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Zuzana M. Pick

Territories of Representation

The New Cinema of Latin America has promoted oppositional modes of production and reception as alternatives to mainstream cinema. Its emergence as a movement in the 1960s was marked by an urgent concern to transform social relations, and its filmmakers argued for a formally innovative cinema capable of expressing the continent's reality. Like the writers, painters and musicians of Latin America, filmmakers have sought to validate distinctive patterns of representation. They adopted strategies capable of engaging the spectator as critical agent through a collective and shared awareness of historical and social experiences.

In this article, I want to emphasize the importance of Latin America's "alternative modernism" for the study of its cinematic production. This alternative modernism seeks to empower those social groups excluded from official history and entails, in Jean Franco's words, "a struggle over meanings and the history of meanings, histories that have been acquired and stored within unofficial institutions."¹ This struggle is particularly relevant to women and to feminist approaches to cultural practices. To rewrite the history of Latin American women involves not only understanding patterns of oppression and resistance, but locating women's experiences within the contested terrain of discourse.

I want to look at a Mexican film on Frida Kahlo, a painter whose life suggests the complex alliances between gender and nationalism that have shaped *mexicanidad*. This film challenges us to make new connections between history and myth. It contests the contemporary readings that have confined Kahlo's exotic femininity to the solitude of otherness. For instance, and as Joan Borsa points out, fashion spreads have featured models "mimicking, fetishizing and eroticizing the Frida look of pain, the Frida look of integrity, and the Frida Kahlo look of Mexican peasant."² *Frida: Naturaleza viva* offers a view of a woman artist whose experiences were simultaneously anchored in gender, ethnicity and class; whose work was ingrained in the pathos and myths of the Mexican Revolution.

I. Filming Mexico's modernity: imagined correspondences

In 1984, Paul Leduc made a film on Frida Kahlo, the extraordinary artist who was born in 1907 but claimed as her birthdate 1910, the year that marked the beginning of the Mexican Revolution. Kahlo was married twice to Diego Rivera, an on-and-off member of the Mexican Communist Party. Her life was marked by polio, abortions and miscarriages. A tramway accident in which her uterus was pierced by a metal rod and her spine broken, led to operations and eventually to the amputation of a leg. She was bisexual and an exotic beauty. She was also a communist, a rebel, and the subject and object of her own art. Her house in Coyoacán on the corner of Londres and Allende streets (since 1958 the Frida Kahlo museum) is a perfect setting for a movie. From the street, the house with its royal blue exterior and its tropical garden might look like any other one in this neighborhood. But inside it is a monument: the artist's paintings and *retablos*, the four-poster bed, the collections of knick-knacks and dresses displayed in the high ceilinged studio of Diego Rivera and the small glass-enclosed passage that leads to Frida Kahlo's rooms.

Leduc's *Frida: Naturaleza viva* was produced independently by Manuel Barbachano Ponce, a veteran producer of Mexican cinema whose name is linked to Luis Buñuel (*Los Olvidados* [1958] and *The Exterminating Angel* [1962]), and to Jaime Humberto Hermosillo (*María de mi corazón* [1982] and *Doña Herlinda and Her Son* [1984]). Shot by Angel Goded in 16mm and then blown up to 35mm, the film is characterized by a highly decorative *mise-en-scène*, a camera that glides through elaborate sets, a preference for sparse dialogue and a skillful use of period music. Its title, *Frida: Naturaleza viva*, signals a play on words with the Spanish term for still life, *naturaleza muerta*, literally dead nature.³

The director has credited Ofelia Medina, an actress who bears a remarkable likeness to the artist, for having made possible the production of his film. In an interview with Denis West, Paul Leduc admitted that "nobody would set out to do a film on Frida—who painted so many self-portraits and was present in her own work—without counting on the services of an actress who resembled the painter."⁴ Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between Frida Kahlo's biography, the historical narratives of her life including her self-portraits, and her re-presentation on film, that is, between Paul Leduc's construction of a historical persona and Ofelia Medina's performance. I will use "Frida Kahlo" to refer to the woman and painter; and "Frida" to refer to the character of the film.

