS AND REVOLUTIONARY PRODUCTION

Considering Modotti's political activism, it is not surprising that her work produced between 1924 and 1928 reflects a deep engagement with Marxist communist principles and includes commentary on contemporary social and political conditions. However, less expected are her marionette photographs. The function of puppets as traditional Mexican and European devices of political commentary imbue Modotti's marionettes with historical significance and evoke them as new *Mexicanidad* symbols of political and cultural potency.

Mexican revolutionary culture embraced an interest in dolls, masks and puppets which was informed by a *Mexicanidad* concern with folklore and Indian traditions. There is very little literature which explores marionettes in Mexico in the twentieth-century; however, there is some evidence which affirms their presence and suggests their recognized potential as political and cultural devices.[15]

Contemporary and friend to Modotti, painter Frida Kahlo makes reference to the cultural inherence of puppets. Kahlo's art draws heavily on Aztec mythology and condemns American technology and modernization. Her self-portraits are shockingly direct expressions of sexual, spiritual and cultural hybridity.[16] In "Body Languages: Kahlo and Medical Imagery," David Lomas discusses Kahlo's experience with reproductive technology: "The resulting scars were deeply etched. An undercurrent of anxiety surfaces in a private diary where she wrote *above a frail marionette toppling from*

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[15] See F. Toor. A Treasury of Mexican Folkways (Crown Publishers; New York, 1947) for a contemporary study of Mexican crafts, traditions and folklore. Although the author address mainly dance, festivals and myths, she does document popular toys. Aside from affirming the popularity of "marionettes of fantastic personages", the author does not comment on traditions of puppetry in Mexico (Toor, p.67).

[16] Kahlo's easel paintings have been marginalized by the notoriety of the muralists. Deeply political and visually disturbing, her work necessitates scholarship on sexuality, ethnicity and radical politics in post-revolutionary Mexico. See Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti (Whitechapel Art Gallery; London, 1982) for an insightful and analytical comparison of the two artists.

a pedestal: 'I AM DISINTEGRATION.'[17] The insertion of marionette imagery into a private journal is perhaps symptomatic of puppetry's deep-rooted cultural and historical significance. Moreover, Kahlo's self-referential use of the marionette introduces it as another visual metaphor in her on-going exploration of identity.

Puppetry as craft and performance art was a recognized part of Mexican heritage. In 1929, the Secretary of Public Education presented a written statement calling for the preservation and promotion of "Los Artes Populares:"

> The Secretary of Public Education calls together the First National Congress of the Popular Arts, which will meet in Mexico City on ---- in 1929, the subjects are the following: 1) To direct and encourage the popular arts and to recognize the importance of our 'folk-lore;' 2) The foundation of the National Museum of Popular Arts. The Congress recognizes:
> Clothes
> Popular Music
> Popular Dance
> Popular Theatre- Dramatic representation- **Puppets** –
> Popular Holidays
> Popular Myths
> Popular Painting...[18]

Further evidence of the *Mexicanidad* interest in puppets is evidenced with the establishment of schools for Indigenous Studies, founded by Vasconcelos. Part of the education of Mexican customs and rituals included learning the art of puppetry, which led to a subsequent revitalization of the puppet theatre.[19] The need to safeguard and promote folklore in the post-revolutionary years was part of the *Mexicanidad* thrust to identify and cherish ethnic and cultural ritual. The bolstering of communal pride worked to create

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[17] D. Lomas, "Body Languages: Frida Kahlo and Medical Imagery," The Body Imagined: The Human Form and Visual Culture since the Renaissance (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 1993) p.14

[18] Memorandum, Secretaia de Educacion Publica, Mexico, D.F.; 11 December 1929. Rene d'Harnoncourt Papers; Archives of American Art.

[19] For contemporary articles on the teaching and revival of marionettes in Mexico in the 1920s, see; Lou Bunin Papers. Center for Creative Photography; University of Arizona, Tuscon, Arizona.

more confident and aware workers, labourers and peasants. Such class-consciousness and identification with mass popular culture was a primary goal for the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors, and most certainly for the PCM.

Before the revolution in 1910, folklore was used as a way to both inform and encourage solidarity among the workers-in-arms. Jose Guadalupe Posada (c.1852-1913) was a satirical engraver and print-maker. Anita Brenner, writer and anthropologist in Mexico City in the early twentieth-century, calls him an "illustrator of ballads and the prophet of the revolution."[20] Posada worked in the period just before the revolution but was regarded by artists such as Rivera and Orozco to be a true revolutionary.[21] Posada broke with tradition both in technique and style. He drew directly on zinc plates with acid, as opposed to wood cut technique. His engravings were distinguishable not only for their unique style but also for their subjects and manner of portrayal. Posada illustrated songs of love, exile and battle. He satirized political legendary events such as Diaz's orations and Zapata's victories. Perhaps the inspiration behind El Machete, Posada engraved for broadsheets; popular illustrated newspapers.[22] Editor and publisher, Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, operated street gazettes in Mexico City and collaborated with Posada in their publication. They were the 'producers' of mass media, which included Arroyo's words and Posada's pictures. The broadsheets featured calaveras, or skeletons, which signified The Day of the Dead and insinuated ancient beliefs in birth/death dualities. Posada used grotesque figures and hyperbole to portray popular celebrations and

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[20] Brenner, Anita. Idols Behind Altars (Biblo and Tannen; New York, 1928), p.185

[21] 'Posada's prolific output of prints represented for Rivera the vitality of Mexico's rich traditions of popular art...and later influenced the imagery that Rivera used in his murals depicting the revolutionary struggles of the people through their traditions of folklore and political and religious festival." D. Rochfort. Mexican Muralists. p. 23

[22] The notion of 'popular' culture is problematic in that it assumes a homogeneous group of consumers. It does not distinguish sexual, political or ethnic differences. See T. Gretton, "Posada and the 'Popular':

historical moments. Using grim humour and blatant mockery to critique bourgeois wealth and power, Posada became, as Rivera claimed, "the artist of the poor and dispossessed."[23] Similarly, Rivera and his contemporaries believed Posada to have a major role in developing mass awareness of the state and in building consciousness of the existence of a Mexican nation.

Posada also designed play bills and metal cuts for puppet shows. The engravings for the theatre bills did not differ from his other types of draughtsmanship in that they characterized the marionettes in an exaggerated and sardonic manner. Posada seemingly recognized the incisive and parodying quality of puppets and chose to include them in his genre of pre-revolutionary satire.

MARIONETTES: FROM 'DIVINING' APE TO THE HAIRY APE

Puppets have always held a certain fascination for their viewers perhaps due to their unlimited scope of characters and guises. A marionette can 'suspend disbelief' in its uncanny personification. Unlike human actors whose idiosyncrasies and mannerisms must be hidden, the marionette is created to the desired shape, size and physical distinction. At the same time, it is a projection of the human being by whom it is controlled. When the audience accepts the convention of puppets, they enter into the miniature stage realm. "When puppets come alive and the play is on, the overwhelming appeal is that of the theatre. One ceases to think of wood and wire; one is absorbed in the action...One loses a sense of proportion."[24]

Commodities and Social Constructs in Mexico before the Revolution," Oxford Art Journal, Vol.17,No.2 (1994) for a thorough discussion on the concept of 'popular' culture in reference to Posada's readership.
[23]J. Rothenstein,. Posada: Messenger of Morality (Moyer Bell Ltd; New York, 1989), p.23
[24]P. McPharlin. The Puppet Theatre in America: A History (Harper and Row; New York, 1949), p.1

Europeans had a great fondness for puppets, Spain being no exception. At the beginning of the seventeenth-century, Cervantes wrote the classic epic Don Quixote, one of the first major literary works to include appearances of marionettes. In Book II, Chapter 25 and 26, Don Quixote and sidekick Sancho encounters a puppeteer, Master Pedro, who is staying at the same inn. The puppeteer was famous for his 'divining ape' and his travelling puppet theatre. Initially, Don Quixote and Sancho meet him with skepticism but after witnessing the true power of the ape, they agreed to view Master Pedro's marionette theatre show:

> Don Quixote and Sancho obeyed him and went to where the puppet theatre was already set up and uncovered, surrounded with small candles which made it look bright and attractive. When they had come, Master Pedro ensconced himself inside it, for it was he who had to work the puppets, and a boy, a servant of his, posted himself outside. He acted as commentator and explained the mysteries of the exhibition, having a wand in his hand to point to the figures as they came out.[25]

The boy narrates the story of a Spanish woman who is being held captive by the Moors in an occupied Spanish city. During the show, a large army of Moors appears on stage. Don Quixote, unable to distinguish between reality and illusion, believes the Moors to be real, and physically attacks the puppets:

> He drew his sword and with one bound placed himself close to the puppet stage. With unexampled rapidity and fury he began to shower down blows on the puppet troop of Moors, knocking some over, decapitating others, maiming this one and demolishing that. Among many more, he delivered one downstroke which, if Master Pedro had not ducked, made made himself small, and got out of the way, would have sliced his head as easily as if it had been made of almond paste... The complete destruction of the show having been accomplished, Don Quixote became a little calmer.[26]

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[25] J.R Jones and K. Douglas, eds. Miguel de Cervantes Don Quixote (W.W. Norton & Company; New York, 1981), p.570
[26] Ibid., p.573

From their first inclusions in literature, puppets have been used as performative devices with which to underscore social and political issues, as well as to reveal and strengthen the personalities of the characters, who become the audience during the spectacle. In the case of Don Quixote, Master Pedro's puppets comment on both the reality of the Moorish domination, and the eventual nemesis of Don Quixote.

The Spanish recognized that the puppet theatre appealed to all classes, to young and old. In Histoire des Marionettes en Europe, Charles Magnin asserts that every major Spanish town had a permanent puppet theatre set up where a diverse audience of different classes and ages came together.[27] Not surprisingly, the Spanish colonizers in Mexico were accompanied by their own theatre troops, including puppeteers. In October 1524, Hernando Cortes set out from Tenochitlan (present day Mexico City) to Las Higueres, Honduras. The diarist wrote that Cortes took with him "five players on the oboe, sackbut, an acrobat, and another who did sleight-of-hand and worked puppets."[28] It is not sure what the initial performances consisted of, although the Spanish at the time would have appreciated the deeds of a martyr, the story of a saint or any chronicle of the Bible. That Spanish colonizers continued to produce puppet shows is confirmed by a petition in 1569 asking permission to play three puppet shows which would "give the gentry no cause to blush."[29]

The history of puppetry must also include traditions from pre-Columbian times. Masks, figurines and puppets were used by indigenous cultures in ritual, medicine and celebration. There is written evidence of this by Spanish observers, such as Bernando de

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[27] P. McPharlin. The Puppet Theatre in America: A History. p.69
[28] Ibid., p.6
[29] Ibid., p.7

Sahagun, who wrote of a Toltec medecine man in 1590. "Seating himself in the middle of the marketplace at Tianquiztli, he announced that his name was Tlacavepan, and proceeded to make a tiny figure dance in the palm of his hands."[30]

The eighteenth century witnessed a growth of puppet theatres in Mexico City and also wandering puppeteers in the country. The attraction of puppet theatre seems to have been so strong that it urged actors away from their own stage to become puppeteers. In 1786, the Controller of the Theatre in Mexico City issued an order to prohibit stage actors, dancers or singers from performing in puppet shows. He also demanded that puppeteers obtain a government license to perform, as previous spectacles included "drunkenness and disorder bringing about illnesses and indispositions."[31] Despite opposition by some government officials, puppet shows increased in frequency and popularity.

In the nineteenth-century, Mexican puppet shows expanded to include elaborate marionette programs accompanied by intricately designed play bills, such as the ones illustrated by Posada. One of the most well-known puppet troops was the Rosete Aranda Family puppeteers. In 1880, the Aranda family opened at the Teatro del Seminario in Mexico City, their plays portraying Indian village life. One reviewer proclaimed: "It is a beautiful and peaceful picture of village life; a religious idyll, a jewel of realism and charming simplicity."[32] The performances included sophisticated puppetry such as marionettes lighting candles and life-like animal puppets. The Aranda family toured the country, applauded for their celebration of Mexican life. The youngest son continued the

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[30] Ibid., p.9. The defined scope of this paper does not allow for an exploration of pre-Columbian traditions of puppetry. See F. Dockstader. Indian Art in Middle America (New York Graphic Society Publishers Ltd; Greenwich, 1964) for an introduction to pre-Columbian art and artifacts, as well as colour reproductions of ancient figurines and puppets. Of particular interest is the 'articulated figurine' from Veracruz, Mexico from c.500-750 B.C. The clay model has jointed limbs, making it a possible pre-cursor to the European moveable marionette.

[31] P. McPharlin. The Puppet Theatre in America: A History. p.70

[32] Ibid., p.245

tradition into the twentieth-century with his inherited 350 marionettes, 750 unjointed puppets and 30 animal puppets. The legacy of the Rosete Aranda Puppeteers continued in Mexico City until 1946.

It is relevant at this point to remark on puppetry in Italy at the turn of the century. The existence of puppet rituals at the time of Modotti's childhood in Northern Italy may also provide a context for her eventual use of marionette imagery in Mexico in 1929. When considering miniature theatre production, one immediately conjures up images of the beloved little fibber in Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio. The book was first published in Naples in 1883, thirteen years before Modotti's birth, and has been revered as a tale for both adults and children. I do not wish to consider the plot and characters of Pinocchio but rather briefly comment on its historical significance as a political work.

Pinocchio was written during a time when Italian artists were struggling to break free of bourgeois limitations and academic restraints. Artists and intellectuals believed the bourgeoisie to be materialistic, spiritually bankrupt, hypocritical, and chained to tradition. Artists sought to challenge, if not overthrow, bourgeois sentiments. One way to do this was to dismiss traditional modes of representation in favour of more avant-garde 'modernist' ones. 'Miniaturization' became a trend and succeeded in achieving the acclaim of 'high' art while remaining below in 'popular' culture. Pinocchio was renowned for its 'Italianness', its place in a newly unified Italy, its reliance on and subversion of the fairy tale genre, and its humour and ironies. Furthermore, its inclusion of the miniature realm and its pre-occupation with childhood, alluded to both a newer generation replacing the bourgeoisie, and to artistic modernist movements throughout Europe: Young Germany, Young Scandinavia, Young Poland. Pinocchio marks the start

of a century long movement to challenge and de-stabilize 'academic' and 'high' art. The metaphor of Pinocchio, that of a toy-child longing to be a human-boy, complements Collodi's biting critique of established materialism:

> The suggestion in Pinocchio, implicit rather than explicit- that the boy Pinocchio at the end of the work is destined to become far more of a puppet once he enters adulthood than he was as a puppet- underlies the metaphoric appeal of the puppet or marionette figure to many modern artists...Children are often compared to puppets because they are not yet "real people." But as Collodi suggests, perhaps it is indeed the adults in bourgeois society who are the real puppets, manipulated by a host of powers they think they have control over but in fact do not.[33]

Given the widespread popularity of Pinocchio, one may assume that Modotti's family was familiar with the book. Moreover, Modotti's father's status as a left-wing labourer and craftsman possibly made him a sympathizer of anti-bourgeois movements.

