

LADSO REVISTA ANUAL DE LA MAESTRÍA EN TEORÍA PSICOANALÍTICA LACANIANA LAI SU

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MAESTRIA EN TEORÍA PSICOANALÍTICA LACANIANA

INTERVIEW WITH LUCRECIA MARTEL*

A While working on the first edition of this magazine in 2015, the editorial committee and the MaTPsiL students thought of interviewing Lucrecia Martel. We were all admirers of her movies and we found them proper for the subject. Lucrecia Martel was very gracious accepting our visit with no delay. We reviewed her filmography ahead of time and went to Buenos Aires to meet her. Being aware of her busy agenda, It was a true honor to meet her. Especially now, while she is editing her new work "Zama".

So there we were. In an old, traditional light filled building in the trendy Buenos Aires neighborhood of Palermo. The music playing made a very welcoming atmosphere to the interview...

HUNTING THE UNCATCHABLE

LAPSO: *In Psychoanalysis we understand the feminine as a mystery. Lacan says: "The Woman doesn't exist". We are interested in your film work because it demonstrates in a subtle way, what cannot be said about female. It is not possible to express it in words. It is uncatchable, intriguing, even threatening.*

Lucrecia Martel: It is possible... The categories that try to transgress the "category status" lead the thoughts to some other areas of thinking. It is very difficult to stay in an ambiguous zone without feeling uncomfortable. We are always trying to understand things as if they were all objects. It is like a positivist passion that we inherited while even the objects resist actively. Perhaps, what happens with the feminine is a non precise way of categorizing the roles in the society. For men, for women, for all. I know nothing about psychoanalysis but I'm obviously interested in it to explore and infringe my perceptions –taking into account that constant hunting of things we will never catch– to suspect that reality is objective and that the subject just can comprehend it.

On the contrary, film, literature –and some other practices that involve a self search and a clear intention of communication– try to break those social patterns in regards of reality and what has been said and established in society, the unquestionable. This is for me, the greatest discovery of cinema. A tool that allows not to say explicitly but that allows to revive certain life experiences that will make people think or understand things in a different way. It is like: "Oh! Things can be different!" or "What's going on between these two characters?" A doubtful reality. We all see "cracks" in reality. Which is the reality or unreality that we are all submitted to today? We are all submitted, though, to sparkling moments as well. A spark that comes and goes when we express ourselves. I feel that, through cinema, we repeat those cracks in order to share with others this doubtful way of experience reality.

*Screenwriter, producer and director of cinema in Argentina. She directed short films and feature films such as *La ciénaga* (2001), awarded with the NHK of Sundance Film Festival, the Grand Prix of Latinoamerican Film Festival in Toulouse, Best Movie and Best Director of La Habana Film Festival, and it was part of the official selections of festivals in Berlin and Cannes; *The Holy Girl* (2004) y *The Headless Woman* (2008), both in the Official Selection of Cannes Festival.

She participated as a member of juror of major competitions around the world, including the Berlin Film Festival (2002) and the Cannes Festival (2006).

Film and literature are attempts doomed to failure, but these fleeting moments are present in a movie. The viewer may or may not find them. But they are there. The constant repetition of that crack or failure in reality may lead to a thought, just a thought that “things may be different”

L: *So your films are built by those cracks and components that can't be named. They show those failures.*

LM: And not even me can name them... I just have the gadgets to try to do so...

L: *Could you share a few?*

LM: Yes! Always stay in the ambiguous zone. For example: I always advise the students at film school not to create a psychological profile on their characters. From that position, the film maker would be superior to the character, analyzing him, his life, his behavior. I'd rather not understand the character. The key is to not know what are they thinking, feeling or where are they going. I can share that purpose with the cast not knowing what's really behind it.

