

THE FRAYED TWINE OF MODERNITY

PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE SOUTHERN ANDES OF PERU (1900-1930)

In recent times many ideologies that exerted a decisive influence on 20th century culture have lost their mythic luster. But while they most persuasively sparkled in the shield of our conceptual framework, they induced us to dearly value some "facts", objects and events unworthy of such degree of idolatry and to dismiss others that have turned out to be more deserving. Although coldly received at first, the works of Peruvian *indigenista* painters of the 1920's were widely acclaimed later as the ideologies that sustained them came to be accepted if not as dogma at least, as background knowledge. On the other hand, no museum collection in Peru up to this very day includes the work of even the most acclaimed of Peruvian photographers: Martín Chambi. As it turns out, however, some of the precursors of *Indigenismo* were photographers like Miguel Chani and Juan Manuel Figueroa-Aznar. Their photographic images —freer from the schematism of picturesqueness than their painterly analogues—may very well have a more enduring value as depictions of the indigenous reality they both meant to bolster. Moreover, visions as different from each other as that of Crisanto Cabrera, Sebastián Rodríguez and the Vargas Bros. can be threaded together to reassemble the fluid complexity of motivations, ideas, and goals permeating Peruvian society at that time.

What was Peruvian Indigenismo all about? As many a social scientist has pointed out, the force behind *Indigenismo* did not come from those enlightened and well-meaning intellectuals who are properly called *indigenistas*, nor from the half-hearted attempt of President Augusto Leguía (1863-1932) to deal with *el problema del indio*, but from the Indian uprisings which took place at the turn of the century and continued unabated even into the 1920's. These rebellions were a reaction to the abuses inflicted upon the Indians by the landowning whites and *mestizos*. Usurpation of Indian lands, excessive and unjustified taxation, forced labor, torture and killings, were all grievances against the feudal system of land tenure called *gamonalismo* (*Gamonal* being a landowner who ruled over land and peons with lawless ruthlessness).

The multifarious writings about Martín Chambi (1891-1973) have failed to point out that his childhood transpired in the midst of serious uprisings such as those of 1895 in Pomata and Ilave which ended with a massacre of Indians by government troops. Thus his mind may have developed with a sense of solidarity and self-preservation that urged him to keep certain themes clandestine —specially since his own last name later became a sort of scarlet letter. In 1901 Indian delegates of the district of Santa Rosa (Puno) arrived in Lima to present their grievances to the central government. An Investigative Commission headed by the highly respected Alejandrino Maguiña went to Puno to find out the facts. Three Indian political organizers, Antonio Chambi (relative?), Jose Chambilla and Mariano Illachura were traveling the countryside inciting Indians to fight for their civil rights and freedom of commerce. The latter cause may seem rather curious were it not for the fact that behind the aggression of the *gamonales* at this time

was the high profits yielded by wool trade. Indians wanted to be free to sell their alpaca production according to the rules of an open market; whereas the *gamonales* forced them out of grazing lands and coerced Indian producers to sell to them so that they could in turn profit by selling to the export firms of Arequipa. Different kinds of exploitation and their corresponding motivations obtained throughout Peru under *gamonalismo*, but the fact that most Peruvians lived within this inhumane system led Peruvian socialist writer José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930) to regard it as central: "The agrarian problem is first and foremost the problem of eliminating feudalism in Peru." The economies of the southern Andean triangle (Arequipa-Cuzco-Puno) were tied together by the 1890s prosperity in the wool trade, the rubber boom, by the discovery of the Santo Domingo gold mine —where Chambi allegedly first encountered photography—, by the newly built railroad, and by such industries as textiles and beer.

