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Bridges between the divide: The female body in *Y tu Mamá también* and *Machuca*

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Abstract

Y tu Mamá también/And Your Mother Too *(Cuarón, 2001) and* Machuca *(Wood, 2004), two successful films that broke box office records in their respective countries, Mexico and Chile, are both coming-of-age stories that narrate unlikely male friendships that cross traditional Latin American social boundaries. Additionally, the female characters in both films function as catalysts of the unlikely male friendships and serve as bridges to the utopian spaces represented by the idyllic beach at the end of the long political tenure of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in* Y tu Mamá*, and the integrated catholic school during the brief but socially promising government of Salvador Allende in* Machuca*. At first glance, it appears as though the realism of each film rests on the injurious use of women as signs demarcating the boundaries of a patriarchal social space inhabited by men, and narrated by men to men. We argue, however, that the narratives also provide critiques of traditional sexualities and thus can be understood as relatively progressive texts that confirm the emergence of new masculinities in Mexico and Chile.*

Keywords

masculinity
race
gender
sexuality
Bildungsroman
psychoanalysis

Introduction

Y tu Mamá También/ And Your Mother Too (Cuarón, 2001) and *Machuca* (Wood, 2004), two successful films that broke box office records in their respective countries, Mexico and Chile, are both coming-of-age stories that narrate unlikely male friendships that cross traditional Latin American social boundaries. Representing the possibility of a classless and raceless social space, *Y tu Mamá* portrays an idyllic beach at the end of the long political tenure of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), whereas in *Machuca*, the utopia is an integrated catholic school during the brief but socially promising government of Salvador Allende. In both films, female characters function as catalysts of the unlikely friendships and serve as bridges to the utopian spaces. As political tropes, their bodies and sexualities are intrinsically bound to unifying disparate social and racial categories and as such, when both young women tragically die, with them die the dreams of youthful friendship and love, and the hope of breaking the

cycle of Latin America's most troubling social problems. At first glance, it appears as though the realism of each film rests on the injurious use of women as signs demarcating the boundaries of a patriarchal social space inhabited by men, and narrated by men to men. We argue here, however, that the narratives also provide critiques of traditional sexualities and thus can be understood as relatively progressive texts that confirm the emergence of new masculinities in Mexico and Chile. In addition, because race and class are always mutually constituted in Latin America, the critique of masculinity in *Y tu Mamá* and *Machuca* also works to criticise contemporary racial and class stratifications.

In dialogue with D. Shaw's article '*The figure of the absent father in recent Latin American films'*, featured recently in Studies in Hispanic Cinemas, *Y tu Mamá* and *Machuca*, like *El viaje*, *Central do Brasil,* and *Amores perros* analysed by Shaw, also portray societies in which young men are confronted with the challenge of facing futures without the help of fathers. Revealing a crisis in the patriarchal system that Shaw links with a crisis of political leadership in the national governments, Shaw appropriately argues that each film 'suggests its own reworking of masculine relations to resolve the absence of what are seen as legitimate patriarchal figures, with national identities linked to masculine identities' (Shaw 2004: 86–87). She convincingly shows us how failed fatherhood problematises the paternalistic tradition of passing power from father to son and thus fails to engender happiness by not setting the social and subjective stage for manly development. Whereas Shaw insights about these films are great at drawing attention to how narrative and aesthetic devices link the absence of a father with failed national projects – and thus promote national and continental identity searches based in traditional masculine terms – we would like to explore how *Y tu Mamá* and *Machuca* also call into question sexual, classed and racial subjectivities. In the films analysed by Shaw, women are confined to broadly traditional and supporting roles in the masculine endeavour to resolve their crises. In contrast, in *Y tu Mamá* and *Machuca*, the female characters are not maternal representations that rely on traditional models of suffering and passivity, but rather are the catalysts behind the non-conventional sexual, race and class relationships presented in the films. To analyse the matters of the construction of racial, class and sexual subjectivities in Mexico and Chile more fully, our investigation uses narrative theory, specifically ideas on Latin American Bildungsroman presented by J. Kushingian, and psychoanalytic theory, in particular the work of E. Cowie and J. Copjec. In the first section, we examine the films in their relationship to the traditional Bildungsroman and propose that they are both instantiations of this narrative form with a particular Latin American flavour. In the following section, we expand on the particular ways in which these two films deviate from the traditional Bildungsroman and link this deviation with changes in the Latin American systems of sex and gender. Cowie (1997) and Copjec (1994) provide feminist applications of psychoanalytic theory to film studies that allow for the understanding of

fantasy and masculine performance, respectively. These frameworks shed light on the texts' complex rendering of sexuality, and allow us to investigate how the narratives subtlety undermine conventional ideas of race and class.

