

Film Compilation as Restoration?: borders, *bricolage* and *La venganza de Pancho Villa*

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Abstract: This essay examines the “film compilation” framed within early Mexican itinerant exhibition practices using the specific case study of entrepreneurs Félix Padilla (1862-1937) and his son Edmundo Padilla (1903-1984) of the El Paso-Juárez border region. As I will show, the Padillas’ *La venganza de Pancho Villa* (Pancho Villa’s Revenge) is a borderless film of continually changing ideas and technical processes, one that destabilizes the notion of the original that is used to identify differences between national cinemas and as a standard for film preservation protocol that determines national heritage. In its place, I offer the notion of *bricolage* as a methodological concept for understanding the heterogeneous nature of cinema in general, and more specifically to describe the craft repurposing exemplified by the Padillas’ artisanal, bilingual and bicultural media practice.

Key words: *bricolage*, *fronterizo*, intermediality, hybridity, film preservation, heritage.

¿Compilación como restauración?: fronteras, *bricolaje* y *La venganza de Pancho Villa*

Resumen: En este ensayo se examina la “compilación fílmica” en relación con prácticas tempranas de la exhibición itinerante en México, utilizando el caso específico de los empresarios Félix Padilla (1862-1937) y su hijo Edmundo Padilla (1903-1984), de la región fronteriza de Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua-El Paso, Texas. Como se mostrará, la película de los Padilla *La venganza de Pancho Villa* es una cinta abierta en la que se da un continuo cambio de ideas y de procesos técnicos. Ese cambio desestabiliza la noción de *original* que se usa para identificar las diferencias entre cines nacionales y para servir de modelo en los protocolos de conservación cinematográfica que determinan el patrimonio nacional. En lugar de esa noción se propone la de *bricolaje*, concepto metodológico que permite comprender la naturaleza heterogénea del cine en general y más específicamente el oficio de reconversión ejemplificado por las prácticas mediáticas artesanales, bilingües y biculturales de los Padilla.

Palabras clave: *bricolaje*, *fronterizo*, intermedialidad, preservación, patrimonio.

Compilação como restauração?: fronteiras, *bricolagem* e *A vingança de Pancho Villa*

Resumo: Neste ensaio se examina a “compilação fílmica” em relação com práticas precoces da exibição itinerante no México, utilizando o caso específico dos empresários Félix Padilla (1862-1937) e seu filho Edmundo Padilla (1903-1984), da região fronteira de Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua-O Passo, Texas. Como se mostrará, o filme dos Padilla *La venganza de Pancho Villa* (A vingança de Pancho Villa) é uma fita aberta na qual se dá uma mudança continua de ideias e de processos técnicos. Essa mudança desestabiliza a noção de *original* que determina o patrimônio nacional e serve de modelo nos protocolos de conservação cinematográfica que determinam o patrimônio nacional. Em lugar dessa noção se propõe a de *bricolagem*, conceito metodológico que permite compreender a natureza heterogénea do cinema em geral e mais especificamente o ofício de reconversão exemplificado pelas práticas mediáticas artesanais, bilíngues e bi culturais dos Padilla.

Palavras chave: *bricolagem*, *fronteiroço*, intermedialidade, preservação, patrimônio.

Like many itinerant exhibitors of the cinema's earliest years, Mexican *fronterizos* Félix Padilla (1862-1937) and his son Edmundo Padilla (1903-1984) of the El Paso-Juárez border region were also filmmakers. Their bi-national, home-grown, and non-industrialized enterprise was based on a heterogeneous method of production and presentation that I argue is best understood as *bricolage*, or “tinkering,” that is the bringing together and repurposing of bits and pieces of known techniques and materials to produce a new construction.¹ The Padillas purchased popular commodities—worn film prints, photographs, postcards and sound recording discs from Mexican and American dealers—and then recycled these materials through a repetitive process of duping, reprinting and re-editing fragments and frames with their own in-house produced bi-lingual intertitles. Using non-professional actors, they restaged and shot scenes, wrote scripts, renamed pre-existing commercial film releases, and assembled the diverse elements they gathered into collage-like constructions. The craft repurposing they exemplify is the essence of *bricolage*. A unique case of an artisanal, bilingual, bicultural, and bi-national form of media practice, the Padillas' body of work offered rural and local border communities a form of leisure activity that was part of a larger transnational media culture—one that courted, juxtaposed and fused the practices of history and heritage.²

The Padillas' most ambitious endeavor, *La venganza de Pancho Villa* (Pancho Villa's Revenge),³ is a compilation of American and Mexican newsreel and silent fictional

¹ *Bricolage* is a French “loan word” deriving from the French verb *bricoleur* and refers in English to “tinkering,” or “do it yourself” activity—the process of improvisation in a human endeavor. Cinema historians Mary Anne Doane, Alan Williams, and Miriam Hansen have adapted the term put into use by Claude Lévi-Strauss in order to articulate and explain aspects of the cinema as an historical, technical, and philosophical aesthetic, as well as modern, mass-medium. Williams clarifies that Americans refer to tinkering, while the French, following Lévi-Strauss' notion, use the term *bricolage*. WILLIAMS, Alan. *Republic of Images: A History of French Filmmaking*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 9.

² On the concepts of history and heritage with respect to the Padillas' practice and its implication for film preservation, see the Introduction, chapter 6 and conclusion of my dissertation, *On the Border: The Transnational Media Practice of Fronterizo Empresarios Félix and Edmundo Padilla, 1916-1937*; PhD diss., New York University, 2016. UMI: 12492, available January 14, 2017.

³ The Padillas worked on their Pancho Villa film versions from approximately 1932 to 1937, the year Félix passed away. Edmundo continued to alter the last version through the forties and possibly the

footage featuring a recreation of the legendary rebel's assassination. Presented in different versions⁴ to the same Mexican and Mexican-American borderland audiences, *La venganza*'s often brutal depictions of the revolution enraged, thrilled, and excited its viewers, who responded with enthusiastic cheers in support of—and in many cases blasphemous cries against—its main star, Pancho Villa. Reaching outside the borders of canonical definitions, *La venganza* poses a number of interpretative problems for historians and preservationists due to the transitory, ambiguous, and contingent nature of its historical production, reproduction, presentation and political commentary. In this essay, I bring the concept of *bricolage* to bear on film preservation practice, in order to address the methodological problems posed by the film compilation in general, and by the very *sui generis* case of *La venganza*. I will also discuss its use as a generic term and descriptor for defining and studying this mode of filmmaking. I approach this problem from the dual perspective of the film historian and the film archivist, whose very different aims and approaches to the film print historical artifact conflate the practical and theoretical problems raised precisely by this case study, and which are applicable to most film preservation projects in general.

As interdependent disciplines, cinema studies and film preservation share the ultimate purpose and goal of this article and of my broader study of the Padillas,⁵ which bears on the use of preservation of moving images and recorded sound artifacts to document and teach film history. While the role of the film historian is not interchangeable with that of the archivist, both rely on the same signifying traces, particularly film artifacts, as a valuable and essential component of their work. Philip Rosen writes that one characteristic of historical artifacts that preservationists and historians share is that

fifties, though we have no exact dates. Over the latter years, Edmundo likely discarded footage from the nitrate print due to deterioration.

⁴ Over the course of 1932 to 1935, the Padillas screened titles as *La venganza de un guerrillero o La vida de Pancho Villa*, *El reinado del terror*, *Hazañas de Pancho Villa* and *Pancho Villa en Columbus*. *La venganza* does not appear on any promotional material or documents until 1935, and was the sole Villa film screened in 1936 and 1937. This was Edmundo's version and the last Pancho Villa movie produced by the Padillas.

