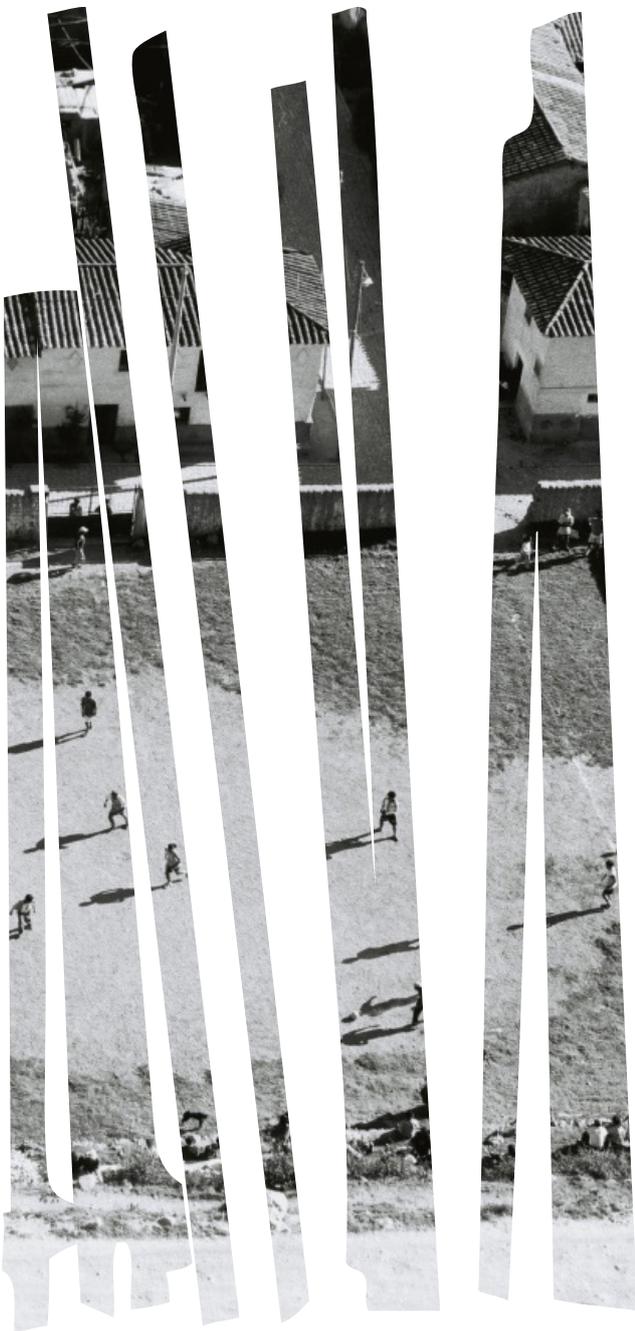


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**Ruthless Desires of Living Together
in Roberto Bolaño's 2666**
Conviviality between *Potestas* and *Potentia*

Jorge Estrada



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Ruthless Desires of Living Together in Roberto Bolaño's 2666: Conviviality between *Potestas* and *Potentia*

Jorge Estrada

Abstract

A desire to live together is perhaps a key idea in Roberto Bolaño's narratives. His characters are constantly negotiating their involvement in diverse societies amid the historical catastrophes of the twentieth century, so this desire becomes highly differentiated. It undergoes perspectival shifts and creates "mirror games", which express scepticism towards universalising forms and trigger reflections on history and modernity. In this working paper, I examine how, in *2666*, the cosmopolitan desire of a self-legislating and self-authorizing individual is disassembled and superseded by a convivial framework and a relational subject that is crossed by diverse determining forces. This transition is correlated to Bolaño's diagnosis of late capitalism, in which a matrix of domination that worked with the logic of *potestas* in the sense of the power to directly elicit determined actions is replaced by the channelling of *potentia*. This mutable capacity that allows creating a habit with diverse actualizations is channelled or governed with an apparatus for capturing a flow of lives whose features only come to light in forensic discourse and project the fictional city of Santa Teresa.

Keywords: Roberto Bolaño | conviviality | potestas | potentia

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1. Introduction

A desire to live together is both a motif and structural feature that gives cohesion to Roberto Bolaño's magnum opus *2666* (Bolaño 2004). This desire might sound relatable, even self-evident, but it must be taken in its broadest possible sense because, after connecting more than a thousand pages with five main narrative lines – each of which is rife with digressions – desire becomes a rather vague concept. It not only refers to a longing for recognition and friendship, as in the case of the literary critics, but also to an exile's desire for a *patria chica*, a *terruño*, a *Heimat* in the sense of a place to lay roots or at least feel at home, instead of constantly feeling out of place like Amalfitano. However, even though “desire” involves psychological aspects, it surpasses an individual's inner life and its relation to social structures and the world. In *2666*, the desire to live together involves History or, more precisely, how the journalist Oscar Fate deals with the burden of his past and of belonging. With his articles about the Black Panther Party and the last communist in Brooklyn, Oscar Fate reports the aftermath of past social struggles and comes to terms with political organisations fading away. Fate's desire to live together involves negotiating with a socio-historical world and brings to the surface considerations about historically produced inequalities, power structures, and their representation. However, in the “Part about the crimes”, this desire is stripped of its many layers to lay bare the simple desire to live, which is brutally negated by an acephalous desire for domination. Despite the asymmetries between a life without a right to exist and the mechanism for domination, both are differently propelled by the inflationary notion of desire proposed by Bolaño. A similar conclusion was drawn by Hans Reiter from his experience while engaging as a soldier in World War II's Eastern Front campaign. The soon-to-be famous German post-war writer understood that if somebody “*había logrado imponer su deseo a la realidad*” (Bolaño 2004: 895), then this meant that desires descending as an overlay on the most solid surfaces are a semblance and: “*La apariencia era una fuerza de ocupación de la realidad*” (Bolaño 2004: 926).

At the end of *2666*, desire becomes an umbrella term involving social structures, history, imaginaries, and power relations because, for Bolaño, literature and the political hinge

on the same desire to imagine ways of life (Zavala 2015: 206).¹ Desire becomes a coarse and uneven term for the projection of a representational and epistemological framework. As an occupying force of reality, it assumes the function of a thought operator for construing modernity. This desire and its semblance are the illusions of a hypermediatised world:

As long as an illusion is not recognised as an error, its value is exactly equivalent to that of reality. But once the illusion is recognised as such, it is no longer one. Therefore, it is the very concept of illusion, and it alone, that is an illusion (Baudrillard 1995: 79, own translation).²

Desire projects an image of the world and implies a representational framework or an “ideal totalising form” that can be linked to the diverse historical attempts to rationally pursue national projects of progress (Zavala 2015: 33).³ Desire is thus the metaphorical vehicle used to explore how modernity is articulated. Because it has social and agential implications linking a micro- and macro level, it cannot be a single desire. Moreover, it is necessarily plural because there are as many desires as attempts to achieve progress. Desires shift and collide, and with their movement, they give expression to Bolaño’s scepticism towards a universalizing perspective. His narratives do not strive to systematize a point of view but adopt a “symbolic dispersion” that challenges a monolithic, totalizing form as the main onto-epistemological operator for worldmaking. This dispersion can be thought of as a constant negotiation impinging on the narrative structure, on the way in which the text positions itself in relation to literary historiography, as well as on an approach to geopolitical referents beyond the idea of cosmopolitanism (Zavala 2015: 21–33). Bolaño’s aesthetics thus lay the groundwork for postmodern

1 Living together amid inequalities and power structures is a recurrent concern in Bolaño’s narratives. His stories thematize regimes. In *By Night in Chile* (Bolaño 2000), for instance, we become acquainted with an intellectual, his career during Pinochet’s dictatorship, and all the direct or indirect compromises he made. In *Amulet* (Bolaño 1999), a public space, namely, an empty bathroom of the University, acquires political dimensions and becomes a counter-hegemonic place of contestation: the locus from which time and space are disarticulated by a narrator that attempts to make sense out of the massacre of students that was perpetrated in 1968 in Mexico City. And, lastly, in “Henri Simon Leprince” we read about a second-rate writer who, instead of seeking a power to exact his revenge during the Vichy regime, ends up working for the French Resistance and helping writers who had previously ignored him to escape. With these stories Bolaño speculates about the effects that historical catastrophes and social configurations have on a character and how he or she confronts history.

2 “Aussi longtemps qu’une illusion n’est pas reconnue comme une erreur, sa valeur est exactement équivalente à celle d’une réalité. Mais une fois reconnue l’illusion comme telle, elle n’est plus une. C’est donc le concept même d’illusion, et lui seul, qui est une illusion”.

3 Zavala uses Echevarría’s conceptualization of modernity to describe Bolaño’s poetics. Here, desire serves as vehicle to depict both a top-down as well as a horizontal approach to modernity.

narratives that are rife with perspectival shifts, with diverse imaginaries at play, with stories within stories, and even interpretations and summaries for said stories.

