

1. *La ciénaga*: distanciation and embodiment

Febrero en el noroeste argentino. Sol que parte la tierra y lluvias tropicales. En el monte algunas tierras se anegan. Esas ciénagas son trampas mortales para los animales de huella profunda. En cambio, son hervideros de alimañas felices. (February in north-west Argentina. Sun that cracks the earth and tropical rainstorms. In the forest some areas turn to bog. These swamps are death traps for larger creatures; and yet they are alive, teeming happily with insects and vermin).

(Lucrecia Martel, 'Sinopsis')¹

The opening minutes of *La ciénaga* have received the most detailed analysis of all Martel's work.² With remarkable dexterity and speed they create an intense, disturbing atmosphere of enervation and stagnation, of uncertainty and threat. Heightened sounds of chirping insect-life are accompanied by far off, then nearer, rolls of thunder. Distant mountains are shrouded in cloud, whilst in the foreground red peppers sit out in the weak sun of a humid afternoon, where the middle-aged, upper middle-class Mecha (Graciela Borges) and her friends and family while away the hours on the declining north-western estate of La Mandrágora, lying by the stagnant swimming pool or indoors on their beds. The credits appear, intercut with the film's opening images, the wavering appearance and disappearance of their gothic lettering suggesting something being stifled, or attempting to emerge from the swamp only to be sucked back under; they echo the wavering of the shadows of lace curtains we now see on the wall of teenage

daughter Momi's (Sofia Bertolotto) room, and the shakiness of Mecha's hand and gait as she attempts to pour herself more wine, drunkenly losing some over the side of the glass. Bodies, skin and touch are central to these opening images, both the wrinkled and puckered skin of the adults in their bathing suits, and the intimate contact of Momi as she spoons Isabel (Andrea López) the family's indigenous maid, gently rubbing the sleeping Isabel's clothing against the sensitive skin of her own upper lip. As she does so, she repeats a passionate prayer: *Señor, gracias por darme a Isabel, gracias por darme a Isabel* ('Lord, thank you for giving me Isabel, thank you for giving me Isabel').

Like much of the speech and sound in the film, the communicative and dramatic function of these words recedes in comparison to their musicality and materiality. They also announce important themes of Martel's *oeuvre*: the conjunction of religion and eroticism, the subversion of the sacred by the everyday, the body and desire, such as will be more comprehensively explored in *La niña santa*, as well as a more generalised preoccupation with the otherworldly: with the divine, the supernatural and the unknown. The soundscape of the opening sequence is both startling and immersive, both defamiliarising and corporeal, and immediately gives a sense of both strangeness and anxiety, through heightened atmospheric sound, and the bizarre, unpleasant and initially unidentified sound of metal loungers being dragged across the patio. This particular sound is used in place of traditional transition or establishing shots to create a spatial link between the outside of the house and its interior, as it is still audible when we first cut to the bedroom. Sound also takes the place of *mise-en-scène*, dialogue and suture: 'aural shortcut[s]' such as the sound of ice

rattling and clinking in the wine glasses are used to immerse us in ‘a practice and lifestyle’ (Greene 2012, 59).³ The use of many-layered sound which is difficult for the spectator to attribute to a source or to prioritise, Laura Marks terms ‘haptic’ (2000, 182-3).⁴ Sound in *La ciénaga* is strange yet corporeal, much like the zombified, fragmented bodies which lounge around the pool in this opening sequence. These friends of Mecha, who barely react when, six minutes into the film, she drunkenly falls over on the patio, are filmed from odd angles, and framed to avoid any humanising focus on their faces. *La ciénaga* thus anticipates the more extreme defamiliarisation of the human body we find in Martel’s 2011 short *Muta*, in which fashion models’ resemblance of monsters or stick insects is emphasised, and their faces completely hidden. In *La ciénaga*, these techniques have the effect of freeing the world they portray from its ‘stamp of familiarity’ (Brecht 1964 [1949], 192), and conversely of emphasising its monstrous aspects, rendering strange or even fearful the naturalised elements of that social world.

Atmosphere is privileged over event in *La ciénaga*, and very often little seems to be happening at all. When, in 1999, the screenplay was awarded the Sundance Institute/NHK Award, the jury recommended that the script be re-written, following a more traditional structure around one or two protagonists (Oubiña 2009, 26), but Martel chose instead to retain the diffuse nature of the script, which refuses to settle on particular characters, perspectives, or events, and which privileges allusion and narrative multiplicity over resolution. Character relationships are not clearly established, there is no clear protagonist, and it can be hard to distinguish between the crowd of child characters played by non-professionals selected from around 2,400 auditions (Rich 2001). *La*

ciénaga's long takes, use of deep focus, naturalistic dialogue and non-professional actors (alongside well-known ones such as Borges and Mercedes Morán), align it with neo-realist tendencies. Like certain neo-realist films, it also employs a series of Brechtian techniques to weaken emotional identification and provoke active spectatorship, denying the spectator a fixed viewing position, and favouring instead the creation of a series of tableaux and vignettes which are revealing of the social milieu and its ideological components.⁵ The 'look' of the film also eschews many of the tendencies of more conventional cinematic forms, as cinematographer Hugo Colace suggests when he remarks that, in working on *La ciénaga*, 'Me impuse como disciplina interna el "no". No, a ningún exceso fotográfico; no, a buscar la fotogenia o el glamour de los actores; no, a regodearme en lo paisajístico, ni siquiera mostrarlo hospitalario. Con los cielos oscuros, debía sentirse el calor, la humedad, el abandono' (I disciplined myself internally to say 'no'. No, to any photographic excesses; no, to seeking the photogenic or glamorous side of the actors; no, to revelling in the beauty of the landscape, which shouldn't even appear hospitable. Alongside the dark skies, there needed to be a feeling of heat, humidity and abandonment, 2001, 26).