⁵ See my dissertation, noted above, footnote 3.

their survival is selective.⁶ Old worn and damaged prints with lines, scratches, and marks, as a result of older duplication processes and repeated projection, like those in the Padilla Collection, pose problems for film preservationists whose goal is to present their audience, both scholars and the public, with pristine quality viewing copies. While digital tools may be used to minimize defects, traditional analog duplication methods, such as wet gate printing rarely mask more pronounced problems, such as watermarks and tears. But we might pose the question of why film preservationists must insist on masking defects in film artifacts in the first place.⁷ After all, such marks are traces of the film print's past—its history.⁸ And this has significance for considering *La venganza* as a film compilation produced during the era of analog film technology.

Importantly, Zuzana Pick identifies the Mexican compilation film as a popularized version of political events and ideological heroes of the Revolution that posed unique challenges to the historicity of documentary images.⁹ Here, we are directly confronted by generic distinctions, for example, the compilation film, and the

⁶ ROSEN, Philip. *Change Mummified. Cinema, Historicity, Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p. 117.

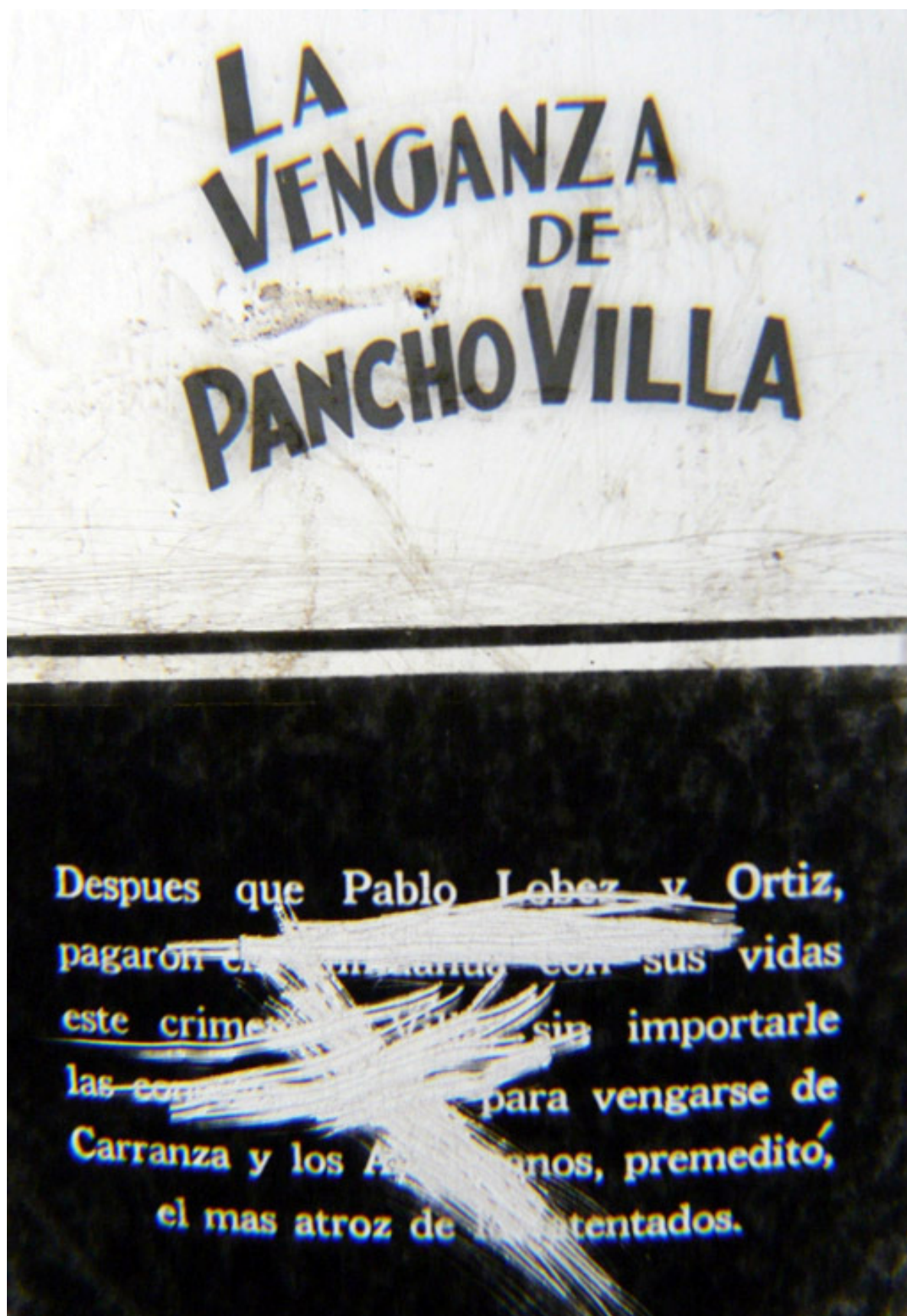
⁷ See CANOSA, Michele. "Per una teoria del restauro cinematografico." In: Gian Piero Brunetta (ed.) *Storia del cinema mondiale*. Torino: Einaudi, 2001, pp. 1069-1118. While there isn't a consensus about the degree to which defects should be masked in film preservation and restoration, the transition to digital technology raises new concerns about the use of digital tools to make "corrections" to printed-in defects and deteriorated footage in analog film materials.

⁸ Ironically silent film audiences and those of itinerants likely saw most films in poor quality prints. While digital processes can help to eliminate defects and damage, digital restoration would totally erase the bricolage features and content that make the Padillas' film products unique as both artifacts, and as an expressive forms. For these very reasons motion pictures like *La venganza* complicate and challenge established protocol that aims to correct and improve the quality of pre-existing film prints in order to make *new* and *better* works, which determines viable candidates for film preservation practices.

⁹ PICK, Zuzana. *Constructing the Image of the Mexican Revolution. Cinema and the Archive*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010, p. 6. Pick's examples are feature-length sound documentaries *Memorias de un mexicano* (1950) edited by Salvador Toscano's daughter Carmen and *Epopeyas de la Revolución* (Gustavo Carrero, 1961). These later sound films utilized fragments and footage from previous productions by filmmakers. This may explain why the term compilation is used by historians to reference recently discovered fragments and documentation of earlier historical films of length, such as Toscano's *Los últimos treinta años de México* (c. 1930).

construction and reification of boundaries and historiographical problems that arise between a film document and history. But along with these issues we have the special problem of the border itself, as a coherent and ongoing socio-political construction produced through the convergence of cinema with other representational media. In an archival paradigm that privileges originals, the extant 35mm nitrate positive print of *La venganza* has been an undervalued historical artifact because it is comprised entirely of poor quality duped and decomposing fragments otherwise classifiable as scraps.¹⁰ But on closer examination, the print reveals fascinating discrepancies: some more common to itinerant practices such as the elimination of main titles and the rearrangement of disparate footage, and some less typical such as a mixture of fictional and non-fictional footage with edge codes and film stocks from widely different eras, as well as color processes and manufactured technical manipulations produced in-house by the Padillas. Heterogeneous like cinema itself, *La venganza* is a borderless film of continually changing ideas and technical processes, one that destabilizes the very notion of the original used as a standard for preservation practice. Its artisanal mode of production is also a constructive demonstration of the very process of craft as mechanical reproduction inherent in the analog film medium. For this very reason, the nitrate print of *La venganza* is an enigma that can never be reproduced as an original in the sense that it has commonly been construed in archival practice. The film defies standard boundaries set by archival protocol for determining acquisition and preservation priorities.

