

A monument to the unknown worker

Roberto Bolaño's 2666

John Kraniauskas

'The need for reflection is the deepest melancholy of every great and genuine novel'.

Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*

Roberto Bolaño (1953–2003) was a poet who only began to write novels towards the end of his life in the early 1990s. But by the time of his death, and especially after the publication of the prize-winning *The Savage Detectives* in 1998, he had begun to occupy the kind of place in world literature (if there is such a thing) once associated with Gabriel García Márquez, and then, as his work was translated into English in the early 2000s, with W.G. Sebald. However, for Bolaño the novel was a commercial form, a means of making money out of writing, of earning a living. Most of them are marked by an intense rage – the anger, *ressentiment* and guilt of a marginalized poet – against the social inscription of the literary institution.¹

This combination of prosaic anger and need, together with Bolaño's own extraordinary knowledge of – and enthusiasm for – the radical history of literary form (which he also deploys as narrative content in his writing about literature) has nevertheless produced a series of works, culminating with the posthumously published *2666* (2004), that have radically reconfigured the 'world' of world literature. *2666* takes the slaughter of women over nearly a decade in the city of Ciudad Juárez, coincidentally the same period in which Bolaño writes his novels, as its point of departure and artistic material to produce a devastating post-conceptual (after such writers as the Argentine Ricardo Piglia) and post-magical realist (after, for example, the Paraguayan Augusto Roa Bastos) cognitive mapping. In doing so, *2666* suggests, in a kind of high-modernist vein, an out-of-kilter realism re-presenting reality – that is, a capitalist world – gone awry.²

Bolaño's novel *2666* is an inorganic work written in five 'parts', a quintet that does not quite make a whole, and whose unity is given paradoxically in narrative proliferation and dispersal.³ Such disunity should not, therefore, be thought of as a lack, but rather poetically, as the novel's fundamental compositional principle: an aleatory, wild poetics of encounter modelled, perhaps, on a permanently shifting or dreamlike network flow – our new cultural unconscious. A novel of novels and of genres of novels, each of the parts is thus endowed with considerable autonomy – they tell different stories; whilst the fragments of which they are made also strain for their own independence, against narrative continuity. Part and whole thus fold into each other producing a kind of distributional unfolding: in *2666* history definitely flows, veers and 'stutters'.⁴ As we shall see in a little more detail below, the narrative composition of Bolaño's novel takes on some of the characteristics of what Deleuze calls 'irrational cuts', a new kind of montage which

determines the non-commensurable relations between images... There is no longer association through metaphor or metonymy, but relinkage on the literal image... relinkages of independent images. Instead of one image after the other, there is one image *plus* another.⁵

Each part, however, in its relative autonomy is also connected to one or more of the others in a variety of ways: characters may cross the text, for example, travelling from the background of one part into the foreground of another. Such connections not only serve to emphasize the autonomy of parts – what is central to one part is not to another – but, as the text refocuses, endow it with a certain three-dimensionality or depth of field, as introduced into cinema by Gregg Toland, or an installation. (As I briefly suggest below, the latter is

important with regard to part four of the novel). This is the case, for example, with the philosopher Oscar Amalfitano, a bit player to the literary critics Jean-Claude Pelletier, Manuel Espinoza and Liz Norton as he guides them around Santa Teresa in search of the novelist Archimboldi, in the first part of the novel, 'The Part About the Critics'. Amalfitano becomes the central character of the second part, 'The Part About Amalfitano'. It is the case with his daughter Rosa too, who increasingly moves to the fore in the third part, 'The Part About Fate'. At this point she begins to resonate throughout the novel as a whole: as an absent presence among the murdered women of 'The Part About the Crimes', the fourth part, and as the name of what I will refer to as the history of the novel's form in the fifth part, 'The Part About Archimboldi'. This is the novel's own postwar historical novel in which the novels scrutinized by the critics in the first part are written by Archimboldi.

'Here is the rose, here dance!'

What's in a name, in her name, Rosa? The answer, I would like to suggest, is that it conjures up the 'pictorial nominalism' that Thierry de Duve associates with Marcel Duchamp; that is, the replacement in art of Kant's sensual 'this is beautiful' with Duchamp's more rationalistic 'this is art'. Here, Rosa is the name of literature in *2666*. Duchamp's practice of the 'readymade' is internalized – sometimes lethally, sometimes playfully – into Bolaño's text both as conceptual means and narrative content.⁶ The name Rosa (Rose) is a sign (or the 'name') of the novel's postconceptual compositional logic as it adapts Duchampian art, as well as its metamorphizing desire or Eros (Rose/a).⁷ For the latter returns with – or inside – conceptualization to Duchamp's art and its apparent objectivizing intentionality. For example, in the persona of *Rose Sélavy* (Eros is life), the title of Man Ray's cross-dressing Duchamp portrait of 1921 (above, right). In *2666* Rosa/Rose (Eros) is life, and she eventually escapes her possible fate in Santa Teresa, with Oscar Fate (the ex-revolutionary member of the Black Panther Party), at the end of part three. As Bolaño experiments with names, 'Rosa' leaves her trace at the level of the novel's literary composition, as well as its transmedial history and content. But there is another important dimension to her name. However deeply interested in literary form Bolaño is no mere formalist: he constantly twists and turns art, politically, with an eye – sometimes melancholic, sometimes comic – on history. His words are 'words with a sideways glance'.⁸ In this respect, although

2666 may be a deeply melancholic novel in its apparently entropic view of post-Second World War history up to the present day, its writerly enthusiasm also suggests a more positive post-1968 spirit, of the kind previously thought of by Lenin as an 'infantile disorder'. Rosa obliquely signifies here too.⁹

