

ATHANOR XXXIV



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FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY

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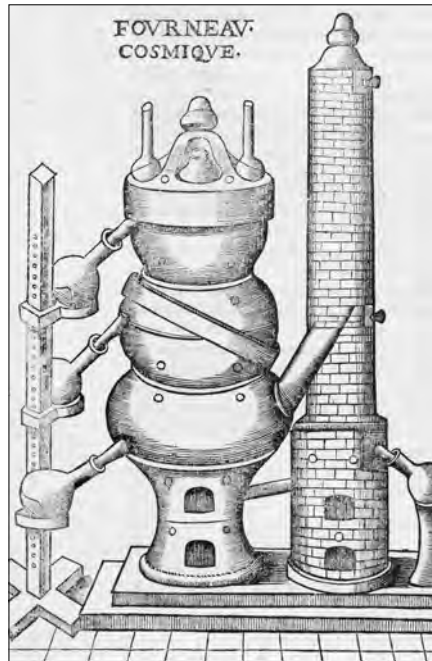
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Cosmic oven or *Athanor* from Annibal Barlet,
Le Vray Cours de Physique,
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In 1980 Professor François Bucher (University of Bern, *Medieval Art*) asked Allys Palladino-Craig (formerly of the variorum editions of *The Collected Works of Stephen Crane*, 10 vols., Fredson Bowers, Editor, University of Virginia Press) to take on the responsibility of general editor and publisher of the first volume of *Athanor* (1981). Professor Bucher served as faculty advisor until his retirement. During that time, Palladino-Craig won several grants for the publication, and in 1994 established the Museum Press of the Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts with Julianne T. Mason as principal editorial assistant and graphic designer. From 1998-2002, Patricia Rose served as faculty advisor to this annual journal, which is a project of the Museum Press. For volumes 26 - 27, Richard K. Emmerson, the Editor of *Speculum* from 1999 to 2006, served as co-editor.

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Nursing the Nation: Postrevolutionary Mexican Consciousness and Consumption in Tina Modotti's *Baby Nursing*

Lesley Wolff

Though she only lived to the age of forty-six, Tina Modotti (1896-1942) led multiple lives: Italian émigré, actress, model and muse, Communist, and, above all else, photographer. On the subject of photography, Modotti wrote, "I believe that the result is something worthy of a place in social production, to which we should all contribute."¹ Modotti largely pursued this social project in postrevolutionary Mexico, where she traveled and worked alongside her mentor and lover, Edward Weston (1886-1958), from 1923 to 1926 and where Modotti then lived intermittently until her death in 1942.² Together, Modotti and Weston photographed the people, landscapes, and folk arts of Mexico while befriending the likes of Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Anita Brenner.

Since the critical revival of Modotti's work in the early 1980s, scholars have been especially drawn to Modotti's provocative and modernist photograph *Baby Nursing* (c. 1926-27; Figure 1). This sharply cropped composition foregrounds an indigenous Mexican child nursing at her mother's breast. Behind the child, a dark textile—a Mexican *rebozo*, or shawl—masks the mother's body while flattening the picture plane, obscuring the background from view. The composition thus offers intimacy, but also mystery. All that the viewers can know of Modotti's subjects are their Mexican heritage and the intimate act of consumption.

Keeping in spirit with the feminist lens through which Modotti's work is most frequently viewed, scholars such as Andrea Noble, Sarah Lowe, and Adriana Zavala have examined *Baby Nursing* in terms of abjection, femininity,

and maternity.³ However, in contrast to such approaches, this paper will suggest that race and consumption comprise the photograph's primary content. By gendering Modotti's art—or by *only* gendering it—scholars risk losing the cultural specificity of her work.

