

## Historicity and the Archive

### RECONSTRUCTION AND APPROPRIATION

Photographers and cameramen became the earliest historiographers of what Americans called the Mexican war. Alongside diplomats, politicians, and journalists, the art historian and curator James Oles writes, “they would participate in the visual reduction of an amazingly complex historical scenario—marked and obscured by shifting alliances, by trainloads of misinformation created by all sides, and by a wide range of competing personalities—into a comprehensible construction for the American public” (1993, 59). Although the accounts of the radical activists and journalists John Reed and John Kenneth Turner remain the most well known, their bearing on mainstream public opinion was minimal. By and large, the American public continued to view Mexico through the prism of prejudice. The historian John A. Britton explains, “The U.S. media were filled with derogatory depictions,” and the “racist explanation of Mexican character reduced the revolution to a mere series of violent explosions engendered by instinctive urges that had no counterpart in . . . Anglo-Saxon legal and constitutional traditions” (1995, 25, 29). These views affected in predictable ways how visual materials were produced and consumed, including those related directly to the Villa-Mutual deal.

On January 5, 1914, following the occupation of Ciudad Chihuahua by the troops of Pancho Villa, the *New York Times* reported the signing of a contract between Harry E. Aitken of the Mutual Film Company and the Mexican revolutionary. The *Times* described it as a business partnership whereby Villa would facilitate the production of films “in any way that is consistent with his plans to depose and drive [General Victoriano] Huerta out of Mexico and the business of Mr. Aitken” (2). Camera crews were given exclusive rights to record the military campaign, and Villa would receive 20 percent of the exhibition profits of the films. On the official document, provisions were made that guaranteed safe conduct, duty-free import of film equipment and train transportation on controlled territories, and food and living quarters for men and horses.<sup>1</sup> The cameramen were to record newsworthy events, battles, and troop movements, subject

to directives issued by officers and Villa on security, strategy, convenience, and safety. "There was absolutely no mention of reenactment of battle scenes or of Villa providing good lighting," Frederick Katz writes (1998, 325). Mutual was to release the films promptly and negotiate profitable exhibition deals. After the unsatisfactory results of filming the Ojinaga battle in January 1914, Mutual and Villa agreed to undertake a more ambitious project. It was a seven-reel film titled *The Life of General Villa* that combined actual combat with dramatic scenes.<sup>2</sup> On May 10, 1914, the *Sun* published a note that stated, "All the horrors of war are revealed, with none of the accompanying pomp and circumstance. . . . Also [appear] stretchers loaded with the dead being taken away from the battle scene, while other corpses were burned. The burning of a woman who had followed her husband to war was especially horrifying" (quoted in De los Reyes, 2001a, 37–38; see also De los Reyes, [1985] 1992, 170). As the concluding statement makes clear, the anonymous writer was less impressed with the reenactment scenes and dismissed them as having no entertainment value.

If this contract turned Villa into a media celebrity and boosted his standing worldwide, it also generated narratives and representations that minimized its significance. Claims of battles delayed and public executions staged for the camera to accommodate technical limitations cast doubts on the authenticity of the war footage and the political impact of filming on the battlefields. Sensationalist accounts by cameramen in Mutual publicity materials, with opinions expressed by film reviewers, fed prevailing stereotypes and discredited Villa's role as the initiator of the deal. Shifts in U.S. foreign policy and engrained attitudes hampered the revolutionary leader's ability to promote his social agenda and cement his political and military leadership within the Constitutionalist forces. In Mexico, in a propaganda effort to undermine Villa's achievements, enraged rivals in the Carranza camp disqualified Villa as being "more a creation of the mass media than . . . a substantial revolutionary force" (Anderson, 2000, 44). By making light of his own awareness of the power of visual media to reconfigure identity, he was turned into a commodity deprived of social agency and burdened by historical reductionism and mythology. As a cinematic hero, Villa came to embody at once the most heroic and most brutal traits of the Mexican Revolution.

Two recent films engage with these issues by drawing on the extant visual archive and current historiography to tell the story of the now-missing film *The Life of General Villa*. Produced by Home Box Office (HBO) and first telecast on September 7, 2003, *And Starring Pancho Villa*

*as Himself* (Bruce Beresford) re-creates anecdotes of the Mutual deal and replicates early cinematic practices. In keeping with its metahistorical aims, the film draws attention to historical modes of spectatorship linking vision and identity to rehabilitate Villa's persona (played by Antonio Banderas) and redress filmic stereotypes. *The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa* (2003) is an experimental work by the Mexican film- and video maker Gregorio Rocha documenting his quest for the missing film. It investigates foreign (mainly U.S.) depictions of Villa and the revolution found in archives and libraries in Europe and North America, including those that reconfigured him into the archetypal Mexican bandit following the Columbus raid in March 1916. It recounts the making of *The Vengeance of Pancho Villa*, a film made in the 1920s from a variety of materials by Félix and Edmundo Padilla.

While both films explore the meanings and value of the archival evidence on the Villa-Mutual deal and the ensuing film, they treat the materials differently. Historicity in the Beresford film is shaped by an investment in apparatus-mediated representations of identity, even if the meanings of the Villa-Mutual deal are relocated into current debates surrounding media politics and war reporting. Notwithstanding its action-packed sequences, melodramatic effect, and archetypal imagery that risk derailing the film's revisionist design, what emerges is a multilayered representation of Villa as a mass-mediated construct that is contingent on narrative slippages between what is historically verifiable and fictional. In the Rocha film, reflexivity is put at the service of alternative modes of historicity. Characters and events of the past are represented as cultural and social projections, their agencies unstable and contingent on the material frailty of the archive and the paradox of historicity. Moreover, reassemblages of extant film materials point to the film's strategies of reclamation aimed at reimagining Villa's subjectivity and cinematic identity as a Mexican hero.

“PANCHITO VILLA SELLS A WAR”: VISION AND  
IDENTITY IN *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself*

A short synopsis of the Beresford film is in order.<sup>3</sup> With D. W. Griffith's (Colm Feore) approval, Harry Aitken (Jim Broadbent) sends his nephew Frank Thayer (Eion Bailey) to Mexico. The Mutual Film Company will accept Villa's (Antonio Banderas) offer to film his campaign against Huerta. After signing the deal, Thayer and his crew shoot their first battle in Ojinaga just across from Presidio, Texas. The poor response by the New York press does not deter Aitken from pursuing the deal, now as a fiction feature

to be called “The Life of General Villa.”<sup>4</sup> In the wake of the murder of the British rancher William Benton (Anthony Head), both Villa and Aitken stand to gain by countering William Randolph Hearst’s pro-intervention propaganda campaign. Only after tough negotiations, a larger crew is dispatched to Mexico. Shooting begins with William Christy Chabanne (Michael MacKean) directing, Raoul Walsh (Kyle Chandler) playing the young Villa, and Teddy Sampson (Alexa Dávalos) playing the sister. Marred by disagreements, it ends successfully just as Villa’s army moves against Torreón. Following Villa’s decision after a disastrous daytime attack on the Federal garrison to launch the final offensive at night, Thayer can only record the bloody aftermath. At the New York premiere on May 9, 1914, Thayer meets with John Reed (Matt Day) again. Both voice their disappointment with Villa and their misgivings about the propagandistic use of war imagery. Thayer returns to Mexico after Villa’s assassination in 1923 to show “The Life of General Villa” at the request of his former Mexican film trainee, Abraham Sánchez (Cosme Sánchez).