Set within and against the legend of Frida Kahlo, and structured around the recurring image of Frida lying on her death bed, Paul Leduc circumvents the traditional linearity of the artist film yet reconstructs some well-known anecdotes of her life. The viewer of *Frida: Naturaleza viva* is alerted by the rolling post-credit note that Frida Kahlo's life will be told through the

"disconnected images of memory," that the "chaotic torrent of images" will be interrupted only by death. The links between the dying Frida and the images Leduc offers as her recollections, represent Frida as the controlling agency of representation and self-representation, while at the same time the highly formalized use of cinematic techniques foregrounds the reconstructive power of historical mediation. I would argue that point of view in *Frida: Naturaleza viva* is an imaging function that informs a multi-faceted and complex enactment of subjectivity, that promotes a reading of Frida's story as a de-centered history.⁵ Frida's memories are neither chronological nor exhaustive; the film omits Frida Kahlo's sojourn in the United States and her trip to Paris, and it treats her marriages to Diego Rivera and her relationship with Leon Trotsky in an elliptic manner. The film insinuates but does not seek to psychologize; memory and anecdote are not bound by causality. Frida's memories are divided into eight filmic segments, each one with a different thematic axis. Markers of the various stages of her life, each segment promotes parallels between preceding ones and sometimes prefigures others. By travelling through the eccentric life of Frida Kahlo, the film projects itself into the turbulence of Mexican culture and society.

The film profited from a renewed national and international interest in Frida Kahlo: its release followed the publication of biographies written by Hayden Herrera in the United States and Raquel Tibol in Mexico, major exhibitions in New York, Washington and London, and several documentary films like *Frida and Tina* (Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen).⁶ But the contemporary recognition of Frida Kahlo's art has been a mixed blessing. As art historians Oriana Baddeley and Valerie Fraser point out, "the emphasis given in her work to the body, to personal emotion and motherhood" and the concentration on the images that "represent an archetypal image of woman as victim" has disregarded the articulation of Frida Kahlo's art within the subjective and collective distinctiveness of Mexican culture.⁷ I would like to argue that *Frida: Naturaleza viva* attempts to reverse this tendency. The film encourages culturally-inscribed convergences between the personal and collective subjectivities that construct Mexico's fragmentary entry into modernity.

II. Private memories and public sphere.

In *Frida: Naturaleza viva*, the organization of sequences within each segment sets up non-linear parallels that ultimately play themselves out throughout the whole film narrative. In order to analyze the various patterns of meaning I will highlight two segments at the beginning of the film which I shall call "The Tramway Accident" and "The Courtship," both key events in Frida Kahlo's biography, which illustrate the manner in which private memories are detached and then re-inserted into the public memory of Kahlo.

The private stream in these segments shows Frida either as a young girl—at a window, at a night vigil for the dead, being brought home after the accident, and being photographed by her father—or as an adult accompanying Diego (Juan José Gurrola)—in the bathroom, her studio, and a public building where he paints a mural. The public stream is guided by two predominantly musical sequences that contrast an onlooking and a participant Frida. These sequences echo traditional icons of Mexico. By placing Frida's militancy within the Night of the Dead rituals and the pro-Zapatista rallies of the Revolution, the film secures a cultural and political bonding with *mexicanidad* ("The Tramway Accident") and peasant movements ("The Courtship").

The play of mirrors, the choreography set up by tracking shots, and the rhythmic engagement of diegetic music propel the narrative forward along a variety of associative connections. "The Tramway" segment, like the other seven segments, begins in Frida's bedroom. A long tracking shot unveils a multitude of objects (including photographs), citations of Frida Kahlo's still life paintings, and Frida lying in her death bed, her face repeatedly revealed by mirrors. Her role as an activator of memory is established by the fragmented mix-and-match strategy that regulates the unfolding of her cinematic autobiography. The dislocated composition of Frida's stream of consciousness is further stressed through suspension and deferral. The accident narrative, for example, is halted by Diego's first appearance in the film while the romance narrative is temporarily delayed by Frida's introduction of "The Two Fridas," one of the best known self-portraits of Frida Kahlo, and her father Guillermo (Claudio Brook).

