



PROJECT MUSE®

Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion by James Maffie (review)

Susan D. Gillespie

The Americas, Volume 72, Number 2, April 2015, pp. 336-338 (Review)



Published by Cambridge University Press

➔ For additional information about this article
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/579749>

the analysis of textiles, clothing, embodiment, and authorship in sacred art and public representations of the Virgin of Guadalupe in colonial Mexico. Chapters 8 and 9 provide an analytical perspective on devotional artworks as representations of thanksgiving by private individuals and public authorities in the viceroyalty, along with some examples in history of thanksgiving as a public ritual in central Mexico in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Chapter 9 provides additional information about the proliferation of Guadalupe images in the transatlantic network of Spanish economic and political elites, particularly in Andalucía in Southern Spain.

Visualizing Guadalupe is an ambitious project that challenges the reader to see the transformations in the *devoción guadalupana* through a critical lens by incorporating the analytical tools of art history and current scholarship on sacred art. While the book may not be as comprehensive or exhaustive in its study of the devotion beyond sacred art and devotional objects, the examples selected certainly offer a fresh and absorbing light for envisioning *el arte guadalupano* in its own specificity and uniqueness. The ideological analysis of the images produced in connection with the veneration leads the reader not only to recognize a line of investigation distinct from the traditional one provided in orthodox texts, but also to appreciate the nuances and transformations in the Guadalupe phenomenon in colonial times.

The book expands the understanding of the connections between sacred representations and the ways they were envisioned by different communities of the faithful. Moreover, it represents a positive contribution to the history of *seeing* religious material culture as it explores the devotional artifacts and sacred representations of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Future researchers on Latin American sacred art and Mexican culture in general will indeed be inspired by *Visualizing Guadalupe*.

Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan

JUAN JAVIER PESCADOR

Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion. By James Maffie. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2014. Pp. xiv, 592. Introduction. Bibliography. Index. \$80.00 cloth.
doi:[10.1017/tam.2015.12](https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2015.12)

Maffie presents a detailed and comprehensive metaphysic to represent the complexities of Aztec (or more broadly Nahuatl) religious and philosophical thought at the time of the conquest. A philosopher trained in the Western tradition, Maffie draws on evidence that has been classified and interpreted primarily by historians, anthropologists, art historians, and historians of religion. His objective is to organize Aztec metaphysics in terms of concepts and metaphors centered and rooted in everyday life, although these are known almost entirely from surviving elite expressions and images.

Writing in a manner accessible to experts and non-experts, Maffie grapples with central tenets in Aztec cosmology such as *teotl*, *ixiptla*, and *nepantla*, which confounded Spanish colonizers and still challenge Western scholarship. His contribution is to probe their logical links to one another in order to model Aztec metaphysics as a systematic and internally coherent body of thought. The keys to Maffie's thesis, as the title indicates, are his insistence on a "process metaphysic" whereby all of reality is in flow, constantly emerging and forming in relation with other phenomena; a focus on *teotl*, often translated as god or sacred, and here understood as dynamic monistic power (force) that is coexistent with reality; the discrimination of three types of transformative movement ("motion-change") of *teotl*; and the use of a weaving metaphor to capture the native logic of the continuous interlinking of cosmic forces and substances in an unending "becoming."

Between a succinct introduction and a brief concluding reiteration of major ideas are eight substantive chapters organized by topic. The first three deal with familiar themes: *teotl* as power in motion and as cosmic process; Aztec religion as pantheistic rather than polytheistic; and agonistic inamic unity, whereby any force or influence is paired in a mutually constitutive yet mutually competitive way with a complement, such as male and female. This last is more often glossed as "complementary opposition" in Mesoamerican studies. The chapters are structured to form logical and empirical sets of arguments consisting of the author's thesis, a review of prior Aztec scholarship on the subject, comparisons to some similar constructs known from other world regions (not enough, in my opinion), intellectual objections to and implications of his interpretation, and the author's response to those objections. Some of his interpretations, such as pantheism, adhere to prior scholarship, which is exhaustively discussed; others are new and require further demonstration of their validity in the face of opposing opinions.

The three subsequent chapters explore the specific movements of *teotl* as a cosmic process of motion-change. They reconfigure prior scholarship that treated these elements as unrelated constructs: *teotl* as *olin* (pulsating motion), as *malinalli* (twisting motion that conveys energy), and as *nepantla* (reciprocal motion that binds inamic pairs). Maffie argues that *nepantla* is prior to other forms of cosmic motion and is foundational to Aztec metaphysics. *Nepantla*-motion accounts for the self-generation of *teotl* via the weaving metaphor; *teotl* is both the weaver of the cosmos and the product of that motion.

The following chapter links *teotl*'s motion-change to the well known 260-day (*tonalpohualli*) and 365-day (*xihpohualli*) calendars and to the acosmogonic quality of Aztec metaphysics. The cosmos is always in process, neither starting nor stopping. Like other scholars, Maffie adopts the relationist view of time-place as a unitary phenomenon, but in his model it is the patterned unfolding of *teotl* as qualitatively different times and heterogeneous places weaving the cosmic fabric. These chapters are organized by the types of evidence presented: linguistic, literary, and graphic.

Many line drawings and photographs of Aztec objects, and designs from the painted books, are included to provide visual support for the author's interpretations. The penultimate chapter brings together all these constructs in a further delineation of the weaving metaphor, the constant orderly and transformative becoming of the cosmos that especially characterizes the current era, the Fifth Sun. Mesoamerican and other Native American scholars will find value in Maffie's arguments and compilation of evidence.

University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida

SUSAN D. GILLESPIE

Screening Neoliberalism: Transforming Mexican Cinema 1988–2012. By Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014. Pp. viii, 291. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$55.00 cloth.
doi:[10.1017/tam.2015.13](https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2015.13)

Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado's *Screening Neoliberalism* is a necessary addition to the contemporary scholarly literature on Mexican cinema. Taking off from a nostalgic introduction that recalls his childhood experiences as a cinema spectator in Mexico City in the 1980s, Sánchez offers a clear, well-defined thesis, arguing the ways in which Mexican cinema has undergone a profound transformation since the economic crisis of the Salinas de Gortari administration (1988–1994), accompanied by the reinvention of movie audiences in Mexico over the next twenty-odd years.

The book takes as its starting point a much-needed reevaluation of the emphasis on crisis and trauma as the paradigm for studies of post-classical Mexican cinema, an emphasis that came to the fore with the publication of Charles Ramírez Berg's watershed book *Cinema of Solitude*, in 1992. What is most significant about this contribution is Sánchez Prado's movement away from the usual approaches (Paz, masculinity, the nation) and its problematizing of genre shifts and spectator responses based on business practices, economic (under)development and the rise of middle-class cinema audiences. In short, the book is a response, a critique, and a continuation of the arguments made by Ramírez Berg in the 1990s, which have weighed down scholarly approaches to Mexican cinema for the past two and a half decades.

Sánchez Prado breaks down his history and analysis not by decades or presidential administration (though he cannot fully escape this typical taxonomy of Mexican politics, economics, and history), but rather by topics and by the ways in which movies have adapted to new audiences and reflected Mexico's transition to the neoliberal politics and economic realities that came into being under Miguel de la Madrid in the 1980s and became cemented under Salinas de Gortari in the 1990s. Significantly, the neoliberal turn in Mexico's economic and social policies was directly associated with the cinema's