By means of a variety of visual effects, the film highlights vision as a primary mode for negotiating identity and difference. Digitally generated or not, masking reveals an agency shifting between what Thayer and the viewers see, what the Mutual cameramen Charles Rositer (Carl Dillard) and Hennie Aussenberg (John Wharton) record, and what Beresford recreates for the film-within-the-film. No matter how often the camera registers Thayer’s expressions of awe and dread, his responses to the thrills and horrors of war are conveyed most effectively when he assumes the position of film viewer and watches the black-and-white images of “The Life of General Villa” on the screen. How Villa enters Thayer’s field of vision in the early sequences is symptomatic of an apparatus-mediated representation of identity. Whether his figure is reflected in field glasses during a battle in Ojinaga across from Presidio, Texas, or silhouetted against the doorframe of the room where Thayer is waiting, the effect is similar. Fearlessly masculine on horseback or plainly menacing in the darkness, he embodies desire and abjection. Only when both characters meet face to face does the phantasmagoric projection give way to subjectivity. In this scene, to which I will return, agency is repositioned by means of a series of renegotiations worth considering because, as Thayer’s closing remark—“I have never seen a man like that”—implies, they are anchored in the vast visual archive that links identity and spectatorship.

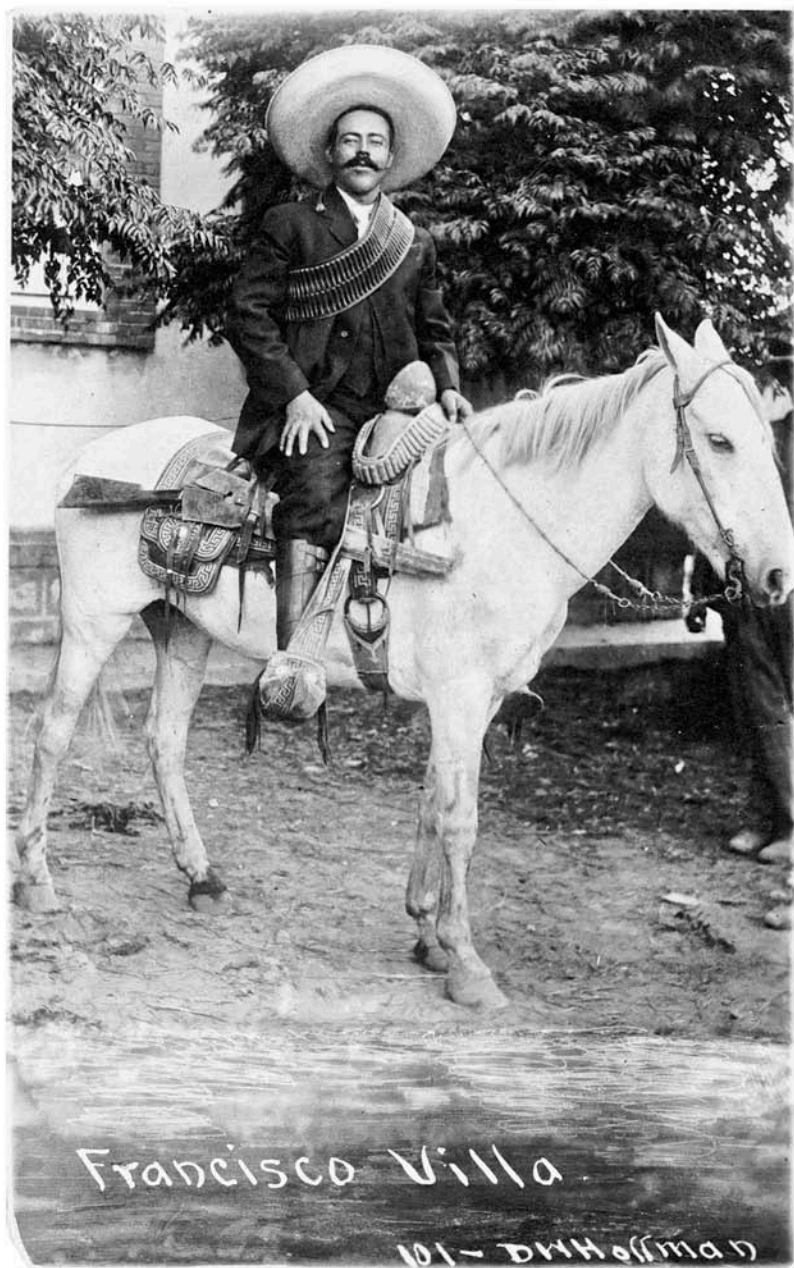
The Mexican Revolution, as Debroise writes, “was photographed from every point of view, both geographically and ideologically” (2001, 181). As noted, visual media reconfigured the public sphere and generated a new



FIGURE 2.1. And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself, *frame enlargement*

iconography from existing formal structures. For the subjects (leaders and common folk), posing and good clothes became validating gestures, not just signifiers of political and social legitimacy. When Emiliano Zapata posed for Hugo Brehme in an elaborate version of the customary *charro* attire and when Villa replaced his wide-brimmed hat and gun belts for a tailored jacket and pith helmet, they transformed themselves into subjects of their own histories. They defied stereotypes, breaking with the Indian peasant and outlaw types of Mexican folklore and the “greaser” bandit figure of American pulp culture to project their leadership and military qualities. The photographs of Villa wearing an army uniform taken prior to the battle of Torreón in May 1914, like the attack strategy he implemented, reflect “in spectacular ways a recently acquired cinematic consciousness” (De los Reyes, [1985] 1992, 13). This ownership of the image extends to numerous group pictures whose subjects, albeit anonymous, enact a powerful belief that no matter how trivial, the moment is worth recording. As the American war correspondent Timothy G. Turner recalls in his memoirs, “The lure of a camera was great in Mexico in those days. It was all so new and so exciting and so romantic. Everybody enjoyed it hugely and wanted everyone else to share the fun. Were not photographs souvenirs, and should not one let friends as well as visitors have souvenirs? That was more important than fighting any time” (1935, 80).

Whether everybody shared in this feeling of excitement and adventure, or how long it persisted given that the war lasted another decade, may in the end be less significant than the awareness that photography afforded



**FIGURE 2.2.** "Francisco Villa on Horseback," D. W. Hoffman, ca. 1900, photograph. Courtesy of the Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library



FIGURE 2.3. "American Sightseers Near Madero's Camp," D. W. Hoffman, June 26, 1911, postcard. Wayne Brendt Collection, Courtesy of the Specials Collection Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library

common people a place in history as actors and witnesses. Nowhere is this rendered more eloquently than in their presence as onlookers in the Mexican-produced still images and the film materials included in the compilations *Epics of the Mexican Revolution* and *Memories of a Mexican*. Conversely, in American images, spectatorship constructs a mirror image of the curious and souvenir-hunting gaze of the camera described by Turner. This gaze was commodified in numerous postcards that show citizens of border cities observing the insurrectional forces camped or in combat on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande. As Claire F. Fox explains, not even the danger of being hit could "stop hundreds of people from flocking to battle scenes anyway, and behaving as though they were watching a play or a movie rather than a war" (1999, 81).

