

A NIGHTMARE OR BENEVOLENT DREAM: GLOBAL VIOLENCE AND THE LIBIDINAL ECONOMY IN LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Mark Piccini

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Abstract

This thesis examines three novels by Latin American writers that were translated into English in 2008: *2666* by Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño, *Senselessness* by Honduran-Salvadoran writer Horacio Castellanos Moya, and *The Armies* by Colombian writer Evelio Rosero. These novels look at actual instances of violence in Mexico, Guatemala, and Colombia, contributing to a social critique of historical and ongoing inequality and injustice in Latin America and the global South. However, their approach differs from narratives that contextualise violence in Latin America and others that exceptionalise it. This thesis argues that it is possible and often preferable for readers in the North to be alienated by exaggerated images of Latin American violence, or to distance themselves from the economic, social, and political situations that exacerbate violence in the South. A close textual analysis of each novel reveals that they express the human potential in desire for and to create excess, which has the effect of universalising guilt against the tendency to contextualise or localise events of mass murder in Mexico, Central, and South America. Using the psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity developed by Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Žižek, and others, this thesis argues that it is impossible for anyone to extricate themselves from the libidinal economy that occupies *2666*, *Senselessness*, and *The Armies*.

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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

QUT Verified Signature

Signature:

Date:

10/11/2016

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Introduction

Whether the topic is Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar and his Medellín Cartel, *sicarios* or hitmen employed by Colombian and now Mexican cartels, military dictatorships, or revolutionary struggles, books, movies and television shows about Latin America tend to magnify life, death, and the violence that brings life and death into contact. The effect is that violence in Latin America appears exceptional, as if “Latin American violence” were its own, ontologically distinct category; that is, as if it were fundamentally different from everyday antagonism in what is known as the West, the First World, or the Global North. This thesis looks at the representation of concrete instances of violence in Mexico, the Central American isthmus, and South America in three novels by Latin American writers, all of which were translated into English in 2008. Rather than exceptionalise violence, these novels universalise it and they will be read in this thesis as breaking down stereotypes about Latin America and the South more generally.

Though critical of certain representations of violence in Latin America, the aim of this study is not to dispute that there is—and has been for the past century—a disproportionate level of violence in the region. To suggest that there are not problems specific to Latin America would be a further injustice to those who have suffered and continue to suffer because of them. Take, for example, the forty three student protesters from the town of Ayotzinapa in the south-western Mexican state of Guerrero who were allegedly kidnapped by corrupt police officials in September 2014 and handed over to a local drug gang to be killed. Or take, as another example, the at least 6,640 people killed in El Salvador in 2015, a number which meant that the Central American country was the most violent nation in the Western Hemisphere that year (Daugherty 2016, n. pag.). The novels in this study offer an alternative to the overrepresentation of violence in other narratives set in Latin America. Other narratives

focus, for example, on the gruesome tactics of the Mexican drug cartels, the extravagant lifestyles of their leaders, and on the miraculous escapes from custody of those same leaders. They repeat the story of Argentine revolutionary Ernesto “Che” Guevara and the Cuban Revolution, or the now archetypal story of Escobar’s rise and fall. However well-rounded the character of the guerrilla leader or the drug lord is, they remain exceptional figures and arbiters of a distinctly Latin American violence. All of the novels in this study were chosen because they step back from these kinds of representations, even when they address the same regional issues and instances of violence.

The principal aim of this study is to use examples of contemporary Latin American literature to traverse the fantasy of Latin American violence. The first novel to be discussed is *2666* by Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño, originally published in 2004. Although the novel is expansive in scope, the narrative returns repeatedly to an epidemic of gender violence in a town on Mexico’s northern border that closely resembles Ciudad Juárez, where hundreds of women have been killed since the early 1990s. The second novel is *Senselessness* by the Honduran-Salvadoran writer Horacio Castellanos Moya, which, like *2666*, was originally published in 2004. It concerns state-sanctioned violence against the citizens of Guatemala during the Central American country’s thirty-six-year civil war, and against those involved in obtaining justice for the victims after the declaration of peace in 1996. The third novel is *The Armies* by Colombian writer Evelio Rosero, originally published in 2007. *The Armies* is focussed on the effect of Colombia’s ongoing, undeclared civil war on citizens, particularly its rural population, and the ambiguous identity and allegiances of the parties to the conflict.

2666, *Senselessness*, and *The Armies* were translated from Spanish to English by Natasha Wimmer, Katherine Silver, and Anne McLean respectively. Wimmer won the PEN Translation Prize in 2009 for her version of *2666* and has translated a further five novels by Bolaño as well as a collection of his essays, articles and speeches. Silver is an award-winning

translator and a theorist of translation. Her description of translation as a labour of love and a political act is consistent with the aims of this thesis:

I would posit that the very *act* of translating literature from Latin America is an act of resistance, a complement to the slow, patient, yet inexorable resistance that world is offering, through numbers, through movement north, through the proverbial sweat of the brow, through noticing when the monster is otherwise distracted and moving away from possession, toward freedom. (Silver 2009, 11, emphasis in original)

McLean's translation of *The Armies* won the 2009 *Independent Foreign Fiction Prize*. She received the same award in 2004 for her translation of Spanish writer Javier Cercas's *Soldiers of Salamis*. Just as translating literature from Latin America is a necessary step towards solidarity, critical (and ultimately political) engagement with Latin American literature should not be confined to cultural and linguistic contexts. This is especially important given that representations of Latin American violence proliferate in the relatively uncritical world of Western entertainment media.

This introduction includes a literature review and a methodology. Key terms are defined at the beginning of each section. The literature review looks first at the context of Latin American literature; specifically, the idea of a distinction between the fantastic and realist literary traditions. Because *2666*, *Senselessness*, and *The Armies* are closest to the realist tradition, the literature review discusses the literary movements that emerged in the late twentieth century and manifested their opposition to the fantastic tradition and magical realism in particular. Bolaño, Castellanos Moya, and Rosero do not belong to any of these groups. In light of this, the literature review looks at the contributions of literary and cultural critics to a re-evaluation of realism in general. In the context of this realism debate, *2666*, which has received more scholarly attention than Castellanos Moya's or Rosero's novel, is repeatedly described as a global fiction, a novel that appeals to something universal in the particular, violent event it narrates. Finally, the literature review discusses the contribution of

the concept of the Lacanian Real to the realism debate by the Slovenian psychoanalytic theorist Slavoj Žižek.

The methodology provides an introduction to some of the key concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis and how they are used in Lacanian psychoanalytic literary criticism. Specifically, it looks at Žižek's approach to the analysis of texts, which is to look beyond the context in which the text is produced and to which it refers so as to reveal what is intersubjective and, in this sense, universal in it. Using an approach to textual analysis informed by Lacanian psychoanalysis, this thesis argues that *2666*, *Senselessness*, and *The Armies* represent a kind of violence that cannot be confined to Mexico, Guatemala, or Colombia. Lacanian psychoanalysis has been chosen as the methodology because it conceives of desire as an intersubjective phenomenon that runs beneath national and other stereotypes at the same time as it is responsible for their proliferation. This thesis does not simply apply the theories of Lacan, Žižek, and others to literature, but engages with questions concerning the practicality of the psychoanalytic approach. Specifically, it aims to examine whether the negative universality to which psychoanalysis refers, and which can be traced in the fiction analysed, might challenge those borders between subjects that are reified by concrete and rhetoric between North and South.

Literature Review

With the sudden increase in popularity of a type of Latin American novel during a period in the 1960s and early 1970s known as the Boom, the fantastic tradition gained ascendancy over the realist one. Any discussion of Latin American literature must address the distinction between fantastic and realist writing because it impacts not only how Latin American writers identify themselves, but how and whether they are received outside the region. The Latin American Boom is epitomised by a particular, international literary event: the translation into English of Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez's 1967 novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in 1970. Particularly outside of Latin America, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and the Boom are synonymous with the narrative mode known as magical realism. In the wake of the Boom, generally younger Latin American writers are willingly or unwillingly part of the phenomenon known as the post-Boom. In her article "Latin America Translated (Again)," Sarah Pollack writes that magical realism is not absent from the post-Boom:

Popular authors such as Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel, and (to a lesser extent) Rosario Ferré and Carmen Boullosa and/or their promoters have deliberately marketed "one image" stereotyping Latin American letters, achieving commercial success in the wake of García Márquez through the magical realism formula. (Pollack 2009, 351)

By and large, however, the post-Boom is defined by groups of writers opposed to the magical realism formula.

According to Jerónimo Arellano (2010, 97), magical realism was criticised by the first generation of post-Boom writers "for a lack of direct engagement with everyday cultural and political concerns in Latin America." These writers were active during the latter half of the twentieth century, when the political situation in Latin America was dire. Between 1954 and 1976, the people of the Southern Cone of South America saw their democratically elected

governments overthrown by military coups as Paraguay, Brazil, Bolivia, Uruguay, Chile, and then Argentina became military dictatorships. Arellano (2010, 104) joins other Latin American literary and cultural critics John Beverley and Idelber Avelar in suggesting that “the eclipse of the literature of the ‘boom’ has a date: September 11, 1973—the day of the bombing of the Palacio de La Moneda by the Chilean military and the demise of Salvador Allende’s government.” Allende was the first democratically elected socialist president of a Latin American country and the Allende government was in its third year when it was overthrown. In 1974, General Augusto Pinochet became President of the Government Junta of Chile, a military dictatorship that would continue until 1990. The details of these events are important because, as this literature review will show, the Allende government and Pinochet’s dictatorship had a significant influence on the life and work of Bolaño.

In 1973, the Central American country of Guatemala was thirteen years into its thirty-six-year civil war. During the conflict, all but one president was a member of the staunchly anti-communist, United States-backed military. The Guatemalan military sought to eradicate a handful of left-wing guerrilla groups and eventually shifted its focus to the highlands and rural areas where support for the guerrillas was supposedly strong. It was Guatemala’s indigenous Maya majority who bore the brunt of the army’s shift in focus. In 1983, Rigoberta Menchú, an indigenous Guatemalan woman, described the extent of the violence against her community in the testimonial book *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. The impact of her testimony both inside and outside of Latin America was immense and in 1992 Menchú was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her activism. Her book also provided the formula for what is known as the *testimonio* genre; specifically, for the production of testimonial novels. While testimonial novels engaged with political concerns in Latin America, many post-Boom writers felt that Latin American literature was still being stereotyped:

By the 1980s, testimonial literature patterned on that of the Guatemalan indigenous activist Rigoberta Menchú, whether as novelization of violence based on ideological struggles, or easily morphed into eyewitness narratives of human concern that had little to do with verifiable political agency, was coming to an end. Despite the unease among self-anointed progressive critics, novelists started to write fiction that was not exclusively dependent on specific social or historical contexts, so that they could stand up without time-locking apprehensions, and the practitioners included Central and South Americans who were somehow expected to be committed to myriad political causes. (Corral 2013, 5)

Perhaps the most pointed objections to the romanticised image of Latin America as a place full of militant political activists committed to causes losing traction elsewhere came from two groups of then young writers, one Mexican and the other international.

In 1996, Chilean writers Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez produced an anthology of short stories by writers whose origins ranged from Cuba and Puerto Rico to Spain. The anthology was called *McOndo*, a term Fuguet and Gómez coined as a play on “Macondo,” the name of the town where *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is set. Five years after the publication of *McOndo*, Fuguet reflected on the term in an article for the American magazine *Foreign Policy*:

The word “McOndo” itself began as a joke, a spoof of García Márquez’s magical and invented town of Macondo where levitation mingled with eternal rain and the eccentric, the overfolkloric, was the only way to grasp a world where true civilization would never be established. The word then crawled into a novel of mine and eventually became the title of [the *McOndo* anthology]. The aim of the book was to seek out fellow authors of “our generation” (i.e., born after 1960) and to see, firsthand, if this anti-magical-realist sensibility was truly spreading like a virus. (Fuguet 2001, 69)

The virus had spread to Mexico where five writers published “Manifiesto del *Crack*,” the “Crack Manifesto,” to express their break with the Boom. In their manifesto, the Crack writers sought to affirm “their affiliation to an expansive Western cosmopolitan tradition and assert their prerogative to write about any topic or geographical location” (Pollack 2009, 352-53). Indeed, the Crack Manifesto (Palou et al. 1996, n. pag.) mentions Stern, Flaubert, Proust and others alongside Cervantes and Borges; elsewhere, it derides media coverage of the Gulf

War and later asserts that Crack novels “will be nothing more than a mockery of a crazy and dislocated reality.”

All of the novels analysed in this thesis are examples of contemporary Latin American literature. However, none of the writers can be said to belong to either the Crack or McOndo generation. Bolaño, Castellanos Moya, and Rosero were born in 1953, 1957, and 1958 respectively. All of them are excluded from the McOndo generation of writers born after 1960 that Fuguet (2001, 69) describes. According to Raymond Leslie Williams (2007, 152), Castellanos Moya “became one of Central America’s more visible writers in the 1990s.” Similarly, Nicholas Birns (2013, 111) writes, “Today, the best-known Central American writer is the Salvadoran Horacio Castellanos Moya.” Although Birns (2013, 111) notes that “Castellanos Moya is a visibly erudite writer, aware of literary histories and genres, freely alluding to other writers both in and outside of Spanish-language writing,” and despite writing and reaching a wide audience at the same time as *McOndo* and the “Crack Manifesto” were being prepared, neither group counts Castellanos Moya among its members. Like Castellanos Moya, Rosero has been writing and publishing for three decades. The Colombian writer Antonio Ungar (2010, 25) calls his countryman Rosero “an oddity indeed, a writer who in spite of the considerable recognition he has attained has never come out of hiding, who has always defended his absolute independence.” As for Bolaño, Will H. Corral (2013, 12) writes, “It is very revealing, in terms of generational self-perception, that he is not in *McOndo*, and was made an ‘honorary member’ of the *Crack* only after his death.”

Bolaño made his own attempt to break with the Boom two decades before the publication of *McOndo* and the “Crack Manifesto” when he was a poet living in exile in Mexico City. Before discussing Bolaño’s attempt, however, it is necessary to understand the circumstances of his exile. Bolaño lived in Santiago, the capital of Chile, until he was fifteen, when he moved with his family to Mexico City. While in Mexico, he became active in left-

wing politics and cultivated the voracious reading habits for which he was well known. In *Between Parentheses* (2004), a collection of Bolaño's articles, various prefaces, and the transcripts of talks or speeches he gave, Bolaño (2012, 343) writes, "The books that I remember best are the ones I stole in Mexico City between the ages of sixteen and nineteen, and the ones I bought in Chile when I was twenty, during the first few months of the coup." In 1973, Bolaño returned to his homeland to support the Allende government. He (2012, 53) writes, "I returned to Chile when I was twenty to take part in the Revolution, with such bad luck that a few days after I got to Santiago the coup came and the army seized power." Mexican writer Carmen Boullosa interviewed Bolaño for *BOMB Magazine* in 2001. She (2001, 51) writes, "From Mexico, he acquired a mythical paradise, from Chile the inferno of the real."

The paradise that Bolaño acquired in Mexico was short lived: the period between 1973 and 1977 when he and Mexican poet Mario Santiago were working to forge a new literary movement. Their efforts culminated in the publication of the "Infrarealist Manifesto" in 1976 and the subsequent Infrarealist movement:

Infrarealism was a kind of Dada á la Mexicana. At one point there were many people, not only poets, but also painters and especially loafers and hangers-on, who considered themselves Infrarealists. Actually there were only two members, Mario Santiago and me. We both went to Europe in 1977. One night, in Rosellón, France, at the Port Vendres train station (which is very close to Perpignan), after having suffered a few disastrous adventures, we decided that the movement, such as it was, had come to an end. (Bolaño 2001, 53)

Bolaño remained in Europe until he died of liver failure in 2003. In the last decade of his life, he focussed his attention on writing prose. His 1998 novel *Los detectives salvajes* received that year's Rómulo Gallegos International Novel Prize from the government of Venezuela, which won him esteem in the Spanish-speaking literary world. In 2007, *The Savage Detectives* was translated into English by Natasha Wimmer. Chris Andrews (2014, 2) writes,

“The novel was reviewed widely and at length, with almost unanimous enthusiasm.” Paradoxically, the novel that gained Bolaño international acclaim expressed his suspicion that literature, especially prize-winning literature, was failing to effect change in the world, compounded by the failure of his own literary movement and the demise of the Allende government.

The Savage Detectives tells the story of two young poets, Arturo Belano and Ulises Lima, the self-appointed leaders of the “visceral realists.” As far as they are concerned, theirs is not a group or movement, but a gang. There are no examples of visceral realist poetry in the novel, but their style can be inferred, for example, from comments by Lima describing the Nobel Prize winning Mexican poet Octavio Paz as the visceral realists’ “great enemy” (4). The novel spans a period of time from 1975 to 1996. Split into three sections, the first and third sections of the novel are the diary entries of seventeen-year old Juan García Madero, the newest and youngest visceral realist. In the (intermittent) company of Belano and Lima, García Madero takes drugs, loses his virginity, and circulates among the young men and women who consider themselves visceral realists. It becomes increasingly obvious that there are only two visceral realists, Belano and Lima. García Madero’s last diary entry is dated February 15, 1976. The longest, second section of the novel is comprised of interviews with people who encountered either Belano or Lima (or, occasionally, both) between 1977 and 1996 as the two traversed the globe.

One of the last interviews in the second section of *The Savage Detectives* is with Clara Cabeza, the secretary of Octavio Paz. It is 1995 and Cabeza is swamped with work: “You don’t know the stacks of letters Don Octavio received and how hard it was to file them” (472). Over the course of several visits to the Parque Hundido or Sunken Park in Mexico City, Paz, chaperoned by Cabeza, meets with a man who is later revealed as Ulises Lima. Walking in circles around the park without speaking, the two poets pass each other again and

again. Eventually, Paz asks Cabeza to “make a list of Mexican poets born since 1950” (478). The following day, Cabeza tells Paz that she has made and memorised a list of names, so he asks her to find out who the man in the park is:

I went up to him and asked him who he was and he said I’m Ulises Lima, the visceral realist poet, none other than the second-to-last visceral realist poet left in Mexico, and to be honest, what can I say, his name didn’t ring any bells, although the night before, on Don Octavio’s orders, I’d gone through the indexes of more than ten anthologies of recent and not so recent poetry. (Bolaño 2007, 479-80)

At odds with anything even remotely resembling the literary establishment, Belano, Lima, and visceral realism fall into obscurity. A similar fate seemed to await Bolaño until the international success of *The Savage Detectives*; however, Bolaño received accolades such as the Rómulo Gallegos Prize begrudgingly.

After the success of *The Savage Detectives*, Bolaño wrote an article in which he questioned the value of literary prizes:

Prizes, seats (in the Academy), tables, beds, even golden chamber pots belong, of course, to those who are successful or to those who play the part of loyal and obedient clerks.

Let’s just say that power, any power, whether left-wing or right-wing, would, if left to its own devices, reward only the clerks. (Bolaño 2012, 112)

Though left-leaning, Bolaño was hesitant to label himself a left-wing writer after his experience of the Chilean coup d’état. His aversion to politics would seem to align him with the McOndo or Crack movements, but, as we have seen, this is not the case. Regarding Bolaño, Andrews (2014, xvii) writes, “In his fiction it matters greatly that art should not be subservient to the policies of any institution.” Bolaño’s suspicion of institutions (the Academy, political brands) and literary movements (following his disastrous adventure with *Infrarealism*) extends to the fantastic and realist literary traditions that opened this literature review. Boullosa (2001, 51) begins her interview with Bolaño: “In Latin America, there are two literary traditions that the average reader tends to regard as antithetical, opposite—or,

frankly, antagonistic: the fantastic [...] and the realist.” Bolaño (2001, 51) replied that such distinctions should never be taken seriously: “Twentieth-century Latin-American literature has followed the impulses of imitation and rejection, and may continue to do so for some time in the 21st century.”