The film's loose collection of events and tableaux centres on the families of Mecha and Tali (Mercedes Morán) in and around the north-western town of La Ciénaga. Mecha's family lives on the decaying pepper-producing country estate of La Mandrágora whilst Tali's lives in a more modest house in town. The film opens with Mecha's fall, after which repeated visits are made by Tali (and her children) to the estate, to visit the convalescing Mecha, and to escape from her own claustrophobic home environment. Mecha's son, José

(played by Juan Cruz Bordeu, Borges' son), who lives in Buenos Aires with his father's former lover, Mercedes (Silvia Bayle), also returns to La Mandrágora after his mother's fall. Characters seem to be drawn back again and again to the estate, and once there, as if in a swamp, they seem powerless to move, overcome by lethargy and inertia. Multiple narrative directions are hinted at, rather than being fully developed: Momi's intense feelings for Isabel, perhaps the underlying cause of Mecha's racist antipathy toward the servant girl, and Isabel's eventual departure from the estate, seemingly due to pregnancy; the unresolved sexual tension between José and his sister Vero (Leonora Balcarce), the latter's jealousy and hatred of Mercedes who threatens to come to the estate for a break from her job in Buenos Aires operating the family's pepper business; Tali and Mecha's plan to travel to Bolivia to buy cheap school supplies for their children, repeatedly thwarted by Tali's husband and never realised; Mecha's psychosomatic illness, her alcoholism, and the breakdown of her marriage to husband Gregorio (Martín Adjemián); and in the background the TV story on which everyone is hooked, a sighting of the Virgin Mary on top of a water tank endlessly covered by the local media.

To a greater extent than Martel's later features, *La ciénaga* is a rhizome text that flows in many directions, suggesting a state of 'becoming' or in-betweenness through a refusal to settle on any one story, character or event. The film is structured through echoes and repetitions, and through the circling, dodging and postponement of events.⁶ It prefigures throughout the final, tragic event: the death of Luchi (Sebastián Montagna), Tali's youngest son, who falls off a ladder, in a closing echo of Mecha's accident. Martel has suggested that this

structure recalls oral narration, and is reminiscent of how a tragic event might be relayed by a speaker who would hint throughout at the final outcome in order perhaps to soften the blow, by way of small incidents which endanger Luchi or foreshadow his death throughout the film: he cuts himself, tries to stop breathing, and plays dead.⁷ However, many of the film's 102 minutes have less to do with traditional narrative or representational drives than with creating corporeal, or sensory vignettes: a trip to the local dam to swim and catch fish with machetes; Gregorio's repeated brushing and blow-drying of his hair; a water-fight in town; Momi's dip in the dirty pool and careful application of sun cream to her skin; the experiments of Luchi and Momi with sensory perception, especially vision; the experiments of Tali's daughters with their voices as they sing into a whirring fan. The sticky, swampy world of the film emphasises dirt, bodily fluids, odours and the abject. It privileges texture: rumpled sheets, peeling walls, the feeling of shampooing long hair. Images of hands, skin and touch abound. Through texture, smell, and touch, the film invites an embodied form of spectatorship. Distanciation and defamiliarisation – and the intellectual, politicising effects they are associated with – are accompanied in *La ciénaga*, then, by a shift in the locus of knowledge from the intellect to the body, from the hermeneutic to the erotic, which will also be strongly in evidence in *La niña santa*.⁸

La ciénaga's poetics are those of uncertainty and ambiguity. Editing and sound do not serve to explain or clarify matters, but rather to further extend the realms of possibility. As Colace notes, the film was largely shot with a hand-held camera, and much of it portrayed family situations, in which, 'la cámara debía

comportarse como si un integrante anónimo de esa familia estuviese observando la situación. No debía sentirse una “puesta”, aunque ésta existía y siempre era muy precisa’ (‘the camera had to behave as if an anonymous member of that family were observing the situation. It shouldn’t feel at all ‘staged’, although it was, and always very precisely’, Colace 2001, 26).⁹ However, rather like a child, the anonymous family member/camera is curious, but does not occupy a position of mastery or control: it doesn’t understand or see everything, either happening upon situations *in medias res*, or staying too long after an action is complete (Oubiña 2009, 28), whilst action and conversations often take place off-screen, such that the frame doesn’t manage to contain what, in traditional cinema, it would be expected to (18). In particular, the dénouements of potentially dramatic or dangerous situations are not shown: when Momi plunges into the pool, we do not see her surfacing; when Luchi is in the line of fire, we do not see him move away, but instead cut to a shot of the mountains, and hear a gunshot. The film doesn’t acknowledge these dangerous situations by resolving them satisfactorily; we only learn that Momi and Luchi have escaped danger when we seem them crop up in an incidental fashion in later shots or scenes.¹⁰ The film also omits the usual means of constructing coherent spaces, meaning that the viewer is often disorientated in space. There are no establishing shots, for example of either La Mandrágora, or of Tali’s house, and there are no transition shots to establish the spatial relationship between the *finca* and either the mountains where the children play and hunt, or the town of La Ciénaga. When Tali and José travel to the *finca*, there are no shots to suggest the duration of the journey. This treatment of space privileges stagnation and stasis over movement or transition. As Oubiña writes: ‘La metáfora del título, entonces,

resulta clara, porque eso es precisamente una ciénaga: se advierte su existencia cuando ya es tarde y uno ha empezado a hundirse en el barro' ('The metaphor of the title, then, is clear, because that is exactly how a swamp is: you only realise its existence when it's too late and you've started to sink into the mud', 2009, 21). Neither is the geography of the house itself established for the viewer: its interior is labyrinthine, and we get to know certain spaces, but we do not get a sense of how they fit together.

The film provides the spectator with limited visual means of understanding either its narrative or its spaces, then, whilst in a variety of ways drawing our attention to seeing and not seeing, to vision and blindness: our own view is occluded by framing and editing, whilst the characters, like us, see partially or inadequately: Mecha wears dark glasses and everyone watches TV but no one sees the Virgin reappear. In relation to the Virgin, Tali's comment that 'cada uno ve lo que puede' suggests limited and contingent sight, the idea that what one sees is conditioned by one's own subjectivity or abilities. In the final scene, Momi returns from a pilgrimage to see the Virgin, but tells her sister 'no vi nada' ('I didn't see anything'), the final line of dialogue in the film suggesting her shift away from the heightened perceptual capacities with which she has been associated throughout, and towards the perceptual impediment and blindness associated with her mother, and with the adults in general (see figure 1). This filmic and narrative attention to the processes of seeing self-reflexively provokes spectator distancing by foregrounding the processes of spectatorship, thus undermining the cinema's illusionistic power.¹¹

(figure 1 near here)