There is a theory that helped me a lot: Monstrosity. The psychological profile is opposite to monstrosity. Back in the days, the monster was bringing this sort of divine design that needed to be deciphered. So, “monere”, that in latin means “warn”: The monster comes to warn about divinity. I like the idea of the human species as monstrous. There is no human being that could concrete a form, a human ideal. On the contrary, we all carry a sign, this divine mysterious design to read and comprehend. This idea is very useful when thinking or creating characters. This idea of monstrosity is an idea that gives the characters freedom because their sexuality is not relevant at all. The monster's nature is to deviate from the rules. That's the power of the monster. Understanding reality as pathological or not pathological is leading us nowhere. You, the psychoanalysts, know better.

In film, these are the gadgets of construction.

Then, we have Sound. We can close our eyes in the theater and sound will come through you. It's like being in a dance club. Sound will pass through your body. If you close your eyes, you will hear that knife slice, the storm or whatever that may be. You can't resist it.

Even being deaf you can't resist the vibration. That is a perception of the body. The sound material in film is the voice, the music and the sounds. If sound is treated from the only aspect of the language reference, then it becomes sounds with a reference. But if dialogues are treated as a sound with functions, you can go into a zone of ambiguity. Then the sound becomes constructive and meaningful itself and you can use it to cut, reject, to wrap....

L: *Forget about the meaning...*

LM: Exactly! And start taking advantage of the voice as a function of sound. The sound and its narrative power, has no reference. It is not the same to express with images than with sound. The image is explicitly showing you a meaning. The sound is something that you will have to interpret yourself.

L: *The sound leads to more ambiguity...*

LM: Yes! The “non reference”. The weakness between the sound and the reference. On one hand,

the weakness and on the other hand the power that generates a location. The weakness is what links sound and the referent will make the sound more useful. The construction of the off sound, weakens the image of that reality you are trying to tell.



L: *Remembering La Cienega (2001) Tali (Mercedes Morán) talks with her husband about leaving to Bolivia. He is giving his child a bath and tells her that she can't go. She goes to the room next door and you can hear a loud sound, an explosion. When the camera comes back to her, it seems that nothing happened there. She claims that the light bulb was burned but the light is on and working fine.*

LM: Yes, the light bulb is working, yes. Film relies on those gadgets. The power of manipulating sound weakens the image or makes it more powerful. Once again, these are the gadgets to keep ourselves in the ambiguous zone. A film is a thinking process. The plot – and I believe this as an absolute truth– it is not the purpose of the film. It is just what we have made up to condense time. With consciousness, I propose to the viewer a film, a piece of work, a thinking process that we will share for two hours, without taking the emotions out of it.

Therefore, it is a process that needs to be built with the gadgets we are talking about. The theme, the storytelling, the plot.

I believe –and that is why the plots may be repetitive and we never get tired of watching movies or reading books that share the same themes– these are just resources to handle time, condense and polish it in order to build the process that will lead to sharing it with others. All those things are never present in what is said, in the story or in the facts. They are present in the construction of this particular film.

L: *Do you think that your movies makes those “cracks” possible?*

LM: I hope. That is my greatest wish. If the audience has experienced that, then my life has a purpose. A meaning. No doubt, I try. Even knowing that is condemned to failure. The outcome will depend on when you watched this movie, what time was it, what where you doing when you did so, how old you were. I really try. Not long ago I was at a colloquium, and Gianni Vattimo was there as well. We were discussing the trends of contemporary art.

I was saying, ‘first, we have to understand what are we standing for. Are we in the area of weak thinking? How do we define Art? And do we establish Beauty or art in this thinking field.’ I believe that all these ways of expression intend to repeat the “crack”. We all try to express these “cracks”. Combining certain elements that will lead to a meaning. Light, objects, sound. The result will make us wonder: Who is the author of this moment? In that very moment, you have no will. Just the circumstances. A subject and a situation (A scene).

This happens even in that field that we don't consider artistic. For those who make this happen the value and purpose is in trying. Even if it causes an effect as a consequence or not. I have been outside the theater, while projecting my work, and the reactions would be diverse. A lot of people would leave the theater pretty mad. As if the movie was insulting to them or as if they were mad at the good critics. My encounter with failure. But the willing is extraordinary. It is a privilege. I

encourage people to lie and say that they are film makers. People knowing you are a film maker, approach you telling stories that they believe can be made into film. It is a true privilege to hear other people's dreams...