Latin America’s fantastic and realist literary traditions have been thoroughly studied in Latin American literary and cultural criticism. For example, *The Post-Boom in Spanish American Fiction* (1998) by Donald Leslie Shaw explores the characteristics of post-Boom writing. Significantly, Shaw (1998, 175) recognises that “in reaction against the Boom, [the post-Boom] incorporates a form of ‘new realism’ conditioned by a new sense of how and when and at which public it is directed.” Alternatively, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (1995) includes essays in support of magical realism written around the time of the Boom by some of its major figures and more recent essays arguing that magical realism remains relevant. It is not the intention of this thesis to weigh in on the debate about the roles played by realism and magical realism in Latin American literary history. Instead, this study is interested in Latin American writers, beginning with Bolaño, who are outsiders and anomalies, whose novels are global fictions, a term that will be discussed in more detail later in this introduction. Corral, who has been mentioned already, coedited and wrote the general introduction to *The Contemporary Spanish-American Novel: Bolaño and After* (2013). The subtitle reflects the influence of Bolaño on the Latin American writers whose work the book discusses; that is, writers who were publishing novels as recently as 2012. After discussing the Boom and post-Boom, and the McOndo and Crack movements, Corral (2013, 12) writes, “There seems to be a consensus that if any author or work from the generations we include will survive the frenzy of trying to select the one with long-lasting values, the Chilean is ahead.” The first two chapters of this thesis shed light on the value of the novel widely regarded as Bolaño’s magnum opus, the posthumously published *2666*. They discuss Bolaño

and 2666 in terms of the re-evaluation of realism by literary and cultural critics in general rather than in terms of the Latin American realist literary tradition.

In a sense, Chapter One and Two of this thesis are a response to the issues raised by Pollack in “Latin America Translated (Again): Roberto Bolaño’s *The Savage Detectives* in the United States.” As the subtitle of her article suggests, Pollack is concerned with how US readers received the English translation of *The Savage Detectives*. Pollack credits the success of Bolaño’s “breakthrough” novel to a change that was easy for many readers in the United States from the magical realism of the immensely popular *One Hundred Years of Solitude* to the picture of visceral realism that emerges in *The Savage Detectives*, particularly the parts of it narrated by García Madero. Echoing the concerns of the McOndo and Crack manifestos, Pollack (2009, 350) writes that US readers of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* “approached the novel’s Macondo as a mini Latin America to consume and interpret.” She (2009, 350) writes, “Instead of being viewed as an allegory of universal human experience, the remote and exotic setting, fantastic characters, and magical and violent occurrences came to symbolize what was quintessentially ‘Latin.’” Thirty seven years after Gregory Rabassa’s translation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the wonderful streets of Macondo were replaced by the bustling *calles* and *caminos* of Mexico City, by bars and coffee shops full of squabbling Trotskyites, drug-dealing poets, and knife-wielding pimps. According to Pollack, readers in the United States embraced *The Savage Detectives* because it did not require them to change their opinion of Latin America and its people.

García Madero’s diary entries make it seem as if he will be the third visceral realist, but in the twenty years that follow, as they are presented through the interviews in the second section of *The Savage Detectives*, he is never mentioned. The tragedy of García Madero’s absence, a reflection of what awaits the two visceral realists as the increasingly elliptical second section of the novel loses sight of them, is apparently lost on a large portion of

Bolaño's international readers. Pollack (2009, 359) writes, "The simplest of the multiple readings of *The Savage Detectives* [...] is based principally on the diary entries of Juan García Madero." Although his diary makes up less than a third of the novel, it details an immersion in excess: private and public sex with multiple partners, a steady supply of marijuana, an unexpected fight between him and a violent pimp, and his escape from Mexico City with Belano, Lima and a prostitute whose life is in danger. Pollack (2009, 359) believes the lure of García Madero's diary has caused reviewers to label *The Savage Detectives* a road story like Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957): "This is Latin America, after all, a space in which to satisfy one's desires for rebellions and adventures of all stripes: political, sexual, spiritual, substance-induced, literary." Pollack (2009, 360) writes, "The yellow butterflies and floating beauties of García Márquez's fiction form no part of the scenery in Bolaño's novel," but argues that "a new and equally reductive image of Latin America is emerging in the U.S. collective imagination, one that *The Savage Detectives* unintentionally feeds." Reality in Macondo and Mexico City appears to be far removed from reality in the United States; however, much of the distance is imposed by outside insistence on the essentially excessive nature of Latin America.

Pollack's article was published in the journal *Comparative Literature* not long after the release in the United States of Natasha Wimmer's English translation of *2666*. In light of the novel's publication, Pollack (2009, 363) writes that "it will be fascinating to see whether Bolaño's work is reassessed and, more generally, how contemporary Latin American literature is translated and understood in the U.S. as a result." As a note on scope, this thesis does not, as Pollack does, look at the response to *2666* or other novels in the context of their reception by a distinct readership, national or otherwise, nor does it examine how particular writers are marketed in languages and countries other than their own. These are all valuable ways of looking at work that enters the North under the shadow of forebears who are few, but

overwhelming. Instead, this thesis looks beyond stereotypes to subjects; specifically, it engages with the desire that generates antagonism between subjects. It shares with *2666*, *Senselessness*, and *The Armies* a concern for the excessive and unexpected manifestations of desire at various levels of social interaction, and an ethical commitment to placing this at the centre of an attempt to understand violence. It is at the level of desire that this thesis situates global violence and, in this way, it seeks to broaden a discussion of *2666* that has moved away from understanding the novel in the context of Latin American literature. An idea that appears often in the recent reassessment of Bolaño's work by scholars is that he is a global writer, and that *2666* is a global fiction. The principal aim of this thesis is to understand the universal human experience that finds expression in novels by a group of contemporary Latin American writers through Lacanian psychoanalytic literary criticism, which is discussed in more detail in the methodology section of this introduction.

In 2010, Andrew McCann published an article in *Overland* magazine entitled "The Eventfulness of Roberto Bolaño"; the subtitle called the Chilean "the writer of globalisation." The geography of *2666*, aside from its narrative, is global. McCann (2010b, 74-75) writes, "This massive novel—universally hailed as an 'event' in its own right—is global in orientation. Its settings include London, Paris, Madrid, New York, Detroit, Berlin, Moscow and Mexico." A year after McCann, Randolph D. Pope (2011, 160) called Bolaño "A Writer for a Globalized Age" in an essay of the same name, giving as an example the "interconnected and fluid geography" of *2666*. He (2011, 160) writes, "Language does not seem to be an obstacle. While supposedly in this novel we should hear Spanish, English, French, German, and even Russian, there is nothing but Spanish, as if the final barrier (or Berlin/Babel Wall) had completely collapsed." Far from criticising the novel, Pope (2011, 160-61) writes that for readers "attuned to a cosmopolitan culture, this intermingling and travelling, these meldings and confluences are part of the attraction of Bolaño's world,

marginless, accessible and uprooted.” For these critics, *2666* is literally global, taking the reader across countries and continents in spite of language barriers. The first chapter of this thesis looks in depth at the different interpretations of *2666* as a novel of globalisation so as to better understand how the novel universalises violence, because if Bolaño’s world is accessible, it is not attractive. For the purposes of this literature review, it will be sufficient to focus on two discussions of *2666* that make an explicit connection between Bolaño’s novel as a global fiction and his novel as one that fits with the conception of what can be called a “new realism.”

The first of these discussions of Bolaño and *2666* is in the 2013 book *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction*. Its author Peter Boxall (2013, 6) identifies Bolaño among “a world community of writers” ranging from North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and Australia. In terms of both the way novels are marketed and purchased, and of the novels themselves, Boxall (2013, 8) describes “an erosion of localism, a supplanting of local categories by global ones.” Bolaño, Castellanos Moya, and Rosero erode localism and regionalism simply by having had their work translated, read widely, and received well. Pollack (2009, 354) cites the University of Rochester’s website “Three Percent,” which provides information about the small percentage of translated books published in the United States: “For the year 2008, the website tallied a total of 277 adult fiction and 79 poetry titles in English translation (excluding graphic novels, retranslations and reprints), of which 39 are from Latin America.” *2666*, *Senselessness*, and *The Armies* were among these thirty nine titles. Further still, Boxall (2013, 14) writes that “the contemporary novel is engaged in an extraordinary refashioning of the ties which bind us in our environments.” This thesis argues that the novels it discusses universalise the experience of violence in the way they approach and foreground the subject of desire. It is possible for readers in the North to distance themselves from the economic, social and political situations

that exacerbate violence in the South. However, it is impossible for anyone to extricate themselves from the libidinal economy conceived in Lacanian psychoanalysis as the universal space in which the personal and political intersect in their attachment to fantasies, and in which the subject is formed.

One of the three strands that Boxall argues run through the work of the writers he looks at in *Twenty-First-Century Fiction* is of particular importance to the present discussion:

Right across the spectrum of writers that I discuss in this book, one can see the emergence of new kinds of realism, a new set of formal mechanisms with which to capture the real, as it offers itself as the material substrate of our being in the world. (Boxall 2013, 10)

The real takes on a specific meaning in Lacanian psychoanalysis, where the Real is usually capitalised and is opposed to the Symbolic and Imaginary orders of being. The Real will be discussed in more detail in the methodology. Suffice it to say, the Symbolic and Imaginary realms are substantial, inherent in any text and inextricable from textual analysis; the Real, on the other hand, is “impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order, and impossible to attain in any way” (Evans 1996, 163). Perhaps the most succinct expression of this predicament is found in Elizabeth Wright’s 1998 book *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal*. She (1998, 99) writes, “The psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan (1901-81) could be said to found itself on the failure of language to match the body.” The Real is experienced in the failure of language to represent reality, but is avoided by constructing or inheriting constructed fantasies about the world, including the fantasy of Latin American violence. Another principal aim of this thesis is to show that the new realism represented by the body of work examined takes an ethical stance that emerges in the failure of language to capture the Real.

The second discussion of Bolaño and *2666* in the context of new realism takes place in a book that is focussed on Latin American literature: *Narcoepics* (2013) by Hermann Herlinghaus. *Narcoepics* positions Latin America in the South; from the South, Herlinghaus argues that writers and other artists speak, consciously or not, against their counterparts in a North comprised of advanced Western countries or the so-called First World. Largely beyond the scope of this literature review, the conception of globalisation by Herlinghaus in *Narcoepics* is discussed in great detail in the first chapter of this thesis. Importantly, however, Herlinghaus makes clear that the South “is not the Third World”:

It has become, by force of worldwide readjustment of the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, perhaps more “contemporary” than the Global North. We are dealing with new spaces of self-consciousness and with narrative and imaginary formations of surprising affective, as well as epistemic force. (Herlinghaus 2013, 29)

Although many of these new narratives are surprising and, as is the case in all of the novels in this thesis, frighteningly violent, they are not magical realist novels and do not belong to the fantastic literary tradition discussed earlier. Herlinghaus (2013, 31) writes that his purpose in *Narcoepics* “is not to foreground a Latin American ‘exceptionalism’ but to rethink the ‘normality’ of the normal, in view of an increasing number of chasms in modernity’s inner edifice.” Each term Herlinghaus uses is specific to his theoretical framework and conception of modernity. It is the purpose of this thesis to show that the Real, on account of which so-called chasms perforate every edifice, is not the exception but the rule. Its effects can be exacerbated by economic and social pressures in Latin America or the South, but not made exceptional to a particular place or moment.

At the same time as the Real is “normal” in its capacity as universal, efforts are frequently made, particularly where cultural productions are concerned, to make it abnormal and foreign. Herlinghaus identifies a collective effort towards realism in the work of the Latin American writers analysed in *Narcoepics*:

At stake is a contemporary kind of “realism” without any moralistic tone, a realism not simply understood as a condensed representation of a crude reality, but of an embodiment of uncomfortable topographies of experience, which is enabled by writing that uses experimental and minimalistic approaches. (Herlinghaus 2013, 95)

The fourth and largest part of *2666*, “The Part about the Crimes,” is an example of an uncomfortable topography of experience. “The Part about the Crimes” is the focus of the second chapter of this thesis. It takes place on the Mexico-United States border in and around Santa Teresa, a town that is modelled on Juárez, the largest city in the Mexican state of Chihuahua and home to nearly one and a half million people. For many years, Juárez was the epicentre of Mexico’s drug violence. Known as *Paso del Norte* (the Pass of the North), Juárez was and is a major route for legal and illegal trade between North and South. As Laura Gillman and Tobias Jochum (2015, 4) note, for three years (2008 to 2010) it had the dubious honour of being the murder capital of the world. Cartel violence in Juárez continues to make international headlines, but the city has been “plagued by a gruesome epidemic of extreme gender violence since at least 1993” (Gillman and Jochum 2015, 4). This epidemic is the focus of the “The Part about the Crimes.”

The uncomfortable experience of *2666* has to do not only with the harrowing context of femicide, as the epidemic of gender violence has become known, but with the way the novel diverges from other attempts to narrate the violence by journalists, filmmakers, crime writers and others. “The Part about the Crimes” is certainly a condensation of the crude reality of femicide. Andrews (2014, 229) is able to match almost all of the 109 women whose bodies are discovered in “The Part about the Crimes” to actual victims. This attests to the relationship between Bolaño and the Mexican journalist Sergio González Rodríguez whose book *Huesos en el desierto* (Bones in the Desert) was published in 2002: the culmination of his work reporting on the femicide for the newspaper *Reforma*. Bolaño’s proximity to the journalist and his admiration of González Rodríguez—he (2012, 232) writes that “if ever I

were in deep shit I would be alright so long as I had Sergio González Rodríguez by my side”—can overwhelm one of the crucial qualities of *2666*. Carlos Burgos sums up the differential treatment of the femicide in *2666*, and of reality elsewhere in Bolaño’s oeuvre:

The amount of testimonials [*2666*] includes, far from leading to a global unambiguous explanation about what occurs in Santa Teresa, create larger questions. [...] [Bolaño] is an author who sympathizes with the unfinished, with the uncertainty of the quest, with roaming, games of chance. (Burgos 2013, 304)

The unfinished story of the violence on Mexico’s northern border yields to a more general experience of violence throughout the novel. These moments of ambiguity serve to obfuscate the nature of the femicide further and are representative of a new kind of realism with which this thesis is concerned.

Stephen Mulhall looks at the topic of realism in and outside of literature in his book *The Wounded Animal: J.M. Coetzee and the Difficulty of Reality in Literature and Philosophy* (2009). Mulhall uses an extract from South African-Australian writer J.M. Coetzee’s 2003 novel *Elizabeth Costello* to express the attitude towards what can be called traditional literary realism. Elizabeth Costello, the novel’s eponymous narrator, says:

There used to be a time when we knew. We used to believe that when the text said, “On the table stood a glass of water,” there was indeed a table, and a glass of water on it, and we had only to look in the word-mirror of the text to see them.

But all that has ended. The word-mirror is broken, irreparably, it seems. (Coetzee quoted in Mulhall 2009, 162)

Although Costello’s language here suggests that the naïve reader has given over to the cynic and that realism has been consigned to antiquity, this is but one of multiple readings. Mulhall (2009, 164) writes, “The bottom has not dropped out of realism, but out of a particular, quasi-theological understanding of what it is for a work of literature to be realist,” and that “Costello’s invocation of the shattered word mirror is not necessarily a denial of the possibility of continuing the realist project of the novel.” His discussion of the form that the

contemporary realist project might take aligns Mulhall with some of the Lacanian psychoanalytic theorists who have contributed to the re-evaluation of realism.

Anticipating his discussion of *Elizabeth Costello* and the broken word-mirror, Mulhall describes a kind of realism that

finds expression in the refusal to ask certain kinds of question, in the recognition that what seems to be an essential underpinning of the real may turn out to be pure illusion, and in the willingness to recognise that what might seem like the record of a few details scattered across the darkness (hence essentially in need of supplementation) is in fact a snapshot of the scene as a whole, human life as it really is. (Mulhall 2009, 151)

This study understands Bolaño's sympathy for the unfinished as a willingness to recognise that the reality of the femicide and similar violent events should not be represented as having passed or being entirely containable to the convergence of volatile factors at the Mexico-United States border. The methodology section of this introduction draws a connection between the unfinished, chasmal realities that find expression in the novels included in this study and what Žižek (2005, 148) writes is "the ontological void that we call 'subject.'" It is in the radical negativity of the subject conceived of in Lacanian psychoanalysis that the universal human experience resides and in light of which Žižek conceives of an ethics that this thesis argues is the ethical stance of new realism.

This thesis is concerned primarily with literary studies and makes occasional reference to the work of visual artists and filmmakers; however, what can be called the realism debate spans the breadth of cultural studies and philosophy. The 2007 book *Adventures in Realism* features contributions by more than a dozen academics who discuss literary realism, but also photography, painting, cinema, feminist philosophy, and, crucially, Lacanian psychoanalysis. Editor of the book Matthew Beaumont (2007, 2) positions *Adventures in Realism* against what he calls the prevailing "intellectual climate" of the late

twentieth century, which “can most conveniently be identified with the name ‘postmodernism.’” Beaumont (2007, 2) writes that postmodernists “have crudely caricatured realism, claiming that as an aesthetic it assumes a fundamentally unproblematic relationship between reality and its representations.” The realist writer is both “simple-minded,” attempting to render reality truthfully, and “duplicitous” for even suggesting the possibility of such total representation; moreover, realism is “a quintessentially conservative form” (Beaumont 2007, 4, 9). Unable or unwilling to question the way things are, the realist writer serves the ideological project of those in power at a given time, which is always to paint the process by which they rose to power as inevitable and foreclose the possibility of another reality in which their power is exposed as contingent and impeachable. This view of realism is outdated, if not entirely ill-conceived, and is one which Beaumont (2007, 10) says *Adventures in Realism* invites us to rethink.

Žižek rethinks realism in the twelfth chapter of *Adventures in Realism*, entitled “Psychoanalysis and the Lacanian Real: ‘Strange shapes of the unwarped primal world.’” Žižek’s chapter provides a crucial link between this literature review and the methodology. Before discussing Chapter 12, it is necessary to draw attention to some of the difficulties specific to the Lacanian Real. Boxall (2013, 10) describes a new kind of realism trying “to capture the real, as it offers itself as the material substrate of our being in the world,” but the Lacanian Real cannot be captured as such:

On the one hand, the term “the real” seems to imply a simplistic notion of an objective, external reality, a material substrate which exists in itself, independently of any observer. On the other hand, such a “naïve” view of the real is subverted by the fact that the real also includes such things as hallucinations and traumatic dreams. (Evans 1996, 163)

This is not to suggest that Boxall’s conception of new realism is naïve. Boxall (2013, 192) writes that 2666 is “an exercise in world building, in giving language to a ‘common world’;

but, at every moment in this vast novel, the urge towards world encompassment is counteracted.” Similarly, Herlinghaus (2013, 168) writes that “2666 has been called a hallmark of global fiction in the wake of the twentieth century. Yet, it is the novel’s virtue that it defrauds us of any expectation of fictional ‘fulfilment.’” Both critics acknowledge Bolaño’s sympathy for the unfinished and suggest that it adds to the affective impact of 2666 at the same time as they include him among the proponents of new realism. On account of the Real, the symbolically mediated world is not whole. However, Evans (1996, 163) writes, “When something cannot be integrated in the symbolic order, as in psychosis, it may return in the real in the form of a hallucination.” Not only are hallucinations and traumatic dreams frequent in 2666, *Senselessness*, and *The Armies*, they are crucial to Žižek’s re-evaluation of realism.

