

Introduction

Since the release of her debut feature, *La ciénaga* (*The Swamp*), in 2001, Argentine director Lucrecia Martel has gained worldwide recognition for her richly allusive, elliptical and sensorial filmmaking. Acclaimed at home and abroad by critics and art-film audiences, she has been called ‘one of the most promising of world auteurs’ (Smith 2012, 70); ‘one of the most talented filmmakers in the world’ (Bradshaw 2008); and a ‘mini-Chekhov of the tropics’ (Kezich cit. in Falicov 2007, 126). Her three feature films, which also include *La niña santa* (*The Holy Girl*, 2004) and *La mujer sin cabeza* (*The Headless Woman*, 2008) have won numerous awards of the Argentinian Film Critics Association (ACCA), as well as prestigious prizes at film festivals around the world, and are consistently rated amongst the top ten of recent Latin American films. In 2009, all three features appeared in a Cinema Tropical poll which asked New York critics to name the ten best Latin American films of the decade, with *La ciénaga* taking the number one spot. Martel has been seen as a prominent figure in the experimentalism and aesthetic break with previous Argentine filmmaking that, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, came to be known as ‘New Argentine Cinema’, yet with only three feature films, her critical acclaim and international appeal looks set to outstrip that of any of her New Argentine contemporaries. *The cinema of Lucrecia Martel* examines her place within that body of work, or tendency in Argentine filmmaking, yet also explores correspondences between her work and other national and global filmmaking trends. It brings together some of the 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.¹

Lucrecia Martel (b. 1966) grew up in Salta province, north-west Argentina, in a conservative middle-class family, and it is this milieu which is depicted in her first three features, which draw on memories of growing up in Salta, and keen – almost anthropological – observations of life there.² Martel began filming her family aged fifteen when her father purchased a video camera. She would place the camera in a static position to record family members as they moved in and out of the frame, developing a sense of off-screen space which would define her future work. At twenty she went to Buenos Aires to study a Social Communication programme and animation at night classes, briefly studying at Avellaneda Experimental and at the Escuela Nacional de Experimentación y Realización Cinematográfica, but not completing a degree (Jubis 2010, 17). She made some short films in the late 1980s and worked in television throughout the 1990s, but her filmmaking career began in earnest when she participated in the 1995 *portmanteau* project *Historias breves*, with her short film *Rey Muerto*, a ‘feminist western’ about domestic violence.³ *Historias breves* was one of a number of initiatives intended to support young, first-time filmmakers in Argentina in the mid-1990s, following the passing of the Cinema Law in 1994,⁴ and led to the formation of a writing group with other talented young filmmakers including Daniel Burman and Bruno Stagnaro. In 1996, Martel began work on the screenplay of *La ciénaga*, which went on to win the Sundance Prize for Best Screenplay, sponsored by Japanese broadcasting organisation NHK, in 1999. The award brought with it \$10,000, and enabled the film to find further backing through a mixture of Argentine and international funding sources.⁵ Martel’s second and third films, *La niña santa* and *La mujer sin cabeza*, also both international co-productions, followed later in the same decade. Since completing *La mujer sin cabeza*, Martel has directed the short films *Nueva Argirópolis* (2010), *Pescados*, for the 2010 Notodofilmfest, and *Muta* (2011), a parodic publicity short for fashion house Miu Miu. *The cinema of Lucrecia Martel* considers these unstudied short films within the broader context of Martel’s filmmaking.⁶

Together with the Cinema Law, an expansion of film school places led to a boom in filmmaking and sharp increase in debut features in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Several new, first-time directors – including Martín Rejtman, Adrián Caetano and Bruno Stagnaro,

and Pablo Trapero, and shortly afterwards, Lucrecia Martel – were deemed by critics and journalists to have initiated an ideological and aesthetic break with ‘veteran’ Argentine directors such as Fernando Solanas and Eliseo Subiela and with the reigning tendency to deal in cinematic metaphors for the 1976–82 dictatorship. Instead – in the 1990s context of neo-liberalism and economic crisis in Argentina – these new directors turned to the private and the personal, rather than the national or the obviously political, to the intimate rather than the epic. Their gaze was typically minimalist, opaque, and focused on the social or geographical margins. Moving away, also, from the depictions of the *porteño* middle class which had characterised most post-dictatorship Argentine filmmaking, these new directors turned instead to the urban or rural poor, or in the case of Martel, to the 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. Salta was cinematically uncharted territory – a world away from the culture of Buenos Aires which still dominated the Argentine film scene.⁷ But the worlds Martel depicted were also peripheral in senses other than the geographical: they explored the lives of women, children and adolescents, they alluded to marginal sexualities, and foreclosed realms of experience.

The history of the New Argentine Cinema has been extensively documented, its trends and tendencies comprehensively analysed, and these writings include excellent discussions of the place of Martel’s work within it – indeed, this is the critical category within which Martel’s work has most frequently been considered.⁸ This book considers ways in which, as Dominique Russell suggests, Martel’s films are both ‘representative and exceptional within the New Argentine Cinema’ (2008, 2). However, as Jens Andermann proposes: ‘[I]t makes sense today to look beyond the uncertain boundaries of an “independent” generational project, which has been in many ways a critical fiction [...]. [W]hat this critical narrative missed was the wider, more contradictory and multilayered landscape of filmmaking in Argentina’ (2012, xii–xiii). As such this book also traces the resonances of Martel’s work beyond the New Argentine Cinema, arguing that it has played a crucial role in the development of a more established feminist and queer cinema in Argentina.⁹ New Argentine Cinema has been characterised as arising from and responding aesthetically and thematically to profound political and economic upheaval, in

particular the economic recession of the 1990s, culminating in the economic crash of 2001.¹⁰ However, the increased liberalisation of the law in relation to gender and sexuality since the 'progressive turn' in Argentine politics has in its turn been accompanied by a striking set of cinematic challenges to gender and sexual ideologies.¹¹ Martel's films draw on the legacy of María Luisa Bemberg (1922–95), whose work initiated such challenges for Argentine film in the 1970s, and Martel's oblique approach to marginal sexualities has in turn paved the way for a series of related films in Argentine cinema, which share a transgressive attitude to regimes of gender and sexuality, as well as concerns and representational modes with other currents of global queer cinema. Martel's work is also profoundly influenced by genre film, especially horror, and the three Salta films undertake a radical subversion of the conservative imperatives of that genre.¹²

Martel and her New Argentine contemporaries have been positioned by criticism and industry as auteur-figures, and often as mediators between commercial and artistic interests. As D'Lugo (2003) discusses, in the era of international co-productions auteurism has been an important way of establishing the identity of Latin American cinemas in the world market. The film auteur was a concept originally proposed in the 1950s by contributors to *Cahiers du cinéma* and it understood the director as possessing a unique, personal vision and a distinctive cinematic style which made his films instantly recognisable as his work. Because of the collaborative nature of filmmaking, the idea of the film-author has always been somewhat problematic, and it has further come under attack in the context of post-structuralist critiques of authorship as the expression of a unified subjectivity and as function of an individualist, capitalist society.¹³ In the 1960s, there was a reconceptualisation 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.¹⁴ As a result, the Latin American auteur has come to be associated with the act of taking a stand, even whilst, since the renewal of cinema that has occurred in the region since the mid-1990s, the politics of the new auteurist offerings are co-opted for commercial ends.