During his eleven-year rule called *El Oncenio*, president Leguía demagogically used the Indian cause in order to win support from radical groups and the Indian vote in an election which never came to pass. Under the motto of a Patria Nueva (New Nation) his socalled "modernizing dictatorship" provided the country with a modern infrastructure of roads, railroads, education and health; but unwisely allowed foreign capital to displace local entrepreneurs in many sectors of the economy. Leguía gave Indians some protection against abuse of their civil rights. His handling of *el problema del Indio* was thus more humane (at least at the beginning) than the systematic extermination some ultra-conservatives would have gladly undertaken. In 1920, the *Comité Pro-Derecho Indígena Tahuantinsuyo* was established under the aegis of Leguía in order to mediate

between Indians and *gamonales*. But as the *Comité* became more sympathetic to the plight of Indians, organized congresses where the Indians represented themselves for the first time and involved radicals like Castro-Pozo, Mariátegui and Zulén, Leguía substituted it with the more innocuous *Patronato de la Raza Indígena* .

Hence, one face of *Indigenismo* starts as a subversive grass-roots movement and develops into an officially sanctioned civil-rights movement on behalf of the Indian population. But there is also an intellectual *Indigenismo* and an *Indigenismo* of literature and the arts. Professor Chang-Rodríguez traces the ideology of *Indigenismo* back to the writings of anarchist poet and thinker Manuel González Prada (1844-1918). In Cuzco González Prada had many followers, the most famous of whom was Luis Velasco Aragón —who appears in one the Chambi photographs addressing what is said to be a union of cattle slaughterers. On account of his long hair and wide-brimmed hat they called him "el cowboy" and his diatribe *La Verdad en el Fango* (the muddied truth) gained him public acclaim and political persecution.

Peruvian historian, José Tamayo, finds the seeds of the *indigenista* ideologues in the 1909 student revolt at the Universidad San Antonio de Abad of Cuzco. The outcome of this violent confrontation was the closing down of that university and the hiring of Cornell economics professor Albert Giesecke as rector of that university in 1910. As odd as it may seem, Giesecke's casual, pragmatic style changed the philosophy of learning and research in that institution and gained him the sympathy of students who were later to become the *indigenista* intelligentsia. Two of the most important books of *indigenista*

thought were written by alumni of this school: Luis Valcárcel's *Tempestad en los Andes*, and Uriel García's *El Nuevo Indio*.

Thus under Giesecke's reign of tennis which lasted until 1923, a true Copernican revolution took place where instead of simply assimilating European knowledge, students were encouraged to understand their own society.² During the decade of the Mexican and the Bolshevik Revolutions, the research theses produced in that university were predominantly about regional matters. So by the time Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, who was to become the founder of the APRA party, came to Cuzco in 1917, he found an intellectual effervescence about native concerns unparalleled by anything he had experienced in the equally restless Universidad de San Marcos of Lima.¹ Thus, the events at San Antonio de Abad anticipated the movement for university reform whose official birth is the 1918 *Grito de Córdoba* (Argentina). The idea that a university is not an island of learning but an intellectual avant-garde which ought to lead the way of social reform, has left a deep mark in Latin America. Furthermore, universities were connected with the development of both radical thought and the artistic avant-garde. Mariátegui's avant-garde magazine *Amauta* —originally to be named "Vanguardia"— listed among its contributors the faculty and alumni of the universities of San Marcos (Lima) and San Antonio de Abad (Cuzco) as well as Surrealist, Dadaist and *Indigenista* (or a mixture thereof) writers and artists.

The term "Indigenismo" in the visual arts was first used to describe José Sabogal's paintings of Andean themes. In its first occurrences, it was a pejorative term, as much as "impressionism" once was. The subject matter of Sabogal offended bourgeois and

oligarchic taste because, by and large, Peruvian ruling classes aspired to live in modern Europeanized cities with icons to match. Despite the calamities of post-independence Peruvian history —bankruptcy in 1876 and an ignominious defeat in the 1879 war against Chile—the ruling class did not forget that Lima had been one of the two main Spanish viceroyalties; a fact which translated into a life of wealth, leisure and culture largely based on the exploitation of the Indian. And yet, the realization that Peru was not on par with more "civilized" nations made those Peruvians (and some of their descendants even today) think of the Indians as an obstacle to progress and wish they would simply disappear. According to their European canons of beauty, the paintings of Sabogal were considered *pintura de lo feo* (painting of ugliness) by the defenders of "good taste".