In the final paragraph of his chapter in *Adventures in Realism*, Žižek mentions some of the key concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis, which will be unpacked below, and complicates the realism debate. He writes that

if what we experience as “reality” is structured by fantasy, and if fantasy serves as the screen that protects us from being directly overwhelmed by the raw Real, then *reality itself can function as an escape from encountering the Real*. In the opposition between dream and reality, fantasy is at the side of reality, and it is in dreams that we encounter the traumatic Real. It is not that dreams are for those who cannot endure reality; reality itself is for those who cannot endure (the Real that announces itself in) their dreams. (Žižek 2007, 222, emphasis in original)

Žižek’s assertions here short-circuit any discussion of literature premised on the idea that realism strives simply to replicate reality and that when it diverges and gives rise to an incomplete or unfinished picture it cedes to artifice. Fantasy inheres as much in the image of a serial killer stalking the streets of Santa Teresa—the “official story” of the authorities in the fourth part of 2666—and in the condemnation of soldiers compelled to slaughter their compatriots by a metaphysical and problematically dehumanising conception of “evil” as it

does in the otherworldly figures of magical realism. Moreover, detective stories and crime fiction, journalism, and even human rights reports invariably (and valuably) act to suppress the Real that announces itself in senselessness. The five chapters of this thesis look at representations of violence that, in one way or another, avoid the context in which the particular violent acts occurred by focusing on subjectivity and the troubling, even traumatic role that desire plays in perpetuating the mistreatment of others.

Methodology

This thesis contains five chapters as well as the Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, and Conclusion. Each of the five chapters that comprise the body of this thesis is a close textual analysis of a particular novel or part of a novel. In all of the chapters, other texts are introduced and examined to strengthen the analysis of the focus text. Each chapter applies Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to the reading of Latin American literature, and in doing so aims to shed new light on both creative practice and specific theoretical concepts. It is impossible to isolate these concepts; however, the purpose is to develop a coherent picture over the course of the five chapters. Therefore, when concepts have yet to be discussed in depth but are necessary to the analysis, they are summarised and the reader is told where further information can be found. It is necessary to consider the shift in Lacanian psychoanalysis from its inception to its present-day applications if it is to provide the theoretical framework for this study.

In the literature review, Wright's (1998, 99) suggestion that Lacanian psychoanalysis "could be said to found itself on the failure of language to match the body" was given as a summary of the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan. The French psychoanalyst developed his theory in a series of seminars spanning some thirty years, culminating in the publication of twenty seven books, only some of which are used in this study. A movement founded on the failure of language to match reality would seem to support the conclusion that realism, understood as an attempt to achieve a one-to-one correspondence between representation and the thing being represented, has failed. However, Lacanian psychoanalysis is not primarily a method of textual analysis; it is a theory and practice that locates subjectivity in the rift between bodies and language. Lacan's practice, the theory inspired by it, and the application of Lacanian theory to literature, among other forms of cultural expression, is a valuable

method for studying new realism. This is because it requires, perhaps more than any other school of thought, a “willingness to recognise that what might seem like the record of a few details scattered across the darkness [...] is in fact a snapshot of the scene as a whole, human life as it really is” (Mulhall 2009, 151).

To understand the significance of Lacanian psychoanalysis to the re-evaluation of realism and to this discussion of Latin American literature, it will first be necessary to define the subject of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Wright (1998, 99) puts it simply when she writes that “subject” is “the term used by French theorists in order to avoid connotations of selfhood and personhood, for this would be to anticipate discussion of how selves come into being.” Subjects, as it were, precede selves. It is at the secondary level of self and personhood that identity formation (and politics), including stereotypes about Latin America and the South, men and women, and so on, operate. Discussing the Lacanian psychoanalytic clinic, Diana Rabinovich (2003, 208) writes, “This program results in a freedom from any a priori determinism, whether biological or sociological, which would undermine the very exercise of psychoanalysis.” This methodology will begin at the level of the Lacanian clinic to show how Lacan’s psychoanalytic practice informs the development of a theory that can engage with and alter stereotypes and social constructs. Crucially, Lacanian psychoanalysis holds that the contingencies of identity emerge as a result of and in reaction to the traumatic emergence of subjectivity. This trauma is universal and the potential to bring people together around a common experience will be discussed in detail throughout this thesis.

The choice between “being” and “meaning” is, for Lacan (1998, 210), the “first essential operation.” It is essential because the subject must choose meaning: “If we choose being, the subject disappears, it elides us, we fall into non-meaning” (Lacan 1998, 211). The basic operation of subject formation is the same in Žižek’s Lacanian theory. Žižek believes that “a subject is formed within the symbolic order by means of a certain ‘forced choice’ as to

whether to enter society or not—which, although it appears free, is in fact forced because the only alternative is psychosis” (Butler and Stephens 2006, 4). Being is meaningless but nonetheless remains a part of the symbolic space as something the subject, who rues passing it over, desperately tries to reclaim. This deadlock is extraordinarily productive and inextricable from fiction not only in the context of literature but at the more fundamental level of fantasy formation.

The forced choice is the primary creative force that gives rise to the fiction of loss:

The forced choice entails a loss and opens a void. The advent of the symbolic presented by the forced choice brings forth something that did not “exist” before, but which is nevertheless “anterior” to it, a past that has never been present. It “creates” something that cannot be symbolized—this is what Lacan called the Real—and which at its “first” appearance is already lost. The retroactive nature of the forced choice entails loss of something that was never possessed. (Dolar 1993, 88)

The importance of the Real in Lacanian psychoanalysis has already been flagged in the literature review. The Real is firmly on the side of being; specifically, it stands for all that is outside of meaning. Its radical ambiguity; namely, the radical ambiguity of what was lost to the subject in its first essential operation and where the lost object might be, attracts meaning and simultaneously exacerbates the failure of language to match the body, being, and the Real.

The concept of desire, as it is used in Lacanian psychoanalysis, is the desire for objects (people and things) that appear to embody the Real. Evans (1996, 37) writes, “If there is any one concept which can claim to be the very centre of Lacan’s thought, it is the concept of desire.” This is because the subject on Lacan’s couch is the subject of desire, a subject traumatised by the failure of language to capture the Real and desperate to occlude the fact that the field of meaning does not contain it. The lost object is the first fantasy creation, the one that conceals what can be called the Real story: “Desire is not a relation to an object, but

a relation to lack” (Evans 1996, 38). Just as the subject cannot choose being over meaning, what lacks does not exist and cannot be desired. The Real of desire would annihilate the subject of desire if it were not for the support of fantasies that take up the theme of loss, allowing the subject to imagine that the object correlative of its loss exists somewhere or for someone else. The major contribution of Lacanian psychoanalysis to the study of fiction is the idea that fantasy is not opposed to reality, but works with it to maintain the illusion of consistency and wholeness against the disruptive presence (absence) of the Real.

Lacan’s interest in fantasy and insistence on the effect it has on the reality of the subject guided his incursions into the field of literary criticism. Lacan delivered his seminars as if addressing an audience of other, practicing psychoanalysts. Speaking directly to the relation of psychoanalytic theory to the theories and criticism of literature and the arts, Wright (1998, 105) cautions that “Lacan’s own example of critical practice is not to be taken as exemplary.” His references to literature (prose and poetry) and the visual arts were, however, frequent. Lacan approached writers as subjects for whom reality was inextricable from the fantasies that helped them avoid the Real of desire and psychosis. From this perspective, there is only room for a fantastic literary tradition. For Lacan, “There is no comparison of a representation with a putative reality: mimetic art is still presenting a fantasy, a favoured view of reality” (Wright 1998, 109). By calling mimesis into question, Lacan does not alienate himself from the re-evaluation of realism discussed in the literature review; rather, he anticipates it. Referring to “the postmodern position,” Beaumont (2007, 4) writes, “It is a conception of realism that at the same time overstates its mimetic ambitions and dramatically undervalues its ability to exhibit and examine the formal limitations that shape it.” The crucial contribution of Lacanian psychoanalysis to reconceiving realism is the suggestion that art which is not mimetic is not divorced from reality but in fact an ethical means of engagement with an illusory reality.

To understand how Lacan conceives of artists as ethical actors requires some discussion of the method of the Lacanian psychoanalyst. Sigmund Freud famously dubbed his clinical practice the “talking cure” and this became synonymous with psychoanalysis. Discussions of Lacan’s clinical practice, however, point to the complex arrangement of the conversation that takes place between analyst and analysand. Justin Clemens (2007, 189) writes, “The talk is addressed to shadowy figures who, though failing to exist, nonetheless organise the subject’s entire relationship to reality.” The talk is not consciously addressed to the shadowy figures, but conjures them. They are what Lacan calls the *objet petit a*, or object-cause of desire: the spectre of the loss of being that attaches itself to ordinary objects. The object-cause of desire begins to reveal itself when the analysand insists on some object in analysis and evinces the weight of fantasy behind it. While the analysand is talking through the fantasy, the analyst remains silent, such that the fantasy does not receive the desired analytic interpretation and finds no support in the symbolic order. At this stage, the value of psychoanalysis resides in the analyst’s equivocation, their silence, and even their embodiment of the failure of language to match the body. The analyst is aware of the fictional status of the original loss, the forced nature of the choice between being and meaning, and the aim of analysis is to help the analysand become aware too. This entails a dual recognition: fantasy is necessary to sustain desire and avoid psychosis, but fantasy works on reality with very real consequences for the other subjects caught up in the analysand’s desire. As we shall see, the social consequences of fantasy have become the focus of the Lacanian theorists and cultural critics that provide the theoretical foundation for this study.

Evans (1996, 216) writes, “The clinical structures of neurosis, psychosis and perversion are seen as essentially ‘incurable,’ and the aim of analytic treatment is simply to lead the analysand to articulate his truth.” What counts as “truth” in Lacanian psychoanalysis requires its own explanation because Lacan suggests that it is the truth of art: “A few basic

points are clear and constant in Lacan's conception of truth; truth always refers to desire, and the aim of psychoanalytic treatment is to lead the analysand to articulate this truth" (Evans 1996, 217). Insofar as it refers to desire, truth does not refer to an object, but to the lack of an object. Speaking as though he were an analysand, Žižek (2006a, 3) describes the final moment of the analytic process: "What awaits me 'there' is not a deep Truth that I have to identify with, but an unbearable truth that I have to learn to live with." This seems counterintuitive if one understands psychoanalysis as a therapy aimed at "curing" the patient in any traditional sense of the term; however, psychoanalysis cannot reverse the forced choice, the first essential operation. Žižek (2006a, 4) writes, "For Lacan, the goal of psychoanalytic treatment is not the patient's well-being, successful social life or personal fulfilment, but to bring the patient to confront the elementary coordinates and deadlock of his or her desire." Perhaps the simplest way of describing the unbearable truth reached by Lacanian psychoanalysis is the simultaneous presence of the analysand's desire as a relation to an object and as a relation to lack.

For Lacan, Wright (1998, 109) says that "art has more the function of the analyst, offering itself as a cause of desire and raising an ethical dimension: the semblance of the (lost) object, like the analyst's equivocal interpretation, provokes and opposes the inertness of fantasy." For example, Lacan describes a painting that the viewer approaches as a subject of desire. This painting causes the subject to fantasise about its profound depth, but, on examination, there is nothing to it other than what the subject imposed upon it. By exhibiting, or at least failing to conceal, its formal limitations, the painting refers the subject's desire back to them. To the extent that the painting facilitates a confrontation between the subject and the nature of his or her desire, it is similar to the analyst. The point of psychoanalysis, and certainly of art as Lacan understands it, is not to annihilate the subject. The subject of

desire is the structural necessity of the lack and Lacanian psychoanalysis works on the basic assumption that the more you know, the better you can desire:

What is unique and rather brilliant about psychoanalysis—and one reason it is not merely a method of psychic cultivation but also, potentially at least, an incisive tool of social critique—is that it can help us to uncover some of the workings of this structural necessity. And, ideally at least, it can help us to begin to rewrite our psychic destinies. (Ruti 2010, 7)

A group of Slovenian scholars including Žižek, Alenka Zupančič, and Renata Salecl have used Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in a number of social critiques that inform the methodology of this thesis. Žižek in particular has developed a method of critical reading that applies to cultural production as well as social systems and concrete, historical events at the level of subjectivity and desire as a structural necessity.

Over the course of some forty books, not all of which are used in this thesis, and countless articles, Žižek engages consistently with Lacanian psychoanalysis. For Žižek, as for Lacan, the subject is split between the Real and reality. This reality appears consistent on account of fantasy, not just those fantasies that are contingent and entirely individual, spoken by the analysand in the Lacanian clinic, but the fantasies that are the unseen (often obscene) supports of every form of social organisation and identification. Žižek (2010, x) places as much emphasis on the disastrous consequences of these collective libidinal investments, which he argues are responsible for an “explosive growth of social divisions and exclusions,” as on the ecological crisis and struggles over natural resources. This methodology will show how Žižek’s conception of social fantasy has politicised Lacanian psychoanalysis and how it can be applied to a critique of the representation of violence in novels like *2666*, *Senselessness*, and *The Armies*. Žižek’s work is particularly useful in its discussion of the role that desire plays in violence. Specifically, his opposition of a kind of violence that is one of the workings of the structural necessity of lack, and hence desire, to lurid violence like that

which the North has come to expect from Latin America. Žižek's discussions of cultural products that represent historical violence has given rise to an ethics of representation that can be used to better understand the significance of Bolaño's, Castellanos Moya's, and Rosero's work.

Wright begins the section on Žižek in her book with a description of the object being referred to in the title of his first book in English, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989):

At its simplest it is that which we most ardently desire, imagining it to be the possession of the Other; this object, beyond everything else, is what is unconsciously believed will fill the void at the core of being. This void is the effect of the constitution of the subject in language out of the real of the body with all its undirected drives, which language vainly tries to bring entirely within its laws. (Wright 1998, 166)

Žižek's crucial addition to Lacanian psychoanalysis is his concern for developing the implications of the Other's possession of the "sublime object," which is none other than the *objet a*. Lacanian psychoanalysis distinguishes between the little other and the big Other, although the distinction is not hard and fast but dependent on perception, perspective, and prejudice. From the beginning; that is, with the first essential operation, Lacan (1998, 211) locates the subject on the side of being and "the Other" on the side of meaning. The little other is easier to unpack than the Other: it refers to the subject's counterparts, the "other people in whom the subject perceives a likeness to himself (principally a visual likeness)" (Evans 1996, 29). However, "The counterpart is the little other because it is not truly other at all; it is not the radical alterity represented by the Other" (Evans 1996, 30). As we shall see, the Other is the name by which Žižek refers to persons or groups of persons who come to occupy an individual or collective (social) fantasy of possession. Believed to possess the *objet a*, the Other provokes intense libidinal responses ranging from love to hate.

Lacan first described the Other as a structure: all of the letters and punctuation that add up to language, and all of the languages that add up to the sphere of meaning, amount to the subtraction of being and the Real of the body. Nevertheless, the Real remains inseparable from the symbolic and in his later seminars Lacan turns to the effects of its destabilising presence on the subject. In the preface to *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, Wright (1998, xi) describes her shift in focus away from early Lacan, whose “main emphasis was on the determining force of language rather than on that which causes language to fracture,” towards the Lacan of the Real, with whom she places Žižek in conversation. Rather than discuss the subject’s determination by language, Žižek emphasises the subject’s role in the production of and reliance on fantasy as an obscene supplement to the indeterminacy of language. The logic of fantasy directs Žižek’s critique of ideology, which is explicitly political and grounded in an appreciation of the role that cultural production plays in proliferating and, alternatively, challenging fantasies. Wright (1998, 167) says, “The ‘sublime’ object of ideology is an object which, be it in life, in art or in popular culture, is elevated into possessing in its very being the attributes that are felt to be painfully missing in the subject.” Of particular importance to this study is Wright’s (1998, 167) description of an effect that parallels the subject’s projection of desire onto an object: “At the same time as sustaining this idealization the subject projects its own internal antagonisms outside itself onto an external adversary.” Wright (1998, 167) gives racism as an example of such a projection: “Typically, the object of racial hatred is regarded as stealing the subject’s enjoyment.” More recently, Žižek and others have continued to progress in the direction of these social fantasies, linking desire to phenomena of gender and racial violence, which are issues examined in all of the novels in this thesis.

Two aspects of Žižek’s thinking about violence inform the methodology of this thesis. The first Butler and Stephens (2005, 5) call “Žižek’s fundamental gesture.” Some examples of Žižek’s work include a social critique based on the different styles of European toilets, an

analysis of Wile E. Coyote cartoons, and another of soft-core pornography. In the same oeuvre, he examines historical events ranging from the Holocaust and the 9/11 attacks in the United States to the apartheid system in South Africa and the carpet bombing of Cambodia during the Vietnam War. His eclecticism can seem inventive, ambivalent, or even disrespectful, but his thinking aims at what is often overlooked or accused of being another form of essentialism that elides the infinite particularities of our postmodern world:

Žižek's fundamental gesture is always to *decontextualize*. But this does not mean an escape from History or the pressures of context, but precisely the attempt to bring out the non-historical or noncontextualizable within context itself. That is to say, to bring out what it means to say that history and context are themselves incomplete, "not-all." (Butler and Stephens 2005, 5, emphasis in original)

Before history and context, there are subjects, and with subjectivity comes the fantasy of the lost object, a fantasy that runs right through history and context. Žižek points to the role of the subject in histories and contexts that confine violence, for example, to a period of heightened tension between groups of people, or a place (a country or region) between the world's most productive coca fields and its largest cocaine market. Žižek expands the realm of fantasy to include not only self-evident fictions and virtual realities, but the work of historians, cultural critics, social anthropologists and others who deal with facts.

Whether it is the Mexican drug war and associated civil unrest, state violence in Guatemala, or the depoliticisation and criminalisation of the decades-old Colombian conflict, crime is a theme in *2666*, *Senselessness*, and *The Armies*. The example that Wright (1998, 168) gives of Žižek's critical practice is the latter's analysis of crime fiction: "He examines the two main types of detective story, the logic-and-deduction form and the hard-boiled private eye one." His conclusion regarding both types of detective story is that they represent two ways to avoid the Real of desire. The first detective, the sleuth, provides a scapegoat for the group of readers who concern themselves with the bloody details of a crime. Wright

(1998, 168) says that “the killer attracts to himself the desire of the group to find a scapegoat—a libidinal gain for the reader to offload his or her personal guilt, for which the sleuth provides the justification in pointing the finger of blame.” Crucially, Žižek (1991, 59) writes, “The detective ‘proves by facts’ what would otherwise remain a hallucinatory projection of guilt onto a scapegoat, i.e., he proves that the scapegoat is effectively guilty.” Although he (1991, 59) calls the sleuth’s miraculous intervention “the detective’s act,” elsewhere Žižek suggests that avoiding the Real of desire by facts occurs outside not only of crime fiction, but of fiction in general.

In *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, Žižek (1994, 167) claims that psychoanalysis is valuable because it leads subjects into a confrontation with the Real of their desire. He agrees with Lacan that the subject loses everything in such a confrontation, but argues that subjective destitution leads to the possibility of acting ethically. It is unclear what such an ethical act might look like, even to those who are primarily concerned with the so-called ethics of the Real. For example, Zupančič (2015, 196) writes that “it is out of [subjective destitution] that some kind of dimension of something which was simply not part of the configuration before, now is present. There is a choice that becomes possible that was not there before.” It is hoped that this study will shed some light on what choices might emerge beyond the fantasy of Latin American violence, taking *2666*, *Senselessness*, and *The Armies* as exemplary challenges to this fantasy. It is not the objective of this methodology to reach conclusions. However, it is significant to the discussion of Žižek’s critical practice that he opposes the influence of theoretical texts to the elementary impact of psychoanalysis:

Suffice it to recall the rhetorical figures that abound in theoretical texts: “The constraints of the present book do not allow for a more detailed account...”; “Here, we can only delineate the contours of what must be fully substantiated in a more thorough conceptual development...”; and so on—in all such cases one can rest assured that this reference to external, empirical limitations is an excuse concealing the inherent impossibility: the “more detailed account” is a priori impossible—or,

more precisely, it would undermine the very thesis supposed to account for it. (Žižek 1994, 167)

The assertion that something has yet to be proven by facts or remains to be uncovered by more thorough research excuses the subject from immediate action by leaving them in anticipation of some future breakthrough. This suspense is enough for the subject to avoid the Real of his or her desire as that which causes violence to escape from history and emerge in the present.