These highly compressed narratives represent a challenge when aiming at an overarching interpretation around a thematic core, such as the desire to live together. For this reason, the following argument runs the risk of indulging in digressions as a means to reconstruct a constellation from the scattered crumbs left in *2666* and to explain what the desire of living together entails. With this goal in mind, I examine in the following pages how the cosmopolitan Kantian subject that assumes itself as a self-determining, self-legislating, self-contained, self-authorizing individual (Pippin 2005: 7) is disassembled in *2666* and left behind as a farewell letter to the generation born around the 1950s. This reckoning with a generation's desires paves the way for a focus on a relational subject and for Bolaño's diagnosis of late capitalism, in which a matrix of domination that worked according to the logic of *potestas* shifted into a channelling of the *potentia* in a relational embodied subjectivity. *Potestas* stands in for a coercive force that can impose a determined intentional action on somebody else, whereas *potentia* is the capacity to develop a habit as well as the basis on which the conditions of possibility for certain habits are created. With the channelling of *potentia*, we are dealing thus with an apparatus for capturing a flow of lives that have been stripped of any recognizable features: the fictional city of Santa Teresa, a place in which power mechanisms stop being merely restrictive and – without direct command – begin channelling the productive, albeit deadly, force of *potentia* in a “*detritorializing* apparatus of rule” (Hardt and Negri 2001: xii, emphasis in original; Braidotti 2013: 26).

In this harrowing twist to the posthumanist program and its ethics of becoming through the self-styling of the relational individual resides Bolaño's critique of the Enlightenment. Bolaño takes Reason and becoming to cruel extents, which can come to light, by examining the passage from a cosmopolitan to a convivial subject and its concomitance with a shift in the logics of domination from *potestas* to *potentia*. Conviviality provides the necessary analytical tools because it not only posits a leeway for perspectival shifts or, more precisely, for the “inconsistencies and multiplicities of getting by despite one's differences” (Heil 2020: 118); conviviality also advances an “alternative to ‘autonomy’: it points towards considering individuals through the meanings of their interrelatedness” (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014: 343). This “relational dependence” is seen in “The Part About the Critics”: how living together can alternatively unfold as a constant negotiation of differences in which consensus steers away from “questions of commonality, similarity or shared values and heritage”, that is, from axiological values and fundamental principles (Nowicka 2019: 22–23). Since there is not a predetermining framework, conviviality focuses on single interactions and on the negotiations that shape their agents whilst reaffirming the structures in which both agents and deeds

are embedded (Costa 2019: 16). By way of analogy, the depicted interactions in *2666* are accompanied by meta reflections highlighting that any representational device deploys an actualization grounded on an inherent tension between how the world could be and how it is. This almost indiscernible gap is what allows one to escape an argumentative circularity and is also what allows Bolaño's narratives to challenge necessity; his poetics advance counterfactuals and fantastic claims to question how schemas impinge on our understanding. Our mimetic endeavours can perpetuate an evil because, independently of what an author decides to narrate, any action has a potential to play out differently and, in this potential, lies the comprehension mode of literary imagination that, as we will see, not only enhances practical knowledge (Nussbaum 1995: 2–4) but can reveal a ruthless reality.

The following interpretation of *2666* focuses on the idea of a desire to live together and aims at unearthing Bolaño's metanarrative consideration on the subjectivities shaped by modernity and its agential frameworks. This paper is divided into three parts. The first section discusses the rise and dismantling of the cosmopolitan and autonomous subject in "The Part About the Critics". The following section focuses on Amalfitano and Oscar Fate, both of which reveal diverse approaches to a relational subjectivity. The last part delves into the fictional worlds in which the characters interactions take place and sheds light on the difference between *potestas* and *potentia*. This distinction is revealed by contrasting Hans Reiter's involvement in the Eastern Front of WWII with Santa Teresa as a chronotope that challenges realism and reveals how becomings are incorporated in globalized capitalism. This structure follows classic poetics in the sense that it reconstructs two types of *ethos*, connects *ethos* to the world it inhabits by indicating that a generic framework predefines *ethos* and world, and, lastly, delves into power mechanisms that establish diverse spatio-temporal configurations.

2. From Cosmopolitan Dinners to *Chilaquiles* for Breakfast

The opening story in *2666* is about four literary critics that read Archimboldi's novels in their youth and begin with "*deslumbramiento*" and "*admiración*" their "*peregrinaje*" (Bolaño 2004: 15). At this point – the first page of the novel – this pilgrimage is merely figurative but is the core of the plot and will become substantiated around twenty years later, in their expedition to find Archimboldi in Santa Teresa. This journey will take them from cosmopolitanism to discovering a convivial sensibility, that is, from being enthusiasts and students to becoming professors in the humanities, consolidating a research network, turning this network into a friendship, into romantic entanglements and, finally, into empathy. This is a journey in which the professional life overshadows the private, and, along the way, the four protagonists are propelled by a desire or perhaps only harbor a feeling that only if their young peers, "que pretendían, sin parar

mientes en los medios, imponer su particular lectura de Archimboldi, como misioneros dispuestos a imponer la fe en Dios aunque para ello fuera menester pactar con el diablo” (Bolaño 2004: 100), stopped acting as “*caníbales entusiastas y siempre hambrientos*” they would discover: “*rostros de treintañeros abotargados por el éxito, sus viajes que iban del hastío hasta la locura, sus balbuceos en clave que sólo decían una palabra: quiéreme, o tal vez una palabra y una frase: quiéreme, déjame quererte, pero que nadie, evidentemente, entendía*” (Bolaño 2004: 100). Their cosmopolitan aspirations are correlated to their need for recognition, for understanding each other, and for a community/cult of an author.

Cosmopolitanism establishes a common ground and is not only an intellectual stance; it requires a secured socio-economical position and a world in which the meritocracy is fed with utilitarianism and a disregard for friendship. Pelletier and Espinoza: “*ninguno de los dos creía en la amistad ni en la fidelidad. Creían en la pasión, creían en un híbrido de felicidad social o pública [...], creían en la posibilidad de la autorrealización*” (Bolaño 2004: 90). For this reason, they endeavor in their respective academic environments to gain cultural capital, build a career in academia, become cosmopolitan intellectuals. In short, they use all available means and a “*voluntad hecha carne, huesos y músculos [para] llegar a buen puerto, en fin, una imagen bastante normal de estudiante en la capital pero que obró [...] como una droga*” (Bolaño 2004: 17). Their cosmopolitanism hinges on a vantage point from which to act and think, because it presupposes a position for a social elite and, even though it is usually thought in terms of “socially less bounded interactions” and – as shown by Freitag’s study on the Ottoman empire – raises claims on a transnational universalism, it involves mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion (Freitag 2014: 386, 378). Espinoza realized this while he was a student and almost met Ernst Jünger, but “*este honor le fue denegado, como si los jungerianos simuladores no le consideraran con méritos suficientes*” (Bolaño 2004: 20). To gain access based on merit and gain a voice in the cultural world, Pelletier and Morini translated some of Archimboldi’s works and Espinoza wrote a dissertation on Archimboldi (Bolaño 2004: 18, 21, 216). All of them possessed an “iron will” (Bolaño 2004: 21), were able to secure a “good job and a considerable income”, and even gained some recognition from colleagues (Bolaño 2004: 21).

This position grants them the authority to veto or label some scientific work as something that “*parecía un trabajo de ratón de biblioteca, de subalterno de un subordinado[...], era bueno que la ola archimboldiana contara también con esa clase de fanáticos sin ideas*” (Bolaño 2004: 79-10)) The disdain with which they perform their gatekeeping duties lays the groundwork for their personal relationship and for their encounters in conferences (Bolaño 2004: 23). Their incursions in an international arena are governed by the same mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion applied first in the national terrain.

This means that they have overcome material constraints and various hurdles to reach, in Ulricke Freitag's words:

Kant's original notion of "cosmopolitanism" as a right to visit foreign places without danger to life or property, that is, a very pragmatic notion of "cosmopolitanism" [...]. Its use and these overtones are closely linked to the phase of globalization after 1990 and the notion of world citizenry beyond the borders of nation-states and political blocks, which had dominated the Cold War (Freitag 2014: 377).

The cosmopolitan subject is a product of the Enlightenment and has the right, unlike the faceless migrant flow, to a life free of violence and precarity and has complete confidence in their capacity to intellectually appropriate cultural artefacts around the globe. For this kind of cosmopolitanism, a positionality must be erased or dissolved because only an elite that assumes itself beyond spatio-temporal coordinates can count among the reasonable people that freely traverse the globe.

This presupposed lack of positionality together with its universal capacity to unpack cultural artefacts is challenged in the novel with subtleties revealing a cultural chauvinism. The literary critics conduct research adhering to a version of multiculturalism in which national and essentialist terms provide fixed positions from which discussions can take place (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014: 3; Gilroy 2006: 40). Espinoza from Spain compared Archimboldi to Unamuno, Morini from Italy wrote about teaching German literature in Italy, and Pelletier went to the nationalist extents of mixing two distinct geographical categories and gave an overview of the most important twentieth-century writers in France and Europe (Bolaño 2004: 25). This national, Westphalian, even Cold War framework is underscored by the bellicose language with which the Western experts on Archimboldi "attack" and "counterattack" in their discussions with their German counterparts (Bolaño 2004: 26). Even among scientific peers, international politics is at play. Bolaño's depiction of global academia hints at an ethnic global hierarchy (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014: 5; Gilroy 2006: 31) and to a clear cut distinction between *anthropos* and *humanitas* (Mignolo 2011: 93), that is, between highly regarded scholars and their dismissal of those doing the scientific work of a "*subalterno de un subordinado*" (Bolaño 2004: 23).