Twentieth-century marionette shows and puppetry revivals may be found in virtually every country in Europe. Even American avant-garde artists re-constructed the puppet genre to promote modernist art forms.[34] When O'Neill's The Hairy Ape appeared onstage in Mexico City in 1929, puppetry's long history of entertainment, humour, and ridicule was recalled. However, this time it was photographed, so that the marionettes could 'work their magic' on stage *and* on film.

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[33]H.B Segel. Pinocchio's Progeny: Puppets, Marionettes, Automatons, and Robots in Modernist and Avant-Garde Drama (Johns Hopkins University Press; Baltimore, 1995), p.43

[34] Ibid. See Section 2 of this book, which deals with avant-garde readings of puppetry across Europe. For example, the author addresses Spanish Modernist Drama, Polish puppetry, and Russian marionettes before the Revolution. Each national form did not surface as an isolated school of puppetry, rather there was constant interchange and appropriation of puppet theatre. Certainly, Mexico is no exception and was informed by American, Spanish, Italian and Russian puppet theatre.

CHAPTER II

THE MARIONETTE SERIES

LOU BUNIN AND THE HAIRY APE

In 1929, Lou Bunin went to Mexico City as an apprentice to Diego Rivera. Russian born, Bunin immigrated with his family to Chicago in 1907. He studied fine arts at the Art Institute of Chicago and at the Academy and in 1925, studied in France and Spain.[1]

Drawn to the cultural re-awakening south of the border, Bunin and his wife, artist Alice Bunin, went to Mexico City to paint. When it was discovered that Bunin was a puppeteer, he was hired by La Casa del Estudiante Indigena (School of Indigenous Studies), part of the school system conceived by Vasconcelos, to teach the art of the marionette. Bunin was hailed by local critics as an artist who would initiate "el nuevo moviemiento que podriamos llamar: el renacimiento del Teatro de Munecos," or, the new movement that was called The Renaissance of the Puppet Theatre.[2] While in Mexico, in addition to painting in the mural project, Bunin produced several marionette plays: The Hairy Ape, by Eugene O'Neill; The Astute Rabbit, a Mexican folk tale; and, The Well of the Saints, by John M. Synge. With Bernardo Ortiz de Montallano and Julio Castellanos, Bunin founded a marionette theatre in Mexico City under the patronage of the Department of Fine Arts. Bunin crafted the marionette cast of The Hairy Ape to use as a form of social commentary. Originally, Bunin had found support with the American ambassador's wife, Elizabeth Morrow. However, when she learned of Bunin's plans to

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[1] For a comprehensive look at Bunin's career, see; Canemaker, John, "Puppet Master." Print Vol.41; (Sept-Oct 1997), pp.5, 94-101, 141-144.
[2] "Titeres Mexicanos," Revista de --- January 1930. Lou Bunin Papers. Center for Creative Photography; University of Arizona, Tuscon, Arizona.

perform O'Neill's play, she declined support. Despite Morrow's refusal to support The Hairy Ape, Bunin performed other marionette shows at the embassy.

As a teacher at the School for Indigenous Studies, Bunin and his students produced a child's tale called The Astute Rabbit. Bunin's use of the puppet theatre as a political art form popularized the marionette. Back in the United States, his work was not going unnoticed. In Young Israel, Harry Alan Potamkin wrote an article on Bunin entitled "Marionettes." Potamkin chronicled Bunin's production in Mexico City, stating that "the marionette theatre has become a major activity in the lives of the Indians, and it has become, in the hands of Bunin, a very lively joy."[3] Furthermore, the political implication of The Astute Rabbit was recognized as an ode to communist ideals: " The Rabbit sought to gather all the animals into a co-operative group where they would work in common for the common good, all sharing alike and pooling their strength."[4]

The Hairy Ape was also a political expression. However, it differed from utopian fables in its harsh and grimly ironic portrayal of working class America. Its bizarre twists and intense condemnation of bourgeois society made it inappropriate to be shown by the American embassy. Bunin and Modotti's carefully developed staging of The Hairy Ape requires an understanding of the play's political and cultural import.

The Hairy Ape (1921) is thought by many to be O'Neill's most complex play. The main character, Yank, is a Neanderthal-like worker in a ship's stokehole who imagines his masculinity in metaphors of a workplace he has clearly internalized. He imagines himself and his labour independent of upper class ownership when he proclaims:

I'm smoke and express trains and steamers and factory whistles;

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[3] Potamkin, Harry Alan, "Marionettes," Young Israel, p.4. No Date. Lou Bunin Papers. CCP, University of Arizona, Tuscon, Arizona.
[4] Ibid., p.4

> I'm de ting in gold dat makes money! And I'm what makes iron into steel! Steel, dat stands for de whole ting! And I'm steel – steel – steel! I'm de muscles in steel, de punch behind it![5]

Yank's co-worker, Long, represents class-consciousness and political awareness and is determined to convince Yank of his 'proletarian' position. Yank's first confrontation with his own class positioning occurs in scene three when Mildred Douglas, the ship owner's daughter, visits the stokehole. Upon catching sight of Yank who is pounding gorilla-like on his chest and shouting, Mildred exclaims, "Take me away! Oh, the filthy beast!"[6] From this point, Yank mockingly refers to himself as 'the hairy ape.' He is profoundly enraged by Mildred's reaction and he and Long go to 5th Avenue the following Sunday to look for her. Scene five includes O'Neill's description of the wealthy uptown churchgoers:

> The women are rouged, calcimined, dyed, overdressed to the nth degree. The men are in Prince Alberts, high hats, spats, canes, etc. A procession of *gaudy marionettes*, yet with something of the relentless horror of Frankenstein monsters in their detached, mechanical unawareness.[7]

During the excursion, Yank has an altercation with one of the wealthy top-hatted gentlemen on 5th Avenue and is promptly arrested and committed to a jail cell.

Literary critic, Joel Pfister writes:

> O'Neill shows his audience and Yank that the "hairy ape's" physical resistance to institutional and ideological ruling class power is futile. The controlling engineer's whistle of the corporate-industrial state is now replaced by the disciplinary whistle of the police, and Yank is summarily tossed in jail.[8]

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[5] O'Neill, Eugene. The Hairy Ape (Random House; New York, 1922), p.98
[6] Ibid., p.214
[7] Ibid., p.230
[8] Pfister, Joel. Staging Depth: Eugene O'Neill and the Politics of Psychological Discourse (University of North Carolina Press; USA, 1995), p.117

Although Yank never achieves a complete understanding of class exploitation, he gains enough awareness to comprehend the hopelessness of his position. He becomes reflective and angst-ridden. In the final scene, Yank goes to the zoo, converses with an ape about his sense of not-belonging, frees the ape who then hugs him to death and throws him in the cage. The final stage directions are "Perhaps the Hairy Ape at last belongs."

MARX, CLASS-CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE 'SUBALTERN'

Like Bunin, Modotti embraced the medium of puppet theatre as an effective means of political and social narrative. The enigmatic nature of marionette figures meant less blatant and less dangerous political photography without being less derisive.[9] In the fall and early winter of 1929, Modotti took photographs of The Hairy Ape marionettes, which were performing at Bunin's puppet theatre. Modotti's marionette series, which includes approximately twenty-four photographs, includes both character sketches and scenes from The Hairy Ape. However, before I commence a critical analysis of the series, I would like to outline an approach to Modotti's marionette images which incorporates Marxian concepts of production, as well as current cultural theory concerned with the postmodern/postcolonial subject. I believe both strategies to be important for several reasons. The functioning of Marxist, or at least leftist, politics can be detected at every level of production of these marionette photographs. Firstly, O'Neill's The Hairy Ape addresses issues of working class subjectivity in America and confronts Marxist notions of class-consciousness. Secondly, the production of The Hairy Ape by Lou Bunin in Mexico City places the play in a transnational context. Both American and Mexican

[9] Modotti apparently did not not take marionette photographs prior to this series in 1929, with the exception of one photograph (Figure 1). *My Latest Lover!*, 1926, is a playful picture of a Mexican puppet. Although it

politics are satirized; not through a 'straight' play but through marionettes. Bunin's theatrical direction and crafting of marionettes (remembering their significance as 'low' art and thus situated 'below') seem to represent Marxist philosophies of class and production. Lastly, Modotti herself adhered to a Marxist framework. Although I do not attempt to suppose her interpretation or understanding of Marx, I aim to explore the implications so that Modotti's production may be viewed in a narrower historical context. Cultural specificity, as I attempted to explain in the introduction, is crucial in art historical readings which seek to account for the subjectivity of an artist.

Secondly, postcolonial theory, in particular the field of subaltern studies, directs itself towards a re-configuration of subject-identity. Modotti's Mexican work, particularly the marionette series, *seems* to be coming from and speaking to a heterogeneous community whose identity was rooted in cultural displacement, a history of oppression, and a shared belief in a communal belonging within *Mexicanidad.* In other words, Modotti's work has been grouped with the work of Mexican revolutionary artists such as Rivera and Manual Alvarez Bravo.[10] Subsequently, it is tempting to categorize Modotti's photography as Mexican post-revolutionary art, or as tangible creations of *Mexicanidad.* However, Modotti's situation is historically complex in that she was both a foreigner and a radical. Her political affiliations were wider than her Mexican context; as a member of the Red Army, Modotti travelled throughout Europe and North America. Therefore, it is extremely problematic to identify Modotti as a Mexican revolutionary photographer. Subaltern theory will work to challenge Modotti's subjectivity and positionality in

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Although it does not seem to be a political expression, it does reflect Modotti's concern with things Mexican and an early interest in folk art of *Mexicanidad.*

[10] M. Frizot, "Once Upon a Time There was a Revolution." Beaux Arts Magazine No.115 (1992), pp.99-103, 141-2

Mexico and will problematize the issue of Modotti's foreign voice as having political agency in the artistic milieu in Mexico City.

In The Social Production of Art, Janet Wolff critiques traditional methods in art history. She posits that challengers to 'old' art history seek to expose the ideological nature of art, and she works from a specific premise which also underwrites my consideration of Modotti's photographs:[11]

> Works of art are not closed, self-contained and transcendent entities, but are the product of specific historical practices on the part of identifiable social groups in given conditions, and therefore bear the imprint of the ideas, values and conditions of existence of those groups, and their representatives in particular artists.[12]

The much-questioned theory of ideology states, put simply, that the ideas and beliefs that people have are directly related to their material existence and that the relationship is structured and systematic. For example, material activities, such as hunting and building dwellings, are primary because they are basic human needs. This primary materiality results in secondary activities. The secondary includes communicating about and planning the primary activities. Therefore, the notion of 'consciousness' results from material conditions of existence. In 1859, Marx formulated his 'base-superstructure' model, he wrote:

> In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions

[11] The term 'ideology' has since been viewed as problematic in the field of cultural studies. The notion of hegemony is more commonly deployed in discourse on unequal relations in class-based society. See Chapter 3 in J. Wolff. The Social Production of Art (New York University Press; New York, 1981) for Marxist theories of art, and Chapter 4 for cultural politics.
[12] Ibid., p.49

the social, political and intellectual life process in general.[13]

From this, Marx explains social revolution as a conflict between the material productive forces of society and the existing relations of production, a conflict which may result in a transformation of material and economic conditions. However, though some material conditions may change or shift, the legal, religious and philosophic power relations which determine production and material existence, may not transform as quickly or at all. For example, the revolutionary government in Mexico was dedicated to working towards peasant reform and autonomy of the working classes. By the end of the 1920s, the government had shifted back to more right-wing policies and had begun to exploit ethnic and class differences. Although material conditions had appeared to change after the revolution, the power structures had invariably stayed the same and eventually re-surfaced to crush proletarian uprisings; a phenomenon which has plagued Mexico through the entire twentieth-century.

Theorists have written extensively on the problems inherent in Marx's base-superstructure model. For example, the model fails to account for marginal practices and entities which are neither base nor superstructural; such as family and domestic labour. However, I want only to define the Marxist structuring of economics, considering material conditions and mode of production as fundamental to both consciousness and cultural production.

Class-consciousness refers to the general collective consciousness of a given class. It is what provokes and gives way to class struggle. Claudio Katz articulates the role of class antagonism in social transformation:

> A class's impact on economic development is rooted in the logic

[13] Ibid., p.76

> of class struggle. Class conflict arises from the system of exploitation, in which control of the means of production entails the right to allocate labour power and its product. Individuals come to organize and struggle as classes principally to protect and defend common conditions of existence. This is the chief reason they develop and maintain various types of class based institutions – for example, peasant village organizations and labour unions.[14]

Understanding the relationship between material existence and thought, between the ownership of the means of production and class, and between class-consciousness and social transformation, is a starting point from which to address Modotti's photographic production. As with her contemporaries in the Syndicate of Painters, Sculptors and Technical Workers, Modotti considered herself a worker-photographer: "I [Modotti] look upon people now not in terms of race or types but in terms of classes. I look upon social changes and phenomena not in terms of human nature or of spiritual factors but in terms of economics."[15] The majority of her photographic output was, as shown in Chapter III, either concerned with documenting the struggles of the peasant and working class, or with propagandizing communist ideals. The marionette series is equally concerned with class struggle, both in its staging of The Hairy Ape and in its strategic use of marionettes as political devices. Furthermore, a Marxist framework allows for an understanding of general social and political dynamics in post-revolutionary Mexico. Modotti's preoccupation with class makes sense within the context of *Mexicanidad*. Her use of more subtle political imagery also makes sense given the growing hostility of the government towards communists in the late 1920s. Modotti was deported in 1930, only months after the production of the marionette photographs. The political significance of

[14]C.J Katz. From Feudalism to Capitalism: Marxian Theories of Class Struggle and Social Change (Greenwood Press; New York, 1989), p.22
[15] S.M Lowe. Tina Modotti: Photographs (Harry N. Abrams; New York, 1995), p.26

the marionette series begins to crystallize when seen in its general context of Marxist communist *Mexicanidad*, and in its immediate and specific context of Modotti's status as foreigner/woman/political activist.

O'Neill's The Hairy Ape is decidedly Marxist in its concern for class orientation and anti-bourgeois sentiments. Leftist playwrights in the United States in the 1920s and 30s looked to the play as a model of innovation. The play explicates a tripartite model of the class system: the working class, the professional-managerial class, and the capitalist or ruling class. The structure revises the traditional working class versus capitalist class paradigm in light of the evolution of the capitalist system in the United States.[16] Liberalism resulted in a group of educated people, including socialists, anarchists, scientists and artists, who both criticized and promoted the growth of the ruling class. The union movement gained momentum and strength, and by 1919, five million workers had joined unions and four million participated in strikes and lockouts.[17] The U.S. steel strike, the United Mine Workers' strike, the Boston Police strike, and the Seattle general strike aroused fear and suspicion of an American communist, or 'red' revolution.

The class orientation and anti-bourgeois sentiments expressed in The Hairy Ape are similar to Modotti's own political convictions. What is intriguing is the play's (and the photographs') mise-en-scene in Mexico City. Multiple variables, such as the producers' status as foreigners and as worker-artists, as well as the location of The Hairy Ape in post-revolutionary Mexico, urge me to consider more advanced theories of 'class' and social transformation.