Boys and Bildungsroman: A Latin American alternative

Y tu Mamá también narrates the story of two adolescent men, Tenoch Iturbide (Diego Luna) and Julio Zapata (Gael García Bernal), who travel together through interior Mexico with a sexy, thirty-something year-old woman, Luisa Cortés (Maribel Verdú), who surprisingly decides to accompany them. Part road movie, part rite-of-passage story, the film tracks the melancholic path to gender and sexual hetero-normative maturity of the young men through their interactions with Luisa. Tenoch and Julio first meet Luisa at an elegant wedding in the capital, where they invite her to go along with them on a weekend-get-away to a fictitious beach called Boca del Cielo. Although she does not accept immediately, she calls them and asks if she can go along after she learns that her husband, Tenoch's cousin 'Jano,' is having another extra-matrimonial affair. Desperate, she travels with the eager young men and engages both sexually, fulfilling their fantasies but also inciting discord. When they arrive to Boca del Cielo, all differences and disharmony evaporate. Enveloped by the utopian beauty of the place, and teasingly led by Luisa, the three engage in a climatic ménage de trios. In the last scene of the film, Julio and Tenoch coincidently run into each other outside a café in the city. Since they have not seen each other since the incident at the beach, Tenoch informs Julio that Luisa died of cancer shortly after they left her at Boca del Cielo.

Similar to *Y tu Mamá*, *Machuca* also chronicles a story about friendship and loss. Told through the lens of two eleven-year old boys with disparate social backgrounds, the film unfolds in parallel course with the budding friendship between Gonzalo Infante (Matías Quer), the son of a government bureaucrat father and an unfaithful mother who aspires for higher rungs on the social ladder, and Pedro Machuca (Ariel Mateluna), an indigenous boy who lives in one of the nearby shantytowns with his overworked mother and alcoholic and abusive father. Beneficiaries of headmaster Father McEnroe's social integration initiatives, Gonzalo and Machuca commence their friendship in the classroom of St. Patrick's English School for Boys, located in an upper-class neighbourhood of Santiago. Seemingly stronger than the class and racial realities that hitherto kept their worlds from mingling, Gonzalo and Machuca's bond grows stronger with the new experiences and worlds they introduce to each other: adventures into the city centre, respective visits into each other's contrasting homes, and most importantly, their first sexual encounters when Silvana (Manuela Martelli), Machuca's neighbour, initiates a sensual kissing session that takes place between the three of them and a can of condensed milk. Despite their intimate bond, the boys cannot forestall the tides of change and political events of 1973 that sweep their nation and separate the two

forever. Although shown a glimpse of what a true friend could be like, the boys are given no choice but to assume the consequences of the actions of their elders. The film ends in a circuitous fashion as Gonzalo returns to a home protected by wealth and Machuca's fate is left dangling in the uncertainty of Pinochet's regime.

Y tu Mamá and *Machuca* share many more similarities than the dysfunctional family systems, love triangles, and friendships that end when the films conclude. Viewed through the lens of the characters Tenoch and Gonzalo, the storylines of both films portray modern renditions of the traditional plot development of the *Bildungsroman*, which presents the hero (traditionally white, middle-class Christian male) who rebels against his parental figures (namely absent father figures) and the social, political, and/or cultural values they represent. In his rebellion, the protagonist declares his independence through an assertion of self in his way of life, selection of companion(s), and education (Kushingian 2003: 14). Representing various stages along the road towards adulthood, *Y tu Mamá* and *Machuca* show the emerging young men experiencing the newfound freedom gained through loss and absence, the formation of new friendships, and the excitement of sexual awakenings and adventures. Ultimately, these discoveries end in jealousy, betrayal and death. Hence, at the end of the hero's journey, as holds true for both Tenoch and Gonzalo, the young male returns home to uphold the rules and values of his society (or family) and as Kushingian states in *Reconstructing Childhood*, gets the job, the girl, and becomes a philistine like all the others (Kushingian 2003: 28).

In both films, discontent or loss at home initially cast the boys out on their voyage towards self-realisation and self-discovery. Neither Tenoch's nor Julio's parents are present nor attentive enough to serve as guides or mentors for the boys during the summer months: Tenoch's father is a corrupt politician in the Mexican PRI government and Julio's father has long since abandoned his working-class family. In *Machuca*, Gonzalo is confounded by the complexities of maintaining the lies his adulterous mother has involved him in telling his father and still wanting to be in her company. Gonzalo's father, partly due to his wife's affair and in part due to his political post in the Allende government that is on the brink of collapse, leaves at the height of the familial/ social crisis and flees Chile into exile. Machuca's alcoholic and abusive father has never been one to emulate and Machuca is relieved to spend as little time as possible in the shantytown where he is daily reminded of his and his family's marginal existence. Only Machuca's mother provides an inspiring example of behaviour, yet her voice is drowned out by her impoverished situation and lack of education that stops others from taking her seriously.