The second chapter of this thesis argues that “The Part about the Crimes” in *2666* subverts crime fiction by introducing a detective figure who fails to organise facts and point the finger of blame. Similarly, the first and second chapters look at two characters, both of them journalists, who are unable to confine the violence in Santa Teresa to the social, economic, political and legal contexts along the Mexico-United States border, where Gloria Anzaldúa (1999, 25) writes that “the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.” As will be discussed in the chapters that follow, Bolaño uses facts about the Juárez femicide that were either obtained by or made available to journalists like González Rodríguez, but uses them differently in “The Part about the Crimes.” Rather than revealing the truth of the crimes, which the reader might expect after reading this at the end of the third part of *2666*: “No one pays attention to these killings, but the secret of the world is hidden in them” (348), the details of the femicide reveal nothing. The only clear culprits in *2666* are two European literary critics who are described beating a man nearly to death on a London street. Their story reveals a kind of violence that concerns the two male critics’ desire for a female colleague who becomes their Other insofar as she is the person they believe will fill the void at the core of their being.

Unsurprisingly, Žižek’s 2008 book *Violence* contains the second of his gestures that informs this thesis. The purpose of his book is to look beneath the cases of explosive violence

that fill the front pages of newspapers and websites alike, and yield themselves to the Hollywood treatment. He (2009b, 154) mentions, for example, two films from 2006 about the 9/11 attacks five years earlier, *United 93* and *World Trade Center*. Žižek (2009b, 1) suggests that “we should learn to step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of this directly visible ‘subjective’ violence, violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent.” Only once we have stepped back can we begin to perceive “objective” violence:

Subjective violence (crime, terror) is perceived as a disturbance of the “normal” nonviolent state of things. However, *objective* violence (such as the implicit racism and discrimination that is embodied in language and symbolic practices) can be invisible: such objective violence is the relatively hidden counterpart to the highly visible subjective violence. (Wood 2012, 257, emphasis in original)

Before going on to consider how desire entails objective violence, it is necessary to point out that all of the novels in this study were chosen because they step back from the highly visible violent events that inspired their authors. The last two chapters of this thesis draw a connection between the distinctly libidinal violence that precedes any mention of the femicide in *2666* and gender violence in *The Armies*. Interestingly, Rosero’s novel has been criticised for not saying enough about the Colombian conflict. For example, Scott Esposito (2009, n. pag.) writes that the thoughts and feeling of the novel’s narrator-protagonist “fail to convey anything particular to separate the Colombian experience from similar ones in other parts of the world.” Instead, *The Armies* conveys the pervasiveness of violence against women and allows for a better understanding of the consequences of libidinal investments in any Other.

Žižek (2009b, 1) divides the category of objective violence into two subcategories: “First, there is ‘symbolic’ violence embodied in language and its forms. [...] Second, there is what I call ‘systemic’ violence, or the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems.” As a note on scope, this thesis is not

interested in Žižek's specific political commitments beyond the points at which his commentary develops those aspects of his critical method that inform this study. Indeed, Žižek's political writings often deviate from what Butler and Stephens (2005, 5) call his "fundamental gesture"; namely, Žižek insists we think and act in the context of class struggle rather than "bring out the non-historical or noncontextualizable within context itself." In doing so, Žižek is often disparaging of other schools of thought that draw either explicitly or implicitly on Lacanian concepts to achieve social justice in the current political climate without challenging the system itself. In his provocatively titled article "A Plea for Leninist Intolerance," Žižek is particularly critical of postcolonial studies, which is concerned with bringing colonised Others from the margins of the current political configuration to the centre:

[A]t the end of the day, we learn [from postcolonial studies] that the root of postcolonial exploitation is our intolerance toward the Other and, furthermore, that this intolerance is rooted in our intolerance toward the "Stranger in Ourselves," in our inability to confront what we repressed in ourselves. The politico-economic struggle is thus imperceptibly transformed into a pseudopsychanalytic drama of the subject unable to confront its inner traumas. (Žižek 2002b, 545-46)

In this extract, the Real of desire seems to have been superseded by the reality of politico-economic struggle, while the importance of traversing the fantasy (of the lost object and its possession by the Other) is diminished. However, as we shall see, this approach is not consistent across Žižek's work or even his political writings.

Ian Almond (2012, 8) points to a number of instances where Žižek "seems to reverse his own objection and, eschewing socioeconomic explanations of [an historical event], opts for an answer superficially closer to 'pseudopsychanalysis' than anything else." Ultimately, Almond (2012, 12-13) argues that "whilst not synonymous with Žižek's own 'ethical stance,' [the aims of the postcolonial project] certainly come much closer than he is willing to admit." Likewise, Gautam Basu Thakur (2013, 751) writes that "it is not difficult to see the

intersections between Žižek's critical methodology and that of postcolonial studies, and this alone problematizes any overarching denomination of Žižek as a puerile Eurocentric thinker." Although this is not a postcolonial study, it does not dispute the importance of postcolonial studies or its applicability to the study of literature from Latin America and other colonised regions of the world. Applying aspects of Žižek's critical methodology to *2666*, *Senselessness*, and *The Armies* illuminates the (disavowed) intersections of psychoanalysis and postcolonial studies insofar as the socioeconomic situation in the South is represented alongside trans-cultural, intersubjective concerns in each of the novels.

Similarly, this is a Lacanian critique, not a Marxist one. There is obviously scope for investigating the politico-economic dynamics that undergird violence in Mexico, Central and South America, but *2666*, *Senselessness*, and *The Armies* point in another direction. They do not translate the socio-economic struggle that Žižek (2002b, 545-46) suggests is at the heart of the postcolonial problem into "the multiculturalist problematic of the colonized minorities' right to narrate their victimizing experience." Rather, they shift the focus from the victims to the subjects of desire and the fantasies of possession and loss that perpetuate violence. In this way, the novels direct a departure from Žižek and point towards Salecl, whose 1998 book *(Per)versions of Love and Hate* includes a particularly relevant discussion of the role of desire in symbolic and systemic objective violence, and one that is far from "pseudopschoanalysis." Salecl uses Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to argue that love and hate often entail a similar libidinal investment in the Other. Specifically, Salecl looks at racist hate speech in terms of a libidinal investment in an Other (culture, religion, and so on) as either a victim or an extremist of some sort. She (1998, 118) writes, "Lacan's theory suggests an understanding of the problem of violence and speech that differs from that of structuralist and post-structuralist theories primarily because he does not give way on the issue of responsibility." The responsibility in question is the subject's responsibility for his or her

production of and reliance on fantasy. Bolaño, Castellanos Moya, and Rosero begin to traverse the fantasy of Latin American violence by not giving way on the issue of intersubjective responsibility for violence in general; specifically, the subject's responsibility for violence against other subjects that can be as covert as adulation, jealousy, resignation, and voyeurism.

Using Salecl's discussion of racism, it is possible to identify the racist's act and suggest that it works in reality as the detective's act does in fiction. As the detective is concerned with the scapegoat, Salecl (1998, 123) suggests that the racist is concerned with the "dangerous" or "enemy Other." Salecl (1998, 123) writes, "This enemy Other lends consistency to the community in which we dwell by becoming the easily grasped cause of all its ills." Because hate speech is an act of racial violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent, it is subjective violence. However, there is an unexpected form of objective violence attached to that community which blames the Other for its problems. A community that counters racism by defending the Other's uniqueness and demanding its preservation is contingent upon, and equally responsible for, a group of people remaining the Other. Both Salecl and Žižek have described a community and counter-community orbiting the Balkans, where the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia led to the emergence of several states including Slovenia and a decade of interstate conflict and ethno-religious tension. The final chapter of this thesis uses the discussions by Žižek and Salecl of the Balkan Other to examine the social fantasies that culminate in a Colombian Other, arguing that *The Armies* challenges these fantasies through the representation of objective violence in the midst of the Colombian conflict. Like the Balkan Other, the Colombian Other is excluded from the (counter-) community of subjects because of, on the one hand, its propensity for exceptional violence, and on the other, its possession of an exotic authenticity that is strictly correlative with the *objet a*.

In a book published while the siege of Sarajevo was under way, Salecl (1994, 13) writes, “Assuming the comfortable attitude of a distant observer, and evoking the allegedly intricate context of religious and ethnic struggles in the Balkans enables the West to shed its responsibility towards the Balkans.” The responsibility is to understand the proper context in which such conflicts take place—Salecl (1994, 13) mentions “the failure of the West to grasp the political dynamic of the disintegration of Yugoslavia”—and not to lose ourselves in the process. Specifically, the responsibility is to recognise that the Other is largely a projection of our desire and that those who appear capable of exacting and enduring violence that falls under the term “inhuman,” which is to say Other, are subjects. Žižek does not seek to revoke the category of the inhuman, but to universalise it, such that it is evident in the desire that animates subjectivity. Insofar as the subject becomes part of the violent event that, to paraphrase Zupančič (2015, 196), it was simply not part of before, a choice to act becomes possible that was not there for the distant observer. According to Žižek, this inhuman ethics is Lacanian:

Lacan [...] confronts the inhuman core of humanity. This means not only an ethics that no longer denies but fearlessly takes into account the latent monstrosity of being human, the diabolic dimension that exploded in phenomena usually covered by the concept-name “Auschwitz.” [...] This inhuman dimension is for Lacan at the same time the ultimate support of ethics. (Žižek 2011, 675-76)

The most important ethical gesture is the recognition of other subjects; specifically, the willingness to recognise that inhumanity is possible in the North and not confined to some Other place, be it the Balkans or Mexico, Central and South America.

It is no longer the case that the clinical practitioner of psychoanalysis monopolises the process by which fantasies are revealed and can begin to be traversed; that is, to embody the failure of language and symbolic practices to contain the Real of desire. Using *2666*, *Senselessness*, and *The Armies* as examples, it is possible to argue that fiction is no longer

destined to support social fantasies, but can even challenge them. Thanks partly to Žižek's critical practice, his "scrutiny of popular culture as a rich source of social and political fantasy," Wright (1998, 169) says that "a new reading can include the suspect fantasies as part of the total aesthetic experience, whether it be longing for complete symbolic confirmation or the horror of what is concealed by fantasy." By beginning in Europe where the libidinous adventures of three academics culminate in violence, such that it precedes and proves symptomatic of the femicide in the fourth part of *2666*, the novel reveals the objective violence that is concealed by the overrepresentation of its subjective partner. *Senselessness* and *The Armies* do the same by collapsing the libidinal distance between two seemingly innocent narrator-protagonists and the clearly identifiable agents of subjective violence. The subject is what is concealed by the fantasy of the Other and is responsible for confining inhumanity to dangerous Other places at the same time as the context, broadly speaking, of uneven development is responsible for disproportionate violence in the developing countries of the South.

Chapter One

The Part about Us: The Excess of Life and Death in Roberto Bolaño's 2666

As was mentioned in the Literature Review, Bolaño spent his youth between Chile and Mexico before leaving for Europe at twenty-four years of age. There, he lived in Paris, Barcelona and Girona in north-eastern Spain, and eventually settled in Blanes on the Costa Bravo. Bolaño's fiction, particularly his two longest novels, *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*, reaches even further than the peripatetic Chilean. *The Savage Detectives* is bookended by García Madero's four-month odyssey from Mexico City to Mexico's northern deserts. However, the longest, middle section spans twenty years and takes the reader to San Diego, the mid-western United States, London, Madrid, Paris, Barcelona, Mallorca, Rome, Vienna, and Tel Aviv, and, through second-hand accounts, to Nicaragua and Liberia. *2666* ranges from Europe to the Americas, and from the mid to late twentieth century. The longest of the novel's five parts concerns the killing of women in Santa Teresa, Bolaño's stand-in for Juárez, between 1993 and 1997. The reader is led to Santa Teresa by a literary critic from France, another from Spain, and another from Britain in "The Part about the Critics," and by an investigative journalist turned sports writer from Harlem, New York City in "The Part about Fate."

The epigraph of *2666* is from a poem by Charles Baudelaire: "An oasis of horror in a desert of boredom." In *2666*, Santa Teresa is an oasis of horror, but this chapter will first focus on the parts of Bolaño's novel that are not set in Santa Teresa to show that any place where there are subjects of desire is a potential oasis of horror. Similarly, the desert of boredom is neither the Sonoran Desert where Santa Teresa is located nor the Chihuahuan

Desert that surrounds Juárez. Unlike an actual desert (or the popular images of deserts), Bolaño's desert of boredom is not empty of content and void of life. Rather, it is full of objects and contains an excess of life. As this thesis understands it, the desert of boredom refers to the fact that "desire is by definition inconclusive, involved in the potentially infinite metonymy of signifiers and objects" (Zupančič 2003, 184). The issue of boredom refers to the insurmountable gap between an ordinary object and the *objet a*, or object-cause of desire. The subject tires of the object that had once stood for its fantasised lost object and either attempts to find satisfaction elsewhere, or tries to transform the object into something capable of fulfilling it. Both responses to boredom find expression in *2666* and are the excess of life that is the focus of this chapter.

This chapter will focus on the role that the European academics and the American journalist play in *2666*. As we shall see, two of the critics turn a street in the centre of London into an oasis of horror before arriving in Santa Teresa, where the potential in their desire for excess is revealed to a third critic. The journalist travels to Santa Teresa and witnesses the horrors there in a way that redoubles the critics' excess at the same time as it reveals something about the killing of women in the city. Like *Senselessness* and *The Armies*, *2666* is a global fiction insofar as it is concerned with establishing a libidinal economy from which readers as subjects cannot acquit themselves. Some characters in *2666* are based on real people involved in the Juárez femicide. The most obvious example of this is the character Sergio González Rodríguez, who, like his namesake, writes for a newspaper in Mexico City and ends up investigating the killing of women in a city some 1500 kilometres north of the capital. Another example is the American investigator who travels to Santa Teresa in "The Part about the Crimes" at the behest of local authorities to help investigate the serial killings there. In 1998, Chihuahua's state prosecutor invited the former FBI agent who coined the term "serial killer" to Juárez. The versions of González Rodríguez and the American

investigator that appear in *2666* are significant to the novel's critique of violence, and they are discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. Unlike them, the protagonists of "The Part about the Critics" and "The Part about Fate" are entirely invented and it is in their stories that the universal in the particular acts of violence alluded to in the fourth part of *2666* emerges. This chapter will show that the academics and the journalist arrive in Santa Teresa to be confronted with their own excess of desire at the same time as they find themselves close to, or actively involved in, the context of femicide. They serve to open the context of Latin American violence for the subject of desire.

First, it is necessary to consider what it means to designate Bolaño a writer of globalisation, and *2666* a global fiction, by developing the idea of globalisation. In *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade and la Frontera* (2010), Elvia R. Arriola writes that globalisation is divisive:

Globalization has its fans and its critics. To some, [...] it is the way of the future, where people of different nations and cultures will interconnect easily through the Internet; markets and democracy will flourish; and all things stodgy, inefficient, and dictatorial will fade away. Others are more cautious, calling for better regulatory oversight by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other financial players in the politics of free trade. (Arriola 2010, 30)

It is the globalisation of capitalism as an economic ideology that provokes these reactions, and *2666* has been used by many scholars and commentators to criticise the way that globalisation has transformed the border between Mexico and the United States in the name of efficiency. In particular, the criticism has focused on the phenomenon of *maquiladoras*, industrial parks where transnational companies employ relatively inexpensive labourers from Mexico, Central and South America to assemble products for export, from fridges to action figures. Arriola (2010, 31-2) writes that, owing to a range of stereotypes, young women are preferred *maquiladora* workers: they are perceived to be more agreeable than Mexican men, less likely to tire than older women, and less likely to unionise than either men or older

women. While there was substantial foreign investment in *maquiladoras*, there was little to no investment in housing, transport and security. This, coupled with high levels of male unemployment, produced a population of foreign, female workers exposed to gender and xenophobic violence.

Like Juárez, Santa Teresa is a city of *maquiladoras* where women, many of whom are migrant *maquiladora* workers, are the targets of disproportionate levels of violence. As we shall see in this and the following chapter, *2666* makes repeated references to the ways in which *maquiladora* workers have been let down by those with a stake in the industrialisation of Mexico's northern border. As a result, global capitalism has been the focus of many valuable discussions of *2666*. For example, McCann (2010b, 78) writes that "the liberalisation of labour markets along the Mexican-US border has also helped create a population of disposable people whose lives are being systematically devalued and constantly threatened." McCann (2010b, 78) writes, "This disposable population and the forces that threaten it haunt Bolaño's novel." Likewise, Grant Farred (2010, 697) writes, "In *2666* the stage that produces despair is, of course, rooted in economic depravity, lack of job options and a postrevolutionary Mexican nation ensnared in and by the catastrophic workings of neoliberal capital." At the same time as *2666* is a conduit for these and other critiques of the concrete circumstances of injustice, it "defrauds us of any expectation of fictional 'fulfilment'" (Herlinghaus 2013, 168). Understanding the myriad contributing factors to the powder keg of socio-economic, cultural and political exploitation in Juárez does not account for the proliferation of violence outside of Santa Teresa in *2666*.

2666 shifts the focus from subjective to objective violence, such that there is no clearly identifiable agent of violence in "The Part about the Crimes." McCann (2010b, 78) writes, "Even when *2666* is focused on cosmopolitan intellectuals and tends to read a bit like a campus thriller, it is permeated by a sense of menace. Something immense and

unrepresentable is always looming on its margins.” Two dissertations that deal directly with contemporary crime fiction register the shift from subjective to objective violence in a variety of novels including *2666*. Both of them describe Bolaño’s novel as a kind of anti-capitalist crime fiction. Gina Louise Robinson Sherriff (2010, 136) writes that “Roberto Bolaño presents the violence in *2666* as a dreadful side effect of the unchecked rise of capitalism and globalization in Mexico.” Simone Sessolo (2012, 170) looks at four novels including Bolaño’s and writes that “the absence of a culprit at the end of [...] *2666* might best be conceived not as a postmodern reaction toward genre formulae, but rather as marking the birth of a new genre formula based on contemporary social conditions.” Thus, Sessolo identifies capitalism as the agent of violence. He (2012, 254) writes that “the capitalist system is grounded in the most extreme reduction of being, and therefore it is the most extreme form of violence.” While this thesis does not disagree with Sherriff’s and Sessolo’s critique of capitalism, such a critique stops short of the non-historical within context itself. This thesis is concerned that the context of capitalism elides the role of the subject in social reality, dissolving guilt and solidarity in a complexity that seems independent of any individual.

In his book *Seeking Social Justice Through Globalization* (2001), Gavin Kitching makes an interesting point about the diminished responsibility for the consequences, good or bad, of capitalism:

There is actually a sense in which the concept of blame, and the very activity of blaming, becomes radically misplaced in this sort of context. One might say that precisely because capitalism is a system, its systematic functioning (and malfunctioning) cannot meaningfully be blamed on any (specific) body. (Kitching 2001, 222n24)

Lacanian psychoanalysis works to counter the projection of guilt and displacement of blame onto a scapegoat, whether it is an enemy Other or the impersonal machinations of the market, because it “does not give way on the issue of responsibility” (Salecl 1998, 118). The subject

of desire precedes the categorisation of subjects as consumers, while the libidinal economy is reified by capitalism. Zupančič (2003, 184) writes, “The only existing object of desire is the lack that sustains its metonymy. In this perspective, the realization of desire can only mean one thing: to make an ‘independent,’ ‘self-standing’ object out of this very lack.” It follows, then, that a market economy based on the consumption of goods and services is inextricably linked with desire and complicit in the fantasies of possession and loss. Henrik Jøker Bjerre (2014, 67) writes, “The capitalist economy, of course, thrives immensely on this metonymic logic of desire, where no meaning is ultimately fixed and every satisfaction is always provisional.” The purpose of this chapter is to show that it is not merely capitalism but subjectivity that is looming on the margins of Bolaño’s novel, and which is behind the most extreme forms of violence.