In the early postrevolutionary era, Mexican elites, intellectuals, and artists oscillated between an adoption of the indigenous past as a symbolic marker of national pride and a fear of actual, living indigenous peoples as vehicles of national degeneracy.⁴ This paper contends that the act of consumption in *Baby Nursing* evokes these conflicted attitudes toward indigenous heritage and indigenous bodies.⁵ When considered in terms of race and consumption, *Baby Nursing* reveals a fraught discourse of eugenics, health, and nation building within which indigenous and maternal bodies have been problematized from the colonial era onward. Roiling within *Baby Nursing* is a sea of anxieties—anxieties of tainted bloodlines, productive citizens, and the threat of the modern-day Indian to Mexico's pre-Columbian heritage. By unraveling the historical ties between breast milk and racialized bodies in Mexican culture, this paper argues that *Baby Nursing* functions metonymically as a site of national consciousness, one in which Mexican anxieties about the indigenous body become visually and conceptually foregrounded.

To argue for the schism between indigenous heritage and the indigenous body in *Baby Nursing*, this paper begins by examining the *indigenismo* movement in which Mo-

I extend my sincere thanks to Professor Paul Niell for his feedback throughout the writing of this paper and to all who organized and attended the Florida State University Thirty-Third Annual Graduate Art History Symposium for their invaluable questions, comments, and suggestions.

¹ Tina Modotti, "On Photography," *Mexican Folkways* 5 (1929): 198.

² Modotti married Roubaix de l'Abrie Richey in 1918, a partnership which initiated Modotti's connection to Mexico. Richey died in Mexico in 1922, after Modotti had begun her affair with Weston. Modotti had intended to travel to Mexico to be with Richey, but after his death, she went instead with Weston and his son. See Andrea Noble, *Tina Modotti: Image, Texture, Photography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), xii-xiii; for an overview of the postrevolutionary socio-political climate, see Alan Knight, "Peasants into Patriots: Thoughts on the Making of the Mexican Nation," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 135-61.

³ Adriana Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition: Women,*

Gender, and Representation in Mexican Art (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 195; also see Sarah M. Lowe, *Tina Modotti & Edward Weston: The Mexico Years* (London and New York: Merrell in association with Barbican Art Gallery, 2004).

⁴ For a discussion of postrevolutionary concerns of indigenous bodies in the nation, see Alexandra Minna Stern, "From Mestizophilia to Biotypology: Racialization and Science in Mexico, 1920-1960," in *Race & Nation in Modern Latin America*, ed. Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Roseblatt (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 188; Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, "Introduction," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 10.

⁵ Sarah Lowe suggests that Modotti's ties to the avant-garde *Estridentista* movement aligned her with the movement's desire to portray "their country's struggle to modernize." See Lowe, *Tina Modotti & Edward Weston*, 26.

dotti worked and which engendered powerful rifts between Mexico's native populations and the artists, like Modotti, who represented them. The paper then attends more specifically to the problem of Mexican consumption, visibly rendered in *Baby Nursing*, by addressing Mexico's historically conflicted attitudes toward breastfeeding. Such anxieties, this paper posits, are reimagined in *Baby Nursing* by way of *pulque*, an indigenous fermented beverage at once celebrated for its ancient Mexican roots, detested for its perceived association with modern-day depravity, and, most importantly, appropriated as a symbolic and literal surrogate for breast milk in Mexican culture. After exploring how this tension has played out historically in Mexican art, the paper concludes by examining the polysemic nature of *Baby Nursing* to argue for the contestations of citizenry embedded within Modotti's photograph.

By 1923, when Modotti arrived in Mexico, race and modernity were at the forefront of elite Mexican minds. The staunchly Francophone attitude of the prerevolutionary era gave way to a postrevolutionary investment in local Mexican heritage inclusive of peasant classes and indigenous groups. One particularly active faction in this move toward inclusivity were the elite artists and intellectuals, Diego Rivera and Tina Modotti among them, who subscribed to *indigenismo*, a socially conscious ideology that sought to re-integrate contemporary indigenous populations into the Mexican nation by elevating their grand pre-Columbian heritage.⁶ As historian David Brading argues, *indigenismo* proved a double-edged sword for indigenous populations, at once championing Indians for their embodiment of a uniquely Mexican past while denigrating them for a perceived inability to move beyond their pre-Columbian culture.⁷ Elissa Rashkin aptly refers to this attitude as "the redemption of the Indian through his disappearance."⁸ At the root of *indigenismo* lay the fear that indigenous populations were un-modern and thus incapable of contributing to the growth of the Mexican nation.