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[16] J. Pfister. Staging Depth: Eugene O'Neill and the Politics of Psychological Discourse. p.69
[17] Ibid., p.147

Gayatri Chakavorty Spivak writing in "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," is concerned with subject-identity in the 'subaltern'. The 'subaltern' refers to the space of de-colonization where change and agency are located. The field of Subaltern Studies proposes two main things in its definition of the origin of the subaltern, or postcolonial, subject:

> The colonial subject is seen as emerging from those parts of the indigenous elite which come to be loosely described as "bourgeois-nationalist." The Subaltern Studies group seems to me to be revising this general definition and its theorization by proposing at least two things: first, that the moment(s) of change be pluralized and plotted as confrontations rather than transition (they would thus be seen in relation to histories of domination and exploitation rather than within the great modes-of-production narrative) and, secondly, that such changes are signalled or marked by a functional change in sign systems (the religious to the militant)...The most significant outcome of this revision or shift in perspective is that the agency of change is located in the insurgent or in the 'subaltern.'[18]

The subaltern studies group's refusal to write the subject into the "great modes-of-production" narrative seems to contradict my previous suggestion of the importance of Marxist theory. Indeed, the Marxist tradition becomes problematic when art is seen as more than an inevitable product of ideology. In other words, by placing art and cultural production in strictly formal Marxian terms, art is reduced to a mere reflection of its society, an image of its class positioning, or a purely economic manifestation. Griselda Pollock warns against reductionist readings of art for obvious reasons: the oversimplification of the circumstances of cultural production; the role of the artist as universal spokesperson for their class; and, the lack of sensitivity to social relations, such as sexual domination, reproduction etc. Pollock seeks to use both Marxist cultural theory and historical practice, as well as feminist art histories. "What we have to deal with is the

[18] G.C Spivak. In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (Methuen; New York, 1987), p. 197

interplay of multiple histories – of the codes of art, of ideologies of the art world, of institutions of art, of forms of production, of social classes, of the family, of sexual domination..."[19] The Subaltern Studies group, while deploying Marx's notion of class-consciousness, goes further to challenge the actual functioning of 'consciousness.' For example, particularly relevant to the present project, is the structuring of the peasant class. A reductionist reading might identify the peasant class as an insurgent or 'subaltern' group whose consciousness reflects an underlying solidarity. However, the 'subaltern' is working to diminish precisely that reading which suggests a 'transcendental consciousness.' The Subaltern Studies group resists the urge to classify all consciousness as class- consciousness, as if 'class' is an inalienable state of humanity. Rather, the group's strategy uses a narrow definition of Marxist class-consciousness:

> Class-consciousness on the *descriptive* level is itself a strategic and artificial rallying awareness which, on the *transformative* level, seeks to destroy the mechanics which come to construct the outlines of the very class of which a collective consciousness has been situationally developed. "Any member of the insurgent community who chooses to continue in subalternity is regarded as hostile towards the inversive process initiated by the struggle and hence as being on the enemy's side" (Guha). The task of the 'consciousness' of class or collectivity within a social field of exploitation and domination is thus necessarily self-alienating.[20]

Thus, the strategy of self-alienating class-consciousness relates to a form of self-consciousness. Subaltern consciousness can therefore be defined as an emerging collective *self*-consciousness.

The reason I have chosen the notion of subaltern consciousness as an approach to Modotti's work is that I believe it to provide a theoretical framework which resists general classifications of cultural and political relations in post-revolutionary Mexico.

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[19] G. Pollock. Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art (Routledge; London, 1988), p. 30

For example, because class-consciousness is re-worked as self-consciousness, it appears unsound to impose homogeneous classifications on certain historical groupings. In other words, in Mexico in the early twentieth-century, the peasant class did not necessarily share the working class self-consciousness, nor did the urban proletariat share that of the rural labourers, and so on.[21] Moreover, while subaltern theory explores insurgent groups and marginalized populations within a national context, the theory can also be applied to the study an individual subject whose identity is nomadic and hybrid. With a 'subaltern' approach, I am not seeking to establish Modotti as a 'subaltern' subject, or even as located in subaltern spaces in Mexico. Rather, I am hoping to convey the complexity of post-revolutionary Mexico in terms of insurgent populations (*Mexicanidad*) and the phenomenon of nationalism and its creation in artistic practice. Modotti's presence within class politics and Mexican (and pre-Columbian) culture that was not her own, demands that her artistic production be questioned as signs in a changing system and that previous and emerging systems be analyzed. Therefore, when considering Mexican cultural production during this epoch, the task is truly to account for the 'interplay of multiple variables.' Modotti can no longer be said to be speaking from and to the 'working class'. Rather, historical notions of peasant class and working class must be opened up and re-addressed in order to allow the art to function as more than a mirror of ideology. The goal is to consider subject-identity, in terms of sexual difference and subaltern subjectivity, so that the marionette series can be conceptualized as a cultural sign within a changing Mexican sign-system. This theoretical configuration urges me to view the photographs as

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[20] G.C Spivak. p.205
[21] Ibid., p.206

culturally significant, yet prohibits me from assuming any inherent meaning based on their 'belonging' to an historically ascribed social class.

I would like to illustrate my theoretical formulation by briefly reading a marionette photograph in two ways; first, as a straight-froward political expression, and second, as a complex metaphor for political and national identity. *Yank* (Figure 17) shows the protagonist growling before what appears to be either the ship's deck or a city street. Having an understanding of both The Hairy Ape and Bunin's association with socialism and the muralists, the photograph becomes an expression of working-class struggle and a parody of the tragic exploitation of the lower classes. Modotti's role of photographer implicates her in the act of condemnation of the American and Mexican governments.

The above interpretation is weakened by the fact that Modotti's subjectivity is neither deepened nor challenged. Instead, Bunin and Modotti, although foreigners, are ascribed to the Mexican working class, or at least to the class struggle. Furthermore, the marionettes' function as symbolic and subversive vehicles of low art isn't investigated in relation to the shifting political and national identity of Tina Modotti. Subaltern theory provides a structure with which to question Marxist class formulations and to view class-consciousness as an historically strategic self-identification. In this light, *Yank* is a photograph which contains several thresholds of representation and ambiguous meanings. The notion of the 'working class' is presented through a mockery of Yank making Yank, Bunin and Modotti unclear in their associations and intentions. Also, the acknowledgement of marionettes as 'popular' art and their consideration within 'subaltern consciousness', links the notion of Marxist cultural production to spaces of difference, hence allowing for a richer understanding of the marionette photographs. Modotti's

political and national identity, having understood subjectivity in terms of difference, are seen as metaphors in the photographs and the political expressions contained within the marionette series are but one facet of their production.

TRANSCENDENT MARIONETTES: METAPHOR AND MEANING

The marionette series is powerful in its satirical poignancy and because of the photographs' striking formalism. However, the photographs are perplexing in their ambiguity. For example, upon looking at them, it is uncertain who the characters are, where the play is set, and what the plot consists of. Yet the photographs realize the capacity of marionettes to parody, critique and undermine. It is not necessarily subtle mockery but always once-removed so that the image becomes one of ambiguous double-ness. Modotti's move to embrace an American play, albeit aligned with leftist politics, is curious in the face of Mexico's anti-American policies. Also significant is the incorporation of marionette imagery, a popular Mexican form of performance, in order to ridicule both the American government and the Mexican government by whom she was persecuted. The intent of the photographer and puppeteer, and the 'personalities' of the marionettes unite to produce an intensely symbolic representation. Furthermore, the double-ness intrinsic in puppetry raises the important issue of the role of metaphor in art.

"Metaphor is usually defined as the presentation of one idea in terms of another, belonging to a different category, so that either our understanding of the first idea is transformed, or so that from the fusion of the two ideas a new one is created. This can be represented symbolically as: $A + B = A(B)$, or, $A + B = Z$."[22] Without the transformation of the first idea, there is no metaphor, simply a comparison or analogy.

Therefore, the original idea, referred to as the tenor or first anchor, is modified or transformed by the intervening idea, the vehicle or second anchor.

Metaphors transcend diverse contexts of meaning. They are puzzling because they are simultaneously nonsensical and meaningful.[23] The construction of metaphor is closely related to the processes and structure of imagination, therefore reflecting cognition and consciousness.[24] Metaphors can be de-constructed to have three main features: tension; the presence of two main subjects or anchors; and, integration, or the interrelation of two meanings. Metaphors express their meaning through tension. Tension is strain, contradiction, ambiguity or discontinuity which is evident between the two or more anchors contained within the conceit. (In the case of art, one of the anchors can be within the work of art and the other can be an existing subject in the exterior). The specificity of the context, then, becomes crucial when comprehending the metaphor. As well, the synthesis and integration of the metaphor relies upon its reception in the intended context. Having identified the subjects and apprehended their reciprocal tension, the metaphor integrates into a complex, but single expression. The marionette series, when viewed in terms of metaphorical conceits, takes on a new meaning. The marionettes featured in the photographs act as one of the subjects in the metaphor construction. The second and exterior anchor fluctuates depending on which photograph is being viewed and how the viewer construes the metaphor.

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[22] T. Whittcock. Metaphor and Film (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 1990), p.5
[23] C.R. Hausman. Metaphor and Art (Pennsylvania State University; New York, 1989), p.9
[24] Metaphors have been studied for centuries as insights into mental and cognitive functioning of human perception. Cognitive psychology, in particular, has named metaphor as a primary process in developmental psychology. The field of linguistics has also studied metaphor in terms of literary analysis and the construction of rhetoric. For theories of metaphor in psychology and linguistics, please see: D. Ross. Metaphor, Meaning and Cognition (Peter Lang Publishing; New York, 1993); and S. Sacks ed. On Metaphor (The University of Chicago Press; Chicago, 1978).

The second anchor or subject of the marionette series has multiple identities. There is always a danger of misrepresenting an artist's intention when critically 'reading' her work. Therefore, I will try to avoid speculating on the desired purpose of the photographs, but rather refer back to Braidotti's notions of identity, difference, and nomadism when considering the metaphoricity of Modotti's production. There are many levels to consider when discerning the second anchor of the metaphor to arrive at its meaning.

Firstly, the marionettes may be viewed in terms of Modotti's political identity. In this case the exterior reference is Bunin's marionette version of O'Neill's The Hairy Ape. Modotti's status as worker-photographer is illuminated when placed within the realm of the play's concern with the tripartite class system. Yank's portrayal of a manipulated class subject represents Modotti's philosophical and political pre-occupation with class difference. The protagonist's name 'Yank' alludes to the derogatory slur 'yankee' used to name American people. Yank, in his egocentricity and lack of political consciousness, comes to signify the 'ignorant American'. In scene seven, after his release from jail, Yank goes to the office of The Industrial Workers of the World, mistaking the labour union for a terrorist organization. The scene is significant for two reasons. Firstly, when Yank enters the office, the secretary asks his name, to which Yank replies: "Name? Lemme tink. I been Yank for so long – Bob, dat's it – Bob Smith."[25] Yank's amnesia signifies a loss of identity and his adopted identity 'Yank' refers to his positioning within the American working class. Secondly, the scene reveals Yank's true lack of class-consciousness. Determined to get revenge on the people represented by Mildred Douglas and the 5th Avenue gentlemen, Yank believes that as a member of the Industrial Workers

of the World, he will be able to bomb factories, steamers, buildings and jails. "Dat's what I'm after – to blow up de steel, knock all de steel in de woild up to de moon. Dat'll fix tings!"[26] Yank's misguided and ludicrous proposition evokes pity in the reader and underscores the human exploitation caused by class oppression. Modotti's decision to photograph elements of O'Neill's scathing satire condemns the government's hand in industrialization and class exploitation. The Yank marionette in Figure 18 acts as the first anchor, which may represent folk traditions of puppetry and Mexican heritage. When the persona of 'Yank', the second anchor, intervenes with the puppet's significance as a performing 'folk' doll, the photograph transforms into a metaphorical expression which bridges together *Mexicanidad* and Marxist politics.

In *Yank with Night Watchman* (Figure 5), Yank's neanderthal appearance stresses the physicality of his existence (his material relation to the means of production) and his foul facial expression reveals his confusion and anger. The watchman looks away and raises his arm in dismissal. The strings of the marionettes have a double-function: to control the movements of the puppets; and, to form the prison bars of the jail cell. Both Yank and the watchman are controlled by a 'higher' entity yet are engaged in a confrontation. This metaphor-conceit of political identity modified by The Hairy Ape, can only be understood in its entirety if the viewers have a knowledge of the play.

Four Puppets (Figure 1) portrays the scene where Yank is arrested by the police. Yank is being apprehended by the police officer while, to the left, a "gaudy marionette" in a top-hat is watching. Yank's accomplice, Long, is behind him to the right, with upraised arm. The scene is set on sophisticated 5th Avenue in the foreground and, in the

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[25] E. O'Neill. The Hairy Ape. P.247
[26] Ibid., p.250

background, the soaring New York skyscape. The windows in the upscale shops advertise diamonds and furs. On the right, the window sign announces 'monkey fur' – the source of the ladies' squeals of delight and Yank's increasing hostility. Irony is heightened with the placing of Yank's defeated form under a sign saying GOLD; emphasizing his ignorant belief in his role in making gold into money.

I would like to study these photographs' metaphoricity in relation to Modotti's specific positioning as their producer; however, first I would like to raise the issue of narrative in her photographic strategy. *Yank with Night Watchman* (Figure 5), *Three Marionettes* (Figure 4), and *Four Puppets* (Figures 1 and 2), portray scenes from The Hairy Ape and represent what I have called the narrative photographs in her marionette series (see Appendix 1). Modotti's choice to photograph these particular scenes from the play, in my view, must relate to their significance as important or symbolic moments. I have used these narratives to explore political metaphor in the marionette photographs because of their representation of The Hairy Ape and its political orientation.

Three Marionettes portrays Mildred Douglas and her mother above on the deck where Yank works down below. The ship's officer is bowing to young Mildred who is standing beside her elegantly seated mother. This establishes the presence of the bourgeoisie, an essential element in the play and foreshadows the imminent encounter between Mildred and Yank.

The two photographs entitled *Four Puppets* visually enact the confrontation between the upper and lower classes, portraying it with mockery and violence. For example, Figure 2 shows the moment of Yank's physical defeat by a policeman. The enormous and muscular marionette of Yank is ironically suppressed by the physically weaker

policeman. The top-hatted 'gentleman' stands to the left motioning toward Yank, as if ordering the officers to seize him. The social status and class power of the 'gentleman', carried out by the police officer, is enough to dominate Yank and render his physical strength obsolete. Modotti's decision to photograph this moment creates a narrative wherein class exploitation is illustrated and the where the dominators and subordinates are clearly defined. However, due to his ignorance and hostility, Yank's character as a victimized labourer is not a sympathetic one. The signs reading FUR and GOLD allude to both Yank's lack of awareness and bourgeois decadence, possibly making both Yank and the gaudy marionettes the targets of ridicule.

Lastly, *Yank and Night Watchman* is a narrative photograph which, by portraying Yank in a jail cell, symbolizes the control of the working classes and evokes feelings of desolation, confinement and frustration. The figure of the watchman is in tension with the figure of Yank; he seems to be walking away in exasperation. Yank remains a hostile and aggressive protagonist. This scene addresses class politics and, in the ambiguity of the relationship between the two characters, is a suggestive image which probes into class-consciousness and intra-class relations.