Julio and Tenoch's freedom from present and attentive fathers/parents, coupled with the independence gained when their girlfriends leave Mexico to travel in Italy for the summer, provides them even more possibilities for adventure. Both Tenoch and Julio are thrilled when Luisa surprisingly agrees to join them on a journey to the beach. The fact that they are able

to find a beach that matches in name to the beach they fictionalised in order to lure Luisa further excites Tenoch and Julio. This adventure presents a once in a lifetime opportunity that they cannot afford to miss. Similarly, Gonzalo and Machuca experience an exhilarating trip to the city's centre one afternoon upon hitching a ride with one of Machuca's neighbours. Freed from parental supervision, Gonzalo helps Machuca's neighbours, Silvana and her father, sell 'banderitas' (little flags) and cigarettes at oppositional political protests taking place on the streets. Seemingly naïve to the political ideologies dividing the nation, Gonzalo and Machuca bask in the opportunity gained with earning money and spending time together away from the watchful gaze of their respective social peers.

Like the freedom that plays an integral part in the self-realisation process, sexual awakenings and discoveries also become important components in the young protagonists' maturation process. Although Tenoch and Julio are not virgins – as verified in the first scenes of the film in which they have youthful and frequent sex with their girlfriends – they embark on new sexual discoveries with Luisa. She first engages in sex with Tenoch in a motel room in route to the beach. The next day, she initiates sex with Julio in the car while they drive. Both boys are clumsy lovers and are incapable of satisfying Luisa, who the narrative presents as an older and more experienced lover. Despite their failed first attempts with her, Luisa gives them another chance when they arrive at the beach. This time, however, the results end with the climatic scene that seems to have been the target of the whole narrative: a ménage de trios and another first for the boys, homosexual sex. In *Machuca*, Gonzalo and Machuca commence their sex education with Silvana, who, after convincing Gonzalo to open up cans of sweetened-condensed milk bought from the ration line, begins kissing lessons. Initiated at first with the white, upper-class boy Gonzalo, the lessons become a threesome when Machuca protests his exclusion. Both boys alternate between kissing Silvana and licking the milk from her mouth, stirring up their heterosexual desires for Silvana, as well as the emotions of jealousy, envy, and homoerotic desire. Although the symbolic ménage de trio*s* happens earlier in the narrative sequence in M*achuca* than in *Y tu Mamá*, the sexual events in both films, in addition to presenting alternatives to hetero-normative conventions, can also be interpreted as allegories of class and racial desires – the dream of equality and egalitarianism. Serving as bridges between the two sides and fostering a friendship that promises to break with history, Luisa and Silvana present the possibility and hope of transcendence.

Alternative hetero-normativity, and as such class and racial equality, ultimately prove unattainable. The women that had bridged the divide die and traditional patriarchal order is seemingly restored. The day following the ménage de trios in *Y tu Mamá*, Luisa tells Tenoch and Julio that she will stay in Boca de Cielo and the boys silently return to Mexico City without her. Months later, on a chance encounter in the street, Julio

learns that Luisa died of cancer. Like the trip to the beach and the events that happened there that Tenoch and Julio never discuss again, Luisa no longer binds the two young men together and the last scene of the film pays testimony to their failed relationship. We learn that Tenoch has chosen a life of convention by dating another young woman and pursuing a degree in political science from the UNAM; the first steps to inherit his father's political power. In this way, the film concludes tragically as Tenoch's early disdain for his father's system of patriarchy ends in resignation. In similar fashion, the love and hope facilitated by Silvana in *Machuca* tragically ends in destruction. Gonzalo and Machuca's friendship begins to unravel when Silvana calls Gonzalo's mother an elitist bitch and when Silvana and Machuca gang-up on Gonzalo one day when they tauntingly take his bicycle from him in the shantytown. Resorting to racial and classist epithets to get them to return it, Gonzalo reveals his hidden feelings and learned social behaviour. Any lingering ties of friendship disappear in the scene in which Gonzalo, riding his bike through the shantytown while its occupants are being drug out of their shacks and loaded up onto vehicles, witnesses Silvana's heroic yet fatal attempts to save her father from being beaten by the military guards that now control the country. Apprehended by one of the guards who think Gonzalo is a resident of the community, Gonzalo declares to the solider that he is of the elite, telling the solider to look at his face and his clothes, whereupon the solider lets him free. Looking back on Silvana, who lies dying in a pool of blood, and Machuca, who has no other choice than to get on the truck that will most likely also take him to his death, Gonzalo rides away to his new, large home bought and furnished by his mother's lover.

