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Reflection and Response of the New Latin American Cinema Movement: Feminism in the Cinema of Lucrecia Martel

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**RESPONSE AND REFLECTION OF THE NEW LATIN AMERICAN CINEMA:
FEMINISM IN THE CINEMA OF LUCRECIA MARTEL**

An Honors Thesis

Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Rhetoric
Bates College

In Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts

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Lewiston, Maine
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I. INTRODUCTION

The film industry is a male dominated domain. The overwhelming majority of directors, producers, cinematographers, and industry leaders are men. Not only has this led to a culture of exclusion in the filmmaking industry, it has meant that problematic representations of women have appeared on silver screens with damaging frequency since Annabelle Moore appeared performing a seductive “Serpentine Dance” in the first ever motion picture produced in 1895. A study of feminism and film is valuable in the context of any world region, however, Latin America’s exceptionally rich cinematic tradition combined with the fact that it experiences some of the most deeply rooted gender inequality of any part of the world makes it an area especially worthy of examination.

History reveals a propensity for revolution in Latin America. While the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the Cuban Revolution of 1959, for example, had platforms and reforms which affected women, Latin American revolutions have systematically downplayed issues of gender inequality. No exception to this trend is the New Latin American Cinema movement, which emerged just after the Cuban Revolution. The filmmakers of the New Latin American Cinema sought to expose the inequalities of social class; of bourgeois oppressors and colonizers versus the common man. With only a few exceptions, the films produced during the movement continued to perpetuate archetypal and problematic representations of women. The movement's manifestos completely lack mention of women in any capacity, and are fraught with exclusionary, masculinized language. The New Latin American Cinema movement excluded women despite the fact that women were, of course, making films. Until the 1980’s, however – by some accounts just past the reach of the New Latin American Cinema movement – notable female filmmakers were “few and far between” (Rodríguez, 2016).

Lucrecia Martel is an Argentine screenwriter and director. Her first feature film, *La ciénaga* [*The Swamp*] was released to great acclaim in 2001. Two more; *La niña santa* [*The Holy Girl*] (2004), and *La mujer Sin cabeza* [*The Headless Woman*] (2008), have followed with similar success, resulting in Martel's lionization as one of Latin America's greatest modern day filmmakers. Martel has reached this status in spite of creating films which criticize the patriarchal hegemony of the Argentine middle class, and expose gendered class and racial/ethnic inequalities.

Though Martel began making films long past any proposed culminating year for the New Latin American Cinema, reflections of the movement are present in her work. These noteworthy reflections are coupled with a feminist response to the NLAC's problematic representations and exclusion of women. This thesis provides an analysis of Martel's work through the theoretical lens of feminist film theory, and the comparative, historical lens of the New Latin American Cinema -- constructed of historical background, manifestos, scholarly literature, and films of the movement. The result of this analysis is an articulation of the ways in which Martel uses and transforms elements of the New Latin American Cinema; maintaining some of its radical practices and philosophies, while simultaneously subverting patriarchal norms in order to construct an alternative, female-centric and sophisticatedly non-idealized breed of feminist film.

I. HISTORY

While the catalysts and influences which led to the birth of the New Latin American Cinema are manifold, they are unified by a theme of revolution. Scholars cite different years as the movement's official beginning, ranging from 1951 (Hart, 32) to 1967 (Pick, 1). Unanimously cited, however, is the Cuban Revolution of 1959 as the primary catalyst to the movement. Yet in the decade leading up to this climax, stirrings of the NLAC were beginning. In the wake of World War II, European filmmakers revolutionized filmmaking with their cinematic "antibodies" -- films and practices which "counteracted Hollywood's dominance" (Hart, 32). The Italian Neorealist and French New Wave movements had the most direct influence on the development of the NLAC. This is evidenced in part by the fact that some of the notable filmmakers of the movement studied at the Centro Sperimentale of Italy (Fernando Birri, Julio García Espinosa, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Néstor Almendros, and Gustavo Dahl, among others), and the Institut des hautes études cinématographiques of France (including Margot Benacerraf, Ruy Guerra, Eduardo Coutinho, and Paul Leduc). Others studied in London and Moscow, but these numbers are much lower (Rodríguez, 161).

Italian New Realism emerged just before the French New Wave, with approximate beginnings in 1943 and 1948, respectively. Many similarities unify the two movements, most importantly in their defying of Hollywood's conventions. The distinction can be made between the two, however, in identifying Italian Neorealism with its namesake and French New Wave with art cinema. The defining features of neorealism are, notes Paul Schroeder Rodríguez, "on-location shooting with direct sound and ambient light, frequent use of nonprofessional actors, and linear storylines that paint a sympathetic picture of the daily life struggles of poor people, "while art cinema "is a more amorphous category. Broadly speaking, it refers to films that value

technical quality, reject classical cinema's generic conventions, and see the director as the author (auteur) of a unique, expressive, and poetic work of art marked by ambiguity" (Rodriguez, 132). French New Wave too favored on-location shooting, hand-held cameras, as well as "elliptical editing favoring the long take and composition-in-depth" (Hart, 33). The idea of auteurship, however, emerged from the French New Wave, specifically born from André Bazin's idea of "camera-stylo" (camera-pen), and flushed out into "la politique des auteurs" (auteurs' policy) in the prominent French film review *Cahiers du Cinéma*. On the convergence of neorealism and art cinema in Latin America, Paul Schroder Rodríguez writes:

While neorealism and art cinema are distinct -- neorealism is didactic, moral, and utilitarian, and art cinema tends to be poetic, ambiguous in its morality, and therefore hard to instrumentalize -- they nevertheless shared the assumption, widespread in Latin American film clubs at the time, that cinema could help improve society by raising viewers' awareness of seldom-seen aspects of reality. They also shared a common rejection of studio cinema's aesthetic and thematic conventions, as well as a commitment to social reform that remained surprisingly consistent until the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, and longer in some cases... Italian Neorealism's multivalence -- at once indexical and immanent -- thus supports the thesis of convergence, in Latin American cinema of the 1950's, between socially progressive politics and poetic expression, between neorealism and art cinema. (133)

The French New Wave, along with more minor influence from the British New Wave and other like-minded European cinematic movements, had great impact on the development of the New Latin American Cinema, yet the connection between the Italian Neorealists and the birth of the NLAC in Cuba is most evident. Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea,

Cuban filmmakers at the forefront of the NLAC and authors of two of the seminal manifestos of the movement, traveled to Rome's Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in the early 1950's to enroll in courses. There, they were immersed in the center of Italy's Neorealist movement, learned both technical skills and principles of theory, and met such filmmakers as Vittorio De Sica, whose *Ladri di biciclette* (1948) -- now the most widely known Italian Neorealist film -- had been released just years before. Alea wrote home to a friend that his courses were "impressive and comprehensive" and in 1953, Alea and García Espinosa left Rome to begin their filmmaking careers at home in Cuba (Hart, 33).

In 1955, Alea and García Espinosa released their first work since returning from Rome: *El mégano*, a documentary which depicts the lives of charcoal workers living in marshlands to the south of Havana. While splitting from the Italian Neorealists by producing a work of documentary rather than fiction, the influence of Alea and García Espinosa's time studying in Rome is visible in the film -- non-professional actors were used, and the everyday realities of the lower classes was its focus. *El mégano* is also exemplary of the brand of revolutionary film which was beginning in Latin America. The film depicts the exploitation of the charcoal workers, which finally led to their decision to rebel. Unfortunately, the life of *El mégano* was short when the film was confiscated by the Batista government.

European cinematic "antibody" movements helped to inspire the New Latin American Cinema movement, but identifying them as anything more than a piece of the equation is incorrect. While the Cuban Revolution of 1959 was the greatest catalyst of the movement within Latin America as a region, prior developments in Bolivia during the early 1950's are often overlooked. The Movimiento Revolucionario Nacionalista (National Revolutionary Movement) party made major changes in Bolivia's government, including declaring universal suffrage,

reducing military spending, and nationalizing several large industries. These changes led to a period of national prosperity, which allowed for the development of such institutions as the Instituto Boliviano Cinematográfico (Bolivian Cinemagraphic Institute) in 1953, which was committed to producing “expository social documentaries focused on the needs of the country’s marginalized groups” (Rodríguez, 167).

In 1958, the International Festival of Documentary and Experimental Film took place in Montevideo. Filmmakers from all around Latin America, such as Argentina’s Fernando Birri, Bolivia’s Jorge Ruiz, and Chile’s Patricio Kaulen were in attendance. All of these filmmakers were working on producing documentary film in a similar genre; films with a focus on social exploration and a breaking with hegemonic cinematic standards. They were “producing images of a rarely seen social reality” (Peck, 16). The 1958 festival allowed these filmmakers from across all of Latin America to share work and ideas, an experience which undoubtedly fostered motivation and inspiration.

In the same year as the the International Festival of Documentary and Experimental Film in Motevideo, Argentine filmmaker Fernando Birri -- an attendant of the festival -- released his documentary *Tire dié* (*Throw Me a Dime*) (1959), which is now widely viewed as one of the classics of Latin American documentary (Rich “An/other,” 278). Similar to *El mégano* (1955), *Tire dié* is a documentary with distinctively neorealist elements. Unlike *El mégano*, however, *Tire dié* was able to reach a fairly wide audience, and its imagery of “children as they run along the parapet of a metal bridge, begging for alms from well-to-do passengers in a moving train” (Rodríguez, 168), enjoys iconic status. *Tire dié* and *El mégano* are often cited alongside one another as the two most notable films produced during the infancy of the New Latin American Cinema.

Fidel Castro and the 26th of July Movement finally ousted the Batista government on January 1st, 1959, and a socialist state was put into place in Cuba. Much has been written about the far reaching effects of the Cuban Revolution -- throughout all of Latin America and much of the world. Stephen Hart goes so far as to argue that the New Latin American Cinema likely would not have gotten off the ground were it not for the Cuban Revolution -- “a political event that changed the face of Latin American politics forever” (Hart, 37). Paul Schroeder Rodríguez elaborates on the impact of the Cuban Revolution on Latin American cinema, stating that:

...the Cuban Revolution represented for many Latin Americans a model for the region to liberate itself from the physical and cultural poverty engendered by North American imperialism. The feeling, moreover, was that this liberation was at hand, for if a small country like Cuba, dependent as it had been on U.S. capitol, could liberate itself through a popular revolution and go on to eliminate illiteracy and drastically reduce poverty in five years, than what could larger and far richer countries such as Argentina and Brazil not accomplish? The sudden and by all accounts impressive transformation of Cuban society during the 1960s had a profound impact on how Latin American filmmakers saw their profession. Most rethought their roles, for if society was in effect in the throes or on the cusp of radical transformation, as in Cuba, then their function should be to document this transformation in film and/or to use film to help bring about the transformation.

(Rodríguez, 171)

The Revolution of 1959 brought with it a golden era of film for Cuba. Prior to 1959, Cubans had a great appetite for cinema. Throughout the 1950's, the country saw an average of

1.5 million moviegoers per week, which is particularly notable given the country had a population under 7 million, and many Cubans lived in rural areas with no access to a movie theater. While enthusiasm for cinema was high, a national film industry was nearly non-existent until 1959. Between 1930 and 1958, only eighty full-length features were produced in Cuba (King, 145). Post-revolution, however, everything changed.

Between 1959 and 1987, Cuba made 164 feature-length films (112 fiction, 49 documentary, and 3 animation), 109 of these in color; 1,026 shorts (16 fiction and 1,010 documentary), 545 in color; and 1,370 newsreels. These films could be seen in 535 cinemas equipped with 35mm projectors or in 905 locations equipped with 16mm projectors. In 1987 more than sixty-one million visits were made to the movies and spectators had a choice of about 120 or 130 releases a year. Of these, about 7 per cent are Cuban films, but they attract 20 per cent of the market share. (King, 146)

Influenced by Lenin in many ways, Castro supported the Leninist belief that cinema is the most important of the arts (Hart, 38), and so on March 24th, 1959 -- mere months after the revolution -- established the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematograficos (Cuban Institute of Cinematic Art and Industry, often shortened to ICAIC). The ICAIC was an entirely state-funded organization. It was also the aim of the ICAIC to use film to educate its population, which had an extremely high illiteracy rate, thus making film a more viable tool for education than printed material. The ICAIC, therefore, helped to define the main objectives and principles of the New Latin American Cinema: to produce and use film as a means of education, revolution, and social exposition, with a primary focus on breaking the chains of colonialism and North American and European capitalism.

Of the founding members of the ICAIC, Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea were the only two with any technical filmmaking training or experience, and so they directed the first two films which came out of the Institute: *Historias de la Revolución* [*Stories of the Revolution*] (1960) directed by Alea, and *Cuba Baile* [*Cuba Dances*] (1960) directed by García Espinosa. Both were designed with the purpose of providing an example for upcoming filmmakers, rather than as important stand-alone films. As there was no time to set up a formal film school, these movies served as educational tools for the young directors of the New Latin American Cinema.

By the early 1960's, revolutionary cinematic movements inspired by the Cuban Revolution and the ICAIC were appearing in other Latin American countries. Perhaps the most well-defined of these movements was the Brazilian Cinema Novo (New Cinema), which drew upon Neorealist cinematic practices, and produced a journal, *Metropolitano*, which bares resemblance to the French New Wave's *Cahiers du Cinema*. Of the films produced by the Cinema Novo, *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* [*Black God, White Devil*] (1964) has received the most critical attention, and won the International Review Prize in the Cannes film festival. It was, according to Rodríguez film which "announced, more than any other, that a new cinema was afoot in Latin American and indeed the world" (Rodríguez, 172). *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* explores the contrasting disruptive and liberating functions of violence. The film follows Manuel, a ranch hand, and Rosa, his wife, on a violent journey which begins when Manuel's boss attempts to withhold earnings from his workers. Manuel murders the boss, and so begins a bloody journey for Manuel and Rosa as they attempt to find a path outside the confines of their society. The primary concept the film seeks to address, according to the film's director, Glauber Rocha, is the difference between "exploitative" and "liberatory," or "reactionary" and

“revolutionary” violence. On the matter, Rocha writes, “From Cinema Novo it should be learned that an esthetic of violence, before being primitive, is revolutionary. It is the initial moment when the colonizer becomes aware of the colonized. Only when confronted with violence does the colonizer understand, through horror, the strength of the culture he exploits” (60).

Argentina’s Nueva Ola, while emerging roughly parallel to the NLAC around 1960, was distinct in many ways from the cinematic movements occurring in other parts of Latin America. The young filmmakers of the Nueva Ola “adopted the cinema as a vehicle of personal expression... their films were narratively experimental, personal, and cosmopolitan and exploited the streets of Buenos Aires as locales for almost autobiographical self-expression” (López , 143). While an important cinematic movement, the Nueva Ola cannot truthfully be categorized as a unique Argentine pocket of the NLAC. As John King writes, the Nueva Ola was somewhat short-lived, as “Later political radicalization...would brush aside their [practitioners of the Nueva Ola] achievements, demanding of filmmakers a clear political consciousness” (84).

According to Zuzana Pick, the New Latin American Cinema officially began in 1967 at the First International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema in Viña del Mar, Chile. The festival “promoted extensive exchanges between filmmakers from Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Cuba, Chile, Uruguay, and Venezuela, most of whom met there for the first time” (Pick, 19). It was here, Pick believes, that a continental project was born, uniting the smaller, disparate, yet similarly minded national movements under the banner of a movement for all of Latin America. In a reflection on the event, Alfredo Guevara -- director of the ICAIC at the time -- wrote that it was at this festival that “we stopped being independent or marginal filmmakers, promising filmmakers or amateurs experimenting and searching, in order to discover what we were without yet knowing: a new cinema, a *movement*” (Guevara, quoted in Pick, 20). At the end of the

festival, filmmakers signed a declaration which was summarized by Ambrosio Fornet as having stated the following objectives:

- 1) To contribute to the development and reinforcement of national culture and, at the same time, challenge the penetration of imperialist ideology and any other manifestation of cultural colonialism; 2) to assume a continental perspective toward common problems and objectives, struggling for the future integration of a Great Latin American Nation; and 3) to deal critically with the individual and social conflicts of our peoples as a means of raising the consciousness of the popular masses. (Fornet, quoted in Pick, 20-21)

Thus, the New Latin American Cinema by that name was officially born and its objectives were understood by filmmakers across the continent.

As with any cultural movement, it is hard to pinpoint the moment when the New Latin American Cinema as it was understood at its inception slowed and gave way to new cinematic movements. Stephen Hart gives the movement an early end date of 1975, while other scholars discuss films made as late as 1990 as part of the movement. The transitions in cinema in the late 80's and early 90's coincide with returns to democratic forms of government in many Latin American countries -- Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and the end to the one-party monopoly of Mexico's PRI. Changes in national sentiment, political structure, and funding for the arts due to these transitions in government brought about related change in Latin American cinema.

While Italian Neorealism was a great influence and catalyst to the New Latin American Cinema, the two movements differed significantly in the area of definition. The term Italian Neorealism was applied to the films of the movement only after they had been made. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the New Latin American Cinema, as previously discussed, was quite well defined starting in its early years, and the many manifestos written by filmmakers

throughout the course of the movement provide a rich and detailed context in which to situate the films of the NLAC. To this end, a complete analysis of the products of the movement necessitates a discussion of both text and film.