Sabogal too made a pilgrimage to Cuzco in 1919—on his return to Peru from Europe and Argentina—and he too suffered an epiphany of sorts in its rarefied Andean atmosphere. Four hundred years after the Spanish conquest and one hundred years since independence, Cuzco had once again become the place that it once was: a navel, a place where traces of the original connection with the land could be found ("Cuzco" is the Spanish version of the quechua word "cosco" meaning "navel"). To its record of being the oldest continuously inhabited city in the western hemisphere, in 1911 Cuzco added the serendipitous discovery of Machu Picchu by Hiram Bingham and his Yale-National Geographic expedition.

So much for *Indigenismo*, but what did photography have to do with it? Miguel Chani's photographs of Andean themes predates all the *indigenistas* on record except for González Prada. Little is known about his life. His intimate portrait of Thomas Penn, the Englishman who established the *Fotografía Inglesa* studio of Cuzco, suggests that Chani may have learnt the trade from him. Card stock with the Chani logo indicate his studio *Fotografía Universal* was in Cuzco, Puno and Arequipa; a feat unparalleled by any of his contemporaries or successors, except Max T. Vargas. Although his main line of business was portraits, circa 1900 Chani shot "views" of local archaeological sites and "types" to sell as postcards and later, for publication in illustrated magazines like *Variedades*. "Views" from Europe and the Orient in postcards and stereographs are abundant in Peruvian private collections and Chani may have been imitating them. There was a profitable international market for them although there is no evidence that Chani had access to it.

The pictorial schema Chani used to execute his early *indigenista* pictures are probably derived from the picturesque depictions of exotic subject matter by European traveling artists. Their style and that of their local emulators also defined *costumbrismo*: which made local types and customs its most conspicuous feature. Chani went further, in addition to his photography of the local types, landscape and architecture which has exact analogues in *costumbrismo*, Chani took his *proto-Indigenismo* to the studio when he used backdrops with pre-Columbian architecture. The non-Indian woman wearing an Indian costume before a backdrop of Sacsahuaman is perhaps the strongest indication of Chani's change of attitude regarding indigenous culture. However cemented Chani is

to the 19th century, his often adventurous style suggests a strong personality and some acquaintance with *Pictorialism* —as evidenced by his allegorical tableaux. Chani's Cuzco studio at Calle Marquez #67 later became Figueroa-Aznar's.

The most eccentric and flamboyant of the Cuzco photographers was Juan Manuel Figueroa-Aznar (1878-1951): actor, painter, photographer. Although, not a *cusqueño* himself, Figueroa-Aznar found his way into the hearts of the Cuzco society through his bohemian ways —a trait which *cusqueños* apparently found so endearing that he managed to marry into one of the city's most important families. His wife Ubaldina Yábar was the niece of Cuzco's Archbishop Benigno Yábar who often appears in his portraits. Through his ecclesiastical connection, Figueroa gained access to a very important clientele which included not only the well-to-do, but also the clergy. His charm is exemplified by the way he manages to alternate between the solemnity of the cloister and the light-heartedness of the theatre. *El Salón Azul* (the blue room) is a rare view of the private world of a wealthy clergyman. The spectator is overwhelmed by the iconographic opulence of the room. The light invading the room shines on the pictures and their idolaters as if to sanction their cult of images. The equestrian portrait of Ubaldina presents her as a romantic heroine; except for the unfailing presence of an Indian servant in a dark corner —which brings this scene set in a typical courtyard of a Cuzco house back to earth.