This is one way of critically interpreting the novel's fifth part, 'The Part About Archimboldi', which, in my opinion at least, reads at times like a contemporary version of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* – a parody of parodies – and his theme of 'arms and letters', which throughout his work Bolaño reads through the overlapping militaristic and militant notions of the avant-garde. The figures of Ernst Jünger and other soldier-writers are important here, such as the modernist Argentine poet Leopoldo Lugones and his proclamation 'The Hour of the Sword' of 1924.¹⁰ This is what Hans Reiter, the main soldier character, also becomes: a writer, Archimboldi. The character's name again underlines the significance of names to the novel; echoing too, perhaps, Malcolm Lowry's 'you are not a de wrider, you are a de spyder' in *Under the Volcano* (1947). Lowry is an author who remains a major figure in contemporary Mexican literature and whose 'Mexican' novel provides the epigraph to *The Savage Detectives*. War is Reiter's foundational experience, as it is for the historical novel more generally, as a socio-cultural form. This is why Fredric Jameson's most recent reflections on it follow on from an account of 'war and representation'.

In *The Antinomies of Realism*, Jameson insists that the historical novel is a kind of transitional form between the romance and realism that endows the latter – and its represented present – with a particular sense of historicity. And in this sense (always following Lukács's account of the relation between the historical novel and the 'new humanism'), the historical novel is revolutionary, even in its compositional form. In pushing the heroic individuals of romance-history into the background it represents the mediocre burgher's entry into the historical foreground (this is Hegel's 'maintaining individual' of civil society), as mediated by the generalized 'mass' experience of war after the French Revolution. It is thus also a formal revolution in literature. In Lukács's terms, national histories – within this overarching European perspective – thus become popular; that is, the property of the masses. For Jameson, such novels dramatically present a 'dichotomization' of the social produced by the (revolutionary) 'event' – this becomes Jameson's characteristic structuralist moment of binarization – which is then dialecticized

into social contradiction by the presence of a 'third', the 'collective dimension', reminding us of the overlap emerging between bourgeois and socialist revolutions in Lukács's conceptualization.¹¹ It is also the characteristic dialectical moment of Jameson's criticism, in which structure and structuralism are conceptually overcome and subsumed.

The historical novel as a genre cannot exist without this dimension of collectivity; which marks the drama of the incorporation of individual characters into a greater totality, and can alone certify the presence of History as such. Without this collective dimension, history, one is tempted to say, is again reduced to mere conspiracy, the form it takes in novels which have aimed for historical content without historical consciousness and which remain therefore merely political in some more specialized way.¹²

The question is whether in 2666 war has become total ruination. This includes the ruining of the dimension of the collective so important to Jameson's conceptualization of the historical novel, and perhaps also of its regime of historicity – its progressive historicism – too. Written in another historical context, that of a renewed and globalized neoliberal counter-revolution, marked in the East by the violent transition from socialism to capitalism after 1989, its 'popular' – the women workers of Santa Teresa – are being slaughtered in a process of neoliberal 'primitive' accumulation, such that history *as representation*, from the above perspective, threatens to become (or already is) de-collectivized, perhaps even de-dialecticized, although not necessarily de-historicized. Note that, apart from its apocalyptic and biblical contents, the novel's title, 2666, seems to demand that we look upon the present of its writing – our present – as if a past historical epoch; or, as that past which is the prehistory of its (our future's) present. From this point of view the novel can be read both as a historical novel of the future and as a work of science fiction. This suggests that we need to think here of another kind of 'history', with another kind of non-historicist grammar or 'regime': a regime of 'irrational' narratives.¹³

The fifth part of 2666 is a postwar European novel whose narrative, however, is repeatedly broken and swerves (following the nomadic life of the author) such that contingency and a migrant-like spatio-temporal diagonality predominates over linear narrative causality – as in *Don Quijote*, in which each episode does not seem to effect the one that follows – to produce a series of bleak episodic parodies that



Rose Sélavy, Paris, 1921
Photographie de Man Ray, retouchée par Marcel Duchamp

take place in a milieu defined not by magic as in Cervantes's work, but by disaster: holocausts, great and small, become everyday (its camps and gulags).¹⁴ In other words, it dramatizes a movement that in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) Deleuze and Guattari describe as follows:

another way of travelling and moving, proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing [as in historicist time – JK] ... they know how to move between things, establish a logic of the AND [producing what the authors later refer to as a quilt-like 'patchwork accumulation' of moments – JK], overthrow ontology [in other words, establish 'becomings' rather than 'beings' – JK], do away with foundations ... a transversal movement.¹⁵

Rather than a desacralization of romance, however, as in *Don Quijote*, in 2666 we are presented with the nightmare of fascism and its aftermath, contemporary regimes of capital accumulation, and the broken dream of historical communism – that is, of Stalinism – which, moreover, returns to conclude part two in Amalfitano's own dream, in the shape of Boris Yeltsin as drunken clown. In other words, the novel that makes up the last part of 2666 – but this may also be said of it as a whole – is defined by constant movement and metamorphosis, but without measured 'direction' or 'progress', the movement of permanent primitive

accumulation: what may be conceived as ‘minor’ in *A Thousand Plateaus* has, in 2666, become ‘major’ or ‘molar’. It is a novel characterized by a distinct lack of narrative ‘development’. 2666 is a narrative whose present is futureless – except as more of the same: the formal significance of the death of its collective, its saturated conjunctures (Badiou) and its fragments whose ‘obtuse’ or ‘third’ meanings (Barthes) qua ‘text’ have now to be contained and managed through sketching and editing as if shots in a film.¹⁶ Indeed, in this regard, Jay Bernstein has taken Lukács to task for suggesting in *Theory of the Novel* that *Don Quijote* – with its schematism compared, in his view, to that of Descartes’s *Discourse on Method* – be considered the first novel, insisting that it is not one at all. It is worthwhile to read this account critically against Jameson’s in *The Antinomies of Realism*:

Realism as a form (or mode) is historically associated, particularly if you position the *Quijote* as the first (modern, or realist) novel, with the function of demystification. Its function which can take many forms, in this foundational instance the undermining of romance as a genre, along with the use of its idealizing values to foreground features of the social reality they cannot accommodate.