“Hacia un tercer cine” (Towards a Third Cinema) is often considered the foundational manifesto of the movement. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, the Argentine filmmakers who directed the highly successful 1968 documentary *La hora de los hornos* [*The Hour of the Furnaces*] wrote “Hacia un tercer cine” in 1969. The manifesto supports a “clandestine, subversive, “guerrilla” and “unfinished,” cinema that radically counteracts the hegemony of Hollywood and European capitalist production and distribution practices” (M. T. Martin, 17). Solanas and Getino argue that those who have been subject to imperialism and neocolonialism must promote and develop culture “for us and by us” (36), or in other words must work towards the “decolonization of culture” (37). “Just as they are not masters of the land upon which they walk, the neocolonialized people are not masters of the ideas that envelope them” (37). For these reasons, Solanas and Getino see cultural, artistic, cinematic revolution as a necessary part of all decolonization and revolution.

While “Hacia un tercer cine” promotes developing anti-hierarchical, alternative cinema, an examination of the semantics of the manifesto reveal an explicit masculine -- and therefore exclusionary -- bias. Most obvious is the fact that not once in the manifesto is the word “she” “her” “hers” or “woman” used, rather, all of the masculine versions of these pronouns. For example:

A través de su acción el intelectual debe verificar cuál es el frente de trabajo en el que racional y sensiblemente desarrolla una labor más eficaz. Determinado el frente, la tarea que le corresponde es determinar dentro de él cuál es la trinchera del enemigo y dónde y

cómo ha de emplazar la propia. (36) *[The intellectual must find through **his** actions the field in which **he** can rationally perform the most efficient work. Once the front has been determined, **his** next task is to find out within that front exactly what is the enemy's stronghold and where and how he must deploy his forces.]*

“Para imponerse, el neocolonialismo necesita convencer al pueblo del país dependiente de su inferioridad. Tarde o temprano el hombre inferior reconoce al hombre con mayúsculas; ese reconocimiento significa la destrucción de sus defensas. Si quieres ser hombre, dice el opresor, tienes que ser como yo, hablar mi mismo lenguaje, negarte en lo que eres, enajenarte en mí.” (37) *[Sooner or later, the inferior **man** recognizes **Man** with a capital M; this recognition means the destruction of **his** defenses. If you want to be a **man**, says the oppressor, you have to be like me, speak my language, deny your own being, transform yourself into me.]]*

Not only are exclusively masculine pronouns used, but explicitly masculine sexualized verbs are also utilized frequently.

“Si en la situación abiertamente colonial la penetración cultural es el complemento de un ejército extranjero de ocupación, en los países neocoloniales, durante ciertas etapas aquella penetración asume una prioridad mayor.” (38) *[If in an openly colonial situation cultural **penetration** is the complement of a foreign army of occupation, during certain stages this **penetration** assumes major priority.]*

“Existe de parte del neocolonialismo un serio intento de castrar, digerir las formas culturales que nazcan al margen de sus proposiciones.” (39) [*Neocolonialism makes a serious attempt to castrate, to digest, the cultural forms that arise beyond the bounds of its own aims.*]

Beyond the use of these explicitly masculine words, the entire piece utilizes military analogies and rhetoric. While some might argue it essentialist to claim that military language is directly masculine, it is undeniable that women have historically been excluded from the military world (and there were no women in Latin American armies in 1969), thus making its concepts and words inadvertently male.

One of a multitude of examples:

“Lo más valioso que posee son sus herramientas de trabajo, integradas plenamente a sus necesidades de comunicación. La cámara es la inagotable expropiadora de imágenes-municiones, el proyector es un arma capaz de disparar 24 fotogramas por Segundo.” (50) [*His most valuable possessions are the tools of his trade, which form part and parcel of his need to communicate. The camera is the inexhaustible expropriator of image-weapons; the projector, a gun that can shoot 24 frames per second.*]

The rhetoric used by Solanas and Getino helps to reveal the masculine biased and exclusionary nature of the New Latin American Cinema movement. Stepping back to examine the greater message of “Hacer un tercer cine” through a feminist lens, one is able to see a gaping paradox. Solanas and Getino confront and attack issues of hierarchy, of exclusion from a system, of the

subversion of a huge group of people within the world of cinema, and yet not once acknowledge the fact that these are the exact issues which all women filmmakers face. In fact, the authors not only ignore the issue of gender equality in filmmaking; their text works to further exclude women from the discourse, as evidenced by the authors' language.

Also written in 1969 was Julio García Espinosa's work entitled "Por un Cine Imperfecto" ("For an Imperfect Cinema"). In the piece, the former film student at the Centro Sperimentale in Italy, founding member of the ICAIC, and co-director/director (respectively) of *El mégano* (1955) and *Cuba Baila* (1960) supports a revolution of art. "Espinosa's essay rejects the technical perfection of Hollywood and European cinema and calls for 'an authentically revolutionary artistic culture' in which, drawing on popular art, filmmaker and (active) spectator are co-authors, and the problems and struggles of ordinary people are the raw material for an alternative and 'imperfect' cinema" (M. T. Martin, 18).

Espinosa concerns himself with the interaction between the creator and the spectator, noting that for far too long art has been produced by a minority for a majority. Into this argument he weaves a discussion of science and technology, observing that the arts and the sciences have oftentimes been at odds with one another, a conflict he sees as unproductive and unjustified. According to Espinosa, science and technology will allow art to be given back to the masses, and it is only through this "act of social justice" that we can "recover... the true meaning of artistic activity" (72). On a more specific level, Espinosa questions the value of film schools, wondering, "Is it right to continue developing a handful of film specialists?" (78). Towards the end of the manifesto, Espinosa unpacks his notion of "imperfect cinema." "Imperfect cinema finds a new audience in those who struggle, and finds its themes in their problems" (80) he writes. "We maintain that imperfect cinema must above all show the process which generates the problems..."

To show the process of a problem... is to submit it to judgment without pronouncing the verdict” (81). Espinosa concludes by stating that, “The only thing it [imperfect cinema] is interested in is how an artist responds to the following question: What are you doing in order to overcome the barrier of the ‘cultured’ elite audience which up to now has conditioned the form of your work?” (82).

As is to be expected, “Por un Cine Imperfecto” shares many commonalities with “Hacia un tercer cine,” criticizing Western and European hegemony, espousing the value of alternative modes of production, and examining the societal and cultural significance of cinematic art. Espinosa draws attention to the elitist and exclusionary nature of filmmaking, yet just as in the case of Solanas and Getino, makes no mention of the unanimous exclusion of women. While Espinosa’s language is less aggressively masculine than that of Solanas and Getino, he too uses exclusively male pronouns, and references all filmmakers and artists as “men” and “man.”

Nearly a decade later in 1988, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (*El mégano* (1955), *Historias de la Revolución* (1960)), penned “Dialéctica del Espectador” (“The Viewer’s Dialectic”) which “extends Espinosa’s concerns about the relation of the cinema to the spectator and society in post revolutionary Cuba to its mobilizing role in the ideological struggle against ‘reactionary tendencies’ in a socialist society, and, more importantly, to shaping the social process itself as a ‘guide for action’ in which the spectator has an ‘active role’” (M.T. Martin Vol.1, 18).

Gutiérrez Alea focuses his writing on the fictional feature film, and its complex and nuanced strengths and weaknesses as a form. The fictional feature-length film, according to Alea, can “obstruct viewer’s spiritual development” (119) and serve only to “meet the exploiting class’ needs” (128) if not executed and examined properly. If, however, the film seeks to engage the viewer -- to take them from the contemplative passive to the active -- a feature film can serve

to change the spectator's view of reality, and cause them to take "practical action." It is therefore vital, Alea writes, that the filmmaker is aware that "the response one wants to arouse in the spectator is not only that which is elicited during the show, but also that which is elicited vis-a-vis reality" (128).

No aberration from the two manifestos previously discussed, Alea makes no mention of the exclusion or exploitation of women in the world of cinema, nor does he stray from the conventional "he/him/his/man/men" language. Listing nearly all imaginable examples of exclusion in the world of film besides that of women, he writes,

In the capitalist world -- and in a good part of the socialist world -- the public is conditioned by specific conventions of film language, by formulae and genres, which are those of bourgeois commercial filmmaking. This occurs so often that we can say that cinema, as a product originating from the bourgeoisie, almost always has responded better to capitalism's interests than to socialism's, to bourgeois interests more than to proletarian ones, to a consumer society's interests more than to a revolutionary society's interests, to alien more than to non-alienation, to hypocrisy and lies more than to the profound truth... (114-115)

Also important to note is the "genderlessness" of Alea's imagined spectator, which in reality implies a male spectator, as any exploration of gender is ignored, and therefore the "dominant" of the two is to be assumed.

It appears that by focusing so intently on class inequality and the hegemony of the bourgeois neocolonial class, the filmmakers of the New Latin American Cinema were blinded to the fact that they -- male filmmakers within a male biased and exclusionary system -- were exacting the same domination over women as the imperialist countries were over the developing.

While fighting for the voices of the “Third Cinema,” they were ignoring, excluding, and silencing those of half the population of potential film artists.

There were several notable exceptions to the exclusionary, often sexist, films and practices of the New Latin American Cinema. *Araya* (1959), is an important film in both the history of the New Latin American Cinema, and as one of the first films of the movement to be directed by a woman. The documentary depicts the lives of workers in a salt mine on the coast of Venezuela. According to Rodriguez, *Araya* was “The first film of the NLAC to draw on [Sergei] Eisenstein’s legacy” (169) -- the influential Soviet director who is often credited with the development of montage in film. Furthermore, *Araya* won the International Critics Prize at Cannes in 1959. “Unfortunately, marginalized as a woman director and as an artist who would not compromise with commercial cinema, Benacerraf did not make another film” (King, 217).

Humberto Solas’ 1968 film *Lucía*, a product of the ICIAC, contains within it three distinct episodes, each with a Cuban woman by the name Lucía as its protagonist. The first takes place in 1895 during the Cuban War of Independence. Lucía, a member of the Aristocracy, falls in love with a Spaniard, and reveals to him a rebel hideout (her brother is involved with the rebellion). She is betrayed by her lover, and a bloody massacre ensues. At the culmination of the episode, she shoots and kills the Spaniard, exacting revenge. In the second episode, “Lucía 1933,” Lucía is again an upper class woman who falls in love with an outsider -- this time a Cuban rebel named Aldo. Lucía joins the rebel cause (to the degree she is able as a woman), and although their attempts to overthrow their dictator are successful, Aldo is killed in the end, and Lucía is left pregnant and alone. “Lucía 196?” is the culminating episode, and depicts post-revolution life through the final Lucía. Lucía 3 is a lower-middle class woman married to the highly machista Tomás. Lucía desires freedom from her oppressive marriage, and writes a letter

to her husband (an important nod to the literacy campaigns enacted by the new government) announcing her separation. Yet ultimately, the separation is never final as “The film oscillates between tenderness and violence in the couple as epitomised in the final scene where the two characters meet again, both hugging and fighting” (Amiot, 111). *Lucía* is both progressive and conservative, and in its unoriginal and sometimes problematic depictions of women through the three Lucía’s, cannot be categorized as a feminist film. All three Lucía’s, after all, are defined solely through their respective relationships with men. However, the film bares recognition as one of the few films which present a vision of Cuban history (and Cuban idealism post-revolution) through the experience of women. As Julie Amiot notes, “Lucía offers a specific image of Cuban social reality in a historical perspective. Making a woman the central figure allows Solas to illustrate the evolution of an oppressive system through its most oppressed element” (Amiot, 116).

De Cierta Manera [One Way or Another](1974), directed by Cuban Sara Gomez, is the most widely discussed of the New Latin American Cinema’s feminist exceptions. María Luisa Bemberg’s *Camila* (1984), though less directly tied to the NLAC because of its genre, has also received a great deal of critical attention. Due to the volume and quality of work on these two film, my discussion of *De Cierta Manera* and *Camila* can be found in the literature review.

With the exception of *De Cierta Manera*, *Retrato de Teresa [Portrait of Teresa]* (1979), directed by Pastor Vega, is likely the most progressive and widely discussed film of the NLAC which explores gender inequality. According to Julianne Burton-Carvajal, “*Portrait of Teresa* as the high point in the (predominantly heterosexual, predominantly male-authored) national [Cuban] cinematic exploration of gender issues” (306). The film explores gendered double standards in relation to divisions of labor, cultural and political involvement, and extra-marital

relationships through its protagonist Teresa and her husband Ramon. The release of *Retrato de Teresa* left a lasting impression on Cuban society. Myra Vilasis, a director of the ICIAC recalls:

We should remember the polemic caused by the exhibition of Portrait of Teresa. The polemic embraced the broadest sectors of society. The equalities of the Cuban woman became a theme of public discussion, outside the home. Teresa, as a worker, found a very important interlocutor, a fundamental element of our society, the working-class woman. From one day to the next, Teresa became the *image* of the Cuban woman, typifying her conflicts. (quoted in King, 159)

The films of the New Latin American cinema exposed realities and gave voice to individuals who had long been silenced. Unfortunately, gender inequality was not one of the injustices championed by the NLAC, despite affecting half of the population of Latin America. The political and cinematic influence of the movement, however, is worthy of veneration.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will begin by surveying writing on the place of women in the New Latin American Cinema, then move on to discuss Argentina's most notable women directors of the last several decades -- María Luisa Bemberg and Lucrecia Martel. Lastly, I will survey the pre-existing literature on feminism and gender in Martel's three feature-length films. This literature review does not include all work on the topics explored. It was my goal, however, to discuss the most relevant of these sources, and to provide an accurate representation of the varying views and methodologies present within the canon.

Women in the New Latin American Cinema

A rare finding amongst literature on the New Latin American Cinema, Zuzana Pick's chapter "Gendered Identities and Femininity" from her 1993 book *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project* directly highlights the gender inequality of the movement. The New Latin American Cinema, she notes, "has generally overlooked women's issues," and "by underscoring class as the primary instance of social relations, the films of the New Latin American Cinema have rarely taken into account gender-specific forms of social and political oppression." Beyond simply overlooking women's issues, "the films of the movement have perpetuated if not explicitly endorsed traditional images of women" (66), she writes. Rather than laying out these problematic practices and representations, however, Pick focuses on the rare exceptions -- female filmmakers of the movement and films that present positive representations of women.

Pick centers her discussion around four films and attaches each to a specific topic: *El hombre, cuando es el hombre [A Man, When He Is A Man]* (1982), directed by Chilean Valeria

Sarmiento (focusing on machismo); *Mujer transparente [Transparent Woman]* (1990), a composite film by several Cuban directors (a view of femininity); *Camila* (1984) by Argentina's María Luisa Bemberg (on reviewing women's history); and lastly *Frida: Naturaleza Viva [Frida: Living Nature]* (1984) by Mexican director Paul Leduc (on identity and representation).

Pick writes:

These films call attention to female agency in the re-imagining of gendered subjectivities by focusing on the romantic ideals that regulate gender relations (*A Man, When He Is a Man*) and the liberating power of female introspection (*Mujer Transparente*), sexuality (*Camila*), and creative expression (*Frida: Naturaleza Viva*). These films have introduced a much-needed feminist perspective into the New Cinema of Latin America and contested the exclusion of gender issues from struggles for social change. (96)

While referencing three out of the four films in Pick's analysis, B. Ruby Rich's "An/Other View of New Latin American Cinema" takes a less direct approach to the issue of gender in the New Latin American Cinema. Rich's discussion is based in the history of the movement, as she argues that the New Latin American Cinema of the 1960's is very different from that of the 1980's, with the first segment focused on "exteriority" and the latter on "interiority." One of the effects of this shift is that it has "opened up the field to women" (281). The essay, however, is not directly focused on this idea; rather it is one important defining feature of this new era within the NLAC.

Rich compares and contrasts films from the first half of the movement to those produced during the 1980's, laying evidence for her claim that an ideological shift occurred during the course of the movement, causing its films to focus less on "the reclaiming of the dispossessed and with the portrayal of the sweep of history," as they did during the movement's early years,

and instead “turning away from the epic towards the chronicle, a record of time in which no spectacular events occur but in which the extraordinary nature of everyday is allowed to surface” (281). This change in focus has allowed “emotional life” to be seen “as a site of struggle and identity equal to those more traditional sites by which the New Latin American Cinema was once, and continues to be, defined” (286). It is in these spaces that women’s voices -- both as directors and within films themselves -- can grow their power. As women have been systematically excluded from so much of history, revolution, and reform -- the axes upon which the early NLAC spun -- a movement away from these focal points allowed for the heightened inclusion of women in the movement.

De cierta manera (One Way or Another) (1974), directed by Cuba’s Sara Gómez (the first woman and first black woman to direct a feature film in Cuba, and the first black woman to direct a feature film in Latin America), comes up in the academic discussion of the New Latin American Cinema with a frequency that suggests its status as one of the movement’s seminal films. Arguably, it is also the only of these iconic films to be directed by a woman. While Matilde Landeta’s *La negra Angustias* (1949) and the composite work *Mujer transparente* (1990) also receive critical attention (though less than *De cierta manera*) each exists at such a far reach of the movement’s time span so to often be viewed as a bookend. Likely due in part to its lionization, *De cierta manera* appears in several works as a focal point or microcosm for discussion of gender in the New Latin American Cinema. *De cierta manera* is further worthy of special consideration, as it one of the only -- if not the only -- film from the New Latin American Cinema movement which has been discussed by the giants of feminist film theory.