The route of Figueroa to Cuzco is interesting in itself. His artistic career started at the Academia Concha of Lima —which was the only institution for art training before the

Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes opened in 1917. He then travelled to Ecuador, Panamá and Colombia. In the Colombian city of Cali he was commissioned to do a painting of writer Jorge Isaacs. It is pure speculation at this time to affirm that he had contact with Colombian photographers of that time. By the time he returned to Lima he must have already received some training in photography because he showed a couple of "illuminated" (hand-painted) photographic portraits at Mercaderes street —where some of the most prestigious studios of Lima were located. A 1901 note in the *El Comercio* daily complimented his disposition to break with established conventions but criticized his unpolished style.

Figueroa must have foreseen that Lima would not give him the necessary space to develop his career for in 1902, he moved to Arequipa —the most important city in southern Peru. There he worked "illuminating" *fotoóleos* and painting backdrops with whom was later to become the teacher of Martín Chambi and the Vargas Brothers: Max T. Vargas. Max. T.'s contribution to all of these photographers was technical proficiency in studio photography and a fastidious attention to detail and composition. Unfortunately Max T.'s archive is nowhere to be found and not much more can be said regarding the influence he may have had on all of these photographers. For sure, he was still publishing photographs circa 1908 in magazines like *Variedades* together with Chani and others. As for Figueroa, he left for Cuzco in 1904 despite what seems to have been a constructive experience in the so called "white city" —perhaps because Arequipa may have been somewhat xenophobic or simply because he envisioned that the old Inca capital would give him more room to develop artistically.

Unless Figueroa would have been ill-disposed toward *indigenista* themes, the *indigenista* stage was set for him to simply follow the script. His first exhibits ranged over a varied subject matter in which the Indian theme did not figure. Due to his involvement in local theatre, he often portrays himself as a minstrel, a monk or other amusing personages. His sequence of himself as a spurned bohemian augurs well for the school of cinematography that later developed in Cuzco. When he does appear as himself it is in his painter persona —a fact that deserves further scrutiny. Indulging in a little speculation we venture to guess that his *indigenista* faith matured on stage and/or through Chani. The first evidence of that conversion is from his 1916 exhibit and that date coincides with the beginnings of theatre revival in Cuzco. Theatre with Indian themes had gone underground since the late XVIII century when Viceroy Toledo forbade the play *Ollantay* —which was allegedly performed for the most famous of all Indian rebels: Tupac Amaru II. Being an actor himself and being the photographer of choice of actors, he had first-hand knowledge of the contemporary *indigenista* theatre.

It has been suggested that Figueroa's *Indigenismo* ran parallel to the intellectual developments at the Universidad San Antonio de Abad under Giesecke; that it deepened as he spent time in the Yabar's hacienda of Paucartambo in the eastern slope of the Andes; and that it was further enhanced by the finding of Machu Picchu by Hiram Bingham in 1911. Whatever the case may be, by the time Martin Chambi arrived in Cuzco and shared his studio, Figueroa had already rehearsed a script that Chambi would perform with more authenticity because despite his dandyism, the latter was virtually indistinguishable from his Indian subjects.

The year 1920 —when Chambi allegedly arrived in Cuzco— was blessed by an all-time peak in Peru's export revenues. The war that had devastated Europe had brought prosperity to the textile, rubber and mining industries. Nevertheless, that year also marked the slow decline of Cuzco, Puno and Arequipa. The lure of modern life, however, with its conveniences and its promise of social mobility, was enthusiastically endorsed by radicals and conservatives, by Caucasians, Mestizos and Indians, by rich and poor. Most importantly, it was fully endorsed by the *indigenistas*. It is this endorsement that is most important in understanding the evolution of that movement and its effect on Chambi. An *Indigenismo* without modernity is merely picturesque; and a merely picturesque *Indigenismo* as an explanation for Chambi's most important work leaves most of it unaccounted for. To be sure, Chambi indulged in picturesque, Pictorialistic images in the exhibitions that he curated himself and it is mostly the "rediscovered" Chambi which features his more modern images. Although that issue deserves further attention, here we will simply grant full rights to all of his images: those he showed, those he published, those he was commissioned to do and those whose motivations research will hopefully clarify.