Notwithstanding the conceptual and political problems of auteurist discourses, there remain compelling reasons to study the work of a

director like Martel within such a framework. Martel writes her own scripts and, despite the collaborative nature of filmmaking, exercises a good deal of control over decisions about aspects such as *mise-en-scène*, lighting and camera placement, as members of her crew have suggested (Jubis 2010, 12; Colace 2001, 26).¹⁵ She has also stated in interviews the autobiographical nature of her work which draws on diaries and childhood memories (Wood 2006, 168). More importantly, though, the consideration of a figure like Martel destabilises the Eurocentric and masculinist underpinnings of the auteurist project, allowing for those traditionally excluded from the canon to be originators of meaning. As many feminist and minority critics have noted, the post-structuralist decentring 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. Martel's feature films to date can be understood in part as expressions of or meditations on feminine identity, especially as it is constructed and plays out in a specific local and ideological setting; in addition, they include enigmatic expressions of lesbian sexuality, often inexplicit or just off-screen, expressions which are part of a broader, multiple and heterogeneous field of desire in these films which this book understands as queer. Such expressions can be read as a kind of subcultural code providing the pleasure of recognition and identification to queer audiences, 'a pleasure of particular political importance to minority or marginalised people' (Dyer 1991, 188); it is in this sense, too, then, that the 'authorial signature' acquires a political relevance.

Martel has worked with two of the most significant 'producer-auteurs' in Latin American cinema, Lita Stantic and Bertha Navarro. Stantic, who Martel met whilst working in television on the children's programme *Magazine for fai*, worked with Martel on both *La ciénaga* and *La niña santa*. Famous for her work on María Luisa Bemberg's films and thus associated with a feminist tradition of filmmaking in

Argentina, Stantic became associated with the New Argentine Cinema through her work on some of its most canonical films, including *Mundo Grúa* (*Crane World*, Trapero 1999) and *Bolivia* (Caetano 2001), as well as Martel's first two features. Stantic encouraged Martel to attend one of the Sundance scriptwriting workshops led by Mexican producer Navarro, who Marvin D'Lugo proposes has been a significant force behind, and creative influence on Latin American filmmaking since the 1970s (D'Lugo forthcoming); Stantic also advised Martel to send the script of *La ciénaga* to the Sundance Institute and was thus instrumental in that project's winning of funding and eventual realisation. She suggested the actress Mercedes Morán for the role of Tali in *La ciénaga* and Morán also went on to take a leading role in *La niña santa*. Elements of Bertha Navarro's methodology are evident in Martel's work, from her emphasis on the creation of a strong script and on adhering closely to it during shooting, to her films' attention to the everyday, the intimate and the private, and the way they tease out the relationship of these to wider social power structures.¹⁶

After the success of *La ciénaga*, which won numerous awards including the Alfred Bauer Prize of the Berlin International Film Festival, and was seen by 130,874 spectators in Argentina,¹⁷ Martel won a Cinéfondation grant which enabled her to attend a residence programme in Paris where she wrote the script for *La niña santa*. Both *La niña santa* and *La mujer sin cabeza* were produced by El Deseo, the production company of brothers Agustín and Pedro Almodóvar. As Shaw notes, '*La niña santa* is the result [...] of a complex configuration of private and public finance, and is an example of auteurist Latin America cinema made possible thanks to the support of European organisations and companies' (2013, 167).¹⁸ Both *La niña santa* and *La mujer sin cabeza* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival and received ACCA nominations and awards.¹⁹ In addition to the thematic and aesthetic resonances between their work – the films' queer politics are an obvious point of comparison – Martel and Almodóvar actively endorse one another's work and have even campaigned together on LGBT rights in Argentina.²⁰ As Paul Julian Smith argues, 'El Deseo is aware that sponsorship of young auteurs like Martel, whose films may well lose money for them, remains a way of adding to the prestige and symbolic capital of Almodóvar himself' (2012, 71). D'Lugo discusses the idea of a house style common to El Deseo productions and sees Martel's later films, and especially *La mujer sin cabeza*, as sharing the company's 'transhispanic' aesthetics and aspirations (D'Lugo

2013). By the time of *La mujer sin cabeza* a clear aesthetic connection to Almodóvar's own work was created through paratextual features such as the striking publicity image for that film, which was designed by Juan Gatti, the graphic designer for the publicity of Almodóvar's own films (Kairuz 2008, 53). In part through this connection with Almodóvar and *El Deseo*, Martel's films have achieved a significant global impact, with Martel becoming perhaps the best-known of contemporary Argentine filmmakers, and serving on the juries of international festivals including Berlin, Cannes, Sundance and Venice. Her increasing lionisation has been augmented by the many public appearances, interviews and discussions of her films through which her authorial persona has been created; in television appearances she glosses and intellectualises the difficult aspects of her films, and has latterly adopted a 'trademark' use of 1950s-style cat eye glasses which she now always wears in publicity shots. Their quirky, elongated shape is wittily referenced in her parodic short film *Muta* and dialogues with the more general meditation on constructions of visual or 'film star' femininity (including, then, her own authorship and its performance) which I show to be a part of her filmmaking.

Martel's work has been more widely distributed internationally than is usual in the case of Latin American cinema,²¹ and its global reach – in addition to the high-profile associations already mentioned – can be attributed to its privileging of themes and styles currently popular in global arts cinema such as the subversive take on child sexuality (which echoes Almodóvar's own *La mala educación* [*Bad Education*, 2004] and which has become an established theme of European arts cinema),²² as well as to its dialogue with the classical auteur cinema of, for example, Antonioni and Hitchcock, and its subtle echoing or re-working of genre film including conventions of the horror, the thriller and the melodrama.^{23 24} In terms of their style, Martel's films can also be seen as part of a tendency in contemporary art cinema towards an aesthetic of sensation, a cinema which privileges the tactile and the sensorial over the visual. This sensorial approach in contemporary 'festival films' often takes place – as in Martel – within the context of a slowing of cinematic time. Tiago de Luca proposes this as a tendency of contemporary world cinema, which he sees as 'defined above all by a sensory mode of address' (2012, 187), and as 'foreground[ing] reality primarily as a perceptual, sensible and experiential phenomenon' (2012, 192). Indeed, both Paul Julian Smith and Marvin D'Lugo see the feature films' transnational funding arrange-

ments and distribution deals as generating a transnationalisation of style, with Martel's films featuring aesthetics similar to those of other transnational auteurs favoured on the international festival circuit.²⁵

Despite these global resonances, Martel's features retain an intensely local flavour, attesting to the tastes of international art-house and festival audiences for local and 'authentic' slices of Latin American life, and suggesting the production of Latin Americanness for foreign consumption as a feature of the contemporary deterritorialisation of cultural production. Whilst the films avoid concrete references to specific places,²⁶ Martel's home province of Salta provides a semi-imaginary geography which played an important part in Martel's creative process when working on the first three features, and which creates intertextual resonances between the films. Subsequent to *La mujer sin cabeza*, Martel has started to film in different regions of the country with a particular focus on riverine landscapes and the provinces of Chaco, Corrientes and Formosa, which provide the settings for the short films *Nueva Argirópolis* and *Muta*, and for the more recent *Zama* project. The riverine location as a setting for increasing ontological fluidity and the deterritorialisation of identities will be discussed in Chapter 4, which deals with the 2010–11 short films. In the three features, as well as the early short *Rey Muerto*, the fictional town of La Ciénaga functions as an anchor for an imaginary *salteño* space, in relation to which Martel has commented that she located each of these films (in Panozzo 2008, 14). *La niña santa* in a sense grows out of *La ciénaga*, because, as Martel has put it: '*La niña santa* es un cuento, un cuento de esa gente que vive en La Ciénaga. No es algo que les pasó a unos personajes sino algo que cuenta la gente de por ahí. Le falta un grado más de realidad' ('*La niña santa* is a tale, a tale told by the people that live in La Ciénaga. It's not something that happened to some characters, but rather a story which is told by people in the area. It's at another remove from reality', in Oubiña 2009, 78). In turn, Martel thinks of some of *La mujer sin cabeza*'s characters as adult versions of the girls in *La niña santa*, and names them accordingly.²⁷ In this way, she creates a semi-consistent world, linking her first three feature films in space and time.²⁸ These films share a minute attention to the vicissitudes of everyday life in Salta: its particular religious practices,²⁹ its class, ethnic and sexual relations, the particularities of local speech. For Porta Fouz, it is their attention to how local ways of speaking construct a provincial world-view that marks Martel's feature films out as *salteñas* (from Salta province): she calls attention to their 'palabras de

provincia' ('provincial words') which 'describen una vida (provinciana) de familia opresiva, [...] de mirar a la ciudad como algo lejanísimo [...]' ('describe an oppressive, provincial family life [...] which sees the city as something very far away', 2008, 21), and which distinguish the characters' speech from a neutral, *porteño* Spanish. This emphasis on naturalistic and non-standard speech has been seen as a defining feature of New Argentine filmmaking, shared by directors such as Rejtman, Caetano and Stagnaro, and Trapero, despite the fact that they were depicting different social milieux.³⁰ The emphasis on local speech in Martel's work constructs a local way of seeing; as Porta Fouz puts it 'La provincia de Martel es la provincia quieta, sin horizontes, de la que es difícil salir' ('Martel's provinces are a place which lacks movement or horizons, and which it is difficult to leave', 21).