THE CATEGORIES OVERFLOW

L: *The female characters are all very particular. We feel that they are not patterns or stereotypes but: Do you find anything similar between them?*

LM: I imagine all my characters, either male or female, as homosexual children that do not know yet where their desire will go. That way of thinking gives the actor, in many situations, a lot of freedom. I say homosexual but I want to clarify that is more about that primitive stage of not knowing where the desire will go. It is very immature. It allows to give a chance to not taking sides. This is how I work with the actors. This is how I guide them. Sometimes, I just have to say it and it works. This is in benefit of the script. I don't have to touch it too much. If you are working with a character that is sexually confused then the scripts are suffering amazing changes. If you categorize the characters naming them as a man or a woman then there is no room to explore. To Play.

Not long ago, I was directing an audio-book project for the National Direction of Cultural Industries. One of the characters was a "Gaicho" and it was too easy to make it happen. My intervention was: Try to think as if he is gay. As a consequence, we found a different kind of "gaicho". He was no longer the typical cliché character. These are the gadgets we have been talking about. We have to play with them all the time to find something new.

L: *Would you place the feminine in this categories overflowing?*

LM: It is very difficult to apply the feminine to women. Zama, my new movie, is very feminine. It is a word that is very hard to connect with women. There is something in the word itself. Do you have a definition of the feminine? I have been a huge fan of the Queer theory. I can see how things can be forged so quickly and we must try to soften that all the time. Intolerance is because of those calcified concepts, for example. Emptiness is intolerable. The absurd of reality is intolerable. Sometimes you just have to trust your will of leaving the house and place a foot in the sidewalk! Otherwise, you would stay inside.



L: *You mentioned at the beginning of this interview: "it is the constant persecution of something you will never catch". In The Holy Girl the young ladies wonder about the calling. One of them answers that calling would be to do it all. Cross the line, go over fear. It's the idea of the Unlimited.*

LM: The calling is very different for women and men. Women have more freedom. Probably because we have been displaced from power. Men, on the contrary, from the beginning of time have been controlled and submissive. There is a book from the XVIII century that advises men on how to confess. For men, the questions are very precise. For women the questions are permissive. It has to do, in my opinion, with our restriction in power or certain fields. That is a world that is

over. Like gay marriage. It's over. The institutions legitimizing certain things are caging some others as well. I think this is such a schizophrenic duty. It is insane to see our system producing sense in order to paralyze. It took some time for science to understand that mass is in constant movement. That static doesn't exist. It comes from human anguish, this willingness to cover up things with "sense" or a meaning, avoiding and as well rejecting a world where anything is possible. I understand, it is necessary. But still coming as a consequence of this cultural constraint.

MYSTICISM AND MONSTROSITY

L: *You were talking about certain non categorized fields for women and certain more determined areas for men. You mentioned Science and I recalled La Nina Santa: A medicine conference, all men. A girls only school and the question about their calling. As if men were related to Science and women to holiness, obedience*

LM: If you check out how many mystics they were in Christian history and how many men... Hildegarda, Sor Juana, Santa Teresa, Santa Teresita. The list is vast and their actions well known. For some reason these women went over their purpose. They achieved more. I do believe that the power given to men was predetermined. For women it wasn't that clear. So they had the freedom to build a direct relationship with divinity. Placing the institutions on the side. That is a very feminine construction. Power wasn't to be executed. Sor Juana was in the system. She was a woman of Science and power. But, Hildegarda von Bingen (XI century) pretended to be paralyzed to establish a cluster. She couldn't talk to anyone. What could have been said? Instead, God wouldn't let her body move because in that very place a cluster was to be established. I don't know if you've heard the story of Benedetta Carlini. In order to have sexual encounters with other nuns she would say that she was possessed by an angelical spirit called: Esplenditelo. She ended up in jail for 25 years. But until she was 36 years old she was constructing her power from madness and seduction. The construction was always physical. Sickness, starve, demons attacks, etc. Women built their power from a very physical place. We had been looking at certain locations for Zama and we found a huge cloister, dated back in the viceroy Vértiz time. Same thing, always guided from madness and mysticism.

