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In Mexican Modernity, Ruben Gallo tells the story of a second Mexican Revolution, a battle fought on the front of cultural representation. The new revolutionaries were not rebels or outlaws but artists and writers; their weapons were cameras, typewriters, radios, and other technological artifacts, and their goal was not to topple a dictator but to dethrone nineteenth-century aesthetics. Gallo tells the story of this other revolution by focusing on five artifacts that left a deep mark on the literature and the arts of the 1920s and 1930s: the camera and its novel techniques for seeing the modern world; the typewriter and its mechanization of literary aesthetics; radio and poetic experiments with wireless communication; cement architecture and its celebration of functional internationalism; and the stadium and its deployment as a mass medium for political spectacle.

Gallo traces the ways artists and writers, armed with these artifacts, revolutionized representation by breaking with the traditional modes of production that had dominated Mexican cultural practices: Tina Modotti rose against the conventions of "artistic" photography by promoting a radically modern photographic aesthetics; typewriting authors rejected the literary precepts of modernismo to celebrate the stridencies of mechanical writing; and young architects abandoned older building materials for the symbolic strength of reinforced concrete.

Gallo uncovers a secret history of Mexican modernity that includes a number of fascinating episodes: the pictorialist backlash against Modotti and Edward Weston; the postcolonial Remington typewriter; Mexican radio in the North Pole; the campaign to aestheticize cement through journals and artistic competitions; and the profascist political spectacles held at Mexico City's National Stadium in the 1920s.