III. The art of the "moving" life.

The placement of art works in *Frida: Naturaleza viva* demands particular attention. The painting "The Two Fridas" was painted in 1939 and is usually linked to Frida Kahlo's separation from Diego Rivera. The two figures, sitting side by side on a bench their hands joined, are described as follows in Hayden Herrera's authoritative biography:

The Frida Diego no longer loves wears a white Victorian dress; the other wears a Tehuana skirt and blouse, and perhaps her face is a shade darker than that of her more Spanish companion...Both Fridas have their hearts exposed...The unloved Frida's lace bodice is torn to reveal her breast and her broken heart. The other Frida's heart is whole. Each Frida has her hand placed near her sexual organs. The unloved woman holds surgical pincers, the Tehuana Frida a miniature portrait of Diego Rivera as a child...⁸

The appearance of the painting in the film is prompted by Frida. The alternate panning over the two seated figures is structured by a shot-counter-shot and is accompanied by the screeching sounds of a wheelchair. This classic device connects Frida's gaze, from the miniature to the stop watch held by the father, and the viewers' glance to the observing sister Cristina. Replicating the shutter, a black screen cues the next shot, initiating the romance narrative of "The Courtship." If the editing links the sister (Cecilia Toussaint) and the husband and anticipates the betrayal theme of "The Two Fridas," this strategy also submits to nostalgia. The medallion of Diego Rivera as a child prompts an image of Frida's own childhood. Taken a step further it can also be argued that the self-possessed glance of the photographic pose mimics Frida Kahlo's portraits. Whereas Frida responds to the gentle coaxing of her German-speaking father, her gaze in self-portraiture asserts power over the viewer. If Guillermo asks her to be attentive to the shutter, Frida Kahlo demands us to stop and take notice of her fragmented subjectivity.

Rather than interpreting Frida Kahlo's life exclusively in terms of the placement of the paintings within her biography, the film spreads her work across a variety of psychological and historical registers. At the same time, as Joan and Dennis West suggest, "our impressions of Frida Kahlo are formed as if we were examining a series of her self-portraits hung side by side in a gallery."⁹ The iconographic engagement between Frida Kahlo's art and Frida's cinematographic biography is an excursion into multiple subjectivities, or as Jean Franco implies, "the deep split personality (that) made it impossible for Frida to recognize herself as a unitary subject."¹⁰ The recurrent summoning of private and public subjectivities in *Frida: Naturaleza viva* plays itself out through parallels that are dynamic rather than static, dialectic rather than linear. In the back shot of Frida's naked—but corseted—body, for instance, that closes "The Courtship" segment, the blood she smears on her shoulder echos the dripping blood on "The Two Fridas."

This apparent metonymic link between the cinematic and the historical Frida can be found in the way in which "A Few Small Nips," a *retablo* dated 1935, appears in the segment that touches on Frida's morphine addiction. It was painted after Frida Kahlo discovered Diego Rivera's affair with Christina Kahlo. Its factual basis—a newspaper account of a man who described the stabbing of his girl to the judge as "but I only gave her a few small nips"—is altered once again.¹¹ It is put to a dramatic use when Frida orders her nurse (Gina Morett) to give her an injection by saying "dáme un piquetito," a direct reference to "Unos cuantos piquetitos" (the Spanish-language title of the *retablo*). Whereas "The Two Fridas" is used as a reflective element in the film, the painting "A Few Small Nips" displaces—even momentarily—the metaphorical representation of a victimized woman. It asserts Frida's determination to control the pain caused by the amputation of her leg.¹²

The consistent use of mirrors plays an important role in the film. In the recurring shots of Frida on her death bed, a small hand mirror reflects her image binding the viewer's look with Frida's cinematic gaze and with Frida Kahlo, the portrait painter. This voyeuristic pattern is taken up in a multiplicity of ways. While it echoes the technique of self-portraiture, I would also argue that it provides a cinematically codified bridge between desire and history, between the attempt to represent Frida and the power of self-representation. As its title suggests, *Frida: Naturaleza viva* struggles to animate the inertness of a "still life" and to distance itself from the hieratic immobility of Frida Kahlo's self-portraits. In this sense, the film opens an intriguing space to explore the issues of cultural identity and political representation that are specific to the New Cinema of Latin America.