At the end of both films, the viewer feels that the protagonists made mistakes returning and conforming to the defined social order of the societies in which they live, innocently in the case of Gonzalo and Machuca given their age but more tragically so in the case of Tenoch and Julio. That is to say, at the conclusion of the protagonists' search for a meaningful existence within their society, one is left with the feeling that the sacrifice of friendship made by all was not worth the price of becoming a fully integrated member of (a racist/ classist/ homophobic) society. Nevertheless, the melancholic endings of the films speak to the hybridity of the texts and encourage new interpretations that can be viewed as modern or Latin American variations of the traditional Bildungsroman. Considering their melancholic endings, we argue that the narrative of growth and youthful development breaks down when viewed from the perspective of the marginalised and disenfranchised characters. In fact, we believe that the richness of these two Latin American films lies in the fact that they both present different perspectives other than those with Tenoch and Gonzalo as their white, middle-class, Christian heroes who follow the traditional paradigm of normative human development. As stated by Kushigian, two intrinsically intertwined points that distinguish the Spanish American Bildungsroman from the traditional, European models are its ability to

exploit the full potential of the genre, reinforcing the goal of forming, cultivating, and developing the self through transcendence, and its celebration of issues of gender, race and class (Kushigian 2003: 15). Thus, when considered from the perspective of the marginalised and disenfranchised characters, Luisa/Silvana or Julio/Machuca, we also see how the narratives are based on alternative and non-conventional formational markers for development. In addition, when considered from the perspective of melancholy, the central characters become sad commentaries on hegemony, not the heroic exemplars of the status quo.

Textual variations and psychoanalysis

When referring to the characters and endings of these films as 'melancholic', we are referring to the way the characters suffer loss that will not be properly mourned. In psychoanalysis, melancholy is a type of depression caused when the love object is lost and there is no proper process for the psyche to address such loss. Freud explains melancholia in relationship to mourning. Mourning is a positive psychic reaction to loss that allows the individual to gradually severe affective ties to the lost object. When the process is broken or nonexistent, the individual is unable 'to complete the process of mourning' and holds on to the memory in unhealthy ways (Ruti 2005: 639). Thus, according to Freud, the melancholic individual continues to identify with the lost object and incorporates it into its own ego where it becomes a symbol of fulfilment and, at the same time, represents the impossibility of completion (Cowie 1997: 80-81). Because of this dual role, the psyche turns against itself and becomes self-deprecating. In both films, the loss that is never mourned is embodied by a woman, not only as the love object but also as a symbol of racial and class equality and unity, and the possibility of undoing traditional Latin American conservatisms.

Traditional scholarship on Latin America posits that conservatisms underscore the sexual and gender systems. At a macro-level, for instance, Shaw speaks of political structures tightly organised around patriarchy and paternalism. At the micro-level, it is common to find the term 'machismo' used to describe social interactions. E. R. Acevedo-Muñoz (2004) uses both levels to analyse *Y tu Mamá* in reference to Mexico's history, and political and sexual structures. He concludes that the male characters' 'ignorance, *machismo*, and narcissism' stand for the PRI's bankrupt political structure (Acevedo-Miñoz 2004: 48). Joining the macro and micro, Acevedo-Muñoz argues that the textualisation of sex and gender in *Y tu Mamá* shows a sexuality recuperated by machismo and patriarchy. Given the ending of *Machuca*, Acevedo- Muñoz's analysis could also be applied. However, a growing number of scholars believe that because Latin America is experiencing dramatic changes in the economic, political and social systems, such societies, including Mexico's and Chile's, are moving away from strict conservatisms and are opening the door for different expressions of masculinity, femininity and sexuality (Montesinos

2005: 15; Martinez 2005: 75; Paredes 1993; Gutmann 1996). In Mexico, for example, an economic crisis that began in the 1980s has pushed women to the workforce and has re-structured gender and sexual expectations (Gutmann 1996; Montesinos 2005: 15; Martínez 2005: 70). In Chile, 'economic adjustment policies, and the values of modernity, are generating profound changes in behaviour, replete with new demands, deficiencies, and possibilities' (Olavarría 2003: 334). Hence, because day to day sexual and gender interactions have changed, so too have the ways that gender and sex are displayed in popular Latin American culture.

