

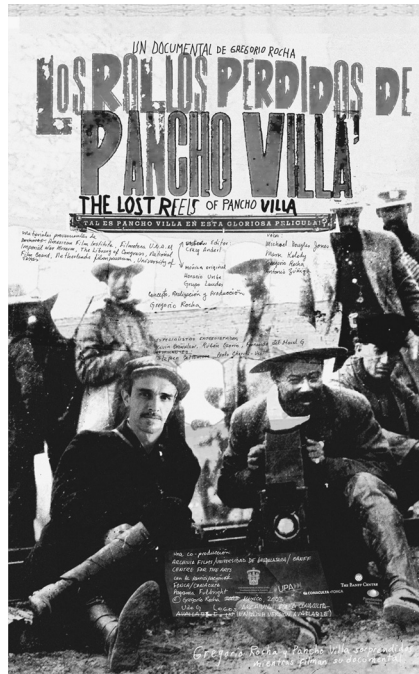
“Gene Martin” (Eugenio Martín), in which a lascivious, cynical, and cold-blooded Villa is played by Greek-American actor Telly Savalas. Another film on Villa, which may also be considered American, is *La Venganza de Pancho Villa* (ca. 1930), a rare compilation film by Texas-based exhibitors and producers Felix and Edmundo Padilla. See Rocha, “*The Vengeance of Pancho Villa: A Lost and Found Border Film*,” *Journal of Film Preservation* 65 (December 2003): 24–31.

In Mexico, Pancho Villa has inspired many productions and a broad range of treatments. The most notable is *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* (1936, C.L.A.S.A.), starring Domingo Soler, part of the famous Mexican revolution trilogy by director Fernando de Fuentes.

4. Chon Noriega, “Latinos in American Cinema: A Historical Essay,” in *Missing in Action: Latinos In and Out of Hollywood*, ed. Harry P. Pachon et al. (Los Angeles: Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 1999), 8.

5. *Gachupín* is a nonderogatory nickname used in Latin America to refer to Spaniards who settled on the continent. It is as friendly as when using *gringo* to refer to white, Anglo-Saxon Americans.

6. The copy of the Pancho Villa–Mutual Film contract, found by Friedrich Katz in Mexico during his research, is not signed. It never mentions battle re-enactments or the \$25,000 advance payment. Neither contract suggests any possible influence of the cameramen in Villa’s war strategies. The second contract, which supposedly existed but has not been found, is the one that ignited the fantasy of journalists and historians alike.



Los Rollos perdidos de Pancho Villa / The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa, directed by Gregorio Rocha

SUBCINE (WWW.SUBCINE.COM), 2003

Rita Gonzalez

Gregorio Rocha begins his film *The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa* (2003) by inviting archival materials to an impossible dialogue. To the mute photographic and filmic subjects, he plaintively demands, “Who are you standing there in front of the camera? Who took your picture? Where were you? What was going through your mind?” With this ruminative gesture, Rocha invokes a now well-circulated notion that the historical nuances of the archive are not located in the institutional documents and artifacts but can be glimpsed in the subjugated perspectives of those in the margins and in the backdrop.

The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa is a peripatetic video journey from the perspective of a displaced Mexican national looking for the displaced relics of a Mexican icon. This inventive metadocumentary (or *making of the making of a documentary*) can be read as a primer on what Joel Katz has dubbed *archiveology*. According to Katz, *archiveology* is a “metalevel of investigation [that] attempts to interrogate [the] archive on its many registers as historical record, mnemonic object, and emotive experience, [thus] making the material’s historicity a central point of investigation.”²¹ Whereas experimental purveyors of archiveology (from Craig Baldwin to the duo of Angela Ricci Lucchi and Yervant Gianikian) foreground montage and its collision of historical meanings, Rocha uses *Lost Reels* as a forum to debate the grounds of archiveology.

Rocha departs from the anarchic impulse of Baldwin, Bruce Conner, and found-footage collagists to examine the fragility of the historical record and the interpenetration of the fictional and the actual in early cinema. We

follow Rocha, the “amateur” (with a nod to Jan-Christopher Horak, a true “lover” of film) archivist traipsing around the world on planes, trains, and automobiles in search of his cinematic holy grail—the lost reels of a 1914 Mutual film entitled *The Life of General Villa*. The Mexican Revolution was one of the first historical events to be photographed by roving newsreel cinematographers. Cinema historian Aurelio de los Reyes notes that “between 1911 and 1920 over 80 cameramen [worked] either freelance or for various film companies” documenting the Revolution.² In 1914, Pancho Villa signed a contract presented to him by Frank Thayer of the Mutual Film Company. In this document, Villa apparently agreed to give Mutual “exclusive rights” to film the battle of Ojinaga in the state of Chihuahua. In return, Mutual would endow Villa with twenty percent of the film’s revenue. Besides being an early biopic, *The Life of General Villa* was perhaps the first to feature a cameo by the historical figure whose life it attempted to depict—certainly a foreshadowing of the twentieth century’s ensuing fusion of entertainment and actuality.