How close was Chambi's association with the *indigenistas*? I will mention two instances. The first is his personal friendship with Roberto Latorre, owner of the most important *indigenista* avant-garde magazine of Cuzco called *Kosko* (1924-1925). Chambi supported this magazine by buying announcements for his *Arte Fotográfico M.J. Chambi*. It was risky business to do so because of the communist links of the magazine and its proximity to members of the *Logia Federalista* movement —bitterly opposed to

the Leguía regime. *Kosko* gathered together the best minds of *Indigenismo*: García, Valcárcel, Gamaliel Churata and others. Chambi's second important connection to *Indigenismo* is precisely with Gamaliel Churata. According to the now deceased Manuel Chambi, Martín's son, Churata was a friend and frequent guest at their household. The friendship which may have developed between Chambi and Churata was probably based on the fact that Churata was a *paisano* from Puno and that of all the renowned *indigenistas*, Churata lived closer to his principles. Proof of which is the fact that he married an Indian not being an Indian himself and lived in an hut like most Indians did. Most other *indigenistas* were Indian in the soul but not in kin. Chambi, although probably a mestizo, was in looks as close to being an Indian as they come.

"Gamaliel Churata" is a *nom-de-plume* for Arturo Peralta. He was the Tristan Tzara of *Indigenismo*. He adopted Dadaism in his quest for authentic cultural expression. He published the very influential avant-garde magazine called *Boletín Titicaca* which, through exchange, circulated throughout Peru and Latin America. In it he published the work of members of his literary group *Orkopata* and of the Peruvian and Latin American literary avant-garde. He also published in Mariátegui's magazine *Amauta* —thus establishing an ideological flow between Lima, Cuzco (via *Kosko*) and Puno. His most famous work (novel?) *El pez de oro* is hermetically coded in stream-of-consciousness automatic writing merging European aesthetic form with modernist *indigenista* themes. Granted, though Chambi seems to have had a bright, intuitive mind, he was no intellectual; but it is still hard to believe that the magnetic, persuasive almost messianic personality of Churata (Aymara word for "the enlightened one") had no effect

on him. If he did in fact have an effect, much of Chambi's most modernistic images would need to be reinterpreted.

The portrait of his friend Mario Perez Yañez on an "Indian" motorcycle with the blurred girl giving the sensation of speed (a favorite theme of the avant-garde) is well known. But the portrait of Chambi himself on the same motorcycle has only recently been published. That image together with his self-portrait holding a negative, the bride on the stairway of the Montes mansion, the children playing cards and the recently found overview shot of multitude of men with hats do not belong to the repertoire of *Indigenismo* —in the narrow painterly sense, but rather to the *Indigenismo* of Kosko and *Boletín Titicaca*.³ The modernity of those images echo the work of another fellow puneño, Carlos Oquendo de Amat (1905-1936), the precocious author of the 1926 book *Five Meters of Poems*. Oquendo's pre-ecological-threat optimistic visionary naiveté celebrated modern life with verses like "clouds are the exhaust gas of invisible automobiles."