Marina Díaz López’s chapter “*De cierta manera*” in the 24 Frames Series’ edition *The Cinema of Latin America* does not set out to examine gender in the New Latin American

Cinema, but rather is a specific examination of the film itself. By nature of the context in which the film was produced (Gómez was a beloved student of Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea at the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry), the director's work (one of her previous documentaries was not released, likely due to its explicit feminist and anti-machismo message), and, of course, the content of *De cierta manera* itself, the chapter, by necessity, is a discussion of gender. López describes the film's negotiation of gender through female protagonist Yolanda and male protagonist Mario, who are romantically involved. Yolanda subverts gender norms, both within her own cultural context, and within the wider world of cinematic representations. She writes:

With regards to feminism, Yolanda's leading role, with her tough and unpatronising character, her direct look to the camera when she speaks about her worries for the destiny of the women in the neighbourhood, and especially her demanding but loving relationship with her partner, does not just make her a charismatic character. She also reveals the director's strict and combative outlook. Yolanda succeeds in creating constant elements for self-affirmation, despite everything and everyone. It is precisely this that affects Mario, who symbolizes the hidden spectrum of sexist relationships revealed from an ethic based on social equality. (147)

Additionally, López argues that using Mario's relationship with friend Humberto, Gómez further disrupts and criticizes the normative gender structures of her world. Humberto represents -- almost embodies -- machismo, and fights to keep Mario from straying outside of its limits. Ultimately, however, Humberto fails, and thus machismo loses some of its power. Through this two-pronged attack, of sorts, *De cierta manera* is an eloquent attack on gender inequality and toxic normative structures.

“The film’s basic theme,” Ann E. Kaplan writes on *De cierta manera*, “is that our ways of behaving sexually are so deeply embedded that it takes enormous power, energy, and commitment to alter our relations with the other sex” (194). Kaplan argues in her 1983 book *Women & Film: Both Sides of the Camera* that it is the film’s juxtaposition of narrative fiction and documentary, as it switches back and forth between the two -- almost two films in one -- which makes *De cierta manera* such a powerful attack on gender norms. Annette Kuhn’s discussion of *De cierta manera* in her 1982 work *Women’s Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* has a similar focus on the structure of the film as vital to its constructed meaning. According to Kuhn *De cierta manera* is a film which “prioritizes feminist issues,” with a specific focus on “the problem of marginalism in post-revolutionary Cuba” (162). Both Kaplan and Kuhn point to Gómez and *De cierta manera* as an important example of a feminist working outside of cinematic genre and composition norms. Gomez died unexpectedly at the age of 31 in 1974 before *De cierta manera* had been fully edited or released, and so Tomás Gutiérrez Alea completed the film posthumously -- an act which garnered criticism from some.

Marvin D’Lugo’s “‘Transparent Women’ Gender and Nation in Cuban Cinema” makes the case that several Cuban films made during the later years of the NLAC allegorized the nation through their female characters. Citing evidence from *Lucía* (1988), *Hasta cierto punto* (1988), *Lejanía* (1985), and *Hello Hemingway* (1990), among briefer references to several other films, D’Lugo argues that these films portray “transparent” female characters -- transparent both in that they demonstrate the ways in which patriarchal society sees through them as unimportant, and also in that the audience is able to see them in their entirety as human beings. Unlike many of the female characters of past (Cuban) films, they are not one-dimensional and sidelined, rather they

are placed at the center of the narrative so as to be seen and identified with their allegorical embodiment as “the nation.”

Las Dos Argentinas

Argentine María Luisa Bemberg is frequently cited as “one of the best Latin American directors of her generation” (Shaw, 122), and “one of the best-known women directors in Latin American cinema” (Taylor, 110). Starting as a screenwriter, she moved on to direct six well received feature-length films in the 1980’s and early 1990’s. A self-identified feminist, Bemberg is quoted as having said that she first began making movies in order to “change the very uninteresting image of women that film generally conveyed,” and stated that, “When it comes to women, Latin American film is terribly poor and tendentious. Women are generally presented as a function of male ambition and are too often, even today, the object of a distorting, grotesque misogyny” (Pick, 78). As Julia Stites Mor notes, Bemberg’s films are often viewed as some of the “piezas convincentes dentro del feminismo cinematográfico en la historia del cine nacional” (*most convincing works of feminist cinema in the history of the national [Argentine] cinema*) (Mor, 137).

Given Bemberg’s important place in Latin American cinema history, much has been written on her and her work. A full-length volume, *An Argentine Passion: María Luisa Bemberg and her Films* was published in 2000. As Bemberg is not the focus of this work, however, I will not be providing a survey of all of the writing on her career. Rather, I will briefly discuss two pieces of literature which directly address gender in two of her most famous films: *Camila* (1984) and *Yo, la peor de todas [I, the Worst of All]* (1990). Both *Camila* and *Yo, la peor de todas* tell the (dramatized) stories of real-life historical heroines. *Camila*, the best known and

most commercially successful of Bemberg's films and also the first Argentine film to be nominated for an Oscar, tells the story of 19th century Argentine socialite Camila O'Gorman. *Yo, la peor de todas* explores the story of Mexico's Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the famous 17th century nun and poet, who is considered by many as one of the first feminists in the continent.

In her analysis of both films, "María Luisa Bemberg Winks at the Audience: Performativity and Citation in *Camila* and *Yo, la peor de todas*," Claire Taylor discusses the ways in which gender is displayed as an act of role-playing in each film. In part, this role-playing is emphasized through Bemberg's subversion of traditional cinematic codes. Subversion of codes and norms takes place within the diagenesis of each film as well, as each tells the story of a heroine working against the patriarchal structures of her world. Taylor writes:

Both films show gender identity to be a process rather than an essence, and both locate their heroine's rebellion not in a space free from societal encoding, but in the reworking of existing codes. Arguably, this partial rebellion can be seen to be reflected in Bemberg's cinematic technique itself, in so that she too reworks codes such that of melodrama. Bemberg does not eschew what is often seen as an "ideologically suspect" genre, such as that of melodrama, in favor of an antirealist attack on its codes, but instead reworks its terms, just as her protagonists rework existing gender codes in order to fashion a tentative space for self-affirmation. (122)

Deborah Shaw focuses specifically on *Yo, la peor de todas*, claiming that the film argues that Sor Juana "can serve as a model for women of the future" despite living nearly 300 years ago. While she spends much of the body of the work comparing the minimal available historical information about Sor Juana's life to Bemberg's depiction of it, Shaw concludes that "the aim of the film (then) is to call upon audiences to recognize and fight against misogyny and

totalitarianism, and thus defend women's rights to have a central position within culture" (133). Sor Juana's struggle in particular as an artist working within a highly patriarchal realm, Shaw argues, is one which Bemberg herself would have an intimate connection as it is analogous to "her battle to succeed in the male-dominated film world of Argentina" (133).

In "Transgresión y responsabilidad: desplazamiento de los discursos feministas en cineastas argentinas desde María Luisa Bemberg hasta Lucrecia Martel [*Transgression and responsibility: shifts in the feminist discourses of Argentine women filmmakers from María Luisa Bemberg to Lucrecia Martel*], Julia Stites Mor discusses the vital role Bemberg played in creating wider visibility for the feminist movements of her time through her films, but also her legacy of "un espacio artístico para los subsiguientes discursos políticos como el de Martel y sus contemporáneas" (*an artistic space for the next generation of political discourses, such as those of Martel and her contemporaries*) (138). As Mor notes, the feminist discourses of this modern generation of women filmmakers in Argentina differs quite significantly from that of Bemberg. In large part this is likely due to the changes that feminism itself has undergone since Bemberg was making films, and the way in which feminism as a socio-political movement has grown, morphed, and multiplied into many different varying pieces, thus rendering feminism a far less unified or singular movement than it once was. Nevertheless, Bemberg's influence and legacy for Argentina's women filmmakers is undeniable. Despite shifts in the political ideology of feminism, the role women filmmakers play in increasing equality and visibility for women remains the same, for, as Mor states:

...algunas de las luchas mas silenciosas de las mujeres en los espacios de trabajo son puestas de manifiesto claramente en el campo de la cinematografía, es mayormente en el tema y la comunicacion de la subjetividad a la cual contribuyen las directoras

individuales y otros trabajadores del cine donde la lucha de genero se concreta” (140).

[some of the quieter struggles of women in the workplace are clearly revealed in the field of cinema, it is mostly in the theme and the communication of subjectivity through which the contribution of individual directors and other film workers to the gender struggle becomes concrete].

Paul A. Schroeder Rodríguez’s *A Comparative History of Latin American Cinema* is an extensive investigation of a vast number of films and filmmakers from the many diverse contexts of Latin America. His section on “The Rise of the Woman Director” pertains specifically to the cases of Bemberg and Martel. Rodríguez writes that, “Before the 1980’s noteworthy Latin American women directors were few and far between... two distinct generations of professional female directors have emerged since then” (265). The first, he claims, is “loosely linked” to the New Latin American Cinema, and includes (“most famously”) Bemberg. The second group “are at the center of a cinematic revival,” with Martel as the “most notable” director of this group (265). Bemberg and Martel, then, can be viewed as the primary representatives of these two different groups, pointing to their mirrored importance in the history of Latin America’s female directors. As I will argue, Martel too can be seen as “loosely linked” to the New Latin American Cinema, despite not belonging to the first generation of directors as described by Rodríguez.

Lucrecia Martel

Deborah Martin’s 2016 work, *The Cinema of Lucrecia Martel* is the first book of its kind, devoted explicitly to a study of Martel’s filmography. The book provides a sweeping analysis of all three of Martel’s feature films, as well as a chapter devoted to her short films. In the introduction to the book, Martin writes that *The Cinema of Lucrecia Martel* sets out to examine

Martel's work within the context of the New Argentine Cinema, as well as within the "tendency in Argentine filmmaking," and other "other national and global filmmaking trends" (1).

Additionally, the book "brings together some of the most important critical approaches to Martel's work -- including feminist and queer approaches, political readings and phenomenology -- and suggests new ways of understanding her films, in particular through their use of the child's perspective, and address to the senses and perception, which it argues serves to renew cinematic language and thought" (2). Martin's book provides the most detailed and thorough analysis of Martel's work to date, and encompasses a wide variety of theoretical contexts through which her films may be examined.

Martel's films are situated within the context of Argentine cinema over the last several decades in Jens Anderman's *New Argentine Cinema*. Martel is just one of many directors discussed in this work, though Andermann holds her up as one of, if not the, most successful and important directors to come out of Argentina in the 21st century. The goal of *New Argentine Cinema* is to examine the work produced during the New Argentine Cinema Movement, though the author also calls into question the constructions of this movement, claiming that "perhaps it makes sense today to look beyond the uncertain boundaries of an 'independent' generational project, which has in many ways been but a critical fiction" (xii). Though detailed and insightful, Andermann's analysis of Martel's films is thus framed within the theoretical framework of, and counter to, a vision of the New Argentine Cinema Movement.

Amanda Holmes' discussion of Martel's first two works is centered around Argentina's historical, political, and economic contexts, as represented in setting and mise-en-scene in "Landscape and the Artist's Frame in Lucrecia Martel's *La ciénega*/The Swamp and *La niña santa*/The Holy Girl." According to Holmes, "Martel's films depict a social and psychological

response to contemporary political and economic transformations” (132), and that “the construction of spatial representation [in the two films] reflects questions about the formation of social and personal order in the complexity of contemporary Argentine society” (133). Of Martel’s three features, *La mujer sin cabeza* is most frequently connected to Argentina’s political history. Holmes’ article provides a unique perspective in its association of the prior two films with Argentina’s political and economic climates, for, as the author writes (connecting the films to Argentina’s economic crash at the start of the 21st century), “The filmed spaces reflect a disturbing vision of a decadent contemporary Argentine society that lacks the potential to advance, and only barely sidesteps annihilation by the imminent dangers that lurk there” (134).

Ana Martín Morán wrote her careful analysis of *La ciénaga* before the release of either *La niña santa* or *La mujer sin cabeza*. Her critique, then, has a unique and specific value in that it is unable to comment on artistic tendencies of Martel; it must instead focus on *La ciénaga* as a singular piece of work. Martín Morán analyzes the film “in terms of the presentation of the family portrait, paying attention to the most relevant elements and motifs” (232), the motifs being wounds and scars, sex, and the news broadcast about the appearance of the Virgin. The analysis concludes with a brief discussion of Martel in relation to other contemporary Argentine directors and the various factors which influenced the rise of this new generation.

In “Staging Class, Gender and Ethnicity in Lucrecia Martel’s *La ciénaga/The Swamp*,” Ana Peluffo provides a much needed focused discussion of intersectionality in *La ciénaga*. Forcinito provides a succinct background on the situating of indigenous women within Argentine economics and society. Peluffo then analyses the film, looking at the interacting forces of gender and race amongst the characters. “Contrary to feminist expectations, household work does not create gender solidarity among women in a private sphere that Martel depicts as fractured by

many tensions,” (213) she writes. Peluffo’s work is lacking only in that it focuses singularly on *La ciénaga* (of Martel’s films, the recipient of the most critical attention). The canon of work on Martel’s cinematography could benefit from an analysis similar to Peluffo’s on the remaining two films.

“Filming in the feminine: subjective realism, disintegration and bodily affection in Lucrecia Martel’s *La ciénaga* (2001)” discusses female subjectivity, yet does not specifically draw upon feminist film theory. Gutiérrez-Albilla focuses on Martel’s construction of a “self-reflexive cinema,” which reveals “the fragmentary and disorienting conditions of perception of our precarious and frayed subjectivity” (219). Specifically, he is interested in the ways in which the film conveys confinement and claustrophobia. Gutiérrez-Albilla’s analysis of the constructions of space and body in *La ciénaga* is helpful, however, does not represent a highly unique perspective on the film.

Of the scholarly literature discussing gender in Martel’s films, Ana Forcinito’s 2006 essay “Mirada Cinematográfica y Género Sexual: Mímica, Erotismo y Ambigüedad En Lucrecia Martel” (The Cinematographic Gaze and Sexual Gender: Mimicry, Eroticism, and Ambiguity in Lucrecia Martel) makes the most use of feminist film theory. Forcinito draws upon the theories of Laura Mulvey, Ann Kaplan, and Teresa De Lauretis in her analyses of *La ciénaga* and *La niña santa*. “Mi intención, en estas páginas, es acercarme a las posicionalidades (femeninas y masculinas) de la mirada” (*My intention, in these pages, is to approach the positionalities (feminine and masculine) of the look*) in Martel’s work, she writes. Forcinito finds it “más pertinente ubicar al cine de Martel dentro del posfeminismo, sobre todo, en la crítica que esté elaborada respecto de la masculinización como estrategia de empoderamiento de las mujeres y de la diferencia dentro de las posicionalidades femeninas” (*more pertinent to locate the cinema*

of Martel within postfeminism, mainly, in the criticism that is elaborated with respect to masculinization as a strategy of empowerment of the women and of the difference within feminine positionalities). This analysis focuses primarily on questions of gaze and looking, with specific emphasis on the interdiagetic looking between characters. As it was published prior to the release of *La mujer sin cabeza*, Martel's third feature is absent from Forcinito's analysis.

III. THEORY

Naming and Identifying Feminist Film

For the purposes of this analysis, I define a feminist film as *one which consciously works to reconfigure the role of women in film, placing them in positions of equality, agency, and power; or one which provides a critique of dominant patriarchy and sexism*. Feminist film theory has developed as a means of describing and analyzing the ways in which a film -- through form, plot, production, and distribution -- contributes to feminist ideology. Before constructing a feminist film theory, it is important to acknowledge the complications that arise when using the term “feminist” to describe a film. It is not a term that was designed as a descriptor or categorizer of film, nor even art more broadly. Rather, it is a direct offshoot of feminism -- a set of beliefs, a socio-political movement: both theory and organized action. ‘Feminist’ can be seen as a term both underutilized and overutilized in film criticism. As B. Ruby Rich writes in her 1990 work, “In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism”:

‘Feminist’ is a name which may have only a marginal relation to the film text, describing more persuasively the context of social and political activity from which the work sprang. By stretching the name “feminist” beyond all reasonable elasticity, we contribute to its ultimate impoverishment. At the same time, so many films have been partitioned off to established traditions, with the implication that these other names contradict or forestall any application of the name “feminist” to the works so annexed, that the domain of “feminist” cinema is fast becoming limited to that work concerned only with feminism as explicit subject matter. (279)

While I accept that both feminist films and their accompanying body of film theory do exist, creating guidelines and definitions within the genre is necessary so as to minimize the misuse of the term feminist. Thus my definition is broad, and breaking the wide category of feminist film into smaller sections is useful for the purposes of in-depth and detailed analysis. In order to begin to remedy the issue of the over and under utilization of the term “feminist,” Rich set forth six new names -- groups in which to place feminist films, or films mis-identified as feminist. Films can now be identified with the categories Validative, Correspondence, Reconstructive, Medusan, Corrective Realism, and Projectile. I have paraphrased and condensed Rich’s descriptions of these categories below from “In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism.”