The supposed antidote to the stasis of the Mexican Indian could be found in a so-called neo-Lamarckian attitude, which pervaded postrevolutionary Mexico. Jean Baptiste de Lamarck, an early nineteenth-century French naturalist, posited that natural selection was determined by the transmission of environmental factors from parent to offspring. As Lamarck's philosophy was applied to postrevolutionary Mexican consumerism, it held that one's environment, natural or man-made, could inform one's hereditary make-up.⁹ This approach was predicated upon the assimilation of the Indian into the elite, and largely European, culture of Mexican urbanism. Rural lifestyles were not conducive to national progress and thus needed to be modified to suit Mexico's desire for modernization. In other words, "Their goal was not to Indianize Mexico but to Mexicanize the Indian."¹⁰

This attitude informed Modotti's approach to photography as well as her struggle to lend agency to the subjects of her photographs. On one hand, she promoted her work as an art object, initially showing *Baby Nursing* at the Gallery of Modern Mexican Art, in 1926, where it was well received by Mexico's international avant-garde.¹¹ On the other hand, she defined photography as a medium of truth in representation. In her essay "On Photography," Modotti wrote, "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."¹² Here, Modotti publically emphasizes not the medium's creative capacity, but rather, its supposed impartiality.

These competing interests—artistry and objectivity—inform *Baby Nursing*'s inclusion as an illustration to Margaret Park Redfield's anthropological essay "A Child Is Born in Tepoztlán" (1928), which appeared in the bilingual journal *Mexican Folkways*.¹³ This brief ethnographic account of Tepoztlán, Morelos, describes the "combination of practical

⁶ Modotti's friend and collaborator Anita Brenner brings indigenism to bear on her canonical text of Mexican art history, *Idols Behind Altars* (originally published in 1929). In her discussion of modern Mexican art, Brenner likens the gestures and postures of living indigenous Mexicans to the gestures and postures depicted in pre-Columbian art forms. Brenner thus participates in the crafting of a fictive indigenous aesthetic that is problematically timeless. See Anita Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars: Modern Mexican Art and Its Cultural Roots* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002), 310.

⁷ David Brading, "Manuel Gamio and Official Indigenismo in Mexico," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 7, no. 1 (1988): 84; Roger Bartra also characterizes the duality of the Indian in the Mexican imagination thusly: "They [Indians] are a symbolic referent to the past, but they are usually rejected as an active presence." See Roger Bartra, "The Mexican Office: Miseries and Splendors of Culture," in *Blood, Ink, and Culture: Miseries and Splendors of the Post-Mexican Condition*, trans. Mark Alan Healey (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 7; for a discussion of the conceptualization of the "primitive" as one without "temporality" but instead rooted in "spatiality," see Walter Mignolo, "(De)Coloniality at Large: Time and the Colonial Difference," in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 149-80.

⁸ Elissa J. Rashkin, "Idols Behind Altars: Art, Authorship, and Authority in the Mexican Cultural Renaissance," in *Photography and Writing in Latin America: Double Exposures*, ed. Marcy E. Schwartz and Mary Beth Tierney-Tello (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 49.

⁹ Stern, "Mestizophilia to Biotypology," 190.

¹⁰ Anne Doremus, "Indigenism, Mestizaje, and National Identity in Mexico during the 1940s and the 1950s," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 377.

¹¹ Lowe, *Tina Modotti & Edward Weston*, 31.

¹² Modotti, "On Photography," 198; Modotti's ethnographic approach to photography was exemplary of modern photographic practice. For a broad discussion of the role of photography in postrevolutionary Mexico and its problematic status as a medium associated with a "truth value," see John Mraz, *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