At first glance, advocates and opponents of globalisation acknowledge that it facilitates interconnectedness: it breaks down certain barriers between people. For some of its advocates, globalisation is an equalising process that opens up economic opportunities for the South at the same time as global communication leads to an increased awareness of humanitarian issues and inequalities. Alternatively, Žižek finds globalisation responsible for the clashes of different cultures. He (2009b, 50) gives as an example the controversy surrounding the depiction of Muhammad in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*: “[T]he ‘global information village’ is the condition of the fact that something which appeared in an obscure daily in Denmark caused a violent stir in distant Muslim countries.” Other recent events such as the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting in Paris seem to confirm that a condition of globalisation is the redistribution not just of wealth, but of violence. Žižek (2009b, 50) writes, “Those who understand globalisation as an opportunity for the entire earth to be a unified space of communication, one which brings together all humanity, often fail to notice this dark side of their proposition.” Even if globalisation exacerbates intercultural conflicts, Žižek

argues that “the way to react to globalization is to endorse it and demand even more radical globalization” (Žižek and Daly 2004, 155). We should not understand this as a reversal, or a case of Žižek being a mere provocateur, but as an example of his psychoanalytic politics. As in the Lacanian clinic, a psychoanalytic social critique aims to show that particular conflicts refer to an internal antagonism. As conflicts erupt they bring out the social fantasies that sustain them, and which must be traversed. The structure of *2666* is such that an internal antagonism and instance of fantasy prefigures a social catastrophe in “The Part about the Crimes.” *2666* is a global fiction to the extent that it reproduces the subjective and contextual dark side of globalisation.

First, Bolaño reproduces the dark side of global capitalism. There are three moments in *2666* when someone—a television news reporter (258), a sportswriter from Santa Teresa (286), and the head of Santa Teresa’s Department of Sex Crimes (568-69)—mentions that Santa Teresa is the Mexican city with the lowest female unemployment rate. These moments are set alongside descriptions of the discoveries of the bodies of 109 women and girls tortured and killed in the city during the “The Part about the Crimes.” Their juxtaposition suggests that the violence in Santa Teresa or Juárez—where the same number of bodies were discovered between 1995 and 1998 (Andrews 2014, 229)—is too high a price to pay for access to employment. However, when violence disrupts a love triangle between the French literary critic Jean-Claude Pelletier, the Spanish critic Manuel Espinoza, and the English critic Liz Norton in “The Part about the Critics,” it prefigures the femicide. Andrews (2014, 16) writes that “the crimes in Santa Teresa reveal a human potential that is universal, if more contained in most other places.” The first subsection of this chapter looks at the significance of “The Part about the Critics” to *2666* and its critique of violence. Specifically, it argues that Bolaño reproduces the global libidinal economy and that the potential in desire for excess brings together all of humanity.

The second subsection of this chapter looks at Oscar Fate, the eponymous protagonist of “The Part about Fate.” Specifically, it looks at the significance of the events leading up to his arrival in Santa Teresa and the implications of what he does and does not do when he is there. Fate is an African-American journalist who writes for the fictional Harlem-based magazine *Black Dawn*. His beat is politics: “Political things that affect the African-American community. Social things (279),” but he travels to Santa Teresa to cover a light heavyweight boxing match. He decides to cover the match after the death of his elderly mother. The details of her funeral are in stark contrast with the situation in Santa Teresa, where women’s bodies await identification at the morgue after having been found buried or half-buried in the desert that surrounds the city or in its vacant lots and garbage dumps. Fate is distracted from the fight by violence outside the ring, by the possibility of a serial killer targeting women in the troubled border city, and pitches the story of “the biggest serial killings in history” (294) to his editor. A series of events leads Fate to confront the uncanny excess of life that inheres in the femicide. This shatters the image (a scapegoat) of the world’s worst serial killer and brings Fate along with the reader into the picture.

“She’s just like me, but she’s dead”: The Archimboldians and the Symptom

Discussions of *2666* invariably mention that Bolaño based Santa Teresa on Juárez. The connection reinforces the fact that the femicide detailed in “The Part about the Crimes” really happened, enabling and ameliorating the kind of criticisms of capitalism and globalisation that have already been mentioned. In an article for the *Nation*, which is discussed in more detail in the second half of this chapter, Marcela Valdes tells the compelling story of how Bolaño worked with González Rodríguez to recreate, as accurately as possible, the details of the femicide. Valdes (2008, 14) writes, “By setting his novel in Santa Teresa, a fictional town

in Sonora, rather than in Juárez, Bolaño was able to blur the lines between what he knew and what he imagined.” This chapter argues that it is significant for another reason as well. Because un- or misnaming people and places is a trait common to *2666*, *Senselessness*, and *The Armies*, the gesture is discussed throughout this thesis in terms of an aversion to contextualising or localising violence that is typical of global fictions.

In 2012, González Rodríguez published *The Femicide Machine*, a short book synthesising nearly two decades of his research and writing about the situation in Juárez. In it, González Rodríguez (2012, 42) writes that the scale of the problems in the border city led Mexico’s federal government and Chihuahua’s state government to a “political diagnosis [that] reflected a consensus: Write off Ciudad Juárez as lost.” As we shall see in the next chapter, the American investigator and expert criminologist whose services are sought by the Sonoran state government in “The Part about the Crimes” comes to the same conclusion about Santa Teresa. However, by discussing “The Part about the Critics,” this subsection will argue that it is impossible to write off Santa Teresa in the same way that readers in the North might write off Juárez. If the official story seems to have doomed Juárez to an ever-escalating violence that is foreign to those in the North and Mexico’s cosmopolitan elites, then *2666*, particularly “The Part about the Critics,” counteracts it.

“The Part about the Critics” begins by describing how the Frenchman Jean-Claude Pelletier, the Italian Piero Morini, the Spaniard Manuel Espinoza, and the Englishwoman Liz Norton became interested in the little-known German writer Benno von Archimboldi. In their own way, the three men attach their aspirations for academic success to the image of Archimboldi as an unacknowledged literary genius awaiting their discovery. According to the narrator, “All three had iron wills” (8), but Pelletier and Espinoza in particular exhibit the will not only to shape the debate about Archimboldi, but to track down the reclusive writer and bask in his reflected glory. This is despite Archimboldi’s dubious credentials. Just as

there are no examples of visceral realist poetry in *The Savage Detectives*, there are no examples of Archiboldi's writing in 2666. Moreover, Archiboldi was largely ignored by the academy before becoming the focus of the "Archiboldians," as the critics are known. The desire of the critics for Archiboldi transforms him into something more than himself and exemplifies the Lacanian notion that what the subject desires is always in excess of what it needs. The following discussion is centred on desire, specifically on the violence that befalls Norton when she finds herself transformed into an object by Pelletier's and Espinoza's desire.

Besides being the only female, Norton is the youngest Archiboldian. According to the narrator:

She was incapable of setting a goal and striving steadily toward it. At least, no goal was appealing or desirable enough to pursue it unreservedly. Used in a personal sense, the phrase "achieve an end" seemed to her a small-minded snare. She preferred the word *life*, and, on rare occasions, *happiness*. If volition is bound by social imperatives, as William James believed, and it's therefore easier to go to war than to quit smoking, one could say that Liz Norton was a woman who found it easier to quit smoking than go to war. (Bolaño 2009, 8, emphasis in original)

This seems to reinforce the gender stereotype that men are active while women are passive. However, the picture that emerges as "The Part about the Critics" progresses, only to be repeated throughout 2666, is one of an unreserved pursuit of desire in excess of life and happiness. One of the overwhelming symbols of this excess are the *maquiladoras*, the benefactors of which are willing to condemn workers to suffering and death to achieve a financial end. There are, however, other ways in which an excess of desire derails the lives of characters in 2666 that are less obviously linked to economic exploitation. It is Norton, not Pelletier and Espinoza, who is acutely aware of her place in the libidinal economy, and who confronts a certain truth about desire and acts.

Pelletier, Espinoza and Morini meet intermittently at a series of German literature conferences in Leipzig, Zurich, Maastricht, Augsburg, Paris and Bologna before they meet Norton. During this time, Pelletier and Espinoza reveal that they are threatened by Morini because the Italian has begun writing a book on Archimboldi “that might be the grand Archimboldian opus, the pilot fish that would swim for a long time beside the great black shark of the German’s oeuvre” (11). The threat posed by Morini seems to subside as the three men begin a war of words with an opposing group of German Archimboldians that comes to a head at a conference in Bremen. The narrator says that “Pelletier, backed by Morini and Espinoza, went on the attack like Napoleon at Jena, assaulting the unsuspecting German Archimboldi scholars” (12). The three men meet Norton when she jumps to their defence in Bremen and in this way the Archimboldians are forged in violence. Their war pales in comparison to the one that rages over Santa Teresa, whose namesake Juárez is “a theatre of operations for the war on drugs” (González Rodríguez 2012, 12). Likewise, it pales in comparison to the Second World War, which is the focus of the fifth part of 2666, “The Part about Archimboldi.” However, it is a continuum of violence that escalates from a subliminal struggle between the critics centred on whose work will be the grand Archimboldian opus to instances of explicit misogyny as Pelletier and Espinoza come to terms with their shared desire for Norton.

Following the Bremen conference, the Archimboldians talk over dinner about “the flaying Norton had given Borchmeyer [one of the German Archimboldian scholars] and about Borchmeyer’s growing dismay at Norton’s increasingly ruthless attacks” (13). After a conference in Avignon, Pelletier, alone in his Paris apartment, realises that he is in love with Norton. The same thought strikes Espinoza as he is boarding the plane for Madrid. Espinoza’s revelation differs slightly from Pelletier’s. The narrator says that “among the ideal images of Norton that passed at supersonic speed through [Espinoza’s] head as the plane flew

toward Spain at four hundred miles an hour, there were more sex scenes than Pelletier had imagined. Not many more, but more” (16). “As for what passed through Liz Norton’s head,” the narrator says “it’s better not to say” (16). This is indicative of the relationship between the three Archimboldians: Pelletier and Espinoza take turns idealising (and, as we shall see, demonising) Norton, who is at stages uncomfortable with the men’s unreserved approach. Separately, Pelletier and Espinoza strike up a sexual relationship with Norton. Eventually, they find out about each other: “Norton told [Espinoza] that she and Pelletier were lovers, although she put it in another way, using some more ambiguous word, friends maybe” (33). The men’s libidinal investiture in Norton far outweighs her investment in them, setting the scene for a story that culminates in violence.

Gender violence is the focus of the fourth chapter of this thesis, which looks at *The Armies*; however, it is a significant part of both *2666* and *Senselessness* as well. All three of these novels move through instances of what this study describes as a kind of objective gender violence that arises when women become the object of a male subject’s desire. This objective gender violence then becomes subjective, most obviously in the femicide that occupies the fourth part of *2666*, but also in the blatant misogyny of Castellanos Moya’s narrator in *Senselessness*, and in the harrowing rape scene at the end of *The Armies*. At the base of objective gender violence is a paradox best expressed by Lacan (1998, 268) when he describes one person saying to another: “I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you—the *objet petit a*—I mutilate you.” An excess that is exemplified by the ideal images of Norton that occupy Espinoza’s mind emerges above and beyond the two (or in case of the Archimboldians, three) people in love. Salecl describes two different logics at work in the relationship between the loving and the loved:

First, the loving one perceives in the other something that he or she does not have—the object *a* [...]. The loving one therefore falls in love by presupposing that the loved one possesses this object, something that is in the loved one more than him- or

herself. And the second logic concerns the loving subject's desire to become the object of love for the loved one. (Salecl 1998, 46)

Norton's unwillingness to become the object of love for Pelletier or Espinoza, and the men's inability to become the object of love for her, is inextricable from the two violent events discussed below.

Over the course of two long phone conversations, Pelletier and Espinoza clear up any misgivings they might have of each other. The main subject of their conversations is Norton, who,

by the time the second call was nearing its close, both had recognized not as the Fury who destroyed their friendship, black clad with bloodstained wings, [...] but as the angel who had fortified their friendship, forcibly shown them what they'd known all along, what they'd assumed all along, which was that they were civilized beings, beings capable of noble sentiments, not two dumb beasts debased by routine and regular sedentary work. (Bolaño 2009, 41)

None of the assertions Pelletier and Espinoza make about themselves are true. When Norton invites both men to London, hoping to end things between them, Pelletier arrives before Espinoza. Fearing the worst, Pelletier wishes he had never become friends with the Spaniard: "Life is shit, thought Pelletier in astonishment, [...] if we hadn't teamed up, she would be mine now. And then: if there hadn't been mutual understanding and friendship and affinity and alliance, she would be mine now" (57-58). Norton says something about Espinoza being late and the narrator says that "Pelletier imagined Espinoza's plane engulfed in flames, crashing onto the runway at the Madrid airport in a screech of twisted steel" (58). Both Pelletier and Espinoza seemed to believe they could stay friends and continue seeing Norton because their "civilised" desires are void of any excess born of animosity or competition. This is clearly not the case. Nor is it the case that Pelletier and Espinoza are above demonising Norton as a Fury or as a *femme fatale*.

Before their trip to London and the suspension of the three-way affair, the narrator says that “it would be fair to say that Espinoza and Pelletier believed themselves to be (and in their perverse way, were) incarnations of Ulysses” (45). Although it is never explicitly stated, it is fair to say that Pelletier and Espinoza believe that Norton is a siren luring them onto the rocks of each new excess despite the reality that they are the ones pursuing her. After three uncomfortable months of avoiding each other, Pelletier and Espinoza travel to London uninvited. This time, their friendship is fortified by the appearance of a much younger man named Alex Pritchard, a friend and possibly an ex-lover of Norton. Pritchard offends the other men when he calls German literature “a scam” (66), and Pelletier and Espinoza cast Pritchard, a secondary school teacher, as a cretin, a fool of no consequence and an uncivilised beast. Pelletier meets Pritchard again and the younger man warns him to be careful:

“Careful of what?” Pelletier managed to ask.

“Of the medusa,” said Pritchard. “Beware of the Medusa.”

And then, before he continued down the stairs, he added: “When you’ve got her in your hands she’ll blow you to pieces.”

For a while Pelletier stood there motionless, listening to Pritchard’s footsteps, then the noise of the street door opening and closing. Only when the silence became unbearable did he continue upstairs, thoughtful and in the dark. (Bolaño 2009, 69)

When Pelletier tells Espinoza about the exchange, neither man dismisses Pritchard as a misogynist. Rather, the idea of Norton as the Medusa and their proximity to Pritchard possesses the men and exposes their own vulgarity to such an extent that “they discovered without surprise (without even a shadow of surprise) that both of them hated Pritchard, and that they hated him more each day” (71). Pelletier’s and Espinoza’s hatred of Pritchard reveals a certain level of self-hatred that reflects the disparity between fantasy and reality.

Pelletier’s and Espinoza’s projection of self-hatred onto others intensifies as the fantasy of the Archimboldians’ impenetrability and each man’s self-image is tested by reality. The narrator foreshadows the dissolution of the Archimboldians by telling us that Pelletier

and Espinoza have little sense of loyalty or friendship: “Both of them paid it lip service, of course. But in practice, neither believed in friendship or loyalty” (64). When Pelletier and Espinoza demand to know whether “their beloved Liz” (72) loves Pritchard, it is as if the image each man has of himself as a civilised being, capable, if not of noble sentiments, then of friendship, disappears beneath a tide of jealousy. Instead of loyalty or friendship, the narrator says, “They [Pelletier and Espinoza] believed in passion” (64). According to Žižek:

I am able to exert control over myself only in so far as some fundamental obstacle makes it impossible for me to “do whatever I want”—the moment this obstacle falls away, I am caught in a demonic compulsion, at the whim of “something in me more than myself.” (Žižek 1999, 390)

When the trappings of civilisation fall away, Pelletier and Espinoza perform the first, directly visible act of violence in 2666, one that repeats and redoubles the attack against the German Archimboldians that inaugurated their relationship with Norton and culminates in a form of disturbing passion.

In London, Norton, Pelletier and Espinoza go out for dinner, during which they drink and discuss “the inevitability of jealousy. And about the need for jealousy, as if jealousy were a middle-of-the-night urge” (73). Afterwards, the trio get in a cab. During the course of the journey, the Pakistani driver accuses them of indecency: he says that the word for Norton “was *bitch* or *slut* or *pig*,” while the name for men like Pelletier and Espinoza “was *pimp* or *hustler* or *whoremonger*” (73, emphasis in original). The trio are understandably outraged and demand the driver stop the cab. On St. George’s Road in Southwark, less than two and a half kilometres from the centre of London, Espinoza drags the Pakistani from the driver’s seat and, while Norton protests that “violence didn’t solve anything,” he and Pelletier beat the Pakistani “until he was unconscious and bleeding from every orifice in the head, except the eyes” (74). This incident is returned to in the fifth chapter of this thesis in order to make the connection between gender and racial violence in terms of the Lacanian Other. Pelletier’s and

Espinoza's yielding entirely to this middle-of-the-night urge, and Norton's transformation by it, are significant to broader discussions of desire. For example, Herlinghaus (2013, 189-90) writes that the men's beating of the Pakistani "is linked to the novel's deeper core of violence" and shows "the way the violent act functions as a release, an unchaining of refrained desire." The violent act reveals a truth about the Archiboldians with broad ramifications for understanding "The Part about the Crimes."

Discussing "The Part about the Crimes," Farred (2010, 698) writes, "In the *maquiladora* murders the place of discovery is not the place—or the time, for that matter—of death. The death scene is, for all intents and purposes, unknowable." Significantly, St. George's Road is as close as any place in 2666 to a scene of death, while Pelletier and Espinoza are as close as anyone else in the novel (including the "main suspects" in the killing of women in Santa Teresa) to known culprits. This makes the way Bolaño describes the Archiboldians in the immediate aftermath of the cab driver's beating particularly devastating:

When they stopped kicking him they were sunk for a few moments in the strangest calm of their lives. It was as if they'd finally had the ménage à trois they'd so often dreamed of.

Pelletier felt as if he had come. Espinoza felt the same, to a slightly different degree. Norton, who was staring at them without seeing them in the dark, seemed to have experienced multiple orgasms. A few cars were passing by on St. George's Road, but the three of them were invisible to anyone travelling in a vehicle at that hour. There wasn't a single star in the sky. And yet the night was clear: they could see everything in great detail, even the outlines of the smallest things, as if an angel had suddenly clapped night-vision goggles on their eyes. Their skin felt smooth, extremely soft to the touch, although in fact the three of them were sweating. (Bolaño 2009, 74-75)

This unlikely oasis of horror is a culmination of Pelletier's and Espinoza's boredom and something in excess of their imaginary identifications and desires. It can be understood with reference to one of the key functions of the symptom as it appears in Lacanian psychoanalysis, specifically in Žižek's Lacanian critique of ideology.

Žižek describes the emergence of the symptom in a way that applies to the Archimboldians and provides a straightforward definition of a multifaceted concept that is returned to at every stage of this thesis:

[T]he ideological lie which structures our perception of reality is threatened by symptoms *qua* “returns of the repressed”—cracks in the fabric of the ideological lie. [...] That is to say, the symptom is the exception which disturbs the surface of the false appearance, the point at which the repressed Other Scene erupts. (Žižek 2009a, 65)

The Archimboldians’ ideological lie is Pelletier’s and Espinoza’s distinction between civilisation and barbarism, one that leads them to repress the increasingly evident elements of their identity that do not adhere to the false dichotomy. The violent act on St. George’s Road profoundly disturbs the Archimboldians’ false appearance and is exacerbated by the ambiguity of its object. The morning after, Pelletier and Espinoza walk along Charing Cross in the centre of London: “They talked about what they’d felt as they rained blows on the fallen body. A combination of sleepiness and sexual desire. [...] They didn’t know [what they were looking for]. Nor, at that stage, did they care” (76). The potential in desire and boredom for excess shows itself to Norton in the form of a threat when the Archimboldians arrive in Santa Teresa.