Equally in line with this modern spirit is Chambi's portrait of Alejandro Velasco Astete and the shot of his airplane hovering over Cuzco —both part of an epic story inscribed in the pages of Kosko. Velasco Astete was the first *cusqueño* pilot who flew across the Andes in an Italian plane bought by the city of Cuzco and which was named "Cuzco". Following a rudimentary textbook map, riverbeds and other topographical reference points he flew from Pisco to Cuzco. Thousands welcomed the man and machine which incarnated their dream of being the condor in his flight over snow-covered peaks. A 1925 cover of Kosko depicts Velasco Astete as one with his machine,

as Spaniard *conquistadores* and their horses had once seemed one to the eyes of the Indians. Velasco Astete became a hero of epic proportions, a winged angel in the midst of mortals aspiring to the elusive blessings of modernity. Only weeks after his spectacular arrival in Cuzco an almost completely blank cover of *Kosko* except for the small silhouette of a small plane in the distant sky—was a posthumous homage to Velasco Astete. He had crashed in Puno as he maneuvered his plane in order to avoid hitting people who had invaded the landing strip as he was descending. Chambi photographed the funeral that buried more than Velasco Astete's remains. From then on, *Cusqueños* redirected their energies towards the overthrow of Leguía. joining forces with that sinister character, Luis Sánchez Cerro.

Some writers dismiss a strong flow of information from Europe and the U.S. to Peruvian photographers at this time. To be sure, until we began work in the Vargas Brothers archive in Arequipa there was no smoking gun. But Pictorialist connections have been fully confirmed with the existence of Pictorialist literature at the Vargas library. Magazines such as *Foto* (Barcelona) and *Foto Magazine* (Buenos Aires)—of which the Vargas were official representatives—suggest the bold hypothesis that the aesthetics of *Indigenismo* are not only rooted in 19th century *costumbrismo* but also in Pictorialism. From Peter Henry Emerson to Missone, Puyo and Stieglitz definite and precise parallels can be drawn to account for at least the points of departure of most of the Peruvian photographers we have mentioned. Most importantly, many *indigenista* paintings can be arrived at from some of Pictorialist photographs in those magazines by way of a mental experiment where llamas are substituted for sheep and Indian peasants

for European shepherds. There is no doubt that the Vargas Bros. fully assimilated the Pictorialist creed. Fortunately for us, they wrote abundantly on photography. Some of these writings are part of a 1929 debate about the status of photography as art that they had with a poet who had written an adverse review of their show. When said poet challenged them to a photographic duel, they responded by choosing the arms not of film but of poetry: i.e., verse.

By 1921, Carlos (1885-1979) and Miguel Vargas (1887-1976) were widely acclaimed for their bromoil portraits and night photography. But a preliminary inspection of their archive shows their photographic interests to have a wider thematic range than any of his peers. The ingenuity that they show in their night photography spills over to every task they set themselves to. In a sense, their work is more removed from *indigenista* concerns, though their thread is as important to the image of the country as the work of the other photographers. Peru is simply that kind of schizophrenic country; it is Indian and it is European, it is rural and cosmopolitan. There are indeed a few images in their work with *indigenista* overtones, but they are simply the exception which confirms the rule: by the late 1920's almost everybody was doing the Indian-thing. Social commentary is not in the Vargas's photographic agenda, but what does seem to be part of it is to express their *zeitgeist* —at least that of Arequipa. The fascination with nocturnes is shared by members of the *Aquelarre*, an iconoclastic group of literati with whom they had close contact. Dandys and bohemians themselves, they had a unabashed penchant for novelty. Their gallery was an island of fascination for the curious wanderer and their devotion for their city echoes that of Sudek for Prague or

Francesco Ferrucio Leiss for Venice. Just as Nadar was the first to show the work of impressionists in Paris, the Vargas Bros. were the first to show the work of *indigenista* painters in their gallery; they also showed the photographic work of Chambi and Figueroa Aznar.