La ciénaga's focus on the lives of two families in Salta, the autobiographical resonances in the film's intimate portrayal of adolescent girlhood, do not rule out political or national readings.¹² In particular, its emphasis on the corporeal and the affective has been read as an encoding of the country's recent history, its wounded and fragmented bodies as carrying the imprint of state terrorism (Gutiérrez Albilla 2013, 221; Martins 2007, 207), as 'speaking' that which cannot be spoken in the country's past (Oubiña 2009, 61). Podalsky suggests that the film allows viewers to experience 'the affective legacies of the dictatorship' (2012, 111). Critics have read the historical blindness of the Argentine middle classes in the foregrounding of blindness discussed (Martins 2007, 210), the 'superficial and unequal prosperity derived from the years of financial speculation and privatisation' of the Menem years in the film's focus on 'holidays that are unable to provide any rest' (Pérez Melgosa 2004, 163), and a divided nation in its focus on a dysfunctional family (Varas and Dash 2007, 198-9). The sense of decay and decline of the middle-class family, with its once-grand but now crumbling *finca* and failing pepper business, have inevitably suggested to many critics the economic fortunes of Argentina in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and in particular of the regional economies which, as Maristella Svampa has discussed, were no longer guaranteed a place in the national economy under the new neo-liberal model (2005, 43). Without wishing to invalidate a historical or allegorical approach, in addressing the film's politics this chapter will take its cue from the film's own detailed, almost anthropological investigation of the *micropolitical*, its close

attention to the functioning and the intersection of neocolonial and patriarchal ideologies, proposing that the film reveals how power operates through desire, belief and inclination, and how subjects are produced within the fields of desire and everyday life, and within the context of the provincial middle-class family as micropower.

Through its close attention to speech and insult, the film investigates how the white elite symbolically 'others' the indigenous and *mestizo* servants and neighbours with whom it lives in close proximity. As Wolf notes, *La ciénaga* is the only film of the early group denominated New Argentine films which seeks to depict class itself (2004, 180) and especially the relations between classes.¹³ Its investigative gaze in particular reveals how the white characters project their own desires and failings onto their ethnic and social others: Mecha continually bemoans the fact that her servants, whom she calls *estas indias*¹⁴ will not answer the telephone, something which she herself seems incapable of doing, whilst her son, Joaquín (Diego Baenas) – whose blindness in one eye and overt racism echo his mother's own use of sunglasses and her attitudes – condemns the *kollas* for supposedly having sexual relations with animals whilst petting his dog's backside, and tosses aside the river fish he has caught, claiming that they are only fit for *kollas* (he later consumes them unknowingly with gusto).¹⁵ The film is also attentive to the workings of gendered and sexual oppression, most clearly through the domestic confinement of Mecha and Tali, and especially through the thwarting of their plan to travel to Bolivia – a possible escape from domestic tedium – by Tali's husband. More subtle is the inclusion of misogynist pop songs, such as 'Mala mujer' ('Bad Woman'), which, proclaiming that 'hay muchas malas

y las buenas son igual' ('there are a lot of bad [women] and the good ones are the same'), jars ironically as the diegetic music for the carnival scene in which Isabel attempts to negotiate a crowd of drunken men, to good-naturedly put off the attentions of the boss's son (José), and then, dismayed, to prevent her boyfriend, Perro (Fabio Villafane), from attacking him, whilst the pop song croons about women as the root of evil and misery.

If the film attends to how categories such as *indio/kolla* and *mujer* are constructed and symbolically othered, whilst undermining these representations, it is especially acute in its analysis of how racial and sexual ideologies overlap and interact with one another. Joaquín's racism against the *kollas*, as mentioned, is expressed through fantasies about their supposed sexual deviance (bestiality) which, it is suggested, are also projections of his own desires,¹⁶ whilst Momi's romantic or sexual feelings for Isabel are mingled with a sense of entitlement and possession which the other members of her family share towards the maid (this is expressed in José's sense that he is entitled to harass Isabel at the party, but also in Mecha's outraged response when, at the end, Isabel announces she is leaving her employ). Isabel becomes a pivotal character in the film; largely silent herself, she is an object of desire for Momi and José, the primary target of Mecha's racist abuse and accusations, and the excuse for or cause of the explosion of class tension in the violence between José and Perro: she is the subject of others' speech and the motivation for their actions. The fact that Mecha accuses Isabel of *stealing*, as well as her conjoining of Isabel with Momi through the insult she levels at both of them – *chinita de porquería* (filthy girl) – suggests that her hatred of Isabel – expressed in racist

and classist terms – is a consequence of Momi’s unrequited passion for the maid, a displacement of unacknowledged homophobia.¹⁷

In *La ciénaga*, as in the later *La mujer sin cabeza*, working-class or indigenous characters are often viewed through a screen, such as a window or door frame, and in *La ciénaga*, also on television, through the coverage of the sighting of the Virgin. For Aguilar, this is the film’s way of ethically representing the oppressed, or ‘popular’ classes: rather than trying to represent them directly, or suggesting that the film’s representation of them is unmediated, Martelian ethics make visible the position of the oppressed, by presenting them as occluded, silenced or marginalised through their positioning at the edges of, or on the far side of, the frame (2006, 153-4).¹⁸ Rather than trying to speak from the position of these characters, *La ciénaga* makes manifest how their reality is mediated by the middle classes. Isabel and Perro, the most important working-class characters, are largely silent, more spoken about than speaking; the film does not attempt to appropriate their perspective or speak from their position. Momi gazes at Isabel through a window, as she is picked up and dropped off at the edge of the estate by Perro. The TV broadcasts feature middle-class journalists interviewing working-class pilgrims and visionaries (with whom their accents contrast strongly), but the manipulation and manufacture of their reality by the news media is strongly in evidence; news reportage, putatively ‘documentary’ footage, appears more manipulated than the main body of the cinematic text. The contrast between the film’s own language and that of the television sequences it includes serves as a further critique: the intrusive camerawork of the TV sequences, the use of zoom and the crew’s insistent

attempts to penetrate the visionary's home all contrast with the film's own use of the camera, which hangs back, for example, at the moment of Luchi's death, retaining an ethical distance.¹⁹

The presence of the televisual in the film also allows for an exploration of spectacle, consumption and desire. The film was made at the tail end of Argentina's neo-liberal 1990s, after around a decade of media-fuelled consumer culture, and the country's economic liberalisation. These years were particularly associated with media spectacle, and the frequent news updates in *La ciénaga* about the continued non-reappearance of the Virgin suggest 'a diversionary entertainment' (Wisniewski, 2010), just as the TV culture of the 1990s functioned as a distraction from the context of economic recession and of massive privatisation.²⁰ The televised miracle references the common Latin American phenomenon of apparitions of the Virgin Mary, such as those which occurred throughout the 1990s to a *salteña* housewife, María Livia Galliano.²¹ The film is critical of the language and form of television, in its eliciting of desire both for the religious experience and the commodity, through the news broadcasts and their punctuation by publicity breaks, such as the darkly humorous one for a mini-fridge which has Mecha – ever in need of ice cubes to replenish her wine glass – enthralled. The news broadcasts insistently manufacture desire for another sighting of the Virgin through their continued presence at the scene, and through their attempt to talk to the exhausted visionary. As Andermann points out, the reappearance of the Virgin is always postponed until after the next commercial break, bringing the temporality of belief into line with that of the commodity (2012, 163); it also means that desire

is momentarily diverted from the spectacle of the Virgin's non-appearance and replaced by a more easily fulfilled desire, such as that for a mini-fridge.