¹³ Margaret Park Redfield, "Nace un niño en Tepoztlán [A Child Is Born in Tepoztlán]," *Mexican Folkways* 4, no. 2 (April-June 1928); also see

utility and magic" that encompassed local birthing customs.¹⁴ Redfield's text frames the consumption habits of newborns in terms of the mystical rituals imposed by communal elders on the child. Modotti's photograph mediates these alien practices with the familiarity of kinship, thus rendering the indigenous body universal and knowable. In the post-revolutionary cultural climate, urban intellectuals and elites believed that better comprehension of indigenous Mexican folkways would yield a more unified and productive nation. Since culture, not biology, determined one's "Indianness," an understanding of indigenous culture could, by such logic, lend itself to more effective reforms to "Mexicanize the Indian." As Modotti's photograph shifts contexts—from the modern art gallery to the anthropological journal—it shifts in function—from modernist composition to index of national peasantry. As *Baby Nursing* circulated among the Mexican and American readers of *Mexican Folkways*, the composition participated in a discourse that underscored the need for modernization of the people and places in the Mexican countryside.¹⁵

Contemporaneous attitudes toward consumption further underscore the fluid dynamic between ethnography and artistry in terms of representations of the Mexican Indian. Specifically, the history of breastfeeding symbolically resonates within *Baby Nursing* by way of its cultural ties to *pulque*. Elite regulations over breast milk date back to viceregal New Spain, where breast milk was considered a highly volatile element, innately tied to bloodlines.¹⁶ Colonial-era casta paintings—representations of racial intermarriage in New Spain—illustrate concerns over the very fate of the Spanish lineage in the New World. Genealogical continuity was contingent upon the production of children from "pure" Spanish blood, semen, and milk.¹⁷ As fears of miscegenation grew throughout the colonial era, indigenous nursemaids became dangerous bodies, capable of tainting the elite

Spanish pedigree through their "inferior quality milk."¹⁸ The perception that bodies of the New World produced lesser bloodlines carries into the postrevolutionary era and can be read in the bodies of Modotti's photograph.

The mother photographed in *Baby Nursing*, Julia "Luz" Jiménez, was a prominent model in artistic circles in 1920s Mexico City.¹⁹ Though Jiménez led a largely urban and avant-garde lifestyle, her body was employed as a model of the quintessential Other to elite city dwellers. Prior to her work with Modotti, Jiménez modeled for Mexican artist Fernando Leal's painting, *Zapatista Encampment* (1922), a reimagining of Edouard Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass* (1863), which Leal populated with revolutionary Zapatistas enjoying a moment of leisure.²⁰ At the composition's upper left corner sits the figure of Jiménez, her braided pigtails and traditional dress an archetypal rendering of the indigenous Mexican female.²¹ Set back in the composition, Jiménez appears embedded in the landscape, framed by the mountain at her back. In her left hand she holds a laquerware bowl full of *pulque*, an indigenous, alcoholic beverage from the sap of the maguey succulent, which has been fermented to a viscous milky consistency. The complex and ancient ties between *pulque*, the Mexican landscape, and the Mexican people further allegorizes Jiménez's figure as evocative of the nation itself.

Since the pre-Columbian era, breast milk has found a symbolic surrogate in *pulque*. A highly nutritive, if alcoholic, beverage, *pulque* was an attribute of the pre-Columbian Toltec deity Mayahuel, goddess of the maguey who represents an earth-mother deity with four hundred breasts.²² Likewise, the pre-Columbian Nahua deity Tonantzin had associations with *pulque*. In the colonial era, Tonantzin became conflated with the syncretic Mexican deity, the Virgin of Guadalupe, who was known to worshippers as the "Mother of the Maguey."²³ Even today, some Mexican households

Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition*, 196.

¹⁴ Redfield, "Nace un niño en Tepotzlán," 102.

¹⁵ Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State After Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 104; Stephen E. Lewis, "The Nation, Education, and the 'Indian Problem' in Mexico, 1920-1940," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 179.

¹⁶ Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 113; for ties between the Virgin Mary and lactation in Catholicism, see "The Milk of Paradise," in Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 192-205; for the role of lactation in a global history of breast milk, its nutritional make-up and overview of nursing practices see Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, "Breast Milk and Artificial Infant Feeding," in *The Cambridge World History of Food*, ed. Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild Coneè Ornelas (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 626-35.