Martel has stated on several occasions that she made the three features to be watched in Salta, where 'repeating the lives of others is a goal' (in Guest 2009).³¹ These films display a strong political commitment to the depiction, analysis and often the defamiliarisation of the local culture. Through a minute attention to private life, to intra-familial relationships as well as to the relationships between the white middle-class protagonists and their dark-skinned, working-class servants and neighbours, the films attempt to reveal how neocolonial, patriarchal and heteronormative structures are perpetuated, with particular emphasis on the tendency to repeat, and possibilities for change. In the features this means that a scrutiny of family life as the field within which these power relations and repetitions play out is central; in the later short *Nueva Argirópolis*, the focus is instead on the construction of (racial and social) otherness by the state, through the depiction of the police handling of indigenous internal migration and activism. These films all share what has generally been understood to be a defining feature of New Argentine filmmaking; that is, the avoidance of obvious didacticism, or of overt political meanings as well as of any tendency to the politically programmatic.³² *The cinema of Lucrecia Martel* contends, though, that Martel's films are, nevertheless, highly political, and that their politics can be found not only in their attempts to reveal reality, and to defamiliarise it – especially in relation to how the power structures of a rigidly conservative society are maintained – but also, and perhaps most importantly, in their pervasive creation of uncertainty and doubt, their play with perception, which in turn suggests a contingent and mutable reality, and allows for the glimpsing of alternative possibilities.

Martel's films work to undermine the ideological mechanisms of the cinema and to reveal those of the worlds they portray. They use well-worn art-house techniques to disrupt spectator identification and produce distancing, to fracture notions of empirical truth and the accompanying *sujet supposé savoir*, favouring ambiguity, a disjuncture between sound and image, temporal and spatial dislocation over classical editing styles, and an immanence of meaning requiring active spectatorial involvement. Characters and the relationships between them are not established in a conventional way, and often remain indistinct or unclear; minor characters especially may be difficult to distinguish from one another. Pans of the camera are rare; they would allow too much certainty about the way spaces relate to one another. Elliptical narrative structures, weak or missing causal links, major events which happen off-screen, and shots which either withhold information or include too much information – often in the form of many minor acts happening at once – all contribute to the creation of uncertainty and disorientate the spectator. Immersive, heightened and often haptic and acousmatic sound is important in Martel's 'aurally conceived' cinema (Russell 2008, 1) and contributes to this spectatorial estrangement and immanence of meaning, working against the tendency of dominant cinema to use sound simply to support and explain the visual image. In Martel's work, sound tends to have thematic and narrative importance, often fulfilling functions traditionally performed by the visual, and the strange, off-screen yet diegetic sounds which permeate the films continually suggest further layers to reality, something beyond the frame, beyond the visible or tangible. Aguilar has suggested that a defining feature of the New Argentine Cinema is the sense in which the films 'trabajan con la indeterminación y abren el juego de la interpretación' ('work with indeterminacy and open up the play of interpretation', Aguilar 2006, 24), and this is a crucial element of Martel's films; where they differ from those of Trapero, Caetano, Rejtman et al. is the sense in which this indeterminacy, the constant menace or possibility of the off-screen, the repressed or the noumenal, generates a pervasive sense of the uncanny often subtly redolent of horror. As this book contends, the uncanny, a feeling of 'uncertainty [...] regarding who one is and what is being experienced [...of a] commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar' (Royle 2003, 2), and the subject of an influential essay by Freud (1953a [1919]), constitutes a major mode of Martel's filmmaking.

Martel's method and process combine intricate planning with an understanding of cinema as an investigative tool which will reveal something about reality. She makes detailed plans of both soundtrack and the use of focus prior to shooting. Having the soundtrack worked out in advance indicates the importance of sound artistically in her work, but she has also spoken about it as a way of saving money, since adopting this method means that fewer takes are required, and that a lot of the information is communicated through sound rather than the visual (in Guillen 2009). She has commented: 'yo me doy cuenta que del rodaje espero una revelación, que cuando filmo un plano espero no solamente poder hacer la película [...] sino, profundamente espero entender algo del mundo [...] entonces es muy contradictorio: llevar acabo tu plan, pero que algo te sea revelado' ('I have realised that in shooting I expect a revelation, that when I film a shot I'm not just hoping to make a film [...] but rather I am deeply hoping to understand something about the world [...] so it's very contradictory: carrying out your plan, yet hoping something is revealed', in Martin 2011). The use of cinema as an investigative tool has been understood as a crucial element of the new Argentine cinema, shared with other directors such as Lisandro Alonso and Juan Villegas (Aguilar 2006, 25), a tendency ultimately drawing on approaches such as that of Dziga Vertov who understood the camera as enabling a 'communist decoding of reality' (1984, xxx), a means of revealing 'that which is invisible to the naked eye' (85). However, as Oubiña (2009, 10) notes, Martel's tight scripting and meticulous planning differentiate her work from that of a filmmaker like Alonso, which borders on documentary. It is also distinguished from naturalist or neo-realist Argentine productions of the same period by its heightened, oneiric atmosphere and expressionist style.

A crucial strategy in the films' investigative and revelatory work involves the use of dialogue and especially the conjunctions and – often ironic – juxtapositions of dialogue with the visual image. As noted above, Martel's is an oral cinema, a 'cine de las palabras [...], de la conversación' ('cinema of words [...], of conversation', Porta Fouz 2008, 18), whose characters are frequently engaged in telling stories, often of the fantastical or horrific. Dialogue is not approached in a conventional sense but instead consists of rambling chatter and open-ended conversations, creating a soundtrack of ambient speech. Voices which predominate are those of the provincial middle classes, and especially of their adult members, and within that field it is

the judgemental and critical voice of the mother which often takes precedence, creating a 'mundo viscoso de aburguesadas palabras-madre' ('viscous world of bourgeois mother-words', 20), a prime vehicle for the films' investigation of the naturalisation of ideology and marginalisation, the production of social subjection and interpellating of subjects through insults and labels of social class, race and sexuality.³³ The discursive circling of certain topics – especially race and class in *La ciénaga* (and to a lesser extent *La niña santa*) and homosexuality in *La mujer sin cabeza* – is often brought to a moment of analytical clarity or revelation through the conjunction of these labels and insults with the visual image. This is the case when *La ciénaga*'s Joaquín bad-mouths the indigenous for 'fucking dogs', attempting to designate them as 'other' and sexually deviant, whilst petting his dog's backside, a conjunction which highlights the many other projections of desires and failings by the film's white characters onto the indigenous underclass.³⁴ Through the conjunction of words and the visual image, the films seek 'una articulación que permite ver las cosas en toda su naturalidad aunque con una nitidez que no sería posible al natural' ('to articulate in a way which appears at once entirely natural and yet which allows for a clarity which would not be possible naturally', Oubiña 2009, 12).