This hierarchy determines the circulation and filtering of culture as well as the pecuniary allocations for it. These mechanisms come at play in an international conference to which the critics attended and in which the panels dealing with contemporary literature in English had a bigger, boisterous audience. Their laughter and noise were not isolated due to fragile walls and the whole situation was perceived as if "*los ingleses se estuvieran burlando, cuando no boicoteando continuamente a los alemanes*" (Bolaño

2004: 32). Even though such remarks might seem exaggerated or paranoid, there are inequalities feeding such suspicions. The organizers,

que dejaron fuera la literatura contemporánea española o polaca o sueca por falta de tiempo o dinero, en un penúltimo capricho destinaron la mayor parte de los fondos a invitar a cuerpo de rey a estrellas de la literatura inglesa, y con el dinero que quedó trajeron a tres novelistas franceses, un poeta y un cuentista italiano, y tres escritores alemanes [...] que llegaron en tren a Ámsterdam y no levantaron ninguna protesta cuando fueron alojados en un hotel de sólo tres estrellas (Bolaño 2004: 33).

There are two points to unpack here. On the one hand, there is a stinging calculation in which famous – maybe two or three – authors from the English-speaking world are equivalent to three French novelists, two Italians and three German writers that belong to that margin in which the East is starting to become the West after the fall of the Berlin Wall: a succinct trickle-down narration. On the other, the literary critics are defined by their desire of reaching the same level of cultural interest, domination, or hegemony. In this conference, they also find out that Archimboldi transits a lesser literary world, an underworld transited by figures such as a “*promotor cultural en ayuntamientos periféricos*” (Bolaño 2004: 33). This comes as a shock and represents the critic’s first step into a marginal literary landscape populated by vagabond writers that put up a “*tenderete [de] libros autoeditados*” (Bolaño 2004: 34). This new social world undermines the critics’ belief in self-realization. It is at odds with their own practices of exclusion, which will accompany them to Santa Teresa and come to the surface when they refuse to give a lecture at the UNAM or COLMEX (Bolaño 2004: 145) and confess the intentions of their search: “Porque queremos convencerlo de que vuelva a Europa” (Bolaño 2004: 158), to a utopia, which, according to Foucault, is related to a “perfect form” and “unreal space”, so it is beyond the tensions between Northern, Southern, Latin, Central, Eastern, Slavic, Muslim-up-to the Bosphorus Europe, beyond spaces where crisis and deviation are contested and negotiated, beyond the “mirror” that serves as a “virtual point” through which we pass by mediating between an encompassing, albeit unreal, reflected image and our lived position (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986: 24–26).

In their imagination, Archimboldi cannot belong to Santa Teresa, because the greatness of this author is linked to the idea of the universal knowledge irradiated from a cosmopolitan center, a place supported by a global ethnic hierarchy, nationally compartmentalized identities, and inequalities overlooked by an economically secured position. Such an encounter is summed up in one of their dinners, when Pelletier visits Liz Norton in London:

la invitó a cenar en un restaurante de Hammersmith, que previamente le había recomendado un colega del departamento de ruso de la universidad, en donde comieron goulash y puré de garbanzos con remolacha y pescado macerado en limón con yogur, una cena con velas y violines, y rusos auténticos e irlandeses disfrazados de rusos, [...] que acompañaron con copas de vodka y una botella de vino de Burdeos (Bolaño 2004: 47–48).

The cosmopolitanism embodied by the critics is symbolized by the authenticity of cuisine together with its decorative staging, both of which must cut short its gaze into a global imaginary and disrupt their charade to allow drinking French wine, that is, a wine from the supposedly cultural centre for gourmandism. This multicultural world and its hierarchy is undermined by the image of a marginal Archimboldi, so now, even if they began as an alliance, “siempre imperturbable, sujeta a un destino mayor al que los cuatro obedecían aunque eso significara poner en segundo planos sus deseos personales” (Bolaño 2004: 32), the critics start to show a deeper interest in each other. The turning point in their development and friendship happened before this dinner or date, the first step into a couple’s intimacy. After hearing the story of the cultural promoter, the critics decided to pay a visit to Archimboldi’s editor and then realized that his oeuvre will not fulfil their desire to live together in a common world grounded on literature:

se dieron cuenta de que la búsqueda de Archimboldi no podría llenar jamás sus vidas. Podían leerlo, podían estudiarlo, podían desmenuzarlo, pero no podían morirse de risa con él ni deprimirse con él, en parte porque Archimboldi siempre estaba lejos, en parte porque su obra, a medida que uno se internaba en ella, devoraba a sus exploradores (Bolaño 2004: 47).

At this point, their desire has surpassed the ally-enemy utilitarian dichotomy (Ríos Baeza 2019: 25). They are now open to interpersonal encounters and to a politics of friendship that steers away from an Enlightened centre, from the position of a cosmopolitan elite, and moves them to journey into the margins (Ríos Baeza 2019: 30–31).

Before their pilgrimage, however, there is still a last, violent blow to their cosmopolitanism. Pelletier, Norton, and Espinoza become entangled in a love triangle, and a conflict ensues. The antagonism is resolved through a violence that seeks to reaffirm that they were “*seres civilizados, [...], que no eran dos brutos sumidos por la rutina y el trabajo regular y sedentario en la abyección, todo lo contrario*” (Bolaño 2004: 62). After proclaiming their virtuosity, in a scene—which provokes and plays with the readers’ expectations by blatantly relying on stereotypes and requiring a “robust suspension of disbelief” (Hoyos 2020: 2)—, the critics almost kicked the life out of a Pakistani taxi driver

who was vexed by their conversation about their free love and by their paternalizing remarks. This incident links an academic world with a global ethnic hierarchy as well as with a desire for cultural domination and violence; it “gives expression to the political unconscious of World Literature” (Hoyos 2020: 2) and announces the “systemic violence” irradiated from “Western hegemonic centres” towards Santa Teresa (Zavala 2015: 159). In the aftermath, Pelletier and Espinoza cannot avoid feeling like xenophobes. The situation seems for them as an inversion of the roles in their social imaginaries: “*por más que en su fuero íntimo estuvieran convencidos de que le verdadero derechista y misógino era el paquistaní, de que el violento era el paquistaní, de que el intolerante y mal educado era el paquistaní*” (Bolaño 2004: 110). With this experience, their desire stops feeding on cosmopolitanism. They no longer seek common ground in the work of Archimboldi, nor in an interpersonal encounter that turns a love relationship free of social constraints into violence. Their cosmopolitan desire resulted deeply solipsistic and coercive, inherently violent:

Una mezcla de sueño y deseo sexual [...]. Más bien, como si se estuvieran follando a sí mismos. Como si escarbaran en sí mismos. Con unas uñas largas y manos vacías. Pero ellos, en esa especie de sueño, escarbaban y escarbaban, desgajando tejidos y destrozando venas y dañando órganos vitales. ¿Qué buscaban? No lo sabían. Tampoco, a esas alturas, les interesaba (Bolaño 2004: 105).

Their desire is an empty husk. It lacks content but is a form striving to assert itself and perpetuate its framework, that is, the imaginary and biopolitics that, independently of how they play out or are organized, predefined their conferences and the fleeting encounter in a cab.

Pelletier’s and Espinoza’s longing for connecting is almost indistinguishable from their worldview, from the social configuration making it possible, and from their desire to be in the right. To unpack the symbolic intricacies here involved, we can follow Herlinghaus and think the experience of the critics in relation to a *pharmakon* with psychoactive properties, whose hallucinations can be shaped and guided by a placebo text informing and conjuring a reality/semblance (Herlinghaus 2011: 104). The critics “need, as exemplary academics, the “pharmakon” of a literary giant who always remains at a distance in order to fulfill their most basic needs and bodily desires, starting with their daily bread” (Herlinghaus 2011: 110). Archimboldi is their higher end that justifies their instrumentalizing practices (Herlinghaus 2011: 108), but they never care to incorporate

in their views Archimboldi's novels as a placebo text.⁴ Even though his oeuvre is merely hinted at in *2666*, we can speculate about their content: they must express the epiphany⁵ that led Hans Reiter to literature and that brought together inclusion/exclusion mechanisms, desire as a motor of the semblances occupying reality, and an empathy arising from shocking historical events and its presupposed necessity. However, at this point in the narrative, the critics are oblivious to such critique, nor do they see in their desire a thirst for domination or violent acts that became a ritual in which "self-perpetuating ecstasy", utilitarianism, a biopolitical global hierarchy, and their intimate wishes come together.⁶ Here, one should note that Morini and particularly Liz Norton steer away from this utilitarian *ethos*, and one could indeed claim that this encroaching desire is masculine. Characters such as Ingeborg, Rosa Amalfitano, Liz Norton, and the Baroness von Zumpe evince another kind of agency and subjectivity, whose analysis, notwithstanding, represents an independent research question and their type of agency might not necessarily fall within the scope of encroaching desires.

These desires occupy reality through semblance and so stand in for Bolaño's ruthless modernity. In the world depicted by Bolaño, it seems as if Blumenberg's notion of a secularizing *Selbstbehauptung* became unfettered and sceptical about its own reasons (Blumenberg 1966: 91, 113). This modernity is construed in formal terms as a totalizing perspective that can emerge instantly, making a clean break with the past and re-positing continuity between periods with the aid of dialectics (Jameson 2002: 65-66, 91); its ruthlessness resides in the suspicion that, despite Kant's efforts, ethics engrained in a formal scaffolding are faulty and even if "it is precisely this unauthorized self-affirmation that will finally shape the new thing we call actuality" (Jameson 2002: 25), let's not forget Bolaño's irony: actuality might be unavoidable but is not simply desirable.⁷

4 Here, I steer away from Herlinghaus's reading in which Archimboldi functions as pharmakon and placebo text (Herlinghaus 2011: 111), which is not consistent with the relationship between both elements: the pharmakon is the physiological trigger for hallucinations, whereas the placebo is what provides a framework and conditions for the finite set of forms that said hallucination might adopt. For this distinction between close reading and the cult of an author see, Zavala 2015: 156).