### *Villa: Identity as Spectacle*

Given the metahistorical intent of *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself*, it should not come as a surprise that Villa's first appearance is an explicit citation of this curious tourist phenomenon. These scenes reconstruct a postcard with the caption, "On the Roof Garden of Hotel Paso del Norte. The only Hotel in the World Offering Its Guests a Safe, Comfortable Place





FIGURE 2.4. "Americans View the Battle of Ciudad Juárez from the Hotel Paso del Norte in El Paso," postcard. Jane Burges Perrenot Research Center. Courtesy of the El Paso County Historical Society

to View a Mexican Revolution." Even if bartenders, soldiers, women, and young children are added to what is in the postcard a largely male crowd, and a title printed on the frame names the setting as the "Rio Grande, The Texas-Mexico border," the ensuing scenes historicize the anecdote. While iris shots single out Villa as the main attraction, other iris shots expose the politics suppressed in this visual equation of warfare and spectacle by panning on embattled town streets and burning American oil wells. To Thayer's remark, "It feels almost like watching a show from up here, doesn't it?" a man who promptly identifies himself as "John Reed, Metropolitan Magazine," responds: "It is more than play acting, sir; what you are watching is a dictatorship in the throes of dying." Benton's disdainful categorization of Villa as "the bloody Robin Hood of Mexico" even before Thayer sees him diverges from Villa's own elation ("The movies have come to Pancho!") when he sights the red cloth that Mutual representative Eli Morton (Saul Rubinek) waves to announce the film crew's arrival.

Villa's representation in this sequence is burdened by historicity, with visual and written sources that give priority to sight and display getting in the way of a critical treatment of this imagery of revolution as a spectacle. Equally reliant on ocular effects (the attention-grabbing reflection of the horse-riding Villa on Thayer's field glasses) and stereotype repositioning (Benton's denigration of a familiar moniker), the treatment of this



encounter of curious yet incompatible gazes confirms historical positions. Whereas for Mexicans the revolution was politically and historically meaningful, “from the U.S. point of view, [it] was a drama, and its soldiers were actors” (Fox, 1999, 83). Americans equated prevailing responses to the camera to backwardness and projected deeply internalized prejudices onto the visual apparatus. An instance of this reaction is found in a review of the Mutual “Mexican war pictures” printed in *Moving Picture World* on February 17, 1914. W. Stephen Bush wrote, “I saw General Villa, General [Toribio] Ortega, Manzanillas and other generals mentioned by the gentleman who explained the pictures and I have not a just conception of what a Mexican general looks like. They were all pleased to be kinematographed [*sic*]. Villa and Ortega posed as meekly as any novice before a camera and obediently took off their hats when told to do so by the photographer” (1914, 657).

Although he had proven to be a successful yet unconventional military leader, the depiction of Villa as naive, self-indulgent, or vulgar reduced his identity and agency to an affectation with the apparatus. Naturalized under the accumulated weight of mythmaking and hagiography, this image has endured in history. Terry Ramsaye, commenting on the Mutual deal in 1926, asserted that “Villa rode to battle and conquest because he loved the vision of himself on horseback” (1964, 670). Edgcumb Pinchon saw Villa on his horse as a photogenic embodiment of visuality itself. In the 1933 biography titled *Viva Villa!* he described Madero’s camp on the Rio Grande in 1911 as “a glorified Barnum and Bailey circus” where journalists and common people mingled to get “a furtive glimpse of a pre-moral order.” There, he wrote, “‘bad men,’ donning their most ferocious smiles, obligingly pose for their pictures; ‘generals’ affix flourishing signatures to colored picture-postcards of themselves in heroic attitudes; and even Pancho Villa, up for a military caucus, reins in his plunging stallion long enough to leave on a strip of film a sun-record of brutal force, vitality and horsemanship” (152–153).

These representations of Villa originate in the vast photographic archive produced during his victorious 1914 campaign. Made up primarily of publicity materials prepared by the Mutual Film Company for trade periodicals, it also included production stills that, issued to press agencies, guaranteed their worldwide circulation as journalistic images (De los Reyes, [1985] 1992, 12–13). This marketing strategy explains why some of the most frequently reproduced images of Villa present him in action, sometimes literally in a freeze-frame, rather than in the conventional style of portraiture. The most celebrated of these stills shows Villa on horseback



FIGURE 2.5. "General Villa after the Battle of Ojinaga," 1914, photograph. John D. Wheelan Collection of Mexican Revolution Photographs. Courtesy of the Cushing Memorial Library and Archives, Texas A&M Libraries

after the battle of Ojinaga and appeared first in the *New York Times* on January 23, 1914.<sup>5</sup> It has been reprinted innumerable times on handbills, posters, and book covers and in magazine articles and illustrated histories of the Mexican Revolution. It was used as a source for monuments in Durango and Chihuahua due, most likely, to an erroneous attribution to the Mexican photographer Agustín Víctor Casasola and inclusion in the first edition of *The Graphic History of the Revolution 1900–1940*, edited and published by Gustavo Casasola, Agustín's son and director of the prestigious Casasola Archive.<sup>6</sup>

Disruptions of the objectifying power of vision serve to renegotiate differences and rehistoricize Villa's identity in *And Pancho Villa Starring as Himself*. Having been led blindfolded and under the cover of darkness across the Rio Grande to meet Villa, Thayer first sees a table laden with desserts. After being subjected to the disapproving gaze of soldiers, among them a stern-looking *soldadera*, a belligerent Villa antagonizes him. With Sam Drebben (Alan Arkin) translating and disputing Morton's admonition not to look Villa in the eyes ("That's a pile of crap, they don't stop telling stories about this guy"), Thayer's agency is put to the test. His self-

assurance collapses, and his identity is destabilized. When Villa sees the Harvard crest on his necktie, a perceptual shift occurs. He switches from English (he calls Harvard “the school where they make presidents”) to Spanish (a joke about having enough sons to fill all the colleges in America). Next, in the contract-signing scene, and by donning eyeglasses, his identity is aligned with rationality to offset the image of Villa as an illiterate simpleton driven by instinct. He comes across as commercially astute and politically informed. He forces an adjustment from 10 to 20 percent in profits and declares his confidence in moving images to counter the Hearst press-led misinformation campaign. After his remark about sharing the same name with Thayer (Francisco and Frank), the self/other structure of identification breaks down. Despite the character’s sporadic outbursts of aggressive and roguish behavior, Villa’s agency is resignified by self-identification to minimize difference. It is ultimately narrative agency that enables the production of new knowledge. While the impetuosity and belligerence associated with Villa as a brutal chieftain are integral to Banderas’s performance, these traits are contained by the weight given to the character’s social and political motivations.<sup>7</sup>

Even if this sequence seems to steer clear of the standard elements of Villa’s filmic portrayals by resorting to archival evidence, it combines two different sources. On the one hand, it refers to the personal recollections of Ivar Thord-Grey, a Swedish-born officer who joined briefly the Villistas and later the Constitutionalist army commanded by Obregón. The artillery and intelligence expert writes about being struck by the sight of the flower bouquet that “stood in front of Villa, stuck in an expensive blue Chinese jar from the Ming period, a beautiful museum piece,” and the leader’s reaction: “When he saw me his face turned to a scowl, almost anger, associated, it seemed to me, with arrogance or contempt. His whole attitude was a challenge, startling although not altogether objectionable” (1983, 54). As in the memoir, the scene relies on Thayer’s bewildered response to seeing the lavish table and then being overtly antagonized by Villa.

On the other hand, this scene contains allusions to Raoul Walsh’s semi-fictional autobiography, *Each Man in His Time: The Life Story of a Director* (1974), regarded by film historians as unreliable or at least “highly colored” (Brownlow, 1979, 577 n. 17). The Hollywood veteran recounts how Villa’s lieutenant Ortega (mistakenly named Manuel instead of Toribio) told him “apologetically” that he had to cover his eyes and made him wonder, “Why did I have to be blindfolded when every child in [Ciudad] Juárez and most

of their parents certainly knew of Villa's whereabouts? Whatever reason, it added more drama to the situation" (Walsh, 1974, 87). The account that follows is "fantastically cinematographic" (De los Reyes, 1985, 24).<sup>8</sup> As in the scene of *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself*, the representation of Villa and his men is highly mediated. However, identification is based on visual fallacy, with Walsh claiming he "recognized him at once from his pictures" in a then-nonexistent biography he read on the train ride from southern California (Walsh, 1974, 88). His views waver between condescension, bewilderment, and alienation. Ignored by Villa and positioned as bystander rather than participating agent, Walsh sees the revolutionary leader at first as "the classic example of a Mexican bandit," adjusting his perception ("Here was a man's man") only when he watches Villa's lively interaction with Ortega (88).

