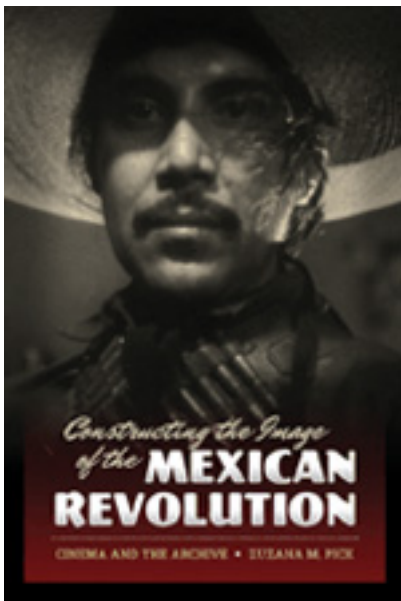


## ***Constructing the Image of the Mexican Revolution: Cinema and the Archive* by Zuzana M. Pick**

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*Constructing the Image of the Mexican Revolution* argues that archival images taken of the Mexican Revolution by Mexican and U.S. photographers and cameramen have been used since the revolution in the construction of a collective Mexican national identity that changes over time in multiple mediations of meaning. In her text on visual culture and film studies, Zuzana M. Pick's objective is "to map the ways in which the meanings surrounding the revolution have been historicized by films that themselves participated in a wider visual field" (2). She discusses how archival images and footage of the revolution were produced and examines the historicity of these images and how themes such as war, violence, death, heroism, gender, class, rural and urban spaces, people, spectatorship, and gaze are portrayed in these images and then appropriated in subsequent works. Pick draws out a detailed analysis of both U.S. and Mexican films, treating the Mexican Revolution throughout the twentieth century as a period during which "the visual archive is appropriated and reconfigured in accordance with historical, political, and cultural agendas" (215).

The book has a total of nine chapters including introductory and concluding chapters. The main body of the text is divided into seven chapters containing 65 images illustrating these archival images and comparing them with frame enlargements and promotional images from the films. A particular strong point of her text is the contextualization and close readings of 12 significant films: in chapter one, the edited

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documentaries of compiled images and footage of *Epopeyas de la revolución* (*Epics of the Revolution*; Gustavo Carrera, 1963) and *Memories of a Mexican* (Carmen Toscano de Moreno Sánchez, 1950); in chapter two, films that address the now-missing film *The Life of General Villa: And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* (Bruce Beresford, 2003) and *The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa* (Gregorio Rocha, 2003); in chapter three, a comparison of different views of the figure of Villa from the U.S. and Mexico in *Viva Villa! (Long Live Villa!*; Jack Conway, U.S., 1933) and *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa! (Let's Go with Pancho Villa!*; Fernando de Fuentes, 1935); in chapter four, Sergei Eisenstein's film *Que Viva México!* as edited by Grigori Alexandrov and released in 1979; in chapter five, the melodrama *Las abandonadas* (*Abandoned Women*; Emilio "El Indio" Fernández, 1944); in chapter six, films dealing with aesthetics of spectacle, *La escondida* (*The Hidden Woman*; Roberto Galvadón, Mexico 1955) and *The Wild Bunch* (Sam Peckinpah, U.S., 1969); and in chapter seven, films about foreigners transformative experiences in Mexico: *Reed: Insurgent Mexico* (Paul Leduc, Mexico, 1971) and *Tina in Mexico* (Brenda Longfellow, 2001).

Pick examines a variety of visual motifs within the archival materials that represent the revolution and are used in the construction of a collective memory. Some of the imagery includes trains, cartridge belts, pistols, and the *charro* (Mexican cowboy). A close examination of the *charro* figure in *Let's Go with Pancho Villa!* shows how it "replaced the revolutionary figure, embodied and sustained primarily by the Villa and Zapata legends" (71). The film equates the *charro* with the heroic and honorable, an idealized image of the rural values. A contrasting interpretation of the *charro* imagery is presented in the "Maguey" section of Eisenstein's *Que Viva México!*, in which the *charro* represents "an agent of violence" and the Porfirian class structure oppressive to the lower class (99). Pick argues that Eisenstein was clearly influenced by *indigenismo*, as expressed in Anita Brenner's *Idols behind Altars* and David Alfaro Siqueiros's art, and that the director identified strongly with the mestizo/indigenous peasant.

One important aspect of this imagery is its association with the rural and the urban. Although a "prevailing theme in the revolutionary genre is Mexico's rural culture," and is likewise important in the majority of the films discussed, *Abandoned Women* is significant in that it makes use of urban space (213). The film deals with those social tensions that arise out of urbanization through the figure of the prostitute played by Dolores Del Río. Pick examines Del Río's celebrity status and its effect on the interpretation of gender roles in postrevolutionary society: "Only as a humble woman can Margarita/Del Río become an icon of Mexicanness" (141).

Another motif is the presence of observers within the frame of the image. Pick writes, "the frame-within-the-frame structure establishes the viewer reflexively both as producer and as spectator of the spectacle of communal identity" (30). The theme of spectacle and spectatorship is woven throughout the text as it contextualizes the photographers and filmmakers producing and appropriating the images.

Stardom and gender representations also figure prominently in the close readings of the films. For example, Pick examines how different actors portray Villa, with particular attention to how they represent masculinity. Villa is “at once a historical actor and a cinematic construct, [...] the embodiment of the Mexican Revolution” (210). In the case of *Viva Villa!*, Wallace Beery’s interpretation undermines the strong masculinity of the Villa myth with a performance that “reconfigured [Villa] as a comic bandit” (82).

*Constructing the Image of the Mexican Revolution* clearly contextualizes the production of the archival images of the Mexican revolution and their subsequent citation and appropriation in film within the history of the nation and the film industry. Pick engages in productive dialogue with contemporary scholars of Latin American cinema and visual culture, including Andrea Noble and Julia Tuñón. Ultimately, the book makes a valuable contribution to the fields of visual culture and film studies by showing how these images of the revolution are used and re-used in film in order to create and reflect the shifting collective memories that inform national identity.

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