L: *Lacan says: "Do you want to know anything about the feminine, study the mystics".*

LM: They are directly connected to divinity. There is no higher expression of anarchy than that. There is no mediator. There is no government, no authority. Women found, I believe, a field that we will be losing slowly but surely. Society now is looking for rights equality. Rights legitimize a way of living. Going back to equal marriage. I was for it, but at the same time I thought it was insane. I felt we were fighting for an institution that is crashing already. It is a broader way of thinking about rights but let's dare to question what does this opening mean in the long term.

L: *It may be like normalizing the monstrosity?*

LM: Right. It makes it legit. Maybe leading us to discover a more interesting thing that is not necessarily connected to sexuality. I link it to the feminine because it is a word that overflows gender. But for me, monstrosity is applicable to any piece of flesh that can speak.



L: In “The Headless Woman”, in contrast to the other two movies where the characters are chatting and talking nonstop, Veronis is mute and people speak for her.

LM: Yes. But for me, she is the one making the others talk. Because of her state, the others must do this to protect her. She abuses from the effect she is causing in others and the complicity that is present in her social class. I think this is something that couldn't be transmitted. We will see what can be read of it. Having said that, her manipulation, her temper... that was very important to me. The victim is very manipulative as well. She is suffering from a post traumatic shock after the accident that will let her be in the ambiguous zone. Perhaps she is a bit amnesic? She can't remember? There is a subtle disorder between the feelings that would connect her to people. And beyond, the oblivion that leads to construction: She goes to a hotel, there are no signs of her being there before. It is not a thriller. It is ambiguously positive. I'm suffering from Zama: Every construction is exposed to failure. The cracks. I am aware of the impossibility to make a perfect film because the risk in the discourse is huge. “Perfect” or functional. Something I haven't achieved yet, is to displace my films from that “highly cultured” zone. They have been categorized as highbrow movies.



L: In *Muta* you treat the female customs. In *Psychoanalysis*, *Hysteria* has a direct connection with the masks. What was your approach with *Muta*?

LM: I had never worked on a commercial film before. When I agreed to make it, I was in a very particular path where financially it was really convenient for me. I was drying out from Zama. Since I have never empathized with what fashion or consumption made with women, I believed I had to do something that would allow to escape in a way. My idea of keeping women hidden, in a way, was to preserve the nature of ambiguity. Make them come out from a hole and eat paper as if they were roaches was the way I found to keep them in a inhuman zone. I was assigned a collection from the 50's divas. I thought that from an aesthetic point of view I had to make them look that way. The idea was to let these ladies escape from the dresses. Be evanescent, not quiet at all and at the same time, mutating.

L: Do you understand your feminine characters as orphans or helpless?

LM: Yes! especially in “La Cienaga” because I was personally concerned about giving the character this divine orphan style. I believe this is important to accept in life. It gives us freedom. Politically, it is what makes you organized. We find ourselves in this world, we have been thrown into this jungle and we have to try to be organized in order to have the best time possible. The minute this orphan human condition is perceived as hurtful it is absolutely empowering of the human. The characters at La Cienaga, especially the families they play, were in the position to feel that immersion in this orphan presence, they couldn't function and overall it wasn't possible

to do. This is the condition of the conservative class. Preservation implies not being capable of imagining an alternative. So, whatever it may be, it is better just because it isn't different. The premiere of this film happened before the Argentinean crisis and it was related to the decadence. For me, that is just part of a time frame: thinking about decline with a negative connotation. But welcome! If this brings declination of those values, then great! It is more about abandonment than declination. This implies a willing exercise, action and responsibility.

The english translation was made by Florencia Bernthal, to whom we thank her work.

Review: Georgina Vorano and David Albano González.