For a while after the violence in London, Pelletier and Espinoza are again separated from their mutual lover. They visit brothels in different cities across a European desert of boredom until the moment arrives when they refocus their energies: “Once more they began to call Norton” (86). The Archimboldians reunite and at a conference in Toulouse they receive information about the possible whereabouts of the object of their academic desire. A young Mexican conference-goer reveals that a friend of his from Mexico City “had met Archimboldi *just the other day*” (99, emphasis in original). Archimboldi had contacted this friend—a poet, novelist, essayist, and top government official “better known to his friends as

El Cerdo, or the Pig” (100)—and the two had met in a hotel before proceeding to a bar in downtown Mexico City. The Archimboldians call El Cerdo, who confirms the story but tells them that Archimboldi was headed for Santa Teresa. Consequently, Pelletier, Espinoza and Norton travel from Paris to Mexico City to Hermosillo, the capital of Sonora, and finally to Santa Teresa. The trio book into separate rooms in a place called the Hotel México that seems to make use of what Pope (2011, 160) calls the “interconnected and fluid geography” of 2666 to merge seamlessly with St. George’s Road.

Unlike Pelletier’s or Espinoza’s room, Norton’s has two mirrors instead of one. The inconsistency goes unmentioned until the two mirrors appear in a dream that Norton has a couple of nights into the Archimboldians’ stay. In the dream, Norton stands between the mirrors, which create a separate image. It is as if another Norton were present: “Her image in the mirrors was dressed to go out, in a tailored gray suit and, oddly, since Norton hardly ever wore such things, a little gray hat that brought to mind the fashion pages of the fifties” (115). The image brought to life by the mirrors is one of the ideal images of Norton that act as the focus of Pelletier’s and Espinoza’s libidinal investment. In *The Parallax View* (2006), Žižek describes desire causing a minimal distance to emerge and divide one and the same object from itself:

The same object can all of a sudden be “transubstantiated” into the object of my desire: what is just an ordinary object to you is to me the focus of my libidinal investment, and this shift is caused by some unfathomable X, a *je ne sais quoi* in the object which can never be pinned down to any of its particular properties. (Žižek 2006c, 18)

The image of Norton in the mirrors begins to resist its original as object and subject merge in the performance of “what is ‘in the subject more than the subject,’ of the *object in subject* which resists interpellation” (Žižek 2008, 126, emphasis in original). A vein stands out on the other woman’s neck and then Norton begins to notice other changes: “The woman’s head was

turning almost imperceptibly. [...] And if she keeps moving, in the end we'll see each other. Each of us will see the other's face" (116). When they lock eyes, Norton's dream becomes a nightmare that carries the Archimboldians' triad of love, hate and violence into the context of the femicide.

Boxall (2103, 197) writes, "The narrator's representation of the female critic Liz Norton [...] dwells repeatedly, obsessively, on the way that her body fits and fails to fit within the forms through which she recognises herself and is recognised by others." The discrepancy between who Norton is, an ordinary person, and who she is for others, Pelletier and Espinoza, is nowhere more apparent than in her dream. The woman who appears at the intersection of the two mirrors embodies the *objet a* insofar as she "starts to function as a kind of screen, an empty space on which the subject projects the fantasies that support his desire" (Žižek 1991, 133). The woman turns to face Norton, who examines her carefully: "The woman's eyes were just like her eyes. The cheekbones, the lips, the forehead, the nose. Norton started to cry in sorrow or fear, or thought she was crying. She's just like me, she said to herself, but she's dead" (116). The fact that the woman in Norton's dream is dead suggests that Norton herself is in danger, but it is wrong to assume that the source of the threat is Santa Teresa. The source of the threat is Pelletier and Espinoza and the fact that Norton is only part of the Archimboldians as a concise desert of Pelletier's and Espinoza's boredom, either the Fury who destroys their friendship or the angel that fortifies it but never another subject.

What compels Pelletier and Espinoza to continue kicking the Pakistani on St. George's Road cannot be pinned down to any of the Pakistani's particular properties. Instead, the Pakistani functions as a screen on which they project their racist fantasies, the nature of which is discussed in the fifth chapter of this thesis, and internal antagonisms. The narrator says that Pelletier and Espinoza "were convinced that it was the Pakistani who was the real reactionary and misogynist, the violent one, the intolerant and offensive one," and that "if the

Pakistani had materialized before them, they probably would have killed him” (80). The Pakistani’s vulnerability, his capacity to embody the cause of all of Pelletier’s and Espinoza’s ills, is mirrored by the post-mortem responses of the dead woman in Norton’s dream:

The woman smiled tentatively and then, almost without transition, a grimace of fear twisted her face. Startled, Norton looked behind her but there was no one there, just the wall. The woman smiled at her again. This time the smile grew not out of a grimace but out of a look of despair. And then the woman smiled at her again and her face became anxious, then blank, then nervous, then resigned, and then all the expressions of madness passed over it and after each she always smiled. (Bolaño 2009, 116)

The link between the Pakistani and Norton as she appears to herself in the dream is that both are objects of Pelletier’s and Espinoza’s desire to the extent that they occupy an imaginary place of loss.

As we know, Žižek (2007, 222) writes that “it is in dreams that we encounter the traumatic Real.” Norton’s dream identifies an excessive element in the Archimboldians that should not be there, but needs to be there for the group to function as such: the symptom. Todd McGowan (2014, 43) writes, “Though the symptom does not fit within the logic of the system, it expresses the truth of the system that confronts the system in an external form.” The truth is that the Other Norton binds the Archimboldians together as a group of lovers, but traumatises Norton with the fact that she herself is excluded from the group or only included in the frame of Pelletier’s and Espinoza’s desire as a dead object or (another) victim. The woman in Norton’s dream seems to grin and bear some obscene influence in spite of her death, which serves as a metaphor for the Lacanian death drive. Paradoxically, the death drive does not stand for the subject’s desire to die, but “for an uncanny excess of life, for an ‘undead’ urge which persists beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death, of generation and corruption” (Žižek 2007, 208). What is so nightmarish or truly uncanny about Norton’s

dream is that the excess of life it refers to by dislocating her in the duelling mirrors is not her own.

Norton protests the futility of Pelletier and Espinoza beating the Pakistani. She tells them that “violence didn’t solve anything, that in fact after this beating the Pakistani would hate the English even more” (74), but Pelletier and Espinoza continue. The two men are encouraged by the weight of the various social fantasies attached to the Muslim Other. Kicking the Pakistani, they yell “shove Islam up your ass, which is where it belongs” (74). Pelletier’s and Espinoza’s fantasies concerning each other as well as Norton, Pritchard, Archimboldi, the German Archimboldi scholars, and the Pakistani generate an antisocial excess that only Norton is able to perceive. Pelletier and Espinoza are unable to traverse their fantasies; instead, they continue to project their desire and internal antagonisms outward. A few days after her dream, Norton leads Pelletier and Espinoza to her room and the three of them sleep together. Afterwards, at Norton’s request, Pelletier and Espinoza return to their rooms, where the narrator says that “they soon fell into a deep sleep, a sleep that eluded Norton, who straightened the sheets of her bed a little and turned out the lights but remained wide awake” (124). For Norton, the *ménage à trois* is a failed attempt to shed light on what Pelletier and Espinoza want from her so that she might be rid of it and reinsert herself into the Archimboldians as (nothing more than) a subject. A desert of boredom appears in another dream Norton has the day before leaving Santa Teresa alone:

Norton dreamed of a tree, an English oak that she picked up moved from place to place in the countryside, no spot entirely satisfying her. Sometimes the oak had no roots, other times it trailed long roots like snakes or the locks of a Gorgon. (Bolaño 2009, 131)

The dream condenses the inconclusiveness of desire as well as the male fantasy of the *femme fatale* that positions her as the object-cause of the passion for either sex or violence that becomes symptomatic of the Archimboldians.

Norton's dreams, or rather her nightmares, allow her to enact a certain freedom vis-à-vis the Archiboldians. Specifically, the freedom to leave the stupid pursuit of imaginary goals, what Žižek (1999, 390) calls "the blind compulsion to repeat more and more intense pleasures," for life and happiness. Aware of herself as an object of Pelletier's and Espinoza's desire, Norton is thrown into her freedom:

There is no freedom outside the traumatic encounter with the opacity of the Other's desire—I am, as it were, thrown into my freedom when I confront this opacity as such, deprived of the fantasmatic cover that tells me what the Other wants from me. In this difficult predicament, full of anxiety, when I know *that* the Other wants something from me, without knowing *what* this desire is, I am thrown back into myself, compelled to assume that risk of freely determining the coordinates of my desire. (Žižek 2002a, lvi, emphasis in original)

Mari Ruti (2008, 116) criticises Žižek's path to freedom through "radical negativity" and "self-dissolution" because it "can only be undertaken from a position of relative security." The path to freedom is barred to "deprivileged subjects—some women, racially and ethnically marked individuals, and those who lead precarious lives" (Ruti 2008, 116). In the context of *2666*, it is significant that Norton is able to exercise freedom and leave the Archiboldians when 109 women in "The Part about the Crimes" are unable to assume that risk and leave the *maquiladoras*, abusive partners, or other exploitative situations.

Like the Archiboldians themselves, "The Part about the Critics" is at a remove from the violence in Santa Teresa. The last letter Norton sends Pelletier and Espinoza describes how "Santa Teresa, that horrible city, [...] had made her think"; it goes on to mention "the criminal acts that had been occurring for some time in Santa Teresa" (142). The massive letter is scattered across the last seventeen pages of "The Part about the Critics." It describes her falling in love with Morini, the Italian Archiboldian who, confined to a wheelchair with multiple sclerosis, was unable to make the trip to Mexico or, it seemed, vie with Pelletier and

Espinoza for Norton's affections. Talking with Morini, Norton forgets about the oases of horror—St. George's Road and Santa Teresa:

We talked for hours. We talked about the Italian Right, about the resurgence of fascism in Europe, about immigrants, about Islamic terrorism, about British and American politics, and as we talked I felt better and better, which is odd because the subjects we were discussing were depressing. (Bolaño 2009, 153)

The context of international socio-economic, cultural and political antagonism and ideological struggle allows Norton to forget the Real violence that the Archimboldians brought with them to Santa Teresa.

The priority of "The Part about the Critics" in terms of the narratological structure of *2666* is crucial to the affective current of the novel. The reader follows the Archimboldians and discovers that they are void of practical ethics as various forms of violence disrupt the lies and fantasies that structure their perception of reality. They arrive in Santa Teresa and are either oblivious to or uninterested in the femicide that is taking place there, which the reader will learn about in great detail during "The Part about the Crimes." After Norton leaves, Pelletier rereads the same three novels by Archimboldi, receding into oblivion. Espinoza, on the other hand, courts a local high school girl who runs a stall at a craft market selling rugs and serapes. Like a materialisation of Norton's dream, the narrator describes how Espinoza "dressed her in a thong and garters and black tights and a black teddy and black spike-heeled shoes and fucked her until she was no more than a tremor in his arms" (154). Here, Espinoza's desire for the object in subject drags him from Norton to the context of exploitation in Santa Teresa and the South, closer than ever before to the femicide. The Archimboldians' violence is in excess of the femicide as a concrete, historical event. Specifically, by preceding "The Part about the Crimes" and introducing motifs that are repeated throughout *2666*, "The Part about the Critics" makes it impossible to extricate

Pelletier's and Espinoza's so-called passion from the murderous rage that threatens women in Santa Teresa.

“A lot or too much”: Fate confronts the repulsive kernel of enjoyment

Towards the end of “The Part about the Critics,” after Norton has left Santa Teresa, Pelletier tells Espinoza that he “want[s] to find out what’s going on in this city” (137). Espinoza recalls the previous drunken night when an acquaintance had told him and Pelletier about the women being killed in Santa Teresa: “All he remembered was that the boy had said there were more than two hundred of them and he’d had to repeat it two or three times because neither Pelletier or Espinoza believed his ears” (138). Nothing comes of Pelletier’s momentary enthusiasm for finding out about the femicide, but Fate, an investigative journalist, offers the possibility of a more sober appraisal of the situation in Santa Teresa. Following the stabbing death of *Black Dawn*’s chief boxing correspondent in the fictional (and ironically named) Paradise City, supposedly near Chicago, Fate joins the convergence of Bolaño’s disparate characters in Santa Teresa as “an accidental sportswriter” (311). Fate’s trajectory, like that of the Archimboldians, is already marred by violence. He is in Santa Teresa to cover a boxing match between light heavyweights Count Picket, a Harlem fighter, and the local favourite El Merolino Fernández, but his interests lie elsewhere.

During a conversation that takes place ringside at Arena del Norte following the Pickett-Fernández fight, Fate calls himself an accidental sportswriter and is asked what he usually writes about: “‘Politics,’ said Fate. ‘Political things that affect the African-American community. Social things’” (311). Before arriving in Mexico, the reader follows Fate to Detroit where he interviews Barry Seaman, another stand-in, this time for Bobby Seale, cofounder of the Black Panther Party. After Detroit, Fate dreams about the subject of his first

story for *Black Dawn*, Antonio Ulises Jones, an old black man from Brooklyn who was a member of the Communist Party. Fate remembers a book that Jones had given him, which he has since lost, called *The Slave Trade* by Hugh Thomas. Both the book and its author are real: Thomas is an English historian and writer, and *The Slave Trade* (1997) looks at the history of the slave trade from Africa to the Americas. While Fate is dreaming about Jones and *The Slave Trade*, the television is on, playing a report about northern Mexico in which the reporter mentions “the long list of women killed in Santa Teresa” (258). While the reporter is talking, the narrator describes shots of “assembly plants,” “[p]ickup trucks covered in a fine dust the brown color of baby shit,” and “[h]ollows in the ground, like World War I bomb craters” (258) filling the screen. When Fate buys another copy of *The Slave Trade* before leaving Detroit for Tucson and then Santa Teresa, the reader might expect the disjointed images of and references to the femicide that have emerged in the previous parts of *2666* to start falling into place.

The second part of *2666*, “The Part about Amalfitano,” is about another academic, the Chilean Óscar Amalfitano. We know Amalfitano from “The Part about the Critics,” in which he is introduced as “an expert on Benno von Archimboldi” (112) assigned by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Letters at the University of Santa Teresa to help the Europeans. Norton’s impression of Amalfitano “was of a sad man whose life was ebbing swiftly away” (114) and “The Part about Amalfitano” pieces together a variety of factors contributing to his anxiety and profound existential dread. Sharae Deckard (2012, 356) compares “The Part about Amalfitano” to a “philosophical thriller.” Details of the femicide work their way through the profound and grandiloquent philosophical dilemmas that occupy Amalfitano. The crimes, however, are overshadowed by Amalfitano’s mind, which careens between such things as pictograms arranging ancient and modern philosophers by name and a book about geography that hangs on his clothesline as an offering or Duchamp-inspired installation. The tone of

2666 changes in “The Part about Fate,” which Juan Meneses (2014, 176) calls “a narrative written in the style of the American hard-boiled crime story.” Fate offers a reprieve from the abstractions of the first two parts of 2666. Like the detective in the detective story, Fate holds forth the possibility of a scapegoat when the femicide catches his attention, but the possibility recedes as he and the reader get closer to the crimes.

Around the same time that the English translation of 2666 appeared in 2008, *The Nation* ran an article called “Alone Among the Ghosts” by Marcela Valdes that is indicative of a tendency to place Bolaño’s novel in the context of investigative journalism from which it often departs. Split into five parts about “the Author,” “the Crimes,” “the Journalist,” “the Correspondence,” and “the Goat” in the style of 2666, “The Part About the Journalist” takes up almost a quarter of the article and tells the story of González Rodríguez. “The Part About the Correspondence” details the relationship between González Rodríguez and Bolaño. González Rodríguez described their close relationship in an interview with Valdes, who (2008, 20) writes, “What Bolaño needed, González Rodríguez explains, was help with the details of the murders and the police investigations, because the press accounts of them were too vague. [...] He wanted to know exactly how murder cases were written up.” According to González Rodríguez (quoted in Valdes 2008, 20), “[Bolaño] wanted to believe that there was a rational power that could conquer the criminal.” However, even when González Rodríguez appears as a character in “The Part about the Crimes,” which is discussed in the next chapter of this thesis, 2666 is never entirely analogous to contextualising, journalistic narratives like *Huesos en el desierto*. This is nowhere clearer than in “The Part about Fate.” Despite his journalistic credentials and the fact that he eventually understands the situation in more detail than any other character (save perhaps González Rodríguez), Fate is drawn away from the context of the femicide. Like Bolaño, Fate is drawn to the non-historical excess of life over death, affected by the madness that overwhelms the first two parts of 2666.

Similar to the first two thirds of “The Part about the Critics,” the beginning of “The Part about Fate” seems to have little to do with Santa Teresa. It is largely concerned with Fate’s response to the death of his elderly mother. Regarding Fate’s mother, Bolaño writes death in a way that contrasts starkly with the femicide as it is represented in “The Part about the Crimes.” Fate visits his mother’s apartment upon learning of her death. Inside, the narrator says, “His mother was on the bed with her eyes closed, dressed as if to go out. They’d even put lipstick on her” (232). This simple, respectful preparation of the body is in direct opposition to the regular descriptions of the state of victims’ clothing in “The Part about the Crimes.” The preparation of victims’ bodies is excessive and reveals no “pattern of behaviour” as the term is understood and used in forensics to delimit the field of possible suspects and close in on the one/s responsible. One woman “was dressed in a bathrobe and stockings that her parents didn’t recognize as hers” (391). Another “was dressed in a sweatshirt and synthetic fabric-pants, in the pocket of which was found an ID card in the name of Elsa Luz Pintado” (391). However, the narrator says that “those who had known Elsa Luz Pintado described her as a tall woman, five foot seven and a half, and the body found in the desert probably measured five foot three at most” (391). In another case, the medical examiner “discovered something odd about the body: the skirt she was wearing the night of her death—the skirt in which she was found—was on backward” (453). Another section describes authorities examining a victim and deducing that “the killer or killers, after stripping and molesting and killing her, had proceeded to dress her before dumping her behind the Pémex tanks” (454). In spite of their deduction, the case, like so many others, remains open.

The preparation of Fate’s mother’s body is consistent with the suggestion by Žižek (2008, 249) that “the funeral rite presents an act of symbolization par excellence” and, again, that “the funeral rite exemplifies symbolization at its purest” (Žižek 1991, 23). Through the

funeral rite, death, which would otherwise rupture the efficacy of the symbolic order to contain all of human experience (precisely because the dead do not speak), is domesticated. Žižek (2008, 249) writes, “In the funeral rite, the subject confers the form of a free act on an ‘irrational’ contingent natural process.” Ostensibly, this careful treatment of the body and the fact that Fate’s mother died of natural causes suggests that death is here the focus of Bolaño’s narrative and not violence. However, violence is inherent in the funeral rite conceived as an act of symbolisation: “It is commonplace to state that symbolization as such equates to symbolic murder: when we speak about a thing, we suspend, place in parentheses, its reality” (Žižek 1991, 23). Femicide is the focus of the fourth part of *2666*, but Bolaño has refrained from committing symbolic murder, turning the novel into a funeral rite in which “the dead are inscribed in the text of symbolic tradition” (Žižek 1991, 23). Bolaño is wary of bolstering this symbolic tradition and a conception of the symbolic order as the ultimate law that contains the possibility of a resolution to the crimes, which its subsidiaries, from the police to academics and investigative journalists, have yet to activate. Žižek (2008, 77) writes that the risk we run when we “attempt to domesticate the Thing by reducing it to its symbolic status, by providing it with a meaning,” is that “the meaning obscures the terrifying impact of its presence.” Calling the crimes the work of an ultimately identifiable agent or agents of violence obscures the terrifying impact of desire as a formal contiguity collapsing distance between us, Bolaño’s characters, and the killer or killers.