The above narrative photographs relate to Mexican post-revolutionary politics but also function as products of Modotti's positioning, political and personal, in *Mexicanidad* culture. In all of the photographs, political metaphor may be realized even without a prior knowledge of The Hairy Ape. The marionettes' inevitable manipulation may be perceived as standing for a lack of political freedom and economic immobility. Modotti's own political identity may be conceptualized as a second anchor. The very inclusion of puppets relates to both European and Mexican cultural practice, from Don Quixote and

Pinnochio, to Posada and the Rosete Aranda family puppeteers. They allude to both European satirical traditions and to *Mexicanidad*. Modotti, then, as the artist, is implied in both phenomena. Born into the Italian working class and artistically active as a worker-photographer in Mexico, her identity is widened as hybrid and nomadic. Furthermore, Modotti's use of Mexican folklore to ridicule the bourgeois and ruling class of Mexico both implicates her within *Mexicanidad* and removes her from it. She identified with the Mexican urban proletariat as a 'worker-photographer', yet appropriated a Mexican folkloric tradition to condemn the Mexican government. The dichotomy of low/high art, specifically the dual function of marionettes as both popular and elite art, reveals itself in Modotti's photographs and simultaneously blurs Modotti's position. It seems apparent that Modotti used marionettes as folk art in order to criticize the bourgeoisie. However, the marionettes can also be seen as functioning as 'high' art in this instance in that the artistic elite of Mexico was their audience. Therefore, while Modotti identified with the working classes, it would be questionable to place her within that category because of her dealings across class and national divisions. The notion of subaltern consciousness works to account for the paradoxical situation of self-alienating class-consciousness. Indeed, Modotti's photographs of The Hairy Ape associate her with the working class struggle in Mexico; however, by virtue of their ambiguity, they blur national and political boundaries which were clear in her previous work.

Furthermore, the marionettes' class oppression relates to Modotti's international dedication to socialism. Class oppression is posited as occuring across cultures and frontiers and the photographs speak of universal politics. The aspect of internationalism again expresses Modott's personal political identity. During the creation of the marionette

series, Modotti was planning her life abroad. On December 3, 1929 in Mexico City, Modotti opened her first one-person show, which included the marionette series.[27] In February of 1930, she was deported. Modotti continued to work as a communist activist with the Red Army in Spain, the Soviet Union, Poland and Russia.

Hands of the Puppeteer (Figure 7) becomes a richer image when considered as a metaphorical synthesis. The photograph may be regarded in terms of Modotti's ridicule of Mexican and American politics via The Hairy Ape or, as a metaphor for her own political identity. However, I want to consider it in terms of the second possible subject-anchor; personal identity. The first subject in all the photographs is the marionette. In this picture, the strings are emphasized, stressing the marionette's function as a regulated and restricted 'person'. The exterior referent in this metaphor becomes, I would argue, Modotti herself. Personal identity embodies a multiplicity of variables. In Mexico, Modotti's gender, political-mindedness and radical photography made her a perceived threat. Her work inverted the public and private spheres by placing women in an exterior and central location.[28] Modotti's political notoriety crossed the line into male-dominated territory and was deemed undesirable. Moreover, her relentless obsession with class (and gender) worked to raise political consciousness; an act the government deemed to be dangerous. Lastly, Modotti's status as foreigner only aided in the Mexican government's persecution of radical political activists, as it was easier to deport her. Braidotti's 'politics of location', in this instance, can be applied to realize Modotti's subjectivity in terms of difference: her political voice in the public (male) sphere; her difference from other women as a non-Mexican; and her Italian-American nationality. In other words, the

[27]S.M Lowe. Tina Modotti's Vision: Photographic Modernism in Mexico, 1923-1930, p.196

tensions between her political beliefs and the increasingly conservative (male) government, between herself and the people she photographed, and between her own shifting national identity as an American, Italian and international communist, perhaps erupted into an antagonistic relationship between Modotti and her surroundings. The manipulated marionette, then, is easily understood as a metaphor for Modotti's gender, class and cultural identity.

Thirdly, Modotti's artistic identity may act as a second anchor in the metaphor. *Hands on Tool*, 1927, represents Modotti's earlier focus on race and labour. By cropping the photograph, the hands become the subject. Their involvement in labour alludes to the interplay between class, gender and ethnicity.[29] *Hands of the Puppeteer* (Figure 8) also represents political and social issues; however, its imagery is much more subtle, the close study of the puppeteer's hands more like a still-life than an action shot. Although hands are clearly the subject of the photograph, the metaphorical connotations are unclear. The conceit of the image is realized depending on how the viewer construes its meaning. In other words, *Hands of a Puppeteer* can be realized as a metaphor for the critique of Mexican politics, as Modotti's own political and social beliefs, or, as an expression of her shifting national identity. This photograph is my final example of the series' metaphoricity. The exhaustive study of hands may relate to modern photography's obsession with pure forms and the sharp study of an 'object'. As with *Hands on Tool*, this representation of hands may relate to the manual labour of the working classes. However, the hands, in their whiteness, do not relate to *campesinos* or native workers. Instead, the hands control the strings of a marionette, again standing as a metaphor for class relations

[28] I will discuss Modotti's photographs in terms of gender politics in Chapter III as part of my investigation of her production as politically engaged in *Mexicanidad*.

in Mexico. With Modotti as the photographer, the hands and strings may again signify her own identity in Mexico in 1929. The entire series is representative of a shift towards heightened complexity, both in the elusive puppetry and multiple metaphorical meanings. Modotti's focus on formalist sensibilities and greater subversive subtlety must certainly reflect the precarious position of her identity at many levels.

Another important aspect of the marionette series is its inclusion of folk art, or what has been traditionally considered as 'low' art. This incorporation points up, yet again, the effort to de-stabilize 'high' art and its grounding in elite and bourgeois cultural systems. Scott Cutler Shershow writes:

> The puppet was repeatedly inscribed in Western culture as a marker or rubric of the 'low': as a cultural practice literally situated in the marginal social spheres of carnival, fairground, and marketplace; as a parodic or degraded form of theatrical performance subordinate to 'legitimate' or literary drama; and even as sign, trope, and metaphor in a hypothetical hierarchy of being and representation, the passive vehicle of a mastering authorial form. This cultural lowness was declared and instantiated in bourgeois texts that also participated in the construction of a particular kind of reader and a particular kind of aesthetic and cultural perception.[30]

Shershow continues by noting that the same bourgeois texts which degrade puppetry, reveal a fascination with the puppet as a 'transcendent' and magical performing object. Thus, the puppet may be seen as part of an on-going cultural process where elite and 'popular' modes thoroughly interpenetrate each other. This relates to the structuring of cultural appropriation where "high discourses, with their lofty style, exalted aims and sublime ends, are structured in relation to the debasements and degradations of low discourse."[31] The marionette series, then, becomes more complex when considering the

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[29] L. Chilsen, "Synthesis of Art and Life: Tina Modotti's Photography in Mexico and the Building of a Mexican National Identity." Photo Review Vol.19,No.1 (Winter 1996), p.6
[30] C.S Shershow. Puppets and "Popular" Culture (Cornell University Press; Ithaca, 1995), p.6
[31] Ibid., p.6

medium and the audience. The series consists of photographs (photography representing a modern, if not avant-garde art form) which use marionette imagery (a traditionally 'low' art) to address the exploitation of the working class. Again; national (American, Mexican and European) and class (bourgeois and working) distinctions are blurred and it no longer seems apparent from where Modotti was 'speaking'. Similarly, the intended audience is also ambiguous. Modotti exhibited the marionette photographs in a retrospective show in December 1929. On the last day of the show, muralist Siqueiros, delivered a talk entitled "The First Revolutionary Photographic Exhibit in Mexico."[32] Therefore, the marionette series was certainly seen by her contemporaries. Having received critical acclaim in the press, Modotti herself wrote: "The exhibit...aroused enormous interest and I feel quite proud of it."[33]

The role of puppets as vehicles with which to transgress class, and their function as both 'low' art and bourgeois objects of fascination, imbues Modotti's series with social and political significance. Similarly, the photographs' complexity is revealed when they are approached as metaphoric representations. The language of metaphor is able to transcend diverse contexts and transform the marionettes into expressions of political, personal and artistic identity.

METAPHOR AND 'NATION AS NARRATION'

Metaphorical expression is a complex and rich form of representation. However, metaphors also function within the wider context of a collective national and social

[32] S.M Lowe. Tina Modotti's Vision: Photographic Modernism in Mexico, 1923-1930. p.197
[33] Ibid., p.198

identity. In order to open up the possibility for a wider reading of Modotti's marionette series, I would like to refer to Homi K. Bhabha's strategy 'nation as narration.'

Nation and Narration, published in 1990 and edited by Bhabha, is a collection of post-modern, post-structuralist essays on narrative knowledge, discourse, textuality, enunciation and ecriture. In "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation," Bhabha confronts the modern and postcolonial nation, suggesting a theory of narration to conceive of the nation. Although this thesis is not concerned with 'defining' twentieth-century Mexico, the role of class (peasant, worker, labourer) and race (Spanish, Indian, *mestizo*) are crucial in understanding post-revolutionary *Mexicanidad* and consequently, Tina Modotti's place as an artist. I believe that the notions of difference and metaphor that Bhabha uses are also relevant when examining this period in Mexico. Metaphoricity and narrative strategy are found in both the marionette series and in Bhabha's conceptualization of nation.

Narration is a process from which emerges a story. The emerging nation, or the nation 'coming into being,' contains, like a story, metaphors. The nation's narrative includes the accepting of foreign cultures and the gathering of immigrants and refugees. In the case of Mexico, the narrative includes indigenous peoples who were displaced by colonial rule and then by dictatorial governments. The nation fills the void left in the uprooting of previous communities and turns that loss into the language of metaphor.[34] Double time (or doubleness) exists because the present is no longer attached only to the colonizer. The present is expressed through metaphor which moves between cultural formations (past; old country) and social processes (present and future; nation). *Mexicanidad* can be said to represent a metaphor of nation; a language and belief system which looked to pre-

Columbian and 'old' traditions in order to embody the post-revolutionary and modern Mexican identity. Modotti's photographic output in the case of Brenner's Idols Behind Altars, as well as in the folkloric significance of puppets in the marionette series, relates to *Mexicanidad* and therefore to a larger quest for Mexican national identity.

Bhabha suggests that the national narrative is the site of an ambivalent identification:

> It is the ambivalent, antagonistic perspective of nation as narration which establishes the cultural boundaries of the nation so that they may be acknowledged as 'containing' thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production.[35]

Cultural identity, which is determined through the process of cultural production, is derived from its locality within the nation, which embodies diverse cultural entities: youth, the everyday, new ethnicities, social and political movements. The locus of cultural identity is formed by the negotiation and articulation of diverse variables. Bhabha conceptualizes this cultural negotiation in the form of two inter-relating forces of time working simultaneously: the pedagogical and the performative. Within this construction lies the complexity of writing the modern nation.[36]

The double-time, or doubleness, implicated by the language of metaphor is again active in the cultural processes of the pedagogical and the performative. The pedagogical tense refers to the role of people in a nation as historical 'objects'. It is pedagogical because they are giving authority to a nationalist discourse which is constituted on, and disseminates, accumulated historical knowledge. The performative refers to the same people as 'subjects' who are instigating and engaging in a continual process of

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[34] Ibid., p.291
[35] Ibid., p.4
[36] For a general history of the notion of the 'modern nation', and for discussions of nationhood and nationalism, please see: B. Anderson. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of

identification by way of erasing prior histories of origination. These two tenses are evidenced in the case of *Mexicanidad* and in Modotti's marionettes. For example, *Reclining Marionette* (Figure 16) is a character sketch of Yank. The puppet itself can be termed pedagogical as it represents historical rituals and folk art. Puppetry signifies a link to past traditions of popular art and cultural practice in Mexico and reminds the viewer of a shared historical identity. The Hairy Ape as represented through Bunin and Modotti reflects performative intervention; that is, the play introduces a contemporary exploration of Mexican identity in its regard for class politics and its intimations of revolutionary urges to overthrow the bourgeoisie. This marionette photograph can be seen as embodying the complexity of *Mexicanidad* which is found in the past's confrontation with the present. Specifically, Yank's amnesia regarding his name and ultimately, his identity, represents the confrontation between the pedagogical (Bob, Yank's given name) and the performative (Yank).[37]

Both the specific context of *Mexicanidad* and Modotti's marionette photographs may be viewed in these terms. Firstly, the 'doubleness' of metaphorical language helps to articulate the transformative and hybrid nature of identity, embraced by feminist perspectives and the Subaltern Studies group. Bhabha's 'nation as narration' addresses collective identity in a manner which works to account for individual subject-identity and sees the individual-collective relationship as a metaphor for the larger national narrative which contains different races, indigenous peoples, foreigners, history, and the future. Bhabha's formulation, in its basis of ambivalence and metaphor, allows for the subaltern

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Nationalism (Verso; London, 1983), and E. Gellner. Nations and Nationalism (Cornell University Press; Ithaca, 1983).

[37] Raymond Williams also outlines the function of the pedagogical and performative in the making of culture stating that societal structure is a result of common meanings and growth. See R. Williams. Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism (Verso; London, 1958)

to exist in tension with the dominant class, for foreigners to co-habit with the native population, and for immigrants to preserve cultural rituals within a new country.

I would like to employ Bhabha's theory in my final approach to post-revolutionary Mexican art, and specifically Modotti's marionette series. Nation as narration highlights the plurality and contradiction contained within *Mexicanidad* and explains metaphorical language and thought as the movement and tension which is necessarily underneath the complexity of the modern nation. The post-revolutionary desire to unite peasants, workers and labourers was inspired by a glorified history of Aztec strength and Native power. The social and political texture of *Mexicanidad* presented the *mestizo* (mixed Indian and Spanish) as the ultimate Latin American expression of identity. In this mix was seen history and greatness, and the future and strength. Furthermore, foreigners and international politics participated in the fabric of *Mexicanidad*. Bhabha's narrative conception also addresses the 'alien' within a nation. Instead of pushing 'foreignness' onto the peripheries of the nation's narrative, it represents part of the metaphoricity of the nation's language and participates in the nation's cultural formation. I am approaching Modotti's art production with a similar regard to national narratives. Modotti's photographs appear in Mexico's national narrative. They must not be taken as representative of the voice of Mexican people, but rather seen as metaphorical constructions reflecting her position within the ambivalent Mexican narrative. Spivak and the Subaltern Studies group outline the parameters for an understanding of subject-identity 'in difference' and articulate a strategy of class-consciousness. Bhabha offers a method of positioning Modotti, as involved in both American and Mexican politics, in a Mexican national context. When contemplating the marionette photographs, questions of

puppetry's historical significance and class oppression are raised in relation to Modotti's specific context as an Italian-American in Mexico. Her national difference does not make these photographs less meaningful or more questionable as 'Mexican' art. Instead, the richness and metaphor of modern post-revolutionary Mexico is opened up to include ambiguous spaces and diverse times and places.

