

FILMIC FICTION: JORGE LUIS BORGES'S "LAS RUINAS CIRCULARES"

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Little, if any, critical writing takes up the question of the complex relationship of mutual exchange which occurs between film and contemporary Spanish American fiction. Several articles have been written regarding cinema as a theme in the works of writers such as Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Manuel Puig and others, but virtually no bibliography exists which examines how narrative structures could be informed by film. Much has also been written about Spanish American writers' exposure to films, mostly as an anecdotal footnote to criticism about their texts.¹ More interesting to me is that many of these writers began writing fiction as an outgrowth of their frustrated dreams to work in movies. In fiction they could realize their fantasies left unfulfilled by incursions into the world of cinema.²

In creating filmic texts contemporary Spanish American writers are encouraging new ways of reading. Their texts induce readers to think differently about language and about literature. These writers violate the laws of genre imposed by their predecessors. They push the limits of the novel to show just how far the novel can go. They also use language in a way that is revolutionary, not in a political, but rather in a literary sense. Readers are compelled to "see" the texts, not as transparent descriptions of another reality, but as artifices, graphic configurations, visual compositions of letters which simultaneously denote and exist as artistic objects. Guillermo Cabrera Infante's interjection of a page that is the mirror image of the one facing it in *Tres tristes tigres* serves as a clear example; other configurations are perhaps less obvious, but equally as compelling, as we shall see.

In both film and modern fictional literature, time is spatialized into what amounts to a perpetual present. The illusion of the passage of time is created through verb tenses in literature, through flashbacks in film. Some

argue that literature has easier access to the past than does film because of the flexibility of tense. Yet the past in literature is still an illusion, as much as is the past implied in film through the flashback, since the reality described through literary fiction is just that: fiction; it exists only between the pages of the book.

The principle of montage, borrowed from the cinema, informs much of contemporary fiction on a variety of levels. Some self-referential literary texts, on a thematic level, characterize the artistic process in terms of montage. Others derive their structure from a montage of fragments of previous texts through intertextuality. Still others are constructed of disembodied narrative voices interconnected through montage. In all of these texts, fragments of an image, echoes of previously existing texts, and multiple narrative voices collide and combine to form a new text whose whole is equal to yet greater than the sum of its parts.

Many fictional texts create strong visual images through language, giving rise to probably the most controversial aspect of the film/literature debate: the contrast between visual and verbal forms of expression. Many critics argue that the visual images presented in film are more compelling and direct than those conveyed by literature through description. Yet, in much of contemporary fiction, the visual images projected into reader memory (on that "inner screen of the mind's eye" described by Herbert Read) are analogous to film images.³ The mental images which the reader creates, consciously or unconsciously, while reading can be just as specific as the film image.

Tom Conley has focused on the fusion of the two forms of expression (visual and verbal) by studying the visual nature of writing as it appears in films. In *Film Hieroglyphs* Conley emphasizes the dual role of writing: acting as language to communicate (e.g. the names of the actors in a film), but also as a visual spectacle yielding deeper insights when we examine the configuration of letters across the screen. Following Conley, then, we can reconsider fictional written texts in the way they are configured graphically, fusing both the verbal and the visual on the same plane. In film, according to Conley, "writing can serve as a *mise-en-abyme* or interior duplication that sums up the seemingly greater problems

¹One must be careful to distinguish the type of films which filled these writers' childhood dreams: they were not indigenous productions, but the fabrications of Hollywood of the nineteen thirties and forties. Carlos Fuentes, Manuel Puig, García Márquez, Cabrera Infante all were taken with the films of Humphrey Bogart, Rita Hayworth, Orson Welles, John Houston and the like. Each of them may have seen films produced in their native countries, but their common experience, the one which transcended national boundaries, was that of the Hollywood "dream factory."

²One could also argue that these writers' preference for literary expression over cinematic reflects their social and economic condition, a condition which prohibited them from making the kind of films that would satisfy their personal need for artistic expression. Making movies is an expensive enterprise, especially when one has high standards, and few Latin Americans can afford to make the kind of films they desire.