### *Villa and the Mutual Contract*

To the extent that Walsh's story functions as a bridge between contemporaneous testimonies and fictionalized recollections of Americans in Mexico, it underlines the burden placed on the film's historicity by the incomplete nature of the extant archival evidence on the Villa-Mutual deal. With most of the films lost, to revisit the deal film historians have had to content themselves with still photographs, handbills, reviews, and articles. As De los Reyes makes clear in *Con Villa en México*, the narratives fashioned around the contract offer multiple and overlapping perspectives that matched the views promoted by the popular press in the United States ([1985] 1992). Besides profit, these promotional materials were intended to create audience anticipation through details on the making of the films and accounts of the hardships and dangers encountered by the cameramen. Although genuine anecdotes and gossip are impossible to tell apart in these testimonies, their historical dimension resides, as the Mexican film historian Margarita de Orellana states, in their reflexivity: "Symbolically what they went to observe and report disappears, and their camera turns on its imaginary 180-degree axis to film them in the act of looking. In those moments, Pancho Villa and his men form a kind of scenography that projects the personal characteristics of the observers" (1999, 86).

Moreover, by favoring their own agency, the narratives of the cameramen reveal to what extent apparatus reductionism diminished the part played by Mexicans as subjects and protagonists of the films. Not even Villa was spared. At best, they treated him with condescending respect. In an interview that appeared in the May 9, 1914, issue of the Mutual Film

periodical *Reel Life*, cameraman Herbert M. Dean offered the following description of Villa: "Sometimes in action he would ride by and stop to watch us at work. Taciturn by nature, he would say nothing but his sunny smile indicated that we amused him hugely. If we wished to photograph him, he would rein in his horse, and in the fraction of a second would be on his way again" (11). For Walsh, Villa's behavior was "unpredictable. When he was angry, he would gallop past the camera, raising dust and making it impossible to follow him" (1974, 97). At worst, accounts about filming in Mexico passed derogatory judgments on military leaders as "being more vain than movie actors" and "willing to reenact a battle after it was over, with corpses still on the ground" (Wagner, in De los Reyes, [1985] 1992, 240). It did not matter that additional battle scenes were most likely staged for "The Life of General Villa" (De los Reyes, [1985] 1992, 20). Claims of faked footage became part of the lore surrounding the Mutual deal, and they resurfaced again in the 1970s in Walsh's fanciful filming anecdotes (Walsh, 1974, 95-97).

While *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* exhibits the same penchant for autobiographical agency and daring exploits found in the cameramen's accounts, it steers clear of the claims of war being re-created for the cameras. It restores Villa's position as initiator of the deal that brings Thayer to Mexico and the movies to the revolution. He partakes in the film's emphasis on visual agency with most moments of conflict revolving around his desire to control representation. Whether the effect is dramatic or comedic, he is shown as being responsive to the visual apparatus both as a naturalized and as an imaginary projection of identity and history. Scenes dealing with the arrival of the actors, shooting fictional sequences for "The Life of General Villa," and later his clash with Thayer over the screenplay make apparent the historical Villa's "clever, if ironic, responses" to American stereotypes (Anderson, 2000, 14). They show a skeptical, impish, and outraged Villa. Although he mockingly acquiesces to the blond Irene Hunt (Barbara May) playing his mother and only approves of Walsh after testing his abilities to ride a horse and fire a gun, he repudiates the idea of being portrayed as president of Mexico. Shooting up the screenplay may be a melodramatic gesture, yet it fits the film's attempt to highlight Villa's awareness of the already proven power of media to reconfigure identity. By calling "lies" what Thayer deems artistic license, Villa comes across as an unwilling partner in a venture that falsifies his past and denigrates his motives to suit the profit-driven motives of film producers and the thrill-seeking expectations of audiences.

### *Antonio Banderas Performing Villa*

If vision has been central to the historical construction of Villa's identity, its objectifying function is further disrupted in *And Pancho Villa Starring as Himself* by charismatic performance and narrative catharsis. Banderas conveys the weight of history and legend on Villa. Through a dynamic and highly sexualized performance of gender and ethnic difference, he endows the character with a transnational identity that is marked equally by the actor's professional trajectory and global Latino icon status.<sup>9</sup> Body language and speech blend action and melodrama, despite the irritating shifts from Mexican to peninsular Spanish vernacular and the actor's propensity to mutter. "Some of his facial distortions," Juan Bruce-Novoa writes, "could be read as parodic tributes to [Wallace] Beery's unique repertoire of grimaces and hand-to-face gestures" (2005, 8). The reference to the actor who played in *Viva Villa!* suggests to what extent Banderas's performance hinges on that of previous Hollywood actors who have portrayed the Mexican leader. It reaffirms, in the words of Charles Ramírez Berg, the "eroticism, exoticism, [and] tenderness, tinged with violence and danger," that have defined since Valentino Hollywood's representations of Latino masculinity (2002, 76). Excessive and unruly, at times bordering on silliness, the acting reflects Banderas's own attraction to the character. "From a dramatic point of view," he said in an interview posted on the film's official Web site, "Pancho Villa is a dream. He's flexible. You can stretch him as much as you want. You can do practically anything that comes to your mind. . . . Because everything is acceptable" (2004, n.p.). This potential is appealing to the Spanish actor. It allows him to go beyond his and the character's persona to restore his own transcultural identity and Villa's historical agency as a cinematic hero.

The coming together of narrative agency and fetishized spectacle is visualized in two important moments that rely on high melodrama for effect to replicate historical modes of spectatorship. In the quarrel over the screenplay, Villa's outburst at being compared to General Ulysses Grant is a visceral projection of how Mexicans have viewed U.S. contempt for their own people. He calls Grant a "drunk dogface; he killed *mexicanos* like he killed his whiskey bottles," and reacts angrily to Thayer's admission that he did not know. The aggressive and sexualized performance turns Villa into the key player and Thayer into the mediating figure of desire. This position is upheld by camera placement and lighting, despite the change of register that occurs later when Thayer confronts Villa about the Benton killing and makes a case for what can be gained politically by self-



FIGURE 2.6. And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself, *frame enlargement*

promotion. Seen in long shot, his figure bathed by light coming from the open roof of the train car, Banderas's lively gestures and hypermasculine pose contrast with Bailey's soft voice and subservient bearing. The scene alluded to by the film's title revolves as well around display and spectatorship. Having bowed to Thayer's request to play himself as president, Villa arrives on the set in a white suit and whiteface makeup with kohl-rimmed eyes and powdered moustache and hair. Visual effects call attention to artifice, and the histrionic performance reflexively alludes to silent film acting. The reverse shot of the internal audience restores the emotional resonance of image production and consumption of the Mexican Revolution. Even if Villa's performance sways precariously toward parody, the men, women, and children of his army approvingly applaud their leader's performance. The thrilled responses of the American film crew are summarized again by the fawning Thayer, who says, with Reed at his side, "Is there anything the man can't do?"

Although this scene is utterly fictional, its credibility depends both on historical evidence and on Banderas's skillful interpretation of Villa's own role in packaging himself as a cinematic hero. As Anderson writes, by the time the revolutionary agreed to Mutual's request to don military garb, "the construction he now presented to the public had become more fully a conscious production that included a package (self-reliant, rugged, uniformed warrior), a content (friendship at any cost), and a pitch (honesty, virtue, courage, love of democracy and fatuous praise of the United States and Wilson)" (2000, 61). By embracing an acting style grounded



on performance, Banderas validates the revolutionary leader's historical and legendary persona at once as an intercultural icon and an agent in the construction of his own mythology.