In an independently forged film career that now spans over two decades, Rocha has been exploring the uneven dynamics of Mexican and United States relations. He is part of a generation of documentary and experimental filmmakers that emerged from the *Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos* (University Center for Cinematographic Studies), a training ground for Mexican filmmakers that emerged in the early 1960s, largely due to the demands of student film clubs and a creative crisis that was plaguing the state-operated film industry at the time. Unlike others from his generation who have gone on to commercial production, Rocha’s independent work (financed by teaching and grants) has evolved from cinema vérité to an experimental forging of personal cinema with historical documentary. He has documented punks and street kids in Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl with his former partner Sarah Minter in *Sábado de Mierda* (1985–1987), a colony of North American utopians in northern Mexico in *Railroad to Utopia* (1995), his own journey to distinguish the myths and geopolitical realities of Aztlán in *The Arrow* (1996), and representations of Mexico in North

American popular culture in *War and Images* (1996–1999).

The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa documents the pathos and solitude of archival research but also features the filmmaker’s lively encounters with colleagues in the field. The highlight is Rocha’s London appointment with the engaging and seemingly ageless Kevin Brownlow. Rocha marvels as Brownlow tells anecdotes and pulls treasures out of a musty cigar box given him by Charles Rosher, the pioneering cinematographer who purportedly shot battle sequences of Pancho Villa.

More than a mere case study for film preservationists, *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 histories come to light. While the object of the hunt is foregrounded for the audience, it is the searcher himself whose peaks and disappointments provide an archival melodrama. Rocha turns the camera on himself to reveal the hours of travel and days spent in archive screening rooms. One critic has labeled Rocha’s point of view self-indulgent, but rarely does one get a chance to witness a case study in action—with all the quirks and passions of the archivist dramatically chronicled. Rocha does play with reenactment in one apocryphal scene in which he receives a mysterious call from a nameless source steering him to the University of Texas at El Paso just before he is about to give up on his search for the missing reels.

For Rocha to connect his film to such a loaded genre as melodrama—especially since he comes from a national cinema that has been permeated by melodrama—is perhaps overblown. What he really achieves is akin to the chronicle. Long popular in Mexico, chronicles are fusions of journalism with elliptical, almost fictional flourishes. Rocha’s video chronicle centers on the search for a lost cinematic treasure but also takes several thematic forays to consider the post-9/11 climate. We never get the sense of this study being dislocated from Rocha’s sociopolitical context. Footage of the 1916 attack on Columbus, New Mexico, that was attributed to Villa’s militia doubles in a split-screen with images of the fall of the World Trade Center.

While Rocha keeps us aware of the present tense of his search for the lost film, the inspiration for his journey turns out to be an unfulfilled project of Jay Leyda, who he quotes in the film's narration:

Many years ago, when I became conscious of the importance to history of the Mexican Revolution, I planned an over-ambitious film to try to reflect its many facets. The center of the film was to be an attempt to bring together the newsreel footage of this world-shaking event, that had been filmed by cameramen sent there from every film-producing country of the world. I even dreamed of a fascinating world tour, digging in London and New York newsreel archives, finding Mexican footage in Copenhagen and Stockholm that had never been seen on the American continents. . . . [The] entire factual heart of the film was to be framed with non-factual material to show less tangible things, attitudes, prejudices, inspirations.³

The visionary Leyda foresaw the archiveological impulse in contemporary experimental and documentary film and video. Rocha follows through on Leyda's "over-ambitious" scheme in a short montage that combines materials he has salvaged from his journey. In this tribute to Leyda's impossible film, prejudices and preoccupations about Mexico are phantasmatically released, rapid-fire. The sequence succinctly illustrates Mexican historian Enrique Florescano's statement that "the revolution is not just the series of historical acts that took place between 1910 and 1917, or between 1910 and 1920, or between 1910 and 1940; it is also the collection of projections, symbols, evocations, images, and myths that its participants, interpreters, and heirs forged and continue to construct around this event."⁴

Rocha sets out to unravel the enigma surrounding the cinematic career of General Villa. Ultimately, he finds the conversation he was looking for, not with the tragic-heroic figure of Villa but with two unknown players in the film histories of the United States and Mexico—Edmundo and Felix Padilla of El Paso, Texas. Although Rocha has set out to find the presumably defunct footage of one of history's most charismatic figures, he ends up discover-

ing a border history so fascinating that it merits its own full-length treatment—a "to be continued" at which Rocha hints during the final words of *Lost Reels*. (In fact, he is now editing a documentary about the Padillas and has written a screenplay for feature version of their life story.)