Ultimately, the fridge – which, when it arrives and is installed further confines Mecha to her bed, meaning she no longer needs to roam the house in search of ice – takes the place of the TV set in Mecha's bedroom, suggesting 'the dissolution of TV into life, of life into TV' (Baudrillard 1983, 55).

The frequent returns to the TV screen are part of the broader structure of repetition and cyclicity in *La ciénaga*. As Tali declares early on in the film, 'las historias se repiten', and several of the film's scenes are reenactments of or variations upon previous ones: Luchi's fall, Tali's visits to La Mandrágora, Momi's dragging of a sun-lounger across the patio in the closing scene as the adults did in the opening one. The characters' lives and actions are marked by uncanny repetitions: Mecha's ending up confined to her bed as her mother had before her, José's relationship with his father's former mistress, Joaquín's echoing of his mother's racist speech. In turn these images of repetition occur against the backdrop of a pervasive atmosphere of inertia, as the film is populated by immobile bodies prostrate, fatigued, depressed or simply bored. For Freud (1953b) the compulsion to repeat, alongside a primary masochism or primitive urge to return to an originary state is a feature of the death drive, evoked in the film in particular by Mecha's seemingly inevitable retreat to her bed, and by its mirror-image in the forest, the cow mired neck-deep in a swamp which we see on two occasions. For Gutiérrez Albilla, a 'loss of verticality' pervades the film, and suggests a move away from the human and towards the animal, 'a fall from [...] civilised bourgeois society to a state of primal abandon' (2013, 217).

Reinforcing this lethargy and inertia, states of postponement, waiting and suspension are also crucial registers of the film: just as the characters perpetually wait for the Virgin to appear on television, the camera itself – and consequently the spectator – seems frequently to be waiting for something to happen. Both the trip to Bolivia and Joaquín’s eye surgery are oft-discussed yet eternally postponed actions, the former a potential escape from life in La Ciénaga, the latter a potential improvement to it, neither of which is ever realised. Through this emphasis on repetition, cyclicity and suspension, the humans’ movement towards animal states, and through its setting, the film recalls the originary world which Deleuze identifies in naturalist film, and which is an expression of the death instinct. The swimsuits adorning the strange headless forms of *La ciénaga*’s opening scene are leopard-print, or zebra-striped, they suggest that, as Deleuze puts it, ‘the characters are like animals [...]’ (2005 [1986], 128). For Deleuze, the setting of such films is likely to be, as in *La ciénaga* a ‘marsh [...] or a virgin forest’, and, as here, such films are ‘composed of unformed matter, sketches or fragments’. He continues: ‘[the originary world] is the set which unites everything, not in an organisation, but making all the parts converge in an immense rubbish dump or swamp, and all the impulses in a great death-impulse’ (2005 [1986], 128).

The naturalist film is dominated by ‘precipitating repetition, eternal return’ (Deleuze 2005 [1986], 131) yet also manifests ‘the desire to change milieu, to seek a new milieu to explore, to dislocate’ (133). Each of Martel’s features stages a tension between repetition and difference, between stasis and change, and each time it is the younger generation through whom this tension is

staged: in a sense each film is about the propensity of this generation to either repeat or differ from the behaviour and attitudes of their elders. Potential for radical change in *La ciénaga* is especially associated with Momi, the only character who seems to perceive the realities of her social milieu, the only one who confronts her mother with the reality of her alcoholism and mental state, and the repetition and stasis it threatens, as she voices what others ignore: 'Yo ya sé como va a terminar todo esto. Vos no vas a salir más del cuarto como la abuela' ('I know how all this is going to end. You'll end up staying in your room all the time like our grandmother'). For Podalsky, Momi's diving into the dirty swimming pool is a crucial image: it signifies this penetration and cognisance of the 'dirty realities ignored by others' (2011, 109). Momi's homoerotic, cross-class gaze upon Isabel – whom she repeatedly watches from her bedroom window as Isabel leaves and returns to the estate, signifies a desire for change – figures change *through desire* – the desire to break out of her family's stagnant, incestuous and repetitive patterns. In the sense that Momi's desire imagines social change, the transcending of the closed and incestuous order of her family, there is a utopian sensibility attached to the young girl's desire, which can also be found in the later features. Desire in *La ciénaga* is especially associated with the younger generation, but in general it flows endlessly and incestuously in all directions. It is evoked by the continual touching of bodies, the erotically-charged play-fighting and looks between José and Vero, and the shot which suggests that José is kissing his mother rather than just reaching over her in bed. In desire, the tension between repetition and change is manifest: incestuous desires suggest a closed world turned in on itself; yet the explosive and

multiplicitous nature of desire in the film also functions to undermine cultural codes of family, heterosexuality, class, race and species.²²

The pull of the outside, of the unknown, which is present in Momi's desire for Isabel is also present in the attraction that José holds for the other characters when he returns to the estate from Buenos Aires, in the fascination with the Virgin's reappearance, the escape to Bolivia, and in the mythical *perro-rata* (dog-rat) that obsesses Luchi. The 'African rat' is the subject of a story told by Vero to the other children about a pet dog, which turns out to be a particularly vicious type of cat-eating rat, and which recalls the stories of Horacio Quiroga, which also use animals to fantastic or macabre effect.²³ The *perro-rata* – as external yet menacing force threatening to encroach on Luchi's world – recalls in name and function Isabel's boyfriend, Perro, a young, male and potentially violent presence largely external to the middle-class world portrayed yet constantly hovering on its edges, as he picks up his girlfriend at the boundary of the estate.²⁴ As such, the *perro-rata* can be read as a displacement of the middle classes' fear of the working class, and also stands for the vaguer sense of threat which pervades the film as a whole, announced by the rolls of thunder with which it commences, and continued through the many accidents and near-accidents which threaten characters physically. Luchi's mind becomes dominated by the mythical animal, and it is his obsession with the neighbour's (real) dog barking on the other side of the patio's high wall, and his conviction that the sound is made by a *perro-rata* that drives Luchi to scale the ladder and fall to his death. Although a fiction, the story takes on a life and a power of its own, and ends up producing the film's tragic denouement. Luchi's obsession with the *perro-rata*, his attempts to see

over the patio wall, are also associated with the desire to go beyond the closed world of *La ciénaga*. In other ways, too, we see Luchi experimenting with the conditions of his existence and perception: holding his breath, playing dead, experimenting with his vision by peering through a set-square much as Amalia in *La niña santa* will try to alter her vision by pressing her fingers on her eyes. The children in these films perceive more than their adult counterparts, who generally manifest some perceptual impediment. Through child characters open to other perceptual possibilities and other realities, the films question the status quo, as well as dominant, visually-predicated cinematic regimes, as I will explore below.