5 Secular epiphanies belong to a Joycean tradition and are considered immanent because they connect the world at large with biographical experiences and produce an individual sense (Andrews 2015).

6 I extrapolated here the elements that Herlinghaus (Herlinghaus 2011: 113) identified in the passage in which Amalfitano considers Boris Yeltsin as the last communist philosopher.

7 Bolaño has been cultivating this skepticism since *Nazi Literature in the Americas* (1996). This collection of texts tacitly argues that creating fictional biographies and genealogies with an encyclopedic sway is not necessarily correlated to any political or ethical orientation, so Bolaño's artistic intervention in history creates its own temporality (Manzoni 2005: 42).

At the end, as crude a caricature as the critics might seem and however instrumental their fictional lives might seem to prove a point, the author allows them to escape this aspirational and meritocratic purgatory. Norton, Espinoza, and Pelletier put their folly into perspective, venture into politics of hospitality (Ríos Baeza 2019: 21–25) and abandon the self-assurance and certainty of the global tourist. This romantic gesture and quest for the Self – in which formalized experience becomes superseded by the lived experience or *Erlebnis* of unknown landscapes – represents escapism doomed from the beginning (Yurgel 2018: 27): romantic defeatism that throws the critics into fantastical hyperrealism or maybe only into critical mimesis. In any case, the landscape, which sparked this shift from the cosmopolitanism to the embodiment of a relational mesh, is situated behind a city quite different from cosmopolitan London: Santa Teresa,

como toda ciudad, era inagotable. Si uno seguía avanzando, digamos, hacia el este, llegaba un momento en que los barrios de clase media se acababan y aparecían, como un reflejo de lo que sucedía en el oeste, los barrios miserables, que aquí se confundían con una orografía más accidentada: cerros, hondonadas, restos de antiguos ranchos, cauces de ríos secos que contribuían a evitar el agolpamiento. [...] [Y] más allá de la cerca contemplaron, bajándose esta vez del coche, el desierto de Arizona (Bolaño 2004: 171).

A cruel harmony is evoked by this endless landscape in which natural accidents are equated to lives on which injuries have been inflicted, *vidas accidentadas* that submit to the uneven landscape or uneven plans of progress. Modernization never stops in Santa Teresa:

Tuvieron la certeza de que la ciudad crecía a cada segundo. Vieron, en los extremos de Santa Teresa, bandadas de auras negras, vigilantes, caminando por potreros yermos, pájaros que aquí llamaban gallinazos, y también zopilotes, y que no eran sino buitres pequeños y carroñeros. [...] El cielo, al atardecer, parecía una flor carnívora (Bolaño 2004: 171–172).

More than an ominous threat, the clouds of black birds point to the death down below and merely express their habit to feed from the ever-growing city. They dive into the surface of the city, but the critics go deeper. By becoming submerged in this city, the critics get symbolically closer to Archimboldi:

Durante tres días vivieron como sumergidos en un mundo submarino. Buscaban en la tele las noticias más bizarras y peregrinas, releían las novelas de Archimboldi [...]. Por primera vez se sintieron, los tres, como hermanos o como soldados veteranos de una compañía de choque a quienes ya no les interesa la mayoría de cosas (Bolaño 2004: 172).

More than only reproducing the motif of a band of brothers, which in this case also includes Liz Norton, this fragment subtly creates a passage to Hans Reiter. Before becoming Archimboldi he experienced and perpetrated horrors in the war, lost all interest in life, and just lingered in a small town on the Dnieper called Kostekino (Bolaño 2004: 881). There he had the epiphany that shaped his worldview, which was always defined by his subaquatic way of seeing. Hans Reiter was a “seaweed boy” and diver (Bolaño 2004: 797) that sees reality distorted by underwater currents. His visions are painful. He has the sore red eyes of somebody who wishes to see the depths, even if this means opening his eyes and irritating them with prolonged exposure to saline water (Bolaño 2004: 799).⁸ This unnatural gaze is mirrored by the “weird” and “outlandish” news that affect the critic’s new perspective and their way to read Archimboldi. Their pilgrimage and story end in an unexpected, almost uncanny outcome, in “noticias peregrinas”.

This new convivial position focuses on “concrete acts and organization of the daily experience of ‘living together’” (Freitag 2014: 376). The critics previously moved against the backdrop of categories that denied inclusion, but now they can “unsettle them in order to bridge social and cultural boundaries” (Nowicka 2019: 17). This unsettling takes place in a nightmarish manner. It was triggered by the landscape, but required a rite of passage: “*Y sí, en efecto, asistieron a la barbacoa de borrego, y sus movimientos fueron medidos y discretos, como los de tres astronautas recién llegados a un planeta donde todo era incierto*” (Bolaño 2004: 172). Their new submarine and bizarre world debilitates their self-assurance, so: “*Aquella noche, tal vez por efecto de la barbacoa y de la bebida ingerida, los tres tuvieron pesadillas, que al despertar, aunque se esforzaron, no pudieron recordar*” (Bolaño 2004: 173). The dreams are the breaking point for the character’s development (Ríos Baeza 2019: 37): Pelletier carefully rereads Archimboldi, Espinoza seeks a meaningful relationship with a young woman from Santa Teresa, and Norton decides to move in with Morini. Their friendship now eclipses, according to Baeza, their penchant for cultural domination, self-assertion, as well as the friend/foe binarism that informed their relationships and worldview. (Ríos Baeza 2019: 25; Zavala 2015: 109). According to Zavala, Bolaño dramatized, for instance in the short stories “Detectives” and “Henri Simon Leprince”, a division of the political in friends or foes and thereby reminds us of Carl Schmitt’s political reflections, but this antagonism is disrupted by individual gestures of friendship and hospitality (Zavala 2015: 109, 117). The critics live a comparable disruption that tears the fabric of reality:

A partir de ese momento la realidad, para Pelletier y Espinoza, pareció rajarse como una escenografía de papel, y al caer dejó ver lo que había detrás: un

8 In a co-authored and forthcoming paper with Caio Yurgel (Estrada and Yurgel 2022), we examine the linkage between Hans Reiter’s subaquatic tendency and Bolaño’s poetics.

paisaje humeante [...]. Dejaron de levantarse temprano, dejaron de comer en el hotel, entre los turistas norteamericanos, y se trasladaron al centro de la ciudad, optando por los locales oscuros para el desayuno (cerveza y chilaquiles picantes) (Bolaño 2004: 179).

They even accepted to give talks in the local university and discovered, almost moved to tears, that: *“La cultura, pese a las desapariciones y a la culpa, seguía viva, en permanente transformación”* (Bolaño 2004: 180). At the end of their pilgrimage, the critics reduce the distance to one another and to Archimboldi. They are – as cloying as it might sound – here and now: *“Archimboldi está aquí – dijo Pelletier –, y esto es lo más cerca que jamás estaremos de él”* (Bolaño 2004: 207). In this manner, the novel bids farewell to the cosmopolitan subject, to its reality as semblance and desire, to its illusionary landscapes, to a *“paisaje enorme de la frontera, pintado, eso se adivinaba en el acto, por un artista que no había estado nunca allí: la industrioidad del paisaje y su armonía revelaban más un deseo que una realidad”* (Bolaño 2004: 199). Desires overstep boundaries to become an illusion and an occupying force of reality that imposes categorizations. Desires are violent and moved the self-sufficient critics not only to dominate, but to annihilate anybody different as a means of self-affirmation (Nitschack 2008: 536, 540). This totalizing endeavor is now countervailed with an alternative *“estructura deseante”* (Nitschack 2008: 534), which allows them to escape the inherent violence in their cosmopolitanism and its mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. The critics, however, do not start a new life. At some point their new culinary immersion stops: *“ya basta de alcohol y comidas que me están destrozando el estómago. Quiero enterarme de qué está pasando aquí”* (Bolaño 2004: 181). Indigestion kindled a new way to approach the Other and defines their return to Europe and new hesitant ethical stance that Pelletier voices: *“Qué es lo razonable?, pensó. Lo más razonable es volver y diferir en lo posible cualquier conclusión”* (Bolaño 2004: 184). In this journey back, the cosmopolitan subject will continue to be disassembled in order to differ ontotheological judgments.

3. Amalfitano’s Negated Community and Fate’s Historical Burden

In the parts of Amalfitano and Fate, Bolaño continues dismantling cosmopolitanism and shift towards depicting a relational *ethos*, by advancing the ideas of a negated community and the mourning of history. Amalfitano is an exile that fled from Pinochet’s dictatorship and represents an eternal outcast. He is characterized as somebody who constantly feels out of place, always contemplating a place to which he does not belong. Oscar Fate, on the other hand, is an investigative reporter dealing with the aftermath of the social movements of the African-American community that took place around the 1960s in the USA. Neither of them is essentially defined by ethnicity nor by the idea of

a nation or social position; they are not hegemonic subjects but experience history and their identity simultaneously (Nitschack 2008: 535; Zavala 2015: 52). They negotiate their involvement in history by applying the scepticism of “reasonable people”. They constantly question actuality and deal with history as if they were negotiating differences in real-time (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014: 5; Gilroy 2006: 40). Both characters pertain to a convivial framework because they mimetically reproduce their grappling with history and society. For this reason, more than individuals crossing paths accidentally, their stories affect reciprocally the sense we make of them. They are the walls in a house of mirrors because “Bolaño creates multiple traps and fallacies to obfuscate his central puzzles all the better, in a multitude of signs and hints. This constant searching resembles a desire, a particular ‘pleasure for the text’” (Klengel 2019b: 136). And part of this pleasure is unravelling the diverse forms that the desire to live together adopted in the twentieth century.