Moments of analytical lucidity such as this are combined in Martel's films with defamiliarisation, and a surreal or oneiric quality. In fact, the films' politics rely as much on the creation of strangeness, ambiguity and otherworldliness as they do on investigation and analysis. Chapters 1 and 3 show how *La ciénaga* and *La mujer sin cabeza* defamiliarise class privilege through their visual styling; Chapter 4 demonstrates how *Muta* renders strange the codes and constructs of what we might call 'hypervisual femininity'. More broadly, all Martel's films in some way work to call into question our perception, making us uncertain about what we see or hear. In this way they undermine the conventional languages of narrative cinema, which tend towards the suture of the spectator, and towards explanation and clarity. Martel's films are also strongly diegetically preoccupied with situations of perceptual uncertainty and crisis, as well as with the creation of new objects of perception. Echoing Shklovsky (2004 [1917], 17), Martel's feature films in particular suggest that our perception is educated and habitual, and that this education is a function of ideology. The idea is given narrative form in the films through images of perceptual deprivation of (mainly though not exclusively) adult characters, themselves associated with

dominant subjectivities and oppressive attitudes. Perceptual impediment is evoked aesthetically by distorted soundscapes, and evocations of limited vision, signalling the ways the white, bourgeois and patriarchally-conditioned subjectivities the films critique and expose are blind or deaf to other, dominated realms of experience.

In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Deleuze argues that through the use of clichéd, sensory-motor images in cinema:

We do not perceive the thing or the image in its entirety, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are interested in perceiving, or rather what it is in our interest to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs, and psychological demands. We therefore normally perceive only clichés (1989, 19–20).

For Deleuze, whilst cinema has the potential to rupture perceptual regimes and to create thought, its industrial and economic positioning means it rarely does (Deleuze 2005 [1986], xx). Instead, it has developed a regularity which inclines it towards perceptual inertia so that (like Martel's older characters) it 'restricts its own potentialities' (Flaxman 2000, 19). Martel's films counter this cinematic tendency to restrict perceptual possibilities by working to engender perceptual flux and fluidity in characters and spectator, engaging with cinema as an experiment with perception, staging diegetic experiments with and crises of perception, which are in turn generative of doubts about social reality or the status quo. This concern with perceptual crisis or flux, with the borders of perception, explains the frequent return in Martel's work to images of falling asleep and waking, dozing, illness and immersion (in water, usually swimming pools).³⁵ In these 'border states', or in the passage between sleeping and waking, between being under water and emerging into air, the films find ample possibilities for the imaging of ideological immersion or submission, and for the rupturing of that submission, as well as for the engendering of uncanny sensations of 'psychical uncertainty', or the idea that reality might not be quite what it seems – a feeling which is (in many cases) experienced by both character and viewer.³⁶ The seeking out of or otherwise experiencing states of perceptual flux and liminality may suggest both threat and anxiety, but also possibility; it allows for the glimpsing of other realities, for an encounter with 'the horizon of ideology [...] the border of the obvious, the natural and the self-evident' (Nichols 1981, 3). The extent to which the films are optimistic or pessimistic about possibilities for change has been a focus for

debate on Martel. For Wolf, *La ciénaga* and *La niña santa* are about cyclical immutable universes, which he contrasts with his view that 'en *La mujer sin cabeza* se abre una potencial [...] transformación' ('in *La mujer sin cabeza*, the space is opened up for a potential transformation', 2008, 44). Whilst the potential for transformation in *La mujer sin cabeza* may be more apparent in that film because of the fact that it is organised around a central protagonist and clearer indications of what that change might be, in fact this potential is strongly present in all the films, which balance their cyclical, repetitive universes with moments of ideological rupture and possibility. As *The cinema of Lucrecia Martel* will show, it is primarily, in the feature films, their representation of crises, shifts and renewals of perception, and their production of such renewals in the spectator via their aesthetic organisation, as well as their figuring of desire, that constitute the major sites of transformation and optimism in these works.

The understanding of desire in Martel's work strongly recalls that of Deleuze and Guattari in the *Anti-Oedipus*. They write:

If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society: not that desire is asocial, on the contrary. But it is explosive: there is no desiring machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors. [...] *Desire is revolutionary in its essence* [...] and no society can tolerate a position of real desire without its structures of exploitation, servitude, and hierarchy being compromised (1983, 116, my emphasis).

For Deleuze and Guattari, desire can be coded by or made to mimic society, yet it is also a decentring, fragmenting and dynamic force, always seeking 'more objects, connections and relations than any socius can allow, pursuing "nomadic and polyvocal" rather than "segregative and biunivocal" flows' (Best and Kellner 1991, 86). Whilst Martel's films clearly show how 'the first order of business for a society is to tame and repress desire, to "territorialise" it within closed structures' (86), and demonstrate the ways in which desire is coded and functions to uphold social systems of domination and privilege, desire is also consistently figured as revolutionary in these films, as pervading and inhabiting the institutions (primarily the middle-class family, but also religion and, in *La niña santa*, medicine) which attempt its control. Asked to comment on the hints of incest in her three feature films, Martel has remarked that 'desire cannot be governed, it is above the law, beyond limitations' (Guest 2009, 8).

It is the films' queer sensibility (and I use 'queer' in this book in a broad sense, to designate the films' non-judgemental assumption of a heterogeneous and plural field of desire, as well as in a narrower one) which constitutes desire as a revolutionary essence, as a crucial means by which the films gesture to the rupturing of the status quo, of the 'closed worlds' they depict. In the features, desire is insistently figured as a force of change or would-be change, and it is often the young, and particularly the young female characters of Martel's features who embody both the radical potential of desire and the idea of perceptual experimentation and openness.

Compelling arguments have been made for understanding Martel's work as 'feminist' or as 'queer' filmmaking, because of this focus on the intimate lives and subversive desires of girls and women, and the domestic, often stifling settings in which the films play out.³⁷ Martel's early shorts suggest an engagement with both feminism and queer politics; her documentary *Historias de vida: Encarnación Ezcurra* (1998) focuses on the historical role and political importance of the wife of the nineteenth-century *caudillo* and dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas, and how her reputation as a weapon-carrying 'marimacha'³⁸ was crucial to her consolidation of Federalist power in Buenos Aires whilst her husband was leading military campaigns in the provinces, as well as highlighting how labels of sexual deviance were used by Federalists to symbolically 'other' Unitarians.³⁹ A later documentary, *La otra* (1990), is a portrait of drag queens in Buenos Aires, in particular the Transformistas, a group whose act further destabilised gender binaries by including a semi-reconversion to masculinity on stage, the removal of bra-padding and wigs becoming part of the performance. In *Rey Muerto*, which has a more straightforward narrative than any of Martel's later work, a woman kills her violent husband, and she and her children escape domestic violence. Unlike Martel's later films, this early short deals much more definitively in feminist options for escape, in the possibility for radical change, which in the features and later shorts is considerably more tempered.⁴⁰ In its use of music and drumming, as well as in its more limited interpretative possibilities, *Rey Muerto* recalls canonical New Latin American Cinema classic *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*). Like the films of that movement, *Rey muerto* has a clear political message: fighting back is necessary for political liberation.

