"The Queer Filming of Frida": Creating a Cinematic Latina Lesbian Icon

Maricela DeMirjyn

SUMMARY

This article analyzes ways in which the theoretical frameworks surrounding hybridity and mestizaje contribute to opening new spaces of analysis regarding the queer filming of Frida Kahlo. By comparing the independent Mexican film with the Hollywood version of Kahlo's life, sites for examining the framing of Latina bisexual and lesbian identity are engaged. This study concludes that in the commercial portrayal of Kahlo, her persona is sexually racialized, whereas her portrayal in the independent film allows for the construction of a more inclusive and fluid reading of a queer Latina identity.

> "Sites of difference are always already interconnected, their identities produced by mutual interaction in the abyss of textuality. Difference is therefore not just a division but also a connection. The perception of difference is the crossing of the space between in a mutually constitutive moment" (Hill, 1998, p. 91).

The following essay examines the ways in which the life of the Mexican painter, Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), has been portrayed internationally and nationally in two films, specifically addressing the ways in which her sexuality and racialized/ethnic identity are represented. The films compared are *Frida, Naturaleza Viva* (1983, Mexico) by Paul Leduc and *Frida* (2002, USA) by Julie Taymor. Each film differs in their cinematic representations: Leduc's is considered to be an art-film, whereas Taymor's is a commercial film. Further, the created cinematic spaces of both films dispel stereotypes that Latinas are not members of queer communities, including bisexual and lesbian communities. The racialized queering of Kahlo's sexuality is analyzed within this piece. In each film, Kahlo is depicted as Mexican, both nationally and culturally. Each director, the essay will argue, uses film not only as a space for the (de)construction of bisexuality, but as a tool capable of either disrupting or maintaining heterosubjectivity. To do this, the directors deploy methods such as through the use of lighting to represent sexualized "Others". Second, this essay will explore the ways in which the celluloid images of Kahlo mark non-heterosexualized identities, as well as the shared cultural ethnicities within queer Latina communities, specifically Latina lesbians.

The overarching theoretical lens guiding the analytical framework for this essay may be defined as crit-queer-feminist, an organic meshing of critical race, queer, and feminist theories, as well as auto-epistemological or self-experiential ways of knowing. Specifically, a crit-queer-feminist framework emphasizing power relations is used in conjunction with visual discourse analysis in order to

unpack the racialization of sexuality and the sexualization of racial/ethnic identities as they are portrayed within the films. Visual discourse analysis examines "the everyday lives of specific subjects and places represented within visual frames" (England, 2004, p. 296). This framework encourages us to take additional categories of identity, including gender and class, into account. As Gillian Rose, a visual culture methodologist, describes it: "A specific visuality will make certain things visible in particular ways, and other things unseeable, for example, and subjects will be produced and act within that field of vision" (2007, p. 143).

Kahlo's status as an icon did not occur until the 1980s after retrospective showings of her artwork, as well as the appearance of the film *Frida, Naturaleza Viva* (1983, Mexico) by Paul Leduc and a biography *Frida: The Biography of Frida Kahlo*, written by Hayden Herrera (1983). It was not until 2002, however, that the second filming of Kahlo's life would occur, *Frida* (USA), directed by Julie Taymor. Prior to the filming of Leduc's *Frida, Naturaleza Viva*, there were no openly gay-identified films produced or directed in Mexico. His film was viewed as groundbreaking and won several awards in Mexico as well as in other countries. It was bestowed with the Premio Ariel Award for best picture, director, actress, photography, and original argument, and the film is listed within the top 100 films in Mexican cinema.

