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Lydia Lunch

by Simon Friel



Lydia Lunch is a name you should know. Lydia moved to New York at 16 and with her band Teenage Jesus and the Jerks was one of the founders of the still influential, but short lived, No Wave movement. She has collaborated with artists and performers such as Nick Cave, Sonic Youth, Henry Rollins, Omar Rodriguez-Lopez, Asia Argento, Richard Kern and Hubert Selby Junior, and today from her base in Barcelona continues to produce a vast and diverse range of work.

Her memoir *Paradoxia: A Predator's Diary* chronicles her life from its conception up on through to a self-defining reawakening in her mid thirties. It has been translated into 8 languages and has recently been

published for the second time in Spain.

Paradoxia bulldozes through emotions and sensibilities in much the same way that men's cocks tear into Lydia throughout her numerous, anonymous encounters; ruthlessly and without remorse. Incest, satanism, rape, bestiality, cannibalism, paedophilia, insanity and destitution are just some of the many of the themes explored, devoured and left for dead as the reader is pulled along a road of broken glass under the influence of acid while Lydia rips through the cities of New York, L.A, Amsterdam, London and New Orleans.

The writing is the most honest that I have ever read and for the same reason some of the most beautiful, shocking and poetic, too. Lydia never seeks to justify and explain the things that happen or proffer empty apologies. In spite of all the blood, violence, destruction and waste that are left in her wake it is, for me, Thurston Moore's final line in the book's after word that rings most true: She can love you.

SF: What is *Paradoxia*?

LL: *Paradoxia* fills a void that really exists in literature, which is an aggressive, honest, non-glamorous psycho-sexual voice. And I think we can find traces of that hyper reality in a lot of different male writers especially from the 50s, 60s and 70s but for female writers there's still a vacancy. It's just not their language, and I have a much more blunt way of expressing what I think needs to be expressed. I'm not the only one who behaves, acts, feels or has this kind of void that they look to fill with whatever means necessary until eventually they realise that only the self will suffice and goodbye garbage.

SF: I was just reading the first part which says none of the names have been changed, everybody is equally fucking guilty.

LL: Even though I'm not even really naming their names.

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SF: Exactly, that was the question, because I read a couple of reviews, and every review was positive but there was a frustration that they want to hear more about the real Lydia Lunch story and the real people in it.

LL: Well, the thing is that most of these experiences are with anonymous people so what good does it do to name their names. I mean, look, people may be waiting and they can wait until the day that I fucking die to hear of the, for me, minutia and the boring details of the rock aspect.

SF: Will we really have to wait all that time?

LL: For me that's not the most interesting detail. For the most interesting thing is what the search was about and what it was for. I mean, believe me, anyone asks and I'll give them the run down and the score card. Maybe I have a different take on it because from the time I was 12 years old I would always say to my parents when I had to be at rock concerts until 3 in the morning that it was for my career. WHAT CAREER WOULD THAT BE, YOUNG LADY? Yes, Gene Simmons probably has a photo of me at 12 in his Kiss collection. So if it starts there, it's like, you know, names, names, names... Who cares? Who cares? And for the most part, in spite of it, it's not like there's that many names that people would really recognise. They weren't the most interesting sexual partners. Sorry, they're not - boring! Just to be a gossipy groupie, the most interesting rock and roll sexual experience was Julian Cope. I didn't even know who he was, but I have to say that dropping acid with Julian Cope was a beautiful experience.

SF: I suppose this leads into a much larger question, and also one that draws comparisons with the epilogue where it compares your work with that of Brett Easton Ellis, which is the fact that you are very anti-capitalism, anti-consumerism, so doing that would I suppose be trading on yourself as a commodity.

LL: Exactly.

SF: But, is that not a big fucking temptation?

LL: It isn't a big temptation. Maybe because I think, in my own mind's eye, I'm a bigger rock star than any of those motherfuckers. I don't even mean rock star, I don't give a shit about rock stardom. I don't think of myself as a star, I think of myself as a fucking planet, honey. I'm sorry, they're just stars, I'm a planet - fuck off!