¹⁰ Mexican filmmaker Gregorio Rocha accidentally stumbled upon the 35mm nitrate film print housed in the Special Collections at the University of El Paso, Texas (UTEP) while conducting research for his documentary *Los rollos perdidos de Pancho Villa* (2003). He later produced *ACME & Co. Historias del cine viajero* (2006), which includes interviews with Padilla family members, while the former reproduces footage from *La venganza*. *Los rollos perdidos* put the topic on the map for a film festival/alternative cinema audience beyond the scope of academic film history, especially in North America and Europe. Rocha attempted unsuccessfully to get a number of archives interested in preserving the film before the Library of Congress agreed to copy it. Thereafter, I met Rocha and made the decision to undertake its restoration.



Fragment of titles from *La Venganza de Pancho Villa* produced in house.

The Compilation Film

In *Films Beget Films*, Jay Leyda offers useful questions for archivists and scholars facing methodological inconsistencies when trying to carry out their different practices. Significantly, Leyda's professional experiences in the archive and with film production make him hesitate as a historian confronted by the question of how to appropriately define the compilation film, a genre employed by the *constructores de vistas*¹¹ from whom the Padillas borrowed and thus of significance to their work and to the revolutionary border context in which they operated. As Leyda reflects:

The proper term would have to indicate that the work begins on the cutting table, with already existing film shots. It also has to indicate that the film used originated at some time in the past. The term could also indicate that it is a film of an idea, for most of the films made in this form are not content to be mere records or documents—and in this factor lies my chief interest in the form, which will have to be referred to in the following pages in various inconsistent ways. Can you suggest a right term?¹²

Leyda's awareness of film as a material substance presents a number of unfamiliar *bricolage* elements; individual pre-existing shots are repurposed, and thus diverse possibilities arise with respect to film form and content. The film compilation is both an editor's work on the cutting table and an archivist's on an inspection bench. This is the preservationists' moment to connect with the filmmaker by confronting celluloid as a changing, indeterminate material substance, the film strip that can be examined in the form of successive frames linked together. Celluloid also bears its ongoing state of decomposition, as well as defects, marks, tears and scratches—all traces of its journeys.

In similar ways, Leyda's inability to define the film compilation befits the extant nitrate film print of *La venganza* and the *bricolage* work of Mexico's *constructores de*

¹¹ De los Reyes uses this term to describe filmmaking practices of cameramen like Salvador Toscano and the Alva Brothers, who used *vistas* (or views) or *exhibiciones de vistas* (exhibitions of views) as the structural principle for sequencing scenes and pictures arranged using what I describe as *bricolage* techniques and characteristics—*assemblage*, *montage*, *collage* and *decoupage*. See DE LOS REYES, Aurelio. *Sucedió en Jalisco o Los Cristeros. De cine, de cultura y aspectos del México de 1924 a 1928*, vol. 3 of *Cine y sociedad en México*. México: UNAM, INAH, Seminario de Cultura Mexicana, 2013, pp. 405-467.

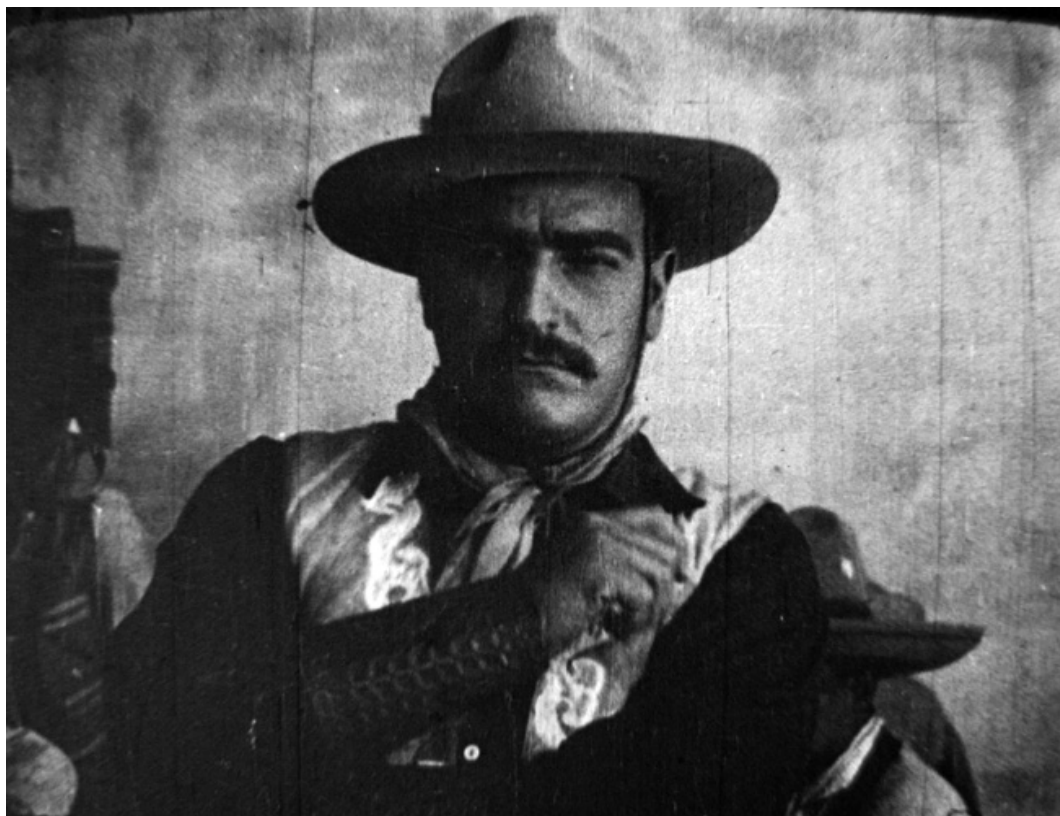
¹² LEYDA, Jay. *Films Beget Films. A Study of the Compilation Film*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964, p. 9.

vistas. On the cutting table/inspection bench, such a compilation is “unlike other films” due to how construction and “content are combined.”¹³ As Leyda points out, the actuality film and photographic tableaux present a similar problem to that of the compilation film. The image appears to be a reliable record but functions as a document with purposeful intent, a problem relevant to the Padillas’ film versions of revolutionary history. But a document in this sense is not only defined at the level of combined or juxtaposed images, but also at the level of the material effects of montage visible on the filmstrip.

For example, Pancho Villa was often referred to derogatorily as a ruthless, cunning barbarian with the primitive instincts of an animal.¹⁴ In *La venganza*, the Padillas literalized this parallel using fragments lifted from a print they purchased of Universal’s serial *Liberty* (1916). The frames show the fictional character Pancho López, aka Pancho Villa, contemplating how he will settle the score against American invaders. A manufactured dissolve devised by the Padillas and produced in a laboratory combines a series of medium close-ups of a smirking Pancho with an animated image of a hyena’s head. The Padillas’ dissolve is longer than was typical of industrialized produced films of the period. Considered in this way, a version of the Kuleshov effect is in play. The “feline grin” of Villa was literalized by the Padillas who manufacture the dissolve as an element of *bricolage* montage in order to create a synecdoche in which the two identities of López, aka Villa are collapsed with the qualities of the carrion eating, cunning, and suspicion of a *real* hyena. The material effects of montage are not just the juxtaposed images. They are also visible on the filmstrip as the images of López dissolve into those of the hyena and back again. In this example the concept of borders is a version of *bricolage*-montage in which fictional fragments—both indexical and iconic—merge. That is Raymond Nye, the actor playing Pancho López aka Pancho Villa, juxtaposed with the illustrative image of the hyena, aka Pancho Villa the hyena, dissolving into a double or pluralized image with new meaning.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ This aspect was a feature of hegemonic discourse on Villa at the time, that is, before he was brought into the pantheon of revolutionary heroes. See O’MALLEY, Ilene V. *The Myth of the Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalizacion of the Mexican State, 1920-1940*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986.



In house produced lap dissolve of actor Raymond Nye as Pancho Lopez, aka Pancho Villa (Universal Liberty series, 1916) and hyena. We don't know where the image of the hyena comes from but its not from Liberty.