Interpreted as derivations of the traditional Bildungsroman's prerogative when viewed through the lens of the marginalised and disenfranchised, *Y tu Mamá* and *Machuca* subtly undermine conventional ideas about masculinity. According to R.W. Connell in *Masculinities*, the most popular and scientific notions of masculinity rely on biological explanations of gender:

> True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body. Either the body drives and directs action (e.g., men are naturally more aggressive than women; rape results from uncontrollable lust or an innate urge to violence) or the body sets limits to action (e.g., men naturally do not take care of infants; homosexuality is unnatural . . .).
>
> Connell 1995: 45

Challenging biological notions of masculinity highlight the way male bodies and masculinity are constituted in the social – by discourse and practices. Chief among these challenges is the discourse of masculine performance. According to this discourse, the true measure of masculinity is through bodily performances, such as sexual and athletic performances. Although rooted in biology, Connell observes that '[t]he constitution of masculinity through bodily performance means that gender is vulnerable when the performance cannot be sustained' (Connell 1995: 54). In this way, understanding masculinity as performance exposes fissures in the traditional/conventional gender and sexual systems, which is what *Y tu Mamá* and *Machuca* portray. As the films move forward, the narratives begin to undermine masculinity's claim to biology and sexual prowess.

The beginning of *Y tu Mamá* establishes the young protagonist's claim to biological power through sexual potency. Tenoch and Julio immediately show their sexual potency signified through their ability to have responsive penises, proper physiologies, and attractive young girlfriends. The first scene of the film shows two people having sex from afar. The camera slowly moves closer. The man is on top but the woman is far from passive; she undulates underneath him, hums, and thrusts her hips upward meeting and matching his energy. His superior position seems to empower him. As the camera closes in, we learn more and the text begins to subtly undermine traditional textualisations of masculinity. He may be in the

typically virile position, but he is also coded with ambiguous sexual markers such as the softness of his skin and the tender curvature of his buttocks. After his climax, the camera moves above the lovers, and both bodies are displayed for the viewer's inspection. Still on top, Tenoch begins asking for reassurances that she will not have sex with other men while she is in Italy: '[p]rométeme que no te vas a coger a ningun italiano' (promise me that you aren't going to fuck any Italian). Playfully, they switch places and she tells him that she won't fuck anybody from anywhere. Their teasing turns into foreplay and ten seconds later he is again on top. She directs his penis into her vagina and they begin to have sex. The next scene takes place in a wealthy flat; Julio sits uncomfortably in front of an older man described by the voice-over narrator as the father of Cecilia, Julio's girlfriend. Cecilia is upstairs, looking for her passport. Calling for his help, Julio goes to her room but learns that Cecilia really just wants to have sex one more time before she leaves on her trip. Within seconds he is up and thrusting. Like Tenoch, Julio quickly penetrates her and ejaculates. Again, time and potency define his performance as virile, regardless of whether Cecilia reaches her climax or not.

The demonstration of virility and biological power is also central in *Machuca*, although given the character's age, is less blatantly sexual. Gonzalo, for instance, is constructed as a slightly feminised white boy by reference to biology. In the film's first scene, he is introduced to the viewer through close-ups on his rounded hands and chubby face, his freckles and longish red-hair. A few scenes later, he is bullied by a taller, leaner, blonde boy at school who seems to be Gonzalo's nemesis. In the same scene, shortly after Machuca is introduced, the same bully tries to push Machuca around, though unsuccessfully. Machuca's brown masculinity seems, by comparison to Gonzalo's, more complete. Throughout the film, these two masculinities are presented through an uneven discursive field that incorporates elements of biological power and performance. That is to say, masculinity is evidenced not only through textualising raw biology, but also through representing the way biology is linked to performance of masculinity and thus bound to the social and cultural. For example, in one scene that develops in the school's swimming pool, the viewer sees all the wealthy, light skinned boys jump into the water and comfortably start swimming. The poor, dark skinned kids, by contrast, approach the pool with trepidation. The viewer sees them stand in-line, brown, in their underwear (because they probably do not have swimming trunks), covering their genitals and looking vulnerable and afraid. Machuca, however, dives in and goes after his and Gonzalo's enemy who taunts him from the water – actions that reiterate his raw masculinity. In the next scene at school, Machuca is thought to have been the one throwing dirt in the school garden and is captured by the blonde bully and his gang. Although held down by three of the gang members, Machuca manages to spit on the bully in defiance. When Gonzalo refuses to join the bully and his gang by punching Machuca, he is called a coward and a 'maricón' (sissy/faggot).

Only when Gonzalo attacks the kids holding Machuca down does he exert, for the first time, his own masculinity.