Oscar Fate, for instance, is constantly negotiating with his past and appropriating it in order to steer his actions in the present. He grapples with history, and, similarly to Archimboldi, his experience of history is expressed with subaquatic metaphors. Fate’s story is a submarine passageway, but, unlike the critics, his journey begins in the submarine world: “*¿Cuándo empezó todo?, pensó ¿En qué momento me sumergí? Un oscuro lago azteca vagamente familiar. La pesadilla. ¿Cómo salir de aquí? ¿Cómo controlar la situación?*” (Bolaño 2004: 295). Fate lost track of the chain of events and cannot fully understand how his work as an investigative reporter took him from New York to Detroit and then to cover a boxing match in Santa Teresa as a substitute for a recently deceased colleague. However, despite his confusion, he identifies a parallel or surroundings that seem familiar. Santa Teresa is held together by the promises of progress and modernization, by exploitation, marginalization, and economical migration from southern Mexico and Central America, so it resembles Detroit before the decline of the automotive industry. The only difference or element needed by the burgeoning city of Santa Teresa to reach Detroit’s fate is: “*–Tiempo – dijo Chucho Flores –. Falta el jodido tiempo. ¿Tiempo para qué?, pensó Fate. ¿Tiempo para que esa mierda, a mitad de camino entre un cementerio olvidado y un basurero, se convierta en una especie de Detroit?*” (Bolaño 2004: 362).

In order to find the missing time, to get out, or even to control the situation, Fate must dive into history. His desire of living together is a desire of learning to live with the past and in the aftermath. His immersion in history has a crucial affective component because even before starting his journey to Mexico and reminiscing, Fate must mourn a personal loss. His story begins with an Aztec lake and confusion, but suddenly there is a flashback that takes the readers to a phone call informing Fate, without indicating cause or time, that his mother has died (Bolaño 2004: 295). This feeling of

irretrievable loss accompanies his journey and work as an investigative journalist. This mourning even contrasts, as rightly pointed out by a black man in a bar in Detroit, with the name of the periodical he works in, *Amanecer Negro*: “Personalmente ya estoy harto de tantos amaneceres [...], me gustaría que de vez en cuando los hermanos de Nueva York hicieran algo con el atardecer, que es la mejor hora, al menos en este jodido barrio” (Bolaño 2004: 308). Fate is also mourning history and deals with the dwindling ideologies upholding the new, like a new dawn, a new man, or new times, all of which have become trite expressions. Ideas that have withered and make space for a new political panorama. Among his investigative work, there is a piece about the last member of the communist party in Brooklyn (Bolaño 2004: 326), about a group called “*La Hermandad de Mahoma*” that marched through New York after 9/11 with a photo of Osama Bin Laden (Bolaño 2004: 368), and he even tried to convince his editor to finance his investigation on Santa Teresa to show “*la estupidez – dijo Fate –. La variedad interminable de formas con que nos destruimos a nosotros mismos*” (Bolaño 2004: 372). But his editor chides him about his project: “*Eso véndelo a una revista de filosofía, a una revista de antropología urbana, escribe, si quieres, un jodido guión para el cine y que lo filme el jodido Spike Lee, pero yo no lo pienso publicar*” (Bolaño 2004: 372). Indeed, Fate has a bleak and generalizing opinion about the past evils returning, but there is something positive to extract from one of his stories, a culinary experience similar to the critics encounter with Mexican food.

In Detroit, Fate listens to a speech by Barry Seaman, a character based on Bobby Seale, one of the founders of the Black Panther Party. In his remarks, Barry Seaman seems to digress and then speaks about his experience after getting out of prison. He got out into a strange world:

sin futuro posible, porque lo que sabíamos hacer lo habíamos olvidado durante los largos años de carel y dentro de la cárcel nada habíamos aprendido, a no ser la crueldad de los carceleros y el sadismo de algunos reclusos (Bolaño 2004: 318).

For Barry Seaman, the only way to recover his life and the only memory that lingers beyond ideology was culinary culture as an expression of everyday life. He remembered all the recipes for pork chops he encountered in his life (Bolaño 2004: 319), wrote a book, and acquired enough cultural capital to start giving conferences, travel, and perhaps join the circuit of the lesser poets and cultural promoters of town halls. This book about pork chops, which is based in a similar book by Bobby Seale, serves Bolaño to ground once again – like Pelletier’s and Espinoza’s acquired taste for chilaquiles – hospitality and empathy on the stomach, the venter, the visceral, or the bodily, which allow for universal claims that are quite different from the abstraction of an all-encompassing desire; this materialism is bound to fail but has a corporal common denominator, such

as the stomach or – as Hoyos argues – the anus that “conjures both pleasure and pain, let alone compassion and community” (Hoyos 2020: 4).

The bodily is the tacit fundament, but its openness is just the point of departure for the relational subject. Fate is a historically shaped subject, and his desire to live together with others is relational in the sense that the only way for him to acquire autonomy is by mourning the past and belonging to a collective; his critical autonomy is achieved when the moral gaze is directed to the other (Overing and Passes 2000: 1–2) and History stops being regarded as a coercive force or burden. Conviviality is a thin line that Fate and the characters in *2666* sometimes tread on, when they undertake a fruitless but critical engagement with difference and stop perpetuating stereotypes and racial hierarchies, or even behaving in that other convivial manner, that is, “festive, intensive, inebriated” and, in this case, semblance (Overing and Passes 2000: 14). This alternative meaning for the convivial appears in Fate’s journeys through Santa Teresa’s nightlife. In the city, he gets acquainted with men that explain racist comments and violence thusly: “*Lo único que sucede es que en ocasiones, para matar el tiempo, jugamos a ser canallas. Pero no lo hacemos en serio*” (Bolaño 2004: 367). Everything is done for the sake of appearances, for a “cruel modernity” that can only be consolidated when a band of brothers tighten their community and show loyalty to a regime through a massacre (Franco 2013: 11). Their festivities have deadly consequences and take a violent turn when semblance conspires with a desire to live together and becomes domination.

Fate’s is a tale about conviviality as mourning and a continuous negotiation with ideologies, social movements, and the diverse modes to destroy ourselves. By mourning the history of those around him, Oscar Fate acquired the sensibility needed to recognize the evils and exploitation in Santa Teresa. His gaze, constantly directed to the other, allowed him to steer away from a feeling of community coupled with an exclusion mechanism based on identity claims. Instead, his convivial engagement grounds a certain solidarity. After being confronted with violence that repeats itself through times and through bodies in diverse manners to pursue modernization, Fate reacts by making a “horizontal” ethic-political alliance, considers his political, economic, and cultural coordinates, and crosses the border northwards with Rosa Amalfitano (Zavala 2015: 152–154). With his action and decision Fate tacitly rejects a “logic of ethnic absolutism” and shows how a “degree of differentiation can be combined with a large measure of overlapping” (Gilroy 2006: 40). He adopted a convivial framework, so history, his biography, and individual emotional development might not acquire total harmony but at least come together in an act that is meaningful but in the grand scheme of things ineffectual.

Fate engages with his world in a manner that might remind us of Roberto Arlt's *El juguete rabioso* (1926) and its "aggressive and coercive conviviality" (Chicote 2021: 3), in which the individual psychology, social and cultural representations are played out in the public space. In Fate's case, the coercive conviviality plays out in his journey through North America and Santa Teresa's nightlife, in the fitful spasm that his imagination undertakes not to drown amid dispossession and inequalities that past ideologies could not thoroughly address. Fate regards from the detached distance the imaginaries populating his world and, in this manner, he can decide with which image of the world he wishes to engage.

Amalfitano, on the other hand, seems aware that each interaction is a negotiation in which personal, structural and representational layers are simultaneously at play, but he does not carry the burden of history, nor feels that he belongs to a community and must play a role imposed by destiny: he has another kind of fate. He is the eternal outcast, a philosophy professor that moved from Barcelona to Santa Teresa, and his story focuses on his character as an exile and how he discovers the unsettling normalcy governing Santa Teresa. Amalfitano contemplates and stagnates in his musings. This means that the "convivial disintegration" that Fate experienced by focusing on the processuality of his engagement with stories and History and by "trying to position [him]self within them" and within this "mutually interdependent questioning and reconfirmation of power" (Heil 2020: 126, 171), has another effect on Amalfitano: a negated conviviality.

Amalfitano is a Chilean exile for whom the ideas of belonging and community are linked to nationalism and to polarizing politics and persecution. His ethical stance is also relating to his personal life and the story about Lola. She left him and their daughter probably around the 1970s or the early 1980s to become a devoted follower of a poet who she and her friends thought was "*un iluminado, un extraterrestre, un enviado de Dios*" (Bolaño 2004: 213). Lola's narrative line introduces the social phenomenon and imaginary of cults and sects, which sometimes are demonized alternative ways of life or can also reveal the excessive devotion of a personality that lead to physical and emotional abuse and violence. Due to these past experiences, Amalfitano became an outcast. He might be a professor in philosophy at a university with leisure time "*para dedicarlo al cultivo de un jardín*", with "*una verja de madera que necesitaba una mano de pintura*", and "*un sueldo mensual*" (Bolaño 2004: 211). However, Amalfitano is far from being a cosmopolitan, far from feeling safe, and far from using his culture for a witty exchange between intellectuals. He is filled with anxiety and with a grounded fear for his daughter's physical well-being in Santa Teresa because Rosa is a potential victim. On one occasion:

Amalfitano llamó a la profesora Pérez y le confesó que sus nervios estaban cada vez más alterados. La profesora Pérez lo tranquilizó, le dijo que no tenía que

preocuparse en exceso, con tomar algunas precauciones bastaba, no se trataba de volverse paranoico, le recordó que las víctimas solían ser secuestradas en otras zonas de la ciudad. Amalfitano la oyó hablar y de improviso se rio. Le dijo que tenía los nervios de puntapiés. La profesora Pérez no capto el chiste. En este lugar, pensó Amalfitano con rabia, nadie capta nada (Bolaño 2004: 255).