Villa the villain was demonized by American film producers like Universal and Mutual, as well as the press following the U.S. led Punitive Expedition in March 1916 to capture him dead or alive. But as David Wood points out, Mexican *constructores de vistas* like Salvador Toscano and the others disparaged Villa throughout the post-revolutionary eras of the twenties and thirties. In a script for his *Los últimos treinta años de México*, an apparently unreleased commemorative film compilation, Toscano allegorized Villa as “animalesque,” primitive and naïve. Toscano used an intertitle to describe Villa as a “spoilt child of fortune, capricious and blind” and characterized by “indomitable arrogance” and with a “feline grin.”¹⁵ The Padillas may have seen or possibly lifted the idea and even the image of the hyena from a print of one of his compilations.¹⁶ In any case, the association between Villa and the hyena is not unique to the Padillas. Like the film compilation on the cutting table, *La venganza* as artifact is “a film of an idea”¹⁷ and moreover, of continually changing and sometimes contradictory ideas. This is both the historian’s and the preservationist’s problem since the film object on the cutting table is just one version of its existence. We are literally on the border in more than one respect. *La venganza*, like the U.S. Mexican border *imaginary*, is ever shifting and inconsistent.

¹⁵ WOOD, David. “Cine documental y revolución mexicana. La invención de un género.” In: Pablo Ortiz Monasterio (ed.). *Fragmentos. Narración cinematográfica compilada y arreglada por Salvador Toscano, 1900-1930*. México: Conaculta / Universidad de Guadalajara, 2010, p. 46.

¹⁶ Wood notes exhibition of Toscano’s film *25 Years of Life in the History of Mexico* in Laredo, in October of 1929 so it’s possible the Padillas may have seen the film or perhaps acquired a print. See WOOD, David. “Revolución, compilación, conmemoración: Salvador Toscano y la construcción de caminos en el México posrevolucionario.” In: De los Reyes, Aurelio y David Wood (eds.). *Cine mudo latinoamericano*, <http://www.ebooks.esteticas.unam.mx/items/show/45>. pp. 103, footnote 59. Further evidence is suggested by identical footage/fragments found in the Padilla Collection and Toscano Archive. In November 2013, historian Margarita de Orellana identified the opening iris shot from a preserved nitrate reel in the Padilla Collection as matching similar footage found in the Toscano Archive. Filmoteca UNAM preserved the Padilla reel sometime around 2001-2002 on loan from Gregorio Rocha who still possesses the print. Rocha’s inspection of the nitrate noted the following, which suggests the footage was duplicated in 1920: “Cia. Cinematográfica Celaya, México, 1920, b/w positive 500 feet, very brittle.” Document titled “Los rollos perdidos de Pancho Villa. Colección Edmundo Padilla. Hoja de evaluación y diagnóstico” Edmundo Padilla Collection, El Paso, Texas.

¹⁷ LEYDA, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

Originals: *The Life of General Villa* (Mutual, 1916)



Fragment from *The Life of General Villa* (Mutual, 1916)

We know Félix Padilla acquired a print of *The Life of General Villa* (Mutual, 1916), in which Villa, having signed a contract with Mutual, appeared as himself in combat, though we don't know what release version it represented (or if it was even complete). A series of frame enlargements and an incomplete nitrate reel in the Padilla Collection labeled "Mormones atacados por el teniente Villa," (Mormons Attacked by Lieutenant Villa) are the only known surviving film print materials from the Mutual production.¹⁸ However, fragments from Mutual's fictional reenactment of Villa's attack on Columbus, New Mexico were edited into the extant copy of *La venganza*. They leave little doubt that Félix duplicated the print

¹⁸ Actor Raoul Walsh in the role of the young Villa, appears in both, which correspond to scenes of the protagonist's early life and to the Battle of Torreón episode respectively.

numerous times for production and advertising purposes. Neither Walsh nor any of the Mormon scenes appear in *La venganza*, although the latter print does contain fragments from the Battle of Torreón episode. Likewise, footage from Mutual's fictional scene of the attack on the city of Columbus, New Mexico in the extant print of *La venganza* does not appear in either the frame enlargements, or the extant reel labeled "Mormones atacados por el teniente Villa." These absences and others show that two equally weighed factors led the Padillas to alter the content and form of their films over the course of 1931 to 1937. The first was changing public attitudes to, and media representations of, figures like Villa and other revolutionary personnel—especially with respect to post-revolutionary Mexican historical film compilations. The second was the inevitable and inherent "auto-destructive nature" of analog film—chemically unstable and prone to damage through projection as well as manipulation resulting from both intentional and inadvertent outside intervention.¹⁹

"We can start with the premise," Leyda wrote, "that anything that has been put on to film can be employed a second time—usually with more force than the first time, depending on the artist who shapes the second employment."²⁰ *La venganza's* method of production, public presentation and reception—including its contradictory content (both pro and anti-Villa) and sometimes denigrating depiction of Mexicans—complicates how we approach it. Bearing in mind its inherent complexity, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge the struggle between analyzing *La venganza* as an artifact, a text, and a work—and also as a preservation and restoration project. But these terms pose problems of classification, especially with respect to the concept of original. Preservationists approach the film artifact as if it were laid out on the cutting table/inspection bench in order to produce a new work for public presentation. They may employ *bricolage* methods of assemblage-lifting, mixing, as well as editing. Preservations use disparate materials, such as film frames or film sequences, as well as intertitle font styles and color techniques, from different print sources—even from film prints produced in different production eras.²¹ This aspect of preservation parallels the Padillas' own practices, as do the processes of duplication and substitution used in order to

¹⁹ Cherchi Usai cited by FOSSATI, Giovanna. *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009, 121.

²⁰ LEYDA, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

²¹ See for example, VICHI, Laura. "The Recovery of Silent Films", MA thesis, University of East Anglia, 1997, pp. 34-45.

fill in gaps and to replace poorer quality footage found in the original artifact. But as we shall see, according to this logic, we must have an original in order to restore available material to its past state, and this is the very problem posed by *La venganza* as a work.

***La venganza de Pancho Villa* as a work**

Understanding the Padillas' *bricolage* method parallels the problems of archival and academic interpretative concepts. Archivists approach a film not as a singular object but as having different forms, defined according to its particular manifestation as a "work." The term *work* is broad.²² However, the standard used by U.S. libraries for descriptive cataloging—Resource Description and Access (RDA)²³—offers three definitions, applicable to all materials. RDA identifies a work as a distinct intellectual or artistic creation, not a physical object. Each work can be realized through an expression (for example, *Gone with the Wind*, realized in English and French versions). Each expression has manifestations, material embodiments, such as the extant nitrate print entitled *La venganza de Pancho Villa* or a DVD copy derived from it. Each print, DVD or video copy is referred to as an item, no matter how many copies exist.

Significantly, RDA is still based on the concept of an original and functions more easily for stable texts, such as printed books. The definition is less flexible when applied to moving images because of their reproducibility as copies available in different formats (print, tape, disc, or file). The past definition for the film object as a "moving image work," and by necessity still used by many moving image archives, is based on there being an "original" of some kind. When situated within the "film as original" framework used by some moving image archives, the notion of a unique work is more easily defined, since it refers to an extant print.

When applied to the Padillas' *bricolage* works, which are not fixed and unstable, this definition raises problems for the archivist—especially the cataloger trying to identify

²² In order to narrow the definition for moving images purposes, "moving image work" was used, for example, by the Library of Congress as a workable definition for cataloging moving images. Library of Congress, Internal Cataloguing rules, AMIM2. I thank LC Senior cataloger Laurie Duncan for our discussions of this topic.