The desire and vitality of the young in *La ciénaga* function, then, to counter the dominant atmosphere of repetition, immobility and entropy, constituting a ‘fuerza vital en medio de la inercia y la parálisis’ (‘vital force in the midst of inertia and paralysis’, Monteagudo 2002, 71). Their impromptu dancing in Mecha’s bedroom, and the sudden changes in pace where young bodies run and jump over and around static older ones, interrupt the lethargy of *La Mandrágora*.²⁵ Domestic stagnation is disrupted by moments of euphoria and violence, the tension of postponement mitigated by moments of intensity and release. As Ana Amado proposes, ‘La temporalidad, detenida y sometida a la ley de gravedad, es interrumpida o “atravesada” por estas fugaces explosiones en las que el tiempo se expresa como velocidad, ligada exclusivamente a los ritmos de la infancia’ (‘Temporality, which is slowed and subjected to the law of gravity, is interrupted or “shot through” with these fleeting explosions in which time is expressed as speed, and which are linked exclusively to the rhythms of

childhood', 2006, 53). Despite the reigning inertia of the adults in depression or prostration, the bodies of the young provide explosive moments of speed, running and jumping over beds, dancing and playing. The film's action plays out on the body: it proliferates with accidents and injuries, with scars, blood and bruises, fragmented and fractured bodies, corporeal pain, loss and fatigue; yet it revels in the tactile, and is suffused with desire and eroticism at the level of gaze and touch. As Martel herself points out, 'swamps are dangerous for some animals, but they are also full of life' (in Guest, 2009). The *mandrágora* (mandrake) is a plant with sedative but also aphrodisiac properties, the image neatly capturing the relationship in the film (and especially at the *finca*) between states of slumber and desire, the sensuality of bodies lazing together.

As Deleuze suggests, it is in the time-image that the senses and the body emerge. The film's slowness, its frequent lack of action and event, its emphasis on suspension and postponement, recall his theory of a cinema which presents us with direct time-images, in which 'the situation is not extended directly into action, it is no longer sensory-motor, as in realism, but primarily optical and of sound, invested by the senses' (1985, 4). In her book *Cinema and Sensation* Martine Beugnet argues that the shift from action-image to time-image also allows for the emergence of the abject which we so often find in horror. For Beugnet the 'gratuitous or surplus nature of the vision' in the time-image, 'engages us [...] with the irrational and the unacceptable' (2007, 40). The abject – that which we repress in order to become subjects – is privileged in *La ciénaga*, a film replete with bodily fluids, dirt, decay and sticky residues, and which suggests a tactile and embodied relationship to these.²⁶ Characters sniff the

underarms of their clothing, evoking the smell of sweat, and lounge around on grubby-looking mattresses amidst peeling paintwork; Momi picks shards of glass from Mecha's bleeding chest after her fall and Jose's face is encrusted with blood the day after his fight. The distancing tendency discussed – the odd angles from which the body is filmed, its fragmentation in the image, the avoidance of techniques which might elicit identification – is countered in *La ciénaga* by a simultaneous sensorial closeness to the human body, and to its abject materiality.

In a film in which mothers loom large, this abject corporeality of course brings to mind Kristeva's abject mother and the creation of a maternal universe. Yet the film's grubbiness and materiality is especially associated with the adolescent girl, Momi. She is taunted with the nickname 'Momi sucia' ('dirty Momi') by her brother while her mother, Mecha, calls her '*chinita de porquería*', and '*inmunda*' (filthy). After her dip in her family's putrid swimming pool (she is the only character to swim in it), Momi, who always seems to be wearing the same gingham swimsuit, is scolded by Isabel for not washing for days. In other words, Momi is aligned with the transgressive materiality the film privileges, and thus with the disruption to the symbolic order posed by the abject. In Kristeva's theory the abject is associated with that which 'disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (1982, 4). In *The Monstrous Feminine*, Barbara Creed proposes that conventional horror, structured according to the anxieties of the dominant (masculine) culture 'stages and re-stages a constant repudiation of [...] "the abject"' (1990, 70), and that this operation is part of the process by which the

abject is culturally repressed in order to uphold the symbolic order. In *La ciénaga*, the abject is not jettisoned, but rather recuperated: the film subverts conventional horror's (misogynist) uses of abjection, instead, like Momi, embracing the 'abject' as part of the everyday, and it does so by privileging tactile and olfactory images which elicit embodied spectatorship – such as that of Momi rubbing sun cream into the skin she has been accused of not washing – thus functioning to diminish boundaries between spectator and film, self and other, rather than (as conventional horror does) redrawing them.²⁷

Momi's 'abjection' by her family can be read as a result of the threat posed by her desire for Isabel to the social boundaries which maintain race and class segregation, and compulsory heterosexuality. Whilst her homosexual desire is never mentioned by her family, their words consign her to the same realm of abject bodies inhabited by the film's indigenous and poor, who as we have seen are subject to constant racist abuse which labels them as perverted, thieves and dirty. Judith Butler argues that abjection can be used 'to understand sexism, homophobia, and racism, the repudiation of bodies for their sex/sexuality, and/or color' which consolidates identities based on the exclusion and domination of others. 'In effect', she posits 'this is the mode by which others become shit' (1990, 182). *La ciénaga's*, and Momi's, embracing of 'shit' – of dirt, bodily fluids and decay – thus also constitutes a queer resistance, a subversive re-citation of the dominant ideology which produces the *jouissance* associated with the transgression of taboo. It is this kind of subversive appropriation of the discourses of repudiation which Butler argues can function as a basis for queer opposition (1993, 223-42). The film's (and Momi's) embracing of the abject also

implies, then, a resistance to the broader functioning of the mechanisms of abjection proposed by Butler – namely the racist – and is particularly important in a film which examines how racial, social and sexual others are constructed in overlapping ways, through images of abject corporeality: Joaquín’s fantasies of the *kollas*’ bestiality or consumption of unclean food; Mecha’s vision of Momi and Isabel as tainted, as *chinitas de porquería*.