In comparison, Taymor creates a "politically lightweight Frida" in order to not offend "the popcorn crowd" although Kahlo had finally become a safe topic for American mainstream audiences, according to film critics Joan and Dennis West (2003, p. 39). Additionally, the reviewers indicate that Taymor did not touch upon Kahlo's "dark side" which included her alcoholism, drug addiction and suicide attempts, and the sex scenes are described by the Wests as "lite," titillating "enough for an R rating, but with little serious exploration of Frida's bisexuality" (2003, p. 40). This Hollywood, or *Latinowood*, interpretation of Kahlo's life, as directed by Taymor and starring Salma Hayek, did not match Leduc's success in winning cinematic awards. Latinowood is defined as the racial politics used in typecasting "currently privileged actors of partial Latino heritage" as in the case of Hayek who is of mixed Lebanese and Mexican descent (Beltrán, 2008, p. 249). The film's reliance on Hayek's celebrity status to bring Kahlo into the mainstream audience awareness did result in an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress. The film *Frida*, however, was only awarded Best Makeup and Best Original Music Score at the Oscars. Regardless, Taymor's film did increase cognizance of Kahlo's existence within the mainstream populace, and with it, the visibility of homoerotic relationships and same-sex romantic interests.

Each film brings to light Kahlo's same-sex romantic relationships; however, the manner by which her sexuality has drawn closer scrutiny from a variety of critics. The lead actresses differ in their portrayal of Kahlo. Ofelia Medina is "far more convincing than Hayek in portraying a distressed person

dealing with omnipresent pain" and her countenance "better suggests the mysterious and alluring, hard-edged, almost beauty-almost ugliness, … of the artist" (West, J. and West. D, 2003, p. 41). In contrast, Hayek's portrayal of Kahlo is hyper-sexualized, in conforming fashion to Hollywood's figures of the Latina seductress or Latinized-Marilyn Monroe bombshell. The critic J. Báez has described this process as "hegemonic tropicalization"; it "occurs through the troping of Latinidad as exotic and Other", with signifiers of brown or olive-skin, dark hair and eyes, and a voluptuous body (2007, p. 121).

As Deborah Shaw, a specialist in Latin American cinema, observes, "The biographical documents and self-portraits contrast sharply with the images of Salma Hayek's embodiment of the artist in the film in which there is a shift from physical pain to romantic pain and from the disabled body to the sexualized body" (2010, p. 302). Shaw further states that Kahlo's relationship with Rivera is visually narrated using a "predominantly romantic, heterosexual and conservative lens despite the incorporation of Frida's lesbian and heterosexual affairs" (2010, p. 305). Film critic Ron Briley also agrees with the above analysis affirming that in Taymor's visual narrative, "rather than a revolutionary, libertine, or feminist, Frida is a bourgeois figure who simply wants to settle down, making art and love with Diego Rivera" (2003, p. 75). Lastly, her film is critiqued as "conventionally eroticizing Kahlo's bisexuality" and "never meaningfully exploring emotional or intellectual aspects of her romantic relationships with other women" (Fein, 2003, p. 1262).

IN-BETWEEN: HYBRIDITY AND MESTIZAJE

Siobhan Somerville (2000) argues for a theoretical framework in which queer bodies are not perceived in isolation from racialized bodies. In regards to the fields of queer studies and ethnic studies, Somerville notes the following:

> Both of these interdisciplinary areas have grown as a response to the absence of inquiry into race and sexuality in traditionally bounded disciplines. … Yet at this theoretical and historical juncture, the analogy often drawn … has produced unfortunate effects, including the illusion that they are parallel, rather than intersectional bodies of scholarship. In lesbian/gay studies, questions of race and racialization tend to be subordinate to analyses of sexuality. In scholarship on race, with a few notable exceptions, there has been a general critical tendency to minimize the role of sexuality. (2000, p. 4)

More than ten years after the publishing of Somerville's text, the majority of his analysis unfortunately still rings true, particularly in the field of media production. Queer theorist, Donald Hall (2003) poses the following questions: "What is a body of theory's responsibility to itself? By this, I mean, when theory theorized

about something, to what extent must it/should it clearly abide by or incorporate its own skepticism and interrogations?" (p. 86). I want to join both commentaries from Somerville and Hall because of my commitment to maintaining fluidity in critical-queer theorizing. I see this as necessary for the progressive development of inquires focused on multiple identities. Such hybridized theories create conceptual "in-between" spaces that function as more inclusive ideologies and ways of knowing. For the representations of Frida, this is especially important because they engage discursive voids pertaining to queer communities of color.

