

signifier can be implanted into any imaginary surrounding, including the Latin American context, which appears not as a surprising, out-of-place, territory to explore the issues briefly described here, but as a legitimate and relevant scenario to negotiate identities, to evaluate notions of acceptance and marginalization, and to determine the price one must pay when crossing textual, psychological, linguistic, and ethical borders. The wandering signifier, according to Graff Zivin, hence becomes the ambivalent sign of acceptance and rejection, of sacred and profane, of sameness and otherness, liberated from semiotic constraints to float with the absolute freedom that fiction grants.

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HEATHER LEVI: *The World of Lucha Libre: Secrets, Revelations, and Mexican National Identity*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008.

Lucha libre, or professional wrestling, is a tremendously popular sport and spectacle in Mexico. In May of 1997, Heather Levi began what would be a year of anthropological fieldwork investigating the world of *lucha libre*, training with other wrestlers (men and women), attending live matches, viewing televised matches, and interviewing both male and female wrestlers.

Luis Jaramillo, a trainer retired from the wrestling ring and his masked identity as Águila Blanca, or White Eagle, agreed to take on Levi as an apprentice only if she understood that he dealt in the true *lucha libre*, not the spectacle for television viewers. Clearly Levi operates on the participant-observer model common to anthropological research. But she is not content to simply report on her field work. She wants to study *lucha libre* as “performance ... subculture... and symbol” in Mexican culture and politics.

She begins her book in 1988 with the advent of Superbarrio during the presidential elections, a masked wrestler functioning as a superhero representing the concerns of the popular classes whose homes were devastated by the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City and who were fed up with the inaction of politicians.

She discusses the question of what constitutes a sport as well as the question of genre: is *lucha libre* a sport, theater, spectacle, or ritual? The answer seems to be yes, it can simultaneously be any or all of those genres. Is *lucha libre* hegemonic or counterhegemonic? Yes again.

Levi provides a history of *lucha libre* in Mexico, imported from the United States in 1933. She explains the three styles of wrestling (Greco-Roman, Olympic, and Free Style), the creation and power struggles of the *empresas*, the companies that promote wrestlers and wrestling in the arena and on television.

She explains the extensive training involved, which is why wrestlers argue that *lucha libre* is clearly a sport with wrestler-athletes. She describes the basic movements and wrestling holds and the orchestration of the matches, in which *técnicos* and *rudos*, or good guys and bad guys, play out their assigned roles in a highly stylized choreography. She explains and analyzes the various uses of the mask, as alter ego, as identity, as assigned by the *empresa*, as handed down from father to son or brother or nephew, as secret and as revelation.

Levi relates *lucha libre* back to politics again, as she portrays Mexican politics with its good guys and bad guys, and in most situations and elections, most certainly a previously choreographed “match” and outcome, particularly during the almost seventy-year reign of the PRI, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or the Institutional Revolutionary Party.

Levi delves into issues of gender, masculinity and femininity, *machismo* (the hyper masculine view of men) and *marianismo* (the code of conduct for women which suggests that, like the Virgin Mary, they should be pure and willing to suffer for their men). In addition to the *técnicos* and *rudos*, she analyzes the *exóticos* who are also *luchadores*, or wrestlers. Feminized wrestlers include some who are openly gay, some secretly gay, and some heterosexuals who have chosen the *exótico* role. The homosexual *exóticos*, Levi argues, can serve as a positive role model for young gay Mexicans, who see an openly gay performer with economic success and public admiration. Levi presents Divino Exótico as an example of a heterosexual wrestler who has chosen to develop the effeminate identity of his masked character in order to appeal to the women in the audience.

Levi spends some time examining the audience, both the spectators in the arena and the viewers of televised broadcasts, which leads to a discussion of class and gender, politics and economics, and the influence and power of the media. She details the golden age of *lucha libre* films and film stars, particularly Mexico’s most popular *luchador*, El Santo.

Levi also takes up the symbolism of wrestling and the wrestler. The neo-pop arts movement’s search for *lo mexicano*, the true Mexican identity, led the artists to *lucha libre* as representative of the people; popular and urban, *lucha libre* allowed for a new interpretation of Mexican identity, which had become increasingly urban. In Levi’s view, all the threads of Mexico can be woven together in “staging [the] contradiction[s]” of Mexico, with its competing identities of rural/urban, male/female, machismo/feminismo, modernity/tradition, all in a ritualized spectacle not unlike Mexican politics.

Levi ends her text with an Epilogue from 2007. Much of the world in which she immersed herself is gone; the mediation (by television) of *lucha libre* seems to have led to its degeneration. The American film, *Nacho Libre*, serves as a sad example of how far *lucha libre* has fallen from its semi-heroic halcyon days.

At times Levi's text reads very much like the doctoral thesis from which it no doubt originated, with comments like "In this chapter I will" and ... small errors such as *colonia* for *colonia*.

Despite the aptly chosen neo-pop cover art, "Santo Santo" by Sergio Arau, featuring a masked wrestler flanked by masked cherubs with wings in the colors of the Mexican flag, Levi's study of professional wrestling as adapted in Mexico as *lucha libre* is not for the popular audience. Only the most die-hard fans will wade through the sometimes tedious language of "hegemonic" and "counterhegemonic," and supporting citations from theoreticians such as Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, and Octavio Paz. Clearly written more for an academic readership rather than a popular one, the text is a thorough history of *lucha libre* with extensive footnotes and a solid bibliography. Though on occasion the reader may suspect that Levi has teased out more from this quintessential Mexican sport/spectacle than *lucha libre* merits, she has nevertheless written a commendable cultural study of an important aspect of Mexican identity. Part of Duke University Press's American Encounters/Global Interactions, *The World of Lucha Libre* fits well within the framework of a series aimed at new interpretations of the influence of the United States.

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JOHANNE HERSHFELD: *Imagining la Chica Moderna. Women, Nation, and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008.

Imagining la Chica Moderna. Women, Nation, and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936 is a study of the popular images that were addressed to female middle-class consumers during the years following the Mexican Revolution. The study questions one-sided historical approaches on state formation and official nationalism by dealing with "popular" forms of female representation in the public domain; hence, "popular culture" and "gender" are key methodological tools for this study. By highlighting the importance of consumer culture addressed to women, the author attempts to expose the interaction between heterogeneous identities and official nationalism, between state formation and market forces, between discourses on *mexicanidad* and transnational gendered commercial ones.

The book is divided into five chapters. The first chapter offers an historical overview of the period in order to contextualize the emergence of popular visual culture, particularly images of "chicas modernas," within the background of post-revolutionary nationalism and global consumerism. By documenting