Bernstein would agree up to a point, but his argument is that it is not quite the first example of a novel precisely because, in a sense, *Don Quijote* ‘lacks’ the (emerging bourgeois) reality that defines it as a form. Bernstein thus writes:

Conjecturally, we may argue that Cervantes’ procedure of parodically ‘de-coding’ the old models [what Jameson refers to as ‘demystification’ – JK] points to a conception of ‘reality’ without being able to supply any criteria by which that real may be established; and that is the reason why he feels constrained to consider the alternative, to construct a ‘model’ reality that can vie with our disenchanting world for the title of ‘reality’.¹⁷

Arguably, however, such a ‘constraint’ with regard to an alternative ‘real’ (which Bernstein implies is already given) in fact feeds Bolaño’s 2666, because, of course, qua ‘Communism’, it is no longer. And its ‘name’, after Duchamp, might be that of another Rosa who momentarily became an object of Lenin’s critical wrath, Rosa Luxemburg, the theorist of a supposed ‘spontaneist’ leftism whom he includes in his description of an ‘infantile disorder’ of the Communist movement.¹⁸ This Rosa (Rose) is, moreover, of utmost significance in Lukács’s own theoretical and political development out of a period of militancy, into one in which he returns – retreats – to literary

criticism (now a politics by other means) to produce not only his account of realism but also his classic, *The Historical Novel*, on which so many interpretations lean, including my own. With the emergence into dominance of Stalinism, Bolshevism was coming to an end through self-annihilation, culminating in the execution of Bukharin in 1938.¹⁹ Indeed, throughout the later essays included in *History and Class Consciousness*, written between 1919 and 1923, and through each of the short chapters of his book *Lenin: A Study in the Unity of his Thought* (1924), which trace his Leninist becoming, Lukács produces his position *against* that of Rosa Luxemburg (to whom he was previously close), her supposed ‘organicism’, and her relatively democratic politics. As Bolívar Echeverría notes, this ‘Rosa’ thus became a fundamental – although negative – ingredient in the production of ‘Leninism’.²⁰

For her part, according to Gillian Rose, Luxemburg’s writing – against both Eduard Bernstein’s ‘evolutionism’ and Lenin’s and Lukács’s ‘discipline’ – rather suggests an ‘aporetic’ path, ‘a poria [a path] without a path’, much like Derrida’s bizarre tracking of Daniel Defoe (whose *Robinson Crusoe* is yet another contender for first novel) and Martin Heidegger’s paths in the second volume of *The Beast and Sovereign* (2010); as well as Deleuze and Guattari’s diagonal pathways, mentioned above. In Luxemburg’s words from ‘Organizational Questions of Social Democracy’ (written in 1904 in response to Lenin’s ‘What Is to Be Done?’): a ‘tacking betwixt and between the two dangers [‘reformism’ and ‘centralism’] by which it [‘this movement’] is constantly being threatened.’ Against the grain of Bolshevik historicism and, arguably, Lukács’s account of the ‘progress’ of the historical novel as well as of his later disciplined ‘Leninist’ realism, Rose’s reading of Luxemburg’s ‘The Mass Strike’ and ‘Reform or Revolution’ produces another ‘way’:

This goes against the common view that Rosa Luxemburg is herself a theorist of immediacy and spontaneity, of the easy path. On the contrary, her authorship is the difficult path of the repeated recognition of mediators which prevents any fixing of the outcome of the previous ‘daily struggle’. The ‘daily’ or quotidian is the aporia – the difficult path, ‘outside’ and ‘beyond’ [‘existing society’], which is, *qua* difficulty, temporally inside and within, continual but not continuous, intermittent but never-ending as opposed to incessant but coming to a finite end.²¹

This is the path, I think, of Rose’s own book, *The Broken Middle*. According to Rose, Luxemburg is

‘consistently anxious in the equivocation of the ethical’. Could this be, then, the kind of disorder – of evolution and discipline – that Bolaño deploys, both narratively and politically: a way of thinking his ‘aleatory’ poetics as a kind of instantiation of ‘dis-order’ or, in Rose’s words again, a ‘cultivation of plasticity’?²² ‘The root of all my problems, Amalfitano sometime thought’, writes Bolaño (in another of his post-humous, unfinished novels, dedicated to Amalfitano, *The Woes of the True Policeman*), ‘is to be found in my admiration for jews, homosexuals and revolutionaries (true revolutionaries and dangerous madmen, not the apparatchiks of the Chilean Communist Party, those despicable killers, ah, those shocking grey beings)’.²³ If in 2666 Rosa lives, this other revolutionary Rosa dies, assassinated on the orders of the kind of ‘grey beings’ Bolaño learned to despise.