Their lofty deco house and their high profile in *Arequipeño* society is an indication that the Vargas Bros. fared better than anybody else in the business. Crisanto Cabrera's story (1904-1990), on the other hand, does not have a happy ending. His recent death in a humble asylum was ignored by even his most immediate family. Cabrera must have learnt photography in his late teens as an apprentice in Chambi's studio. But as soon as he had a camera of his own he set up a darkroom in his brother's home and went to work seeking a modest clientele which could probably not afford a Chambi portrait. Thus, his work is important because he picks up where Chambi's ideological or pecuniary motivations stopped. His "touch" is every bit as masterly as his master's and I dare say, bolder. The stance of the two brothers, one slightly in front of the one with a prosthetic arm, is a comment on being handicapped? It is a portrait not only modern in the way it is taken, but modern in spirit; for it elicits no pity but rather pride that modern medicine is available to them even in tragedy. It would not be surprising to find out that Cabrera played an important role in many of Chambi's masterly self-portraits.

Shortly before he died, Crisanto would choreograph the inmates of the asylum and acted as if he was going to take a picture. "I'm a great photographer", he would announce. But when his subjects laughed at his imaginary camera, he would complain that his camera had been stolen.

The twenties were also the decade when American capital consolidated its power in Peru specially in the mining and oil sector. Buying off its competitors, the Cerro de Pasco Copper Corporation became the single most important force in the Peruvian economy and copper became the main export. But this extractive export did not rebound back into the national economy the way exports in years past had. Politicians and local capitalists, concerned with their short-term wellbeing, failed to see the long term implications of surrendering economic power to foreign capital. People like Mariátegui and Haya de la Torre raised objections to this foreign penetration; but not being economic agents themselves, their outcries had little or no effect. Moreover, their revolutionary ideologies often blinded them to the finer aspects of this penetration and the available options to counteract it.

In the central Andean highlands, artificial mining towns sprouted in some of the most inhospitable areas. The job opportunities created for Peruvians were unhealthy, dangerous and badly paid. Would-be miners left their peasant communities deceived by "enganchadores" (the *enganche* often amounted to a contract to work for free given that food and shelter would end up costing more than what salaries could pay) and by the lure of a modern job. In the photographs of Sebastián Rodríguez (1896-1968), miners proudly pose before the camera wearing mining attire and bearing the equipment of their newly acquired status. Rodríguez was commissioned by the mining company to take i.d. mug shots of the miners; but in his modest studio Rodríguez also worked for the miners themselves who wished to send their folks back home an image of their new selves. Sebastián's brother, Braulio, who possessed painterly talents, painted the backdrops for

his studio. The Swiss chalet in many of the studio portraits was copied by Braulio from a box of Swiss chocolates.

That incongruous backdrop is as moving as it is comic, for in the dreams of these miners who usually worked to save money to improve their farms mining was a way out of their misery —an illusion proved to be one by the *enganche* system.⁴ Instead of saving money they soon found their life and health slowly disintegrating in Morococha — "the many-colored lake." By contrast, life inside the company walls —where natives were not allowed to cross—, American employees and their families enjoyed the comforts of modern living and country club leisure— golf included. Rodríguez, who was trained by Luis Ugarte —one of the most prestigious photographers of Lima — did his commissioned work with a sense of mission which carried over to his numerous photographic expeditions to the surrounding areas. Unfortunately, upon his death, most of his work was lost or destroyed. Most of the images which do exist were those meaningful to the history of his family; such as the one where the Rodríguez's pose in front of a hydroplane floating on the icy waters of Lake Morococha.

In 1930, the year of the Great Depression, Leguía was overthrown by Luis Sánchez Cerro with the complicity of the *Partido Descentralista* established in Arequipa. Martín Chambi had photographed him in Cuzco shortly before he led the coup. It was not so much how many people conspired against Leguía but how many allies he had left. As the economic situation deteriorated in the late 1920s Leguía's methods of coercion had become more brutal. Sánchez Cerro and his sympathizers soon

established the Union Revolucionaria party with the hope of launching him as candidate for the presidency. Its members wore black shirts, used the Roman salute and participated in the 1932 massacre of thousands of Apra members. The troops of Sánchez Cerro raided the house of Churata and the defunct Mariátegui and destroyed their libraries. Churata and Roberto Latorre were deported to Bolivia and many other radicals were persecuted or jailed. Photographers were spared maybe because—in the minds of most men— images still commit less than language or simply because their commitment was not really political. In 1934, Sánchez Cerro was assassinated by an *aprista*; photographers were also there to register it.