More than showing Amalfitano's social awkwardness, this scene combines a paranoid tendency with an obscure eloquence. Both traits point at a Hamletian ascendancy or, in other words, a decision "to put an antic disposition on" (Shakespeare 2006: 225). Amalfitano's worldview is a riddle. We don't know whether he is pretending not to be anchored in reality or his behaviour is just an illusion. Not even he knows his own motives or why he moved to Santa Teresa: "*¿Realmente no lo sabes?, se preguntó. Verdaderamente no lo sé, se dijo a sí mismo, y no pudo ser más elocuente*" (Bolaño 2004: 211). The connection between his solipsistic eloquence and Hamlet is corroborated by a voice that haunts him: "*¿De verdad eres el fantasma de mi abuelo? Mira con lo que me sales, dijo la voz. Por supuesto que no, soy el espíritu de tu padre y no te olvidaré jamás*" (Bolaño 2004: 269). This spirit not only reminds us of Hamlet but seems like a Joycean intertext that leads us to the stream of consciousness.⁹ In the character of Amalfitano, Bolaño merges a melancholic and contemplative personality with the elements from the psycho-narration of the English literary tradition to delve into paranoia and forebodings. But more than representing the narrative renderings of a theory of mind and *ethos*, Amalfitano is not an enigma but a prism deflecting his environment. Amalfitano experiments a seemingly "psychotic reaction" to a postapocalyptic environment, a history of severed lifepaths and an everyday exposure to violence. For this reason, his convivial experience – in the sense of a real time negotiation of difference – results in "conceptual experimentation" or cognitive dissonance (Baldraia 2020: 1, 4).

This derealization is foregrounded in a scene in which Amalfitano sees in hostile architecture a community that wishes to threaten everybody, and his contemplative nature reacts to such hostility by disassembling these iconic threats to turn them into ornaments. This transformation begins when Amalfitano, remembering a *ready-made* from Duchamp (245), "*se [le] ocurrió [...] dejar un libro de geometría colgado a la intemperie para ver si aprende cuatro cosas de la vida real*" (Bolaño 2004: 251). This experiment not only confronts an "*ordenada discusión sobre los fundamentos de la Geometría*" (Bolaño 2004: 240) to the battering of nature; the conflict between the axioms of consistent theories and the experiments that aim at repetition by controlling

9 The voice first introduced itself as his grandfather, which reminds us of Stephen Dedalus in Ulysses, who playfully "proves by algebra that Hamlet's grandson is Shakespeare's grandfather and that he himself is the ghost of his own father" (Joyce [1922] 1997: 29).

and registering the starting conditions is just the tip of the iceberg. This experiment is broader than pitting against each other the laws of nature and the laws of thought. Actually, it is “*ningún experimento, en el sentido literal de la palabra, dijo Amalfitano [...]*” (Bolaño 2004: 251), or we could say it serves many functions. It is a contrast for Santa Teresa, a beacon of Enlightened hope and even part of a social experiment. It elicits diverse reactions in people around Amalfitano. Rosa, for instance, asks his father why he left that book there and tells him to take it down: “*los vecinos van a creer que estás loco. ¿Los vecinos, los que ponen trozos de vidrio encima de las tapias?*” (Bolaño 2004: 251). This experiment is how Amalfitano acts out his antic disposition and is not only a riddle about behaviour, but a statement about his social environment, his wish to shape it and transform it through hallucinations and a poetic and paranoid glance. At some point, the voice in his head tells him:

Te ruego que te tranquilices. Te ruego que no te tomes esto como una intromisión en tu libertad. ¿En mi libertad?, pensó Amalfitano sorprendido mientras de un salto llegaba hasta la ventana y la abría y contemplaba un lado de su jardín y el muro o la barda erizada de vidrios de la casa vecina, y los reflejos que la luz de las farolas extraían de los fragmentos de botellas rotas, reflejos muy tenues de colores verdes y marrones y anaranjados, como si la barda en aquellas horas de la noche dejara de ser una barda defensiva y se convirtiera o jugara a convertirse en una barda decorativa, elemento minúsculo de una coreografía que ni el aparente coreógrafo, el señor feudal de la casa vecina, era capaz de discernir ni siquiera en sus partes más elementales, aquellas que afectaban a la estabilidad, al color, a la disposición ofensiva o defensiva de su artefacto. O como si sobre la barda estuviera creciendo una enredadera, pensó Amalfitano antes de cerrar la ventana (Bolaño 2004: 259).

The auditory hallucination explains that reality is not so harsh and entreats him to transform the aggressiveness of the shards. Instead of seeing a limit to his freedom or a deterrent to climbing and contacting his neighbors, he should perceive a decorative artefact. In every edge there is nothing more than an ornament, i.e., lights growing a new life. This means that Amalfitano contemplates from the distance almost with the gaze of a dandy, who sees in good and evil just segments of the same drama, just ornaments. This is an example of the “ornamental aesthetics” that, according to Klengel, Bolaño appropriated from Ernst Jünger and integrated into his worlds and narrative structures (Klengel 2019a: 39–41). The dandy’s distance, however, is not purely cold in Amalfitano’s case. This character adds a layer of melancholia and empathy to the use of the ornamental in Bolaño’s poetics. More than indifferent examination, Amalfitano contemplates and, filled with empathy, asks whether the world is necessarily cruel.

This challenge to the given is performed through a psychotic reaction that must not be confused with escapism.

By hallucinating, not fearing his derealizations and refusing to accept a state of nature as a war of all against all, Amalfitano exploits his poetical capacity and raise contrafactual claims that challenge necessity and History. He can thus realize his dream about:

algo que Amalfitano no entendía y que la voz de su sueño llamaba “historia descompuesta” o “historia desarmada y vuelta a armar”, aunque evidentemente la historia vuelta a armar se convertía en otra cosa, en un comentario al margen, en una nota sesuda, en una carcajada que tardaba en apagarse y saltaba de una roca andesita a una riolita y luego a una toba, y de ese conjunto de rocas prehistóricas surgía una especie de azogue, el espejo americano, decía la voz, el triste espejo americano de la riqueza y la pobreza y de las continuas metamorfosis inútiles (Bolaño 2004: 264).

In view of an ever changing, ruthless world, the experiment provides Amalfitano a compass, a cornerstone that might be far from reality, but its has a constructive function for the moments he arrives at home:

no había luz pero la sombra del libro de Dieste que colgaba del tendedero era más clara, más fija, más razonable, pensó Amalfitano, que todo lo que había visto en el extrarradio de Santa Teresa y en la misma ciudad, imágenes sin asidero, imágenes que contenían en sí toda la orfandad del mundo, fragmentos, fragmentos (Bolaño 2004: 265).

Extending in the desert like the shards that his neighbours glued on top of their walls presupposing an attack from their surroundings: those are the fragmentary images brewed in de-realizing contemplation. His constant feeling of being out of place is triggered by a space configuration and by interiorizing the neighbours' controlling gaze that acts as an informal control mechanism (Segura 2019: 8–9). This feeling becomes productive when it thrust his reflections on space as a multifaceted place for conviviality: geometry is a soothing, reasonable construct, and its conflict with nature is just a stepping stone to think about time, history, and a society ridden with a mechanism for domination and violent practices of inclusion and exclusion. This narrative argumentative line hinges on Amalfitano's contemplative nature and his position as an outcast, which allowed him to de-realize his relation to the real and experience a “dysfunctional cognitive model” (Baldráia 2020: 16) that will end up revealing Santa Teresa as a non-localizable space. Despite the referential grounding on Ciudad Juarez, Santa Teresa is a photographic negative that becomes alive and deployed with the forensic excerpts of “The Part About the Crimes”. Each death implies

a life that negotiated her movements between the shards of Santa Teresa and a globe for which Santa Teresa serves as an apparatus for the capture of migration flows.

4. *Hic Et Nunc: From WWII's Eastern Front to Santa Teresa*

The critics traded their cosmopolitanism for an empathy grounded in the here and now. This personal insight seems quite trivial in relation to discovering in Santa Teresa the desire of living together at its cruelest: “¿Cómo es el infierno?”, inquires Bolaño, “[c]omo Ciudad Juárez que es nuestra maldición y nuestro espejo, el espejo desasosegado de nuestras frustraciones y de nuestra infame interpretación de la libertad y de nuestros deseos” (Bolaño 2004: 235). Santa Teresa is the contrived trap for desires and becoming. It presents another way of command that is apposite to the relational subject because, instead of shaping a transcendental subject by means of inclusion and exclusion, Santa Teresa captures the potential of the relational subject and provides a matrix for its encounters. This does not mean that there is no exclusion at play, but only that Bolaño aims at exploring a shift that is concomitant with the passage from a cosmopolitan to a convivial-relational subjectivity and leads from the domination grounded on *potestas* to the harnessing of *potentia*.