A transcultural swerve

In Latin America, meanwhile, the historical novel takes another – transcultural – turn in which the formal (that is, narrative) centrality of bourgeois civil society’s ‘maintaining individual’ as ‘mediocre hero’ is displaced. The prime movers of the ‘civilization’ of capital in the area are rather *militarized political societies*, states representing the region’s landowning class, violently enforcing the spread and consolidation of dependent – or so called ‘peripheral’ – capitalism in and on its heterogeneous spaces and times through a variety of context-specific ‘passive revolutions’. Such a political overdetermination of the economic explains why ‘heroic individuals’, such as dictators, remain central to the Latin American historical novel, *realistically*, without necessarily falling back into romanticism. Indeed, taking the political form of the ‘dictatorship novel’, the genre arguably becomes a singular one: it is perhaps the only genre that actually *narrativizes and reflects upon state form as the subject and object of history*. With the dictator as its de facto embodiment, the state can be narrated: it walks, talks, desires and plots.

In other words, the ‘misplaced’ and transculturated literary configuration of the Latin American historical novel registers the process in which the form has been occupied by dictators, as if in a military *coup d’état*. Augusto Roa Bastos’s *I the Supreme* (1975), for example, specifically dramatizes the process in which a revolutionary Jacobin dictator takes the place of the ‘collective’-popular in the constitution of the nation-state, thereby producing what in Jameson’s terms appears as a counter-revolutionary but historically dialectical re-dichotomization of the ‘event’.²⁴

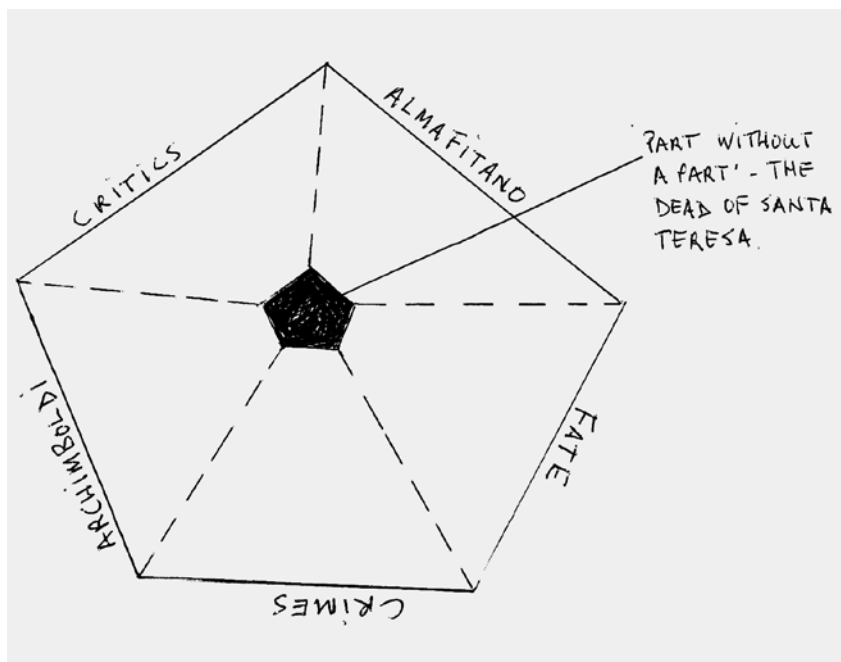
As Peter Osborne insists, to engage critically with, and render historical as ‘contemporary’, a post-conceptual literary compositional practice – here, Bolaño’s practice of aleatory ‘dis-order’ – it is necessary to begin by tracking the historical emergence and deployment in literary practice of the genres that have become its artistic materials, as well as its transmedial conceptual forms:²⁵ here, ‘text’ (associated with post-structuralism), on the one hand, and the notion of narrative ‘transculturation’ (associated with the deployment of anti-colonial anthropology, including the ‘political’ transculturation of the historical novel in Latin America outlined above), on the other. Critically, this would involve overcoming both the overtly semiotized, anti-aesthetic conception of cultural form contained in the notion of ‘text’ (given its use in 2666 as ‘art’) and Angel Rama’s now dated culturalist opposition between an urban ‘cosmopolitan’ and a neo-regional ‘transcultural’ avant-garde – a critical version of ‘magical realism’ – to produce an alternative and more dialectical and differentiated sense of the kind of *fallen* ‘epic’ (novel) that 2666 may be, in all of its cultural determinations, including Bolaño’s territorial remapping of the world.²⁶

It is a non- (even de-)national, aleatory or wild text that not only simultaneously synchronizes diachrony (that is, geographizes history) and diachronizes synchrony (historizes geography) – as in Franco Moretti’s account of world texts²⁷ – but also transforms these categories by rethinking the contemporary spatio-temporal logics of uneven capitalist development, the flows and networks that radically displace the ideological notion of ‘progress’ (Moretti’s ‘befores’ and ‘afters’). Meanwhile, at the level of form, in the novel’s compositional strategies, such critical scrutiny would also need to look at how Bolaño’s work reflects upon such narrative *détournements* as (and I am only referring to post-Borgesian Latin American literature after García Márquez here) ‘compilation’ and ‘variation’ – as in the post-transcultural and anti-authorial work of Augusto Roa Bastos – and the compositional anti-archival work of ‘in-direction’ and ‘interruption’ in the post-‘cosmopolitan’ texts of Ricardo Piglia.²⁸ In this light, the latter has referred to the importance for his own texts of the eccentric avant-gardist writer Macedonio Fernández, as an Argentine Marcel Duchamp.²⁹ What Bolaño adds is the experience of the digital grab, reconceiving his artistic materials beyond their reduction to the ‘oral’ and ‘lettered’ anthropological, historical and literary archives, and emplotting them into the transversal, dis-ordered narratives described as ‘Rosa’.