For Aguilar, a defining feature of the New Argentine Cinema is the insufficiency and disintegration of the family order and patri-

archal authority, the ‘pasaje de una imaginación masculina a una imaginación femenina’ (‘shift from a masculine imagination [...] to a feminine imagination’, 2006, 46). Martel’s films depict feminine worlds in which women and girls loom large and male characters are less prominent (even if they may silently control matters from the background). Mothers, especially, ‘pululan y se multiplican’ (‘abound and multiply’) in Martel (47),⁴¹ though they are presented in a highly ambivalent way; from the aggressive alcoholic Mecha (Graciela Borges) of *La ciénaga*, to the harshly judgemental, critical and moralising mothers that recur in *La niña santa* and in *La mujer sin cabeza*. Men are often sidelined, and are frequently feminised (Russell 2008, 17). Martel’s camera pokes fun, gently, at the vain, and this includes Gregorio’s (Martín Adjemián) obsession with hair-care in *La ciénaga*, and Marcos’ (César Bordón) suggestion that his new swimming trunks are ‘medio chiconas’ (‘on the small side’) in *La mujer sin cabeza*, as well as the image-obsessed parody of the *femme fatale* that is Helena in *La niña santa*. Men also become objects of desire, as the voyeuristic punishment and fetishistic idealisation which has marked the treatment of women in cinema undergoes a subtle gender inversion, with the beaten and bruised body of José (Juan Cruz Bordeu) being undressed somewhat sadistically by his sister in *La ciénaga* and Amalia (María Alché) spying on the sleeping mirror-framed form of Jano (Carlos Belloso) in *La niña santa*. Critics highlighting feminist readings of Martel’s work have tended to focus on the earlier two feature films, and to draw attention to the privileging of a transgressive feminine gaze in these (Forcinito 2006; Jagoe and Cant 2007, 179), and to the contradictions of patriarchal ideology demonstrated in particular in *La niña santa* (see Rangil 2007, 220). For Stites Mor, who notes that Martel is reluctant to align herself with a feminist political programme (2007, 149), Martel’s work is nevertheless part of a feminist film culture which constitutes one of only two significant public sites of feminist discourse in Argentina (the other is the work of human rights organisations), a space she posits was opened up by María Luisa Bemberg. There are, indeed, moments of homage to Bemberg in the work of Martel: the most striking being the pivotal moment of *La niña santa* – a moment which suggests ideological rupture, an escape from or transformation of gendered and sexual ideologies – which plays out to ‘L’amour est un oiseau rebelle’ from Bizet’s *Carmen*. This is an aural reference to the bodily liberation of Charlotte (Alejandra Podestá) in Bemberg’s *De eso no se habla* (We

Don't Want to Talk About it, 1993), in a scene where she dances before the mirror to the same music.⁴²

An increasing number of critics are also now discussing the queer politics and aesthetics of Martel's work, and indicating where it departs from orthodox feminism. Julián Gutiérrez-Albilla (2013), B. Ruby Rich (2013) and Deborah Shaw (2013) all draw attention to the non-judgemental nature of the gaze in Martel's films, especially in relation to sexuality and desire. For Shaw, who discusses *La niña santa*, it is the film's refusal to judge the story or the characters' actions or desires from an orthodox feminist standpoint which designates the text as 'queer', as well as its emphasis on 'multiple sites of desire that escape scientific and social regulation' (2013, 171).⁴³ The lesbian subject matter – girls' desires for other girls, or for women – is presented largely unremarkably: it is just another aspect of the field of heterogeneous and multifarious desires presented in each film, the ambiguity of these desires just part of the generalised ambiguity of sexuality, narrative and motivation. For Galt, this ambiguity forms part of a 'queer refusal to signify' (2013, 62) which she identifies in contemporary world cinema.⁴⁴ It is certainly a very different approach to sexual dissidence to that proposed by the 'coming-out story' which would conventionally feature a strong gay character, as well as tending towards narrative closure; instead, as Rich puts it, Martel's work is 'assumptive' rather than 'declarative' on the subject of homosexual desire (2013, 181), her promiscuous narratives resisting closure and always tending towards the multiple and uncontainable. *The cinema of Lucrecia Martel* develops further queer approaches to Martel's work, discussing her frequent return to images of dirt and contamination as a subversive appropriation of the discursive abjection of the queer, and proposing a parodic, kitsch or camp excess in her citing of cinematic versions of femininity.

Pleasure, performance and parody are crucial elements of Martel's filmmaking: there is a self-conscious, playful meditation on the visual pleasure of the female image running through her features, from *La ciénaga*'s irreverent use of Graciela Borges – the great diva of Argentine cinema who is forced to lament her deteriorating physique throughout the film ('como a mí me gustan los escotes' ('you know how I love to show off my cleavage'))⁴⁵ – to *La niña santa*'s Helena, a parody of the 'to-be-looked-at' woman (Mulvey, 1989), and finally to Vero (María Onetto), the Hitchcockian heroine of *La mujer sin cabeza*, whose visual presence is coded as cinematic excess. In all these cases, as well as in

the short *Muta*, the films flirt with paradigms of visual femininity, whilst simultaneously defamiliarising the visual or cinematic signifier 'Woman' in a number of ways: through the acting style of Borges,⁴⁶ through Helena's excessive self-consciousness of her status as visual object, and through the excessive use of the close-up in filming Vero. Partaking in the norm of cinematic femininity, yet destabilising this norm, these films demonstrate an increasingly kitsch or camp excess in their treatment of the female image, drawing attention to its constructedness, whilst, in the features, contrasting these women of the older generation, trapped in their excessive visibility, with adolescent girls who seem to resist being looked at, either through a lack of conventional beauty or femininity, or through being pushed to the edges of the frame. Whilst more associated with the position of bearer of the gaze than their adult counterparts, these girls also move away from involvement in gaze dynamics through an increasing involvement in extra-visual epistemologies of touch, sound and smell.

In addition to their parodic citation of cinematic femininities, the features draw, at times subversively, on a range of genres and trends in cinema, from European art-house codes to classical Hollywood, and especially the genres of melodrama and horror, also at times citing these in a destabilising way. Russell argues that, in melodrama, 'Martel is playing with the themes of arguably the dominant mode in Latin American cinema [which is] still central culturally through hugely popular soap operas' (2008, 4). Like melodrama, Martel's feature films centre on 'the bourgeoisie, the domestic and the maternal' (2008, 4), and each of them recalls Thomas Elsaesser's analysis of melodrama's characteristics: the depiction of a 'stifling social milieu', which characters are powerless to influence or determine (1987, 55). *La ciénaga* in particular, with its alcoholic Mecha and thwarted Tali, recalls the genre's masochism and frustration, the inner, non-cathartic violence emanating from characters 'turn[ed] against themselves' (56). Yet, as Russell argues, 'usually melodrama is constructed from the spectacle of emotion' (2008, 4), whereas in Martel's films the structures of melodrama are subverted: as emotion and conflict are downplayed, the 'big moments' take place off screen (4), and, importantly, extra-diegetic music is not used.⁴⁷ Despite narrative gestures to notions of guilt, innocence and responsibility, moral polarities are rejected, as the films refuse to pass judgement on characters. Instead they analyse and explore the functioning of this stifling milieu as well as how its workings reflect and reproduce wider

societal structures of power and oppression, reclaiming the domestic as a site of (micro)political analysis.

Martel's interest in genre cinema extends into the realms of horror and science fiction. Her three features can be characterised as subtly Gothic in mode, with *La mujer sin cabeza* employing some conventions of the thriller, and more recent projects such as *Nueva Argirópolis* and *Muta* drawing in an understated way on science fiction.⁴⁸ *The cinema of Lucrecia Martel* pays particular attention to the place of horror in the director's work, arguing that its use of horror conventions is a playfully subversive one, which functions to challenge the genre's constructions of otherness. The feature films, each of which has a title worthy of a B-movie, are thematically concerned with the supernatural, the divine and the unknown, their characters subtly redolent of zombies, monsters or ghosts, their soundtracks punctuated by shrill telephones, and weird acousmatic sounds. The language of horror on which Martel calls is often intimately linked to her films' defamiliarising aesthetics, generative of uncanny effects and doubts about reality. Motifs from horror which are commonly used conservatively to demarcate social or sexual otherness are often repeated transgressively in Martel's work in ways which overturn the genre's conservative imperatives, from *La ciénaga*'s queer embracing of the abject of monstrous (adolescent) femininity to *La niña santa*'s uncanny protagonist Amalia who challenges horror's disciplining of the female gaze, and *La mujer sin cabeza*'s use of ghosts to evoke social exclusion and the film's conversion of the dominant social group into the primary source of fear. This dialogue with horror has taken place in the context of a surge in production of Argentine horror films. Between 2000 and 2010 almost 100 horror films were produced in the country (Rodríguez 2014, 90). As Rodríguez discusses, it is very difficult for actual horror films to access INCAA funding in Argentina, as the Institute tends to favour realist cinema with more obviously 'national' or 'political' themes, which has led to horror developing, generally, in polarisation from the New Argentine neo-realist-influenced cinema (though Martel's work could be seen as bridging the two), and being largely produced for export (151).⁴⁹