Hybridity and mestizaje as theoretical concepts are explained and highlighted by various theorists, such as Anzladuá (1987) and Bhabha (1991), and are used to intellectualize an in-between space often referenced as *napantla* or *third space*. Philosopher Maria Lugones raises hybridity within the context of cultural spaces as occupied by "Latina/Lesbians" which she considers a linguistic oxymoron (2003). In self-reference, Lugones states, "We are also constrained in invisible locations … where our rehearsals and creations leap geographically out of border contestations" (2003, p. 179). Alicia Arrizón (2006), a theorist whose work centers on Latina performativity, refers to the conceptual in-between space as a location site available for constructing and analyzing the cultural politics of queering mestizaje. Arrizón shows how the production of racial hybridity in conjunction with sexual hybridity leads toward the queering of brown bodies. The power dynamics between differing cultures are recognized and conceptualized according to racial/ethnic and sexual identities, and as such, are situated within an inclusive theoretical framework. Hence, the ideology supporting a queering of mestizaje provides "an imagery that brings to mind colonial encounters, forming new subject positions, histories, and cultures ready to be re-construed, re-embodied, and re-visioned" (Arrizón, p. 1). Furthermore, if "representational ambiguity" attaches to the imagery provided by the queering of mestizaje, then the ambiguity or reimagery becomes a strategic tool with "the potential of speaking to different segments" within racialized and sexualized communities or audiences (Valdivia, 2004, p. 5).

Jillian Báez has synthesized the above theoretical concepts within contemporary cinema studies and in regard to what she refers to as the multiplicities of Latinidad and feminism (2007, p. 109). She suggests that "although there have been differing trends in the quantity and quality of Latina/o visibility throughout the course of Hollywood's history, very few scholars have focused on the intersection of gender and Latinidad in mainstream film" (Báez, 2007, p. 110). Báez contextualizes the definition of Latinidad, or Latina/o ethnic consciousness, as an analytical framework by incorporating the following three branches of proposed Latinidad: political Latinidad, commodified Latinidad, and lived Latinidad. Borrowing from this *Latinidad Feminista* framework, of most interest to me here is what she refers to as lived Latinidad, or "a process of identity-making among Latina/os interacting with one another in everyday, local spaces" (Báez, 2001, p. 110). By including lived experiences within local spaces

into the process of identity formation, the expression of queer realities may also be realized. Extending a hybridized-pan-ethnic positioning of identity into one that is also representative of a hybridized-queer Latinidad is can also occur when engaging with visual narratives and analyzing multiple or intersecting identities. This goes beyond the framing of Latinidad as "a social construct informed by the mediated circulation of ethnic-specific community discourses" (Molina Guzmán and Valdivia, 2004, p. 208).

Hollywood's mainstream productions reveal the need for a re-imagined, queer-ethnic lens. Unfortunately, the US film industry is using the "allure of sexual difference" to "court" audiences in ways that are not inclusive of multiple identities and which suppresses the creation of queer commercial spaces (Griffin, p. 15). This is particularly notable in Taymor's *Frida* and will be further analyzed later in the text. Additionally, when US advertisers and marketers specifically target Latina/o audiences, they are presented as "consumers who share Spanish language, conservative values, Latin American cultural practices, and racially ambiguous physical characteristics" (Molina Guzmán, 2006, p. 236). In order to incorporate inclusivity and create awareness within mainstream productions, new guiding theoretical frameworks, such as the ones described above, need to be employed.

QUEERING SEXUAL IDENTITY: BISEXUALITY AS CINEMATIC CAMOUFLAGE

Both films by Leduc and Julie Taymor provide a queer lens onto the life of Frida Kahlo. Each film contributes to the construction of a hybridized sexual identity by drawing upon Frida's bisexuality. Hybridity, in this case, is being applied to the sexual crossings, as performed by the Kahlo character in the Frida films. However, each film engages its viewers differently in the framing of her sexualities. The argument here is one that neither legitimizes nor dispels Kahlo's sexual identity as being bisexual, but rather seeks to widen the lens from which she is envisioned, or imagined, to be inclusive of other queer realities. In effect, what will be dispelled is the traditional manner in which bi-subjectivity, or bisexual ways of being, is approached even within the films' visual languages. Historically, the location of bi-labeled individuals has been limited to heterosexual or gay/lesbian frameworks as scales of comparison, whereby bisexuals "often must choose which features of their structurally fractured identities to emphasize and deny in a social world organized by oppositional categories" (Ault, 1996, p. 174). This essay discusses how both Frida films either visually avert, as in Leduc's version, or reinforce, as Taymor's film demonstrates, this historical mode of representing bi-subjectivity. The following paragraphs convey the ways in which Leduc and Taymor use the filming of scenes and character interactions to engage audiences in the cinematic queering of Kahlo.