Border town, murder capital

From this point of view, *2666* is self-reflexive, broken 'world' text (it dis-orders even Moretti's epic literary world) intensely concerned with the dialectics of literary or, more precisely, narrative totalization and de-totalization. Bolaño takes seriously Lukács's dictum that 'the composition of the novel is the paradoxical fusion of heterogeneous and discrete components into an organic whole which is then abolished over and over again', so as to exhibit in post-avant-gardist fashion the aleatory transcultural and textual compositional (that is, multi-generic) logics that feed *2666*, as well as the process of their abolition, again and again, over its parts, five times.³⁰ In this respect, the demands Bolaño's work makes on literary criticism is to reintroduce into it a post-conceptual ('Duchampian') concern with the contemporary history of form. As Adorno would have insisted: mimesis *and* construction.

The order in which the five parts of *2666* are presented also functions to contain the text's will



to dispersal. The first and final parts mirror each other across the novel (and Santa Teresa), sharing a concern with the same literary object, the novels of Benno de Archimboldi/Hans Reiter. But they do so from different, even opposing, perspectives: from the perspective of reading and critical interpretation in the first part, 'The Part About the Critics'; from a historico-biographical perspective in the last part, 'The Part About Archimboldi', in which his novels are written. In a sense, each part reads the other. Although this also takes the form of a non-reading:

there is very little sense that, in the discussions of his work, the critics perceive the significance of the histories of devastation their author has experienced *for literature*. He thus remains the disavowed enigma that their institutionalized reflections demand. This is *2666*'s literary frame, a circuit of reading and writing that contains the text, and its deaths (many more than the critics seem able to imagine), to produce it as a broken whole. If at the end of the first part, the critics fanatically travel to Santa Teresa in search of Archimboldi, at the end of the novel Archimboldi does so too, in search of his nephew – they never meet. Rosa and Fate do see his nephew, in jail for killing women. He is clearly a 'patsy' as the killings continue. The narrative thus closes with an open loop, which holds and contains the 'literary' (the 'rosa') and so holds it up as an object (and concept) for us to contemplate, critically examine and scrutinize as 'art'.

Each of the five parts of *2666* is focused through different kinds of intellectual. Each is associated with particular practices of writing and their respective

institutions or ideological apparatuses, as Althusser would have called them. And in so far as *2666* is a novel about critics, a philosopher, a journalist, a police detective and a novelist, it stages and performs writing: its subjects, its modalities and its varied social inscriptions. In this sense, *2666* is also imprinted with genre: the campus-like romance, the philosophical novel, the investigative/sports novel, the crime novel and the literary war/historical novel. As we have seen, the first part is focused on literary criticism, presented – through the politics and romance of conference-

attending across European (as if part of an Erasmus programme) – as the administration of aesthetic experience as a specialized sphere of value in universities. This includes the kind of canon formation Bolaño railed against from outside institutional walls, as the representative of a perceived generational shift.³¹ In this sense, the first part of *2666* echoes Pierre Bourdieu's account of the distribution of symbolic capital within the field of cultural production, its socio-economic content and the violence that subtends it too. In one episode, driven by sexual jealousy and desire, Espinoza and

Pelletier (who are both visiting Norton in London) turn on a Pakistani taxi driver and beat him ferociously in a racist attack. Their excuse is the driver's own sexism. But the occasion is provided by his literary ignorance – he had not heard of Borges, who, the critics informed him, had also described the streets he was lost in as a 'labyrinth'.³²

Such violence resonates out of Santa Teresa and through the other parts of *2666* as the primitive accumulation and reproduction of cultural capital. As mentioned above, the fifth part is Bolaño's European historical novel, tracing the life of a novelist who might also have eventually occupied the same kind of canonic world-literary place within this field as an author like Günter Grass or W.G. Sebald; indeed, that might be occupied now, paradoxically, in part because of his successful commercialization and institutionalization in the Spanish and, especially, English languages (still the neo-Imperial *sine qua non* of the 'world' in 'world literature') by Bolaño himself. There is a Bolaño 'chair' in a Chilean university.

Gayatri Spivak began her recent book *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012) with the statement: 'Globalization takes place only in capital and data. Everything else is damage control.'³³ This puts the worlds of *2666* into perspective: all of the parts of Bolaño's novel – as phenomenologically worlded by each of their writers – run into the ground, literally, in the town of Santa Teresa, where their geographical movement across continents is radically halted and spatially fixed at the US–Mexican border. As is well known, Santa Teresa is modelled on Ciudad Juarez, historically a Mexican staging post for the USA. It is a city that has recently experienced considerable growth, and is one of the murder capitals of the world. In the recent film *Sicario* (2015) a CIA black-ops team refer to it as 'the Beast'. It is the US state's 'other'. According to some, it represents something like a 'laboratory of the future'. At its centre lies what Sergio González Rodríguez (the journalist whose research was made available to Bolaño for his city portrait) has called a 'femicide machine'.³⁴ It is the product of a fatal encounter of industrial *maquiladora* production and a narco-accumulation subordinated to global finance capital (the importance of laundering, which links the two, is crucial to this process), on the one hand, and the 'free' labour power of migrant women (abstract labour to exploit and kill), on the other. It is this formation that marks the limit of each of the parts of *2666* – to suggest a further 'part without a part', to adopt Rancière – and which makes them all contemporary: one more

holocaust at the centre of all its parts, a lethal process of primitive accumulation that attracts women to work in the growing city, as it does all of Bolaño's principal characters, 'looking' for it.³⁵