The strength of Bhabha's argument vis-a-vis Mexico lies in it ability to recognize *Mexicanidad* culture as constructed on the past *and* the present, and the pre-colonial, colonial and revolutionary. Mexican cultural space was 'shared' and an understanding of difference and the perplexity of hybridity allows for a conceptualization of that shared space. By extension, the marionette photographs are seen in that light of culturally shared and ambiguous spaces. The ambiguity of the marionettes' personalities and their multiple references are part of the national narrative and are neither termed "Mexican" nor categorized as art of a foreigner, a radical, or a woman. Rather, their point of 'departure' and their 'destination' is scrutinized within the context of traditions of puppetry, socialist politics and internationalism in Mexico in 1929. Their language of metaphor bridges together two or more disparate ideas to form one new and coherent one. Similarly, the narrative language of Mexico's emergent identity of *Mexicanidad* rests on metaphor and through its inclusion of artistic production, succeeds in "crossing, erasing and translating thresholds of meaning."

The multi-layered quality of the marionette photographs demands that many circumstances of production be examined. Firstly, The Hairy Ape and its performing marionettes enact a narrative of social oppression and class-consciousness. The

playwright is American and the play was shown in Mexico City at a time of increasing hostility towards American intervention and radical politics. The producers of the series, Bunin and Modotti, were American of Russian and Italian descent, who worked in Mexico as political artists and who were associated with the most prominent figures in art and politics, namely, the Ministry of Education and the muralists.

The nature of marionettes motions towards concepts of control and power, humour and satire. Puppets also allude to popular performance art and the social and political tension harboured within the low/high art dichotomy. When the plot and meaning of The Hairy Ape is super-imposed on the marionettes, a metaphor-conceit is constructed. The marionettes' function as controlled 'popular' performance vehicles is doubled; they also become the carriers of political ideals and social satire. It is possible that Modotti recognized the paradoxes contained within the practice of puppetry and that she chose to use them as a culturally subtle yet politically powerful form of national (and international) ridicule.

CHAPTER III

PHOTOGRAPHING MARIONETTES: INTRODUCING A NEW NARRATIVE STRATEGY

MODOTTI'S 'GAZE': POLITICAL AND DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY

This section will situate the marionette series within Modotti's photographic production in Mexico. It will reveal the marionette series as a new narrative strategy which represented a movement *back* to formalist concerns of photographic quality and subtlety, and *toward* heightened political subversiveness, complexity and metaphoricity.

While discussing the political nature of Modotti's photography in Mexico, I would like to stress that she was a prolific photographer whose work was reproduced in many photographic journals and as visuals in literary writing. Modotti's photography was renowned for its social concern and her camera was seen as a tool or a means to "register the present epoch."[1] Sarah M. Lowe, one of the pioneers of scholarship on Modotti and certainly one of the first authors to free Modotti from biography, remarked on the internationalism of Modotti's photographs:

> In 1926, six of Modotti's (non-commercial) photographs appeared in two different journals; in 1927, ten appeared in three different journals; and during the three years, 1928, 1929, and 1930, over 50 of her photographs were published in a variety of venues internationally: in left-wing journals such as *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* and *Der Arbeitr-Fotograf* (Berlin), *CROM* (Mexico City) and *New Masses* (New York), in literary periodicals such as *transition* (New York) and *BIFUR* (Paris), as well as in art magazines such as *Forma* and *Mexican Folkways* (Mexico City), and *Creative Arts* (New York), and *L'art Vivant* (Paris). Not surprisingly, her work was also represented in journals that mixed art and politics, for example,*!30-30!* (Mexico City) and *International Literature* (Moscow).[2]

[1] T. Modotti, "On Photography." Mexican Folkways Vo.5, No.4; (Oct-Dec. 1929), pp.197-198
[2] S.M Lowe. Tina Modotti's Vision: Photographic Modernism in Mexico, 1923-1930, p.150

Modotti's photographs were viewed internationally and were associated with leftist politics and various modernist photographic movements.

Modotti arrived in Mexico City in 1923 with the American photographer, Edward Weston who was to instruct her in photography. Weston was part of the American Modernist movement, new vision photography, which held as one of its primary principles the notion of straight photography, or minimal manipulation of negatives.[3] Part of straight photography's minimal printing manipulation was a pre-occupation with the 'Thing Itself'. Weston's technique involved "closing up the distance between camera and the subject so that the photographer seems to have lifted a veil between the viewer and the image."[4] Strict formalism lead to a confrontation with the 'Thing itself.' In his Daybooks, Weston articulated his way of working:

> I start with no preconceived idea – discovery excites me to focus – then rediscovery through the lens – final form of presentation seen on ground glass, the finished print previsioned complete in every detail of texture, movement, proportion, before exposure—the shutter's release automatically and finally fixes my conception, allowing no after manipulation-[5]

The result was a sharp and clearly outlined photograph of the subject in 'pure' form. Weston's photos reflect the modernist slogan 'form follows function' so that they are cool in their stringent formalism and warm in their almost claustrophobic rendering of the 'Thing Itself.'

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[3]R. Ehrlich, "Edward Weston: 1886-1958." Creative Camera No.10, (1986), p.12. On straight photography, Ehrlich writes that "dominant aesthetic in American photography after 1920 or so, was that printing should be done with minimal manipulation. If you hadn't got your idea right when exposing the negative, you couldn't correct the deficiency in the darkroom. This notion received its most forceful early expression in the writings of and conversation of Alfred Stieglitz, and was eagerly adopted by Weston..."
[4] Ibid., p.28

Modotti's early photographs dating from 1924, used Weston's technique. Like Weston, she used a wide view camera, or Graflex, and a tripod and her design was based on his search for sharpness and incorporated geometric compositions and un-cropped prints. Modotti adopted the more experienced photographer's emphasis on print-making and believed developing to be crucial in the completion of the original concept. *Roses*, 1924, emulates Weston's obsession with the 'Thing Itself' – the subject becomes the object of intimate dissection. Modotti continued to photograph still-lifes and inanimate forms; however, her style, while maintaining adherence to rigid technique, shifted from hard formalism to narrative.

Un-accepting of Mexican revolutionary politics, Weston left Mexico in 1926. Modotti then left the studio and brought her camera onto the street where her photographs attained what Carleton Beals, American journalist for *The Nation*, called a "true and superior balance between social and individual expression."[6]

Modotti's political photographs were not only informed by her strong belief in communism but also by contemporary and international artistic movements. The *Movimiento Estridentista* called for a uniquely Mexican aesthetic denouncing bourgeois taste and academic practice. The manifesto was written in 1921 by Manuel Maples Acre and appeared in the broadsheet, *Revista Actual*. "All Stridentist propaganda must praise the modern beauty of the machine...gymnastic bridges tautly stretched over ravines on muscles of steel..."[7] The tenets of the *Estridentista* manifesto echo the principles of Italian Futurism in their espousal of dynamism and technology, and in their negation of modern

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[5] Ibid., p.10
[6] C. Beals, "Tina Modotti." Creative Arts Vol.4, No.2, (February 1929)
[7] S.M Lowe. Tina Modotti's Vision: Photographic Modernism in Mexico, 1923-1930, p.99

European traditions such as Impressionism, Fauvism and Cubism. Futurism represented a narrow, more political aesthetic which could be adapted and transformed by Mexican modernist photographers. Between 1921 and 1927, the *Moviemiento Estridentista* was responsible for the publication of several journals and exhibitions. The *Estridentistas* also supported the formation of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors and shared many of the same members. In April 1924 the *Estridentistas* held their first exhibition at the Café de Nadie in Mexico City. An "*Estridentista* environment" was created by the inclusion of all the plastic arts and music and literature.[8]

One of Modotti's most well known photographs, *Telegraph Wires*, was considered an *Esrtidentista* triumph. The photograph, while deploying American new vision or straight photography to focus on the 'Thing itself', constructed the wires as boundless sources of power. List Arzubide referred to the photograph as "electrical antlers" in his 1927 history, *El Movimiento Estridentista*.[9] A few years later, the image was printed in an international modernist journal called *transition* beside photographs by Man Ray and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy.

Estridentismo was a crusade to modernize Mexico and it was inevitably engaged in political insurgency. In 1926, the *Estridentista* journal, *Horizonte*, featured an article which officially allied the movement with the unfinished Mexican Revolution and the artists of the Syndicate. Modotti was also deeply associated with the Syndicate. The broadsheet, El Machete, which printed the manifesto of the Syndicate, became the subject of some of Modotti's most published photos. *Worker Reading El Machete* (1927) re-enforces the newspaper as a tool of revolutionary politics as an Indian labourer reads the

[8] Ibid., p.100

headline "Down With the War against Russia!" The photograph alludes to the newspaper's success in the propagation of the Communist Party as well as reflecting the principles of cultural and political enlightenment advocated by the *Movimiento Estridentista*. The composition of Modotti's photograph reflects a divergence from American straight photography in its repudiation of still-life sharpness and focussed study of an object. Instead, the photograph narrates a scene which clearly addresses the situation of a native Mexican worker in an act made political through his reading of El Machete.

Some of Modotti's most poignant photographs were taken in 1927 in one of Mexico City's poorest barrios, Colonia de la Bolsa.[10] Modotti photographed poverty-stricken children, destitute peasants and the appalling living conditions of labourers. These pictures were taken contemporaneously with the wide-sweeping *Arbeitierfotograf* Movement. Started in Germany by Communist propagandist, Willi Muzenberg, *Arbeiterfotograf* embodied the concept of the camera as "the eye of the working class" and was dedicated to the making of photographs of, for, and by the proletariat. In 1921, Muzenberg, under the direction of Lenin, organized the Workers' International Relief, the originating concept of which was to urge developed countries to help alleviate the mass-starvation of Russian peasants. Such efforts brought about several organizations, such as newspapers, journals, and ant-fascist and anti-imperialist societies. The movement also grew to include artists, writers and thinkers under Muzenberg's direction, such as Albert Einstein, George Grosz, Anatole France and Henri Barbusse. The *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (Workers' Illustrated News) was one of the movement's most influential journals; its circulation

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[9] Ibid., p.103

[10] These photographs have also been named as part of a series of everyday life called "The Contrasts of the Regime" of 1928. See L.Chilsen, "Synthesis of Art and Life: Tina Modotti's Photography in Mexico and the Building of a Mexican National Identity" Photo review Vol.19,No.1 (Winter 1996), p 8-10 for a

reached over two hundred and fifty thousand copies in 1924 in Germany alone. The journal's focus switched away from Russia and concentrated on Germany and the working classes of all nations. Modotti's photographs appeared in this journal as part of Muzenberg's attempt to show the struggles of the proletariat through the political power of photographs. [11]

Arbeiterfotograf coincided with Modotti's self-perception as worker-photographer. *Children from Colonia de la Bolsa* speaks of the economic and social exploitation of the working and peasant class. Modotti has almost completely done away with Weston's un-cropped, clearly defined and singular forms. Instead, she narrates her vision of economic conditions in a documentary style.

While Weston photographed the female nude, including Modotti, in keeping with his exploration of the "Thing Itself", Modotti's representation of women centred around their roles as workers and mothers. The artistic persona of Modotti transformed from being the 'object of the gaze' in Weston's photos, to 'owning the gaze' in her own photographic constructions. The notion of the 'gaze' refers to Baudelaire's conception of the flaneur who epitomizes the ultimate modern observer, or traditionally male voyeur.[12] Modotti harnessed her right to look and appropriated the 'gaze' to express her perceptions. Pollock discusses the sexual politics of looking and again insinuates difference:

> The producer is herself shaped within a spatially orchestrated social structure which is lived at both psychic and social levels. This point of view is neither abstract nor exclusively personal, but ideologically and historically constructed.[13]

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discussion of the photomontages and photographs which were included in this series.
[11] S.M Lowe. Tina Modotti's Vision: Photographic Modernism in Mexico, 1923-1930, p.152
[12] See G. Pollock. Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art Chapter 3, for a discussion of the politics of looking, in particular Baudelaire's flaneur and the phenomenon of the male observer who drifts through private and public places uninhibited.
[13] G. Pollock. Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art, p.66

In other words, Modotti's photographs of proletarian women, peasants and labourers are the sites of the inscription of difference. Modotti's worker-photographer orientation, gender and political convictions determined her creative process and induced a crucial interaction between producer and subject. The repudiation of American straight photography was almost inevitable in view of the narrative strategy that Modotti used in order to move the meaning of the picture beyond the borders of the photograph.

Modotti's photographs of women encompass *Mexicanidad* in their pre-occupation with the indigenous, or Indian races. The ascribed social significance by the leaders of *Mexicanidad* culture, such as Vasconcelos and the muralists, of the native Mexican and *mestizo* referred to the desired solidarity among male workers and peasants while Modotti's photographs directed themselves to the specific political and ethnic realities of women.[14]

During the 1920s, the women's movement did not receive presidential support, which resulted in setbacks within the general cause for political agency, and in particular, within the labour movement. A lack of high-level government support resulted in male union officers hiring more and more men to fill factory positions. Consequently, apprenticeships and education for skilled labour were made inaccessible to women. The labour unions and the government worked in partnership effectively to limit opportunities for women.[15]

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[14] There is no documented evidence of any participation by Modotti in the women's movement in Mexico during this decade. However, the PCM and the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors, had varying roles in supporting women's labour unions during the twenties. See S.A Soto. Emergence of Modern Mexican Woman: Her participation in Revolution and Struggle For Equality, 1910-1940 (Arden Press, Inc; Denver, 1990)

[15] S.A Soto. Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940, p.98. Due to the length and scope of this paper, I am unable to construct an analysis of the women's movement and gender politics in Mexico at the beginning of the twentieth century. Please see Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of this book for a thorough examination of the social, political and economic conditions informing the events and development of the women's movement.

By the end of the decade, the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR), Mexico's official party, attempted to incorporate women into the party, and sought the full incorporation of the *campesina* into the economic life of the country. However, despite these proposed platforms, the PNR passed legislature, in 1929, which prohibited women from participating in partisan politics. The economic imprisonment of peasant women meant social, familial and political servitude. In 1931, the First National Congress of Working and Peasant Woman was held in Mexico City. Cuca Garcia, a devoted female advocate in the struggle for women's rights and writer for El Machete, described the conditions of the peasant women:

> Thousands of women work the land like peones for a small salary, or work the miserable parcel of their husband, father, or brother, because they are almost completely limited to their right to the land. The Agrarian Law states that they can only obtain land as the female head of the family, or as adult campesinas who have suitable needs...Agrarian legislation condemns them to live at the poor economic level of their father, their husband, or their brother. Economic independence is the base of political independence for women.[16]

An Aztec Baby is characteristic of the many mother-and-child photographs taken by Modotti. The closely cropped frame emphasizes not the female form but rather the woman's interaction with her child. She is not objectified in an isolated pose, photographed from above, but is represented in compromise with the camera. Modotti's expression is bound up in gender and class difference in that her 'gaze' focuses on Indian women and their social role as mothers and peasants. The photograph re-iterates women's lawful obligation to the family, but it also exposes and celebrates the pride of the *campesina*. Furthermore, although Modotti claimed to be interested in class first, the

[16] Ibid., p.109

Aztec subjects allude to *Mexicanidad* and the inevitable complicity between gender, race and class.

Similarly, Modotti's numerous photographs of Tehuantapec women speak to the political and social consideration of indigenous culture in the communist artistic movement. The Tehuana culture has a matriarchal structure and the women have a long history of freedom and independence.[17] Modotti's photographs actualized their historical and symbolic power by capturing moments of movement, strength and community. The women dressed in indigenous clothing, highlighting the ethnic and sexual difference. Modotti's pictures of the Tehuantepec women at once exude *Mexicanidad* in their reverence for Indian culture; and implicate class and gender as irreducible elements of social relations.