If the film uses images of the rubbing, sniffing and touching of the body to instigate a relation of shared embodiment with the spectator, it also does so through the sensory experiments of the younger characters, which operate as a *mise-en-scène* of the film’s own propensity to rupture the ideologically-indebted perceptual regimes which, according to Deleuze, dominate cinematic form. For Flaxman, following Deleuze, ‘Sensations possess the capacity to derange the everyday, to short-circuit the mechanism of common sense, and thus to catalyse a different kind of thinking; indeed, sensations are encountered at a threshold we might call the “thinkable”. [...T]hinking for Deleuze begins with a “disorder of the senses”’ (2000, 12). Common visual regimes are altered by Luchi (peering through a set-square) and Momi, (a rain-drenched window); both images suggest the possibility of being able to see the world differently. Early in the film, Tali’s two little daughters sing into a fan, experimenting with the effect it has on their voices:

‘Dóctor Jano, cirujano/Hoy tenemos que operar/ En la sala de emergencia/A una chica de su edad/Ella tiene veintiun años/Y usted tiene un año más’ (Dr Jano,

surgeon/Today we have to operate/In the emergency room/On a girl of your age/She is twenty-one years old/And you are a year older')²⁸

The whirring blades of the fan act as a gate, which as it opens and closes allows some sound waves through but not others. The familiar human voice is made strange in the process, and the sequence gains a further uncanny resonance through its intertextual relationship with *La niña santa*, in which, as we will see in the next chapter, the words to this song take on a new life as the basis for its plot, which revolves around the sexual misdeeds of Dóctor Jano (Carlos Beloso) and his advances to the teenage Amalia (María Alché). The fan-singing sequence will then be eerily evoked in the later work, like *deja vu*.²⁹

The sequence produces both defamiliarisation and bodily closeness. Initially, as we watch Tali on the patio we hear the acousmatic and unidentified sound of the fan. The dislocation of sound and image, and the unfamiliar distortion of the familiar human voice create uncertainty: what are we hearing? We then cut to the girls and the fan, but initially the image is not easily recognisable either, the camera being too close to the object (the fan), with the girls' faces almost entirely obscured behind it: what are we seeing? This close-up on the fan's whirring blades is also an instance of hapticity, inviting the kind of tactile gaze, which, for Marks: 'tends to move over the surface of its object [...] not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to "gaze"' (2000, 162). Likewise, the sound in this sequence produces a corporeal resonance for the spectator. As in certain films discussed by Beugnet: 'sound plays an essential role in the

construction of a haptic space. [...P]recise and hyper-detailed or inchoate, the audio close-up pulls the viewer in and envelops him or her with a sensuous or uncanny sense of intimacy' (2007, 91). The whirring fan in this sequence makes the girls' voices vibrate strangely, and allows for the feeling of the unfamiliar vibrations in the familiar territory of one's own body, evoking the feeling of air falling unevenly onto the skin. As discussed in the Introduction (00), Martel sees sound as a way of penetrating the body of the viewer. The fan-singing sequence is seen by Oubiña as one of the film's many instances of tragedy foretold (2009, 29), because of the proximity of the rotating blades to the girls' faces. And, I would add, to ours, because this feeling of threat is augmented by the viscerality, the haptic nature of the image and sound here, at a point in the film which wavers uncannily between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between vision, hearing and touch, between distancing and embodiment.

Sensorial experimentation and the openness to alternative versions of reality are in particular associated with Luchi, a character who can be read as modelling the mimetic, intersubjective relationship between film and spectator which the film is proposing.³⁰ In his essay 'On the mimetic faculty', Walter Benjamin argued that our behaviour is conditioned by 'a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else' (1978, 333), adding that 'children's play is everywhere permeated by mimetic modes of behaviour, and its realm is by no means limited to what one person can imitate in another. The child plays at being a windmill or a train' (333). For Benjamin and other thinkers of the Frankfurt School, humans 'give up this rich mimetic world when they become adults' (Potolsky 2006, 141). In stark contrast

to the older boys who point a gun at it (thus reinforcing a subject/object divide) Luchi imitates the cow stuck in the swamp by getting closer to it, in doing so submerging himself in the mud and thus coming to resemble it. As the many-toothed *perro-rata* progressively takes over Luchi's imagination, the child informs Tali 'me están saliendo muchos dientes' ('I'm growing lots of teeth'), rather like those plants and animals which defend themselves by imitating the features of more dangerous species. This impressionability, the 'wonderingly open side of childlike cognition' (Connell 1998, 74) with which Luchi responds to the story of the *perro-rata* is rendered visually in the film by images of Luchi pressing up against the inside of a car window, the skin on his hands becoming moulded by the contact with the transparent surface, as he tries to ascertain the safety of getting out of the car against the possibility of *perros-rata* marauding below (see figure 2). The impressionability of skin here echoes the process of psychic mimesis taking place.³¹ The mimetic faculty of Luchi, his pressing up against, yielding to, or taking the shape of the world suggests an openness to possibility and a non-dominating relation to otherness. As Potolsky writes: 'rather than setting the world at a distance, mimesis brings it closer, [... and] forges a bridge between self and other' (2006, 145). The mimetic tendency has also been associated with the death drive,³² and, given that it renders Luchi vulnerable and leads to his death – the ultimate symbolic yielding to the *perro-rata* – it could be interpreted as yet another manifestation of that impulse in the film, yet the wondering openness of Luchi's relation to otherness, his reliance on the physical and the mimetic, on touch and hearing, also strongly suggest a counter to the dominant relationships towards otherness which we see elsewhere in the film, and which are epitomised by Mecha. In this sense, Luchi's

death suggests not only the ‘cancelación de la idea de futuro’ (Amado 2006, 55)³³ but also the denial of the wonderingly open relationship to the world and to the other which he exhibits.