Narco-territory

From the point of view of the work as a whole, the third part of *2666* is arguably the most extraordinary, as well as the most hopeful of a deeply melancholic work. 'The Part About Fate' is his US novel, and tells the story of Quincy Williams, also known as Oscar Fate. Fate is an ex-militant journalist from Harlem and member of the revolutionary Black Panther Party. In counter-revolutionary times (both politically and journalistically), he too arrives in Santa Teresa like everyone else in the novel, not to investigate, reveal and criticize, but in order to cover a boxing match. Once there, he discovers the 'crimes' that are taking place (his newspaper, however, is not interested in reporting them) and 'saves' Rosa, the other Oscar's (Amalfitano's) 'infant' daughter. The critics and Reiter travel to Santa Teresa from Europe, the latter making his way there from its Eastern wartime 'bloodlands' and the USSR. Oscar Amalfitano travels, like Bolaño, north from Chile, whilst Oscar Fate travels south, linking one ruined (post-industrial) city in the USA to the ruin that Santa Teresa is becoming on its border. What *2666* maps in the Americas, however, is the outline of another world – or hinterland world – of which cities like Santa Teresa/Ciudad Juarez are the capital, the capital of a border-hinterland that is neither the USA nor Mexico but that is simultaneously global whilst, parasitic, crossing and containing some of each, a narco-territory.

Oscar Fate strays into this world whose public secret, *2666* reveals, is that the world of narco-accumulation in which the murder of women takes place is also a dense and complex narco-culture; that is, in almost the classical sense of the term, 'a whole way of everyday life' (and death) – with its rituals, symbols and institutions, including its own laws. This is the very particular regime of primitive accumulation that Bolaño places at the centre-edge of his worlds (in a mirror darkly), as their condition. It suggests, furthermore, that Yann Boutang Moulier's migrant Deleuze-and-Guattarian diagonals have been overcoded by narco-capital.

[W]hat is distinctive to both internal (national) and external (international) migratory movement is that it 'diagonalizes' totally or partially, th[e] passage from the 'raw' to the 'cooked' ... [it] realizes one of the classic steps of proletarianization

– namely, the transition of sizeable portions of the economy from agricultural activity, toward industrial or service activity – without the intermediate steps of the development of a wage-earning class and urbanization in the country of origin.³⁶

‘The Part About the Crimes’ details the above femicide, but it is arguably in the second part, ‘The Part About Amalfitano’, that its abyssal significance first begins to emerge: the mass production of what Étienne Balibar refers to as ‘disposable people’ in a new theatre of cruelty, capital’s new surplus population of abstract labour.³⁷ This is symptomatized in Amalfitano’s traumatized ego as, for example, the super-egoic ‘voice’ accusing him of ‘homo-sexuality’, or as the indiscernible menace he feels when waiting for his Rosa, his daughter, at night. (Oscar Fate meets her, in the third part, in a narco-nightclub and begins to worry too.) Like all the other characters in *2666*, Amalfitano is the subject of this structure, in both senses of the term: he acts in his subjection, he writes and draws, plots out names around the axes of triangles, rectangles and the like, interrupting the flow of narrative, to demand time for reflection in those unusual blank spaces in which sensuous particularity appears to be subordinated to reason, but is not.

There is a constant need to escape prose in Bolaños’s writing, for poetry, or the lines of the poet Cesárea Tinajero in *The Savage Detectives*. In *2666* there is, however, nowhere to go.³⁸ Amalfitano is privileged here because, being a Chilean philosopher, he has experienced ‘disappearance’ before. In fact, his part might be considered another of Bolaños’s so-called Chilean novels, such as *By Night in Chile*. Suddenly he realizes that the university where he teaches philosophy ‘was like a cemetery that suddenly begins to think, in vain’. Amalfitano experiments with geometry too, creating his own Duchampian work of art (out of his own lines) in his garden, hanging a book about geometry by the poet Rafael Dieste (his *Testamento geométrico*) on the washing line so as to see how it might react to the environment. What he eventually sees is a ‘long shadow, the coffin-like shadow, cast by Dieste’s book hanging in the yard’.³⁹

A kind of unconscious is at work at the edges of Amalfitano’s world that resists symbolization. Such unintelligibility defines the kinds of violence Balibar insists are constitutive of the dialectics of power – here the spectre of

finance capital in its various manifestations, especially narco-finance capital as it ‘washes’ through both industrial and entertainment capital (bars, brothels, hotels) – and which, interestingly, he also locates in those places, like border zones, in which the idealities of God, the Law and other signs of hegemony break down and collapse. This is Santa Teresa, its cruel unmediated violence *measured* (as its shadow appears, grows, shrinks and disappears) by Amalfitano’s Duchampian installation.

According to Balibar, such cruelty is often sexualized. This brings me to my last Duchampian moment in *2666*. In the first part, ‘The Part About the Critics’, Duchamp is included in the text in classic fashion: conceptualist procedures were conceived as a revolt against the medium of painting, and in *2666* this revolt is enacted literally, and violently, when the artist Edwin Johns severs and uses his own hand as a readymade: he ‘had cut off his right hand, the hand he painted with, then had it embalmed, and attached it to a kind of multiple self-portrait’.⁴⁰ However, I would like to conclude by briefly considering a possible Duchampian motif that is not actually cited by the author, but which may be significant *for* the novel, in so far as it helps us read its most disturbing part, ‘The Part About the Crimes’, which comprises long forensic descriptions of the dead bodies of murdered women abandoned



Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés*, 1946–1956, Philadelphia Museum of Art

and on view around the city of Santa Teresa. As is well known, in Duchamp's view, the readymade described a shift away from art made for the eye – that is, from 'retinal art'. But in his last provocative installation, *Étant donnés/Given* (below, left), the retinal returns as scopophilia theatre. In the words of Eric Alliez: 'c'est le *tableau vivant* d'une *nature morte*'. For his part, Julian Jason Haladyn, describes it as 'an installation that [like Apollo to Cassandra] spits in the mouth of the museum as a site of institutionalization and historicization'.⁴¹ And what we are shown or given, in *Given*, as we look through its peephole, is the naked body of a young woman lying, abandoned, on the ground.