But the biology of these four protagonists is not presented as evidence of stable masculinities. Contrariwise, through their physical displays we are invited to begin questioning the straightness of their performances and to begin to see them as masquerades. On this, Joan Copjec writes that, according to Jacques Lacan, 'no man can boast that he embodies this thing – masculinity. All pretensions of masculinity are then sheer imposture; just as every display of femininity is sheer masquerade' (Copjec 1994: 234). Masculinity is thus a set of actions that can only be coded as such within a hetero-normative contract that is never fully stable. As Connell argues, for masculinity to be understood as truth, it ought to proceed from male biology, yet biology itself is discursively constructed and relies for its stability on unwavering notions of sexual difference. The textualisation of heterosexual biologies is only understood in relationship to the textualisation of female, feminine, effeminate and/or homosexual biologies. Given the constant changes on this complex system of gender and sex, masculinity becomes an unstable text in need of constant reconstitution, one that the films undertake. Machuca's claim to masculinity is partly related to his unwillingness to be physically submitted by the white bully; yet, Machuca's brown body is slight and childish-like. He is ultimately incapable of defending himself and relies on Gonzalo's bigger white body to save him from a beating. Gonzalo's white body may be bigger, but he is otherwise passive, rounded and soft. More troublesome is that they depend on the sexual agency of Silvana to experience the pleasures of heterosexuality. Similarly, Tenoch's soft buttocks and his girlfriend's aggressive sexual play destabilise his masculinity. Julio's rabbit-like sexual style and his girlfriend's aggressiveness work to destabilise his. In addition, Tenoch and Julio fail to please Luisa and discover that their respective girlfriends had sex with the other – further commenting on their inability to please and thus their lack of virility. Finally, their homosocial bond wavers between straightness, homoeroticism (masturbating side by side while talking to each other), and homosexual desire (in their last sexual encounter). In these films, the boys' physicality only thinly disguises the social constructedness of their bodies; although ruled by apparent natural-animal-male instincts, they exist only in and for the symbolic realm and, in this realm, their bodies break the hetero-normative contract.

Tenoch's, Julio's, Gonzalo's and Machuca's biologism can serve as evidence of their lack, of their powerlessness, of their inability (impossibility) to respond to the needs, bodies and sexualities of women. Through the narrative, the young men's sexuality has moved them further and further away from sexual stability, away from the space of biological conventions and towards the realm of the semiotic. Hence, the end comes as no surprise. The male characters in both films turn into melancholic and mournful figures. In the last scene of *Y tu Mamá*, Tenoch and Julio share the death of Luisa, mourn her loss, and the loss of their desire and love for

her. Tenoch's choice to pursue gender conventions and reproduce his father's sexualisation by taking the steps to inherit his father's political power, earlier referred to with disdain, further underscore the film's tragic and melancholic ending. *Machuca* ends with the death of Silvana, which is witnessed both by Machuca and Gonzalo, who we last see riding his bicycle and crying through the decrepit and soon to be gone shantytown. Freedom, the power to be an agent, the ability to befriend someone outside your race and class, are gone. Instead, Gonzalo will live the highly stratified, racist and classis life of wealthy Chilean whiteness. All masculinities presented in the film are brought into question as constructed responses to the impossibility to sexually perform male biology and to the impossibility of being bodies unencumbered by semiosis, by the cultural (Stacey 2005: 1862). Ergo, all masculinity is cast as performativity, as fraud, and as a disguise of impotence. Nowhere is this more evident than in the ménage de trios scenes. In these scenes, the relation between biology and semiosis becomes highly unstable when mixed with the radical textual ingredients from two aggressive women.

Femininity and race as catalysers of instability

At the centre of both films are the ménage de trios scenes. In *Y tu Mamá*, this trio happens at the end of the film, and it is the climactic scene of the narrative. In *Machuca*, the trio happens earlier, but its ongoing importance is manifested in the way it engenders both a supreme closeness between the two boys and, when gone awry, precipitates their separation. In both films, the ménage de trios seem as much about sexual unity as they foster class and race unity, and can be seen as manifestations of class and racial desires, the realisation of a social fantasy, the dream of equality and egalitarianism. Here, desire is not simply a social script for moral good or political efficacy, but an attribute of the psyche that in its functioning constitutes the subject.

According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, masculinity and femininity are produced through processes of desire experienced during infancy. Desire, first experienced when the child masters her/his mother's absence, also marks the beginning of language, the entrance into the symbolic. Experienced as a lack that needs erasure, desire is the process by which the subject attempts to fulfill the gap generated by the recognition of the mother as other. Through desire, self and other become entwined in the formation of subjectivity, giving shape to a linguistic world structured on the principle of difference. Desire 'depends on the other for its very existence; it is the desire for recognition, the desire to be the desire of the other, which has to be frustrated, for if it were eliminated through gratification, there could be no separation from the other, that is, the mother' (Marcus 1998: 370-371). Insofar desire is constitutive of the subject, it can never be fulfilled. Insofar desire depends on the difference from the other, difference cannot be erased. Desire is a search that engenders the individual and its futility gives it a tragic and powerful psychic force, melancholia

being one such psychic manifestation. It too becomes a popular template for filmic narratives exploring growth and difference.