[figure 2 near here]

The little hands which press up against the inside of the car window refuse to stay within the world of the film and instead suggest the possibility of traversing the screen and touching us, appealing to our own embodied memories of touch, and in this way ‘subverting notions of “onscreen” and “offscreen” as mutually exclusive sites or subject positions’ (Sobchack 2004, 67). Through this image, the film diegetically stages its desire to instigate a relation of shared embodiment. Tactile, physical and mimetic forms of knowledge were understood by the thinkers of the Frankfurt School as having been suppressed by Western reason; these perspectives have recently been taken up by theorists of the senses in cinema such as Laura Marks, who proposes that images of touch, or which invite a tactile and embodied response in the spectator, instigate a fundamentally mimetic relationship, a relationship to the image which functions as a corrective to dominant – symbolic – modes of visibility in late capitalism (2000, 138-53). For Marks cinema is an apt medium for producing mimetic knowledge, and as this chapter has proposed, *La ciénaga* is something of a model in this respect, offering a mutual co-creation of viewer and film, self and other. For Marks such embodied spectatorship consists in ‘being drawn into a rapport with the other where I lose the sense of my own boundaries’ (2002, 1), it constructs a spectatorial subjectivity ‘constantly transformed by its encounters with the

world' (xix). This interpenetration of self and other is also suggested not just by *La ciénaga's* tactile images, but also by its insistence on the sense of smell, if, following Adorno and Horkheimer, '[o]f all the senses, that of smell – which is attracted without objectifying – bears clearest witness to the urge to lose oneself in and become the "other". When we see we remain what we are; but when we smell, we are overtaken by otherness' (1972, 184). These thinkers also link the sense of smell to the urge to return to a horizontal or an animal state, and thus perhaps to of a form of abject materiality, when they write that '[t]he multifarious nuances of the sense of smell embody the archetypal longing for the lower forms of existence, for direct unification with circumambient nature, with the earth and mud' (184). The film's privileging of the moments of being overtaken by otherness – the return to an originary state, the mimetic film language which dissolves distinctions between self and other – also constitutes, then, a kind of embracing or recuperating of the death drive, a drive to (pleasurable) submersion which runs counter to Western capitalist and consumerist modes of viewing and being.

With her first feature film, then, Martel effects an important challenge to the aesthetic codes which have defined intellectual and resistive cinema. *La ciénaga* is a highly reflexive film which uses many techniques to distance the audience, defamiliarising social reality in order to create a questioning, critical spectator, and using minute investigations of social realities, hierarchies and speech in order to reveal to the spectator aspects of the ideological. Yet instead of implying a disembodied intellect, or Cartesian viewing subjectivity – which might readily separate mind and body, subject and object, self and film – *La*

ciénaga's aesthetics function to create an embodied viewing experience which privileges a kind of intersubjectivity, a cross-contamination, a transgressive material relationship between the viewer's body and the sticky, swampy body of the film. The film thus combines traditional tactics of political cinema with a bodily and sensorial aesthetics, bringing it into line with the current interest in the body, the senses, the skin, and touch in filmmaking and theory, understood by Elsaesser as crucial to what he terms the 'new realism' (2009, 7) of contemporary world cinema. This is one important difference between Martel's first film and its contemporaries on the Argentine scene which were on the whole less interested in the non-optical senses.³⁴ Whilst on a diegetic level the film is pessimistic – for all their openness to other realms of experience and forms of knowledge, both Momi's and Luchi's experimental, undomesticated perceptual capacities are in different ways denied by the close of the film, by its diegetic ending – if we read the film, in the words of Barbara Kennedy 'not as a text with meaning but as a body that performs' (2000, 5),³⁵ the film's radical optimism – the possibilities it stages of the renewal of perception and the creation of thought, can be more fully comprehended. To draw on Kennedy's (Deleuzian) vocabulary, the film can be understood as a machine or assemblage for this renewal and creation. Through the children's diegetic experiments, and the filmic experiments which accompany them, the film counters the stagnation of the body and the domestication of perception which it portrays. As such these filmic and childish experiments function as 'lines of flight'³⁶ from the sedimented perceptual regimes constructed and perpetuated by dominant cinematic forms, by a reliance on the visual economy and conventional visual languages. In addition, if the film engages in a defamiliarisation, a rendering strange of the

status quo – another traditional mechanism of critique – then it also works, through its sensorial aesthetics, to re-familiarise, to bring into bodily proximity, that which is abjected and excluded by the social order. In this way, the film’s exploration of constructions of otherness through images of dirt, deviance and contamination is complemented by the non-dominating, non-exclusive relationship to otherness that it produces through its own spectator-construction.

Notes

¹ From the synopsis of *La ciénaga*. Available at www.wandavision.com/site/sinopsis/la_cienaga (Accessed 4 October 2014).

² See, for example, Greene (2012), Gundermann (2005, 247-52) and Wisniewski (2010).

³ Greene (2012) provides a very detailed analysis of the film’s sound design, concentrating in particular on the sound-images of the opening sequence and how sound performs functions commonly held by the visual in conventional filmmaking.

⁴ Marks writes that: ‘as vision can be optical or haptic, so too hearing can perceive the environment in a more or less instrumental way. [...] One might call “haptic hearing” that usually brief moment when all sounds present themselves to us as undifferentiated, before we make the choice of which sounds are most important to attend to’ (2000, 183).

⁵ Colin MacCabe argues that Rossellini’s work, for example, is Brechtian in its treatment of narrative and character (1974, 19-20).

⁶ For Oubiña, 'El filme avanza dando rodeos, esquivando algo innumerable que no se deja ver pero que amenaza con hacerse presente' (2009, 18).

⁷ Martel has said: 'When I saw *La ciénaga* finished, I realised that the overall structure of the movie was very similar to the way my mother would have told the story of a child's death, trying to find a lot of small situations to foretell that death that was going to occur' (Guest, 2009).

⁸ Following Jennifer Barker, I use 'erotic' in the loosest sense, not necessarily as relating to adult sexuality, but to refer to tactile, pleasurable, sensory relations (2009, 34-47). As Barker notes the tactile is also closely associated with disgust (47-56); *La ciénaga* hovers around this border between pleasure and disgust.

⁹ Eisenstaedt notes that the camera used was an AATON 35-5. This allowed for shooting without a big technical team, and for hand-held work, even during the sequences where the camera follows the children as they run through the forest. It also enabled cameraman Hugo Colace and his assistants to keep a low profile on set when necessary (2000, 26).

¹⁰ As Oubiña writes, 'el filme no se hace cargo del efecto de peligro en el que nos obligó a reparar' (2009, 29). I am indebted to Oubiña for his very detailed analysis of *La ciénaga*'s editing and style (28-9).