### *Translators and Spectators*

Notwithstanding the transcultural dimensions of Banderas's portrayal of Villa, the translation of cultural difference falls primarily to the gunner Sam Drebben, nicknamed "the fighting Jew," and the journalist John Reed. Whether in their habitual role as narrative catalysts or as historical figures, the Americans are central to the film's revisionist designs and, with the latter as a secondary character, perspective on media politics. Through Drebben, and Alan Arkin's characterization, the film illustrates the participation of U.S. soldiers of fortune in the Mexican Revolution and takes a pragmatic view of war devoid of the patriotic overtones of Hollywood action movies. In a sense, he is Thayer's mature alter ego. Skilled in the rules of combat and cultural exchange, he is energized by the revolution because it is an adventure and an opportunity to come into his own as an individual. In the end, having lost an eye and an arm in Torreón, Drebben is a battle-weary veteran. He is a custodian of memory and a Cassandra-like figure who foretells the fate of Mexico. Yet the bond between the characters is knocked off balance because he is at once decoder and actor of the violence that Thayer witnesses. After the Ojinaga battle, for instance, neither the reasons provided by Drebben nor the actions of Villa dispel Thayer's revulsion at the sight of hanging corpses and the unbridled hostility he encounters as he strolls through the ravaged town. Accompanied by Reed, he watches Rodolfo Fierro (Damián Alcázar) killing two Federal officers with a single gunshot ("It saves ammunition," says the journalist) and then Drebben extracting a gold tooth from one of the corpses with pliers. In the next scene, during a joyful night party and escorted by Reed, Thayer gains knowledge on what drives the various actors of the revolution. The journalist characterizes the U.S. and Mexican followers of Villa according to their compassion, idealism, and brutality. "Healing Jews and fighting Jews," is how Reed refers to Maurice Rauschbaum, "a surgeon from Indiana," and Drebben, "the machine gunner from the Bronx." Reed uses the same symmetry for General Felipe Angeles (Diego Sandoval), the cultured military and idealist, and Rodolfo Fierro, who, as he says, "gets ugly unless he kills at least one prisoner before breakfast."

Reed (like Drebben) acts as a go-between, his interventions providing a reflexive counterpoint to the visual reductionism that has turned the

popular mobilization of the revolution into a spectacle. Echoes of archetypal images and sounds abound in this sequence: the earthy hues imitate the sepia-tinted or discolored look of old photographs and the “Adelita” song on the sound track. Yet the tracking camera restores historicity to the vignette-like shots. The social and political dynamics of revolutionary community are revealed by choreographed movement and framing that favor interactions among the diverse actors. Matching moments disrupt the objectifying gaze, give agency back to the characters, and expose the visual transactions and narrative deferrals hidden behind the spectator-based imagery of the Mexican Revolution. Two scenes with Villa merit attention. The point of view shots of Villa dancing and singing the familiar refrains of “Adelita” around a campfire bind Thayer and the film viewer to evoke the investment of apparatus-mediated vision in the constructions of Villa as a cinematic figure. Yet this bond is broken in the scene of Thayer’s failed attempt to have Charlie take a picture of a grief-stricken widow expressing her gratitude for having been given money. Thayer’s repositioning as observer is made more explicit for Charlie, who is presented as an agent of representation in the opening scene of this sequence as he sets up his camera and magnetic flash to photograph a group of four soldiers.

Reed is a witness, as well as a socially and politically responsive interlocutor. With Thayer at his side, he is addressed as “Juanito” when Villa solicits his feedback on what Americans will think of the movies. He prompts Villa’s own account of why Edward Doheny and William Randolph Hearst have reasons to be nervous about the events in Mexico. Although there is no mention of the Mutual deal in Reed’s accounts published in the *Metropolitan* and collected in *Insurgent Mexico*, his presence in the film is crucial.<sup>10</sup> The film relies on his historical standing, first as an eyewitness whose romantic and sympathetic vision is put to the test by the brutal realities of war and later as a radical committed to Communism. In this capacity, he provides crucial historical information. A notable example is the Presidio sequence where Reed’s remarks contextualize the action, explaining events and anecdotes not shown in the film (Bruce-Novoa, 2005, 9). Positioned as an informed bystander, the fictional Reed is both a foil to Thayer’s star-struck and naive idealism and a savvy critic of the media’s complicity with U.S. interests in Mexico. In the only scene where Reed is shown as a working journalist, he says, “Clearly more people would discover Pancho Villa from a few feet of this crude historic film than from the reams that have been written about his struggle to rid Mexico from its greedy robber-barons, the only ones to profit from their marriage with rapacious American interests.” Thus reconfigured, Reed is

the mediating agent of the film's present-day outlook, which is articulated best in the screening sequence of "The Life of General Villa" (see below).

A significant metahistorical component of *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* is the diverse reactions of crew members and the revolutionaries who observe the shooting and the New York and Mexican audiences who view the newsreel and "The Life of General Villa." Through this emphasis on spectators, the film exposes a complex process of acquiescence and resistance that implicates contemporary viewers as well in the work of the image and its competing truth-claims. At the press showing, for instance, the New York journalists greet the Ojinaga footage with perplexity and amusement. They dismiss Aitken's pitch about "never seen [battle] footage" with "never seen . . . you still can't see it," and make fun of Villa's jovial acknowledgment of being filmed. This scene registers the negative responses to the 1914 newsreel. As De los Reyes writes, "There were no good, exciting battles; Villa did not wear an elegant military uniform but old, dirty city clothes and a three-day beard which made him look like a common bandit, not a General; and the clouds of dust raised by the action obscured the images" (2001b, 37). Conversely, in the closing segment, a Mexican audience greets with enthusiasm the scene of Villa as president. A letter from Abraham Sánchez to Thayer prompts the screening. But it is the official refusal to grant a hero's burial to Villa after his assassination in 1923 and Sánchez's question posed offscreen—"How will the sons of Mexico remember Pancho Villa?"—that aligns the representation with popular memory. Reaction shots capture the affect-charged effect of the fictional images and legitimate the legendary leader's place in the social imaginary.

At the New York premiere of "The Life of General Villa," the well-heeled public greets the war images with puzzlement and outrage. Used to complement acted scenes about Villa's early life, these images are a shocking and spectacular intrusion into what is otherwise a trite story of revenge. Their effect on Thayer and Reed is significant as well. Through their subsequent discussion, the film constructs what is ultimately its message. At issue is the veracity of the image and the anxiety resulting from its manipulation for political purposes. To have Reed invoke Senator Hiram Warren Johnson's notorious pronouncement from 1918, that "the first casualty of war is truth," the film's historicizing agenda is projected into the present. The Mexican Revolution as a mediated event and Villa's role in fashioning himself into a cinematic hero are displaced onto contemporary debates over the various meanings of "reality" and repositioned within a renewed anxiety about the media and the representation of war.

This should not come as a surprise. Both the director, Bruce Beresford, and the scriptwriter, Larry Gelbart, have tackled the topic of war before, and reviewers have ensured that analogies with reality TV, celebrity spin, and “embedded” journalism are not overlooked (Gilbert, 2003, 1). What the British film historian Kevin Brownlow describes as “one of the most curious and remarkable deals in film history” (1979, 91) is put at the service of current debates on media fabrication. Moreover, *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* falls short of what I believe are genuine intentions to rehabilitate the most complex figure of the Mexican Revolution—and the most notoriously demonized by Hollywood cinema. In spite of its reflexive emphasis on vision and identity, its historicizing position remains uncritically aligned with the numerous narratives circulated first by American journalists and cameramen and later by film historians about Villa and the Mutual deal. What remains is nothing more than a made-in-Hollywood spectacle that uses the revolution as a pretext for moralizing statements on war and representation.