Although desire is typically associated with gender and sex formation, it is not fuelled by the anatomical. Lacan's ideas rest on the notion of the phallus (not the penis), which is better understood as the other concretised as power and fulfilment. Given this, and despite that psychoanalysis is not typically applied to the analysis of race or class (Walton 1997: 223), desire is activated through othering and, as a process, it is suited to understand and problematise racial and class differences. The role of the phallus in the concretion of identities is dependent on sexuality-as-difference: masculinity is about possessing the phallus, thus averting the fear of castration (Walton 1997: 230); femininity, Joan Riviere argued in her 1929 classic, is about becoming the phallus through the masquerade. Riviere set herself to show how 'women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men' (Riviere 1929/1987: 35). This masquerade is a performance of (hyper)femininity that at once signals males that the woman can be taken and that the woman is the phallus. On this, Judith Butler writes: 'For women to "be" the Phallus means, then, to reflect the power of the Phallus, to signify that power, to "embody" the Phallus, to supply the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through "being" its Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of its identity' (Butler in Walton 1997: 230). Jean Walton argues that this same process of desire through the masquerade is applicable to racial difference and suggests that subjects can locate themselves in parallel registers where the meanings of difference may coincide or contradict phallic economies. In the case analysed by Walton, a white woman fantasises with being raped by a black man and later she delivers him to white justice. Walton argues, this subject occupies an ambivalent relation to the phallus. On the one register as woman, she masquerades as the phallus; on the other register as white, she forces the masquerade on the black man and makes him possessable and able to be the object of (masculininist-racist) sadism (Walton 1997: 231).

With these ideas in mind, the ménage de trios scenes and the ensuing melancholy of the white/male characters takes on rich connotations. First, in both scenes women act in the masquerade and thus foster the possibility of transcendence. The sex shared between the three promises the possibility of rising above not only sexual isolation, but also class and racial separations. Luisa and Silvana are masquerading as the phallus because they are represented through sexual mastery: they know what to do, they act first, they are more seasoned, and they have a greater understanding of the world. However, these women remain the objects of desire, and play into masculine fantasies of female sexual aggressiveness that still allow the male to penetrate, act on, and posses the woman's body.

Establishing the agency of the female characters, their phallic power, is not done in the spirit of feminism but rather as a narrative device employed to produce excess, transcendence, and fear of castration. The brashness and

self-confidence of Luisa and Silvana pave the way to their transgressive actions and make their behaviour appear natural and authentic. These female characters are quite useful as agents of excess for they allow the narrative to place the boys in non-traditional situations where homosexuality is patent or latent, and yet the boys (and the viewers) have legitimate excuses for their actions. Tenoch, Julio, Gonzalo and Machuca can explain their actions by placing blame on the women: they weren't seeking these marvellous and strange renderings of pleasure (threesomes and the like), but rather were duped by the women. One may even see the boy's behaviour as chivalrous and masculine, because, after all, they engage in these acts in the pursuit of heterosexual desire. Although both narratives are careful not to overstate the phallic power of the female characters, Luisa's and Silvana's behaviours are unorthodox representations of sexuality and raise the fear of castration. That is, their agency is dangerously constructed through the objectification of the male characters, thus subverting the heteronormative structure of desire. In furnishing excess via their bodies, the women act as bridges joining two racial and class worlds.

The films entertain the notion there is a space, a middle ground, where the two classes and races can exist. This type of investment is consistent with psychoanalytic understandings of the role of women in patriarchal narratives. According to E. Cowie, 'a film works as fantasy, just as in the dream, where feelings and desires are transferred and displaced onto other figures than those in relation to whom the desires have arisen' (Cowie 1997: 114). Fantasy is a process of vision through which the reality of conventions is perceived as a translucent panel that cannot conceal the existence of a fantasy world, a world of relations of desires in which the subject finds the manifestation of her/his potential unity. According to Cowie, the woman, as myth, is the correlative of 'phallus as symbol of life, as divine, as symbol of the unity and cohesion of the body etc.' (Cowie 1997: 246). In both films, the young men's desires are articulated as desires for the women protagonists (Luisa and Silvana); fulfilled in each film through the structure of the ménage de trios, which suggest (more so in *Y tu Mamá* than in *Machuca*) that these desires are transferences that hide homosexual desire. However, the texts here are equally ambivalent, because racial and class differences exist in parallel systems of desire. Although desire in both narratives is ostensibly sexual (and at this level desire is 'homo' sexual), racial and class difference register on scripts of desire where whiteness and wealth represent embodied subjectivities quite different from the embodiments of brownness and (relative) powerlessness.