¹⁷ For an extensive study of the contribution of casta painting to Mexican colonial and early national consciousness, see Magali Carrera,

Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Alison Krögel, "Mercenary Milk, Pernicious Nursemaids, Heedless Mothers: Anti-Wet Nurse Rhetoric in the Satirical *Ordenanzas del Baratillo de Mexico* (1734)," *Dieciocho* 37, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 234.

¹⁹ Zavala, *Becoming Modern Becoming Tradition*, 194-95; also see Tatiana Flores, *Mexico's Revolutionary Avant-Gardes: From Estridentismo to i30-30!* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 61-65.

²⁰ Flores, *Mexico's Revolutionary Avant-Gardes*, 62.

²¹ Rick A. López, "Ethnicizing the Nation: The India Bonita Contest of 1921," in *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 29-64.

²² Tim Mitchell notes that lactation, menstruation, and fermentation were all associated with the moon's lunar cycles and that this connection prompted associations between fecundity and fermentation in Mesoamerican mythology. See Tim Mitchell, *Intoxicated Identities: Alcohol's Power in Mexican History and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 14.

²³ Jenny O. Ramírez, "Nurture and Inconformity: Arrieta's Images of

carry on the tradition of weaning their young off of breast milk with *pulque*.²⁴

Amie Wright attributes the historical emphasis on the maguey's life-giving value to its thirst-quenching capacity in arid regions of Mexico. The connection between maternity, breastfeeding, and *pulque*, however, may alternately reside in the process of extracting the liquid from the succulent by nursing the sap from the plant. This relationship is evident in the trope of the *tlachiquero*, a rural laborer who extracts sap (*aguamiel*) from the maguey by sucking from a long gourd (*acocote*), such as that seen in Charles Waite's photograph, *Tlachiquero Drawing Aguamiel from a Maguey* (c. 1900; Figure 2). Waite represents the *tlachiquero* in the precise moment of the transference of fluids. The *tlachiquero* is hard at work, capturing the sweet juice to be fermented later into *pulque*; however, as Waite depicts him, the *tlachiquero* appears to be drawing from the maguey to quench his own thirst in the hot, arid landscape. Although the *tlachiquero* labors, his motivations appear self-indulgent—he seems to take the *aguamiel* for himself, not for the benefit of his countrymen. Waite's composition thus evokes the working-class laborer nursing alcohol in the tavern, tying the urban tavern and its clientele back to the rural Mexican landscape from which they supposedly came.

In Waite's photograph and myriad images of the *tlachiquero* in nineteenth and twentieth-century painting and photography, the rural figure literally nurses the liquid from the heart of the mature maguey. The plant is the mother and the *tlachiquero* the child, his hands gently holding the vessel just as the baby holds to the mother's breast in Modotti's photograph. Like Jiménez in *Zapatista Encampment*, the *tlachiquero*'s body seems to merge with the land off which it suckles. In spite of this maternal dynamic, the nourishing qualities of *pulque* were undercut by the beverage's alcoholic content. As Tim Mitchell argues, *pulque* functioned as a vehicle of turbulent resistance, emergent from its intoxicating effects.²⁵ *Pulque*'s role in the body politic was thus conflicting and multivalent.

The academic Mexican painter José María Obregón focuses on *pulque* in his nineteenth-century painting *The Discovery of Pulque* (c. 1869; Figure 3), which delineates the convergence of tensions among race, heritage, and civility in early national Mexico. The painting harkens back to the

pre-Columbian era where a young Toltec woman, Xochitl, presents a bowl of *pulque* to the King of Tula. Building upon Stacie Widdifield's interpretation of this painting, this paper argues that Obregón's work lends meaning to Modotti's photograph by way of the juxtaposition of the light-skinned, fully clothed Toltec woman holding *pulque* with the dark-skinned, bare-chested woman, seen in the background at left, who holds the raw maguey, the source of *pulque* and, symbolically, breast milk. Widdifield argues that the painting illustrates the triumph of civility over savagery, *mestiza* over the Indian.²⁶ *Pulque* at once legitimates pre-Columbian heritage and demonstrates that being of the land is insufficient—one must *civilize* the land. Yet the painting's logic is not so simple, because at the literal and figurative root of Xochitl's civility remains the Indian with the raw maguey. The *pulque*, therefore, becomes not a linear referent for the triumph of refinement over barbarism; instead, it becomes a conflicting and malleable signifier of the ever-present Indian, symbolically civilized yet corporeally savage. Obregón's use of *pulque* underscores the problematic integration of the Indian into the Mexican imagination.