Some final comments are in order. The work of these Peruvian photographers emerges from the business of studio portraits, photojournalism, tourism, etc. but it does not stop there. In the Perú of those decades, one is not likely to find a school of “pure” photography a la Ansel Adams, but every one of these photographers considered himself an artist, and, except for some sporadic reactionary outbursts, the members of the larger art community also thought of them as artists.⁵ This attitude may very well have been the result of Pictorialist proselytizing. Or, as I hinted before, it may be the legacy of 19th century costumbrista painters that one of the main roles of the artist is to document his surroundings. European neo-classical and romantic painters travelled the continent since the late 18th century doing precisely that. But there is also in Perú an ancient and pervasive tradition of vernacular depiction that intertwines with the history of photography. The sum total of these legacies adds up to a paradigm of art that is not

merely a snobbish activity practiced by an elite and aimed at an elite, but rather something more ubiquitous and democratic. The enthusiasm for modernity that these photographers show is as spontaneous as that for popular art. There is no critical distance on their part with the phenomenon of modern life, only with the condition of the Indian —and that only occasionally.

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FOOTNOTES:

1. APRA became a populist party that defended national industry against imperialist penetration and stood for forging a Panamericanism where the Indian had a main role –both timely and lofty political objectives. Several times its electoral victories were frustrated by reactionary forces. But when in 1985 it finally placed its candidate, Alan García, into the presidency, the Aprista regime proved to be the most corrupt and incompetent administrations in Peruvian history, pauperizing the population to a degree unmatched by even the most reactionary of regimes.
2. Giesecke used to play tennis with his students, an informality that was unheard of in the relations between faculty and students.
3. The role of Peruvian illustrated magazines in promoting photography must not be underestimated. According to historian Tamayo Herrera, in 1919 the number of

periodicals in Peru was 145, and that number increased by 1928 to 473. Modestly assuming that only 10% of those magazines were photographically illustrated, that still means that photographers had a clientele of some 50 magazines at the peak of the boom.

4. The enganche often amounted to a contract to work for free given that food and shelter would end up costing more than salaries.
5. In Perú perhaps the sole exception may be the photographic work of the Peruvian poet José María Eguren.

The exhibit 'The Frayed Twine of Modernity: Photography in the Southern Andes of Peru: 1900-1930,' on which this article is based, was produced by the Photographic Archive Project in collaboration with the Instituto Audio Visual Inka, the Vargas Bros. Association, the Chambi Collection, the University of New Mexico, Fototeca Andina, and the Edward Ranney Collection. This essay has drawn biographical and historical information from the author's own research, as well as work by Adelma Benavente on Crisanto Cabrera, Fran Antmann on Sebastián Rodríguez, Deborah Poole on Juan Manuel Figueroa Aznar, and Edward Ranney on Martín Chambi. The essay is a shortened version of a lecture bearing the same title which the author delivered at the Menil Collection on January 21st, 1992.

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The exhibit 'The Frayed Twine of Modernity: Photography in the Southern Andes of Peru: 1900-1930" was shown at the Brown Convention Center for the Fotofest Biennial Houston, March 7 – April 7, 1992. It received the ACIEL award for curatorial excellence from Fotofest and Photo Metro. The exhibit was co-curated by Fernando Castro R., Edward Ranney, and Peter Yenne. The exhibit toured the United States (New York, San Francisco, Pennsylvania, etc.), Mexico, and Venezuela for several years. It received accolades wherever it was shown. In New York it got half a page review in the New York Times; in San Francisco it was ranked among the ten best art exhibits of the year; etc. Most importantly, it established a connection between "modernity" and the work of these photographers, that has been quoted in the literature over and over since then.