Potestas and *potentia* are closely related. *Potestas* as right to command has a covenantal ground and juridical structure that is transferred to a sovereign or can be gained by submitting with violence, dominating individuals, harnessing their *potentia* (Field 2020: 61–63). *Potestas* sees in *potentia* identifiable units, to sum up, and is colonial. It expands frontiers, instantiates categories and declares the rules at work in a space (Hardt and Negri 2001: 60). Either with founding violence or contractually, *Potestas* gains authority in the sense of a “metajuridical” element that either suspends or activates the rule of law (Agamben 2005: 79, 85), so it is the occupying force that desires fill with the promises of the Enlightenment, namely, with the “teleologically ordained, rational progress” devised by the “faith in the unique, self-regulating and intrinsically moral powers of human reason” (Braidotti 2013: 13). *Potentia*, on the other hand, is a configuration in which the multitude is integrated by shaping subjectivities through biopolitics (Hardt and Negri 2001: 60).

In 2666, the shift from *potestas* to *potentia* as the main operator in a logic of domination is first hinted at by the former FBI agent who was consulted during the murder investigations and claims that in the past: “La mayoría de los seres humanos estaban en los extramuros de la sociedad” (Baldría 2020: 338), so nobody, says Kessler, would dwell on the considerable percentage of black people that died at seas in the slave trade ships, but if a southern “hacendado” went haywire and killed his neighbors and wife, Virginia’s society lived terrorized, because “lo que a ellos les sucediera

ere escribible, era legible” (Baldraia 2020: 339). Inclusion and exclusion are crucial elements that make the world readable and allows us to counter its contingency, so both were constitutive elements in epistemic and representational frameworks, but Bolaño’s scepticism puts such frameworks under metanarrative scrutiny and advances a “radical contingency” (Loy 2019: 334-335, 397). The past categorizations that made a body readable as well as delimit society are blurred in a city that, like Santa Teresa, is encroaching over a limitless surface. In Santa Teresa, there are other mechanisms at play because: “*esa sociedad está fuera de la sociedad, todos, absolutamente todos son como los antiguos cristianos en el circo*” (Bolaño 2004: 339). Everybody is attracted and managed independently of features and categorizations, so ethnic or gender components of murder victims are engrained and historically handed down in a managerial approach to the forces of life, an approach in which there is not a direct application of declared categorizations. But the fact that *potentia* expands through surfaces does not mean that the walled-in society of the past remained inside. *Potestas* has a colonialist impetus.

The distinction between *potestas* and *potentia* is developed in the novel by using the life of Hans Reiter as a notional hinge to oppose and compare Santa Teresa to WWII’s Eastern Front.¹⁰ On the one side, we read about Reiter as a young soldier of the Wehrmacht in the East Front campaign, with its scorched earth strategy and the ethnic cleansing of the *Generalplan Ost (875)*. On the other, we learn that, after becoming a writer in post-war Germany, Reiter travelled to Mexico in his old age to help his estranged sister and his nephew, Klaus Haas, accused of killing women in Santa Teresa. This itinerary is far from being a mere historical accident or a plot concocted by a wild narrative imagination and makes a symbolic point by adding further elements in a notional constellation. These historically anchored spaces reflect different logics of domination. Both are spaces contended for and in the process of being redefined. The indeterminateness at its core indicates that, for Bolaño, modernity does not emerge from the philosophical discourses irradiated by a centre with a strong cultural industry and material conditions that facilitate an intellectual’s reflections. This modernity is defined by constant negotiation and ever-encroaching margins (Zavala 2015: 151). In pinpointing this ruthless negotiation resides Bolaño’s critique of the Enlightenment, of Reason and its expanding borders that create a space for a cruel imagination, a domain in which a desire to shape a world can forcefully apply categories and generalizations. Modernity emerges when desires to live together envelop and localize a space or when they manage and channel *potentia*. For this reason, Hans Reiter mistrusts desires,

¹⁰ The life path of Hans Reiter is a chronotope and as such its “temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from one another, and always coloured by emotions and values” (Bakhtin [1975] 1981: 243). In other words, a path’s progression and a life following a straight-utopic-reasonable line are poetically connected to the Bildungsroman.

and this mindfulness or prudence represents a challenge to the Enlightenment that is articulated via a challenge to the *Bildungsroman*.

Hans Reiter mistrusts the inner development achieved by mediating between intimate longings and society, so contrary to the *Bildungsroman*'s tenets, he does not come up with strategies that would allow him to claim some agency and rationally find his place in a world by mediating desires with contingency and societal constraints (Althaus 2003: 1-10, 49-52; Küpper 2017: 200). Instead, Hans Reiter is certain that representations only convey how people "confuses reality with [their] wishes", because they "impose their desires to reality", like a hunter (Bolaño 2004: 893, own translation) – explains a narrative digression – who had lost his sexual organs and once a week "*se iba al bosque a buscar su pene y sus testículos*" (Bolaño 2004: 895). The hunter always came back empty handed, but if he were to stop lingering in the forest, he would immediately age and stagnate, so this "*hombre sin atributos*" continued feeding his desire, and thanks to his assiduousness or stubbornness managed to marry, had kids: "*había logrado imponer su deseo a la realidad, que, a su manera, había transformado su entorno, la aldea, a los aldeanos, el bosque, la nieve, el pene y los testículos perdidos*" (Bolaño 2004: 895). Such a melancholic and Faustian nature has filled the gaps of a not so symbolic castration to gain the ability to abstract, control the master signifier, constitute reality (Žižek 2004: 83). The hunter's habits, which were blindly or impotently pursued, project a rhythm that substantiates the pace and laws governing the environment and social relations. By doing so, he connects desires to the virtual, as if "actual reality is the real filtered through the virtual (Žižek 2004: 84). This idea of authority achieved through symbolic castration and residing in the mediation of the *Bildungsroman* as well as in a master signifier defined by a will to act according to the deliberations of a self-asserting reason is challenged by Reiter. His critique is articulated in the conviction that:

La apariencia era una fuerza de ocupación de la realidad, se dijo, incluso de la realidad más extrema y limítrofe. Vivía en las almas de la gente y también en sus gestos, en la voluntad y en el dolor, en la forma en que uno ordena los recuerdos y en la forma en que uno ordena las prioridades. La apariencia proliferaba en los salones de los industriales y en el hampa. Dictaba normas, se revolvía contra sus propias normas (en revueltas que podían ser sangrientas, pero que no por eso dejaban de ser aparentes), dictaba nuevas normas (Bolaño 2004: 926).

This mistrust of semblances – in the sense of a reality ridden with generalizing desires for domination – means that Hans Reiter renounced any claim on an inner development that could allow him to configure his own semblance. He eschews goals and cannot find a way to mediate his wishes with a cruel world. Notwithstanding, his

story still advances a solution to tackle modernity or, better said, an ethical stance that is linked to the “epiphany” that allowed him to articulate his mistrust of semblances and desires for domination. Epiphanies are a recurrent poetical feature in Bolaño’s works, and even though an epiphany might change a character, it remains ineffectual in the great scheme of things, it serves in Bolaño’s narratives to glimpse at the negativity or voidness of the instant (Andrews 2015: 29). Their immanence expresses a certain scepticism that Bolaño turns into mourning as an ethical imperative imposed by the face of the faceless. Reiter’s distrust of semblance is only the abstract articulation of the empathy kindled in him by the story of Ansky, who was a Jewish boy that arrived late at the October Revolution, became a ghost writer in Soviet Russia, and, before probably being killed by Reiter or by the *Einsatzgruppe C* (Bolaño 2004: 928), left his story hiding in his home., Ansky’s favorite author Alfred Döblin is central to understand how the “Part About Archimboldi” challenges the *Bildungsroman*. Although Bolaño’s novel and the book of Ansky only mention Döblin’s “early works” (Bolaño 2004: 897, 1002, 1022), it is probable that, in *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun* (1916), Reiter found thanks to Ansky the Taoist idea of “nicht Widerstreben” (Döblin [1916] 2007: 81), that is, not resisting as the only means to counter destiny, necessity, and navigate the currents of history and time without imposing a cruel modernity.

Not resisting history represents an attempt to avoid occupying reality, and it leads us directly to two manners of command and their respective spatial designs. On the one hand, the campaign in the Eastern Front illustrates a violent reconfiguration of a living space through the genocidal application of categories at their frontiers. In the occupation and its “semblance” or desire not-live together, we can see the “the exclusion of everything that is other” (Mbembe 2001: 192) or a gratuitous act of limitless subjectivity in which the Self can only find itself in the mirrors of annihilation (Mbembe 2001: 189). In this respect, the aesthetics of annihilation provides the representational means to express a lack of faith in a Reason that cannot expurgate evil and violence, both of which will repeat themselves in diverse historical forms (Cáceres 2010: 48–50).

In Santa Teresa, on the other hand, we find biopolitics and geopolitics entangled in the management of death. We are confronted with a literary artefact that brings the semantic repetition implied in a concept or categorization to a representational limit. Santa Teresa is made up of the hundreds of narrated femicides together with the conditions that made them possible, and its commandment does not hinge on a Self that imposes its dominion, but it is rather a “discontinuous form of sovereignty” that exercises its power over fluid subjectivities; it extracts their labor and brings to realization what was virtually or potentially enclosed in their life (Hardt and Negri 2001: 39). In this process, imagination and the imaginaries that populate it play a crucial role. Imagination provides a content for desires. Despite its lack of material substratum or

capacity to cause, imagination is the subtle body of ideas with palpable consequences conveyed by “visions” and “figurations”. Imagination represents: “*el impuesto que dizque había que pagar por vivir en una sociedad moderna*” (Bolaño 2004: 713). Even if these imaginary contents fail to lay the groundwork for generalizations as well as for an enclosed and systematized framework like in the Eastern Front, imagination still propels semblance and shapes space in Santa Teresa.