³According to Herbert Read, film is "imagination embodied. . . . If I were asked to give the most distinctive quality of good writing, I should express it in this one word: VISUAL. Reduce the art of writing to its fundamentals and you come to this single aim: to convey images by means of words. But to convey images. To make the mind see. To project on to that inner screen of the brain a moving picture. . . . That is a definition of good literature. . . . It is also a definition of the ideal film" (231).

of character and intrigue within a given shot" (xvi). I hope to show that the same can be said of the graphic configurations of writing in contemporary Spanish American literature, beginning with Borges.

As Edna Aizenberg has pointed out, one of the central characteristics of postmodern fiction is "the end of the unified subject which leads to the blurring of distinctions between fact and fiction" (10). This is certainly true of Spanish American "boom" literature, beginning with Borges. It is also true of early cinema, which is why the films of D.W. Griffith, with their close-ups and parallel editing, provoked such a strong reaction from their audiences.

Richard Peña claims that Borges

is a rare example of a major Latin American intellectual figure working before 1960 who showed any real interest in the cinema at all. . . . Among the older generation of Latin American writers, perhaps only Vicente Huidobro demonstrated a similar level of interest in the new medium. (230)⁴

Alexander Coleman has pointed out the influence of the likes of Chaplin, King Vidor, Eisenstein, John Ford, Hitchcock and Orson Welles in Borges's texts (100). According to Coleman, Borges

saw, observed and 'read' [these films] as possible strategies for his own work—that is, stories and poems which in many ways can be read as if the blank page were a screen . . . Borges saw in film . . . a counter-reality . . . one that he wished to gain for literature itself. Film gave to Borges a teleology for his fictions, a way of summarizing the world and the cosmos in a series of refracted and disconnected images, yet unified in the viewer's and the reader's imagination . . . Borges' art is one of montage, of juxtaposed planes. (100)

Raymond Bellour has found Borges's story "The Mirror of Ink" to be an allegory for cinema. For Bellour, the pool of ink held by the tyrant in the story is like a movie screen which reflects disassociated images. "De sorte que cet espace du miroir devenu lieu de projection puisse être d'autant plus naturellement à la fois un écran et une page blanche" (64, emphasis added). Ultimately, for Bellour, literature and cinema merge together in this story:

Son tour de magie propre, et son invention d'écrivain, ici, est donc de souligner, de façon à la fois mythique, ludique et historique, l'émergence d'un dispositif global, à l'intérieur duquel mots et images, littérature et cinéma, échantent leurs propriétés. (64)

In "Las ruinas circulares" Borges has created a text whose visual clues and graphic configurations do not point quite as overtly to cinematographic principles as does "The Mirror of Ink," yet nonetheless suggest these same principles, albeit indirectly. In "Las ruinas

circulares" just as Bellour has indicated in "The Mirror of Ink," "l'acte d'écrire, ou celui de produire et de voir des images . . . est une seule et même chose"(63).

Many critics have pointed out the way in which "Las ruinas circulares" can be understood as a metaphor for artistic creation.⁵ Jaime Alazraki sees it as "una expresión más de ese tópico borgeano de origen agnóstico que ve el mundo como un sueño de una divinidad que es a su vez otro sueño" (295). His view is shared by many including Stanton Hager and Dan Smulian. So far, however, no one has suggested a link between "Las ruinas circulares" and the cinema.

Already in the Prologue of *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* Borges advises his readers that, "En 'Las ruinas circulares' todo es irreal" (11). This description is ironic when we consider that all fiction, verbal or visual, entails the creation of an unreality, the displacement of the real world in order to create a space with its own laws, its own codes. The unmediated images of dreams are a reflection of that unreality. While dreams have no semiotic basis and therefore cannot be considered in the same light as narrative fiction, the images contained in them are not unlike the images found in film. While some may claim that dreams are based in reality, they are, nonetheless, made up of images which do not always remit to objects in the real world. Maureen Turim has shown that dream sequences figured prominently in early cinema (24-25). Because of film's reliance on images it can imitate the unmediated images which make up a dream. Cinema uses dreams, then, as a mechanism for (re)creating (un)reality. Given the links established between dream and cinematic images, one can reread Borges's story, taking into consideration its other aspects such as spatial relationships and linguistic signs, in order to reveal the story's cinematic nature. In rereading the story and following its visual clues, we find that "Las ruinas circulares" examines the artifice, the unreality of fiction and of reality as a linguistic creation.