Validative films are often misidentified as “cinema verite.” While sharing many characteristics with this category of film, they are different in that they are made from an “inside” view, rather than the view of the oppressor as a voyeur of an oppressed group. They serve to validate women’s experiences, and reveal issues women face as a result of dominant patriarchy. Examples of validative films include *Union Maids* (1976), and *Chicana* (1979).

The category of **Correspondence** describes avant-garde films; those which are “investigating correspondences, i.e., between emotion and objectivity, narrative and deconstruction, art and ideology” (281). Examples of films which fit into the category of Correspondence include *The All Around Reduced Personality* (1978) and *Film about a Woman Who* (1974). These films contain reference, or are based upon in some sense, written work. Distinguishing them from other similar avant-garde films is the emphasis on the author -- necessarily a woman.

Reconstructive films renegotiate and redefine pre-existing cinematic forms. They serve as both a critique of these forms, and a new way of constructing films within the form that align with feminist ideology. Rich cites Sally Potter's 1979 film *Thriller* as an example.

Comedy is the defining feature of **Medusan** films. According to Rich, "Comedy requires further cultivation for its revolutionary potential as a deflator of the patriarchal order and an extraordinary leveler and reinventor of dramatic structure" (282). She cites Jan Oxenberg's *A Comedy in Six Unnatural Acts* (1975), and Jacques Rivette's *Celine and Julie Go Boating* (1974) as exemplary of the Medusan film.

Corrective Realist films include many of the preexisting cinematic traditions, yet it is the actions of the female characters, rather than the male ones, that serve as the driving force of the film. Some examples are *The Second Awakening of Christa Klages* (1978) and *Women* (1977). These films often reach wider audiences than those in the aforementioned categories.

Lastly, Rich uses the term **Projectile** to describe "women's films," films that may be designed to "appeal" in some way to a predominantly female audience, yet are undeniably a *projection* of male fantasy and insecurity upon female characters. While these films may feature women more predominantly than other mainstream films, this does not make them feminist. Projectile films include *An Unmarried Woman* (1978), *The Turning Point* (1977), and *Pretty Baby* (1978).

The Cinematic Whole

While traditional film theory and criticism tend to focus almost entirely on film form, it is important, especially in the realm of feminist film, that the view is expanded to include the many other moving parts that constitute the film as an entire entity (Rich "In the Name of," 278,

Lesage, 14). There exist six mechanisms that function together to create the full body of a film as a social, historical, humanistic piece of work. While the examination of a film's content and construction is vital, there is little value critiquing a film isolated from the other mechanisms that make it a whole. In her description of the six mechanisms, Julia Lesage in "Feminist Film Criticism: Theory and Practice," identifies the two "milieux" which must be considered in film criticism, where milieu 1 includes the past and present conditions -- social, historical, economic, ideological, environmental, situational -- from which the film emerged. In other words, milieu 1 describes factors that led up to and existed during the creation of the film -- the primordial soup, so to speak, from which the film emerged. Milieu 2 indicates the same set of conditions, yet in relation to the audience. Milieu 2 attempts to answer the broad question: what factors have contributed to the way an audience is likely to interpret a film? It goes without saying that milieu 2 can only be so specific and accurate, as each audience member will have individual experiences and qualities which lead them to have a unique interpretation of a film.

The six mechanisms -- condensed and simplified from Lesage's work -- are as follows.

1. Milieu 1
2. All of the different players -- directors, producers, editors, actors, etc. who work together to create the film itself
3. The completed film, which is the object of formal film analysis examining narrative, cinematography, sound, mise-en-scene, and editing
4. The audience
5. Milieu 2
6. The system through which the film is produced and distributed

Each of these six mechanisms is vital to the existence and life of a film, it is necessary that all are considered when conducting analysis and criticism of a film. As B. Ruby Rich emphasizes:

Aesthetics are not eternally embedded in a work like a penny in a cube of Lucite. They are dependent on and subject to the work's reception. The formal values of a film cannot be considered in isolation, cut off from the thematic correspondents within the text and from the social determinants without. Reception by viewers as well as by critics is key to any film's meaning. (Rich, 1990, 285)

Constructing a Feminist Film Theory

Traditional film theory was born out of the patriarchal institution of academia. There is no such thing really as feminist film theory, some might argue, but only the appropriation of existing methodology for the use of examining film through a feminist critical lens. While this may be true to some degree, feminist film theory by necessity must appropriate some of the existing language and methodology in order to enter into conversation with other film theory. This fact does not negate the of a classical approach, yet it does emphasize the importance of combining less traditional, technical approaches to the analysis of a film when the goal is to see it through the feminist critical "spectacles." While the development of a structure of film theory born strictly out of feminism itself would be valuable, one has yet to be widely accepted (Kuhn, 1982, 70). Instead, traditional feminist film theory has relied heavily on the fields of semiotics, structuralism, and psychoanalysis in conjunction with more fundamental methods of film analysis. Kuhn writes:

An immediate question, and extremely important in this context, is one that is less simple than it might at first appear: if some notion of feminist film theory is to be advanced,

what exactly is to be inferred from the use of the term ‘feminist’? What is it that feminism does to film theory that turns it into something special, something different from the general run of film criticism that makes no claim to be ‘feminist’? In this context, a useful distinction may be advanced between feminism as a perspective and feminism as a methodology. That is to say, feminism might be regarded on one hand as a way of seeing the world, a frame of reference or a standpoint from which to examine whatever it is one wishes to examine... Feminism, I would argue, offers not so much a methodology as a perspective -- a pair of spectacles, as it were -- through which we can look at films. (Kuhn, 1982, 69)

Born of a socio-political movement that opposes patriarchal forms -- in this case specifically of studying culture, art, and film -- feminist film theory has a clear connection with the broader feminist movement. Throughout its history, the feminism has undergone many changes, reflected in its descriptors “First Wave” “Second Wave,” and so on. Intersections between gender, race, sexuality, class, or nationality, while always present, have been featured more prominently in feminist ideologies at different times. The basic premise of the movement is a belief in and promotion of the social, economic, and political equality between women and men, yet feminists and their ideologies have not, and will most likely never always align. Various feminist film theorists have chosen to emphasize different intersections in their work, but the discipline as a whole has tended to reflect a basic and universal brand of feminism. Annette Kuhn, paraphrasing an unpublished work by Angela Martin, writes:

Most kinds of feminist film theory actually share a broadly-based concern to look at the cultural products and institutions of a patriarchal society from a feminist standpoint. This

concern has tended to be focused on the silences of film *texts* in relation to women, to ‘the exclusion of the woman’s voice and her position within the text as object. (73)

For the purposes of this analysis, I will borrow Kuhn and Martin’s analysis of the connection between feminism and feminist film theory as one that is relatively simple at its foundation, despite the vast complexities of the feminist movement as a whole.

The Gaze

Laura Mulvey’s seminal 1975 article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” is one of the most widely referenced works on feminist film theory. The purpose of the article, she writes, is “to demonstrate the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form,” and is intended to be used as a “political weapon” (57). While some of the theory and research Mulvey draws upon has since been revised or discredited -- most notably that connected to Freud -- the film theory she herself constructs continues to be highly relevant and useful for feminist film analysis.

Mulvey’s argument stems from the idea that, “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (62). Thus, the male -- via the cinematic eye of the camera -- gazes, and the woman is presented in a way that will be pleasing to this (heterosexual) male gaze. The curation and presentation of a woman’s image for the purposes of male visual pleasure is, of course, not a practice exclusive to film. The female body has been objectified and reconstructed as symbol rather than human throughout most of history. It is the imposed power of the male gaze that teaches a woman that her value lies not in her character, but in the sum of a mysterious aesthetic appeal attached to each of her individual body parts. The manifestation of the male gaze in film is unique, however, in that the dynamic

quality of the image, combined with its interdependence on narrative, adds to the complexity of “gaze” in film. Mulvey explains:

The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a storyline, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation. This alien presence then has to be integrated into cohesion with the narrative. As Budd Boetticher has put it: What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance. (Mulvey, 62)

Female “characters” are thus hardly characters at all, for they themselves do not affect the narrative trajectory of the film. It is instead the female image that incites change within the male characters, causing the storyline to move ahead or change direction. “Hence the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man’s role as the active one of forwarding the story, of making things happen” (Mulvey, 63). The female character is valuable to the narrative only in what it may cause the male character to do. Furthering this point, Teresa De Lauretis, in her article “Oedipus Interruptus” argues that in narrative cinema, the male characters fill the role of “mythic subject,” they are the human beings with whom we are taught to identify. We experience the narrative movement through them. Female characters, however, exist as “narrative images” -- they work as symbols, as “mythical obstacle, monster or landscape” (De Lauretis, 88). They help to construct the diegetic landscape in which the narrative plays out rather than contributing to the narrative itself.

In a film, “the look of the camera (at the profilmic), the look of the spectator (at the film projected on the screen) and the intradiegetic look of each character within the film (at other

characters, objects, etc.) intersect, join and relay one another in a complex system which structures vision and meaning” (De Lauretis 1999, 87). Film is necessarily constructed so as to appeal to an audience. It must fulfill its “contract” with the audience; in order to be successful a film has to offer the pleasure to the spectator (De Lauretis 1999, 85). According to Mulvey, mainstream, patriarchally-contrived cinema appeals to a voyeuristic desire. It works off the pleasure one feels in “in looking at another person as an object,” and works to produce “a sense of separation” for the audience, and plays “on their voyeuristic fantasy” (Mulvey, 60). As articulated above, most films are constructed around the active/male and passive/female gaze relationship. This means that the audience views the on-screen world through the active male gaze of the camera. Unless the film forces the audience to engage, to do more than indulge in voyeuristic pleasure as a viewer removed from the world of the film, then the dominant patriarchal gaze will not be disrupted. The viewer will become complacent, by means of the film’s construction, with the female as passive and male as active dichotomy. “Unchallenged, mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order” (Mulvey, 59).

Spectatorship and Identification

Given the relationship between gaze, masculinity, and the audience, it would follow that a female spectator’s relationship with a mainstream film would be complicated. If, as was previously discussed, a film must fulfill its contract of providing pleasure to the viewer in order to be successful, what is the pleasure that is offered to the (heterosexual) female spectator? As De Lauretis puts it, “How can the female spectator be entertained as subject of the very

[narrative] movement that places her as its object, that makes her the figure of its own closure?" (1999, 88).

The "active" gaze -- both within the diegesis between characters and outside the diegesis as the cinematic eye -- has been established as masculine, catering towards a heterosexual, voyeuristic version of visual pleasure. The narrative of mainstream film is also masculine; the male character is the active participant in the narrative, while the female character serves as symbol, an object to be reacted to. Here arises the issue of identification for the female spectator. Is she to identify with her own image -- the "identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator's fascination with and recognition of his like" (Mulvey, 61) despite its devalued role symbol and source of visual pleasure? Or is she to identify with the active, masculine agent? De Lauretis writes:

To identify, in short, is to be actively involved as subject in a process, a series of relations; a process that, it must be stressed, is materially supported by the specific practices -- textual, discursive, behavioral -- in which each relation is inscribed.

Cinematic identification, in particular, is inscribed across the two registers articulated by the system of the look, the narrative and the visual. (De Lauretis 1999, 89)

Mainstream film in its intertwining of the narrative and the visual, and in its desire to fulfill its contract of pleasure, thus sends a conflicting message to the female spectator, necessitating her identification with both the masculine and the feminine. In her article "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator", Mary Ann Doane writes that, "Given the structures of cinematic narrative, the woman who identifies with a female character must adopt a passive or masochistic position, while identification with the active hero necessarily entails an acceptance of what Laura Mulvey refers to as a certain "masculinization" of spectatorship" (48).

Yet as De Lauretis points out, a spectator cannot truly identify “as an inert object or sightless body” (the feminine), nor can the spectator “see oneself *altogether* as other” (with other as masculine, for the female spectator) (89).

These contradicting forces are, in the end, what leads the female spectator to buy into a film’s representation of femininity, and taken as a collection of similar representations, “seduced” into participating in mainstream cinema’s problematic view of women (De Lauretis 1999, 90). “For the female spectator there is a certain over-presence of the image -- she is the image. notes Doane. “Given the closeness of this relationship, the female spectator’s desire can be described only in terms of a kind of narcissism -- the female look demands a becoming” (45). Thus the female spectator, by nature of the film’s construction, identifies with both the masculine active and the feminine passive. She looks and simultaneously is looked at. She is both the voyeur and the object. And so, one might argue, she begins to see herself in the role of femininity just as the masculine camera, the masculine characters, and the masculine narrative sees her. She is taught to identify with and thus desires to be this patriarchal reflection of femininity. And in Narcissus, the act of identifying with the image -- the opposite of reality -- is self-destructive and ultimately.

Issues of Identification

While theories of gaze, spectatorship, and identification remain invaluable to the study of gender in film, these theories are not without great limitation. Feminist film theory, in its primarily isolated focus on gender relations, has very often ignored the many factors that complicate such an essentialist and binary approach to gender and identification. For most women, many other factors, such as race, sexuality, class, and heritage, among many others,

interact and weave together to form an individual identity. Assuming that gender above all other factors dictates a woman's identity -- and therefore tendency for identification as a film spectator -- minimizes the importance these other identifiers have for many women. The existence and promotion of feminist theory is vital, as half of the world's population still resides, in most ways, under the hegemony of the other half. Perceiving gender power relations as existing in isolation from all other human power dynamics, however, is incorrect, and leads to the exclusion of many women from a feminist movement meant to include and empower them.

Inviting connection to the isolationist focus on class of the practitioners of the New Latin American Cinema, Jane Gaines in her seminal work "White Privilege and Looking Relations" writes that:

Just as the classic Marxist model of social analysis based on class has obscured the function of gender, the feminist model based on the male/female division under patriarchy has obscured the function of race. The dominant feminist paradigm actually encourages us not to think in terms of any oppression other than male dominance and female subordination. (Gaines, 201)

Gaines argues that feminist film theory -- and, in fact, most forms of theoretical practice -- remove themselves far from social reality. They do so, she posits, in the hopes of maintaining a purity of discipline, focusing so narrowly on film form and semiotics that theory may be contained and constructed as a static language -- an equation for analysis. As feminism is born out of social reality -- the abuse, oppression, and restriction of women -- it is illogical to remove feminist film theory from these social realities and use stale theory to analyze films in a vacuum. Just as it is illogical to isolate feminist film theory from feminine reality, it is also illogical to isolate feminism from all other arenas of human struggle and oppression. Gaines writes that

classical feminist film theory has often ignored the fact that women of color (and more specifically in her analysis, African-American women) do not necessarily identify with white women before identifying with men of color. She writes:

Even more difficult for feminist theory to digest is Black female identification with the Black male. On this point, Black feminists diverge from white feminists as they repeatedly remind us that Black women do not necessarily see the Black male as patriarchal antagonist but feel instead that their racial oppression is “shared” with men. (Gaines, 202)

Though specific to the United States, examining the intersections between race and gender relations in the case of African-American history helps exemplify the need to eradicate an isolationist approach to feminist film theory.

As slaves, black men did not have ultimate authority over black women, rather both men and women were subject to the equal and total power of their white masters. Additionally, white women held complete power over black men either directly or by delegation, disrupting the notion of the all-powerful patriarchy. Were black men to have had complete authority over black women, disruption of the unquestionable authority of white over black would have occurred, and so was therefore unacceptable. After the Civil War during Reconstruction, however, many African American men and women found it necessary for their survival to adopt white culture and customs, one of which was the family configuration containing an authoritative male figure of husband and father. Thus, argues Gaines, patriarchy was “learned” by African Americans. This gendered structure was taken on in an effort to survive white dominant culture (Gaines, 198). Thus for many African-American women, patriarchal dominance -- and its negative effects

on women -- can be viewed as yet another form of oppression brought upon them by white supremacy. The question therefore arises, if feminism is born out of patriarchal dominance, and patriarchal dominance is a result of white supremacy, then how could feminism and race possibly be disconnected from one another? Minority groups and people of color have experienced white domination in a multitude of ways. The case of slavery in the United States as illustrated by Gaines is just one, yet it provides an excellent argument for the need to examine the historical roots of patriarchal dominance for different people, and acknowledge that feminism which fails to do so is at a high risk of being exclusionary to all but white women.

Theories such as those constructed by Mulvey and De Lauretis also make the mistake of assuming a heterosexual female spectator. More recent approaches to understanding gender relations in film have tended to place less of an emphasis on psychoanalysis and Freudian concepts that limit discussions to a heterocentric male/female dichotomy. Chris Straayer writes in “The Hypothetical Lesbian Heroine in narrative Feature Film” that:

Feminist film theory based on sexual difference has much to gain from considering lesbian desire and sexuality. Women’s desire for women deconstructs male/female sexual dichotomies, sex/gender conflation, and the universality of the oedipal narrative. Acknowledgment of the female initiated active sexuality and sexualized activity of lesbians has the potential to reopen a space in which straight women as well as lesbians can exercise self-determined pleasure. (343)

Thus, feminist film theory which fails to consider the non-heterosexual viewer not only excludes this demographic from its analysis, but also ignores an opportunity to complicate and re-situate dominant gender structures. While arguments that highlight the problematic implications of a

male active/female passive dichotomy remain valuable, theory must also recognize the queer spectator, who does not necessarily identify or find visual pleasure in the same way a heterosexual female spectator might.

Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Latin America and Argentina

As a primarily western-centric and western-born discipline, discussions of race and ethnicity in feminist film theory tend to focus on women of color of African descent and representations of these women in western cinema. The history of slavery in Latin America, of course, contains many similarities to that of North America -- it was, after all, the same Atlantic Slave Trade which brought slaves from West Africa to both North and South America. The modern-day experiences of these Afro-Latin Americans vary greatly from country-to-country within Latin America, and of course from those of North African-Americans. Racism and subjugation, however, unifies the histories of nearly all descendants of African slaves in the Americas. The history of African and Afro-Latin American populations in Argentina is just as fraught with racism and violence as other Latin American nations. Because the Afro-Latin American population of Argentina is relatively small compared to other Latin American nations, less attention has been given to the experience of the Afro-Argentine population. Despite being the fourth largest Latin American nation, only roughly 150,000 Argentines identify as Black, according to the 2010 national census, making up less than 1% of the population. The racial dynamics of Latin American countries are, of course, not formulated just in the divide between whites and Blacks, but also in the divide between whites and other non-whites since colonial times --indigenous, mestizos, and people of Asian descent, among others. Feminist film theory must work to expand its purview to include discussion of representation and reception of and by

women of all races, ethnicities, and backgrounds. For the purposes of this analysis, however, I will narrow my focus towards the interlinking forces of race and ethnicity, class, and gender as they are manifested in life and film in Argentina.

Argentina, perhaps more so than its neighboring nations, is a nation of immigrants. A common Argentine saying which symbolizes a national allegory is “Los mexicanos descenden de los aztecas, los peruanos de los incas y los argentinos de los barcos” [*Mexicans descended from the Aztecs, Peruvians from the Incas, and Argentines from the ships*]. While it is true that Argentina has a large immigrant population, is not as though the land lay uninhabited and barren until the arrival of Europeans in the late 19th century. “In this ideologically-charged dictum, the metaphor of the ship obliterates the cultural contributions of an Indigenous Other that was geographically there, occupying the land, before the arrival of massive European immigration” (211), writes Ana Peluffo. It is important to note that ethnic distribution in Argentina is geographically very unequal. While the province of Buenos Aires is predominantly white (and contains nearly 40% of the population) the rest of the country is much more diverse.

Contrary to a national myth which overlooks the existence of an indigenous population, in the 2010 national census nearly 1 million Argentines self-identified “as descending from or belonging to an indigenous people,” according to the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs. No aberration from other countries with a history of colonization, Argentina’s Amerindians have been, and continue to be, the victims of racism, violence, and oppression. “Generalised stereotypes have forced many indigenous people to defensively hide their identity in order to avoid being subjected to racial discrimination. Even so, the use of pejorative terms likening the indians/indigenous to lazy, idle, dirty, ignorant and savage are common in everyday language,” states the IWGIA. As is common worldwide, the indigenous populations of Latin

America have been economically disenfranchised. The 2010 United Nations Development Program found that extreme poverty (that is, living on a dollar or less per day) in Latin America is twice as high among indigenous peoples than the rest of the population -- a clear illustration of the connection between race and class.

In her 2005 book *Weaving the Past: A History of Latin America's Indigenous Women from the Prehispanic Period to the Past* Susan Kellogg discusses the "feminization of poverty." As is the case for many impoverished populations, indigenous women more heavily affected by poverty than indigenous men. "Population pressure, shortages of arable land, and male outmigration may will be related factors contributing to a feminization of indigenous poverty, both rural and urban," (102) notes Kellogg. Additionally, indigenous women are far less likely than men to receive an education, the reasons for which include "household needs for female labor and doubts about the value of education in regions where rural indigenous people see themselves as having little social or economic mobility" (124). Facing discrimination due to their gender, race, and class, indigenous women are one of the most widely oppressed population in Latin America. Unfortunately, Latin American cinema has yet to pay sufficient attention to the oppression of indigenous and other women of color in their forms of expression.

In the realm of feminist film theory, inadequate attention has been given to cinematic representations of Latin America's indigenous women. The growing strength of indigenous feminist movements in Latin America, however, will hopefully lead to the development of indigenous feminist film theory. R. Aida Hernandez Castillo's 2010 article "The Emergence of Indigenous Feminism in Latin America" traces the growing momentum of these movements. The issues with mainstream feminism many indigenous feminists have highlighted are analogous to those revealed in by North American and European women of color. Castillo writes:

Most indigenous women associate feminism with urban middle-class women and regard it as divisive of their shared struggles with indigenous men. However, these preconceptions are starting to change... In many Latin American countries organized indigenous women have joined their voices with those of the national indigenous movements to denounce the economic and racial oppression that characterizes the insertion of indigenous communities into the national project. But at the same time, these women are struggling within their organizations and communities to change these traditional elements that exclude and oppress them. (Castillo, 541)

Thus many of the same issues with theories identification, spectatorship, and gaze which have been emphasized by women of color and women of queer sexual identities in Europe and North America can be related to an indigenous feminist film theory. That is, all feminist film theory should not assume a singular, unified female identity which unites all women regardless of race, class, or sexuality in a shared cinematic experience.

Subjectivity

In film theory, the term “subjectivity” takes on a confounding number of meanings. The simplest version of film subjectivity occurs within the diegesis of the film in relation to a specific character. Perceptual subjectivity will put the viewer (via the camera) in the eyes of a character, mental subjectivity will put the viewer in the character’s mind (via camera, sound, flashback, etc.) (Bordwell and Thompson, 216).

More loosely, subjectivity can be seen as the perspective from which a story is told. In a straightforward example, a work of autobiography is clearly subjective. Less concrete, yet

closely related to Mulvey's conception of "gaze," a film can be seen as having "female subjectivity" if the sights, sounds, perceptions, etc. seem to indicate that the film is constructed from the perspective of a woman. Feminist film theorists, starting with Mulvey, have long argued that mainstream cinema typically displays (heterosexual) male subjectivity. According to Anneke Smelik, the "imagining [of] female subjectivity" is a vital component of feminist filmmaking (6). Some film theories of subjectivity seek to understand the subjectivity of the spectator. The goal of this work is to attempt to understand the way a spectator receives the text of the film. According to this body of work, the filmmaker "encodes" the film with meaning -- through use of film form and semiotics -- and the spectator then "decodes" this meaning, and interprets the film based on their subjectivity. The study of spectator subjectivity is apt to hit many roadblocks, as indeterminate results to inquiry are common, and the risk of generalization runs high.

The study of subjectivity in the above two ways -- both as imagined perspective and as spectator -- necessarily must assume some sort of generalization. To say that a film has female subjectivity assumes that all, or at least a majority, of women have a shared perspective. To theorize about the way a female audience will "decode" a film must assume the same. As De Lauretis writes in *Alice Doesn't*, "A woman, or a man, is not an undivided identity, a stable unit, 'consciousness,' but the term of a shifting series of ideological positions. Put another way, the social being is... an always provisional encounter of subject and codes at the historical (therefore changing) intersection of social formations and her or his personal history" (1984, 14). While theorizing about subjectivity in these contexts has value, the dangers of generalization and assumption can negate the legitimacy of the work.

Thus, I will chose instead to focus on the final version of subjectivity -- that of the filmmaker. The subjectivity of the filmmaker is frequently linked to auteur theory, a child of the French New Wave, which sees a film's director as its author. Auteur theory can be used to categorize and study film based on director, seeking to understand the cinematic language of each film through the context of that director's canon of work. Auteur theory has been critiqued, as filmmaking is a collaborative effort that relies on more than just the director. Important to note, however, is the fact that -- due to the exclusionary nature of the filmmaking industry -- many female filmmakers are making films outside of the studio structure, and therefore very well may be screenwriting, filming, etc. in addition to directing. More importantly, our lack of female filmmakers has left a void of female subjectivity in the filmmaking world. As Deborah Martin writes:

As many feminist and minority critics have noted, the post-structuralist decentering of the subject and of authorship is all very well for those groups (straight, white, European males) for whom subjectivity is a given, but for groups which have traditionally been denied a voice, the post-structuralist project comes at the wrong time, and does not seem especially liberatory. Assuming a subject position and telling one's own story continue to be important political activities for groups historically excluded from those activities, and whilst critical discourse must retain its understanding of the author-function as constructed category, it can also act as a vehicle through which the author's lived, material existence (as a woman or a member of a minority) and identity (however strategic) may enter the public realm. (D. Martin, 5)

Arguing for the value of an auteur theory in feminist film criticism, Geetha Ramanathan writes, "Feminist auteurship entails the impression of feminist authority, not necessarily that of the

auteur herself, on screen... Further, such a production of meaning that asserts the feminist standpoint is constructed against the backdrop of very specific strictures in the aesthetic and visual domains that inhibit the authority of women, both behind and on the screen” (3-4). The iteration of auteur theory Ramanathan posits does not narrow the purview of the theory to the director alone, but calls for a recognition of the ways in which a feminist subjectivity (whether specifically that of the auteur or not) is constructed despite the many forces working against such a construction.

A Working Theory for Analysis

Feminist film theory is complex and ever changing. As with many academic pursuits, danger lies in entering an endless maze of theories and counter-theories which never seem to lead to a tangible denouement. For fear of entering such a maze, I will now construct, for the purposes of my analysis, a working feminist film theory.

To begin, I will return to the first part of my definition of a feminist film as one which works to reconfigure the roles of women in film, placing them in positions of equality, agency, and power. Primarily, a film is able to work to reconfigure the roles of women through use of film form -- narrative, cinematography, sound, mise-en-scene, and editing. It is through the language of these five elements that a film communicates its message.

Narrative is the most visible and easily interpreted element of film form. While at its most basic level narrative is the story the film tells, examining narrative more deeply is greatly revealing of a film’s message. Narrative is not only what happens and how it happens, but the way the story is told. As Mulvey noted in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” mainstream cinema nearly always places male character as “the active one forwarding the story, making

things happen” (63), while the female characters work as symbols, as pieces of the cinematic landscape to be reacted to. It is not a question of protagonists versus secondary characters, for there exist many films which are “about” women (in that they contain a female protagonist), yet the narrative is still propelled by the actions of men, and the women are still relegated to serving as catalysts for action in the male characters. Thus I argue that the narrative of a feminist film must find its power in female characters. They must be the focal points around which the story spins, acting rather than being reacted to, serving as narrative agents rather than symbols.

Cinematography and editing work together to create the “kino” or cinematic eye through which we watch the film’s events unfold. The construction of the kinoeye is, of course, directly related to theories of visual pleasure and gaze (Mulvey), and the theories of spectatorship and identification they relate to (De Lauretis, Doane). Through cinematography and editing, a film tells the spectator what to look at and how to look at it. This piece of cinematic language is powerful as, according to Mulvey, De Lauretis, and Doane, it can create specific types of (sexualized) visual pleasure, control the way we understand different characters, and influence the way we identify with them -- thus working to control the way we understand the film. As previously discussed, it is problematic to apply the theories of Mulvey, De Lauretis, and Doane to film analysis without an examination of the many complicated and nuanced ways different spectators view and identify with films. I will therefore argue that a feminist film will use its kinoeye to disrupt hegemonic standard practices in cinematography and editing, thus causing the viewer to question the gaze of the film, and allowing room for alternative paths of identification for a diverse audience.

Sound and mise-en-scene, in some ways more elusive than the rest, are vital in the creation of the diegesis and atmosphere of the film. While a film can emphasize and evoke

reactions of touch and smell, it necessarily has only sight and sound in its arsenal of sensory tools. Thus sound can be used to strengthen and heighten the visual, or in some cases to distract from it. With heavy use of non-diegetic soundtrack and simplistic use of diegetic sound, mainstream film has tended towards a combining of audio and visual which favors later, using sound as a way to intensify the visual. It is difficult to claim the use of sound in a film to be particularly feminist or non-feminist, necessarily. Commonly emphasized in feminist film theory, however, is the value in disrupting hegemonic film practices, and finding new and unique ways to use film language to tell a story which breaks from the patriarchy-contrived and intertwined methods of mainstream cinema. Therefore, as mainstream cinema has tended towards an emphasis on the visual over the audio, a feminist filmmaker may chose to challenge this hierarchy and utilize sound in an alternative and more vital way in the telling of her story.

Mise-en-scene plays an important role in the creation of meaning in a film -- working as an underlying system of semiotics that works in conjunction with narrative. The many different components of mise-en-scene -- actors, lighting, costumes, scenery and props -- all work to indicate meaning in ways most often very specific to the film's context. While general comments can be made -- high-key lighting evoking a happier mood, low-key a more ominous one, for example -- it is most often difficult to unpack meaning in the mise-en-scene independently of the world of the film. The creation of an in-depth and complete understanding of a film, however, necessitates close examination of mise-en-scene, as much of the "subliminal" or less direct communicating in film language is found in the mise-en-scene.

A filmmaker uses film form as language. It is therefore the job of someone analyzing a film to deconstruct this language in order to understand a film's meaning or message. In order for a film to be feminist, then, the five different pieces of this language must work together to

communicate a meaning, message, or critique that says something about the role of women in the world. What one sees as a feminist message, meaning, or critique, however, will vary depending on one's definition of feminism.

Jill Dolan, in her 1988 book *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, identifies three categories of feminism which may influence a spectator's reading of a film's message as feminist or not. According to Dolan, Liberal feminists are of the belief that men and women should be equals in every sense of the word -- that there should be "parity between men and women" (4). With this view in mind, feminist films should view male and female characters the same, allowing them equal agency and power. Cultural feminism, which "is founded on a reification of sexual difference that valorizes female biology, in which gender is an immutable, determining, and desirable category" (6) argues that women should celebrate the ways in which they differ from men, rather than seeking to portray men and women as exactly the same. A film would be feminist then, according to a Cultural feminist, if it portrays women's characteristics and experiences as different from those of men, yet positive and deserving of celebration and praise. Material feminists -- more recently labeled Intersectional feminists -- view "women as historical subjects whose relation to prevailing social structures is also influenced by race, class, and sexual identification" (10). Therefore, the message, meaning, or critique created by a feminist film must not simply be one of male vs. female, but one of women and the many different factors that make up and influence their experiences.

These are, of course, simplified categories. Limiting definition or understanding to just one perspective or another would be both incomplete, and nearly impossible given the nuanced and complex meaning most films communicate. For the purpose of this analysis, I will posit that a feminist film must convey a meaning, message, in which female characters have equal to

greater agency and narrative power to the male characters, yet does not diminish nor negate the unique experience of being a woman or girl, and acknowledges and addresses the different factors which can work to make one woman's experience different than another's (thus complicating a simplified male vs. female power dichotomy). Finally returning to the second half of my definition of feminist film, a film which presents a feminist critique may not necessarily give narrative or gazing power to its female characters. Such a film is feminist, however, when it is made clear that the female characters are denied power and agency because of restricting and sexist patriarchal power structures, and thus a critique of dominant patriarchy is presented.

IV. ANALYSIS

Lucrecia Martel (b. 1966) grew up in Salta, Argentina -- the setting of each of her feature films. As she states in an interview with BOMB magazine in 2009, her family was “solidly middle class” (Guest, 31). At the age of 15 or 16 she began experiment with a video camera purchased for the family by her father. As she recalls, “My family got used to it because I was always filming... There are two or three years in our family life where I don’t appear at all in videos or photos, because I was always behind the camera” (Guest, 32). Martel attended Catholic school before moving to Buenos Aires to study “Social Communication” (“a typical post-transition-to-democracy program made to train journalists and media analysts” (Guest, 31)). It was in an animated drawing class (separate from her university) where her professional interest in film began. She recalls:

At this time I started to meet people who were studying film, and I began producing short films. So I decided to take the exam for a state-sponsored film school -- the only one at that time. You had to take a huge qualifying course, because over 1,000 people signed up and there were only 30 vacancies. I spent months preparing for that course. I finally got in, but when school was supposed to start, the economic crisis was already so severe that there weren’t any professors or materials. We didn’t have classes. The only real possibility was to study autodidactically, to watch films and analyze them. (Guest, 31)

After winning a state-funded script writing contest, for which the prize was a budget to produce a short film, Martel released her first widely-recognized short, *Rey Muerto* (1995), a “feminist western about domestic violence” (D. Martin, 2). The film was screened alongside the shorts produced by the other contest winners. The resulting compilation of these shorts

(Historias Breves (1995)) is often cited as the first film of the New Argentine Cinema. A year later, Martel began work on the script of *La ciénega* which went on to win Best Screenplay at the 1999 Sundance Film Festival. Again the prize for her script won a small filming budget, which, combined with some additional Argentine (including from the Argentine Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales) and international investment, allowed for the production of *La ciénega*, which was released to great critical acclaim in 2001, premiering at Sundance and winning the Alfred Bauer Award at Berlinale, among others (Dawson, 1). *La niña santa* premiered at Cannes in 2004, and among other awards, was lauded as one of the 10 best films of 2005 by the New York Times. Her most recent feature, *La mujer sin cabeza* was released in 2008.

La ciénega

Martel's first feature film is also her most widely acclaimed and studied to date.