#### COUNTERMEMORY AND APPROPRIATION IN *The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa*

As De Orellana points out, “The history of the revolution through the fictional and newsreel films of North America is simply the history of a self-directed gaze and its transformations, the history of a circular look” (1993, 14). If cinema turned events and their protagonists into a reflective mirror in which Americans could view themselves as other, then it is legitimate to ask, what is the meaning of these representations for Mexicans? This question is explicitly addressed in *The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa* (Gregorio Rocha, Mexico, 2003), a formally imaginative, multivocal, and personal work that deals with the archival object. Its value comes from its political and affective investment in historicity and strategies of reclamation. Rocha’s on-camera presence and first-person offscreen address establishes him as protagonist and narrator of a search to locate “The Life of General Villa.” He describes events, characters, and images and articulates the questions guiding his quest. “I like to ask questions of old pictures. Who are you standing there in front of the camera? Who took your picture? Where were you? What was going through your mind? . . . So General Villa, what happened to the movie you shot in 1914?” says the filmmaker early in the film over a montage of period images, including the footage known as “Unknown Seffens” depicting Federal army refugees in Presidio, Texas, after the battle of Ojinaga.



FIGURE 2.7. The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa, *frame enlargement*

To explore the stories hidden behind extant period images of the revolution, Rocha enlists the silent film scholars and archivists Kevin Brownlow (London, England), Paolo Cherchi-Usai (Rochester, New York), and Fernando del Moral González (Mexico City); the historians Rubén Osorio (Ojinaga, Mexico) and Stephen Bellmore (London); the grandson of cameraman Charles Rosher, Langdon Morrell (San Diego, California); and the exhibitor Edmundo Padilla (El Paso, Texas, in a previously taped interview). To find the lost reels of the Villa film, Rocha sets out on a journey that is part wandering and interrogation and involves trans- and intercontinental travel by airplane, train, car, and foot. In the process, the desire to rescue the past is repeatedly put to the test. Visits to film archives and libraries in New York, London, Amsterdam, and El Paso bring mostly disappointment but yield some unexpected results. By far the most exciting discovery is made in El Paso. Among the deteriorating film reels kept by the family of the itinerant movie exhibitors Félix and Edmundo Padilla, Rocha finds the hitherto unknown *The Vengeance of Pancho Villa*, which is made up of segments from a variety of silent films, including one from *The Life of General Villa*. Produced in the 1930s, the Padilla film appropriates Villa as a popular Mexican hero by reconfiguring his legendary

filmic identity from the numerous fictions that turned him in 1916, after the attack on Columbus, New Mexico, into a ruthless and bloodthirsty bandit (Rocha, 2002, 26–27).

Not having found what he is looking for, Rocha transforms failure creatively. He integrates into the film still photographs and documentary and fictional footage, as well as a variety of printed items.<sup>11</sup> Rather than simply confirm long-established opinions on the systemic objectification and racism in U.S. depictions of Mexico, he places these materials at the service of alternative modes of historicity. His statement, “I want to believe that Utopia is to be found in the shape of an archetypal image, one that refuses to disappear despite the wear and tear of the years,” echoes the film historian Jay Leyda’s insights on reconstructing the past out of old newsreels expressed in his pioneering study of compilation films, *Films Beget Films* (1964). Whether used as evidence or reorganized into filmic montage segments, the archival materials provoke reflections on their historicizing value and purpose. Their diverse iconographic and narrative features and shifting spectator positions enable meanings to be scrutinized, deconstructed, and reformulated. “History in film,” as the filmmaker aptly remarks over the earlier-mentioned shots of refugees, “does not necessarily coincide with history of reality. Rather, film records the history of the imaginary.” This caveat is sustained not just by the revisionist opinions of the interviewees but also by the reflexive treatment of the film’s various components. By means of technological, aesthetic, and rhetorical mediations, characters and events of the past are represented as cultural and social projections. The caption replicating period postcards on the film poster reads, “Gregorio Rocha and Pancho Villa caught by the camera while filming his documentary.” Villa also appears literally as a ghost reflected on a Parisian subway car window and a metal container filled with corroded film reels. He also enters the film as a disembodied voice summarizing the plot of *The Life of General Villa* over water-stained pictures, perhaps the only extant visual record of the lost film. If iris shots of a spinning record on an old gramophone expose the artifice, then first-person address, diction, and vernacular idioms infer a subject in control of his own, albeit fictionalized, life story.<sup>12</sup> Revealed in this way, the revolutionary leader haunts the film’s discourse: its dialogue with an elusive subject in danger of melting away, like images bearing the telltale signs of nitrate decay, and an absent agent of his own representation waiting to be rediscovered.

Those who recounted filming the revolution are also invited to partake in this dialogue between what is lost and what waits to be reconstituted. As Rocha says, images “tell the stories the film makers want us to

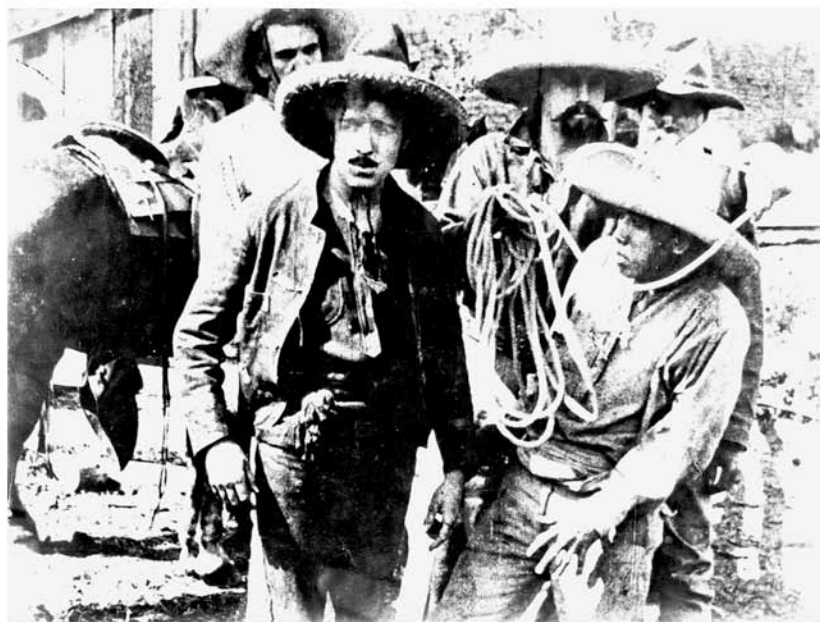


FIGURE 2.8. *The Life of General Villa*, film still, Mutual Film Company, 1914. Courtesy of the Specials Collection Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library

see,” even if some may be true. Whether depicted or vocalized, historicity and agency are shown as unstable constructs, contingent on historiography and mediated by affect. As noted, cameramen’s testimonies were mainly vehicles for promoting newsreels dealing with events in Mexico. To enhance their own standing, cameramen circulated misleading stories, sometimes based on rumors or anecdotes told by colleagues working for Mutual or other film companies (De los Reyes, [1985] 1992, 21). To what extent genuine anecdotes and gossip are indistinguishable is demonstrated in the Brownlow interview segment that involves perusing photographs and viewing footage in an editing room. Matching film and still images are used as proof of reliability of the stories told by the famed Mutual cameraman Charlie Rosher. Other accounts are shown to be inconsistent, if not outright fabricated by self-attribution or visual trickery. Rocha deconstructs the notorious account of his arrest in Ojinaga by orders of the Federal army general Salvador Mercado as a misappropriation of a comparable incident recounted by the freelancer Charles Pryor (Brownlow, 1968, 256). New evidence modifies perceptions, not solely assessments, as the film historian’s reactions reveal. He marvels at Rocha’s discoveries, the



detention scenes and Rosher's letter describing Pryor's arrest, yet is utterly repulsed by the graphic violence of the imagery of executions and doctors tending badly wounded soldiers in the Seffens collections.