After a ceremony that is “simple and businesslike” (236), Fate is handed the urn containing his mother’s ashes. The urn is a false promise of completion that is radically incommensurate with *2666* and Fate’s story. Significantly, Fate decides to leave it behind: “He stood with his hand on the doorknob, wondering whether he should take the urn with the ashes home with him. I’ll do it when I get back, he thought, and he opened the door” (239). The next chapter of this thesis discusses the mysterious case of Santa Teresa’s church

desecrator, dubbed “the Penitent” by local media. The Penitent breaks into churches, destroys the likenesses of saints, urinates in the pews, and defecates on the altars. As we shall see, his anger is directed at the failure of sacred objects such as those associated with the funeral rite to contain the Real of desire by way of a certain symbolic interdiction. When Fate arrives in Santa Teresa, the femicide begins to shift from the periphery of the self-involved Archiboldians and the anguished Amalfitano towards the centre of the narrative.

In the lead-up to an underwhelming fight in which Fernández goes down in the second round to Pickett, Fate falls in with a local journalist and an entrepreneur introduced as “the biggest film buff south of the Arizona border” (279). The men respond vaguely (warily, it seems) to Fate’s early questions about the dead women. Fate asks the Mexican journalist how the women are killed, to which he replies: “Nobody’s sure. They disappear. They vanish into thin air. Here one minute, gone the next. And after a while their bodies turn up in the desert” (287). Despite this flippant response, Fate decides that the crimes would make a better story than the boxing match:

When his editor came to the phone, Fate explained what was going on in Santa Teresa. He gave a synopsis of the story he wanted to write. He talked about the women being killed, about the possibility that all the crimes had been committed by one or two people, which made them the biggest serial killings in history, he talked about drug trafficking and the border, about police corruption and the city’s boundless growth, he promised that all he wanted was another week to get all the material needed and then he’d come back to New York and in five days he’d file the story.

“Oscar,” said his editor, “you’re there to cover a goddamn boxing match.”

“This is more important,” said Fate, “the fight is just a little story. What I’m proposing is so much more.”

“What are you proposing?”

“A sketch of the industrial landscape in the third world,” said Fate, “a piece of *reportage* about the current situation in Mexico, a panorama of the border, a serious crime story, for fuck’s sake” (Bolaño 2009, 294-95, emphasis in original).

Fate’s sketch of the industrial landscape in the third world alludes to the kind of contextualising, journalistic narrative that 2666, though it imitates journalism, never entirely becomes in order to present, as new realism, the non-historical space of excessive desire.

Because the reader is aware that Fate normally writes about political and social issues, there is an assumption that he will pursue his serious crime story in spite of his editor's reservations. This affords readers a moment of respite, a gesture that is repeated by Bolaño in "The Part about the Crimes" with the introduction of González Rodríguez and the American investigator and criminologist. Fate, like the Archimboldians, and like other characters from all five parts of the novel, arrives in Santa Teresa to be confronted with an excess of desire materialising in the minimal space between Juárez and Santa Teresa as Bolaño has written it, emphasising figurations of the potential in desire for excess. Fate follows his new friends: the Mexican sportswriter Chucho Flores, the film buff Charly Cruz, Rosa Méndez, one-time girlfriend of Flores and Cruz, and Rosa Amalfitano, the beautiful young daughter of Óscar Amalfitano with whom Fate falls in love. Insinuating the nature of the libidinal economy in which Fate is engaged, the narrator describes how Rosa Méndez "asked him whether he liked Santa Teresa a lot or too much" (311). Fate does not understand the question, but it resonates with him and, perhaps, guides his actions as excess becomes the only option for the group led by Flores and Cruz, up until Fate is confronted with the groups' fundamental symptom, its repulsive kernel of enjoyment.

After the boxing match, Fate and the others eat at a place called El Rey del Taco, a kitschy restaurant "decorated like a McDonald's, but in an unsettling way," full of "big green tiles" and "huge piñatas" (312). Paintings on the walls depict the life of the restaurant's mascot, a kid called El Rey del Taco who wears a crown and straddles a restive donkey. The scenes reveal El Rey del Taco's improbable, violent trajectory from, for example, enjoying a pot of beans in one panel of the comic strip to holding a gun to his donkey's head and threatening to pull the trigger in another:

Some of the scenes depicted were charmingly ordinary: the boy, the burro, and a one-eyed old woman, or the boy, the burro, and a well, or the boy, the burro, and pot of beans. Other scenes were set firmly in the realm of the fantastic: in some the boy and

the burro fell down a ravine, in others, the boy and the burro were tied to a funeral pyre, and there was even one in which the boy threatened to shoot his burro, holding a gun to its head. (Bolaño 2009, 312)

This obscene cartoon replaces the sketch of a third world, industrial landscape. Like the Hotel México, El Rey del Taco is one of the places in *2666* where the libidinal economy seems to overwhelm the so-called real economy, where the Real begins to announce itself in dreamlike transformations to a character who can no longer avoid it.

Inside the restaurant, Fate notices that the waiters and waitresses were “very young and dressed in military uniforms” and that they “radiated exhaustion”: “Some seemed lost in the desert that was El Rey del Taco” (312-13). Fate finds himself in the desert of boredom, a place where the usually invisible libidinal economy gradually reveals itself: “Why am I here, eating tacos and drinking beer with some Mexicans I hardly know? thought Fate. The answer, he knew, was simple. I’m here for her [Rosa Amalfitano]” (314). While Fate is thinking, Charly Cruz is discussing DVDs replacing film reels and movie theatres. Cruz contends that the sacred died with the introduction of multiplex movie theatres and Fate recognises the potential in desire for excess when he wonders whether the pang he feels in his gut whenever he looks at Rosa Amalfitano suggests that her beauty is sacred to him:

And what if all of a sudden the most beautiful actress in Hollywood appeared in the middle of this big, repulsive restaurant, would I feel a pang each time my eyes surreptitiously met this girl’s or would the sudden appearance of a superior beauty, a beauty enhanced by recognition, relieve the pang, diminish her beauty to ordinary levels? (Bolaño 2009, 315-16)

Afterwards, Fate draws a conclusion that aligns him with Pelletier and Espinoza, articulating his role as a desiring subject: “All I register is practical experiences, thought Fate. An emptiness to be filled, a hunger to be satisfied, people to talk to so I can finish my article and get paid” (316). When Norton leaves Santa Teresa, the narrator says that “reality for Pelletier and Espinoza seemed to tear like paper scenery, and when it was stripped away it revealed

what was behind it: a smoking landscape” (135). Likewise, reality for Fate tears like paper scenery as he comes closer to confronting the potential in desire for excess.

Fate and company leave El Rey del Taco to go club-hopping. This part of the night involves a series of ominous events that seem to link Cruz, Flores and others with the femicide, although their involvement occurs in that elliptical or unfulfilled space that repeatedly interrupts the consistency of 2666. In one club, Fate stumbles upon an upstairs room where Flores is speaking with another man while Rosa Amalfitano sits in the corner. Fate notices that she seems high and is directed out of the room: “‘We’re doing business here,’ said Chucho Flores” (317). Later, Fate is talking to Rosa Amalfitano when he sees a man hit a woman in the corner of the club: “The first blow made the woman’s head snap violently and the second blow knocked her down” (318). Nobody else in the club seems to notice, and when Fate tries to approach the scene someone grabs his arm: “When he turned to see who it was, no one was there” (318). Earlier, in El Rey del Taco, Cruz describes four steps to recreate the experience of the old movie theatres and says, “If things work out, and sometimes they don’t, you’re back in the presence of the *sacred*” (315, emphasis in original). The night ends at Cruz’s house, where the film buff shows Fate and the others a movie that repeats Norton’s dream, in which the Archimboldian appears as an object of Pelletier’s and Espinoza’s desire in the second mirror of her room at the Hotel México. Fate appears to have inadvertently entered the libidinal engine room of the femicide and the movie brings the reader back into the presence of an excess of life in its capacity as what is symptomatic in violence.

The movie starts out as hard-core pornography; a woman is joined by three men who have sex with her, at first separately and then together. The movie goes on and becomes a kind of snuff film, a genre that, perhaps more than any other, exemplifies an exploitative libidinal economy and demonstrates with particular force the “compulsion to repeat more and

more intense pleasures” (Žižek 1999, 390). The narrator describes the film and its violent trajectory:

The woman’s movements, constrained by the weight of the three men, accelerated. Her eyes were fixed on the camera, which in turn zoomed in on her face. Her eyes said something, although they spoke an unidentifiable language. For an instant everything about her seemed to shine, her breasts gleamed, her chin glistened, half hidden by the shoulder of one of the men, her teeth took on a supernatural whiteness. Then the flesh seemed to melt from her bones and drop to the floor of the anonymous brothel or vanish into thin air, leaving just a skeleton, no eyes, no lips, a death’s-head laughing suddenly at everything. (Bolaño 2009, 321)

The violence of Norton’s dream, which was confined to the unconscious, is exacerbated by the film, which represents a shift from emotional to physical trauma. Excessive libidinal investments are shown to strip the woman of flesh, eyes and lips after the instance where “everything about her seemed to shine.” Something in her more than herself impels desire up to the point of mutilation. The content of film is the closest the reader gets to the commission of the crimes for which the next part of *2666* is titled, crimes that are stripped of their context in such a way as to suggest that getting to the bottom of things would be to leap into the void.

When the film ends, Fate sets out to find Rosa. What follows is a dramatic escape from Cruz’s house and Santa Teresa, during which Rosa describes how she became Flores’ girlfriend and Fate meets Óscar Amalfitano, who asks if Fate can get his daughter into the United States. Fate says that he can and asks Amalfitano if Flores is involved in the femicide: “‘They’re all mixed up in it,’ said Amalfitano” (343). Fate leaves Santa Teresa and his serious crime story behind. The theory that the crimes are the work of one or two people is disproved by the numerous people Fate encounters who are somehow involved in violence and exploitation. Besides Flores and Cruz, there are the two men who join Fate to watch the film, the man doing business with Flores in the upstairs room of the club, the man downstairs who hits a woman, the other ambivalent clubbers, and who or whatever stops Fate from intervening. Crucially, there are the three men in the film, who serve to recall Pelletier and

Espinoza. This last, libidinal connection suggests that the secret of the world hidden in the femicide is a global one, although it remains concealed. In “The Part about the Crimes,” the Santa Teresa authorities attempt to reinstate the serial killer theory, which dissolves on closer inspection.

Chapter Two

“They’re ordinary faces”: The Real of Desire in “The Part about the Crimes”

Now I have a pile—a pile of people who want me to take them. I am not going to make a totality out of them.

No whole.

— Jacques Lacan, “The Other Is Missing”

For what we have done with the dead Shelley, and with all the other bodies that appear in romantic literature [...] is simply to bury them, to bury them in their own texts made into epitaphs and monumental graves. [...] They have been transformed into historical and aesthetic objects.

— Paul de Man, “Shelley Disfigured”

Bolaño is typically dismissive of his novel *Monsieur Pain*, originally published in 1999. He (2012, 16) writes that “[its] plot is indecipherable.” Written in either 1981 or 1982 when Bolaño was living on the Mediterranean coast of Spain in a town called Blanes, *Monsieur Pain* is only tangentially linked to Latin America. Set in Paris at the end of the 1930s, the novel anticipates the work of younger Latin American writers such as those who belonged to the Crack and McOndo groups and sought to affirm “their affiliation to an expansive Western cosmopolitan tradition and assert their prerogative to write about any topic or geographical location” (Pollack 2009, 352-53). Andrews (2014, 43) notes that no characters from

Monsieur Pain reappear in later novels like *2666*, which are “strongly interconnected” and share common characters and Latin American settings. However, Pierre Pain, the eponymous protagonist of *Monsieur Pain*, can help us to understand what *2666* achieves in terms of new realism. He says, “The sky over Paris, though clearer than the day before, seemed more sinister than ever. Like a mirror hanging over the hole” (77). There is a hole at the heart of *2666* that is most obvious in “The Part about the Crimes.” This chapter argues that at the same time as *2666* represents the situation in Juárez, it reflects an unintelligible dimension of the crimes there that exceeds the context of Latin American violence. Specifically, it looks at how “The Part about the Crimes” reflects the Lacanian subject of lack as it was discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis.

The centre of *2666* is absent but nevertheless exerts an influence on the novel without revealing its identity. Repeatedly, scholars have described a black hole that pulls the contents of *2666* into its maw. Discussing “The Part about the Crimes,” Catherine Grall (2013, 481) writes, “The ‘world of crimes’ is like a kind of black hole rather than like something the reader can actually cope with.” Similarly, Deckard (2012, 369) writes that “the disparate parts [of *2666*] are bound by a web of recurring spectral motifs—voids, rats, hells, cannibals, zombies, dreams—that function like the outward rippling signs of a black hole.” Although she acknowledges the spectral entities in *2666*, Deckard (2012, 355) writes that “these beings serve only as similes and metaphors. [...] One character might be described as vampiric or ghastly, but there are no levitating women or literal ghosts in *2666* as in magical realist novels.” This chapter of the thesis and the previous one seek to establish Bolaño as a new realist writer, to argue that his unwillingness to reveal who is responsible for the crimes recorded in the fourth part of his novel makes the Juárez femicide a global, intersubjective concern. The three chapters that follow move away from new realism to get a bigger picture of attempts by Latin American writers to represent the violence in their regions without

exceptionalising it. One of the aims of this thesis is to show that these appeals to the universal in Latin American violence are part of a move away from magical realism. As we shall see, magical realism imposes a semblance of meaning on the black hole.

This thesis finds repeated similarities between works of visual art and the novels that are the focus of the study within the framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis. In this chapter, work by British artist Rachel Whiteread and by Mexican artist Teresa Margolles are contrasted with the way Bolaño writes about violence in “The Part about the Crimes.” Another Lacanian intervention into the field of visual arts is Žižek’s discussion of Jacques-Louis David’s 1793 painting *The Death of Marat*, which Duane Rousselle summarises:

This painting, designated by Žižek as the first modern painting, has, for half of its image, complete darkness. In the darkness the viewer can find only death, anxiety and nothingness. Žižek believes that the painting uses this nothingness as a space for thinking rather than narrativization. In other words, the painting resists the counter-revolutionary impulse to construct a narrative in place of the void. (Rousselle 2014, 216)

Returning to literature, narrativisation can be considered in terms of supplementation. Mulhall (2009, 151) contends that a form of realism emerges with the recognition “that what might seem like the record of a few details scattered across the darkness (hence essentially in need of supplementation) is in fact a snapshot of the scene as a whole, human life as it really is.” One form of supplementation includes literalising metaphors and spectral motifs, as is often the case in magical realist fictions. Literal ghosts or zombies can personify death, but at the same time serve to foreclose nothingness as a space for thinking. The distinguishing feature of new realism has to do with the ethics of avoiding supplementation so as not to foreclose this space. In *2666*, Bolaño produces a space for thinking about the crimes in northern Mexico that is different not only from magical realism but from the narratives that journalism and crime fiction construct in place of the void. This chapter aims to productively

apply Lacanian and Žižekian theoretical perspectives on reality to human life as it appears in *2666*.

Understanding how fantasy and reality work together in Lacanian and Žižekian psychoanalytic theory is necessary for an appreciation of the ethical value of a novel that works like a mirror hanging over the hole to preserve an abysmal scene of human life. The fabric of reality, as Žižek understands it, is flimsy because it relies on the symbolic register for its consistency, but there is no signifier for the subject. Something of the subject is excluded from the symbolic order and the subject is the void at the centre of the desire-machine because it constantly searches for some object to fill the void and make it whole. Inasmuch as the subject in psychoanalysis is a hole in reality, psychoanalysis is like a mirror hanging over the hole, and the connection between Lacanian psychoanalysis and Bolaño as a new realist writer will be discussed in this chapter. In *Žižek: A Reader's Guide* (2012), Kelsey Wood describes how fantasy is on the side of reality: it structures our desire and simultaneously attempts to keep us at a distance from the potential in desire for excess. Wood (2012, 67) writes, “Fantasy [...] fills out the void or ‘black hole’ of the Real.” The black hole of the Real, set apart from reality and fantasy, is the black hole of *2666*.

As Fate and the three Archimboldians come closer to facing the repulsive kernels of their enjoyment in the third and first parts of *2666*, the narrator describes each character's reality breaking down. Pelletier's and Espinoza's reality seems to rip and tear “like paper scenery” (135), Fate is dogged by a “sense of unreality” (322). However, at stake in these existential crises is the fantasy that supports each character's reality. Adam Cottrel's violently-worded description of the transformation that befalls the thing objectified by desire sheds light on the meaning of Norton's dream and the reasons for its inclusion in a new realist novel like *2666*:

The object that consumes desire and therefore occupies the fantasy of the subject must first fall prey to the illusion that it is more than its pragmatic material. The object is marked by this structure as being more than its materiality, as being endowed with the promise to satisfy the desire that necessitates it. (Cottrel 2014, 89)

In Norton's premonitory dream, she falls prey to Pelletier's and Espinoza's illusion that she is more than her pragmatic material, but the dream is not a moment of magical realism. Rather, such a scenario exemplifies the ethical stance that underpins new realism. Norton's dream is an impossible attempt to symbolise the Real that necessarily runs counter to fantasy insofar as one of the functions of fantasy is to cover the black hole of Real.

Concluding his contribution to *Adventures in Realism*, Žižek (2007, 222) writes that "it is in dreams that we encounter the Real. It is not that dreams are for those who cannot endure reality; reality itself is for those who cannot endure (the Real that announces itself in) their dreams." Inscribed in the text of *2666* is the effect of an encounter with the Real that is conditioned by Norton's encounter and alluded to in the trauma-filled stories of Pelletier, Espinoza and Fate. In "The Part about the Crimes," the fictional universe expands to include a huge number of people who appear and disappear as they skirt the peripheries of the crimes, assuming myriad roles towards them. Furthermore, the bodies of 109 women and girls are discovered. Attached to the discoveries are forensic details that vary in focus and scrupulousness, but that seem to actively stymie the formation of a bigger picture as formulaic details become recurrent motifs that point towards nothing or, as is often the case, when evidence is lost between one branch of authority and another. The surrealism of stories like Norton's and Fate's dissipates as the all-too-real, bureaucratic process overwhelms it, but forms of repetition and recurring forensic motifs in "The Part about the Crimes" function like the outward rippling signs of two opposing modes of the Real.

This chapter will argue that the labyrinthine catalogue of crimes in the fourth part of *2666* has to do with the myth of the *lamella* that Lacan proposed in his eleventh seminar,

published as *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973). Žižek (2007, 209) writes, “*Lamella* stands for the Real in its most terrifying dimension, as the primordial abyss which swallows everything, dissolving all identities.” The Real of the *lamella* is experienced in the way that the identities of victims in “The Part about the Crimes” dissolve as the repeated description of crimes creates a sense of a single corpse that is being transformed as an object arising from the infinite measure of desire. This coincides with the dissolution of the identity of the killer or killers. Discussing the myth of the *lamella* in this chapter will reconcile two seemingly contradictory statements about *2666* by separate scholars. Andrews (2007, 205) writes, “Bolaño’s Santa Teresa fictionalises but also mythologises Ciudad Juárez,” whereas Grall (2013, 484) writes that *2666* “creates a strange mixture of moves, crossing boundaries and deaths—something like an ‘open space’ architecture, a labyrinth with a very evil minotaur wandering in it, but which has nothing to do with myths.” The myth of the *lamella* is compatible with new realism because the way that it appears in *2666* does not constitute a form of supplementation.