According to the director, here is what it is about:

February in the Argentine Northwest. A sun that makes the earth crack, tropical rainfalls. In the woods, some of the soil turns into swamps. These swamps are deadly traps for the larger animals. For the happy vermin, on the contrary, they are hotbeds. This story is not about swamps, though, but about the town of La Ciénega and its surroundings. 90 kilometres from there is the village of Rey Muerto, and close from there the estate of La Mandragora, The Mandrake. The mandrake is a plant that was used as a sedative, before ether and morphine were discovered, when someone's pain had to be soothed during an amputation. In this story, it's the name of a farm where red peppers are being harvested, and where Mecha lives, a fifty-something woman with four kids and a husband who dyes

his hair. But that's something you can forget about after a few drinks. Although, as Tali says, the booze enters through one door and doesn't leave through the other. Tali is Mecha's cousin. She also has four children, a husband who loves hunting, his house, and his children. She lives at La Ciénega, in a house without a pool. Two accidents bring these two families together in the countryside, trying to survive a devilish summer. (Andermann, 78)

In an initial viewing of *La ciénega*, it is difficult to surmise the relationship between characters. The same is true of *La niña santa* and *La mujer sin cabeza*. The relationship between characters are of special importance in Martel's Salta Trilogy, as all three films are composed of interweaving webs of family; cousins, parents, in-laws, children -- all kissing one another on the cheek and lying in bed together. "I never wrote anything where people didn't already know each other," says Martel (Guest, 35). On the ambiguous familial relationships between characters, Martel states that, "If you spy on your family through a camera, it's not easy to tell who's who" (Guest, 35).

While relationships may at first be unclear, there is no doubt that the narrative is centered around the film's female characters. It is their actions that propel the narrative forward, setting off the domino effect of the next events. The male characters, meanwhile, "are always placed far from the core of the story, seen from the perspective of women who rule the realm of home life where the film rests" (Morán, 233). *La ciénega* does not follow the storyline of one character, nor is the film "about" any one person or persons. Thus an attempt to identify any protagonist in a classical sense of the word is futile. Instead, the interweaving layers of plot find their axes in the mothers of the two families examined by the film. Mecha, to whom we are introduced first, is an ornery, narcissistic alcoholic. In the opening scene of *La ciénega*, Mecha is depicted seated by

her pool, which with its brown murky water and aquatic plants looks more like a pond. Sunglasses cover her eyes -- and remain as such for the majority of the film, despite never again appearing outside in the film. A nearly finished glass of wine rests in her hand. Mecha barks rather than speaks. The dark sunglasses serve as a barrier, preventing any emotion from being communicated through her eyes, and disallowing anyone to know where she is looking. Tali, the second mother, is Mecha's cousin. Tali is younger, more attentive to her children, and has a functional partnership with her husband. The narrative is centered around the two families, with the two families both born from (literally) and oriented around their matriarchs -- though, as will be discussed, this does not entail ultimate agency for these characters.

The two characters are juxtaposed against one another, as Tali's character adheres to a more idealized version of femininity as suitable mother, wife, and homemaker -- roles at which Mecha is seen to be failing. As Ana Forcinito notes,

Al acercarse a la opresion de genero dentro del confin de la casa como espacio de encierro el film enfatiza entonces estas dos posiciones feminiñas: la de Tali como acatamiento de los atributos tradicionales de la feminidad y la de Mecha, por el contrario, como un personaje dominante y violento que escapa del modelo tradicional femenino (113) [*When approaching gender oppression in the confines of the house as a confinement space, the film emphasizes these two feminine positions: that of Tali as observer of the traditional attributes of femininity and that of Mecha, on the contrary, as a dominant and violent character who escapes the traditional female model*].

It is Tali's gaze and subjectivity, however, which are emphasized by the film. While Mecha remains in bed for the majority of the film, Tali is highly mobile, pacing about her

apartment, traveling to various locations, including to visit Mecha at La Mandrágora. Tali circulates around Mecha, and enters her home as a spectator. Mecha is a primary focus of Tali's subjectivity and gaze. This is communicated through the positioning and interactions between the characters in the scenes in which they both appear. Tali sits while Mecha lies in bed, Tali's line of gaze therefore slightly above that of Mecha, demonstrating a dominant position. While Mecha's face appears somewhat shrouded in shadow, light from the window in Mecha's bedroom illuminates Tali's face, further emphasizing her eyes as they gaze upon Mecha. Through dialogue too we are shown Tali's subjectivity, as it is she who passes verbal judgement on Mecha and not vice-versa, making such statements as "Pobre Mecha, si le hubiera hecho caso a la madre no se hubiese casado co ese hombre" (*Poor Mecha, if only she had listened to her mother she would not have married that man*), and "Para mi que Mecha siempre supo lo de Mercedes pero se hacía la tonta" [*Seems to me Mecha always knew that about Mercedes, but she acted ignorant*] (Forcinito, 113). All the while, Mecha's gaze and subjectivity has been obstructed both by her sunglasses, and her lack of ability to see anything beyond the reach of her bed.

In emphasizing Tali's gaze and subjectivity over Mecha's, Martel mirrors the patriarchal valuing of women who successfully perform their duties as mother, wife, and homemaker. Because she has adhered more carefully to traditional views of femininity, Tali is allowed greater narrative and subjective power in the film. Yet ultimately, both women are subject to the same domestic captivity, and thus the film's emphasis on the confinement of women is made clear. Mecha's interment moves from the confines of her property to the edges of her bed. Towards the end of the film, we see a mini refrigerator being moved into her bedroom so that the ice she is constantly calling for will be within arm's reach, indicating the closing in and deepening

claustrophobia of her domestic prison. Tali's confinement, however, is not revealed until the end of the film, when Tali's plans to take a trip to Bolivia to buy school supplies for her children are halted by her husband. When Tali first brings up the possibility of the trip to her husband, his initial reaction is to assume that he will be accompanying her. Later, he outright discourages her from going, stating that, telling her "Es demasiado peligroso para dos mujeres" (*It's too dangerous for two women*). Finally, he goes to buy all of the school supplies locally without telling Tali, an act which happens off-screen outside of the purview and containment of the camera -- a demonstration of his freedom. Tali is left to find the school supplies in the trunk of the car, and has no option but to cancel her trip. Thus the limits to her agency are made clear, and she too is confined to her domestic space. Therefore, regardless of the "brand" of femininity to which one adheres -- ranging from "positive" (Tali) to "negative" (Mecha) as supported by patriarchal hegemony -- women are ultimately confined. The confined and unmoving nature of the film's two narrative agents is highlighted by title and setting -- *La ciénega* (the swamp) -- an area in which water ceases to move or flow, and instead becomes stagnant and putrid. As Forcinito notes, water is a "principio femenino dentro de la imagineria de atributos de genero, por asociarse con la concepcion y la vida" (112) (*feminine principle in imagery with gendered attributes, as associated with conception and life*). The feminine, then, is represented as confined, stagnant, and rotting within both the narrative and mise-en-scene of the film.

Though Mecha serves as an axis of the film's narrative, it is her two daughters Vero and Momi with whom we become most familiar. It is in their relationships with José (brother), and Isabel (a young indigenous woman who works for the family), respectively, where an exploration of gaze and visual pleasure becomes most relevant in the film. In interviews, Martel frequently discusses her interest in the force of desire between people -- which she sees as not

necessarily based in sex (Guest, 35). In all three of her feature films, relationships between family members can appear highly intimate -- bordering perhaps on incestual. Martel would encourage the viewer, however, to view these relationships with a more nuanced understanding of human desire, which is not necessarily directly linked with desires for sexual contact.

The relationship between siblings Vero and José is exemplary of this type of intimate familial relationship. Vero and José lie in bed together and wrestle in the mud. While Vero is in the shower, José sticks in muddy legs to be rinsed off. Between the two, however, it is Vero's gaze and subjectivity which is emphasized in the relationship, and visual pleasure is found in Vero's gaze on José's body rather than vice-versa. After a drunken fight with Isabel's boyfriend "El Perro," José returns home and passes out on the floor. Vero and Augustina find him the next morning and heave his body onto a bed. While Augustina undresses José, Vero sits and watches. The camera jumps from naked arm to leg to stomach, turning José's body into a compilation of pieces rather than a whole, and thus creates a sense of voyeuristic visual pleasure for the viewer, and, as we see her watch José intently, for Vero. José, however, does not seem to find the same visual pleasure in gazing upon Vero, as is demonstrated in a scene in which Vero enters a room after taking a shower. José lies on the bed. The moment Vero drops her towel and begins to dress herself, however, José turns his body away from her -- towards the camera -- and so it is made clear that José does not find voyeuristic pleasure in looking at Vero. The looking relationship between Vero and José thus represents a reversal of the active/male and passive/female dichotomy.

Desire, too, characterizes the relationship between Momi and Isabel. In their first appearance in the film, the two characters lie in bed together. Isabel is curled up away from Momi, facing the camera. Isabel's face is never made visible as it is hidden by shadow. Momi,

on the other hand, props herself up and leaning slightly over Isabel's body whispers fervently, "Señor, gracias por darme a Isabel" (*Thank you God for giving me Isabel*). After a minute, Momi gets up and gets in bed with Vero, sniffing. "No quiero estar con nadie mas que con Isabel" (*I don't want anyone but Isabel*), she tells Vero tearfully. Momi's desiring of Isabel is therefore established within the first several minutes of the film.

During the scenes in which Momi and Isabel both appear, Momi is nearly always depicted gazing, quite literally, at Isabel. On two occasions, Momi is shown staring out of a window at Isabel. These shots are almost subjective, from Momi's point of view, as the camera seems almost to be a second face pressed up against the window right next to Momi's. The power of Momi's gaze is further emphasized by Isabel's lack of gaze. Her eyes are often closed, obscured by shadow, or simply cut out of the shot altogether, despite the bottom half of her face appearing on screen. Momi, then, is the agent of the active, desiring gaze -- with Isabel as its object -- while Isabel's gaze is obstructed through use of lighting and cinematography. Momi's desiring and active gaze upon Isabel opens up a new path for identification and the creation of visual pleasure which does not assume a male heterosexual viewer.

Isabel's lack of gaze not only emphasizes Momi's active gaze, but is also demonstrative of Isabel's place in society as a member of the indigenous lower class. As a poor indigenous woman, Isabel has very little power of mobility or action in society -- as represented in the film by the repression of her gaze -- nor do the voices and demands of young indigenous women receive apt attention and representation in public nor private life -- as represented by Isabel's lack of subjectivity.

Returning to Jane Gaines' discussion of intersectionality in terms of gender and identification, Isabel can be seen as a site of interaction between forces of gender, race, and class

in the film. While Isabel and Momi have a close relationship (despite often appearing annoyed with Momi's unrelenting attention, Isabel is affectionate towards Momi on several occasions, and has clearly been tasked with serving as Momi's primary caregiver), the schism between them caused by race and class is clear. Despite Momi's clear and unrequited desire for Isabel, Momi is unable to shake the racism and classism towards Isabel which is engendered in her by Mecha, and undoubtedly by society as a whole. Mecha's abuse of Isabel is highly visible and overt. Momi, meanwhile, appears somewhat confused by the nature of her societal positioning. In one scene, Momi is depicted opening a door to her bedroom to look at Isabel and asks accusatory, "*¿Qué estás tomando?*" (What are you taking?) -- an inappropriate question clearly born out of Mecha's constant assertions that Isabel has been stealing towels. Not long after this scene, however, Isabel discovers that Momi has stolen her bracelet and hidden it in her bedside table. Thus while Momi accuses Isabel of stealing (as learned through Mecha), it is actually Momi stealing from Isabel -- an act which carries extra weight as it is the stealing of economic resources by white middle class from indigenous lower class. This subtle treatment of harmful stereotypes which result from racism and classism clearly highlights both the falseness of these stereotypes, and the power of racism and classism as it creates a division in any unification Momi and Isabel might feel as two young women, and is able to overpower Momi's desire for Isabel.

Gaines' theories on minority women as often more likely to identify with a character of their own racial group rather than gender group (as they see racial oppression as shared with men) is exemplified through Isabel in a scene in which she, Momi, and Vero go shopping for a shirt for José. In the first shot of the scene, all three girls are visible -- Vero in the foreground, Momi behind Vero, and Isabel in the background, only partially in focus. Already Isabel's

liminal existence is clear. As soon as she notices that several young men of indigenous ancestry are outside the shop, she leaves to join them. (Momi, displeased at this development, presses her face up against the window to watch her). Once outside, Isabel appears smiling, clearly more comfortable among young men of her racial and class groups than with young women outside these groups. As Ana Peluffo notes, “Isabel’s gender position pulls her in the direction of Momi and her sisters but her class and ethnic affiliation create a discomfort zone that tears her apart in the direction of El Perro and his friends” (Peluffo, 215).

Noticing the boys outside with Isabel, Vero tells Momi to call them into the store. Vero then directs El Perro to try on the shirt she has picked out to determine whether it will fit José -- a quite explicit ploy to see watch him undress. The erotic adolescent gaze from Vero to El Perro (as well as Momi to El Perro, although this can also be seen as as a substitution of desired bodies, with Isabel as the primary object of desire) is laced with racial tension. This tension erupts several scenes later during the carnival. The diegetic soundtrack of the scene is a Cumbia -- a genre of Afro-Latin dance music. The male singer addresses a male listener, warning him that all women are the same, the good and the bad, for they all make men suffer. The camera focuses on the faces in the crowd, all spattered with white paint and powder, creating a moment of racial confusion. Any homogenizing effect created by the paint evaporates, however, the moment a fight starts between José and El Perro; the fight is blamed on El Perro (lower class, indigenous), despite the fact that José (upper class, white) initiated the confrontation, and thus his race and class hegemony are re-established. Though the fight was begun (primarily) over Isabel, her subjectivity in the situation remains ignored, and she is erased from the remainder of the scene for but a fleeting second.

Components of class, race, gaze, and femininity further converge through the leitmotif of the Virgin Mary. A television broadcast about an apparition of the Virgin above a water tower near La Ciénega plays throughout several scenes. The water tower is located in a working class part of town. Those who are interviewed in the broadcast -- and who report seeing the apparition -- are all lower-class women of color. The characters who watch or reference the news story are also all women, though separated from the actual apparition of the Virgin by several degrees through a scratchy black-and-white television screen. Momi's expedition to explore the water tower happens off-screen -- we are only made aware of her pilgrimage when she returns to tell Vero, "no vi nada" (*I saw nothing*). Martel places the apparition of the Virgin closest to the most liminal characters -- the lower-class, non-white women. Their subjectivity and gaze are never prioritized, yet they are given the ability to see what others cannot (in the newscast the camera points up to the water tower, but shows nothing). One step removed are the characters viewing the newscast from their middle-class homes. Religion -- an increasingly marginalized institution itself -- as representative of hope, salvation, and divine reality, is thus placed in the vision of the most subjugated. By giving this group the power to see what others cannot, Martel depicts an attempt by the disenfranchised group to gain power -- albeit of a different, metaphysical kind -- over the patriarchal, hegemonic discourse of religion. Furthermore, the Virgin Mary is *the* symbol of femininity in Christianity -- as a monotheistic religion with a paternal God, Christianity had to invent idea of the feminine. The image of ideal womanhood it produced is based in virginity and motherhood -- two opposing and simultaneously impossible characteristics. Recalling Julia Kristeva's *Stabat Mater*, Christianity seeks to humanize itself through the cult of the Mother (Kristeva, 142), yet the ideal version of motherhood it deifies (and of daughter and wife, for Mary was all three for Jesus) is unattainable, and so the earthly woman

is left to be perpetually lacking. Including the symbol of the Virgin Mary further emphasizes Martel's critique of patriarchal (in this case religious) constructions of femininity which are unrealistic and unattainable.

La ciénega is an examination of the claustrophobic confinement of female gaze, desire, and experience within the domestic familial sphere. The dominant power of patriarchal structures -- though not overtly explored -- appears in the film as a nearly invisible, spectral force which confines the women of *La ciénega*. The fact that patriarchal forces are left as such points to their perceived normality -- the omnipresence of dominant patriarchy has rendered it so natural so as to make it seemingly invisible.

La niña santa

It is amongst the crumbling walls of a once-luxurious hotel in Salta where Amalia (the "holy girl" of *La niña santa*) experiences an adolescent spiritual and sexual awakening. Enraptured with ideas of divine vocation and mysticism promulgated in their all girl's Catholic school, Amalia and best friend Joséfina experiment with the interactions between the earthly and the divine, the religious and the erotic, and their own perception. At the hotel, run by Amalia's recently divorced mother Helena, a medical conference is taking place. Dr. Jano, one of the doctors attending the conference, covertly molests Amalia in public. Rather than perceiving herself as a victim, Amalia sees the event as a divine call to action -- the "sign" which points to her vocation -- the salvation of the middle aged doctor. To further complicate matters, a romance begins between Helena and Dr. Jano.

Though far from a sequel to *La ciénega*, a thin but vital thread can be seen connecting the two films. In the closing scene of *La ciénega*, Momi has just returned from a trip to the water tower where The Virgin had purportedly been seen (several characters in the film are depicted

watching news reports on the event). “No vi nada” (*I didn’t see anything*), she tells Vero, voicing the closing line of *La ciénega. La niña santa*, seeming almost to respond to Momi’s statement, allows our other senses to displace sight as the dominant tool of investigation. As Deborah Martin writes, “If Momi’s unproductive pilgrimage to see the Virgin ended with a recognition of the incapacity of the visual to provide meaning or answers...in *La niña santa* Amalia will move her quest into domains beyond the visual, relying on touch, sound and smell to guide her” (D. Martin, 55-56).