There is a particular image which repeats itself across the three features: a child's hands are pressing up against a screen, touching its far side. In *La ciénaga* this is Luchi (Sebastián Montagna), on the inside of a car (see figure 2), an image which finds a very strong echo in *La mujer sin cabeza*'s opening minutes. In *La niña santa*, the screen

is a less transparent one, and is perhaps the most redolent of horror, but all these images bear traces of horror's fascination with touch and the visceral, with the threat posed by the image to the bodily integrity of the viewer.⁵⁰ We are reminded of the 1970s horror of Dario Argento, whose *Suspiria* also draws attention to the skin, to contact, by pressing the human face up against the far side of a window pane. Deleuze proposes that images of the hand may elicit a tactile gaze (1989, 12), arguing that the tactile can constitute a pure sensory image as long as the hand gives up its motor functions and 'contents itself with pure touching' (1989, 12).⁵¹ The little hands in Martel's features invite an uncanny closeness, pushing us up against the image just as the children push up against these diegetic screens. *The cinema of Lucrecia Martel* shows how these films destabilise the traditional relationship between viewing subject and viewed object, eliciting a sensual and mimetic relationship between film and viewer, often evoking the sense of touch and using sound in ways which augment the corporeal, tactile relationship that cinema can have with the viewer. Younger characters' experiments with sensation and perception, Luchi's peering through a set-square in *La ciénaga*, or Amalia's pressing on her eyes in *La niña santa*, operate as a *mise-en-scène* of the films' own propensity to rupture the ideologically-indebted perceptual regimes which, according to Deleuze, dominate cinematic form.

Martel has said that, in the three feature films, she has thought of the camera as a child of ten or eleven, valuing the child's gaze for its curiosity and lack of judgement, its ability to perceive more, to perceive what adults have learned not to (in Martin 2011). The camera is not attached to the viewpoint of any of the children we see, though, as Martel's filmmaking avoids subjective shots. Rather, the camera is positioned as another (unseen, child) character, and as such is only placed in positions that character could realistically occupy.⁵² For Deleuze, the time-image, which he saw as undoing the ideological functioning of cinema and allowing for thought, was especially associated with the child's gaze, since the child – due to its physical limitations – has a reduced capacity to act, and a greater capacity for seeing and hearing than the adult (Deleuze 1989, 3). It is also in the time-image that there is a shift of emphasis away from the visual and action, and towards the senses and the body. As this book will show, the films' own experiments with the senses and perception can be understood as conveying a childish sensorium and mode of apprehending the world, rather than simply a child's 'gaze'.

Indeed, the gaze and the visual are often displaced or decentred in Martel's filmmaking, not only by the tactile but most importantly by sound, which may itself have tactile qualities.⁵³ Commenting on this aspect of her work, the director has said: 'En el cine, lo más táctil que uno tiene para transmitir, lo más íntimo, es el sonido. El sonido se mete en uno, es muy corporal. Y para ser fiel a esa perspectiva infantil, trabajé con la idea de que el sonido pudiera contar más que la imagen, incluso más que las palabras' ('In cinema, the most tactile thing one can use to transmit, the most intimate tool, is sound. Sound penetrates you, it is very corporeal. And, in order to be true to the child's perspective, I worked with the idea that sound could tell more than the image, and even more than words', in Monteagudo 2002, 74). As Chion writes, in contrast to the visual field, '[the] aural field is much less limited or confined, its contours uncertain and changing' (1994, 33). Sound poses a challenge in Martel's work to the hegemony of the visual, and is continually used to suggest layers to reality beyond the visible, to open up the field of interpretative possibility.⁵⁴ If, as Merleau-Ponty writes, 'to see is to have at a distance' (1964, 166), these films' appeals to extra-visual epistemologies – through sound, through touch, and even smell – resonate in the body, bringing viewer and film closer, undermining cinematic and visual regimes which uphold mind-body separation and which are associated with a Cartesian, a Western, a patriarchal and an adult way of seeing. Merleau-Ponty suggested that Western art, rooted in Cartesian thought, has worked through perspective to construct the viewing subject as rational and adult, and as a disembodied intellect. By contrast the cinematic experiments with touch and sound which characterise Martel's work are a means to convey, through alternative sensory and perceptual experiences, the 'aberrant forms of life and consciousness', which Merleau-Ponty attributed, amongst others to 'children and madmen' (2004, 56).

In this attention to the tactile, the senses, and their evocation of other forms of life and consciousness, especially childhood, but also the sexually non-normative, Martel's work has had a significant influence on filmmaking in Argentina. Filmmaker Julia Solomonoff has linked this in particular to *La ciénaga*. In interview, she commented: 'Para mi lo que Lucrecia [Martel] ha tenido es un efecto muy liberador en mucha gente [...E]n esa intimidad, en esa observación, en ese momento muerto de la tarde o de la siesta, hay un montón, y creo que ella inauguró una especie de 'planeta ciénaga' que le ha dado el pase

a mucha gente' ('For me, Lucrecia Martel has had a very liberating effect on [filmmaking] people. In that intimacy, in that observation, that dead moment of the afternoon or the siesta, there's so much, and I think she has inaugurated a kind of 'swamp world', which has opened up the way for many people', in Martin, 2012). The themes and aesthetics of Martel's films have paved the way for a new wave of Argentine women filmmakers including Solomonoff (*El último verano de la boyita/The Last Summer of La Boyita*, 2009) and Albertina Carri (*La rabia/Anger*, 2008) making films about children and marginal sexualities, and using tactile and immersive film languages and experimentation with sound to destabilise the cultural hegemony of the visual, the masculine and the adult.⁵⁵

All Martel's films work to open us up to such repressed or aberrant forms of consciousness. They operate on the border of the known and the unknown, always gesturing to that which is just beyond our grasp, at the edges of the visible and of the thinkable. This is why the uncanny is such a prominent mode for Martel: the uncanny is an experience of doubt, of uncertainty, and Martel's films operate to communicate an essential lack of certainty, with all the anxiety and possibility that this entails. As such, despite their depiction of closed orders, of claustrophobia, repetition and oppression, these are films replete with exhilarating possibility and potentiality. They exhibit a pervasive openness of frame and of meaning, an openness echoed by their representation of desire which proliferates promiscuously, eluding fixity. There is also a strong emphasis on the opening of perception; an idea which is diegetically staged, and which also results in cinematic experiments inviting a renewal of spectatorial perception. As we shall see, this openness and experimentation gives a radical political valence to Martel's work.

Notes

- 1 Martel's work has attracted a good deal of academic attention. Although there is no monograph to date on her work in English or Spanish, Viviana Rangel's *El cine argentino de hoy: entre el arte y la política* (2007) devotes a section of essays to *La ciénaga* and *La niña santa*, whilst David Oubiña has written an excellent extended study of *La ciénaga* (2009). Marcelo Panozzo's *La propia voz: el cine sonoro de Lucrecia Martel* (2008) is a useful collection of short articles and reviews (though with twelve male contributors to one female, somewhat imbalanced). Two noteworthy theses have also been published: Oscar Jubis's *The Films of Lucrecia Martel: The*

Salta Trilogy (2010) and Natalia Christofolletti Barrenha's *A experiência do cinema de Lucrecia Martel: Resíduos do tempo e sons à beira da piscina* (2013).

