



Vlaamse
overheid



Retro Music, Selective Amnesia and Senseless Violence in Lucrecia Martel's *La Ciénaga* and *La mujer sin cabeza*

Conferencia dictada por Prof. Dr. Dianna Niebylski (UIC – University of Illinois at Chicago) sobre la directora de cine argentina Lucrecia Martel

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Resumen: The sense of unabated anxiety that hangs over Martel's first and last full-length films, the 2001 much lauded *La ciénaga* and the 2008 more polemical and less well-received *La mujer sin cabeza* (2008), is shared by the films' characters and the films' audiences alike. It is easy to agree that for several of the characters in these films (at least the principal characters) this anxiety stems from the seemingly inescapable feeling of entrapment they experience. In delving into the causes of my own –and my students' discomfort when seeing these films—I have concluded that the anxiety we as viewers and listeners experience when viewing these films is due to our sense of spatial and temporal disorientation, a sense we experience both on an affective and a cognitive level. The spatial disorientation most viewers experience when watching Martel's films stems from the directors' use of the camera and her predilection for fragmented, intensely mobile takes, from her refusal to provide establishing shots and from the incomplete or fractured narrative that emerges from always interrupted or barely audible conversations. These aspects of Martel's films have received considerable critical attention. What has not been studied to date is Martel's unorthodox but resonant use of the soundtrack, and almost no attention at all has been paid to the popular music she features sparingly yet knowingly and purposely in her films. It is largely as a result of the temporal disjunction between what we see and what we hear in these films most crucial scenes, I will argue, that results in our discomfort and frustration with the characters and the story on screen. As my discussion will reveal, a degree of cultural competence is required to appreciate the full extent of Martel's use of pre-existing or popular music, yet I hope to demonstrate that acquiring this competence enriches tenfold our

appreciation –and perhaps our understanding– of these films.¹ Furthermore, I am convinced that one cannot engage in a full discussion of the important themes that have been discussed in connection with these films –the themes of selective memory, of collective amnesia, of class privilege and class prejudice, of socio-economic stagnation and enormous income inequality– without delving into the cultural and historical circumstances that attach to the musical repertoire that forms part of both the context and the subtext of these films.

¹ Similar arguments can be made for *La niña santa*, but I leave that study for others.