After the dramatized mystery call, Rocha ends up at the University of Texas at El Paso, where he finds a cache of 35mm nitrate prints.⁵ He tracks down some surviving members of the Padilla family. With the assistance of an oral history conducted by Padilla's grandniece, Rocha fills in the gray areas surrounding the mysterious reels labeled *La Venganza de Pancho Villa* (The Vengeance of Pancho Villa). Rocha has stumbled upon the holdings of itinerant movie exhibitors on the U.S./Mexico border and what may be the first U.S./Mexican border film. The father and son duo of Edmundo and Felix traveled throughout El Paso and the northern Mexican state Chihuahua showing *La Venganza*. Rocha unearths detailed editing logs and journals that prove that the Padillas purchased outdated silent prints (including *The Life of General Villa*) and edited together their own revisionist version of Villa's contributions to Mexican history. They often changed the compilation reel, even adding their own reenactment of the 1923 assassination of Villa.

Rocha declares the Padilla concoction an ingenious act of "cultural resistance" that foreshadows the work of future Mexican-American and Chicano films. Similarly, Rocha has taken his cues from Leyda and the Padillas in creating his own "dreamy mixture" of chronicle, compilation film, and diary from the lost and found reels of the archive.

NOTES

1. Joel Katz, "From Archive to Archiveology," *Cine-matograph* 4 (1991): 100.
2. Aurelio de los Reyes, "Francisco Villa: The Use and Abuse of Colonialist Cinema," *Journal of Film Preservation* 63 (2001): 36. See also Gregorio C. Rocha, "The Vengeance of Pancho Villa: A Lost and Found Border Film," *Journal of Film Preservation* 65 (2002): 24–29. Emily Cohen places Rocha's film within a "growing apocalyptic cultural movement of film preservationists," in "The Orphanista Manifesto: Orphan Films and the Politics of Reproduction," *American Anthropologist* 106, no. 4 (2004): 719–31, which also includes an interview with the filmmaker.
3. Jay Leyda, *Films Beget Films* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), 113.

4. Quoted in John Mraz, "How Real is Reel?" in *Framing Latin American Cinema: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. Anne Marie Stock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 93.

5. Mexican Revolution Photograph Collection, C. L. Sonnichson Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library. The library catalog describes the holdings: "[Series VI] includes seven reels (800 ft.) of 35mm nitrate film. The reels were originally housed in a metal container titled 'Edmundo Padilla Collection: La Venganza de Pancho Villa.' The films contain newsreel and motion picture footage. . . . A few copy prints show movie posters about Pancho

Villa. Titles of these movies include *Pancho Villa, La Venganza del Guerrillero!!*, *Pancho Villa en Columbus*, *El Reino del Terror* and *La Venganza de Pancho Villa* starring Doroteo Arango—Pancho Villa himself. In conjunction to the stills, the nitrate films, once restored and copied, will bring to light an important part of the history of the Revolution as seen through cinematography.

"The movie stills, poster copies, and motion picture films were donated by Magdalena Arias and were originally called the Edmundo Padilla Collection. Magdalena Arias is the daughter of Edmundo Padilla who was an El Paso film producer and distributor."



Courtesy of Milestone Film and Video

Mary Pickford Films on DVD

HEART O' THE HILLS (1919), *M'LISS* (1918), *SUDS* (1920), *THROUGH THE BACK DOOR* (1922), AND *CINDERELLA* (1914)

Christel Schmidt

In the early 1990s, it was nearly impossible to view the films of Mary Pickford outside a motion picture archive. Public screenings were rare, and local video stores and libraries rarely stocked the handful of Pickford titles released by Kino, Grapevine, and Blackhawk. Today, much has changed, due to the growing DVD

market, revived public interest, and the efforts of Milestone Film and Video.

In 1999, riding on the success of its theatrical tour of Pickford films, Milestone (in collaboration with the Mary Pickford Institute and Timeline Films) released the first of eleven Pickford DVDs to date. Fifteen features, four shorts, and several clips of actuality footage are now easily accessible. The latest of these include *Heart O' the Hills* (1919), *Suds* (1920), and *Through the Back Door* (1922).

Heart O' the Hills, the best of the three new DVD releases, is perfectly paired with *M'liss* (1918), a bonus feature. In many ways the films overlap: each takes place in a poor rural area, and each involves a murder of a par-