¹¹ See Stam 2000, 151-3.

¹² Paola Arboleda Ríos proposes that in *La ciénaga* and *La niña santa* there is a 'shift from a national-allegorical to a subjective-autobiographical paradigm' (48), and discusses the way that 'Martel's creative proposal is pervasively enhanced by personal experience, memories, diaries, and desire' (68). Martel herself has said that 'all of [her] films are more or less memories' (in Wisniewski 2009).

¹³ Other films by Martel's contemporaries may depict social classes, (often the poor, as in Caetano and Stagnaro's *Pizza, birra, faso*, but also the middle classes, as in the work of Martín Rejtman) but they do not feature *La ciénaga's* scrutiny of relations between the middle classes and their working class, indigenous or *mestizo* counterparts.

¹⁴ Pejorative and racist expression meaning 'these Indians'.

¹⁵ A hispanicised spelling and pronunciation of 'Qulla', an indigenous people living in Salta and Jujuy provinces.

¹⁶ This echoes the theme of Martel's short *Historias de vida*. See Introduction, 00.

¹⁷ Forcinito makes a similar point, arguing that the mother-daughter conflict produced by Momi's desire for Isabel is shown visually, yet hidden behind Mecha's racism, linking this to the film's general preoccupation with what is seen and what is obscured (2006, 129).

¹⁸ This is another sense in which, as I suggested in the Introduction, Martel's work can be compared to that of William Faulkner. For Celia Britton (glossing Edouard Glissant) in Faulkner, 'the black characters are only ever represented from the outside', which can be understood as 'evidence of the author's honesty in recognizing the limits of his own understanding' (1999, 21).

¹⁹ Andermann discusses the contrast between the language of the TV footage and that of the film itself in more detail (2012, 162-3).

²⁰ As Gundermann shows, the languages of advertising, spectacle and desire that the film plays with, for example the citing of the Argentine star system through the use of Borges, or the film's repeated use of the colour red which he sees as a reference to an advertising aesthetic, are ultimately disrupted by the film's

distancing mechanisms, a process which he argues '[interrupts] the flow of desire in late capitalism' (2006, 260).

²¹ See 'María Livia, la mujer que dice ver a la Virgen'. Available at: www.lanacion.com.ar/924137-maria-livia-la-mujer-que-dice-ver-a-la-virgen (Accessed 4 October 2014).

²² For Martel 'the desire among family members [is] closely linked to the gap between classes and to the social tendency to want a social class closed, like a caste, while the gap between classes gets bigger' (in Wisniewski 2009).

²³ For example the flesh-eating ants of 'La miel silvestre', and the pillow-dwelling parasite of 'El almohadón de plumas', both in the collection *Cuentos de amor, de locura y de muerte* (1917). Martel has commented that she was told Quiroga's stories by her maternal grandmother as if they were real events that had happened to people she knew (Guest, 2009). *La ciénaga* shares other details with Quiroga's stories, including the children running wild, the foreshadowing of a child's death, and the extreme weather conditions of the Argentine interior.

²⁴ Aguilar suggests this comparison between the character of Perro and the *perro-rata* (2006, 53).

²⁵ For Oubiña, '[t]odo el filme se juega a una dialéctica entre el reposo y el movimiento: el sosiego de lo que vemos y el flujo imperceptible de lo que se alborota por debajo' (2009, 30).

²⁶ For Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, wounds, blood, pus and sweat are what we 'permanently thrust aside in order to live'. They bring us to the border of our condition as subjects (1982, 3).

²⁷ Elsewhere I have discussed the association of the abject with Momi as an expression of feminine puberty, and ‘the uncomfortable materiality of a changing body’ (Martin 2015, awaiting pagination).

²⁸ A playground rhyme which refers to the protagonist of the 1970s TV series *Medical Centre*, Dr Ganon. Thanks to Núria Triana Toribio, who alerted me to the origin of the rhyme. In *La ciénaga*, the girls sing ‘Dr Jano, cirujano...’ (Martel, in Panozzo 2008, 15).

²⁹ As noted in the Introduction, Martel has suggested that she thinks of *La niña santa* as a tale told by the characters of *La ciénaga* (00).

³⁰ Thanks to Jo Evans for this observation, after a reading of an early version of this chapter.

³¹ Luchi also ‘plays dead’, another tactic adopted by some species to defend themselves until the danger of a predator has passed.

³² Discussing the work of Roger Callois, Potolsky writes: ‘Callois [...] regards mimesis as a perennial instinct of all life forms [...]. [H]e seeks to explain the strange fact that many insect species have evolved to mimic their surroundings. Although most studies of this phenomenon see mimicry as an offensive or defensive adaptation [...], Callois approaches it as part of a more primal relationship between the organism and its surroundings. As he notes, some examples of mimicry lack obvious advantages for survival. [...] In [some] cases mimesis is even suicidal [...]. Callois sees this as evidence of a “universal mimetic drive”’ (Potolsky 2006, 142).

³³ Amado sees this negation of the future as ‘un tópico recurrente en el cine argentino actual’ (2006, 55).

³⁴ Although the time-image privileging 'slow cinema' of Lisandro Alonso, for example *La libertad* (2001), and certain sequences of Caetano's *Bolivia* do privilege the extra-visual senses, in general films associated with New Argentine Cinema do not stage sensory experiments as part of the diegesis in the same way as Martel's first two features. In later films by Albertina Carri (*La rabia*, 2008) and Julia Solomonoff (*El último verano de la boyita*, 2009), we see the influence of Martel's experimentations with sound and touch.

³⁵ Noting that much film theory (and especially feminist film theory, which is her topic of investigation) has been dominated by 'debates about representation, signification, semiotics and structuralism', Kennedy, in her book *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation* proposes to 'provide a neo-aesthetics of the film experience as an "event": an aesthetics of force and sensation, where "subjectivities" are no longer purely contained in the image, or in the spectatorial psychic spaces, but through a melding of matter, the material of film, force and sensation as movement, the 'in-between' of those spaces. Rather than film being perceived as purely representational, with images seen and perceived through a purely specular economy, film is here explored as a mind/body/machine meld, as experience, as sensation, as a perception-consciousness formation' (2000, 5).

³⁶ The Deleuze-Guattarian 'line of flight' 'is a path of mutation precipitated through the actualisation of connections among bodies that were previously only implicit (or "virtual") that releases new powers in the capacities of those bodies to act and respond' (Lorraine 2005, 145).