Leduc's depictions of scenes with Kahlo and her female lovers are direct, whereas Taymor's directing of the onscreen representations of Kahlo's same-sex

or homoerotic acts are eclipsed by overt heterosexual interactions. As such, in Leduc's version of Kahlo's life, scenes specifically show Kahlo (Ofelia Medina) physically engaging with other women in a sexual manner, including touching breasts and flirtatious smiles. He crafts a cinematic sexual shifting by using bisexual desire as a mechanism for creating hybrid queer spaces that are inclusive of Latina lesbian identities. Consequently, *Frida, Naturaleza Viva* enlists viewers visually with a discourse that expands upon traditional bisexual binaries. There are two important scenes that seem to elicit a queer reading; both occur at the ending of the film. The audience's gaze is not focused on Kahlo's sexual identity, as she is not depicted in explicitly amorous scenes with any men up to this point. One scene comes slightly before Leduc's final sexualized scene showing Kahlo in a hammock physically flirting with her nurse (a reading of this scene will be expanded upon later in the essay). Meanwhile, in addition to the sexual tension created in the above mentioned hammock scene, it also evokes an emotional tension between the two characters, as the only words shared by Kahlo are in song, accompanied by laughter and simultaneous crying in pain. Regarding Leduc's visual narrative, Behar states, "he did not evade the issue of Kahlo's lesbianism, depicting with both passion and humor the love that developed between Kahlo and her nurse toward the end of Kahlo's life" (1989, p. 1046). Argumentatively, this positioning of homoerotic acts toward the film's finale, as well as its avoidance of overwhelmingly heteroerotic scenes, are indicative of a supplementary cinematic widening of the lens, leaving viewers with a queered ending.

Leduc's strategy of erotic desires differs from those scenes in Taymor's Frida that imply same-sex or lesbian desires, because in Taymor's version the actions themselves are only performative in gesture or left to the audience's imagination. This detracts from the queering of Kahlo as the overall erotics and "political possibilities of the very same sites differ" (Griffin, 2008, p. 15). For example, in the first scene that depicts homoerotic desire, Kahlo (Salma Hayek) engages in a seductive dance with Tina Modotti (Ashley Judd), one of Kahlo's famous female lovers. The audience witnesses the two dancing at a party through the ongoing appraisal of the male gaze of the surrounding actors, including the actor who plays Diego Rivera. The scene concludes with a kiss and an amorous smile between the two women. During this scene, Rivera is depicted as jovial, without jealousy either at the thought of Kahlo and Modotti dancing or that their erotically charged dance is publically witnessed by the other partygoers. Furthermore, the dance scene is initiated by a drinking contest and may be disregarded by viewers as trivial or happenstance. Thus, the tone under which bisexuality is highlighted presents intimate homoerotic contact as perceivably nonthreatening to heteronormativity, particularly since Kahlo's romantic relationship with Rivera, as well as with other male lovers, is emphasized throughout the film. This is done intentionally, as Taymor states that she was "blown away by the love affair between Frida and Diego" (Bosley, 2002, p. 1).

Additionally, Taymor used Herrera's biography of Kahlo as a main reference for the film. Within Herrera's work, Rivera is claimed to have "actually encouraged Frida's homosexual affairs," but would not "tolerate his wife's heterosexual affairs" (1983, p. 199).