> Photography, precisely because it can only be produced in the present and because it is based on what exists objectively before the camera, takes its place as the most satisfactory medium for registering objective life in all its aspects, and from this comes its documental value. If this is added sensibility and understanding and, above all, a clear orientation as to the place it should have in the field of historical development, I believe that the result is something worthy of a place in social production, to which we should all contribute.[18]

The above quote comes from "On Photography", Modotti's only written statement on photography. It is significant for two main reasons. Firstly, Modotti outlines her vision of photography in Marxist terms of production. Secondly and more importantly here, it raises the issue of documentary photography and its attempt to record the 'truth'. Modotti's

[17] For a brief discussion of Tehuantepec women see O. Baddeley, " 'Her Dress Hangs Here': De-frocking the Kahlo Cult," Oxford Art Journal Vol.14,No.1; 1990, pp.10-17
[18] T. Modotti, "On Photography," Mexican Folkways Vol.5, No.4 (Oct-Dec 1929) pp. 197-198

view of her photography as being an objective register of life, and hence of documentary value, is inextricably related to her position as a foreigner in *Mexicanidad* culture, her deep involvement in international communist politics, and her gender. In other words, Modotti's perception of the objective 'truth' was informed by her political, economic and social positioning.[19] Modotti's 'gaze' came from outside the group she was photographing, hence was foreign, and her choice to photograph peasants and workers was undeniably informed by her communist dedication to class struggle. Therefore, the truth was in effect her truth, which did not function as an objective register but as a deliberate political stance. I would like to explore briefly the politics of documentary photography with regards to Modotti's earlier work. In doing so, the marionette series can be seen as a new narrative strategy in contradistinction to her photographs of labourers, peasants, and women.

Paula Rabinowitz in *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary*, explores the political and social implications of documentary photography and film in the construction of historical narratives, and in the construction of 'history' itself. Rabinowitz's analysis is especially concerned with the use of documentary by American radical and intellectual artists, and in the construction of gender, national and artistic identity. She explores various motivations behind taking 'documentary' photographs, and notions of subjectivity and agency contained within and around these visual documents. Rabinowitz argues that 'documentary as truth' is the central myth which re-enforces its role in presenting, interpreting, and even controlling history:

[19] In a letter to Edward Weston, Modotti herself muses on the problem of synthesizing art and life which is chiefly "an effort to detach myself from life so as to be able to devote myself completely to art." In this letter, Modotti acknowledges life as "too unconscious" and thus admits her art as being infused with her life, one grounded in political philosophy. See A. Stark ed. "The Letters from Tina Modotti to Edward

> Documentary circulates between the public and the private, personal and political spheres by becoming simultaneously an aesthetic and archival project – part-fiction, part-truth; or if you will, at once base and superstructure, economic practice and cultural form. This boundary-crossing is why I insist that gender is a central category within documentary rhetoric, though one often ignored, suppressed, or resisted, because it is not always clear who occupies what position when...The social *uses* of documentary – their 'value' to Leftists, radicals, and reformers, but also to governments and corporations – develop from their simultaneous and dual place between object and subject.[20]

The overlapping of subject and object within documentary photography demands that certain questions be asked: what is the 'document' saying, to whom, about whom, for whom, and how? Modotti claimed that a clear orientation positioned her photographs as objective pictures of life, as documents. Documents, in the form of text, film, or print, appear to be neutral sources of historical truth that present realities and values. However, any claim of truth depends on its distinction from fiction. Documentary presents itself as non-fiction without addressing that which it believes to be fiction. In other words, the rhetoric of political documentary addresses sexual, class, racial, and gender differences. The spectator, whose position is located within history, is constructed *by* these differences; a construction that essentially forms a reciprocal relationship between the 'document' and the spectator, and between truth and ideology.[21]

An Aztec Baby and *Children from Colonia de la Bolsa* are examples of the genre of photography which made up most of Modotti's output between 1926 and 1929. As already discussed, they reflect Modotti's involvement with *Arbeiterfotograf* and a specific concern for class, gender, and social relations in Mexico. However, political documentary

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Weston," Archive No.22 (January 1986), The University of Arizona, p.49
[20] P.Rabinowitz. They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary (Verso; London,1994), p.6
[21] Ibid., p.7

has "seen its mission to point out problems within the social fabric of a nation with the aim of changing them."[22] While pointing up the social injustices of the nation, documentary photography is involved in a process of self-definition. In the case of Modotti, the photographs which address the exploitation of the peasant class, included women and children, are producing and re-producing the ideals of the political belief-system to which Modotti adhered. The local and international communist agenda, in effect, represented itself to itself. For example, *Children From Colonia de la Bolsa* visually shows the devastating repercussions of class exploitation and functions to both demonstrate the need for political action as well as to promote communism as the remedy. The photograph affirms Modotti's self-identity as worker-photographer and in a wider context, contributes to communist cultural production. The photographs were viewed by a wider audience and were seen as narratives of truth, or as documents of revolutionary objectives.[23] In documentary photography, another crossing of contexts occurs with the audience; it can be both included yet outside of the photograph. The Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors, for example, was involved in the 'ideological' construction of the photograph as a result of their manifesto to "socialize artistic expression." However, the members of the Syndicate were not the objects of the photographs and therefore remained outside of them. The function of the audience is another reciprocal and paradoxical cultural phenomenon where the audience informs a political need for the photograph, remains outside it, but then consumes it to promote its own interests. Modotti entered

[22] Ibid., p.11
[23] The "Contrasts of the Regime" series was produced specifically for El Machete, the official newspaper of the communist party and founded by the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors in 1927. Modotti was involved in the publication of this paper as well, and worked as a translator and illustrator. See Cilsen, Liz, "Synthesis of Art and Life: Tina Modotti's Mexico and the Building of a Mexican National Identity." p.8

cultures (blurring public and private, and political and domestic), such the Colonia de la Bolsa and peasant villages, to take photographs to show the exploitation of the classes, and to re-enforce and perpetuate communist principles. Modotti's subjects, when seen in this light, were objectified in order to produce her personal vision; a vision which I have attempted to articulate as a complex interplay of variables.

MARIONETTES AS VEHICLES OF SATIRE

During the late 1920s, Modotti's political involvement intensified and her engagement in photography, exhibiting and activism continued. She began to produce blatant propaganda which was published in various journals such as *Mexican Folkways* and *Creative Arts*. The photographs consisted of rigidly composed still-lifes of a hammer, sickle, and sombrero; or, bandolier, corn and guitar. This series is referred to as her "Iconic" photographs and represents some of her most dramatic and alluring photography, perhaps because of its visual power coupled with acute political symbolism. In anecdotal form, the photographs imply the fusion of the Mexican peasant population and communism. They incorporate symbols loaded with political and cultural significance and place them together in jarring unity. The "Iconic" series was produced in 1927, the year of Modotti's membership with the communist party. The images embody revolutionary allusions (sickles, corn, sombreros) and symbols of *Estridentista* futurism (bandoliers). Particularly, Modotti seems to be addressing the concerns of land re-distribution and reform with her incorporation of objects of *campesino* life.[24]

[24] Ibid., p.7

Communist ideology was flourishing and the government, which had come to be seen as counter-revolutionary, increased its attacks on Party organizations. Joseph Freeman, an American journalist in Mexico in 1929, wrote:

> The Party further attacked the government's compromises with the clerical and porfirist elements, as exemplified by the pact with the church, its cooperation with American imperialism, represented at the time by Dwight Morrow (American Ambassador to Mexico); its reorganization and rationalization of industry in the interests of native and foreign capital; its agrarian policy which robbed the peasant of his land.[25]

The communist party renewed its interest in rallying workers and peasants together to challenge the government and re-ignite revolutionary causes. Modotti's hammer and sickle photographs reflect the party's blatant and willful surge of solidarity and relate to communism's new strength in the face of the government's increasing hostility. Cuban communist party leader, Julio Antonio Mella, was exiled to Mexico where he became an actively his radical Marxist philosophies. Mella was killed in 1929 and although the assassin is unknown, the murder is possibly linked to the government's perception of him as a threat. Modotti was Mella's compatriot and lover and was arrested for her association and involvement with him. The tension that had always existed between Modotti and her Mexican context was no longer a circumscribed site of cultural production.[26] It seemed as though her right to the 'gaze' was seriously threatened by deportation: "Modotti was

[25]S.M Lowe. Tina Modotti's Vision: Photographic Modernism in Mexico, 1923-1930, p.143 "Porfirist" refers to Porfirio Diaz and the elements of suppression and dictatorship which accompanied his rule which provoked the revolution in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
[26] See L.Chilsen, "Synthesis of Art and Life: Tina Modotti's Photography in Mexico and the Building of a Mexican National Identity," p.11, for an analysis of the state of the communist party and the situation of political radicals in 1929.

damned for her unconventional romantic relationships, her foreign nationality, and her political activities...Modotti had felt acutely her status as a foreigner."[27]

The marionette photographs were produced at this precarious moment of political and social instability in Modotti's life. In the remainder of this chapter, I would like to address two aspects of the marionette images: 1) Modotti's switch in mode of expression from propagandistic and documentary narratives to puppet narratives; and, 2) Modotti's strategy of hard formalist technique to render the photographs.

I would like to examine Modotti's choice to deploy marionette imagery by using her photograph *Pulqueria with Puppet* (Figure 3). The photograph does not belong to The Hairy Ape collection but represents a scene from an unidentified Mexican puppet play and was produced during the same period. The 'pulqueria' is the 'popular' Mexican bar. It is named for 'pulque', the traditional drink of the Aztecs made from maguey plants. Diego Rivera wrote an article about the pulqueria and the tradition of painting their interiors and exteriors, explaining the frequenting and decoration of pulquerias as an act of solidarity among workers and as a ritual steeped in cultural significance. The worker-artists who are engaged in the painting of pulquerias are raised above bourgeois artists and represent, according to Rivera, the epitome of proletarian nobility:

> The painters of 'pulquerias', the workmen painters and decorators that are solicited to apply in all the splendor of the nobility of the trade they possess – from the smooth surface, the well traced lines, the well drawn letters and well raised in volume, to the very 'puppets' of the art – fully comply with their commission...The great hierarchy of the noble trade of painters of doors, dignify the excrement of the false artists of the bourgeoisie, and a truly esthetic proletarian- a purely and genuinely proletarian copy is set upon the arabesque in hand.[28]

[27] S.M Lowe. Tina Modotti: Photographs, p.42

Rivera refers to the typical images in pulqueria painting (colourful votive offerings of figures, ornaments and abstract shapes) as 'puppets of the art.' Or perhaps the painters are the puppets – proletarians whose art is dictated by the higher authority of cultural iconography. In any case, Rivera's allusion to puppetry is provocative in its suggestion of social and artistic control. Nonetheless, the pulqueria and the artists who adorn it are glorified as true and noble Mexican proletariat.

Modotti's photograph, *Pulqueria with Puppet*, narrates a scene in front of a pulqueria. The marionette lies crumpled in the foreground clutching a drinking mug, possibly intoxicated after his time spent in the tavern. The bar is identifiable by its sign and it is decorated with votive-like paintings of a duel on the right and a religious portrait on the left. The sleepy dog, stone walls and wooden shutter doors place the pulqueria in a rural or village environment. Modotti's photograph appears to be an almost playful anecdote, celebrating Mexican country life and customs of celebration. However, the photograph can also be read in relation to the increasing resentment towards the bourgeoisie in 1929. Firstly, the inclusion of marionettes signals a deliberate strategy to use low art, or popular art, to simultaneously speak to and condemn the bourgeois classes. Secondly, the pulqueria represents the persistency, cultural vibrancy and national identity of the working and peasant classes:

> Pulquerias are the only places that the bourgeois have left in complete possession of the people, because taverns and sanctuaries serve exactly the same ends, since alcohol and religion are good stupifyers- and effective anesthetics to prevent the proletarian masses from feeling so strongly their hunger and pain and from being overcome by faint desires of revindication and destructive organizations.[29]

[28] D. Rivera, "Mexican Painting, Pulquerias." Mexican Folkways Vol.2,No.2; (June 1926), p.8
[29] Ibid., p.10

The pulqueria then, or at least its decoration, represents worker solidarity. However, the existence of the institution itself functions to de-stabilize the proletariat through culturally promoted intoxication. Modotti's photograph becomes ambiguous. Is the drunk marionette suggesting the weakness and ineffectiveness of the working class? Or, is it condemning the government for its hand in perpetuating the popularity of the pulqueria? Or, in its portrayal of a pulqueria, is the photograph celebrating the culture of the rural masses?

Modotti's provocative narrative is dissimilar from her work which came directly before it. The subjects are no longer humans or communist symbols, but vehicles of folklore. The narrative is not one which presents itself as objective reality as in her documentary photography. The narrative presents itself as theatre or drama enacted by puppets. The photograph is not a narrative in itself, but *contains* a narrative. The result is doubleness; a play within a play. The theme of doubleness also includes the duality found in folk art coupled with modern art, and the metaphorical language inherent in puppetry.

Modotti's shift to a more enigmatic and metaphorical expression can perhaps be explained by the fact that she was being persecuted for her radical political photography. Although Chilsen, in her very important article on Modotti and Mexican production, does not discuss the marionette photographs, she does acknowledge Modotti's shifting and evolving relationship with Mexican politics and chronicles her artistic production against her politics: "It is clear that Modotti's own relationship to the political climate and *Mexicanidad* changed significantly during this decade. She helped to define and expand the nationalist ideology, and a new Mexican identity, but she also pushed the ideology

further, using it to critique the very society from which it arose."[30] Where Chilsen ends with the "Iconic" series, I am positing the marionette series as the final artistic manifestation of Modotti's political, national and personal relationships with *Mexicanidad* culture. Unlike Chilsen, I have also raised the problems with placing Modotti within Mexican class politics without making complex her status as a foreigner.

Modotti intended to exhibit the marionette photographs in December of 1929 and knew that it was likely to be her last exhibition in Mexico because of the "government's repeated threats to deport foreign communists."[31] Communists were growing dis-enchanted with the post-revolutionary government which was becoming more and more right-wing. Modotti's commentary had previously been concerned with the *Arbeiterfotograf* movement for international class-consciousness, although specified within Mexico. With the marionette images, Modotti is addressing the Mexican government specifically and perhaps even satirizing the class struggles, possibly alluded to by the drunk marionette.