It is possible to read 'The Part About the Crimes' in this (sexualized) cruel light. Here is the last 'death' as set out in there as it comes to an end:

The last case of 1997 was fairly similar to the second to last, except that the bag containing the body wasn't found on the western edge of the city but on the eastern edge, by the dirt road that runs along the border and then forks and vanishes when it reaches the first mountains and steep passes. The victim, according to the medical examiners, had been dead for a long time. She was about eighteen, five foot two and a half or three. She was naked, but a pair of good-quality leather high heels were found in the bag, which led the police to think she might be a whore. Some white thong panties were also found. Both this case and the previous case were closed after three days of generally halfhearted investigations. The Christmas holidays in Santa Teresa were celebrated in the usual fashion.⁴²

Bolaño's description of this body found at Christmas 1997, conceived as part of a Duchampian installation, can be looked at and experienced in at least two ways. First, as part of a crime scene, the body is a clue presented to (and then represented by) the eyes of the police (of the local state) that – if properly interpreted and tracked (which they are not) – symptomatizes narco-accumulation and culture in its capital-border city. From this point of view, this part of *2666* is a state monument that forensically reproduces its desire and jurisdiction. From another point of view, however, the body represents one of the many stories left untold in the novel, its part without a part – its absent 'collectivity' – without which its many worlds would not exist. Here, 'The Part About the Crimes' installs itself in the centre of the text, in its capital city, as a monument whose imaginary contours, sexuality and jurisdiction are of another (dis)order. This is a monument to the unknown worker.

Notes

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1. In *By Night in Chile* (2000), for example, he has members of the literary establishment gather together for an aperitif and discussion, whilst below, in the basement of the house, the host's husband is busy at work torturing for the Pinochet military regime. This is Bolaño's version of Benjamin's well-known assertion that all documents of culture are also documents of barbarism. Born in Chile, Bolaño migrated with his family to Mexico in 1968 where he dropped out of school early. He stole books, stalked writers and became a poet. He returned to Chile immediately after the military coup in 1973 and was briefly imprisoned. Soon after he visited El Salvador where, after the assassination of the revolutionary poet Roque Dalton by members of the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo, he became politically disillusioned. The civil wars of the 1960s to 1980s – and the lost generation they represent – however, remain crucial to his thought. Back in Mexico he joined a group of poets known as the 'Infrarealists' who disrupted readings and attacked poets financed by the state. In 1977 he left for Spain (where he would live for the rest of his life), living in poverty, illness and addiction, until he got married and had children. Bolaño died of kidney failure in July 2003.
2. 'It was raining in the quadrangle, and the quadrangular sky looked like the grimace of a robot or a god made in our own likeness. The oblique drops of rain slid down the blades of grass in the park, but it would have made no difference if they had slid up. Then the oblique (drops) turned round (drops), swallowed up by the earth underpinning the grass, and the grass and the earth seemed to talk, no, not talk, argue, their incomprehensible words like crystallized spiderwebs or the briefest crystallized vomitings, a barely audible rustling, as if instead of drinking tea that afternoon, Norton had drunk a steaming cup of peyote.' Roberto Bolaño, *2666*, trans. Natasha Wimmer, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 2008, p. 9. Bolaño's wild free-indirect speech mines the history of narrative for its procedures, radically transforming the transcendental (narrating) third person into something both more and less than a 'person', a mad 'robot' perhaps.
3. Each of the parts was originally to be published separately in the hope of making more money for his family, but after his death Bolaño's publishers decided to release it as originally – artistically – intended, as one novel.
4. 'History stutters' in Jean-Luc Godard's film *Detective* (1985).
5. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galata, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997, pp. 213–14.
6. See Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from painting to the Readymade*, trans. Dana Polan, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1991.
7. For a theorization of postconceptual art, see Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, Verso, London and New York, 2013.
8. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Problem of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984.
9. Indeed, following Badiou, but in the light of Bolaño, such a spirit might be considered as the more or less doomed faith in the return of the rebellious 'infantile' at the level of the literary – which in Latin America might include the drama of the history of guerrilla warfare and its suppression in dictatorship, a historical experience that is fundamental to Bolaño's writing.
10. This 'address' was delivered on the occasion of the centenary of the battle of Ayacucho in Peru at which the independence of the region was militarily secured. Lugones was insisting that it was, again, in 1924, 'the hour of the sword' in order to stem ongoing processes of