²³ Rda-jsc.org.oclc.org/rda/about.

and verify content. Since *La venganza* is constructed from fragments lifted from non-extant newsreels and non-extant fictional border subjects, including *The Life of General Villa* (Mutual, 1914) and the serials *Liberty* (Universal, 1916) and *Lieutenant Danny, U.S.A* (Triangle, 1916), it is not easy to separate "original" film content. These lost works exist only as bits and pieces combined with other footage in *La venganza*. Thus, they no longer manifest the same expression they once did as part of singular works or episodes, but as expressions of past work(s), existing as something else—in *La venganza*, or in the case of *Liberty* also, as fragments mixed on a reel and as individual frames in a can.²⁴ As noted above with respect to *The Life of General Villa*, fragments of footage duplicated in *La venganza* exist alongside duplicated film frames of lost footage from the film that was used for promotional purposes and perhaps in earlier versions of the Padillas' films.



Fragment from Universal's *Liberty* serial (1916) – actress Marie Wallencamp as Liberty

²⁴ A nitrate reel consisting of miscellaneous fragments from different episodes of Mutual's *Liberty* series was reconstructed and restored to safety film and is housed in the AFI/Edmundo Padilla Collection at the Library of Congress.



Fragment from serial *Lieutenant Danny* (Triangle-Ince, 1916). Actor Robert Korman (in brownface) as villain Pedro Lopez

A complete work once manifested thus may no longer exist in extant form as an item—or when extant, as a fragment or an incomplete reel or frame may be unidentifiable. But we confront this problem in a number of different senses with the Padillas' earlier versions. Film compilations comprised of segments and fragments of still and moving images, such as those of Mexican *constructores de vistas* and the Padillas present a double challenge since there is no original manifested item to view—of a whole or the individual parts that comprise it. As I will show, only through comparative analysis and highly descriptive catalog notes would the researcher or archivist grasp how pre-existing footage takes on particular significance in *La venganza* and its various iterations.

Eye Film curator Giovanna Fossati comments that scholars rarely ask for documentation of how a restoration project was carried out.²⁵ Nor do archivists, she writes, think about

²⁵ FOSSATI, p. 105.

documenting all aspects of their work. This is important to consider and is discussed below. However, singular Pancho Villa films as conceived by the Padillas in scripts, logbook notes, as well as the extant print of *La venganza*, are related and could be the same work(s) if we think of them as remixes like music sampling, or as collages made of fragments, like Bill Morrison's *Decasia* (2002). This paradox problematizes attempts to define and document *La venganza* in order to consider it for preservation in the traditional archival sense of an original—or film compilation *per se*. Considering a moving image work in a more abstract way, as an expression(s) embodied in different manifestation(s), may be a more productive approach. *La venganza* and its predecessors are expressions manifested in many forms, such as film frames, fragments, scripts, as well as log entries and advertising materials that document the Padillas' process of *bricolage* construction. Thus we can approach the question of how to preserve *La venganza* by interpreting meaning in relation between the different expressions of works that comprise it in its changing form as different versions of the Padillas' film. *Bricolage* as a representational practice offers us a way to discuss the plurality of media, like film, television, and sound recordings as objects, as well as expressions of works manifested in particular formats as performances or screen projections using different platforms and technologies.

Bricolage

The International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) lexicon offers the following definition for the film compilation: “a film with a recognizable concept, which consists of footage from existing films.”²⁶ While this definition could apply to any number of categories, such as found footage, film collage,²⁷ documentary or newsreels where pre-existing footage is often a main source of film content, it does remind us that generic terms are less stable and fixed, but rather dynamic and changing as forms crisscross. We can say the same holds true for terminology used by border historians who combine

²⁶ See <https://www.fiafnet.org>. The lexicon also notes that credit for a compilation film is assigned to the individual responsible for assembling it, which suggests the possibility of an editor-filmmaker.

²⁷ Wees, for example, differentiates between compilation, collage and found footage films. He argues that the kinds of representation that compilation films tend to take for granted are precisely the kind collage films call into question. See WEES, William C. *Recycled Images: the art and politics of found footage films*. Anthology Film Archives, New York City, 1993.

words or phrases, like “non-moving” (those who do not cross borders) in order to describe differences amongst peoples within regional borderland populations. Terms like hybridity are also commonly used to describe borderless activities or states in which, for example, aspects of different social and cultural practices, like language and speech, as well as material products, overlap, intersect and/or merge thereby producing mixed breeds or forms of expression.



Fragment from newsreel of *Pancho Villa at the burial of Francisco Madero*

Early cinema historian André Gaudreault offers the notion of intermediality to theorize the structure of media-technology in a broad sense that takes into account early 19th century technological devices of imaging and sound in which expressive forms merge

and/or converge.²⁸ Concepts such as hybridity and intermediality are useful signifiers for isolating and describing the borderless areas that characterize post-revolutionary Mexico's historical film compilations that repurposed footage from earlier actualities, news reporting, and still photographs published in illustrated magazines, such as *Novedades*, *La Semana Ilustrada*, *El Mundo Ilustrado*, *Arte y Letras*, and *La Ilustración Mexicana*, among others.²⁹ *Bricolage* however, is a far more encompassing concept for the cinema than intermediality and hybridity in that it has less to do with making something new, than with borrowing, lifting, and using something pre-existing and altering its structure or construction, thereby altering diverse expressive forms, while at the same time still retaining aspects of their past states. For example, the Padillas' *bricolage* method mixes pre-existing elements and the techniques of commercial industrial film production, with techniques of reproduction, thereby producing new cinematic structures and meanings through processes such as editing and montage (manufactured ellipses or lapse dissolves), as well as the addition of bi-lingual intertitles produced in-house. While they operate in concert and overlap conceptually, intermediality and hybridity differ from *bricolage* in that the latter is a practice or craft. Intermediality defines a mixed state of being or becoming for a technical medium,³⁰ while *bricolage* refers to a flexible practice in which different elements and techniques are brought together and arranged in a new way. Twentieth-century artistic devices such as *collage* and *montage* used in both literary and visual forms of representation are different types of *bricolage* operations where "a certain number of elements from works, objects, pre-existing messages," are lifted out of context and then put together.³¹ Hybridity is a state and does not necessarily define the specific types of

²⁸ See GAUDREAU, André. *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011. In this sense Gaudreault's theory resembles Alan Williams' use of the term *bricolage* to fill in and account for the fifty years of "cinema before cinema"—the visual consumer experiences, attractions, and inventions of nineteenth century Paris of the early modern period—that collectively brought about the cinema as we know it. See WILLIAMS, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 9-24.

²⁹ See DE LOS REYES, Aurelio. "Hacia la industria cinematográfica en México: 1896-1920," also published in this issue, and NAVITSKI, Rielle. "Mediating the Revolution, 1910-1920." In: *Public Spectacles of Violence: Sensational Cinema and Journalism in Early Twentieth-Century Mexico and Brazil*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming.

³⁰ See GAUDREAU, *op. cit.*

³¹ Group Mu (eds.) *Collages*. Union Générale: Paris, 1978, pp. 13-14, cited by ULMER, Gregory L. "The Object of Post-Criticism." In: Hal Foster (ed.). *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1983, p. 84.

operation where processes such as cutting, duping and lifting, and borrowing material from different sources create combinations in which linguistic, “class and symbolic capital differences” produce new meanings by cross-cutting national differences,³² as well as bi-national and transnational, and local differences.