The story opens with a paradox. "*Nadie* lo vió desembarcarse en la únanime noche, *nadie* vió la canoa de bambú sumiéndose en el frango sagrado, pero a los pocos días *nadie* ignoraba que el hombre taciturno venía del Sur. . ." (61, emphasis added). According to the logic of the real world, if *nadie* saw the man, *nadie* could tell of his arrival, and if *nadie* saw the canoe, *nadie* could later say that it was made of bamboo. The fact that a text exists which describes this arrival indicates that *alguien* had to have witnessed it, if not physically, at least in his/her imagination. By the same token, if *nadie* ignored the facts surrounding the identity of the man who arrived, it would not be necessary to include them in the narration, yet they are there, implying that *alguien* did ignore them. The *nadie* who saw the narrated incidents cannot be the same *nadie* who ignored them, yet the two are fused in one same sign. The *nadie* who witnessed the events and

⁴For an excellent discussion of Huidobro and the cinema see René de Costa.

⁵See Carmen R. Rabell, Guillermo Arango, and Geoffrey Green.

subsequently narrates them must be the narrator while the *nadie* who ignored them and needs *alguien* to relate them is the reader.⁶ Where this fusion occurs, then, we find the locus of the discursive act.

Cristine de Lailhacar in "The Mirror and the Encyclopedia" has defined how signs function in the texts of Borges:

The sign, in particular the written letter or combination of written letters such as the name *Borges* [or *nadie*], stands in ordinary perception for an already existing object. In Borges' universe—a universe made of books—the sign not only precedes but creates the eventually existing object. The thing is mirrored before it exists. (156)

Thus another paradox presents itself: *nadie*, as sign, precedes and creates an eventually existing entity, *nadie*, that cannot exist (it is no one); it therefore marks both a presence and an absence. This graphic fusion of two entities into one sign mirrors the fusion of dreamer and dream-creation which occurs in "Las ruinas circulares."

The man who arrives at the circular temple ruins comes from the South, from a town that is upstream. When he completes the task of dreaming another, he sends his creation to another broken down temple, just like the one where he has labored, which is downstream, in the North. When the dreamer receives news of "un hombre mágico en un templo en el Norte capaz de hollar el fuego y de no quemarse" (68), he thinks of his "son." But when we compare the spatial descriptions surrounding each figure, we discover that they coincide: both are in the North (the dreamer "came from the South," implying he is now in the North), both are downstream (the dreamer came from a town upstream, implying he is now downstream), both inhabit circular temple ruins, both are immune to the ravages of fire. The two locations as well as the two "men" are separate but equal. They are juxtaposed in such a way that one dissolves cinematographically into the other. Time is spatialized through the coincidence of two "generations."

The importance and nature of the dream in "Las ruinas circulares" has already been debated elsewhere. For Ana María Barrenechea, the dream acts as a symbol of unreality.⁷ For Guillermo Arango, on the other hand, the dream in "Las ruinas circulares," "más que sueño, puede considerarse como una perpétua vigilia . . . creadora" because of its mental lucidity (252). Whether the magician's dream is conscious or unconscious, it *does*

create a being whose existence seems real but is a mere simulacrum of reality. The dreamer's projected image of a man seems real, just as he himself does; this confusion is not unlike that described by Juri Lotman as one of the pitfalls of viewing cinema, which he describes in Chapter One of *The Semiotics of Cinema*. Both film and fiction create a simulacrum of reality through a *montage* of images. Films are the product of editing. Even though some films (à la Pudovkin) may try to approximate reality through seamless editing, they are still a montage of two-dimensional images.

Even a film like Hitchcock's *Rope* is pieced together. The joints are artfully concealed, but the director was limited by his medium and had to construct his film from pieces of celluloid that were only as long as his camera could hold. Borges's dreamer also realizes the limits of his medium. He cannot create a whole being in one "shot," even when he tries to start by using an already existing being: one of his students.