This tension also resides within the visual trope of the *tlachiquero*, a figure who mediated between rural and urban lifeways. As *pulque* production became industrialized in the early twentieth century, the *tlachiquero* symbolized the promise of rural labor's contribution to a booming, urban Mexican economy.²⁷ His suckling of the raw maguey at once perpetuated the threat of alcoholism in the working classes while aiding the economic growth of the nation. Fernando Leal promotes a similar conflict in the figures of *Zapatista Encampment*. They are at once bourgeoisie men and women in repose, yet, as the title tells us, they are also revolutionaries, fighters for a social cause. The antithesis of the *flâneurs*—their combative purpose defines them. These indigenous figures thus embody the potential for virtue or vice.²⁸ The bowl of *pulque* Jiménez holds becomes the vehicle for this potential. Will they become inebriated or empowered? Are they soldiers of or against the nation? In the same manner, Modotti's photograph confronts the viewer with a child's body sustained by her mother's milk—at once a nourishing and dangerous potion.

Nowhere is the ambivalence toward the Mexican Indian more prevalent than in the multivalent locus of the *pulquería*,

Women, Food, and Beverage," in *Woman and Art in Early Modern Latin America*, ed. Kellen Kee McIntyre and Richard E. Phillips (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 213.

²⁴ Amie Wright, "'La bebida nacional': Pulque and Mexicanidad, 1920-46," *Canadian Journal of History* 44, no. 1 (March 2009): 9.

²⁵ Mitchell, *Intoxicated Identities*, 194; also see Marie Sarita Gaytán "Drinking Difference: Race, consumption, and alcohol prohibition in Mexico and the United States," *Ethnicities* 14, no. 3 (2014): 438.

²⁶ Stacie G. Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 94-95.

²⁷ Olivier Debrouse, *Mexican Suite: A History of Photography in Mexico*, trans. Stella de Sá Rego (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 120.

²⁸ Tatiana Flores suggests that Leal's artistic rendering of indigenous subjects and the subsequent fracturing of his compositions situate him at the forefront of Mexican modernity. See Flores, *Mexico's Revolutionary Avant-Gardes*, 76-80; Rick A. López likewise discusses the problem of the integration of the Indian into Mexican consciousness because of the ambiguity of the Indian's role in nationalist discourse. López suggests that "the embrace of either Indianness or *mestizaje* did not, in itself, resolve the larger problem that even the staunchest advocates remained uncertain what, if anything, was worth admiring in Mexico's indigenous people." See López, *Crafting Mexico*, 89.

or *pulque* tavern. Historically, *pulquerías* were grassroots locales of perceived degeneracy, often run by working-class women out of their homes.²⁹ By the early twentieth century, *pulquerías* were seen by Mexican urbanites as the lowest form of social interaction. They were unhygienic, shameful places that prevented their largely indigenous clientele from properly contributing to Mexican society.³⁰ In the spirit of *indigenismo*, however, Modotti and Weston, along with Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, prolifically photographed the *pulquerías*, which they lauded as sites of free expression for the Mexican proletariat. In spite of the value they ascribed to the idea of the *pulquería*, these artists nonetheless voiced concerns over the bodies that populated the taverns. In his journal, Weston wrote:

The Indian needs a new shirt,—does he buy it?—not if first he sees a fancied bunch of flowers! When hungry does he consider calories for maximum nourishment?—no—he eats and drinks for pleasure, most likely wandering to the nearest *pulquería*[...] So one questions—what hope is there for such uncalculating lovers of life?³¹

To the artists of the *indigenismo* movement, therefore, the idea of the *pulquería* represents the intellectual and social nourishment of oppressed and ancient peoples; yet, in Weston's eyes, the living, "uncalculating" Indian seems to demand intervention. Like the bare-chested woman in Obregón's painting, Jiménez's body in *Baby Nursing* embodies this contest over Mexican genealogy, whereby advancement, sustenance, and local assertions of national identity must be measured against concerns of corruption, debauchery, and socio-political regression.