In house produced intertitle

With respect to the film compilation, *bricolage* is a more exact term that takes into account both the material and the presentational aspects of film in its various forms—that is, as celluloid or nitrate film print, projected image and as a mass-medium commodity. The very nature of the analog film medium is built on diverse *bricolage* operations, such as cutting, duplication, and transfer, as well as such characteristics as

³² CAMPBELL, Howard and Josiah Heyman, “The Study of Borderlands Consumption: Potentials and Precautions.” In: McCrossen, Alexis (ed.) *Land of Necessity: Consumer Culture in The United States-Mexico Borderlands*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, p. 331.

découpage, *collage/montage*, and *assemblage*. Cinema and most significantly film preservation practices use these representational strategies and techniques of appropriation such as quotation, excerptation, accumulation and repetition. Modern film preservation practice echoes techniques, used by the Padillas and others like them, such as, selection and arrangement, as well as substitution. Moreover, *bricolage* shares much in common with individual and institutional collecting activities, like *pillage*, hoarding, and raiding.

***Bricolage*, Film Preservation and the Importance of Place**

The Padillas were do-it-yourself exhibitor-producers who used *bricolage* for their own specific reasons that responded in part to the trans-border experience. *Bricolage* afforded them diverse representational strategies in their film production and advertising, and in their performances. In all cases, it retained the same basic function of mixing disparate and competing elements in order to draw contrasts and produce multi-directional forms of expression. Considering Félix and Edmundo as *bricoleurs* or craftsmen, rather than auteurs with a unique style, allows us to account for crucial aspects of their innovative screen practice and to read their activities in the *fronterizo* mode.³³ *Fronterizos* are migrants, travelers and voyagers, who live *in between* places, and freely move back and forth crisscrossing the borderlands; as subjects, they are somewhat unclassifiable being “neither fully Mexican, nor unequivocally American.”³⁴ *Fronterizos* literally transcend boundaries of various kinds, including geographic, linguistic, cultural and economic; their mobile lifestyle or existence in-between, places them literally along the margins of spaces and cultures.

La venganza de Pancho Villa, being a cultural marker of American and Mexican forms of expression and a representation of border filmmaking practices, calls attention to the

³³ Tenorio Trillo uses this expression to suggest we read cultures in less strict terms than those fixed and bound. For example, the term *fronterizo* suggests an identity synonymous with the boundless nature of borders. TENORIO TRILLO, Mauricio. “On the Frontera and Cultures of Consumption.” In: McCrossen (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 350.

³⁴ *Fronterizos* can be Mexican nationals, Mexican Americans, or foreign refugees (Jewish, Chinese, Japanese, etc.) who reside in border cities either in the U.S. or Mexico or in both countries while maintaining a transient lifestyle.

importance of a local place, the El Paso-Juárez border zone. But the transnational and the regional, the national and the local, often operate in combination or in parallel. While not necessarily an oppositional relationship, the structural dynamic that places Mexico and the United States in a historical, dichotomous relationship must be confronted also with respect to film preservation, which itself must deal with the paradoxes of the border. The entrepreneurial spirit and creativity of the bricoleur who also has a practical business sense and understands his or her investment (and its predictability with regard to expenditures and in terms of consumer demand) is an apt parallel to the work of the film preservationist – especially the curator³⁵ who must justify institutional expenditures for restoration projects. Often film curators like myself face difficult decisions, ones that might run counter to our personal preferences but which are necessary to address practical concerns and economic realities. Curators must decide which archival material should be restored and how it should be publically presented. We must weigh the viability and legal considerations in the commercial release of a restored film.

I confronted thorny issues with respect to cultural patrimony when deciding to accept *La venganza* as a restoration project. For example, how does a curator decide which laboratory to use when restoring a film made in between localized border spaces? Which national film archive gets to own and house the archival materials—including source materials, preservation and access copies? Moreover, who pays to ship, duplicate, and store the artifacts? One cannot responsibly proceed with restoration without answering this last question. In fact, many significant collections are lost when such practicalities cannot be resolved from the outset. Below, I discuss these problems of place and others that arise when a film artifact like the print of *La venganza* is considered a candidate for restoration.

In its gaps, discontinuity, and instability, *La venganza* requires us to abandon some principles of established preservation protocol and the search for historically stable

³⁵ A film preservationist may be a lab technician with specific expertise in duplication processes, while a curator of preservation generally oversees how a restoration is carried out scholars tend to conflate the different roles of those working in archives by referring to all as simply “archivists.” On curatorship, see CHERCHI USAI, Paolo, David Francis, Alexander Horwath, and Michael Loebenstein. *Film Curatorship: Archives, Museums and the Digital Marketplace*. Vienna: Synema, 2008.

entities. Film history as preservation or film preservation as film history takes into account different interpretive perspectives and the disparate languages and meanings they produce. Nonetheless, the argument that there is no final stable form of the film artifact confronts the fact that any viewing of the Padillas' work as a restoration will be informed by the preservation project that makes it accessible, which will in turn be situated within a nationalist discourse (Mexican or American). Indeed, the Padillas' own practice relied upon an opportunistic and crafty manipulation of the discourses of heritage and history; restoring that sense of contingency, or lack of a "true" version of the story, is a necessary component to a historically informed project of film preservation.

La venganza de Pancho Villa's Heterogeneous Materiality

If defining and identifying a moving image work presents challenges as a result of duplication technology, it becomes a far more complex task, as the above discussion shows, when dealing with a film print artifact, or an item comprised of fragments. The extant nitrate print of *La venganza* is a version of the Padillas' Pancho Villa films; it is a representation of a conceptual and intangible work based on the idea of transferability—recycling the old and adapting the new—a process of perpetual change and adaptability that the Padillas developed as part of their *bricolage* method, and as a result of their *fronterizo* borderlander perspective and way of life. In its ongoing process of decay, the film artifact reveals a combination of heterogeneous elements that are inconsistent both in their provenance and quality: different film stocks, edge code dates, duped poor quality footage of pre-existing works, as well as in-house shot footage. Additionally, we have both pre-existing and new technical interventions, such as coloring, dissolves, as well as bi-lingual intertitles that the Padillas made up and produced using the services of commercial labs. Like film content of any work, the heterogeneous materiality of *La venganza*—that is, the artifact on the cutting table—presents inconsistencies that are difficult to describe and analyze in a consistent way especially when compared to extant paper documents, such as scripts and Edmundo Padilla's logbook entries. Thus, I use *bricolage* as a historicizing concept for approaching *La venganza* the artifact, which in turn must be discussed in productive tension with the Pancho Villa films that preceded it. But we must first interrogate the concept of an *original* as applied and used within the motion picture archive. As I will show there are limitations and drawbacks when relying on this conceptual

framework in order to *preserve* and document, such as cataloging, inspection, and not just lab duplication, a work for purposes of both film history and film preservation.

The Aura of the Film As Original

Under the premise that past collaborations between historians and archivists “ha[ve] been mainly in the field of film history,” Eye Film Institute curator Giovanna Fossati calls for a theoretical focus on preservation to be added to the dialogue between scholars and archivists. By doing so she shifts the emphasis away from film history to the theory of archival practice in which “the film as artifact, in its different possible meanings, is central.” The nature of film (its materiality) is changing and thus so is the nature of traditional film preservation—which in turn, impacts on how we do film history. Fossati writes that the idea of “the original is central to film preservation practices,” and is “bound to that of authenticity.”³⁶ A newly recognized authenticity originates when film enters the archive: it becomes heritage and copies become museum artifacts. In this sense film prints become institutional assets and can be used for heritage production via duplication technologies. At the same time, as I will show, by this definition heritage is muddled with notions of traditional history (gathering all of the facts), pursuit of the original moment, as well as romanticized notions of uniqueness and originality.

Significantly Fossati’s theorization of the broadly applied “film as original framework” used by some moving image archives, along with its concept of an “authentic original” excludes non-industrial practices and artisanal works like those of the Padillas. Silent film production of Latin America and regional border nation-states, which survives as fragments, also fall outside the selection criteria of Fossati’s theory, which focuses on industrialized “Western realities, including Europe and North America.” A heterogeneous material artifact like the extant print of *La venganza* produced during the analog film production era is a cultural product of the U.S.-Mexican border and revolutionary and post-revolutionary contexts, and is of historical significance to the region and its people. Like the many incomplete traces of analog film production

³⁶ FOSSATI, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.