The way in which the dreamer creates his "son" through a montage of images is cinematic and acts as a metaphor for artistic creation in general. "El propósito que lo guiaba no era imposible, aunque sí sobrenatural. Quería soñar un hombre: quería soñarlo con integridad minuciosa e imponerlo a la realidad" (62). In order to carry out his task, the man must forget his own existence in favor of the one he is trying to bring forth. "[S]i alguien le hubiera preguntado su propio nombre o cualquier rasgo de su vida anterior, no habría acertado a responder" (2). The creation takes on more importance than its author as the latter begins to exist merely to service the former: "(ahora también las tardes eran tributarias del sueño, ahora no velaba sino un par de horas en el amanecer)" (63-64).

But the dreamer's first attempts to create an oneiric being fail since he tries to undertake too comprehensive a task. Upon failing he understands that he cannot create an integrated whole but that instead his creation can only be constructed of fragments—first the heart, then other organs and, finally, the skeleton, the eyelids and the hair. The result is a complete being, a montage of fragments which, like words and images, have a separate and individual existence which can remit to another level of reality outside the text.

The juxtaposition of the two *nadies* at the beginning of the text serves to foreshadow the juxtaposition of the two dream-creations which are, in reality, *nadies* since they have no objective physical existence but reside only in the imagination of another. This coincidence also exists between the writer and reader. Never physically present simultaneously, both, however, are present (if only as "phantoms" or "imagnations") at the moment meaning is created within the text.

In another context Borges has written of the bond between reader and writer:

If the pages of this book offer some felicitous line or other, may the reader pardon me the discourtesy of having claimed it first. Our inconsequential selves [nuestras nadas] differ but little: the circumstances

⁶Carmen Rabell has found a parallel between the dreamer ("hombre X") whose existence is suggested by the end of the story and both the author ("Borges") and the reader. "En 'Las ruinas circulares' el lector, junto al escritor, es autor de la trama. . . . El hecho de que el narrador finalice el relato introduciendo la existencia del hombre X . . . introduce también el momento de la escritura y de la lectura como elementos literarios en el relato" (98).

⁷As cited in Arango 249.

that you are the reader and I the writer of these exercises is accidental and irrelevant. (1923, *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Translated and cited by Suzanne Jill Levine)⁸

Thus, for Borges, reader and writer are separated only by "accidental and irrelevant circumstances," but have much in common, just like the dreamer and his creation in "Las ruinas circulares."

According to Bellour,

Borges fait constamment du double, des doublures, un principe actif. Il exprime par là un certain état de la culture saisi par la reprise et la répétition. Il définit aussi la nature même de l'acte d'écrire, lié à l'image, et singulièrement à l'image de soi. *Borges et moi, L'autre*, comme il écrit si bien.

"Las ruinas circulares" is cinematographic not only because it contains visual images "seen" by the reader, but also their creation. The reader watches as the dreamer imagines his "son"; simultaneously the reader sees that creation embodied in the word "nadie." *Nadie* acts both as signifier and grapheme in the story; when read narratively, it refers to both the man who arrives at the sacred temple and to the being he creates, both of which elide away upon the discovery that they are but dream creations of another. When read visually, however, the two *nadies* dissolve into one another, duplicating within the text the fusion which occurs between text and reader. On all levels, this story functions cinematographically by inscribing visual elements in the writing itself in addition to creating visual images and problematizing the process of artistic creation in terms of montage.

Jorge Luis Borges's story "Las ruinas circulares," then, provides a compelling example of how the visual and the verbal interact. In this text the juxtaposition of the two "nadies" and the space(s) they inhabit is not unlike a cinematic lap dissolve fusing two spaces and two times. We also find in this text an emphasis on images: the way the dreamer creates a being (or, indeed, the way the writer creates a text) is through imagining images, dreaming images; through the process of montage he puts those images together and creates a being, an artistic construct, which is his so-called "son." That same creative process is also mirrored in the language used, in the actual writing of the text. The use of the word "nadie"—the grapheme—to describe both the narrator and the reader visually represents within the text the artistic, narrative process.