IV. Political iconography

As much as *Frida: Naturaleza viva* journeys through the emotional and physical turbulence of Frida Kahlo's life, it is permeated by the memories of her social engagement. The changing perspectives of Frida's politics are signalled by the recurrent presence of Emiliano Zapata, Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin while the allusions to the Spanish Civil War, Hiroshima and Guatemala are integrated into the public stream of her memories. More than historical markers, these indicators of period are located simultaneously in history and subjectivity. While the film assumes the syncretic internationalism of the 1930s and 1940s, it also integrates the nationalism of Frida's lifetime. From an aesthetic point of view the film reacts against the folkloric stereotype without erasing its affiliation with the images that have codified national identity. The film endorses as well as questions the representation of *mexicanidad*, in the same way as Paul Leduc's earlier film—*Reed: México insurgente* (1971)—sought to visualize Mexican history differently from commercial cinema. With *Frida: Naturaleza viva* this project is taken even further. It breaks in a self-conscious way with the social realism characteristic of most Latin American cinemas and stresses through its ornate *mise-en-scène* the representational territory of Latin American cultures. Rather than indulging in melodramatic excess, the audiovisual landscape of the film displays an intriguing blend of luxury and asceticism, not unlike Frida Kahlo's paintings. It combines subtropical and monochromatic colors, epigrammatic dialogue and whole songs. Its unrelenting camera movement gives body to Frida's memories, it underscores the power of memory to articulate identity.

The highly self-conscious iconography of *Frida: Naturaleza viva* anchors the multiple sources of nationality and identity that make up the Latin American imaginary. In the segments I have chosen to highlight, for instance, the composite references to Indian culture and Revolutionary

mythology are anchored into distinctive forms of social participation. In "The Tramway Accident" Frida attends a Night of the Dead vigil. Her head is covered with an Indian shawl and she nervously chews her nails as she looks on. The photographs of Zapatista soldiers and the dried flowers that adorn the caskets, the wooden instruments that accompany the plaintive ballad mediate the highly codified populism of Mexican mural art. A similar sequence is included in the "The Courtship" segment, this time a pro-Zapatista rally attended by Frida, Diego and a female friend (played by Margarita Sáenz). A crane shot centers Frida. The disclosure of a revolver hidden by her long black skirt (revealed in close up) confirms the audacious femininity of Frida the militant. The individual and collective defiance of the government's armed agents is expressed by repeated shots of a young girl in male attire singing the Revolutionary *corridos*.¹³ The endorsement of Mexican iconography, particularly its *mestizo* roots, suits the film insofar as it captures the exoticism of the period.

In the same way, the music of *Frida: Naturaleza viva* accommodates otherness and universality. The blend of popular Mexican (*corridos*, ballads and folklore) and European forms (opera and *zarzuela*) underscores what Angel Rama calls the "transcultural" character of Latin American cultures.¹⁴ The period music emphasizes Frida's shifting sense of identity. She moves easily between the down-to-earth and the refined aspects of culture, embracing its rural and urban, racial and class-bound sources. This multiracial composition of Latin American societies has produced a multifaceted aesthetic, a realism that is abstraction, metaphor and hallucination. Alejo Carpentier called it "*realismo maravilloso*" and Gabriel García Márquez uses it to express the "outsized reality" of Latin America. The symbiotic relationship between art and politics has characterized Latin American intellectual and artistic projects. The struggle to affirm an identity has been recognized through the conscious acceptance of its ambivalent origins. The "ironic echo" of Latin American cultural practices, as Robert Stam suggests, "between European and Latin American modernism" which Leduc expresses in *Barroco* (1989).¹⁵ Using the musical/narrative structure of Alejo Carpentier's "Concierto barroco" (1972), *Barroco* proposes, like *Frida: Naturaleza viva*, a search of origins. Although the question posed by an Afro-Cuban song with the untranslatable refrain "¿De dónde son los cantantes?" remains unresolved, *Barroco* offers a journey through the poetic territories of Latin American reality.

It is from this perspective that I want to argue that *Frida: Naturaleza viva* is both a portrait of Frida Kahlo and a re-appropriation of Frida's story. In this sense the film grapples for an expressive modernity to interpret Latin America because—in the words of Gabriel García Márquez in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1982—to see "our reality through patterns not our own serves only to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary."¹⁶ To the extent that Paul Leduc has sought to free Frida

Kahlo from the solitude of her inward-looking art, the political project of *Frida: Naturaleza viva* hinges on its potential to re-insert art into history. The back and forth movement between historical iconography and cinematic *mise-en-scène* is designed, in my view, to contribute to the rewriting of women's history in Mexico and Latin America.