(common across Latin America), no original film print exists to document it. This more or less describes the vast majority of film prints held in archives.

Yet, Fossati's engaging discussion of "film as original" brings significant weight on understanding the role of heritage and how it operates as a key function and goal of film preservation.³⁷ She acknowledges that the notion of the original is unstable or changeable, "depending on the theoretical framework one embraces."³⁸ Fossati writes: "an original" can be a "conceptual artifact" (what she defines as one particular version of a film, as conceived by its restorer), or a "material artifact." Her example is an original camera negative, which is an ideal element for both preservationists and historians because it is valued for being the copy that literally came out of the camera and was processed by a lab. Original negatives rarely survive--this is certainly the case for early Latin American film production, with the general exception of commercial feature films. For this reason original negatives, which generate pristine copies, are also valued as an institutional asset, especially when restored and made accessible to the public and researchers as a commodity (DVD, festival screening, etc.) used to generate financial gain and for promotional purposes.

Importantly, Fossati's working theory of "film as original" must "address the authenticity of the film artifact." In so doing she looks to Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in order to argue "there is no difference between the original and its copies" since 'authenticity' ceases to bear significance when an object is mechanically reproduced.³⁹ Significantly, her interpretation of Benjamin's notion of authenticity is read through art critic Boris Groys' discussion of the original and the copy with respect to a contemporary photographic art exhibition, the "Aura" project of Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani. Groys writes:

³⁷ The terms preservation, restoration and conservation are often used interchangeably and ambiguously. For an analysis of these terms and their application, see MEYER, Mark Paul and Paul Read. *Restoration of Motion Picture Film*. Newton, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2000.

³⁸ FOSSATI, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

³⁹ Walter Benjamin writes in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*: "To ask for the 'authentic' print made from a photographic negative makes no sense." Cited by ROSEN, *op. cit.*, footnote 26, pp. 167-168.

There is one thing missing even in the most perfect reproduction: the ‘here’ and ‘now’ of the piece of art—its unique presence in its location. On the contrary, the copy is virtual, without location, without history (...) In fact, provided there is only a topological difference between original and copy, it is not only possible to de-locate and deterritorialize a work of art, but also to re-territorialize a copy.⁴⁰

Here the disparate languages of film preservation, theory, and art historical criticism collide in different interpretations of Benjamin’s notion and importantly with respect to location or place. But rather than acknowledge the paradox and the unstable meaning of “original” for film preservationists, we can acknowledge its irrelevance for the majority of prints held by archives: all films known to exist cannot be preserved. For many practical reasons, curators who oversee access are often limited to working with a stable material object whose value can be measured in cultural and economic terms. That is, as an institutional asset belonging to film heritage, which is in turn identified by a singular nation. This is why initiatives like the Eye Filmmuseum’s “Bits and Pieces,” exhibition, Joseph Joye and Davide Turconi’s film frame project at George Eastman House,⁴¹ and the Salvador Toscano card catalog at Fundación Toscano, now housed at Filmoteca UNAM, are important. Fragments are cultural products that have an aura of their own.

Philip Rosen has discussed the ambiguities in Benjamin’s evaluation of the aura, particularly with respect to the notion of an “authentic print,” as a measure of its indexical connection to the auratic original. Rosen sees a productive paradoxical tension in the disparate ways in which indexicality functions to pluralize image objects for mass distribution, thereby superseding any notion of an original, while at the same time such copies operate as “culturally reliable transmission[s]” of the objects they reference.⁴² A

⁴⁰ GROYS, Boris. “The Aura of Profane Enlightenment.” In: *The World (Maybe) Fantastic*, Exhibition Catalog, Sidney Biennale, 2002, p. 2.

⁴¹ In 1994 calling for “a more polyphonic approach “to film history and preservation, archivist Eric de Kuiper, curator of “Bits and Pieces” exhibition selected fragments and unidentified materials that belong to no singular nation for film preservation. In this way, he problematized “an all too homogenous image of what the history of film was and is.” See DE KUYPER, Eric. “Anyone for an Aesthetic of Film History?.” In: *Film History*, 6, n. 1, 1994, p. 108. On the Turconis Project see FLETCHER, Alicia and Joshua Yumibe. “From Nitrate to Digital Archive: The Davide Turconi Project.” In: *The Moving Image* 13, n. 1, 2013, pp. 1-32.

⁴² ROSEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-168.

fragment is a representation that in itself has its own significance, a significance divorced from the original in its refiguring of part of the original—both present and absent, and here lie the fragment's aura. Like the photograph, the fragment becomes autonomous, and when rearranged with other fragments, produces a new representation. Compiled fragments, like mixed footage found in film compilations, contain pre-existing shots in unified sequences, which can be combined in any number of possible arrangements, thus highlighting the process of construction. This shifts the aura from the nature of the work to its production. It is the fragment's inconsistency, as well as its unstable relationship with respect to the original, which allows us to think about the aura of fragments as a means of reevaluating works like *La venganza*.

Importantly, while Groys erases the notion of “location” associated with cultural products as objects, whether we refer to film as art—which is perhaps the problem—or as cinema, or performance, or as a form of media technology, he does so because he is not referencing artworks or artifacts as emanating an aura, but rather as “documents” of a journey by the artist “looking for profane enlightenment”, “a journey which resulted in the ‘aura’ pictures being created in the first place.” Location or place is thus still important to Groys’ discussion but from a very different point of view. The artist selects a destination, and journeys to a place by documenting it using photographic or media technology. The difference is between an authentic journey to a place, and an authentic original object or artifact that belongs to one. This has importance for the Padillas with respect to Gregorio Rocha’s film essays *Los rollos perdidos de Pancho Villa* and *ACME & Co. Historias del cine viajero* which use their screen practice as a point of departure and final destination of his journey to reconstruct a history of Mexican itinerant film exhibition practices.⁴³ Importantly, Rocha uses artifacts in the Padilla Collection as documents in order to tell the story of his journey. What is of value here then, is Groy’s analysis of how contemporary artists use media as a means of “moving away from the work of art itself

⁴³ See also ROCHA, Gregorio. “*La venganza de Pancho Villa* (The Vengeance of Pancho Villa): A Lost and Found Border Film.” In: *Journal of Film Preservation* 65, 2003, pp. 24-29, and “Two men and the moon. The forgotten archive of Félix and Edmundo Padilla, itinerant film exhibitors in Northern Mexico, 1920-1937,” unpublished manuscript. Durango, Mexico: North American Council of Film Archives, 2002. Rocha argues that by producing their own version of the events in the life of Pancho Villa, the Padillas took vengeance on Hollywood for its racist depiction of Mexicans and of their nation’s historical revolutionary hero of the peasant class.

and towards the documentation of it.”⁴⁴ Documentation is one form of film preservation and can take different forms such as in Rocha’s films; it is generally overlooked and undervalued by some archivists.