Rivera's screen presence differs under the direction of Leduc. Rivera's character has fewer scenes overall in comparison to Taymor's rendition, and when he is included within a scene, there is limited physical contact between Rivera and Kahlo. In Taymor's *Frida*, Rivera's character dominates almost every mutually shared scene with Kahlo, and in most cases, he is scripted as touching or holding onto her in an arguably male-dominating fashion. Additionally, when the affair between Kahlo and Leon Trotsky, a Marxist revolutionary, is directed by Leduc, only a brief, emotionally passionate exchange over a letter is shown, whereas, in Taymor's *Frida*, several scenes are dedicated to the affair involving highly sexualized physical interactions. Scenes in Taymor's version are also devoted to Rivera's feelings of betrayal regarding Kahlo's affairs with men, specifically Trotsky, but no references, either visual or oral, are ever made concerning her affairs with women. For example, when Rivera discovers that Trotsky has elected to move out of the Rivera-Kahlo household due to his affair with Kahlo, Rivera laments that Kahlo has broken his heart. The absence of any lengthy visual representation of Kahlo's same-sex relationships within Taymor's film creates an overall insinuation that their existence is not worthy of mention, thus adding to the perception of Kahlo's queerness as minor or nonthreatening.

SCREENING RACE: SEXUALIZING THE "OTHER" AS A QUEERING SCAPEGOAT

The two films also contextualize the queering of racial and ethnic spaces by positioning Kahlo's same-sex interests in varying styles. This may be done by analyzing the difference in how both Leduc and Taymor utilize the politics of location in their visual narration, or visual storytelling, of Kahlo's life.

A visual discourse analysis of the two films reveals how each director represents Kahlo's positioning and politics of location. Without fail, Leduc places Kahlo in Mexico and in her home, specifically her kitchen or gardens, when she engages in same-sex romantic scenes. These scenes are depicted as emotional with raw vulnerability, and are not presented as casual sexual flings. In contrast, Taymor primarily situates Kahlo as being away from Mexico, or in foreign lands, when she *ventures* into same-sex relations. For example, on two occasions, scenes are set in connection to hotels and living the highlife, which alert the audience members into dismissing the longevity and authenticity of Kahlo's relationships with her female lovers. Taymor further exoticizes the homoerotic developments between Kahlo's character and her same-sex companions by provoking her viewers into a racialized discourse. The two main characters who are introduced as Kahlo's lovers are a blonde, upper-class white woman within

the United States who is depicted as being a former lover of Rivera's and a Black woman, namely Josephine Baker, while she is visiting France.

In both settings, one woman is always "Othered" within the sexual union. When Kahlo's character is with the white woman, an emphasis is made on her petite stature and native dress as they are filmed standing side-by-side. She is further exoticized by her sexual partner as being surprisingly more adept than her husband, Rivera, as a Latin lover. The roles of exoticism are reversed when Kahlo is being shown as seducing Baker. The scenes are set so that Kahlo is an audience member viewing a performance by Baker. At the closing of the show, Kahlo takes her to her room. During the love scene, the lens focuses on Baker's black body in contrast to Kahlo's light skinned body with shifting angles, therefore creating a racialized discourse that overplays the homoerotic setting. Rather than portraying a sexually intimate scene between the two characters, the focus is literally blurred contrasted by the sharp lighting of what appears to be disjunctive images produced to represent the filming of two women having sex. The scene ends with Kahlo leaving Baker, who is watching her as she goes behind the revolving glass doors at the hotel's entrance - indicative of Kahlo's easy dismissal of Baker as a sexual object. Thus, the angling of the camera lens in conjunction with the dramatic lighting effects, as well as the scene's ending, contributes to how audience members may perceive this exchange between Kahlo and Baker as the racialization of the sexuality.

FILMING FRIDA: LATINA LESBIAN ICON

In brief, it is difficult to overlook the timeline and the localities of where each *Frida* film was created and by whom, as well as for which audiences. The film, *Frida, Naturaleza Viva*, is an independent film created in the early 1980s by a male, Mexican director for what has been suggested as a *gay* or queer predominately Spanish-speaking audience. In contrast, Taymor's new millennium filming of Kahlo occurred after her life-story was picked up by celebrities including Madonna and Jennifer Lopez. Prior to their interests, "Fridamania" was already well underway with Kahlo being "appropriated by the feminist community" (Behar, 1989, p. 1045). Therefore, by the time Taymor's film came to fruition and by enlarge, as a Hollywood endorsed project, her audience members were mainly projected to be mainstream and residing in the United States.