This inherent relationship between imagination and desire makes Santa Teresa a fictional contraption defined by interactions rendered in a mediatized or highly codified way. “Santa Teresa” stands in thus for the illusion of a proper noun. Its name juggles with the fictional pact of realism and with the ideas of localizable space and reference. This city might hint at an extratextual reality and direct our gaze to Ciudad Juarez and true events, but Santa Teresa is projected through the interactions reconstructed by looking at corpses. With descriptions that combine a medical, detective and ironical gaze, the narrator outlines a convivial space with structures determining when and who can transit certain spaces as well as what outcome their movements have (Segura 2019).

Notwithstanding the centrality of this spatial dimension, the focus must be laid on the deadly encounters that project such configurations because, as Peláez explains, the mere focus on the societal structures would render misogynistic violence as an effect of neoliberalism and would thus disregard the aporia at which the forensic iterations hint: their repetition implies the singularity of the deaths and reveal the infrapolitical plane in which they have been placed by a society that fails to identify these deadly encounters; the femicides merge private and collective accountability; open up a space unthematized by sociality and its institutions; show the limits of testimony as a tool for visibility because language reifies and can hide the singular with a representational framework that leads to the repetition of the same (Pelaez 2014). With this ironic approach to forensic prose, Bolaño designs a textual artefact that advances, like in the *Savage Detectives* (1996), a “fleeting and deceptive centre” or “always escaping event”, for which death represents the limit of experiences and limited experience: a contentless centre (Espinosa 2017: 385).

Santa Teresa is thus the umbrella term for an event posited indirectly, so it is a spectral city and the product of forensic reality. Its narrative rendering is an “active reiteration” that crystallizes conditions of possibility, projects the same fatal outcome, and produces a reified absence or “lamentation of nothing to find”; corpses are turned into a site of “excavation”, and the knowledge extracted is channelled by the bias engrained in a factual, testimonial, or even objective framing (MacCormack 2009: 73–76). To counter the objectiveness of excavation, the femicides are posited as compositional principles and measures of time and space.

In “The Part About the Crimes”, cohesion is not granted by a main character or narrative line. It begins with a first corpse found in January 1993, which is the first femicide because “[a] *partir de esta muerte comenzaron a contarse los asesinatos de mujeres*” (Bolaño 2004: 444). During the next 400 pages bodies keep appearing like a steady rain, drop by drop, and we – an accountable society – are “*incapaz[es] de detener la ola (o el goteo incesante) de crímenes [...] y devolver la paz y tranquilidad a una ciudad de natural laborioso*” (Bolaño 2004: 565). Suddenly we read about the last murder: “*El último caso del año 1997 fue bastante similar al penúltimo*” (Bolaño 2004: 790). The similarity between the last and the penultimate is filled with forebodings. It is just as arbitrary as the beginning. It is only the moment in which the narrator stops counting. And even if between the tentatively first and tentatively last cases we encounter diverse characters and narrative lines, time progresses with the rhythm imposed by forensic descriptions and, ultimately, the death of women.

How were they found? What they were wearing? What was the name of the victim? Was a culprit ever found? By answering these questions, the novel not only reveals parts of a life, but also implicitly tell us how the city is shaped and what kind of interaction can take place there. The women are part of a new working force and have become independent from old gender roles, which might cause conflict with men’s opinions thereof. These women must travel back and forth to the factories at late or early hours in dark streets and are left to fend for themselves. Most of them are also migrants, so they are only starting to create a community and after they disappear, not many people will ask for justice on their behalf. The vast majority has long dark hair and are seldom white women, which adds a racial dimension to this problem, but even if there are wide similarities among the victims, there are also exceptions. There is never a rule. There are no particular instances, just an accumulation of cases that produce with their details the illusion of the real that is not the background but the story itself, so this inversion of a realist effect depicts a reality devoid of resolution, solutions or of a guiding narrative structure or signification because the coupling of referent and signification stop meaning, their fundamentals become inexpressive (Barthes 1984: 174). The details are advanced as if they were clues or pieces that, if put together, might lead to the culprit. However, these details, for instance, a ring, a certain knot to tie the victims, a black car that is almost nondescript, all continue accumulating and become absurd (Bolaño 2004: 469, 629), as if Bolaño were asking the reader, why do you need a simple explanation for this cultural phenomenon, why is it easier to juggle with the idea that there is one murderer, a serial killer, a savage foreigner, or maybe a gang, or an international net of snuff filmmakers, or the Narcos? Reducing the femicides to one explanation and framing it with a causal relation would imply that a femicide is not a category that can stand for itself.

Perhaps here is the point that Bolaño is trying to make: Violence and death are, to some extent, part of the life in a community, but there is a difference which the narrator points out after there are two months without a new corpse: “*Las muertes habituales, sí, las usuales, gente que empezaba festejando y terminaba matándose, muertes que no eran cinematográficas, muertes que pertenecían al folklore pero no a la modernidad: muertes que no asustaban a nadie*” (Bolaño 2004: 675). For the narrator, the probabilities fostered by modernity with its logic, desires, and imaginaries are more harrowing but perhaps not less brutal than the single act of protagonists or villains. Santa Teresa advances probabilities and functions as a harrowing husk for a desire to live together. The femicides show how *potentia* can be channelled into death. Hence, Santa Teresa represents the nightmare for the posthumanist program focused on the forces that cross and shape the relational subject, on “a process of auto-poiesis or self-styling, which involves complex and continuous negotiations with dominant norms and values” (Braidotti 2013: 35). The inequalities in Santa Teresa depict as a utopia the attempts to pursue a self-styled death that is a “condition of possibility” and “virtual in that it has the generative capacity to engender the actual” (Braidotti 2013: 132, 138). Bolaño renders with the spectral and diaphanous Santa Teresa a critique on the faith in *potentia* and its self-aware becoming. Santa Teresa reveals that becoming can be channelled by a matrix of comparison that redefines an activity and determines the potential that bodies have to change and/or produce; this apparatus of capture is already constitutive of the bodies involved; the violence inflicted in them is already perpetrated before any movement has been made and yet, it appears anew every day in encounters that shape and are reaffirmed by subjectivities (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 552-558, 570). This means that Santa Teresa exemplifies zoë-politics at its worst: “statistically reconfigured in populations that surface as profiles of bodily capacities, [...] [which] can be apprehended as such without the subject, even without the individual subject’s body” (Braidotti 2013: 118). Furthermore, the faceless singularities captured by Santa Teresa remind us of Empire, which integrates in its machinery the singularities of the multitude along with its virtuality (Hardt and Negri 2001: 361). However, in 2666, the indomitable forces of *potentia* will not lead to the disintegration of Empire, because of the singularities’ inherent desire for liberation, or sometimes a desire for community, but most of all a deterritorializing desire and desire for freedom is subsumed by Bolaño in the desire to live together (Hardt and Negri 2001: 47-48, 52, 69), which can adopt diverse contents, even forms, all of which shares a ruthless self-affirming and self-realizing assertion.

With the metanarrative discussion of a desire to live together, Bolaño explores diverse imaginaries of state sovereignty. His novel conveys a commandment and explores in narrative terms the ways to “inscribe dominant and the dominated within the same *episteme*” as well as an “imaginary capacity converting the founding violence into

authorizing authority” (Mbembe 2001: 25, 110). This epistemic participation is, in 2666, metanarrative. It is the enchantment of representation that coerces his audience into repeating and perpetuating in his or her reception the same idea. To countervail this ethical representational issue, the novel proposes a narrative accretion, that is, iterations as a reaction to the stupor of somebody that is “*conmovidx*” and “*conmocionadx*” by history. His characters *move* between dreams, intertexts, and imaginaries to retell and reconstruct the world to deal with this stupor. By doing so, they create a growing tension between stories that explain each other and resonate Bolaño seems to dive into a clamour as the source for his multifaceted stories and brings to the surface an obstinate retelling or revisiting.

5. Half a Closing Remark

Desire is the notion that Bolaño illustrates in order to connect subjectivities with a space and its various possible orders. Desire has thus many metanarrative components that foster tensions between knowledge, ethics, and aesthetics. These tensions are instrumental to dismantle the cosmopolitanism and reflect how inequalities are fostered by categorizations and dissolved by inclusion and exclusion mechanisms. Conversely, the convivial framework is situated, embraces differences, assumes inequalities, and seeks to incorporate these differences and inequalities in reflections that could not raise universal claims. The cosmopolitan nightmare is, for Bolaño, WWII’s Eastern Front, whereas the cruel design for the relational subject is the desert city of Santa Teresa. Both are configured by desires in the multifaceted sense proposed by Bolaño, and here, perhaps the feature that permeates the past discussion and could not be addressed is imagination. Bolaño’s seems to believe that an unhinged imagination and yet channelled by its socio-historical-literary contexts can provide the underpinnings for deciding over desires, as well as for reflecting at a metanarrative level on its consequences. However, examining how imagination works as an affirming force that countervails the scepticism towards the desire to live together is an exploration and will remain a desideratum.

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