- 2 Martel has commented in interview that the scripts of, in particular, *La ciénaga* and *La niña santa* are based on her own experiences and recollections of adolescence and family life in Salta. See, for example, Wood (2006, 168).
- 3 Prior to *Rey Muerto*, Martel made the short films *El 56* (1988), *Piso 24* (1989) and *Besos rojos* (1991). In the student short *No te la llevarás, maldito* (1989), there is an exploration of the subversive power of children that would become a crucial feature of the later work, as a little boy's murderous Oedipal feelings towards his mother's lover are fully unleashed in a fantasy he lives out through his drawings. Between 1996 and 1999 Martel worked on the children's television show *Magazine for fai*. She also made two documentaries for television: *Encarnación Ezcurra* (1998) about the wife of Argentine *caudillo* Juan Manuel de Rosas, and *Las dependencias* (1999), a reconstruction of the life of the celebrated Argentine writer Silvina Ocampo which draws on the testimonies of servants and friends. Page remarks on the affinities between Ocampo's short stories and Martel's own fiction filmmaking, which both 'focus on the subterranean power struggles of parents, children and servants' (2009, 186).
- 4 This law responded to the complaints of young filmmakers who had previously had to compete with established filmmakers to gain access to state funding. For detailed discussion of the national film funding situation in 1990s Argentina and the conditions which led to a group of talented young directors coming on the scene, see Battle (2002) and Falicov (2007, 115–50).
- 5 The project received finance from the Argentine production company Cuatro Cabezas, as well as the support of Ibermedia, Fonds Sud and the Argentine Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA).
- 6 Since completing *La mujer sin cabeza*, Martel has worked on several further feature projects. The first was a science fiction film to be entitled *Gente* and the second an adaptation of Argentine Héctor Germán Oesterheld's science fiction comic strip *El eternoauta*, which Martel was adapting as a meditation on power and social class in Buenos Aires. In both cases these projects were shelved, after significant work had been undertaken on them, due to artistic differences with the producer. At the time of writing, Martel is working on an adaptation of Antonio di Benedetto's novel *Zama* (1956), which is set in the late eighteenth century and narrates the story of Don Diego de Zama, a Spanish colonial functionary sent to Asunción for a short period but who ends up waiting there interminably, and who is consumed by the long wait to the point of self-destruction. These unfinished projects suggest a shift into more overt engagement with genre filmmaking, and an interest in adaptation which imply a break with the previous 'Salta' films.

- 7 Producer Lita Stantic was impressed by the unconventionality of Martel's first feature. She is quoted as saying that 'nobody has ever dealt with this region, this ambiance, or exhibited such purity of style' (in Rich 2001).
- 8 Aguilar's *Otros mundos: un ensayo sobre el nuevo cine argentino* (2006) provides the most comprehensive analysis of the New Argentine Cinema's political and aesthetic tendencies, and includes excellent and extended analyses of *La ciénaga* and *La niña santa*. Andermann's *New Argentine Cinema* (2012) probes the category more critically, and treats it in a more open manner; it also includes illuminating analyses of Martel's three features.
- 9 These developments have an important precedent in the work of María Luisa Bemberg. Viviana Rangil's *Otro punto de vista: mujer y cine en Argentina* (2005) positions Martel's work within feminist currents of filmmaking in Argentina (90) but pre-dates *La mujer sin cabeza* and other more recent films such as those by Lucía Puenzo, Julia Solomonoff and Albertina Carri, which share feminist and queer subject matter, as well as aesthetic strategies with Martel's work.
- 10 As Andermann notes, the New Argentine directors have been characterised as sharing a 'preoccupation with the national present at a time of crisis, often encountered through neo-realist chronicles of the social and geographical margins' (2012, xii).
- 11 In 2010, Argentina became the first Latin American country to legalise same-sex marriage, and in 2012 passed a comprehensive transgender rights bill, allowing transgender people to change their gender on public documents without undergoing surgery and without medical or legal permission.
- 12 As she notes: 'When I was a girl, what I mostly saw on television were Westerns – *Rey Muerto* is, in a way, a Western – and horror movies. These were the genres that I paid the most attention to. They also formed part of the general "climate" of my area of the country, with its deep affection for horror stories, for stories full of apparitions and fantastical situations' (in Guest 2009).
- 13 See Roland Barthes' 'The death of the author' (1977) and Michel Foucault's 'What is an author?' (1984).
- 14 See D'Lugo (2003, 109–10).
- 15 As Oubiña notes, however, the production model of Martel's films has differed significantly from that of other films identified with the New Argentine Cinema, such as Trapero's *Mundo Grúa*, Stagnaro and Caetano's *Pizza, birra, faso* (*Pizza, Beer, Smokes*, 1997) and Lisandro Alonso's *La libertad* (*Freedom*, 2001), which were produced by their directors (2009, 9).
- 16 For example, *Cosas insignificantes* (*Insignificant Things*, Andrea Martínez Crowther, 2008), produced by Navarro, focuses on the intimate and the private and their relationship with wider social and political issues, as

- D'Lugo suggested at a talk entitled 'Bertha Navarro and the re-mapping of Latin American cinema' given at the 'Latin American women filmmakers on the global stage' Symposium, University of Portsmouth, 10 May 2013. *Cosas insignificantes* also features a diegetic kaleidoscope, and thus a self-reflexive focus on altering the conditions of (visual) perception, which this book will contend is crucial to Martel's feature films. In chapter 1, I discuss *La ciénaga's* use of similar images (42).
- 17 The film won the Grand Prix at the Festival Cinelatino de Toulouse, the most significant festival for Latin American cinema in Europe, and three ACCA (Asociación de Cronistas Cinematográficos de Argentina) awards.
 - 18 For a fuller discussion of the writing and financing of *La niña santa*, including the Paris Résidence programme, see Shaw (2013, 167).
 - 19 *La niña santa* was warmly received on the international festival circuit and purchased by HBO. For more on the critical reception of *La mujer sin cabeza*, see chapter 3 (80, 102 n.2).
 - 20 Martel notes that Almodóvar was a 'director emblemático' for her generation (Jagoe and Cant 2007, 173), whilst Almodóvar contributed a laudatory text on Martel's work to the (Gijón Film Festival compiled) collection *La propia voz: el cine sonoro de Lucrecia Martel* (Almodóvar 2008). Martel and Almodóvar also publicly united in support of the same-sex marriage bill in Argentina which was passed in 2010, with Martel's publishing in the local publication *Salta* 21 a letter written by Almodóvar in support of legalising gay marriage.
 - 21 Jubis writes that '*La niña santa* enjoyed commercial runs in Turkey and Israel, countries where audiences normally have access to Spanish-language films only when screened as part of film festivals' (2010, 14). All the features were released commercially in the US.
 - 22 Examples include *Ma vie en rose* (*My Life in Pink*, Berliner, 1997) and *Tomboy* (Sciamma, 2011).
 - 23 Shaw argues that 'Martel's success in the international arena depends on her use of an intellectual and self-conscious global language of art cinema that attracts cinephiles and has made Martel a critical success and a favourite of art-house audiences' (2013, 174).
 - 24 Martel's work is frequently compared to the cinema of Antonioni for its use of *temps-morts* and attention to the body. It often recalls the corporeal evocation of 'tiredness and waiting, even despair' which for Deleuze are the hallmarks of Antonioni's work (Deleuze 1989, 182). *La mujer sin cabeza*, in particular, recalls Antonioni's use of focus to suggest the psychological state of female leads such as Monica Vitti in *Red Desert*. Oubiña suggests further associations of Martel's work with that of María Luisa Bemberg, Luis Buñuel, Leonardo Favio, Jean Renoir, Roberto Rossellini, Leopoldo Torre Nilson and Luchino Visconti (2009, 13).
 - 25 Although remarking that Martel's style makes her aesthetic more distinctive than most, Smith suggests that 'festival films' are threatening to