Borges is perhaps the first Spanish American writer to use cinematic devices to create a text which reflects his view of the fractured nature of reality. In doing so, his story underscores as well the dual nature of language—both its plasticity and its transparency. This preoccupation with language, as well as the desire to represent a fragmented reality through fiction, is shared by other Spanish American writers who follow Borges. The writers of the so-called "boom" have created a literary style

of metafiction which calls attention to language and seeks new forms of literary expression by combining intertextual elements from other realms of artistic creation. In developing new modes of fiction, these writers demand new modes of interpretation from their readers. A cinematographic approach to these texts affords the reader a deeper understanding of what is at stake both artistically and linguistically in contemporary Spanish American fiction.

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⁸The editorial remark "[nuestras nadas]" belongs to Levine.

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Many critics have pointed out the way in which "Las ruinas circulares" can be understood as a metaphor for artistic creation.^[5] Jaime Alazraki sees it as "una expresión más de ese tópico borgeano de origen agnóstico que ve el mundo como un sueño de una divinidad que es a su vez otro sueño" (295). His view is shared by many including Stanton Hager and Dan Smulian. So far, however, no one has suggested a link between "Las ruinas circulares" and the cinema.

Already in the Prologue of *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* Borges advises his readers that, "En 'Las ruinas circulares' todo es irreal" (11). This description is ironic when we consider that all fiction, verbal or visual, entails the creation of an unreality, the displacement of the real world in order to create a space with its own laws, its own codes. The unmediated images of dreams are a reflection of that unreality. While dreams have no semiotic basis and therefore cannot be considered in the same light as narrative fiction, the images contained in them are not unlike the images found in film. While some may claim that dreams are based in reality, they are, nonetheless, made up of images which do not always remit to objects in the real world. Maureen Turim has shown that dream sequences figured prominently in early cinema (24-25). Because of film's reliance on images it can imitate the unmediated images which make up a dream. Cinema uses dreams, then, as a mechanism for (re)creating (un)reality. Given the links established between dream and cinematic images, one can reread Borges's story, taking into consideration its other aspects such as spatial relationships and linguistic signs, in order to reveal the story's cinematic nature. In rereading the story and following its visual clues, we find that "Las ruinas circulares" examines the artifice, the unreality of fiction and of reality as a linguistic creation.

The story opens with a paradox. "*Nadie lo vió desembarcarse en la únanime noche, nadie vió la canoa de bambú sumiéndose en el frango sagrado, pero a los pocos días nadie ignoraba que el hombre taciturno venía del Sur. . .*" (61, emphasis added). According to the logic of the real world, if *nadie* saw the man, *nadie* could tell of his arrival, and if *nadie* saw the canoe, *nadie* could later say that it was made of bamboo. The fact that a text exists which describes this arrival indicates that *alguien* had to have witnessed it, if not physically, at least in his/her imagination. By the same token, if *nadie* ignored the facts surrounding the identity of the man who arrived, it would not be necessary to include them in the narration, yet they are there, implying that *alguien* did ignore them. The *nadie* who saw the narrated incidents cannot be the same *nadie* who ignored them, yet the two are fused in one same sign. The *nadie* who witnessed the events and subsequently narrates them must be the narrator while the *nadie* who ignored them and needs *alguien* to relate them is the reader.^[6] Where this fusion occurs, then, we find the locus of the discursive act.

Cristine de Lailhacar in "The Mirror and the Encyclopedia" has defined how signs function in the texts of Borges:

The sign, in particular the written letter or combination of written letters such as the name *Borges* [or *nadie*], stands in ordinary perception for an already existing object. In Borges' universe—a universe made of books—the sign not only precedes but creates the eventually existing object. The thing is mirrored before it exists. (156)

Thus another paradox presents itself: *nadie*, as sign, precedes and creates an eventually existing entity, *nadie*, that cannot exist (it is no one); it therefore marks both a presence and an absence. This graphic fusion of two entities into one sign mirrors the fusion of dreamer and dream-creation which occurs in "Las ruinas circulares."