By means of digital animation the figure of Rosher at his tripod-mounted camera is moved from one picture into another to illustrate Brownlow's anecdote of having come across a faked photograph of the U.S. cameraman with Villa. If visual trickery replicates here the notorious tendency to counterfeit images during the revolution, in other instances the visual effects of silent cinema are used reflexively. In the combat shots complementing Osorio's account of the Ojinaga battle as having started at seven o'clock in the evening, the deep-blue tinted images restore the temporality of Villa's attack and contest the stories about the Mutual film contract. In *The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa*, the disclosure-refutation rhetoric of competing claims of authenticity and historical agency generated by the imagery of the Mexican Revolution is particularly significant. If some of these claims are invalidated, the film does not resolve the uncertainty surrounding faked footage. Instead, the images themselves become the focal point for negotiating the essentialism of ubiquitous assertions that all war films shot before World War I were faked.<sup>13</sup>

The newsreel footage makes clear the blending of spectacle and actuality in silent films. In the Ojinaga scenes, for example, the yellow-tinted shot of U.S. soldiers with field glasses standing on a roof, their backs turned to the camera, evokes the spectator-themed imagery of the Mexican Revolution. Coloring is also a reminder that visual effects in this period were cosmetic enhancements. Like battle reenactments that, in De Orellana's words, "seemed more convincing dressed up in the studio than photographed direct," technical mediations were aimed at intensifying the reality effect of newsreels (1993, 7). What is more, a present-day outlook on the constructed nature of representation sustains the handling of archival footage. Visual effects and editing denaturalize the indexical properties of the footage to reveal image making then and now as a process, rather than a willful deception, and promote readings that are more consistent with current silent film historiography.

### *Period Imagery: Fact and Fiction*

For this reason, period images in *The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa* deserve detailed attention. As indicated earlier in this chapter, they are evidence of diverse points of view on Mexico and revolution. Produced during the phase called transitional by silent film historians (i.e., 1907–1917), these

images demonstrate the joint impact of apparatus and narrative-driven identifications in shaping a social spectator. In the U.S.-produced documentary footage, as De los Reyes states, “what prevails is a scrutinizing gaze on the human side of events, people and leaders. The epic was marginalized by their authors maybe because their gaze as foreigners compelled them to record habits, customs, and behaviors of people who were strangers to them” ([1985] 1992, 11). The Seffens materials of the Federal troops in Presidio illustrate the suffering and brutality of war and construct a point of view that betrays curiosity and compassion. The long shot composition accentuates the desert landscape. Group shots express in dramatic ways distress and isolation, such as the scenes of soldiers wearing rough wool blankets to protect themselves from the winter cold. All the refugees acknowledge the camera, even the women and young children standing behind a crude fence described as *corrales* (animal enclosures) in Osorio’s present-day account of the disastrous Federal army retreat in January 1914. Framing reveals the refugees’ vulnerability and, like the border imagery of the period, “indicates an anxiety about containing the Mexican population within the United States” (Fox, 1999, 74). Panning breaks momentarily the controlling and objectifying gaze of the stationary camera. The refugees’ agency is realigned with a narrative about life in the makeshift camp in the scenes of a man receiving a bundle of firewood from a woman camp follower and groups of men looking at U.S. Army officials inspecting seized ammunition. With scenes of soldiers burning the dead, the affect of the imagery shifts to mourning. A spectacular panoramic shot of a caravan of people and animals escorted by U.S. troops across the sand-swept desert from Presidio to Marfa illustrates what has passed into history as the march of sorrows.

In contrast to this affect-laden representation of a defeated army, the footage of the Federal maneuvers on the outskirts of Mexico City in 1914 is primarily a military spectacle. Located at the British Film Institute (London), it may well be the film shot by the Austrian-born cameraman Fritz Arno Warner on a commission by the U.S. subsidiary of Pathé. As Rocha says, it was recorded “so [that] the American president Woodrow Wilson could see for himself that [Victoriano] Huerta was still the strong man in Mexico.” Framing and composition point to controlled conditions and confirm the cameraman’s account published on April 14, 1914, in *Moving Picture World*. The apparatus-mediated aesthetics of militaristic display and authoritarian agency are exemplified by a long shot of a photographer in a dusty field, his back to the camera. Horsemen pulling cart-mounted artillery guns and a cavalry officer respectively in the rear and front of



FIGURE 2.9. *The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa*, *frame enlargement*

the image surround him. The image of a well-equipped, disciplined, and efficient army is reinforced by shots of a cannon being fired, a trench with soldiers shooting, as Rocha says, at “invisible enemies,” and a bridge being built over a canal. In the battle drill scene, a narrative dimension is added with below-the-waist shots of soldiers jumping over a “dead” soldier lying on the stony ground of a hill. The objectified performance is made more explicit by reenactment where, as De Orellana writes, the camera “was like an extension of [Huerta’s] army: a weapon manipulated by the cameraman” who had been made “A General for a Day” (1999, 50).

This depiction of war as spectacle is sustained in fictional dramatizations by narrative and generic devices familiar to film audiences in the silent period. As the fictional films included in *The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa* demonstrate, spectacle is placed at the service of representations of gender, class, and racial difference. Moreover, the film insinuates the merits of viewing these materials as a broad canvas on which the history of foreign (largely U.S.) representations of Mexico can be retraced. By means of an extended montage combining various films, Rocha carries out Leyda’s imagined but unrealized project on the Mexican Revolution using footage shot by foreigners. The filmmaker may well have taken a cue from

the historian's plan to have the "entire factual heart of the film . . . framed with non-factual material to show less tangible things, attitudes, prejudices, inspirations" (Leyda, 1971, 113).<sup>14</sup> Yet he takes this idea further. The mosaic-like assembly of archetypal images is central to the film's politics of reclamation. Over shots of the Seine in Paris, Rocha says, "Today, in the city of the manifestoes I proclaim my right to challenge the demeaning image the foreign film industry has projected of me. I proclaim my right to see myself through the stereotypes (the savage, the half-breed, 'greaser') they made of me. I proclaim my right to the images of the past; to make them mine and bring them back to life."