The decentering of the visual and the emphasis on sound, touch, and smell is in itself a challenge to dominant, normative (and therefore patriarchal) cinematic constructions. Furthermore, vision is frequently constructed a source of unequivocal, analytical truth. After all, one must “see it to believe it.” This dominance and veracity of the visual is closely linked with the scientific, the mathematic, and the empirical -- all historically seen as masculine fields and characteristics. Sound, touch, and smell, meanwhile, are seen as closely linked with the emotional, intuitive, and the sensory -- and thus can be seen as “feminine” senses. Sound, touch, and smell are also central to Catholic mysticism -- which is explored in the film through Amalia and Joséfina -- and are specifically feminized within images of the Virgin Mary, for, as writes Julia Kristeva in “Stabat Mater,” “Of the virginal body we are entitled only to the ear, the tears, and the breasts,” and, “That the female sexual organ has been transformed into an innocent shell which serves only to receive sound...The female sexual experience is therefore anchored in the universality of sound...” (142). In pursuits of truth and fact, the former is always valued over the latter, and thus the masculine over the feminine. By positioning sound, touch, and smell as necessary to the narrative trajectory of the film, Martel reconstitutes the feminine sensory as equal to or greater than the masculine empirical.

The use of sound in Martel's films has received great critical attention, likely in part due to the director's own self-proclaimed fascination with it. According to Martel, "Sound is...the only truly tactile dimension of the cinema. It is the only way in which the cinema physically touches the spectator. Audio frequencies are experienced through the entire body" (Guest, 36), and is also "what connects the film, the spectator, and the director" (Taubin, 4). In *La niña santa*, as in the rest of the Salta trilogy, sound plays a fascinating, integral, and dynamic role in the film's construction. The importance of sound in *La niña santa* is apparent immediately, as the film begins auditorily rather than visually, with the first minute of the work being comprised of rustling papers, a few notes played on a piano, and then the disembodied voice of a young woman singing a hymn.

Sound and the ability to hear are emphasized in the character of Helena who, we learn, suffers from hearing impairment as a result of her time as a competitive diver in her youth. While in the pool, Helena begins to experience ear pain and a ringing in her ear -- the later of which the audience, too, experiences. Dr. Jano, who has been watching Helena from the pool deck, confronts her later about her condition. Helena reluctantly agrees to undergo a series of audio tests, conducted by Jano and several other doctors attending the conference at the hotel. The emphasis on Helena's difficulty hearing becomes especially noteworthy when considering Helena's character as a representation of traditional femininity. Helena's image is first projected on screen through the subjective gaze of Dr. Jano who sees her, though it just her back which is visible, as her head is blocked by a window. Immediately, then, Helena is represented as a more typical depiction of femininity in the cinema -- the object of the active, male, voyeuristic gaze. Her continual concern with her appearance and her desire for male attention serve to emphasize this coding of Helena as feminine "object," in a way which is extreme enough to be seen almost

as caricature. Helena then, as representative of a problematic version of femininity, is denied much of her access to sound -- a commodity which is valued within the film.

Amalia and Joséfina, meanwhile -- as representative of a new generation -- continuously play with their astute ability to produce and receive sound. In school, the two girls whisper devilishly to one another, always on the subject of sexual exploit and eroticism, which directly disobeys the strict religious doctrins they are in the midst of being taught. Amalia specifically experiments with the sounds she can make, muttering prayers under her breath, tapping on things, and humming idly at various points in the film. In one of the most memorable moments of the *La niña santa*, Dr. Jano is reclined against the side of the pool, just his head above the water. Amalia, her image distorted behind and her hand pressed up against a semi-opaque screen, spys on Jano. Clicking her fingernail against a metal pole, she creates an eerie and incessant “ping,” which soon gets Jano’s attention. This moment marks an important shift in power relations between Amalia and Jano, as it is the first moment in which Jano is made aware of the fact that he is now the “victim,” as it were, of Amalia’s covert actions and gaze, rather than vice-versa.

The interaction between touch and sound is emphasized in *La niña santa*, most notably through the recurring appearance of a theremin -- “an electronic instrument invented by a Soviet physician in the 1920’s, which is played without physical contact from the player, who controls pitch and volume through movements of his hands that are sensed and transformed into audio signals by two metal antennas” (Andermann, 156). In the inciting incident of the film, Amalia and Joséfina are outside a storefront watching a theremin being played, clearly enraptured with both the strange, eerie music the instrument produces, and the disembodied quality of it, as the performer's hand hovers over the contraption at such a distance so it is abundantly clear that no

contact between player and instrument is made. It is in this context of disembodied and displaced touch that Jano's molestation of Amalia occurs. Dr. Jano (an Otorhinolaryngologist, we learn), pretending to be interested in the theremin, joins the crowd watching the performer. Coming up behind Amalia, he inches closer, then presses himself into her from behind. Jano's forbidden touching, then, can be seen as a co-option of the displaced touch of the theremin player. The correspondence between sight, sound, and touch is further emphasized in this scene, as neither Jano nor Amalia can see one another at the inciting moment. In this moment of high narrative importance, sound and touch have hegemony over sight. The presence of the theremin affirms the displaced and perverse nature of Jano's touch on Amalia, while the emphasis on sound and touch over sight serves to situate the viewer within the feminine subjectivity of Amalia.

Appeals to the sense of smell are made most notably in three instances. In the first -- a repeated action which occurs several times throughout the film -- workers cleaning the hotel spray air freshener in rooms. In all instances, the can of spray is loud and noticeable, and the characters react to the change being enacted on the environment. This motif ties in with the overall sense of decay in the mise-en-scene of the hotel. The clearly once nicer space is now rundown, things don't always work, and -- we learn -- it is riddled with undesirable smells. The gently decaying hotel can be seen as representative of the declining middle class (D. Martin, 72), a reality highly relevant at the time of *La niña santa*'s production due to the economic crash in Argentina at the turn of the century. In the second instance, Amalia has snuck into Jano's room. She finds a bottle of his aftershave, and dabs some on the inside of her collar. For several scenes after, she appears enthralled with the scent, burying her nose in the fabric and inhaling the scent of her assailant and the object of her perceived divine project. In appealing to scent, Martel teases out a sensory reaction, encouraging the viewer to engage with Amalia's desire for Jano.

Lastly, in the film's closing scene, Amalia is floating idly in the pool, completely oblivious to the impending crescendo of events happening within the same walls. Joséfina, who has just lit a fire of controversy in informing her mother of Jano's infraction upon Amalia, wades into the pool to join her friend. "Huele a azahar" (*It smells like orange blossoms*), she comments. The orange blossom, a favorite in mystic literature, is associated with innocence and purity. The scent of orange blossoms around the two girls, then, serves to represent the patriarchal envisioning of the two adolescents as innocent, chaste beings. Amalia and José are surrounded by this vision, yet it is external to them rather than interior -- both in the presence of the scent in the air around them (they are not the source of the smell), and their own defiance of the vision (neither character is an embodiment of innocence or purity).

Though Martel appeals frequently to the non-dominant senses in *La niña santa*, gaze and looking relations still contribute significantly to the language of the film. As is noted by both Martin and Forcinito, Amalia's appropriation of gaze and voyeurism allows her to usurp the patriarchal power which Jano normatively possesses as a white, heterosexual male. "Amalia's refusal to accept her status as object in the economy of gaze and touch initiated by Jano, and her dogged insistence on actively looking/desiring is especially threatening to the social order" (D. Martin, 60). Not only does Amalia flip the power dynamic of her narrative, she also subverts the structure built around her by her Catholic school. Her fervor for prayer and fascination with the teachings of her catechism class do not entail a docile and demure character in Amalia. Instead, she reconfigures her learning, turning her understanding of divine purpose into an erotic and forbidden quest. An erotic feminine aesthetic of religion is further emphasized through the gaze between Amalia and Joséfina. During the scenes taking place in their catechism class, close up shots are used to emphasize the two girls' eyes, clearly highlighting the charged, meaningful

looks they exchange. The erotic nature of these looks is emphasized during the opening scene, when a magazine cut-out of a shirtless young man is passed around. The two girls gaze at the picture, then at one another, and then to their teacher, who is also the subject of their erotic gaze (supported through their whispers about her sexual exploits). In a later scene, Amalia and José lie in a pile of sheets in the hotel's laundry room. Amalia has her eyes closed, and is whispering a prayer fervently under her breath. "Abre tus ojos" (*Open your eyes*) José tells Amalia, who ignores her. After several iterations, José finally leans in and kisses Amalia on the lips, causing her to open her eyes. For these two girls, the mystic and religious is intimately entwined with the erotic. When the erotic gaze is cut off, then, the erotic touch is employed.

La niña santa, in many senses a story about a young woman molested by an adult man, renegotiates a narrative of victimhood. Amalia, an adolescent girl surrounded by the monolithic patriarchal structures of religion and medicine, reinvisions her positioning, and in so doing becomes a powerful agent. Her mother, meanwhile, serves as a caricature of femininity -- a projection of a patriarchal ideal, and thus is prop more than person in the film's vision. *La niña santa* is a depiction of the subversive power of the adolescent girl.

La mujer sin cabeza

Martel's most recent feature breaks with many of the commonalities shared between the first two. *La mujer sin cabeza* (2008) follows the story of its protagonist, Vero a middle-aged, upper-middle-class woman who hits something (either a dog or a boy, it is never revealed which) while driving on a rural dirt road. The film is a study of the aftermath of this hit-and-run, in which notable "plot points" are scarce. Analyses of *La mujer sin cabeza* have tended to focus on the film's connection to Argentina's "cinema of the disappeared" -- referring to films which

explore or reflect the terror, disappearance, and grief of the last dictatorship (1976-1983). Undoubtedly, *La mujer sin cabeza* makes reference (covertly, as is always the case in Martel) to this weighty component of Argentine history and identity, most notably in the way murder (though an accident in Vero's case) is silenced and wiped away by the ruling class -- reminiscent of the state terror of the Dirty War. Martel described her latest as her "most Argentine" film (Sosa, 259), likely in large part because of its nods towards this national trauma. While the analysis of *La mujer sin cabeza* in relation to Argentina's history of political terror, loss, and grief is compelling, I will focus instead on the way in which the film presents a critique of the silencing and disempowering capability of dominant patriarchy, and its intimate connection with classism and racism.

In the opening scene of the film, a group of young indigenous boys run along a dirt road yelling, playing, their swift movements mirrored by a quickly moving, unstable camera. Then, quite suddenly, the scene changes, and the camera is amongst a group of mothers with pearl earrings, chatting next to their cars. The juxtaposition of two distinct and separate worlds is made clear. These two worlds collide, literally, briefly, when Vero, looking on the floor of the car for her ringing cellphone, hits something -- what exactly, we never know -- which she believes to be one of the running boys from the opening scene. This moment is, says Martin a "...cataclysmic collision across social class and ethnicity" (93). From this moment on, the world inhabited by the darker and poorer class is no longer completely separate from Vero's, yet nor do the two become one. Instead, the two groups seem to exist in the same place temporally and physically, yet on different planes, as if one is a spectral presence in the other. Because we are attached to Vero's subjectivity, the indigenous lower class becomes an "other" inhabiting the white upper-middle class world. As Cecilia Sosa writes, those on the lower rungs of society become "eerie spectres

who circulate within the space like phantasms: they are the ones who live on the edges, the ones who have been perversely neglected such that they have become almost invisible” (Sosa, 256).

Martel constructs the nearly invisible, of-another-world quality of these liminal characters through use of cinematography and mise-en-scene. The camera is trained, with high intensity, on Vero throughout nearly every shot of the film. In a scene that takes place in Vero’s kitchen after the accident, for example, Vero is centered in the shot, standing still, her gaze detached. The domestic workers she employs move swiftly around her, completing tasks and chatting. The camera remains still, however, focused on Vero -- who appears almost not to notice the people around her. The use of shallow focus throughout much of the film creates a sense of unease. What is within the camera’s range of focus (most often Vero’s face) is sharp and clear. All that is beyond the range of focus, however, is blurry, dark, and difficult to discern. This constructs a world in which Vero -- and the audience -- are simultaneously wary and unaware of the surroundings, which often includes the ghostly “others” of the lower class.

Vero and members of her upper-middle-class cohort are nearly always shot inside (with the exception the interior of cars and Vero’s tiny walled-in garden -- a representation of their possession of the privilege of privacy), while non-in-group individuals nearly always appear outdoors. The in-group/out-group dichotomy is thus manifested physically. The walls which separate the two groups, however, are often sheer -- curtains, glass, or screens through which the camera can see, working to further the sense of multiple planes of existence, which co-exist yet can’t quite touch. This physical separation is typified in the scene in which Vero, Joséfina, and Candita drive past the dam where the boy’s body is soon to be found. They slow down to enquire about the commotion. “Podría ser un person o un ternero” (*It could be a person or a calf*) [blocking the canal], they are told (again, the equation between the boy and an animal is made).

The women acknowledge the news silently, commenting only on the bad smell coming through the window of the car, and drive off. Within the safety of their car, they are able to view the world of the lower classes, but are not subjected to its realities. Vero is tall, very blonde, and quite pale, and so appears highly distinct from the indigenous individuals with whom she is juxtaposed. The previously mentioned scene in the kitchen is exemplary of this visual distinction. Vero's noticeable silence is also contrasted with the voices of her indigenous employees -- voices which at times it seems Vero is unable to hear, further contributing to the othering of the members of the lower class, and the feeling that they and Vero inhabit different realms of existence.

In presenting lower-class minority characters as specter-like beings existing on the edges of a bourgeois world, Martel highlights the upper-class othering, decentering, and desire to overlook and ignore the existence of a struggling lower class, a problematic phenomenon upon which Martel comments, noting the "...social tendency to want a social class closed, like a caste, while the gap between classes gets bigger" (Wisniewski, 4). Vero's ability to ignore and overlook those outside of her in-group is momentarily shaken after the accident. Yet even the belief that she killed a member of the out-group does not completely open her eyes to their existence. "...Vero's hit-and-run accident plunges her (and us) through a shift in the use of focus, into an altered perceptual state which cleverly suggests both social blindness as well as a heightened awareness of social hierarchy and its causalities" (D. Martin, 93). The subjugated group switches from existing in a completely separate frame (as in the opening scene) to existing liminally in the same.

As Martel has noted in several interviews, the film is not concerned with whether or not Vero was actually responsible for the death of the boy. Instead, the film is concerned with the

way Vero and her social group deal with the possibility that she *may have* killed another human being. Vero's initial reaction to the event is certainly unforgivable. Were there even the slightest chance she hit a person, basic human decency would require her to stop. It isn't until she's far enough down the road to be out of sight that she finally stops. Yet the guilt, fear, and trauma she experiences after the accident is palpable -- it causes her, after all, to "lose her head." After staring at a dark-haired child in the supermarket, Vero finally blurts out to her husband Marcos, "Maté a alguien en la ruta" (*I killed someone on the road*). This moment marks a transition, as the potential manslaughter moves from its space confined in Vero's head to a potential crack in the walls dividing the comfortable, dominant in-group from the poor and struggling out-group. And so, in a graceful exercise of hegemonic gender, race, and class power, the men of Vero's caste move with ease and efficiency to remove any threat to the quiet dominance of their social group. "The men of the family," writes Sosa, "a syndicate of patriarchal kinship, seem to know exactly how to take care of the 'situation'" (Sosa, 254). In a 2009 interview with Amy Taubin, Martel states:

I think that in the film I show a social mechanism, which in itself could be really beautiful and fascinating, but at the same time is really frightening. And that's the mechanism whereby a social group as a whole tries to alleviate the suffering of one of its members. They gather together and cover up what happened in order to protect one of their own, even though it is possible that the person has committed a crime. On the one hand, that is beautiful in terms of human support, but it also contains all the roots of what's evil about a social class: hiding facts, crimes even, and it leads to racism. It is the psychological basis of racism. (Taubin 2009, p. 3)

Though an adult woman and mother to two grown daughters, Vero is treated like a child by the men around her. She is never once consulted nor asked for consent as her husband, brother, and cousin reconfigure her reality. Vero's agency in her own narrative is usurped, taken over by the power conglomerate of white male privilege. The men around Vero not only alter her reality without consent. They react to any effort Vero makes to voice concern about the accident with "infantilizing" (D. Martin, 82) dismissal. "Fue un susto" (*You had a fright*) and "No paso nada" (*Nothing happened*), they tell her again and again. Her car is given "unos retoques" (*a few little touch-ups*) -- which in reality is some fairly serious work to erase all evidence of the crash from the car. And so the men around Vero control the way she thinks, feels, and remembers her own experiences. This is not to say, however, that Vero openly objects to their actions. Though not an active agent in the cover-up (she is not given that option either), she makes no attempt to stop it. Vero therefore can be seen as collaborating, in her acquiescence, with her own gender oppression in her willingness to maintain class privilege.

Vero appears in nearly every shot of the film. The highly frequent use of extreme-closeup shots on Vero's face, as well as the positioning of the camera -- always in a position that could reasonably be taken by another person in the scene, an anthropomorphising of the camera -- creates a sense of unease and surveillance. The camera seems to follow Vero wherever she goes, sometimes peeking at her through a window or from through a doorway. This surveillance, I argue, is enacted by the gendered, classed, and raced hegemonic power which is embodied in the film through Vero's male family members. It is as if the camera is surveilling Vero, ensuring that she does not resist the reconfiguration of her reality nor commit any acts fueled by guilt which could disrupt the carefully balanced social strata. The final scene is evidence of this claim. Vero and her family are attending a party at the hotel where Vero stayed in the night of the accident.