V. Feminist (ad)dress and Latin American film history

The question of dress occupies an important place in the understanding of Frida Kahlo, the artist and the woman. We are told that she adopted the Tehuana dress only after she married Diego Rivera. According to Hayden Herrera, this dress was also "an elaborate packaging (...) to compensate for her body's deficiencies, for her sense of fragmentation, dissolution and mortality."¹⁷ The anecdote that Frida Kahlo borrowed clothes from her maids to wear at her wedding in 1929 suggests that the Indian dress is equally related to class, to the class-based impulse of the Mexican Revolution and not only to ethnicity. My impression is that Frida Kahlo's Tehuana dress has several meanings, that the adoption of this dress signifies different things at different times. It acquires a programmatic value for the restoration of *mexicanidad* and in the struggle between the modernist and nativist definitions of cultural identity that permeate the period. The ostentation of Frida Kahlo's dress can equally be seen, in the words of Robert Stam, as an "ambivalent solution within a situation of cultural asymmetry," or an "art (that) is necessarily parodic, caught in specular games of doubling and redoubling."¹⁸

The ornate boldness and the ultra-femininity of Frida's dress blends with the hedonism of *Frida: Naturaleza viva's* *mise-en-scène*. Although the costume never distracts from the drama of the film, it frames Ofelia Medina's characterization of Frida, her filmic identity. Identity as representation and as self-representation are crucial to the film because it joins the two Fridas. To the extent that Frida's dress refers both to Ofelia Medina's performance as Frida and to Frida Kahlo's paintings, its value within the film fuses two distinct representational systems. Costume and dress are simultaneously spectacle and citation, cinema and history, or what Wilson Harris calls an "imaginative strategy that begins to alter the very fabric of what we call the creative adventure."¹⁹ The combination of Indian and Spanish motifs in the colors and textures of dress and jewellery suggests a self-conscious affirmation of a *mestizo* identity but also a specifically Mexican re-arrangement of the indigenous.

Frida Kahlo, as other Latin American artists and intellectuals of the 1930s and 1940s, rejected the European-centered surrealism with its hijacking of the unexpected and the primitive. She transformed herself from an "*objet trouvé*," or rather a "*sujet trouvé*," that exults and parodies the exotic. The

"alternative modernism"—for which Baddeley and Fraser argue—intimated by Frida Kahlo's dress, its effect as representation and self-representation, embodies a distinctly Latin American way to affirm cultural identity.²⁰ In the same way, *Frida: Naturaleza viva* is a valid attempt to seek out a new aesthetic direction for the development of the New Cinema. Paul Leduc might have rejected social realism, particularly in its documentary-like function, but has retained the political problematic that has characterized the last three decades of Latin American filmmaking.²¹ What I have argued here is for a Latin American reading of *Frida: Naturaleza viva*. Paul Leduc's film, with its refusal to conform to linearity and its distinctive emphasis on the poetics of realism, replaces Frida at the center of a Latin American imaginary. I have used the film as a pretext to rescue Frida Kahlo's solitude from the figurative body of her paintings and to insert her story into women's collective struggle for the preservation of their identities.

Notes

1. Franco, J. (1988), "Beyond Ethnocentrism: Gender, Power and the Third World Intelligentsia," in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (p. 504), Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
2. Borsa, J. (1990), "Frida Kahlo. Marginalization and the Critical Female Subject," *Third Text*, 12, p. 29.
3. The North American distributor has retained the original title of the film.
4. West, D. (1988), "FRIDA: An Interview with Paul Leduc," *Cinéaste*, 16(4), p. 55.
5. In other words as a "history that discusses the intricacies of the social formation from many points of entry, avoiding the consensus interpretations which can mask the heterogeneity of social life," in Haralovich, M. B. (1986), "The Social History of Film: Heterogeneity and Mediation," *Wide Angle*, 8(2), p. 6.
6. It is also worth mentioning the early documentary *Frida Kahlo* by Marcela Fernández Violante in 1971 which preceded the recent attention given to the Mexican artist. Although it is beyond the intent of this article to consider reception, the revival of Frida Kahlo in the early 1980s contributed to the film's success with audiences.
7. Baddeley, O., and Fraser, V. (1989), *Drawing the Line: Art and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Latin America*, London: Verso, p. 92.
8. Herrera, H. (1983), *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo*, New York: Harper and Row, pp. 278-279.
9. West, "FRIDA: An Interview with Paul Leduc," p. 55.
10. Franco, J. (1989), *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico*, London: Verso, p. 107.
11. Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo*, p. 180.