The contest over Mexican genealogy even extends to the photographic medium itself, whereby photography's polysemic nature amplifies the fragmented signs within *Baby Nursing*. As Roland Barthes has suggested, the photograph, broadly conceived, embodies conflict, particularly in the dissonance between the photographic rendering of a subject and the real subject.³² In other words, the historical tensions awakened by indigenous bodies in Modotti's photograph resonate deeply with the literate viewer; yet, this message is persistently undercut by the very real presence of Jiménez's

body. Jiménez's realness disrupts and complicates the photograph's meaning by pitting her individual personhood against the discourse of national heritage evoked by her body. This rupture is acutely pronounced in *Baby Nursing*, where the photograph's cropping actualizes the idea of seeing a person's body but never knowing to whom that body belongs. This sentiment persists in Modotti's musings on the photographic process. While her published writings espoused the documental value of the photograph, Modotti's private correspondences to Weston betrayed her desire to artfully craft her works: "My experience is that the way I am accustomed to work, slowly planning my composition, etc. is not suited for such work. By the time I have the composition or expression right, the picture is gone."³³ Thus, even (or especially) for Modotti, the complications between reality and representation could not be reconciled. The bodies of *Baby Nursing*, therefore, become fractured signifiers and fractured selves, irreconcilable in the viewer's imagination.

The complex relationship between idea and reality, self and other is echoed in the fluidity of the act of breastfeeding.³⁴ Yet, Modotti's representation of this act raises questions not just about the female body, but also about the indigenous presence in the Mexican imagination, about the transference of Mexican heritage from one body to another, and about whether that transference will elevate or disparage the nursing child. Perceived as innocent, uncalculating, and unrefined, the child depicted here characterizes the contemporary Indian, whose future is uncertain and wholly reliant upon that which nourishes her.³⁵ Thus, the subject of *Baby Nursing* is not, as scholars suggest, only or even primarily about the female body. Rather, *Baby Nursing* encodes consumption as an act that either bolsters or destroys the consumer. As the viewer struggles to negotiate the tensions in the photograph, a metonym of postrevolutionary Mexican consciousness emerges in which indigenous heritage signifies all that is celebrated in Mexican culture, while the indigenous body represents all that is feared. The tenuous relationship between race, class, consumption, and control thus render this innocent moment between mother and child pregnant with the anxieties and promises of a postrevolutionary era.

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²⁹ Ramírez, "Nurture and Inconformity," 214; also see John E. Kicza, "The Pulque Trade of Late Colonial Mexico City," *The Americas* 37, no. 2 (October 1980): 199.

³⁰ Wright, "La bebida nacional," 22.

³¹ Edward Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston: Volume I, Mexico*, ed. Nancy Newhall (Rochester, NY: The George Eastman House, 1961), 140–41.

³² Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 154.

³³ Noble, *Tina Modotti*, xviii.

³⁴ Rebecca Tuvel, "Exposing the Breast: The Animal and the Abject in American Attitudes Toward Breastfeeding," in *Coming to Life: Philosophies of Pregnancy, Childbirth and Mothering*, ed. Sarah LaChance Adams and Caroline R. Lundquist (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 263–79.

³⁵ In his influential work on consumption, David Graeber writes that women "remain caught in a perpetual suspension between embodying the extremes of both spirit and matter, transcendent image and material reality, that seems to play itself out in impossible dilemmas about food." David Graeber, "Consumption," *Current Anthropology* 52, no. 4 (August 2011): 498.



Figure 1. Tina Modotti, *Baby Nursing*, c. 1926-1927, gelatin silver print, 7 1/4 x 9 1/16 inches, anonymous gift. Photo credit: Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 2. Charles B. Waite, *Tlachiadero* Drawing *Aguamiel* from a *Maguey*, c. 1900, gelatin silver print, C. B. Waite Mexico Photo Album (PICT 000-170-0015). Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico.