Tenoch and Gonzalo exist in the system of the wealthy-white classes of Mexico and Chile; Machuca is within the poor-indigenous class of Chile. Julio belongs to the middle-mestizo class in Mexico. If desire is a script that highlights the possibility of completion, these racial and class differences force us to posit the question of desire in quite a different way: Is whiteness (and richness) complete without the other? In structuring the possibility of erotic desire between the boys, the films suggest that, in the racial and class

registers, whiteness and wealth cannot be complete on their own (nor can brownness and poverty). It is noteworthy that the way masculinities are performed by the white coded characters (Tenoch and Gonzalo) and the brown coded characters (Julio and Machuca) suggests different lacks in both pairs of males. The masculinity of Tenoch and Gonzalo relies on the social context to convey power: this masculinity is bound to political and economic power. In contrast, the masculinity of Julio and Machuca relies only on biology and the boys' unwillingness to be submitted. When Julio finds out that Tenoch slept with his girlfriend, he challenges Tenoch to a fistfight. Tenoch declines. Machuca consistently performs his masculinity as unwillingness to be bullied. Machuca's body, like Julio's, is slim, brown and strong. By contrast, the bodies of Tenoch and Gonzalo are taller, bigger, but rounded and soft. Each pair of males lacks some masculine codes establishing that whatever erotic desire may exist between them is as much homo as it is hetero(sexual). Difference and sameness come together to create an ambivalence that José Limón identifies as eminently postcolonial.

Both narratives posit the question of whether the social spaces of the wealthy can be occupied by the poor or middle classes. In *Y tu Mamá*, the narrative brings Julio into Tenoch's world of money and political power. Machuca comes to Gonzalo's privileged school and his home. Both narratives show integration before the involvement of the women, but it is the women that act as catalisers of a fuller, more complete and utopian integration. The sharing of sexual intimacy is depicted as a powerful bond. Moreover, the women are codified as a shared symbolic space where both boys' desires and social and racial identities can coexist. The women are bridges, middle-spaces and potential utopias. In the narrative, Luisa's and Silvana's agency (an effective masquerade and fetish) un-inhibits the rigidities of class and race prompting excess and transgression.

Y tu Mamá and *Machuca* use the masquerade and fantasy to problematise difference. However, class and racial inequality, as unnamable differences, remain unbridgeable; thus the women that perform the role of bridges ought to die. In this film, homosexual desire and postcolonial ambivalence explains the tension between Tenoch and Julio and Gonzalo and Machuca. In the last scenes: the films engage in a criticism of the relationship of conventional masculinity and race/class. Tenoch decides to go to UNAM and do Political Sciences; Gonzalo continues his predictable biography of masculinity by moving with his mother and her wealthy/white lover. It is also a reversal where the fantasy of class/race convention and masculinity makes homosexual desirable unmentionable.

Conclusion

The two films are renditions of the Latin American Bildungsroman, where male characters experience the 'growth' required to enter adulthood. This process, however, far from reconstituting the idea that adulthood is a 'mature' social status, is narrativised as a tragedy that throws two of the central characters into a melancholic state. This melancholia surfaces after

a woman dies and the masculine bonds engendered by her are broken. This unsavory textual element (the death of a woman) brings to attention a conventional way in which women have been used in classic film narratives: the woman is part of a fantasy where human completion and plenitude is possible. Of course, as is articulated in these two films, the fantasy is sexed: it's a masculine fantasy that speaks to the troubling subject construction of males and females in Western cultures, including Latin America.

We first came to this project because of this textual element, which suggested to us that the films were guilty of reconstructing traditional patriarchal structures in Mexico and Chile. However, careful analysis made us realise that the films were also invested in undermining traditional masculinity. The films, we argue, undermine masculinity's claims to natural power by proposing, by film's end, that masculinity is only a socio-political category that allows for the acquisition of political and economic power. Displayed as performance, masculinity is textually rendered frail, weak, especially without the social arrangements that constitute its power. For the white/light skinned male characters, Bildungsroman means that their future depends on embracing the distasteful set of privileges that come with their race and class. For the lower/browner characters, the future is uncertain and their ability to fully share on the bounty of patriarchy is limited. By the end of both films, patriarchy has been racialised and the idea that masculinity is a ready-made formula for success is questioned. Moreover, through the trope of melancholia, the privileges of racial patriarchy are shown tragic and available only through the sacrifice of (racial and class) mutuality and the possibility of being and living as a unified nation.

Because of how these films treat masculinities, we argue that they are complex texts that speak to a changing Latin America and that they cannot easily be dismissed as sexist. Rather, they show ambivalences about masculinity and race that fit contemporary realities in Chile and Mexico. Our national stratifications are indeed tragedies and our awareness quick to turn to melancholia: to be in a world of racial and class hierarchies is to live in relative isolation and to be incomplete. This, we assure you, is a reality that cannot be properly mourned.

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