Modotti's Rene d'Harnoncourt puppets are another example of the marionettes' particular relevance to the Mexican government and politics. D'Harnoncourt arrived in Mexico in 1926 from Vienna and eventually went on to be the director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1949. He was an artist and collector of Mexican trophies and with the sponsorship of the Morrows, he curated a travelling exhibition of Mexican arts and crafts which opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in October

[30]L. Chilsen, "Synthesis of Art and Life: Tina Modotti's Photography in Mexico and the Building of a Mexican National Identity." p.11
[31]M. Hooks. Tina Modotti, Photographer and Revolutionary (Pandora Press; London, 1993), p.191

1930: "An exhibition which is a gesture of international friendship, a study in race psychology, and an historic comparison of ancient and modern art."[32]

Lou Bunin crafted two Rene d'Harnoncourt puppets which performed at the American embassy, the show also being sponsored by Dwight and Elizabeth Morrow. One photo shows the Rene d'Harnoncourt puppet bowing to the audience while pointing to three retablos to his right (Figure 11). Retablos are traditional religious votive paintings symbolizing spiritual beliefs about death and birth. They were painted on small pieces of metal and hung for religious rituals. The retablo style was re-appropriated by *Mexicanidad* artistic culture (such as in the easel paintings by Kahlo) and came to symbolize national and cultural identity. The second photograph shows d'Harnoncourt standing beside and nose-to-nose with a large, white wooden bird, perhaps one of his Mexican trophies (Figure 15). It has a still-life quality in that it captures a moment of friendly interaction between d'Harnoncourt and the toy bird, perhaps referring to his intimacy with Mexican life.

The Rene d'Harnoncourt marionette photographs are unclear in their satire and metaphorical meaning. However, it seems that d'Harnoncourt is mockingly portrayed as a collector and 'appropriator' of indigenous artifacts or trophies. D'Harnoncourt's connection with the Morrows also implicates him as a possible target of communist dissatisfaction. Elizabeth Morrow refused to support The Hairy Ape due to its political content. However, she was a major participant and organizer in d'Harnoncourt's Mexican exhibit which he claimed to be "a Mexican interpretation of Mexico."[33] Moreover, writer

[32] "Morrow-Sponsored Mexico Art Exhibit Opens Here Thursday." Globe, January 30, 1930. Rene d'Harnoncourt Papers, Archives of American Art; Washington.
[33] D'Harnoncourt, Rene. Mexican Arts. American Federation of Arts, 1930. Rene d'Harnoncourt Papers, Archives of American Art; Washington. Elizabeth Morrow and Rene d'Harnoncourt were friends and

Joseph Freeman, as quoted earlier, named Dwight Morrow as an instigator of American imperialism in Mexico and subsequently an 'enemy' to Mexican communists fighting against foreign intervention. Although these photographs may be playful mockery, Modotti satirizes d'Harnoncourt on intimate terms with Mexican cultural symbols; ones he used in his exhibition to construct a history of ancient and modern Mexican art. His show's American sponsorship and destination perhaps represented the imperialism that the Mexican government was allowing, and the cultural exploitation that the Americans were committing. Therefore, Modotti's marionette photographs are again addressing specific issues in Mexican politics and are ambiguous in their intended meaning.

METAPHORIC FORMALISM

The marionette photographs are metaphorical expressions. The Hairy Ape marionettes are 'folk' performance dolls which *transform* into complex vehicles of meaning when O'Neill's play directs them (Mexican marionettes + American The Hairy Ape). The result is a series of marionette photographs which animate political satire. The transformation of the marionette actors underscores the narrative dimension of metaphor.[34] Because the metaphoric narration is visual, the formalist quality of the photographs must be understood as a key formation in the structuring of the conceit. That is to say, the

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collaborators on several projects, such as The Painted Pig, a children's book which she wrote and he illustrated. The long and dedicated sponsorship of d'Harnoncourt by Morrow suggests a common goal to educate foreigners, particularly Americans, about Mexican art and culture. This cultural appropriation is reminiscent of upper class appropriation of folk culture and puppetry. Modotti's placement of d'Harnoncourt among cultural objects perhaps alludes to his role in foreign imperialism in Mexico. The ambiguity lies in the fact that Modotti's satire could be aimed at American and/or Mexican politics, or could be a mockery of Rene d'Harnoncourt himself. See the Rene d'Harnoncourt papers, Archives of American Art, for personal letters and a complete record of d'Harnoncourt's activities in Mexico.

[34] A.L Pimentel. Metaphoric Narration: Paranarrative Dimensions in *A la recherche du temps perdu* (University of Toronto Press; Toronto, 1990), p.34. Please see chapter 3 and 4 for a complete examination of the structuring of metaphoric narration in literature. Chapter 2 is particularly useful as it

narrative power of the metaphors is achieved by and through the photographs' technical and stylistic aspects.

It is important, in my estimation, to analyze the stylistic changes evidenced in the marionette series. Modotti's movement towards more subtle and covert forms of political subversion coincided with a shift back to formalist concerns of precision and clarity. Bunin's craftsmanship imbued the marionettes with texture and definition. He loved the "sculptural quality of puppets and the accidents of shadow and lighting" and delighted in his ability to do sculpture and painting that lived in space, caught light and had a character.[35] Modotti focussed on the marionettes in a direct and exhaustive manner, detailing each string and its shadow. *Hands of the Puppeteer* is a study of light and shadow, human form, tension and harmony. In a sense, the photograph explores the 'Thing Itself'- in this case, the mechanics and control of a marionette. Without discussing its relation to the exterior component of the metaphor, the photograph can be accepted for its contained meaning. The sharply intimate and unmistakable pre-occupation with the hands and the strings establishes the photograph as a 'dissection' of a marionette. This rigid formalism in effect works to ground or present the anchor, or first subject, of the metaphor construction – the marionette. Modotti's technique recalls Weston's new vision photography which has been been described as embodying duality. On one hand, his pictures convey intense physical intimacy, and on the other, they re-invent their subjects as ideas. Richard Ehrlich writes that Weston's photos are "simultaneously cerebral and visceral, cool and hot, sensuous and unfeeling."[36] Modotti's marionette photographs are

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addresses metaphors as discursive phenomena in their power to transcend boundaries. However, the book deals with verbal and written metaphor and does not confront metaphor in art.

[35] J.Canemaker, "Puppet Master," Print Vol.41, (Sept/Oct 1997), p.102

[36] R. Ehrlich, "Edward Weston: 1886-1958," p.28

strikingly similar to this description of Weston's work. At first, the marionettes are mechanical and inanimate contraptions approached formally with curiosity in their displacement of light and space. Then, the puppets become ideas – alive with movement, volition and emotion. Modotti's new narrative approach assimilated aspects of her previous technique, and at the same time, introduced metaphorical meanings which stretched outside of the photograph. The 'Thing Itself' acts as the anchor of the metaphor. The clarity of the rendering of the marionettes allows for a transformation of their meaning, and consequently a metaphoric narration.

While Modotti engages in straight photography by embracing the 'pure' form, she specifies it within Mexican folkloric tradition by photographing marionettes as singular shapes, thus separating herself from what was purported to be Weston's universal formalism. In 1926, in *Mexican Folkways*, Diego Rivera commented on the photography of both Weston and Modotti:

> Weston is the culmination of THE AMERICAN ARTIST; that is, one whose sensitivity contains the extreme modernism of the PLASTIC LIVING ARTS OF THE NORTH... Tina Modotti, his student, has created marvellously sensitive things on a plane which is perhaps more abstract, more ethereal, maybe more intellectual; her work flourishes perfectly in Mexico and harmonizes with our passion.[37]

Yank with Night Watchman is highly formalist in its use of light and shadow. Modotti relied completely upon photographic technique to produce the scene. She writes:

> I try to produce not art but honest photographs, without distortions or manipulations. The majority of photographers will seek 'artistic' effects, imitating other mediums of graphic expression. The result is a hybrid product that does not succeed in giving their work the must valuable characteristic it should have – photographic quality.[38]

[37] D. Rivera, "Edward Weston and Tina Modotti." Mexican Folkways Vol.2, No.1, (April-May 1926), p.7

The notion of 'pure' photography, unfettered with artistic intervention or technical manipulation, informs Modotti's approach to the marionette series. It seems that she intended to capture the marionettes in action. This photograph, *Yank with Night Watchman* shows the characters in confrontation. Their shadows loom on the wall, their size and presence insinuating a small and dimly-lit place. The strings of the marionettes cast shadows that form the prison bars. Modotti used the camera as an apparatus of light in order to inscribe the scene.[39] From her formalist technique, interpretations of the metaphoricity of these photos may be made.

Modotti diverged from strict formalist photography with her 'reportage' and documentary photography. As opposed to *Colonia de la Bolsa*, workers on the street, and market scenes, the marionettes reflect a shift back to formalist technique and become the only subjects of the photographs. Modotti focused only on them, and with minimal manipulation, produced photographs which are exhaustive and intimate studies of the marionettes. New vision photography seems to be recalled just as Modotti's American identity is challenged. In The Hairy Ape, Modotti harnessed American modernist straight photography and used it for the double condemnation of American and Mexican politics. Her return to strict formalism may again have to do with its appearance as less threatening than documentary-style photography, as documenting social conditions related to communist objectives. Weston himself was perceived, as Rivera said, as a modernist from the north, and Modotti as "flourishing with Mexican passions." Modotti's hyper formalist

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[38] T. Modotti, "On Photography." p.197

[39] Modotti's denial that her photography was art raises questions about artistic photography vs. photo-journalism, for example. Modotti's worker-photographer status perhaps prevented her from calling herself an artist. However, I do not believe that her strict formalism, rigid technique and political agenda dis-qualifies her photography as art.

marionettes seek to be politically subversive, not through radical symbolism or propaganda, but through association and subtlety by way of 'pure' or straight photography - a trend which could have been seen as apolitical, at least in Weston's case.

Therefore, the marionettes' rigid formalist rendering had two main functions. Firstly, the re-initiation of American straight photography de-politicized the photographs by dis-associating them with political photographic movements such as *Arbeiterfotograf* and the *Movimiento Estridentista.* This subtle approach was more strategic in the face of Modotti's position as an undesireable and radical foreigner. Secondly, in a structural sense, the formalist approach to the marionettes allowed for their representation as 'Things Themselves.' This, in turn, allowed for the marionettes to clearly function as the anchor, or first subject, of metaphor-conceits. Had Modotti portrayed the puppets with less focus and clarity, they would not be able to function as one determinate element within the construction of the metaphor, thus rendering any metaphorical expression improbable. The metaphorical quality of the marionette series is precisely what establishes these photographs as distinct from her other work. The photographs' metaphoricity, achieved through this strict formalist approach, provokes an interrogation of the representation and meaning of cultural signifiers (puppets, pulquerias, The Hairy Ape) in Mexico, and consequently, a re-questioning of Modotti's artistic and national identity.

Metaphoric formalism in the case of the marionette series also works to question Mexican politics as well as Modotti's positioning. The two Rene d'Harnoncourt puppet photographs, for example, allude to Mexican and international politics through a still-life approach. The objects representing *Mexicanidad,* such as retablos and wooden crafts, are portrayed with clarity and sharpness easily allowing for an interpretation of the

significance of these objects. Similarly, Rene d'Harnoncourt is unmistakably portrayed by the marionette caricature. As a result, the two disparate elements of culture and politics are bridged together and opened up for interpretation.

The focus and detailing of the marionette photographs instigate the questioning of an exterior subject and thus issue a metaphoric narrative. The marionette imagery itself works in tandem with 'photographic quality' to produce ambiguous yet intensely political photographs.

CONCLUSION

Modotti's marionette series from 1929 represents a distinct shift in her photographic production in Mexico, both in technique and subject matter. This thesis has aimed to open up discussion of these photographs by analyzing both the circumstances of their production and the cultural significance of their content. Drawing from archival sources, contemporary cultural theory, and the existing literature on Modotti, I have outlined an initial approach to the marionette series which invites further development and expansion. Inevitably, there will be future re-readings and re-visions of Modotti's marionette photographs; indeed, with this thesis, the foundation has been laid and the 'marionette series' now stands as a body of work which I hope demands art historical attention and interdisciplinary study.

Feminist theory and postcolonial discourse ground themselves in notions of sexual difference and in the political functioning of difference. Art, as a cultural product, arises, in part, from difference and must be viewed in those terms in order to be understood as culturally rooted. Understanding or realizing an artist's subjectivity is essential in positioning the maker within the larger political and cultural formations which structure difference. Therefore, it has been necessary to establish Tina Modotti as a volitional and complex subject whose gender structures her in harmony and in tension with men, other women, and within herself. In doing so, the marionette series can be seen as reflective of her personal and political identity in Mexico.

By examining the marionette photographs with sensitivity to Modotti-As-Subject, the cultural significance of the photographs has come alive, as well as the paradox of

identity, in this case, that of Modotti. The marionette photographs, when seen as metaphors for the various facets of identity, may be read to relate to Modotti's antagonism with the Mexican government, her dedication to communism, and her fluctuating national and personal identity. Moreover, the photographs' inclusion of puppets may relate to specific concerns of folk culture within *Mexicanidad* society and may allude to international Marxist policies; both cases representing political photography of the early twentieth-century. Modernism in photography incorporates international trends and political movements and Modotti's marionette photographs deserve a thorough analysis in the context of the history of photography, specifically the conflation of politics and modernism in revolutionary settings.[1]

Moreover, the marionette series raises the role of metaphor in art, particularly in photography, as a suggestive means of expression in political representations. The complex specificity of Mexican post-revolutionary politics embodies the intersection of many cultures, nations, languages and philosophical beliefs. The language of metaphor transcends diverse contexts and the marionette photographs, particularly those of The Hairy Ape, cross contexts of meanings in their loaded cultural symbolism and international politics. I have studied the marionette images to "trace those moments when dissident subjects appear in the social text" and have put them forth as representative of the culmination of Modotti's professional, artistic and personal negotiations in Mexico.[2] Their political subversity, complexity and and metaphoricity is achieved through

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[1] Despite her foreign nationality and short ten-year stay, Modotti has been cited as Mexico's first woman photographer. Consequently, her documentary and political photography has a prominent place in both Mexican history of photography and photographic modernism. See E. Ferrer, "Lola Alvarez Bravo: A Modernist in Mexican Photography." History of Photography Vol.18, No.3 (Autumn 1994) p.211-218

[2] J. Franco. Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico (Columbia University Press; New York, 1995), p.xii

photographic formalism and subtlety - with these photographs, Modotti's interpretive power truly erupts.