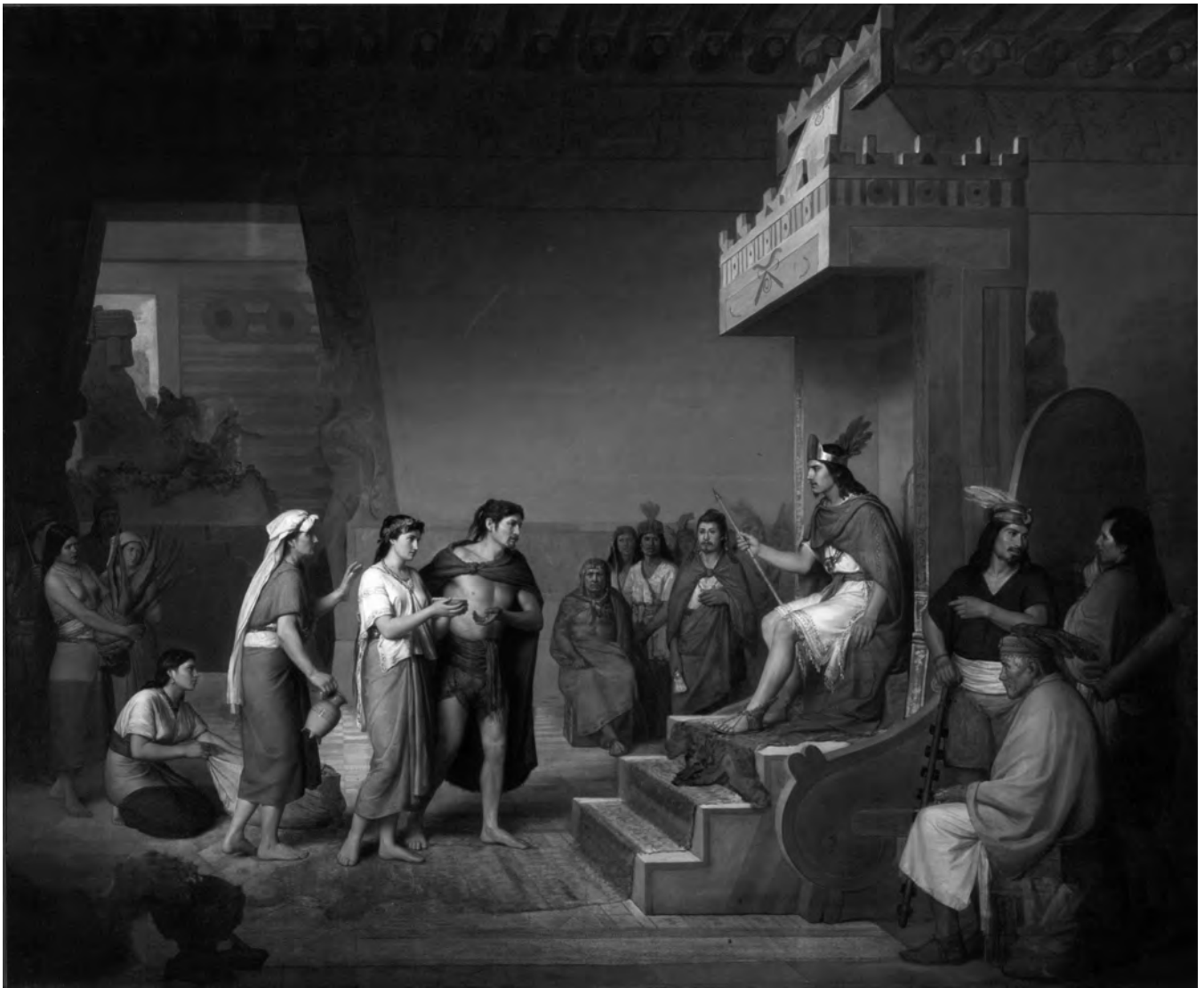


Figure 3. José María Obregón, *The Discovery of Pulque*, 1869, oil on canvas. Museo Nacional de Arte, INBA, Mexico.