The man who arrives at the circular temple ruins comes from the South, from a town that is upstream. When he completes the task of dreaming another, he sends his creation to another broken down temple, just like the one where he has labored, which is downstream, in the North. When the dreamer receives news of "un hombre mágico en un templo en el Norte capaz de hollar el fuego y de no quemarse" (68), he thinks of his "son." But when we compare the spatial descriptions surrounding each figure, we discover that they coincide: both are in the North (the dreamer "came from the South," implying he is now in the North), both are downstream (the dreamer came from a town upstream, implying he is now downstream), both inhabit circular temple ruins, both are immune to the ravages of fire. The two locations as well as the two "men" are separate but equal. They are juxtaposed in such a way that one dissolves cinematographically into the other. Time is spatialized through the coincidence of two "generations."

The importance and nature of the dream in "Las ruinas circulares" has already been debated elsewhere. For Ana María Barrenechea, the dream acts as a symbol of unreality.^[7] For Guillermo Arango, on the other hand, the dream in "Las ruinas circulares," "más que sueño, puede considerarse como una perpétua vigilia . . . creadora" because of its mental lucidity (252). Whether the magician's dream is conscious or unconscious, it *does* create a being whose existence seems real but is a mere simulacrum of reality. The dreamer's projected image of a man seems real, just as he himself does; this confusion is not unlike that described by Juri Lotman as one of the pitfalls of viewing cinema, which he describes in Chapter One of *The Semiotics of Cinema*. Both film and fiction create a simulacrum of reality through a *montage of images*. Films are the product of editing. Even though some films (à la Pudovkin) may try to approximate reality through seamless editing, they are still a montage of two-dimensional images.

Even a film like Hitchcock's *Rope* is pieced together. The joints are artfully concealed, but the director was limited by his medium and had to construct his film from pieces of celluloid that were only as long as his camera could hold. Borges's dreamer also realizes the limits of his medium. He cannot create a whole being in one "shot," even when he

tries to start by using an already existing being: one of his students.

The way in which the dreamer creates his "son" through a montage of images is cinematic and acts as a metaphor for artistic creation in general. "El propósito que lo guiaba no era imposible, aunque sí sobrenatural. Quería soñar un hombre: quería soñarlo con integridad minuciosa e imponerlo a la realidad" (62). In order to carry out his task, the man must forget his own existence in favor of the one he is trying to bring forth. "[S]i alguien le hubiera preguntado su propio nombre o cualquier rasgo de su vida anterior, no habría acertado a responder" (2). The creation takes on more importance than its author as the latter begins to exist merely to service the former: "(ahora también las tardes eran tributarias del sueño, ahora no velaba sino un par de horas en el amanecer)" (63-64).

But the dreamer's first attempts to create an oneiric being fail since he tries to undertake too comprehensive a task. Upon failing he understands that he cannot create an integrated whole but that instead his creation can only be constructed of fragments—first the heart, then other organs and, finally, the skeleton, the eyelids and the hair. The result is a complete being, a montage of fragments which, like words and images, have a separate and individual existence which can remit to another level of reality outside the text.

The juxtaposition of the two *nadies* at the beginning of the text serves to foreshadow the juxtaposition of the two dream-creations which are, in reality, *nadies* since they have no objective physical existence but reside only in the imagination of another. This coincidence also exists between the writer and reader. Never physically present simultaneously, both, however, are present (if only as "phantoms" or "imagnations") at the moment meaning is created within the text.

In another context Borges has written of the bond between reader and writer:

If the pages of this book offer some felicitous line or other, may the reader pardon me the discourtesy of having claimed it first. Our inconsequential selves [nuestras nada] differ but little: the circumstances that you are the reader and I the writer of these exercises is accidental and irrelevant. (1923, *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Translated and cited by Suzanne Jill Levine)^[8]

Thus, for Borges, reader and writer are separated only by "accidental and irrelevant circumstances," but have much in common, just like the dreamer and his creation in "Las ruinas circulares."