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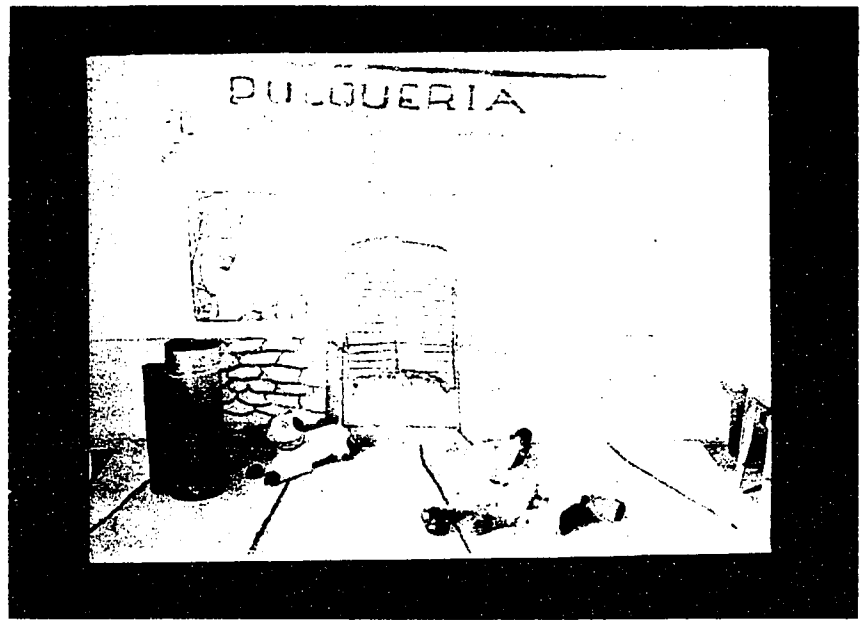
Figure 1

Tina Modotti. *Four Puppets,* 1929

Figure 2

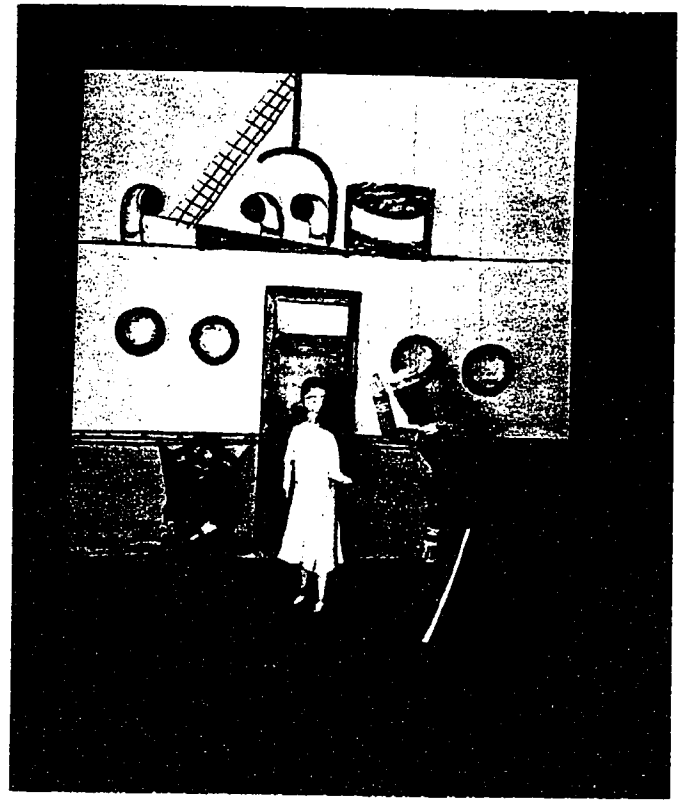
Tina Modotti. *Four Puppets*, 1929

Figure 3



Tina Modotti. *Pulqueria with Puppet*, 1929

Figure 4



Tina Modotti. *Three Marionettes*, 1929

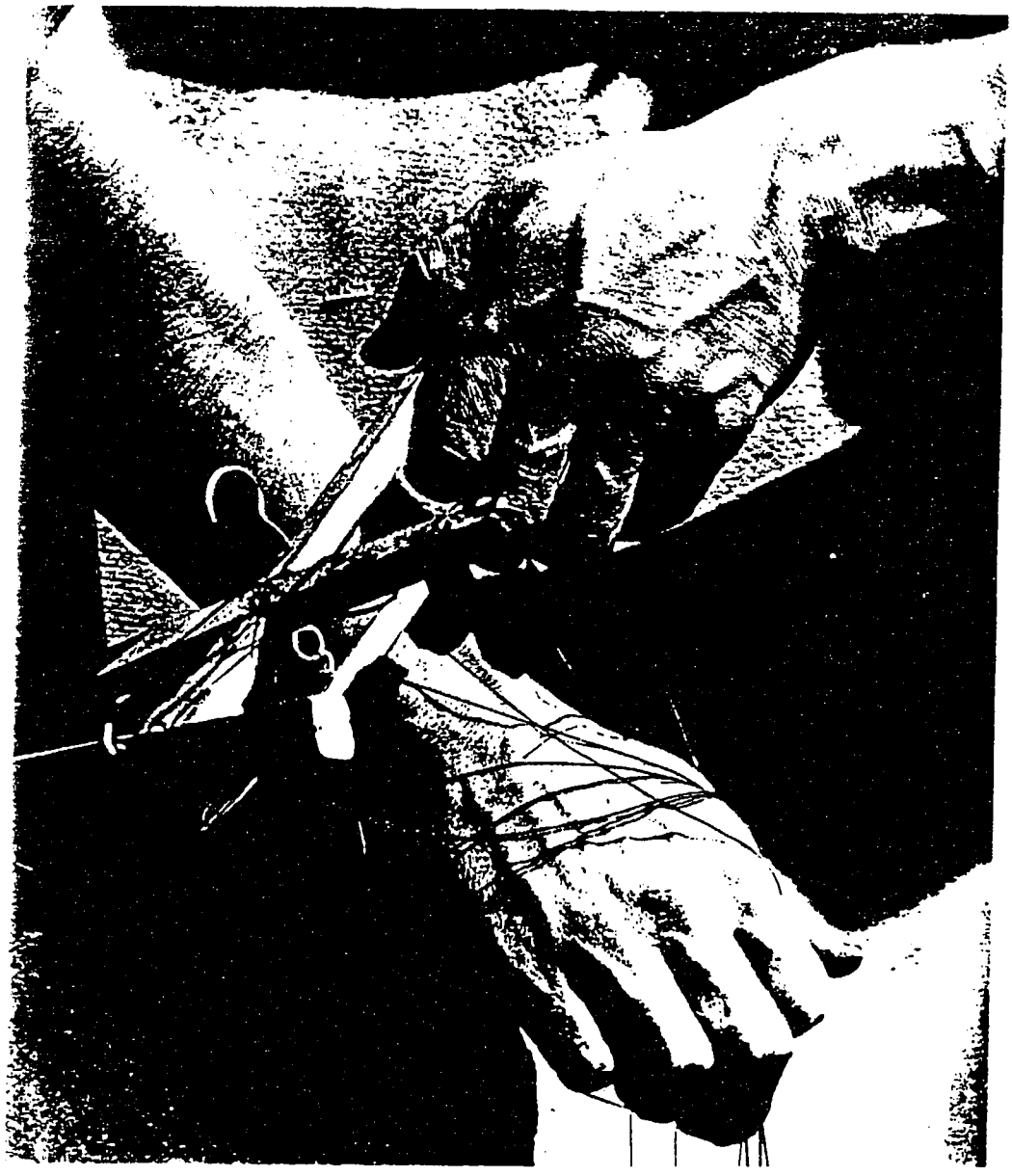
Figure 5

Tina Modotti. *Yank with Night Watchman*, 1929

Figure 6

Tina Modotti. *Hands of a Puppeteer*, 1929

Figure 7



Tina Modotti. *Hands of a Puppeteer*, 1929

Figure 8

Tina Modotti. *Hands of a Puppeteer*, 1929

Figure 9

Tina Modotti. *Lou Bunin, Puppeteer*, 1929

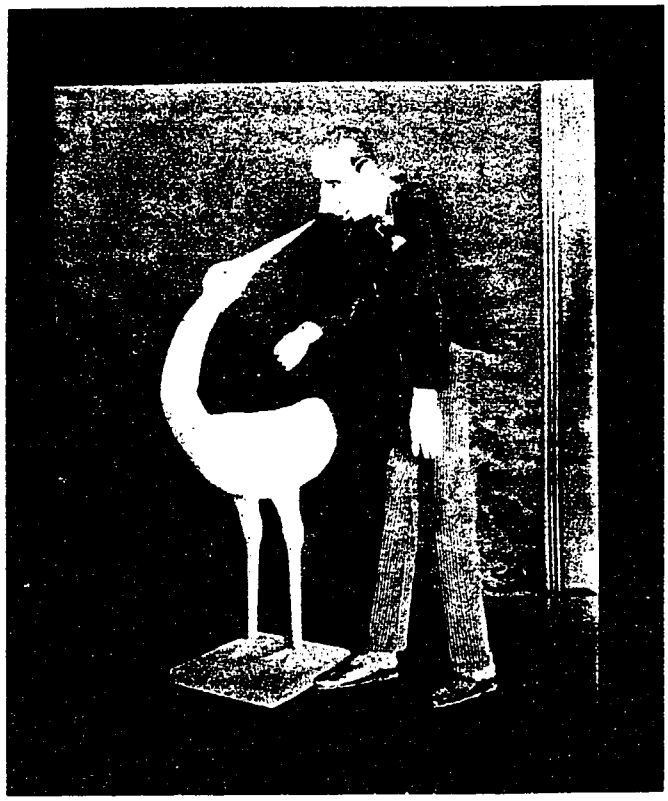
Figure 10

Tina Modotti. *My Latest Lover!*, 1926

Figure 11

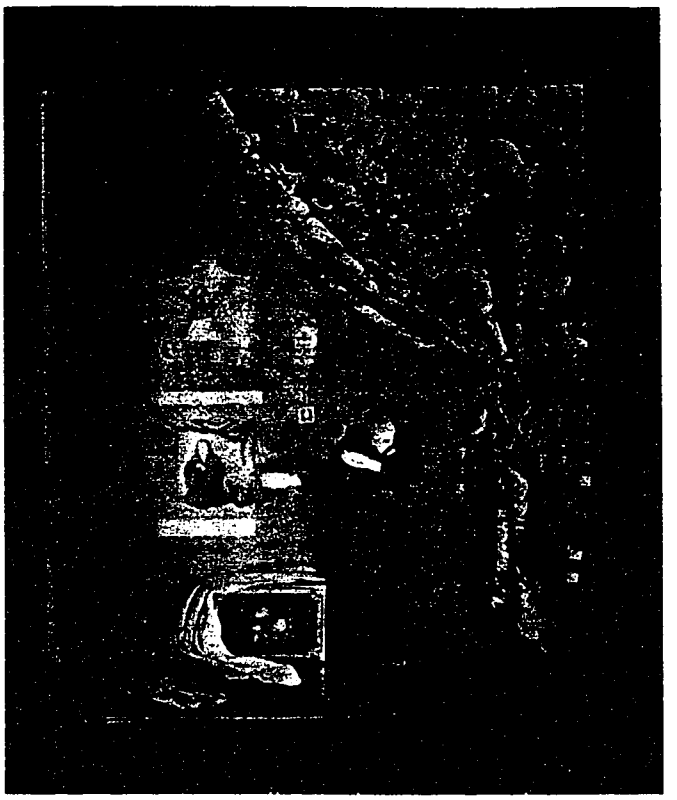
Tina Modotti. *Police Marionette*, 1929

Figure 12



Tina Modotti. *Rene d'Harnoncourt Puppet*, 1929

Figure 13

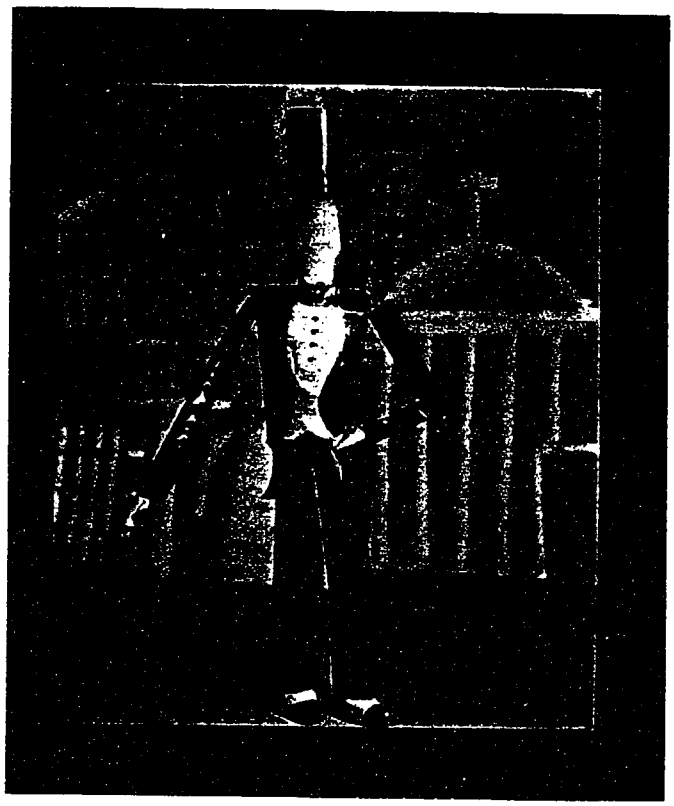


Tina Modotti. *Rene d'Harnoncourt Puppet*, 1929

Figure 14

Tina Modotti. *Five Puppets on Stage*, 1929

Figure 15



Tina Modotti. *"Gentleman" Puppet*, 1929

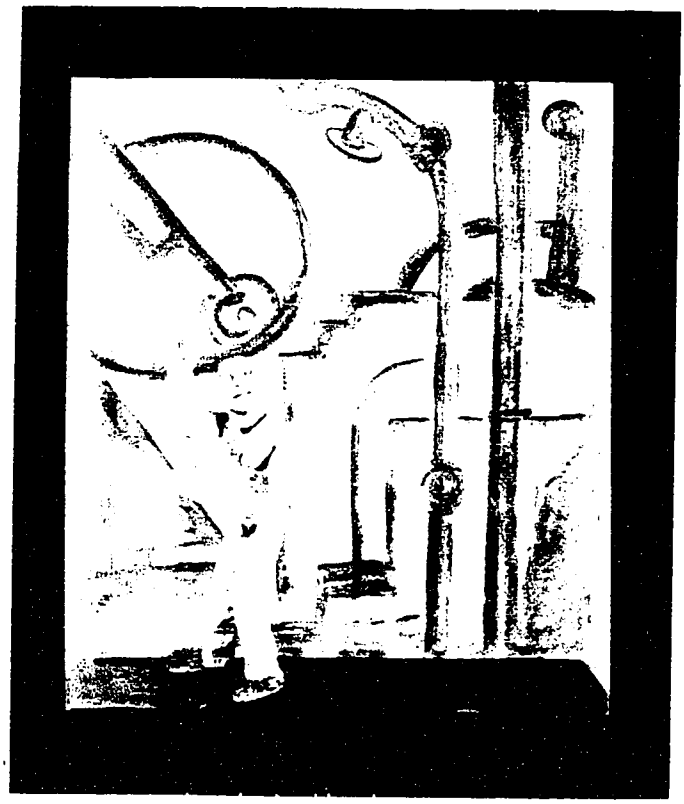
Figure 16

Tina Modotti. *Reclining Marionette*, 1929

Figure 17

Tina Modotti. *Yank*, 1929

Figure 18



Tina Modotti. *Yank*, 1929

Figure 19

Diego Rivera. *Distribution of Arms*, 1928

APPENDIX I

Tina Modotti, The Marionette Series, 1929

Narratives

Four Puppets
Four Puppets
Four Puppets *
Four Puppets *
Four Puppets *
Four Puppets *
Pulqueria with Puppet
Three Marionettes
Three Marionettes *
Yank with Nightwatchman

Still-lifes

Hands of a Puppeteer (with puppet)
Hands of a Puppeteer (with 'Mildred')
Hands of a Puppeteer
Lou Bunin, Puppeteer
Lou Bunin, Puppeteer *
My Latest Lover! (1923)
Police Marionette
Rene d'Harnoncourt Puppet
Rene d'Harnoncourt Puppet

Character Sketches

Five Puppets on Stage
"Gentleman" Puppet
Reclining Marionette
Yank (Puppet with Modern Stage Set)
Yank (Puppet with Modern Stage Set)

* Figure not included