12. Furthermore, "A Few Small Nips" initiates a montage of paintings that begins with "The Broken Column" and ends with the close-up of women reacting to Frida Kahlo's paintings during the opening night of her last—but major—exhibition.

13. This shift from observer to participant re-enters the film later in the mise-en-scène of two consecutive sequences that show Frida mourning at a burial of massacred peasants and Frida attending a peace rally after the Hiroshima bomb.

14. Rama, A. (1982), *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina*, Mexico: Siglo XXI.

15. Stam, R. (1989), *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 123.

16. García Márquez, G. (1988), "The Solitude of Latin America," in D. Meyer (Ed.), *Lives on the Line: The Testimonies of Contemporary Latin American Authors*, (p. 232), Berkeley: University of California Press.

17. Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo*, p. 112.

18. Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film*, p. 123.

19. Glassman, M. (1989), "Interview with Wilson Harris," *BorderLines*, 15, p. 27.

20. Baddeley and Fraser, *Drawing the Line: Art and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Latin America*, p. 2.

21. This shift in perspective has not gone unrecognized. Leduc's film shared the first prize at the International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema in Havana, with Fernando Solanas' *Tangos: The Exile of Gardel* in 1985. Nonetheless, this commitment to innovation remains marginal to the overall output of Mexican and Latin American cinemas.

Frida: Natureza viva (Paul Leduc, Mexique, 1984) met en scène une artiste dont les expériences sont déterminées par des considérations sexuelles, ethniques, et de classe sociale. Son oeuvre, marqué par le pathos et les mythes de la révolution mexicaine, rappelle les convergences du personnel et du collectif qui assurent l'entrée fragmentaire du Mexique dans le monde moderne. Le film ouvre un espace où il est possible d'explorer les problèmes de l'identité culturelle et de la représentation politique spécifiques au nouveau cinéma latino-américain. Cherchant à libérer Frida Kahlo de la solitude de son art intérieur, Paul Leduc a créé un film dont le projet politique dépend de sa capacité de réinsérer l'art dans le cadre de l'histoire.

Claire F. Fox

Hollywood's Backlot: Carlos Fuentes, *The Old Gringo*, and National Cinema

Like a Hollywood star, Fuentes develops a legendary status by constantly appearing in the public eye, through his many lectures, in both Spanish and English, his television appearances, and his writing of columns on Latin American politics in leading newspapers in the United States. In a conversation with the author [Lanin Gyrko], Fuentes stated that he was a frustrated actor, and that he sought to become another Sydney Greenstreet or Conrad Veidt.¹

Latin America's celebrated literary boom of the late 1950s and 1960s occurred at an historically transitional moment, in which intellectuals, and writers in particular, found themselves occupying new places in the social formation. According to Jean Franco, this period was unique because the uneven process of development in Latin America led to the coexistence of three modes of communication alongside one another: oral, print, and mass media.² The relatively recent rise of mass media brought the writer into competition for social recognition with two other cultural heroes: on the one hand, the oral storyteller/narrator who still occupied rural areas and marginalized *barrios* of urban metropolises, and on the other, the modern superstar, whose persona was the focal point of spectatorial identification in television and cinema. In order to resolve this competition, the writers of the boom did not attempt to usurp the other positions, but rather to dissemble, parody, or absorb them. Cinema, the realm of the superstar *par excellence*, was taken up directly by writers of the boom as a theme of their literary works. They also experimented formally, imitating the style of scriptwriting and the visual language proper to the cinema. Finally, the authors inserted themselves into the texts, either as characters or through literary alter-egos. By such means was the writer conflated with the star or the movie director.

The fusion was a tenuous one, however, and it often resulted in representation of conflicting ideologies within the same text. Above all, the boom writers' literary efforts still sought to "raise" cinema to the status of literature, rather than to "lower" literature to the level of cinema. Recent years, in contrast, have witnessed a growing collaboration, if not mutual exploitation, between print and visual media on the part of Latin American