Debatably, both renditions of *Frida* have assisted in creating queer cinematic spaces that enlist not only the realms of bisexuality, but also encompass pansexual realities, such as those experienced by Latina lesbians. This essay deploys a sense of discord between how Leduc and Taymor have visually represented Kahlo's sexuality by using scenes that either disrupt or support heteronormativity. The ways in which Kahlo's same-sex relationships have been cinematically presented lend themselves to a larger queer audience, namely queer community members who do not necessarily identify as bisexual. Both films also consistently portray Kahlo as a Mexican woman with nationalistic

tendencies and indigenous heritage, thus supporting her unwavering public recognition as a Latina icon. As Isabel Molina Guzmán and Anghard Valdivia imply, "The iconic location of Latinas and their articulation into commodity culture is an inescapable affirmation of the increasing centrality of Latinidad and Latinas to U.S. popular culture" (2004, p. 205). In combination, these two subjective representations of Kahlo's identity, her ambiguous sexuality and racial/ethnic background, manifest into the making of a Latina lesbian icon that is also acceptable to mainstream audiences.

By using Kahlo's self-portraits, as well as replications of photographs, the directors of both films are able to reconstruct an iconic figure that is viewed as *brava* and independent, as well as autobiographic to a set degree in terms of self-representation. Throughout the two films, various scenes represent Kahlo as being androgynous and engendering a butch drag or cross-dressing appearance, however, the significance of how these portrayals are performed greatly differs. One such visual example is drawn from the way that Leduc and Taymor convey differently within the context of staging scenes related to a photograph taken of Kahlo in 1926 where she is dressed in men's clothing for a family portrait (Stellweg, 1992). Leduc's *Frida* depicts Kahlo's character as taking pleasure in donning on men's wear that visually match the above mentioned photo by showing her dancing with girls'/women's dresses while smiling and humming. The scene's sole attention to Kahlo's self-interpretation in terms of gender performativity is what creates a third space or in-between space for the queering of her identity. Comparatively, Taymor's rendering of a similarly staged scene has Kahlo's character only briefly witnessing herself in a mirror before arriving for the family photo, wherein the camera lens captures the disapproving look expressed by the actress playing Kahlo's mother, Matilda. Within this scene, the message being sent to the audience members is one in which gender-bending, as demonstrated by cross-dressing, is culturally frowned upon. Kahlo's gender disruption is twofold as the portrayed disapproval from her mother represents a directed critique of breeching proscribed femininity, while simultaneously assisting in the creation of a *brava* character persona that is read by audiences as queer.

Other examples of when Kahlo's character use of clothing is varied within the two films occur during scenes that are categorically artistic, sexual or political in quality. For instance, Leduc's directing of a political scene has Kahlo's character dressed in men's attire as she carries banners and marches in a crowd, thereby making her genderless to some degree both in appearance and in action. In contrast, the void of political voice or active political agency rendered by Taymor's Kahlo limits her cross-dressing performance to artistically dubbed scenes and sexualized scenes. Accordingly, each film weighs the scenes that are deemed "appropriate" to dress Kahlo's character in gender-bending fashion. For example, both directors use Kahlo's painting titled *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* from 1940 (The Museum of Modern Art, April 12, 2011) to support a specific