- political democratization. For more on the militarization of literature, see Bolaño's own Borgesian fictional encyclopedia, *Nazi Literature in the Americas* (1996).
11. See Neil Davidson, *How Bourgeois Were the Bourgeois Revolutions?*, Haymarket Books, London, 2013. According to Perry Anderson, 'within the huge multiverse of prose fiction the historical novel has, almost by definition, been the most consistently political' – the first sentence of his 'From Progress to Catastrophe: The Historical Novel', *London Review of Books*, vol. 33, no. 14, 28 July 2011, www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n15/perry-anderson/from-progress-to-catastrophe – accessed 26 September 2016.
 12. Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, Verso, London and New York, 2013, p. 267. Note here the collective singular – this is the kind of history whose existence Piglia's *Artificial Respiration* (1980) begins, in the light of the counter-revolutionary military dictatorships of the Southern Cone in the 1970s, by questioning (but not rejecting) in its very first sentence: 'Is there a (hi)story?' Ricardo Piglia, *Artificial Respiration*, trans. Daniel Balderston, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London, 1994, translation revised (*historia* means both story and history).
 13. For 'regimes of historicity', see François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and the Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown, Columbia University Press, New York, 2015.
 14. For the principle of 'diagonality', see Yann Boutang Moulier, 'Between the Hatred of all Walls and the Walls of Hate: The Minoritarian Diagonal of Mobility', *Traces: A Multilingual Journal of Cultural Theory and Translation* 2, 2001, pp. 105–29.
 15. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, Athlone Press, London, p. 25.
 16. For 'saturated conjunctures', see Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject* (1982), trans. Bruno Bosteels, Bloomsbury, London, 2009; and for 'obtuse meaning', see Roland Barthes, 'The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, Fontana/Collins, Glasgow, 1977, pp. 52–68.
 17. Jameson, *The Antinomies*, p. 4; J.M. Bernstein's *The Philosophy of the Novel: Lukács, Marxism and the Dialectics of Form*, Harvester Press, Brighton, 1984, p. 156. Coincidentally, in one of the many conversations that make up Piglia's *Artificial Respiration* it is also argued that, considered as an autobiographical voyage of an individual consciousness, Descartes's *Discourse on Method* might be considered the first novel. This too echoes Lukács's account of the literary origins of the novel from the point of view of its schematization of time.
 18. V.I. Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1981. According to Gillian Rose, 'spontaneism' may best be rendered as 'experimental'. See her *The Broken Middle: Out of Ancient Society*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, p. 208 n232.
 19. '[I]n the *Theory of the Novel*, the form is essentially distinguished by its capacity for registering problematization and the irreconcilable contradictions of a purely secular modernity. The latter becomes reidentified as capitalism, in the later Lukács, and the novel with realism, whose task is now the reawakening of the dynamics of history.' Jameson, *The Antinomies*, p. 4.
 20. Bolívar Echeverría, *El discurso crítico de Marx*, Ediciones Era, Mexico City, 1986, pp. 161–77 (my translation). In this sense, Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* is marked by a political and theoretical break – a break with Luxemburg.
 21. Rose, *The Broken Middle*, pp. 201, 205, 210–12, 201.
 22. *Ibid.*, pp. 201, 207.
 23. Roberto Bolaño, *The Woes of the True Policeman*, Paladin, London, 2013, p. 127.
 24. I reflect further on the significance of this political displacement in my forthcoming *Capitalism and its Discontents: Power and Accumulation in Latin American Culture*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2017. For 'misplaced ideas', see Roberto Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture*, trans. John Gledson, Verso, London and New York, 1992. As Davidson insists in his *How Bourgeois Were the Bourgeois Revolutions?*, 'passive revolution' should now be conceived as bourgeois revolution's *norm* – which might also suggest further rereadings of the historical novel in terms of their political overdetermination. Angel Rama's important 1982 book is now available in translation: *Writing Across Cultures: Narrative Transculturation in Latin America*, trans. David Frye, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London, 2012.
 25. Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, chs 3 and 4.
 26. For an account of the emergence of the idea of text, see John Mowitt, *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object*, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London, 1992; and for 'transculturation', see Rama, *Writing Across Cultures*.
 27. Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to García Marquez*, Verso, London and New York, 1996, pp. 49–52.
 28. For 'compilation' and 'variation', see Augusto Roa Bastos, *Yo el Sepremo*, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, Buenos Aires, 1975, and the second, revised, edition of *Hijo de hombre*, Penguin Books, New York, 1996. For 'indirection' and 'interruption', see Ricardo Piglia, *Artificial Respiration*, and the author's 'Afterword' in *The Absent City*, trans. Sergio Waisman, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London, 2000, pp. 141–7.
 29. See Macedonio Fernández, *The Museum of Eterna's Novel (The First Good Novel)*, trans. Margaret Schwartz, Open Letter, New York, 2010.
 30. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (1920), trans. Anna Bostock, Merlin Press, London, 1978, p. 84. For an account of modernist 'organic' and avant-gardist 'inorganic' works of art, see Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, 1984.
 31. See his at times arbitrarily 'caudillesque' *Between Parenthesis: Essays, Articles and Speeches*, Picador, London, 2012.
 32. 'Which led Espinoza to remark that he'd be damned if the cabbie hadn't just quoted Borges, who once said London was like a labyrinth – unintentionally, of course.' Bolaño, *2666*, p. 73. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 29–73.
 33. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2012, p. 1.
 34. Sergio Gonzalez Rodríguez, *The Femicide Machine*, MIT Press, Boston MA, 2012; Jean Franco, *Cruel Modernity*, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London, 2013.
 35. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1998.
 36. Boutang Moulier, 'Between the Hatred', pp. 108–9. *2666*'s epigraph is a quote from Baudelaire that reads as follows: 'An oasis of horror in a desert of boredom'. For 'regimes of accumulation', see Jairus Banaj, *History as Theory: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation*, Haymarket Books, London, 2010.
 37. Étienne Balibar, 'Violence, Ideality and Cruelty', in *Politics and the Other Scene*, Verso, London, 2002, pp. 129–45.
 38. See Philip Derbyshire, 'Los detectives salvajes: Line, Loss and the Political', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, vol. 18, nos 2–3, December, 2009, pp. 167–76.
 39. Bolaño, *2666*, p. 207.
 40. A conceptual (self-)attack on the painterly. Bolaño, *2666*, p. 87.
 41. Éric Alliez (with Jean-Claude Bonne), *Défaire l'image*, Les presses de réel, Paris, 2013, p. 292; Julian Jason Haladyn, *Marcel Duchamp: Étants donnés*, Afterall Books, London, 2010, p. 12.
 42. Bolaño, *2666*, pp. 632–3.