- become formulaic, and share cinematographic elements with Martel's work (2012, 72).
- 26 Martel notes that when filming these features she would eliminate any place names or other geographical identifiers in order to avoid suggesting a documentary element to her work (in Panozzo 2008, 14).
 - 27 She has said '*en La mujer sin cabeza* de una manera muy *sui generis*, muy libre, era como el futuro de Jose y Amalia, como si esas amigas ya grandes, hubieran ido por ese camino' ('*La mujer sin cabeza*, in a very loose way, was like the future of Jose and Amalia, as if those two friends were now grown up, and their lives had developed in that way', Martin 2011). Thus, *La niña santa*'s Jose (Julieta Zylberberg) shares a name with *La mujer sin cabeza*'s Josefina (Claudia Cantero).
 - 28 Martel's depiction of hot, oppressive summers and family life playing out in a racially divided society has often been compared to the fictional universe of William Faulkner. Like Faulkner, Martel also creates a semi-consistent geographical world which has linked several of her works.
 - 29 Rangil, for example, considers the films' engagement with local religious practices as evidence for an understanding of them as intensely local ('muy salteñas', 2007, 210).
 - 30 On 'El lenguaje como tema' in the New Argentine Cinema, see Wolf (2002, 35–6).
 - 31 Elsewhere, Martel has drawn attention to the specifically local aspects of her filmmaking which are unlikely to be understood by foreign audiences. See Smith (2012, 71) and Taubin (2009).
 - 32 On the status of 'the political' in New Argentine Cinema, see Aguilar (2006 133–42). Commentators have questioned the political status of these films because they tend to lack '*la idea de agrupaciones activas, movilización permanente y demanda de cambio social*' ('the idea of active groupings, permanent mobilization and a demand for social change', 137), which is to say that they differ from the militant model of cinema established by filmmakers associated with the New Latin American Cinema in the 1960s. Critics have often turned to the aesthetics of Martel's films to argue for ways in which these disrupt the viewing experience, or demystify ideology. Gundermann, for example, in relation to *La ciénaga* discusses how the film uses distancing to interrupt 'the conventional (and commercial) suture of the spectator' (2005, 242), whilst Quirós discusses the temporal structuring and the editing of *La mujer sin cabeza* as '*un instrumento para desvelar las relaciones de poder inscritas dentro de lo cotidiano*' ('an instrument for revealing the power relations inscribed within the everyday', 2010, 251).
 - 33 A similar investigation of the power of words to perpetuate oppression and marginalisation is undertaken in Adrián Caetano's *Bolivia* (2001). Gonzalo Aguilar considers this aspect of *Bolivia*, drawing on Judith Butler's concept of excitable speech (2006, 172–4).

- 34 Referring to his dog, he says 'estos kollas de mierda se la deben de haber cogido' ('those shitty *kollas* must have fucked her').
- 35 Martel has said: 'La palabra "inmersión" no lo asocio solamente con el agua, porque en verdad uno está inmerso en el aire, no estamos tan conscientes de que estamos inmersos en el aire que es muy parecido al agua físicamente, en su comportamiento. [...] la idea de inmersión es algo muy específico del estado humano [...] una idea epistemológica desde la que hay que partir es que estamos inmersos [...] cualquier intento de transformación implica salir de esa inmersión...' ('I don't only associate the word 'immersion' with water, because the fact is we are immersed in air, though we are not as conscious of being immersed in air, which is very like water physically, in its behaviour. Immersion is very specific to being human [...] epistemologically, we should start from the idea that we are immersed [...] any attempt at transformation implies coming out of that immersion', in Martin 2011).
- 36 Ernst Jentsch in his essay 'On the psychology of the uncanny' (1906) signals light sleep as one of a number of psychic states, also including illness, which cause the subject to experience a psychic uncertainty giving rise to uncanniness.
- 37 Scholars producing feminist readings or debating the place of feminism in Martel's work include Forcinito (2006), Gutiérrez-Albilla (2013), Stites Mor (2007) and Russell (2008), whilst recently Galt (2013), Grant (2012), Shaw (2013) and Rich (2013) have evaluated her work from a queer standpoint.
- 38 Slang for masculine woman.
- 39 After Argentine Independence, there was a civil war between Unitarians and Federalists about how the country should be organised and administered, with Unitarians favouring a centralised power base in Buenos Aires, and Federalists a federation of self-governing states. Martel's documentary *Historias de vida* includes discussion of a Federalist rhyme of the period which labels the Unitarians 'maricones hermafroditas'. Martel's later films would also be interested in the use of language to subject, in particular through insult (see 12).
- 40 Forcinito suggests that this is a fundamental difference between the feminist politics of Martel's feature films (she discusses *La ciénaga* and *La niña santa*) and those of Bemberg. For Forcinito, Bemberg's films always explore feminist options of rupture and escape, whereas Martel's are more focused on analysing the lives of women and girls as they exist within confinement and domestic enclosure, though as I will argue, hints of and gestures towards rupture and escape are an integral part of her vision (2006, 115).
- 41 Aguilar is referring to *La ciénaga* specifically.
- 42 Thanks to Deborah Shaw for this observation. In *De eso no se habla*, the dwarf Charlotte is closeted by her mother because of her bodily

difference. The scene in which she dances before the mirror signals sexual awakening, celebration and liberation of her body, and a resistance to its strict regulation.

- 43 Gutiérrez-Albilla, discussing *La ciénaga*, concurs with the idea that Martel's work goes beyond orthodox feminism, and he also cites the film's lack of judgement. For Gutiérrez-Albilla, Martel is 'more interested in providing us with a kind of experimental *écriture* that may undermine the law of the symbolic order than in attacking power directly' (222).
- 44 Galt suggests that this refusal can be found also in Diego Lerman's *Tan de repente* (*Suddenly*, 2002), and in the films of Todd Haynes and Apichatpong Weerasethakul.
- 45 Borges, who once quipped 'I am Argentine cinema' (Gundermann 2005, 258) is an iconic diva who has starred in over fifty films. B. Ruby Rich points out that 'just as Almodóvar has centered many of his films on divas, so too has Martel recruited some of Argentina's most dazzling divas to anchor her casts of unknowns and non-professionals' (2013, 180).
- 46 Gundermann argues that 'Martel takes the stereotypical acting style of an actress/diva like Borges, which constitutes an important part of what defines Argentine cinema since the beginning of the 1950s, and dismantles it systematically, leaving it behind like an empty shell' (2005, 259).
- 47 As Elsaesser notes, '[i]n its dictionary sense, melodrama is a dramatic narrative in which musical accompaniment marks the emotional effects' (1987, 50).
- 48 The unfinished projects *Gente* and *El eternauta* both deal with alien invasion.
- 49 Martel's work is held up in Argentine film schools as an example of cinema to be emulated, including by those interesting in making horror, and as such has had a significant influence on the work of this new generation of Argentine horror directors (Elián, cit. in Rodríguez, 148).
- 50 The sequences from *La ciénaga* and *La niña santa* are discussed in detail on 47–8 and 61, respectively.
- 51 Deleuze's argument here is somewhat different to those of recent theorists of touch in film, such as Laura Marks. For Marks a focus on the hands themselves suggests identification, whereas her focus on haptic images suggests rather that the eyes can function as organs of touch (2002, 8). Martel's cinema elicits a tactile gaze through both means.
- 52 For Martel, this means that 'whether you like it or not, you always have the feeling as a spectator that you are part of the action. And that's the same reason that I don't use establishing shots or transition shots. I find that they are very anonymous devices. I like to think that the camera is actually somebody who is physically there, like a creature, and it's somebody who is very curious, with no moral judgement. Somebody who is not scandalised by what they see' (in Taubin, 2009)

- 53 For detailed analysis of sound in Martel's work, see Greene (2012), Losada (2010) and Russell (2008).
- 54 Martel has also commented that 'Me parece que estamos mucho más colonizados visualmente; estamos mucho más encaminados a ver determinadas cosas que a escuchar. El oído está todavía muy suelto. Uno escucha mucho más que lo que ve. Las contradicciones en la palabra, en la conversación, en el intercambio oral, para mí son mucho más perceptibles que en la imagen' ('I think we are much more colonised visually; we are pushed much more to see specific things than we are to hear them. The contradictions in speech, in conversation and oral interchange, are in my opinion much more perceptible than they are in the image', in Porta Fouz, 22).
- 55 Other recent Argentine films, including *XXY* (Puenzo, 2007) and *Una semana solos* (*A Week Alone*, Murga, 2007), also echo the themes of children's lives and child sexuality we find in Martel.