sexualized scene, signaling the separation, and later divorce, from Rivera after she discovers that he is having an affair with her sister, Cristina. The socio-cultural connection of this particular art piece resides with what feminist art historian Margaret A. Lindauer explains as the passive growing of hair being equated to femininity and the active cutting of hair as representing masculinity (1999). She states the following, "In relation to Latin American codes, Kahlo's 'cropped hair' is sexually significant" (Lindauer, 1999, p. 46). Resultantly, Kahlo's dress in each film alludes to an androgynous or gender-bending self-representation through the use of men's wear combined with a short hair style.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As an overview, this essay engages in a discussion regarding how the filming of Frida Kahlo's life has created hybridized-queer cinematic spaces by comparatively analyzing the two films, *Frida, Naturaleza Viva* (1983) by Paul Leduc and *Frida* (2002) by Julie Taymor. Global representations and markets, as well as media discourse, around the subject of Kahlo impact the "visual readiness" of each film. As such, the first portion of the analysis delves into the (de)construction of bisexuality as a method by which each director conveys Kahlo's sexual persona within the framework of heteronormativity. It is argued that under Leduc's direction, Kahlo's life story is situated in an openly queer space without the reliance, or emphasis, on her past relationships with men, namely Diego Rivera. In essence, his filming of *Frida* readily presents a queering of Kahlo, thereby providing the audience with multiple avenues to interpret her same-sex romantic relationships and homoerotic interests. This supports an understanding of presenting Kahlo's sexuality as pansexual or ambiguously queer, as there is no indication that she ever personally adopted the label of bisexual. The importance of creating this cinematic opening of queer space is that it allows for a new viewing of an iconic persona that is inclusive of her multiple identities, especially pertaining to sexuality.

The second portion of this essay examines how the representations Kahlo's onscreen homoerotic acts are racialized, as well as brought into the public sphere, within Taymor's Hollywood version of *Frida* in ways that are distinguishable from Leduc's film. These variations in the portrayals of Kahlo's same-sex romantic relationships guide the films' visual consumers either toward a direct witnessing of non-heteronormativity or cloud it by diffusing sexuality through the process of Othering. This point of discussion is used to demonstrate the ways in which it is cinematically possible to convey a queering of personas, and how it depends upon the marketing expectations of the film. The value in Leduc's queering lies in the possibilities it extends to the creation of inclusive spaces pertaining to the conceptualization of lived sexual realities.

In conclusion, a case is made that viewers across all borders, personally and figuratively at the international and national levels, are able to take up Kahlo as a Latina lesbian icon. That is to say, that Kahlo's cinematic presentations as a

Mexican woman representing sexual diversity, allows for Latina audience members to connect culturally, and perhaps ethnically, depending upon their-our backgrounds. This, in combination with how Kahlo's sexuality is depicted in film, creates a queer space for the inclusion of Kahlo as an iconic figure for Latina lesbians, as well as for Latinas who do not identify as heterosexual. The relevance in her portrayal as a fluid and non-static sexual, as well as ethnic or class-based, figure is the potential for the multiple interpretations of Kahlo to assist in the formation of an all-encompassing, or universal, Latina icon.

Suggestions for future studies would include a cross analysis of sexual identity and the politicizing, as well as the de-politicizing, of Kahlo via film and other performative representations, such as in theatre. Respectively, in the films by Leduc and Taymor, the political identity of Kahlo is either heightened or diminished. For example, in Leduc's version of Kahlo's life, she is shown as actively participating in political events, such as protest marches and community gatherings. Conversely, in Taymor's *Frida*, there are no obvious scenes tying Kahlo to political activism of any kind apart from following Rivera's lead in agreeing to house Trotsky. Both films however, as previously mentioned, do address the romantic relationship between Kahlo and Trotsky. Therefore, using the filming of Frida Kahlo to promote further discussion on how political identity, as well as gender and class, intersects with a sexualized racial/ethnic identity is feasible. In essence, Frida Kahlo, whether by her own representation constructions or by present-day visual cultural productions, "is able to speak from several places at once and, in so doing, to center the marginal, respond from both inside and outside the hegemonic structures, and question the norm by imbuing it with that which is 'other'" (Block and Hoffman-Jeep, 1998, p. 11). Specifically, these studies would promote an even wider opening of cinematic queer space by defusing set parameters in relation to gendered expectations of leadership and gender-biased acts of political engagement.

Lastly, Kahlo's multiple subjectivities, as demonstrated through ethnic and queer performativity, assist in the continual formation of progressive theoretical constructs focusing on categories of intersectional identities. To quote Latin American historicist, Steven Volk, "Frida manages to reclaim the centre," and as such, provides access to a hybridized-queer imaginary (2000, p. 183). As such, Kahlo moves us toward a heightened understanding through the continual analysis of her work and representations of the impact in the positionality engendered by an iconic persona and the portrayal of identity. By creating cinematic spaces that permit new and inclusive "viewings" or insights, thus blurring the edges of theorized realities, the potential surrounding the queering of identities occurs by members of multiple audiences.