Before entering the party, Vero approaches the concierge. “La habitación 818 estuvo ocupada el fin de semana pasado” (*Room 818 was occupied last weekend*) -- a statement not a question, yet she follows, “Fijate” (*Check it*), using the informal “tu” rather than the formal “vos,” which serves as a clear reminder of her superior social status. Here Vero learns that the last potential piece of evidence has been erased, for there is no record of her stay. Her complacency is revealed through a soft, sad smile, and with the potential for any disruption of social order finally fully mitigated, Vero is released from the surveilling gaze of the camera. She passes through cloudy glass doors into the party, and the camera does not accompany her. Instead, it remains outside, watching Vero move about the party through the smoky screen. The truth too is left behind on the other side of the door.

As is always the case in Martel, a younger female character is presented who defies patriarchal constraints. In *La mujer sin cabeza* this character is Vero’s niece, Candita. Much like *La ciénega*’s Momi and *La niña santa*’s Amalia, Candita demonstrates lesbian desire, and in so doing presents an alternative to heterosexual, male dominated paths of identification and visual pleasure. Candita also challenges class and race divisions, as her best friend (and maybe girlfriend) Cuca is of the same social group as the boy Vero may have killed. Candita spends her time with Cuca and a group of girls whom her mother, Joséfina, refers to somewhat scathingly as “leidyies.” “No se donde saca esa gente, todo el dia machoneando con esa moto” (*I don’t know where she finds these people, messing around with that bike all day -- using the verb “machonear” -- to act macho, connoting lesbianism*), Joséfina tells Vero. It is no mistake that Candita, the only character to challenge the stratifications of her society, is also the only character to outwardly acknowledge that the boy found in the canal was likely murdered, as she refers to him as, “el chico que mataron” (*the boy they killed*) (D. Martin, 96). Through Candita,

Martel presents an alternative to the self-segregating of the upper class, and the obfuscation of truth and justice which accompanies.

La mujer sin cabeza is an exposition on the exhaustive and limitless power of the white male upper class. Vero is the protagonist, her face an over-present image on the screen. Yet she has no agency in her own narrative. The result of oversaturating the screen with Vero's image while simultaneously eliminating her agency is a critique -- almost satire -- of the "narrative image" (to use De Lauretis' term) status of women in film. At the forefront of Martel's latest cinematic exploration is the frightening bourgeois tendency to render out-group members invisible, the value of their lives equivalent to that of a dog. Unlike critiques of class inequality that ignore the vast patriarchal component of the problem, however, *La mujer sin cabeza* "resists a purely class-oriented analysis, by showing the mechanisms of gendered oppression to be crucial to the maintenance of the status quo" (D. Martin, 98).

Reflections of the New Latin American Cinema

Martel's focus on the feminine, the domestic, and the claustrophobia which results from dominant patriarchal power clearly differentiates her work from that of the New Latin American Cinema. As previously noted, the practitioners and films of the New Latin American Cinema did very little to recognize the sexism, disempowerment, and abuse experienced by so many Latin American women, nor did it work to include or promote women directors. For these reasons, Martel's work can be seen as a response to this exclusion and blindness on the part of the New Latin American Cinema, as her films bring female subjectivity and experience to the forefront and expose realities of womanhood in Salta, Argentina. While the differences between Martel's

work and that of the NLAC are clear, the ways in which Martel can be seen as a reflection of the movement are also abundant.

The New Latin American Cinema saw itself as a revolutionary movement, one which disrupted hegemonic processes. “Surely the truly revolutionary position, from now on, is to contribute to overcoming these elitist concepts and practices... The new outlook for artistic culture is no longer that everyone must share the taste of a few, but that all can be creators of that culture. Art has always been a universal necessity; what it has not been is an option for all under equal conditions” (Espinosa, 75-76), wrote Julio García Espinosa in “For an Imperfect Cinema.” Despite completing formal training himself in Italy, García Espinosa and many other practitioners of the movement felt that film school -- while useful -- was also problematically exclusionary. Recall that García Espinosa and Tomás Guitiérrez were the only founding members of the ICAIC with any formal film training. *Historias de la Revolución [Stories of the Revolution]* (1960) and *Cuba baila [Cuba Dances]* (1960), the first films produced by ICAIC were intended to be studied by upcoming directors, a resource for the many autodidactic filmmakers who emerged throughout the NLAC. Lucrecia Martel, too, received no formal film education. Instead Martel was self-taught, as she stated, “The only real possibility was to study autodidactically, to watch films and analyze them” (Guest, 31).

Martel’s reflection of the directors of the NLAC is also evident in the discussions of auteurship which surround both parties. The theory of auteurship was born out of the French New Wave, therefore in many ways a theoretical import, which arrived just as the NLAC began. Auteur theory morphed somewhat once coming into contact with the highly continental and collectively-minded NLAC. As Martin writes:

In the 1960's there was a reconceptualization of film authorship in Latin America by the directors associated with the militant New Latin American Cinema; a shift of emphasis in understandings of auteurism from the individual to the collective, from the Cahiers model -- an elite club of virtuosos and a strong emphasis on style over content -- to the politicised auteur as voice of the people and agent of change. (4)

Auteur theory, then, underwent change -- reconceptualization -- in order for the collective body of NLAC directors to be understood as (an) auteur(s). By the time Martel began to make films, auteur theory had been discredited by many. The understanding of Martel as an auteur thus necessitates its own reconceptualization, or resurrection perhaps, of auteur theory -- a new version which celebrates all those who contribute to a work, yet also emphasizes the voices of authors who have historically been silenced -- such as that posited by Geetha Ramanathan. Thus auteur theory finds reason for reconstruction and application in both Martel and the New Latin American Cinema.

Perhaps a more obvious connection between Martel's films and those of the NLAC is their detachment from hegemonic modes of production and associated commercial motivations. The filmmakers of the NLAC frequently utilized non-professional actors, shot on-site, and took a somewhat guerrilla approach to filmmaking (Hart, 24; Rodriguez, 132). They were not motivated by desires for commercial success or recognition, but rather the desire to expose realities often unseen and to incite political change. Martel's filmmaking practices, while in many ways more conventional than those of the NLAC, are still in many ways revolutionary. Martel writes her own scripts, and exercises a high degree of control over the cinematography, editing, costuming, and sets of her films. Her intimate working relationship with the actors in her films has been commented upon in many interviews. As a woman, her role as not only director, but also

screenwriter and co-author of all other aspects of her films is, in itself, revolutionary and disruptive of hegemonic filmmaking practices. Additionally, Martel has chosen to work closely with female producers Lita Stantic and Bertha Navarro, further distancing herself from the patriarchally-centered hegemonic filmmaking system. The highly non-conventional structure and composition of Martel's films is evidence enough that the director is not motivated by major commercial success nor widespread recognition. The non-linear plot and ambiguity of relationships among characters is more than enough to render her work "unsuccessful" in terms of box office revenue or viewership numbers. Yet Martel has stated that she makes films "fundamentally for them to be watched in my own city [Salta]" (Guest, 34), and therefore her ambivalence towards the commercial success which could result in making films aimed at a less specific audience is clear.

Martel and many directors of the NLAC utilized state funding in the production of their films. Latin American nations have an impressive history of creating state-run institutions devoted to the development of the film industry in their respective countries. While Cuba's ICIAC (Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos) is perhaps the most famous, Bolivia's Instituto Boliviano Cinematográfico was founded six years prior to the ICIAC in 1953. Brazil's lesser known Instituto Nacional do Cinema was founded in 1966, and Argentina's Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales followed in 1968. All of these institutions were integral to the success of the NLAC, many providing not only funding, but later workshops and programs for aspiring filmmakers. Martel too is connected to her country's national film organization. Though her matriculation at the state-funded film school was derailed due to the economic crisis of the time, Martel has received financial support from the Argentine Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales for the production of all three of her feature films.

Moving beyond externalities to the contents of Martel's films, reflections of the NLAC are clear. Fundamentally, the NLAC saw film as a means of exposition and political action. Martel's films may not contain political messages as conspicuous as those promulgated in the films of the NLAC, yet her films are political nevertheless. The director was expressly pleased when *La ciénaga* was described as a "political film," and, furthering the point, Julia Stites Mor writes that, "Martel considera la cinematografía un arma política valiosa, debido a su capacidad para comunicar sutilezas y contundencias" (*Martel considers cinema a valuable political weapon because of its ability to communicate subtleties and strengths*) (149). The filmmakers of the NLAC used the "arma política valiosa" in order to expose and problematize class inequality. In their explicit focus on this issue, many of the NLAC's practitioners isolated the issue, and as a result gender inequality -- though irrevocably intertwined with class inequality -- was, for the most part, left out of the discourse. Martel's films add gender to the equation in a large way, yet also can be seen as expositions on class and race inequalities.

As Stephen Hart notes, the films of the NLAC are characterized in large part, by their "depiction of everyday reality" and "of poverty among the disadvantaged classes" (34). Echoing this, Martel's work focuses on "provinces and rural settings held in the grip of a conservative, patriarchal bourgeoisie, and the sharp class division between this elite of European descent and the *mestizo* or indigenous poor" (D. Martin, 3). Each film of the Salta Trilogy presents a slightly different perspective on class and ethnicity, yet all three characterize the issue of privilege disparities in the same way, exposing the racism and classism which plagues the crumbling bourgeoisie of Salta. Taking somewhat literally Solanas and Getino's statement that, "The more exploited a man is, the more he is placed on a plane of insignificance" (45), the indigenous characters of Martel's films live in the background of shots, often out of focus, their

voices and bodies pushed to the side. The NLAC has often been described as “militant” in its disseminations on class inequality, an adjective inapplicable to Martel. Yet class and race inequalities are always one of the primary “layers” of exposition emphasized in Martel’s work (Wisniewski, 2). In large part, this is likely due to Martel’s understanding of the ways in which all social disparities are interconnected, and therefore she does not isolate one from the others in her cinematic expositions. The setting of her films in Salta, however, bares particular importance in considering Martel’s focus on class and race inequalities -- both due to the director’s pointed emphasis on the area as a defining feature of her films, and the culture and demographics of Salta.

A somewhat U-shaped province in the northwest of Argentina, Salta has borders with Chile, Bolivia, and Paraguay. Like most provinces in the northeast of the country, Salta is primarily rural. Rates of poverty and income inequality in Salta are higher than the national average -- in 2014, the Instituto Argentino para el Desarrollo de las Economías Regionales (*Argentine Institute for the Development of Regional Economies*) estimated that 30.2% of the population of Salta lived in poverty. Additionally, a 2005 report conducted by the World Bank found that 31% of the population in Salta have unmet basic needs (UBN), whereas only 8% of the population of the Buenos Aires province have UBN. Of Argentina’s 24 provinces, Salta has the fifth largest indigenous population. The simultaneously high rates of poverty and large indigenous populations in Salta are, of course, no coincidence. The higher than national average income gap, rate of poverty, and indigenous population make Salta a region where class and race disparities are a salient element of society.

On her home and the setting of each of her films, Martel states, “It’s the most politically conservative, classist area of the country and has a large Catholic population. What’s attractive

about the north is that it also has a strong aboriginal culture; it's resistant to European influences" (Taubin, 2005, 2). Every indigenous character who appears in the three films is in one way or another tied to domestic labor, working for one of the whiter, wealthier characters. This representation is reflective of reality. "The problem is that in the North, where my films are set, it's [domestic work] not seen as a job but a servant-type thing. In the upper middle class, they see people who work in their homes as servants, they don't see them as employees who have a job to do. They expect these people not just to do their job efficiently but also to be affectionate towards them and have an emotional connection" (Taubin, 2009, 5), says Martel. Martel's motivation for exposing through her films the vastly imbalanced and unjust relationship between indigenous domestic workers and their European-descendent upper class employers is clear.

Martel's work is reflective of the NLAC's commitment to exposing realities of peripheral groups not only in her focus on the inhumane treatment of indigenous citizens, but also in her depiction of life in Salta more generally. In Argentina, Buenos Aires sits in the throne of not only economic activity, politics, and tourism, but also the arts. As Martin writes, "Salta was cinematically uncharted territory -- a world away from the culture of Buenos Aires which still dominated the Argentine film scene" (D. Martin, 3). In her intentional focus on Salta in all three films, Martel gives voice and image to day-to-day realities rarely before depicted on screen. In making her films in Salta, with Salta's people as the intended audience, Martel also perfectly emulates Solanas and Getino's call for "developing a culture by us and for us" (36).

In "For an Imperfect Cinema" García Espinosa states that a film should show, rather than analyze the problem it addresses. "To analyze, in the traditional sense of the word, always implies a closed prior judgement... To analyze is to block off from the outset any possibility for

analysis on the part of the interlocutor...To show the process of a problem, on the other hand, is to submit it to judgement without pronouncing the verdict” (81). Martel’s films are in many ways exemplary of this idea. Her representations of the problems and malignity of dominant patriarchy and class and race elitism are expository rather than explanatory -- she exposes this privilege cinematically rather than through subject or plot. In fact, comprehending her films as critiques of these hegemonic structures is not necessarily straightforward. Paul Schroeder Rodríguez writes that, “What makes Lucrecia Martel stand out among her female cohorts is not so much her critique of patriarchy’s traditional gender roles and normative sexuality... but the way she delivers that critique through a multilayered and innovative cinematic language that privileges nonlinearity over causality, sound over sight, and suspense over closure (Rodríguez, 266). In so doing, Martel creates a mechanism for discovery, which, writes Gutiérrez Alea in “The Viewer’s Dialectic,” is far more beneficial to the “spectators’ development” (120).

A film’s relationship with its audience was a fundamental concern for the practitioners of the NLAC. Gutiérrez Alea emphasized the importance of appealing to the “reason and intellect” of the viewer, for, he writes, “Film will be more fruitful to the extent that it pushes the spectators towards a more profound understanding of reality” (120). Solanas and Getino wrote that during the making of *La hora de los hornos* (1968), they “discovered a new facet of cinema: the participation of people who, until then, were considered spectators” (54). Martel’s films, as well as her philosophy on the connection between a film and the audience directly reflect the assertions made by Gutiérrez Alea, Solanas, and Getino. According to Martel, “a film is an emotional and intellectual process ... that only has meaning in the relationship that’s established between spectator and the film, but not from itself” (Dawson, 4). “If you show everything, you underestimate the audience” (Wisniewski, 2). Martel constructs her films so that the spectator

must engage in order to comprehend, or even follow along. Martel “does not shoot establishing or transition shots. Instead, her images are mostly shallow focus close-ups. As a result, she demands that her viewers work to make sense of them, to follow character relationships that are established with fleeting lines of dialogue, to infer off-screen space through sound, to question the limits of their own perception” (Wisniewski, 1). As did the filmmakers of the New Latin American Cinema, Martel works to engage the audience on a deeper level, which in turn causes the impact of her films to reverberate within the reality of the spectator long after the closing credits, for, writes Gutiérrez Alea, “The response one wants to arouse in the spectator is not only that which is elicited during the show, but also that which is elicited vis-a-vis reality” (127). As Martel stated in an interview after the release of *La mujer sin cabeza*, “You have to be there. I need you. I don’t want to show you. I want to really share something” (Wisniewski, 5-6).

V. CONCLUSION

Gendered inequality and violence affect women in every part of the world. Latin America experiences these issues at a particularly high rate. Recent Gallup polls have found that Latin Americans were the least likely in the world in 2012 and 2013 to say women in their countries are “treated with respect and dignity” (English and Godoy). According to UN Women, over half of the 25 nations with the highest rates of femicide are in Latin America.

The powerful effects of film, television, and other media on human thought and behavior have been widely documented and discussed across a variety of disciplines. Examining the ways in which representations of women are created and disseminated are therefore vital processes in the fight against gendered inequality, oppression, and violence, and this becomes that much more important in regions where these evils are most abundant.

The most political cinematic movement in Latin American history, the New Latin American Cinema gave image and voice to disenfranchised groups. Among those the movement championed through the creation of visual images, however, women and their concerns were scarce. With Lucrecia Martel, a new kind of film has emerged. Her cinema reflects many of the best elements of the New Latin American Cinema -- the exposing of class and race inequality, the innovation and development of alternative modes of production and cinematic construction, as well as an increased intellectual engagement with the audience. Martel, in her refined and nuanced brand of feminist expression, offers one of the best responses to date to the New Latin American Cinema’s failure to engage with the disenfranchisement of women.

The study of women auteurs such as Martel helps to level the male-dominated field of cinematic discourse and analysis, and emphasizes female subjectivity in a space where it has long been ignored. Furthermore, meaning is constructed in Martel’s cinema in a highly complex

and aesthetically rich way, and thus the analysis of her work necessitates careful interpreting. Her films are unique, cutting edge works of cinema, and so their analysis pushes the boundaries of existing film theory. In providing original composition of image and sound, Martel's films expand the realm of cinematic possibility. Further study could incorporate other women directors who reflect and respond to the New Latin American Cinema in ways unique or analogous to Martel. A study of Martel that focuses specifically on representations of race and class would also be a valuable contribution to the canon of scholarly work on the topic. This essay has been an attempt at initiating this discussion.

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