Preservation as Documentation: *La venganza de Pancho Villa* as a Text

Scholars regularly use textual materials (scripts, copyright descriptions, trade press advertising and reviews) for historical analysis in lieu of lost films, or when access is prohibited. While archivists too may consult these materials, and any number of copies of archival artifacts, they do so in order to weigh and measure their usefulness for film restoration purposes. The questions asked by the archivist partly determine the materials to be used and how, while the historian’s questions can be diverse, sometimes converging with the archivist’s but often diverging. For example, scholars and their students connect to artifacts using textual resources, among the most important of which is the film interpreted through viewing a DVD or a film print projected. As discussed above, when identifying and describing motion pictures, catalogers, like most archivists, do not use the term ‘text’ in the same way it is used by scholars, though most archivists may rely on the underlying concept of textuality—especially when making judgments about discrepancies of content. For example, when a situation requires a main title for a work that is unidentifiable, a cataloger makes a decision based on content (including how it is arranged), and chooses descriptive search terms that will increase the odds of retrieving that supplied title when a search is carried out. In this sense they approach film content as a descriptive text, overlapping with the practice of researchers. Fossati may be the exception in that she actually incorporates the notion of a text into her revisionist theory of “film as original.” Scholars, on the other hand, tend to treat screen-able film restorations as fixed texts that can be analyzed as exemplary of past film practices. The dangers of this approach has recently been described as “a routine occupation for film scholars” using DVDs in teaching.⁴⁵ But the notion of a *text*, flexibly applied and contextualized within the

⁴⁴ GROYS, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁴⁵ HEDIGER, Vinzenz. “The Original is Always Lost. Film History, Copyright Industries and the Problem of Reconstruction.” In: Marijke De Valck, and Malte Hagener (eds.) *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005, pp. 135-150. Serna’s textual analysis of *La venganza* and based on a video copy of the nitrate in which a reel was accidentally printed out of

archive can be very useful to both archivists and scholars—especially in terms of interpreting and documenting content—which is actually far more than the manifested expression visible in the film artifact or screened projection. Preservation should, though it does not always, take into account other related versions of a work and archival materials that document its production, that is, other textual evidence.

Importantly film historians Casper Tybjerg and Vinzenz Hediger offer their perspectives on film preservation. I see their work as productive since they understand the importance of preservation as part of a screen historiography that must account for forms of historicity that restored films generate (e.g., commercial re-releases and festival revivals). Hediger for example, discusses “the rhetoric of the original” used in preservation practice in order to make the point that preservation of film heritage is a cultural practice that has a history that relies on its own assumptions. Film restorations, he argues, have a dual purpose as a mission of film heritage as well as a “market for specialists in the field of film preservation and presentation.”⁴⁶

Entering the discussion from a different perspective Casper Tybjerg emphasizes that the “raw material of film history” consists of different kinds of sources, not just films. He looks to other disciplines in order to approach film history as the “historian’s craft,” a way to connect with the work of the film preservationist. He suggests the sub-discipline of codicology, “the study of handwritten books as archaeological objects, including the study of materials (parchment paper), of the binding, of cataloguing, and of preservation problems for manuscripts.”⁴⁷ Codicology concerns itself with “the technical preparation

order, is a case in point. It is not my intention to single out Serna here, as the practice of relying on copies of films in tape, digital file or safety print format as primary sources for textual analysis is standard practice for scholars, albeit with the exception of some early film historians who examine archival film materials for their research. See SERNA, Laura Isabel. “La Venganza de Pancho Villa: Resistance and Repetition.” In: *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 37, n. 2, 2012, pp. 11-42. Importantly, Serna characterizes the footage used in *La venganza* as “found footage,” linking the Padillas’ practice to the later, politically-motivated practices described in WEES, *op. cit.* Felix and Edmundo, however, purchased prints from second-hand distributors.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁴⁷ HOWELL, Martha and Walter Prevenier. *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001, p. 56.

of tools and the writing surface.”⁴⁸ Here is the plurality we seek when considering *La venganza* as a document of its own history, and useful for historicizing *bricolage* practices such as that of the Padillas, as well as the craft of the archivist. Tybjerg also places emphasis on the importance of the preservationist’s work as a means of preserving collective memory. Both scholars remind us of the problems with film viewing as a research method—that is, “it keeps many kinds of research questions hidden from view,”⁴⁹ especially those that are legal (e.g., driven by copyright), economic, and social.

Thus *La venganza* offers us important ways to think about film preservation as both film history and as screen history. For example, the nitrate print can be analyzed as a text in the sense of being one specific version of the film as it entered the archive as a physical item. But at the same time, to borrow from Fossati, it is a conceptual work when considered along with other extant film and non-film materials: scripts, in-house advertising, film fragments, and log books. Thus, rather than establish a dichotomy that separates a material artifact from a conceptual one as theorized by Fossati, I consider them as one and the same, existing in productive tension.

La venganza’s ontology is defined by the changes inherent in its mode of production, its process of recycling and discarding fragments or leftovers. In a sense, we might say the Padillas’ work was counter both to the professional industrial standards of their time and to the preservation standards of our time. Importantly, past industrial and present archival standards, in their shared goal to produce pristine prints of the best quality, often crisscross during the preservation process.

If we raise the issue of how the preservationist preserves the indeterminacy and multiplicity of a work like *La venganza*, we can say the same is true of all film prints. To ask a better question: can a traditional film restoration preserve and document the complete history of a film print? Preservationists need to bring the concept of *bricolage* into their practice. Scholars too should rethink how they use archival restorations as objects of study, and consider film preservation as a form of historicity when writing film history. Both camps should ask why a

⁴⁸ James W. Marchand, “What Is Codicology?” (2001) cited by TYBJERG, Casper. “The Raw Material of Film History.” In: Dan Nissen *et al.* (eds.). *Preserve Then Show*. Copenhagen: Danish Film Institute, 2002, p. 17.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

restoration should not reproduce defects such as the marks, lines, and out of frame shots. In confronting such heterogeneous material, the notion of cinema as *bricolage* helps us to conceptualize what the history of film was and is, as well as what it will be.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Bricolage places importance on *fronterizo* itinerant practices, as well as on the craft of the film preservationist who tinkers and adjusts when working with historical artifacts, as a means to conceptualize what is changing and mobile, never stable. Practices of remixing diverse media, generic and collective expressive forms from different eras merge national with vernacular cultural traditions and political histories through *bricolage* repurposing as *fronterizo* ingenuity. It allows us to reconsider our connection to objects in other ways than through identity and origin, as creative acts used to express what is in-between. That is, as media expressions and the different ways they are manifested in their plurality using interpretive knowledge as a means to posit “meaning in relation” and not as an “uncovering of their meaning” as fixed material traces of a past.”⁵¹ Which is how objects are approached—as relics and acts of magic—through heritage production whose goal is to make them authentic.

Films such as Bill Morrison’s *Decasia*, nominated to the Library of Congress National Film Registry in 2013, is, like *La venganza*, comprised entirely of fragments; both are designated as American film heritage precisely because they bear the ruptures and gaps of the process of history, film preservation, as well as showing the process of ageing and decomposing film artifacts. A form of borderless *bricolage*, like the Padillas’ and Morrison’s work and others, similarly move in different directions and through different film eras. *Bricolage* as a practice shared by both the filmmaker and restorer unites both historiographic and archival priorities and the shared goal and purpose of this essay, which bears on the use of film

⁵⁰ Despite arguments to the contrary, film history and analog film are not dead, as evidenced in the ongoing collecting practices of archives, libraries, collectors and stock footage houses. However, both film history and analog film technology are being re-conceptualized by historians and archivists as subcategories of media archaeology.

⁵¹ TAFURI, Manfredo. *The Sphere and the Labyrinth, Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987, p. 3.

preservation to document and teach film history. The Padilla Collection thus opens up an entirely new category of analog film material requiring new criteria for what is worth saving and offering a new opportunity to historicize that, which has gone unrecognized.

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Date of reception: 26th September 2016

Date of acceptance: 12th November 2016

How to cite this article:

TOMADJOGLOU, Kimberly V. "Film Compilation As Film Restoration?: borders, bricolage and *La venganza de Pancho Villa*." *Vivomatografías. Revista de estudios sobre precine y cine silente en Latinoamérica*, n. 2, diciembre de 2016, pp. 13-45. Available : <<http://www.vivomatografias.com/index.php/vmfs/article/view/89>> [Accessed mm.dd.yyyy.].

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