Works Cited

Anzalduá, G. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza.* San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

Arrizón, A. *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2006.

Ault, A. "Ambiguous Identity in an Unambiguous Sex/Gender Structure: The Case of Bisexual Women." In M. Storr, ed. *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1996: 167-185.

Báez, J. "Towards a *Latinidad Feminista*: The Multiplicities of Latinidad and Feminism in Contemporary Cinema." *Popular Communication*, 5 (2), 2007: 109-128.

Behar, R. "Frida" (film). *American Historical Review*, 94 (4), 1989: 1044-1046.

Beltrán, M. "Mixed Race in Latinowood: Latino Stardom and Ethnic Ambiguity in the Era of *Dark Angels*." In M. Beltrán & C. Fojas, eds. *Mixed Race Hollywood*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2008: 248-268.

Beltrán, M., & Flojas, C. *Mixed Race Hollywood.* New York, NY: New York University Press, 2008.

Block, R. & Hoffman-Jeep, L. "Fashioning National Identity: Frida Kahlo in 'Gringolandia'." *Woman's Art Journal*, 19 (2), 1998: 8-12.

Bosley, R. "A Dynamic Portrait: *Frida*, photographed by Rodrigo Prieto, AMC and directed by Julie Taymor, offers a vibrant vision of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo." *American Cinematographer: The International Journal of Film and Digital Production Techniques*, October, 2002: 1-4.

Briley, R. "Frida" [film]. *Film & History*, 33 (2), 2003: 75-77.

England, J. "Disciplining Subjectivity and Space: Representation, Film and its Material Effects." *Antipode*, 2004: 295-321.

Fein, S. "Film Reviews." *The American Historical Review*, 108 (4), 2003: 1261-1263.

Griffin, H. "Your Favorite Stars, Live on Our Screens: Media Culture, Queer Publics, and Commercial Space." *The Velvet Light Trap*, 62, 2008: 15-28.

Hall, D. *Queer Theories*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Herrera, H. *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983.

Hill, J. "Crossing the Water: Hybridity and Ethics in 'The Crying Game'." *Textual Practice*, 12 (1), 1998: 89-100.

Huddart, D. *Homi K. Bhabha*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2006.

Leduc, P. (Director). *Frida, Naturaleza Viva* [Film]. Mexico, DF: En Pantalla Producciones Internacionales, 1983.

Lindauer, M. *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1999.

Lugones, M. *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2003.

Molina Guzmán, I. and Valdivia, A. "Brain, Brow, and Booty: Latina Iconicity in U.S. Popular Culture." *The Communication Review*, 7, 2004: 205-221.

Molina Guzmán, I. "Mediating 'Frida': Negotiating Discourses of Latina/o Authenticity in Global Media Representations of Ethnic Identity." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 23 (3), 2006: 232-251.

The Museum of Modern Art. *The Collection*. Retrieved April 12, 2011 from http://www.moma.org/collection/object/php?object_id=78333.

Rose, G. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretations of Visual Materials* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007.

Shaw, D. "Transforming the National Body: Salma Hayek and 'Frida'." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 27, 2010: 299-313.

Somerville, S. *Queering the Colorline: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000.

Stellweg, C. *Frida Kahlo: La Cámara Seducida*. Mexico, DF: La Vaca Independiente, 1992.

Storr, M. *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1999.

Taymor, J. (Director). *Frida* [Film]. Santa Monica, CA: Miramax Home Entertainment, 2002.

Valdivia, A. "Latinas as Radical Hybrid: Transnationally Gendered Traces in Mainstream Media." *Global Media Journal*, 3 (4), 2004: 1-21.

Volk, S. "Frida Kahlo Remaps the Nation." *Social Identities*, 6 (2), 2000: 165-188.

West, J. & West, D. "Frida" [film]. *Cineaste*, 28 (2), Spring, 2003: 39-41.