The montage consists of Kalem Film Manufacturing Company productions, *The Mexican Joan of Arc* (1911) and *The Colonel's Escape* (1912), found in London and Amsterdam, respectively; the Wagner footage; and a Dutch film, *The Mexican Telegram* (1914). The story line eliminates good-versus-evil dichotomies and dispenses with melodramatic catharsis. Instead of brutality and retribution, it focuses on thrilling and dignified actions.<sup>15</sup> This narrative rearrangement works against the grain of the rescue motif, and its attendant fantasies of restoring the threat posed by gender and racial alterity, in silent westerns and female-centered adventure serials. As a result, characters and their agencies are reconfigured. The revenge-seeking widow in *The Mexican Joan of Arc* becomes an ingenious young woman at ease with trains and horses, a fearless but compassionate revolutionary leader.<sup>16</sup> Rather than the arrogant foreigner who saves Mexicans from oppression in *The Colonel's Escape*, the bravery and patriotism of the gun smuggler (and real-life Welsh-born mercenary) Caryl Rhys Price equals that of the other rebels.<sup>17</sup> The military unit from the army maneuvers film that surveys the mountainous landscape with field glasses is turned from enemy into passive spectator. With his cruel tormentors out of sight, the Dutch settler Willem's distress is revealed as nothing more than a mental image conjured by an anxious elderly father.<sup>18</sup>

One may argue that using films that depict the revolution in sympathetic ways because they draw on factual incidents and characters facilitates Rocha's reclamation of archetypal images of Mexico. However, he does more than just substitute negative with positive images. The western-style train robbery, battle reenactments, and trick film-style fantasy scenes in the montage point to the hybrid features of period silent film practices that mixed authentic locations of newsreels with stage setups of studio filming (Hansen, 1991, 46). Intertextuality and crossing genres, in Miriam Hansen's words, "acknowledge a diversity of viewer interests" and "a more open relationship with the arena of public discourse . . . that allowed

that discourse to be contested and interpreted in alternative ways” (1991, 48, 94). Hence the montage segment revisualizes, albeit briefly, silent film spectatorship out of temporalities and identities dispersed around the world in film archives. The restructured narrative enables multiple identifications, reinstating the pleasures lost when early films are hidden from view. The resulting effect is a subject that is at once positioned and transitory, local and global.

### *Recycling as Resistance*

Having said that, Rocha pays homage to Félix and Edmundo Padilla as pioneers of recycling as a strategy of cultural resistance. As noted earlier, they made *The Vengeance of Pancho Villa* in the 1930s from fragments of existing films about Villa and the Mexican Revolution. By integrating this film, along with outtakes found in the family’s garage, the filmmaker rescues the work of this Mexican American father-and-son team of itinerant exhibitors as an early example of Mexican and Chicano cinema practices in the United States. Moreover, he uses the story of these other lost reels as a metaphor for the frailty and paradox of historicity. Recurrent shots of an unidentified figure in a blue smock and protective headgear, white gloves stained with brownish powder, oxidized reels, and brittle film stock turned into a whitish mass function as a visual trope for a salvage project literally at risk from hazardous and fragile materials. This “compilation of compilations,” as Rocha calls it, is what counter-memory is to historicism: an idea rather than an object, a construct made up of differing temporalities. The Padilla film is a political gesture of self-affirmation, as the divergent imagery of Villa used in the poster and the discarded outtakes exemplify. Wearing a white shirt and northern hat pushed slightly to the back of his head to reveal a jovial face, the legendary hero is revisualized. As an explicit quote of an archival photograph, it reinstates his historical persona and counteracts the filmic image equating Villa with a vicious predator by means of a ghostly superposition of his face with a mountain lion.

*The Vengeance of Pancho Villa* contains a segment from *The Life of General Villa* on Mormon settlers being attacked by bandits and requesting Villa’s assistance.<sup>19</sup> A scene recorded by the Alva brothers showing Villa in Mexico City at Madero’s tomb in December 1914 and a dramatized reconstruction of Villa’s murder in 1923 shot by the Padillas with the help of friends in 1930 are also included. There is also footage from *Liberty, Daughter of the United States* (Jacques Jaccard and Henry McRae, 1916), a Universal serial of which only three of the twenty episodes seem to have



FIGURE 2.10. *La venganza de Pancho Villa*, poster. Courtesy of the Specials Collection Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library

survived. Changes in attitudes toward Villa, President Woodrow Wilson's recognition of the Carranza government in 1915, and the public outrage over the Columbus, New Mexico, raid are graphically displayed in the exhibitor-aimed advertisement reproduced in De Orellana's book, *La mirada circular*. The serial was a timely melodrama intended to appeal to patriotic sentiments at a time when "all eyes [were] on Uncle Sam's boys along the Mexican border" (1999, 149). The National Guard soldier with a bugle against a backdrop of army tents, with the caption "Is Your Boy on the Border?" is a visual reminder of General John J. Pershing's punitive expedition into Mexico. Geographically undefined, the border is turned into a space where an "archetypal confrontation between Anglo and Mexican" occurs and "in which racial and physical contrasts are hyperbolized" (Fox, 1999, 72). The story line combines crude analogy and allegory, idealized femininity and ominous alterity. Liberty (played by Mary Walcamp) is the Anglo heiress of an enormous Mexican property that must be freed. Pancho López is the ferocious-looking, brown-faced bandit in dire need of money to finance his revolution who kidnaps her for ransom. And Mayor Rutledge is the all-American hero sent by Washington to rescue her and destroy the bandits who have attacked the U.S. town of Discovery.

As Rocha discovers in an editing logbook and among the outtakes, the Padillas eliminated Liberty as the main character, cut blatantly racist

scenes and titles, used real names for characters and events, and created bilingual Spanish- and English-language titles. In keeping with the Mexican-centered perspective of *The Vengeance of Pancho Villa*, as Rocha says, “Pancho López became Pancho Villa, the Mexican hero. Discovery was changed back to Columbus.” The image of victimized Americans was discarded in favor of fearless Mexicans, such as the title celebrating Villa’s elite corps, the famed Dorados, which complements the fictionalized battle shots from films dealing with the Columbus raid. The representation of gratuitous violence is not associated with the New Mexico attack but the U.S. invasion of Veracruz in 1914 by means of the title “Lo mismo aquí, que en Veracruz, nuestros hermanos han sido sacrificados! Here as in Veracruz, our brothers have been sacrificed!” and the scenes from various films that follow. Villa’s gaze is humanized. Instead of sadism and lasciviousness, it expresses determination in the Mormon segment of *The Life of General Villa*, despite the eerie effect produced by the contrast between Raoul Walsh’s blue eyes and his brown-face makeup. It projects serenity in the 1920 footage documenting the talks in Sabinas, Coahuila, that lead to Villa’s surrender. Respect and compassion are elicited by the title “Paz a sus restos. Rest in peace” and the shot of Villa’s dead body slumped over a car window. Notwithstanding the addition of the period photographs and postcards that the shot replicates, the affect of these last images of the Padilla film enables an alternative historicity. What the viewer is left with is a multifaceted and mediated image of Villa, ephemeral, dynamic, and changing as Rocha’s split-frame triptych of movable film frames suggests. Villa’s subjectivity and identity as a cinematic hero are revisualized, reimagined, and reclaimed.

“More than a mere case study for film preservationists,” Rita Gonzalez writes, “*Lost Reels* is a meditation on film’s role in the field of history. The search for ‘lost reels’ unsettles so much dust in the archive that other film histories come to light” (2006, 2). It alters the salvaged-from-oblivion inferences driving the rescue and preservation of lost images. Out of divergent and dispersed temporalities, *The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa* constructs new identifications overlaid with the affect of memory, estrangement, and cultural activism. The documentary is at once a work of historiography and of memory. Although it does not resolve the pervasive assumptions about faked footage, it offers a unique opportunity to reexamine the competing representations and narratives generated by Villa’s association with cinema. What is more, the reflexive treatment of period imagery and archetypal figurations signals their signifying power as imaginary projections, yet open to be reclaimed. By drawing attention to counter-memory



and appropriation, this film is far more effective in addressing the filmic constructions of Villa's historical persona than is *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself*. The film's revisionist aims are undermined by the priority given to sight and display. Whether explicitly quoted as historical or inscribed by narrative, spectatorship is central in Beresford's film. Characters and film-within-the-film audiences function as agents of the American fascination with Villa and the Mexican Revolution. Villa's representation depends at once on Bandera's ability to portray him as an agent in the making of his own mythology and on replicating historical modes of spectatorship that turned him into a movie celebrity and the revolution into a commodity.