SF: Ok, I mean, that's another thing, we've got Nick Cave doing a big concert tonight here.

LL: Yeah, at the fucking basketball arena!

SF: These are all people from your history and that's what I mean by temptation. It must sometimes be frustrating to think they are doing that and I could be doing that.

LL: But I couldn't be doing what they do, the same way they can't do I what I do, because I think what separates me from a lot of the people I came up with, which would be like Sonic Youth, Nick Cave and Henry Rollins, is all 3 of them, in so much as all 3 have diversified, they have the ability to take one thing, whether it was The Bad Seeds, or Sonic Youth as a 4 piece, whether it was The Rollins Band, and do it and do it and do it, and I would fucking die of brain damage.

SF: So you don't have the patience to do this?

LL: I'm a conceptual artist, I'm not a rock band. My concept from the beginning was you find the collaborators, you do a few shows, you fucking go on. So I don't understand how anyone has the patience, the capacity for this kind of boredom to play the same songs over and over. My message is always the same, it is always sexual insanity and political hysteria, or sexual hysteria and political insanity, however I have to find new ways to express this.

SF: So it's more not you having the patience but more other people not having the patience with you because you're always doing different things?

LL: How can they even keep up when I don't work inside the machinery that lets them know.

SF: The world can't keep up.

LL: I don't fucking care. I can't care. At 17 one of the first songs I wrote was Popularity is so boring; fuck off, I still feel the same way.

SF: You obviously still have a lot of energy and you have been running it for 31 years, so why Barcelona? I don't really see that same energy out here in the street.

LL: I don't need that same energy. I left New York because it was like plugging my finger into a light socket. It was enough. I don't need to plug into a city for energy.

Here I can just breathe, I can relax and the pace is different. As America went into fascism, I came to a place that is 30 years out of it, although there are still a couple of danglers here and there. It's a different energy, and part of Spain's amnesia sees to that. If I'm focusing so much on what drives me insane, on how politically fucked things are, I need a place that doesn't further aggravate that. I need a place that doesn't give me more fucking cancer.

SF: So Barcelona is a safe haven?

LL: Curative, because most of the damage that has been done here is in the past. The architecture impacts me. I get very emotional in certain places at certain times, the history infects me. I love the Hospital San Pau at the top of Avenue Gaudí, this is one of my stomping grounds. I use the architecture more for stimulation than I do the bars or the club scene.

SF: Ok, so what would your advice be to any young images of you who might be out there trying to make their mark today?

LL: Look, people have to be comfortable with being alone, and if you're strong in yourself, any communication, any experiences you have are going to be far better anyway. If you understand that you may be permanently an isolated individual in a world of 6 billion people, be comfortable in that, then you, like I, will be able to be an endlessly wandering nomad seeking other like-minded individuals to collaborate with. So, I think you have to make whatever the time is work for you. You have to figure out a way because there will be so many things always against you, against the individual, against someone who wants to radically create. So you have to find historical references, as I did with Hubert Selby, Henry Miller, Jean Genet, The Marquis de Sade, that can at least inspire you to create or do whatever it is that you have to do. It's going to be the few who make a career out of complaining about everything that pisses them off, and there is only room for maybe 1 or 2 of us, I'd encourage everyone to do it, but to make a career out of it, good fucking luck. So, in other words, do as I have done; create without a budget and find a way to get it out. You've just got to be stubborn. I don't care what your age is, you've got to be a fucking bull. Embrace the bull.

SF: Embrace the bull?

LL: Take the bull by the horns, cut its balls off, sew them on to the fucking base of your spine and get going. It's that easy. What's so hard?

SF: You know, I won't have enough space in the piece for all that we've talked about, but that'll definitely be going in there.

LL: That's right, grab the bull by the horns and cut its fucking balls off. I mean, there is no other choice. I can't find a better way of putting it.

SF: That's brilliant. Thank you, Lydia Lunch. BCN Week loves you.

LL: Thank you, Simon. I love you too.

More Lunch: www.lydia-lunch.org



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