According to Bellour,

Borges fait constamment du double, des doublures, un principe actif. Il exprime par là un certain état de la culture saisi par la reprise et la répétition. Il définit aussi la nature même de l'acte d'écrire, lié à l'image, et singulièrement à l'image de soi. *Borges et moi, L'autre*, comme il écrit si bien.

"Las ruinas circulares" is cinematographic not only because it contains visual images "seen" by the reader, but also their creation. The reader watches as the dreamer imagines his "son"; simultaneously the reader sees that creation embodied in the word "nadie." *Nadie* acts both as signifier and grapheme in the story; when read narratively, it refers to both the man who arrives at the sacred temple and to the being he creates, both of which elide away upon the discovery that they are but dream creations of another. When read visually, however, the two *nadies* dissolve into one another, duplicating within the text the fusion which occurs between text and reader. On all levels, this story functions cinematographically by inscribing visual elements in the writing itself in addition to creating visual images and problematizing the process of artistic creation in terms of montage.

Jorge Luis Borges's story "Las ruinas circulares," then, provides a compelling example of how the visual and the verbal interact. In this text the juxtaposition of the two "nadies" and the space(s) they inhabit is not unlike a cinematic lap dissolve fusing two spaces and two times. We also find in this text an emphasis on images: the way the dreamer creates a being (or, indeed, the way the writer creates a text) is through imagining images, dreaming images; through the process of montage he puts those images together and creates a being, an artistic construct, which is his so-called "son." That same creative process is also mirrored in the language used, in the actual writing of the text. The use of the word "nadie"—the grapheme—to describe both the narrator and the reader visually represents within the text the artistic, narrative process.

Borges is perhaps the first Spanish American writer to use cinematic devices to create a text which reflects his view of the fractured nature of reality. In doing so, his story underscores as well the dual nature of language—both its plasticity and its transparency. This preoccupation with language, as well as the desire to represent a fragmented reality through fiction, is shared by other Spanish American writers who follow Borges. The writers of the so-called "boom" have created a literary style of metafiction which calls attention to language and seeks new forms of literary expression by combining intertextual elements from other realms of artistic creation. In developing new modes of fiction, these writers demand new modes of interpretation from their readers. A cinematographic approach to these texts affords the reader a deeper understanding of what is at stake both artistically and linguistically in contemporary Spanish American fiction.

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[1]One must be careful to distinguish the type of films which filled these writers' childhood dreams: they were not indigenous productions, but the fabrications of Hollywood of the nineteen thirties and forties. Carlos Fuentes, Manuel Puig, García Márquez, Cabrera Infante all were taken with the films of Humphrey Bogart, Rita Hayworth, Orson Welles, John Houston and the like. Each of them may have seen films produced in their native countries, but their common experience, the one which transcended national boundaries, was that of the Hollywood "dream factory."

[2]One could also argue that these writers' preference for literary expression over cinematic reflects their social and economic condition, a condition which prohibited them from making the kind of films that would satisfy their personal need for artistic expression. Making movies is an expensive enterprise, especially when one has high standards, and few Latin Americans can afford to make the kind of films they desire.

[3]According to Herbert Read, film is "imagination embodied. . . . If I were asked to give the most distinctive quality of good writing, I should express it in this one word: VISUAL. Reduce the art of writing to its fundamentals and you come to this single aim: to convey images by means of words. But to convey images. To make the mind see. To project on to that inner screen of the brain a moving picture. . . . That is a definition of good literature. . . . It is also a definition of the ideal film" (231).

[4]For an excellent discussion of Huidobro and the cinema see René de Costa.

[5]See Carmen R. Rabell, Guillermo Arango, and Geoffrey Green.

[6]Carmen Rabell has found a parallel between the dreamer ("hombre X") whose existence is suggested by the end of the story and both the author ("Borges") and the reader. "En 'Las ruinas circulares' el lector, junto al escritor, es autor de la trama. . . . El hecho de que el narrador finalice el relato introduciendo la existencia del hombre X . . . introduce también el momento de la escritura y de la lectura como elementos literarios en el relato" (98).

[7]As cited in Arango 249.

[8]The editorial remark "[nuestras nadas]" belongs to Levine.