Lacan (1998, 198) writes that the *lamella* “is the libido, *qua* pure life instinct, that is to say, immortal life, or irrepressible life, life that has need of no organ, simplified, indestructible life.” Lacan (1998, 198) writes that “it is of this that all the forms of the *objet a* that can be enumerated are the representatives.” The woman in Norton’s dream represents the object-cause of desire, which is subject to an irrepressible life that coincides with excess. The coincidence is exacerbated by the woman in the film *Fate* watches whose skin and other organs melt away “leaving just a skeleton [...] laughing suddenly at everything” (321). Each image “lends its ‘face’ to some disturbing void ‘beyond representation,’” which is Zupančič’s (2001, par. 5) definition of evil; specifically, they stand in for “the infinite measure that is at work in desire in the form of lack or void” (Zupančič 2003, 184). We never actually encounter the Real in *2666* because any attempt to give form to it would amount to

supplementation. Žižek (2007, 208, emphasis in original) writes, “*Lamella* does not exist, it *insists*: it is unreal, an entity of pure semblance, a multiplicity of appearances which seem to envelop a central void.” As we know, the central void of 2666 remains; the crimes are insistent, but no figure emerges—most likely a serial killer or killers—to personify the *lamella* and annul the universal human potential for which the term stands.

Žižek (2007, 209, emphasis in original) writes, “[The] Real of *lamella* is to be opposed to the other mode of the Real, the *scientific* one.” The scientific Real is “the Real of a formula which renders the meaningless functioning of nature” (Žižek 2007, 211). These formulas, which Žižek (2007, 211) calls “language deprived of the wealth of its human sense,” are ideological, positioned as movements towards an objective truth and the annihilation of meaninglessness. With repetition, the forensic language of “The Part about the Crimes,” which, in the context of crime fiction, would underpin the movement towards an objective truth and resolution, is deprived of the wealth of its human sense. If we agree with Zupančič (2001, par. 6) that the infinite measure of desire “is not some empty space or no man’s land that could be gradually reduced to nothing or conquered by the advance of knowledge and science,” then annihilating meaninglessness by expanding the space for narrativisation is impossible.

In “The Part about the Crimes,” a character called Sergio González Rodríguez appears, described as a journalist from *La Razón*, a fictional Mexico City newspaper. The scientific Real is experienced in the way that Bolaño’s González Rodríguez and the real-life reporter fail to draw analogous conclusions. Comparing *Huesos en el desierto* and 2666, Herlinghaus (2013, 214) writes, “González Rodríguez’ book, which, driven by a more ‘enlightened’ purpose, focuses on accounts and information drawn from various perspectives and condensed into eighteen narrative units containing analytical approaches, as well.” The enlightened purpose of *Huesos en el desierto* is to conquer the meaninglessness of the crimes

by advancing knowledge, whereas, as this chapter will show, the story of González Rodríguez in *2666* implies the impossibility of such a pursuit. The scientific Real is also experienced in the way that the character Albert Kessler differs from the real-life former FBI agent Robert K. Ressler, for whom he is an obvious stand-in. Ressler co-authored two text books, *Sexual Homicide: Patterns and Motives* (1998) and the *Crime Classification Manual* (1992), furnishing the advance of knowledge and forensic science while demarcating criminal desire from our own as an object of study. Bolaño's Kessler disappears from "The Part about the Crimes" after the narrator describes an audience gathered "to wait for the scientific miracle, the miracle of the human mind set in motion by that modern-day Sherlock Holmes" (610). In *2666*, the reader can find only death, anxiety and nothingness in Kessler's investigation.

Sergio González Rodríguez, the seer of Santa Teresa, and the myth of the *lamella*

I'd say that the savage detective wanted the other savage detective, who is me, to draw analogous conclusions.

— Sergio González Rodríguez quoted in Valdes, "Alone Among the Ghosts"

The character Sergio González Rodríguez arrives in Santa Teresa to cover a story which, tellingly, is garnering more attention than the killings of women. A man dubbed the Demon Penitent by the local press has desecrated four churches, killing both a priest and a caretaker who had intervened to stop the Penitent's latest desecration. Bolaño's González Rodríguez seems to counter Fate's trajectory from writing about political and social things to becoming an accidental sportswriter. The narrator tells us that González Rodríguez would not normally

write about vandalism or homicide “because he was an arts writer, not a crime reporter. He wrote reviews of philosophy books that no one read, not the books or his reviews, and sometimes he wrote about art shows or music” (376). However, like Fate, González Rodríguez finds himself, either intuitively or by accident, in a position to experience a dimension of the crimes that simultaneously attracts and repels him. This subsection argues that the Penitent catalyses González Rodríguez’s experience of the crimes inasmuch as the Penitent’s anger is directed towards a symbolic attempt to condition and contain the Real in its most terrifying dimension, which is evident everywhere but in Santa Teresa’s churches. Two years after González Rodríguez filed his story on the Penitent, “He hadn’t forgotten [...] the days he’d spent in Santa Teresa or the killings of women, or the priest-killer called the Penitent, who had vanished as mysteriously as he’d appeared” (464). Experiencing the Real of the crimes dissolves all identities, a process that affects González Rodríguez: “Sometimes, he thought, being an arts reporter in Mexico was the same as reporting on crime” (464). Several months later, González Rodríguez is back in Santa Teresa to cover the femicide.

The Penitent’s *modus operandi* is remarkable because it is one of the recurrent motifs that points towards the black hole of the crimes, which is the black hole of the Real. In his first desecration, the Penitent enters an almost empty church during the early service, sits in a pew towards the back and urinates in his pants. When he is confronted by the sexton, the Penitent stabs him. The Penitent repeats a similar process at the next church; a policeman says to the inspector in charge of the case:

This time the freak didn’t hurt anyone. [...] He was carrying a switchblade or a knife. He sat in the last row. There. Where it’s darkest. An old woman heard him crying. Because he was sad or happy, I don’t know. He was pissing. Then the old woman went to call the priest and he jumped up and started to smash statues. Christ, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and a couple of other saints. Then he left. (Bolaño 2009, 365)

The Penitent smashing religious statues and figurines is particularly interesting, and it gets progressively worse. During his last, fatal attack, the Penitent smashes a wooden carving of the Archangel Gabriel mounted on a six-foot column. Zupančič (2003, 178) writes that “the law, far from simply ‘repressing’ our desire, helps us deal with the impasse or impossibility involved in the mechanism of desire as such. [...] The law condenses the impossible involved in desire into one exceptional ‘place.’” The impossibility of satisfying desire is a correlative of the potential in desire for excess. Zupančič (2003, 178) writes that “the law supplements the impossibility involved in the very nature of desire by a symbolic interdiction.” The sacred objects smashed by the Penitent represent one type of symbolic interdiction, the impotence or insufficiency of which is revealed by the discovery of each dead woman.

The Penitent is a kind of anti-hero, his killings are incidental and his anger is directed at the religious symbolic interdiction that is failing to contain violence in his city. In the previous chapter, it was suggested that an object of desire is made out of the infinite measure of desire. Such an object never represents the Real, but Zupančič (2003, 185) writes that “the lack which is involved in the endless metonymy of desire is, so to speak, isolated as such and presented in a unique representation, in a privileged and separate object, an object like no other object.” Religious statues and figurines are privileged objects *par excellence*. However, the failure of sacred objects to isolate desire and curb the potentially infinite metonymy of signifiers and objects is evident in the kinds of violence that appear throughout *2666*, particularly the femicide, which González Rodríguez learns about while researching the Penitent’s crimes: “The priest at Santa Catalina suggested he take a good look around, because in his opinion the church-desecrator-turned-killer wasn’t the worst scourge in Santa Teresa” (376). The statues smashed by the Penitent recall the urn that Fate is given containing his mother’s ashes insofar as each object is incongruous with the world of crimes that is the absent centre of *2666*.

Zupančič (2003, 185) writes, “Lacan’s topological example of an object that can represent the Thing is the example of a vase. [...] A vase is what gives body to the emptiness or void in its center. It makes this emptiness appear as something.” Similarly, a funerary urn gives body to the void of death in its centre as a part of the funeral rite, through which “the subject confers the form of a free act on an ‘irrational’ contingent natural process” (Žižek 2008, 249). By attempting to represent the Thing, a funerary urn isolates death and attempts to foreclose the part of death that both escapes symbolisation and creates space for thinking. Nichols’ (2008, 468) description of funereal objects offering “a promise of that which [the subject] desires, a promise of completion, a promise of an end to the neurotic question of existence” goes some way towards explaining the prolificacy of funeral rites. However, we should remember that the risk inherent in “an attempt to domesticate the Thing by reducing it to its symbolic status, by providing it with a meaning,” is that “the meaning obscures the terrifying impact of its presence” (Žižek 2008, 77). The Penitent’s crime spree is set against the background of the femicide and it serves to juxtapose privileged objects like the statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe with the bodies of women and girls discovered in Santa Teresa.

Before the appearance of the Penitent, “The last dead woman of May was found on the slopes of Cerro Estrella. [...] According to the medical examiner, she had been stabbed to death. There was unmistakable evidence of rape” (360). Shortly after the Penitent’s final desecration, the body of Emilia Mena Mena arrives at a Santa Teresa police station, having been found near an illegal dump: “The medical examiner’s report stated that she had been raped, stabbed, and burned” (372). It is as if the beheading or shattering of religious statues and figurines is penitence for this violence. While the Penitent smashes these statues, each of which “isolates the impossible Thing that desire aims at but never attains, and [...] provides an image of this thing” (Zupančič 2003, 178), he manifests a different, undomesticated configuration of the realisation of desire. As opposed to the symbolic interdiction that

supplements the void at the centre of the desire-machine with a privileged object or signifier, Zupančič (2003, 188) describes a circumstance in which “the realization of desire produces something which is not a representation of the void, but rather its most material presence.” The Penitent’s urinating in his pants while inside of the churches is his calling card, the obscene gesture belongs to the world of crimes, excessively material, and it would seem useful as evidence, but ultimately meaningless in the forensic context.

At the first church, the Penitent is described as “wetting his pants and loosing a river of urine that ran toward the vestibule” (362). After the Penitent’s second desecration, one inspector says to another, “The bastard must have a huge bladder. Or else he holds it as long as he can and waits until he’s inside a church to let go” (366). At the third church, The Penitent goes a step further and defecates as well as urinates. The priest of that church tells the inspector, “He wasn’t startled by the shit on the altar. [...] But the quantity of urine alarmed him” (368). The narrator tells us that “the inspector and the priest examined every corner where the Penitent had urinated, and the priest said at last that the man must have a bladder the size of a watermelon” (368). The police have a few leads; they think that “the penitent must have a car. [...] He can’t get around on foot without attracting attention” (371), and also that “he probably carries a change of clothes in the car. [...] If he’s got some woman at home or his folks, he must change his clothes before he goes in” (371). González Rodríguez is given a sketch of the suspect, but Bolaño gives us no details of this facial composite.

“The Part about the Crimes” begins with the appearance of a girl’s body, which is later identified as thirteen-year-old Esperanza Gómez Saldaña. This is the first femicide recorded in 1993, but there are, according to the narrator, “Other girls and women who didn’t make it onto the list or were never found” (353). The body of Gómez Saldaña is discovered in a vacant lot on the outskirts of Santa Teresa, a lot bordered by two streets whose names

Bolaño gives and an abandoned dairy. The bodies of the other women await discovery in an unspecified desert, Baudelaire's "desert of boredom," where a nameless person, a killer or accomplice to killers, disposes of bodies without knowing "where he was, what place he had come to" (354). The Penitent's excessive excretions are correlative to the remains of these other girls and women, which multiply to infinity in the world of crimes, or the desert of boredom, that exists outside of the 109 murders discussed in *2666*. Regarding the 109 women's bodies found in "The Part about the Crimes," Andrews (2014, 229, emphasis in original) writes that "their number *exactly* matches that of the real victims in Juárez in the years 1995-1998 as recorded in *Huesos en el desierto*." Like the journalist González Rodríguez, Bolaño collects and relays information about individual crimes with such accuracy that Andrews is able to match almost all of them to their real-world equivalents, but Bolaño's focus in *2666* remains on the potentially infinite unmarked graves scattered across the desert of boredom.

2666 is a mirror hanging over the black hole that suggests itself in disparate ways as the obverse of excess, nowhere more so than in "The Part about the Crimes." The novel is itself excessive, almost two thirds the length of *Huesos en el desierto*, but unfinished at the time of Bolaño's death. A spectre haunts *2666*; Valdes (2008, 13-14) describes a letter Bolaño sent to a friend in 1995 "mentioning that for years he'd been working on a novel called 'The Woes of the True Policeman,' exclaiming that "this book [...] 'is MY NOVEL.' Set in northern Mexico, in a town called Santa Teresa," and boasting that "[t]he manuscript had already topped 'eight hundred thousand pages.'" *Woes of the True Policeman* (2010) was translated in 2012 and is a kind of compendium to *2666*, but, at 256 pages, it is not the improbable tome Bolaño described. Rather, eight hundred thousand pages is another excessive figure that correlates to the void Bolaño wants his readers to be brave enough to face. He foreshadows this act of bravery when he introduces Florita Almada, a seventy-year-

old television psychic regarded by some as a saint. According to the narrator, “She [Florita] saw things no one else saw. She heard things no one else heard. And she knew how to find a meaningful explanation for everything that happened to her” (427). By way of comparing her visions with the intuition she imagines Benito Juárez, the 26th President of Mexico, having had as a boy, Florita concludes several things, one of which is “that facing boredom head-on was an act of bravery and Benito Juárez had done it and she had done it too and both had seen terrible things in the face of boredom, things she would rather not recall” (433). Eventually, González Rodríguez interviews the psychic hoping for a meaningful explanation to the crimes; instead, Florita describes the ordinary faces of the killer or killers, suggesting that the Real of the crimes has indeed dissolved all identities.

González Rodríguez first travelled to Santa Teresa in July 1993 to write the story of the Penitent, during which time he learnt of the femicide. He returns years later to interview a man named Klaus Haas, who has been arrested “as a suspect in the rape, torture, and murder of Estrella Ruiz Sandoval, seventeen-year-old Mexican citizen” (478). Haas is the subject of a counter-narrative in “The Part about the Crimes,” organised by politicians, hapless agents of law enforcement, and apathetic journalists, which depicts him as a serial killer. This counter-narrative collapses when, in response to Haas’s arrest, the mayor of Santa Teresa appears on television and says, “The serial killings of women have been successfully resolved [...]. Everything that happens from now on falls under the category of ordinary crimes [...]. This is the end of the psychopaths” (539). The mayor’s announcement is followed by 94 pages of “The Part about the Crimes,” throughout which bodies continue to be discovered in states suggesting that crimes are still being committed. Indeed, it comes 36 pages before local and state officials, including the mayor, invite the American investigator Albert Kessler, an expert on serial killers whose story is the subject of the following subsection, to Santa Teresa.

In 1996, Haas contacts González Rodríguez, who is in Mexico City, to tell him that the stories about him as a serial killer, buoyed by the mayor's announcement, are "bullshit" (539). In April 1997, González Rodríguez is again in northern Mexico, his third visit, this time "to write a new story about the killings in Santa Teresa" (559). He interviews an inspector, who tells him that "he shouldn't try to find a logical explanation for the crimes. It's fucked up, that's the only explanation" (561). Afterwards, he interviews the mother of a victim, who tells him about Florita Almada:

She's an old woman who's on Hermosillo TV every so often, on Reinaldo's show. She knows what's hidden behind the crimes and she tried to tell us, but we didn't listen, no one listens to her. She's seen the faces of the killers. If you want to know more, go and see her, and when you've seen her call me or write me. I'll do that, said Sergio. (Bolaño 2009, 562)

Herlinghaus (2013, 223) describes two groups of characters in "The Part about the Crimes": "First, there are the journalist Sergio Rodríguez, Florita, the Saint from Hermosillo, and the accused German, Klaus Haas. Not part of the apparatus of terror, all three are in one way or another affected by it." For Herlinghaus, the apparatus of terror is contextual. Herlinghaus (2013, 222-23) describes "the ethical and political decadence, together with psycho-cultural brutalization, that exists [...] on the part of those actors and institutions, such as the police, the apparatus of the state, and influential politicians." Herlinghaus suggests that Florita's visions, though allusive, refer to this context. However, the group consisting of González Rodríguez, Florita, and Haas can be expanded to include the Penitent, Fate, and the Archimboldians: characters whose stories represent the confrontation with the terrifying apparatus of desire for which the *lamella* stands.

Beginning his discussion of "The Part about the Crimes," Herlinghaus (2013, 209) describes "the most difficult aspect of violence—its disguised core." In other words, what Žižek calls objective violence, as opposed to the directly visible, subjective violence or, as

Herlinghaus (2013, 209) calls it, “The visible part, increasingly taken care of by corporatized media.” Herlinghaus contextualises *2666* and attacks the circumstances contributing to femicide on three fronts:

The novel’s narrative embraces three areas in which violence against young women is a daily reality, with a tendency to suggest massive proportions. [...] The perhaps most pervasive realm can be labelled “family affairs”; it is associated with the custom that makes the punishment of “misbehaving” wives and girlfriends a matter of masculinity that is widely tolerated. [...] Then there is the second terrain, one in which misogynist [*sic*] excesses acquire forms of outright monstrosity. Savage violence has become established in unwritten codes that sustain the functioning of drug-trade networks, as well as other blood-thirsty fields of informal, cross-border business. [...] Thirdly, a symptomatic trait [...] points to the role that *maquiladoras* play in the game of femicides throughout the Juárez region. (Herlinghaus 2013, 215)

Without a doubt, constructing a picture of life and death along Mexico’s northern border in which these atrocious socio-cultural and socio-economic circumstances loom large was the goal shared by two resolute and brave savage detectives, Bolaño and González Rodríguez. However, in keeping with the aim of this thesis to approach the non-historical within whichever context is foremost, *2666* not so much embraces but insists upon another area, the infinite measure of desire, where violence is an inherent potential that escalates when unacknowledged.

Herlinghaus (2013, 218-19) emphasises Florita’s knowledge of the socio-economic circumstances contributing to the femicide: “It is through Florita’s visions that we may get a sense of the immanent closeness of the femicides to the places pertaining to either the maquiladoras or to the contaminated earth into which these big plants have converted their environment.” Taking the grieving mother’s advice, and hoping to discover what is hidden behind the crimes, González Rodríguez visits Florita, who is uncomfortable about discussing her visions, but assures González Rodríguez that the killings she sees are the Santa Teresa killings. Florita says that “an ordinary murder [...] almost always ended with a liquid image, [...] whereas serial killings, like the killings in the border city, projected a *heavy* image,

metallic or mineral, a smoldering image” (571). Herlinghaus writes that this image alludes to the maquiladoras:

The “heavy image,” metallic, mineral, smoldering, crystallizes into a war-like, predatory force, which might also resemble the metaphoric of capital accumulation in its savage stage, when it was perceived as a nature-like force, being either miraculous [...] or unholy and threatening, with a bestial capacity to not only amass property and wealth but to convert human beings into waste by extracting their life force. (Herlinghaus 2013, 219)

However, another image emerges after the heavy one, an image that delves deeper into the impersonal machinations of capitalism’s need to accumulate, extract and exploit, an image that lends an ordinary face to the disturbing void beyond representation and through which the *lamella* insists.

When González Rodríguez asks Florita if she can see the killers’ faces, Florita tells him, “Sometimes, [...] sometimes I see their faces” (571). When pressed to describe these profiles, Florita says, “They’re ordinary faces” (571). González Rodríguez asks if they look like killers and Florita says, “No, I’d say they have big faces. [...] Yes, big, somehow swollen, or inflated” (571). Asked if she means that they are wearing masks, Florita says that “they’re faces, not masks or disguises, they’re just swollen, as if the killers were taking too much cortisone” (571). González Rodríguez asks if they are sick, but Florita does not know. Confused, González Rodríguez shakes Florita’s hand and makes to leave, but Florita stops him. One thing of which she is certain is that “when these figments of mine speak among themselves, even though I don’t understand their words, I can tell for a fact that their joys and sorrows are *big*. [...] *Huge*” (572, emphasis in original). When González Rodríguez asks Florita if the killers know that they are beyond the law, Florita tells him, “No, no, no, [...] it has nothing to do with the law” (572). The description of ordinary faces is meant to exclude no one from Florita’s visions, forcing us to imagine a part of ourselves hidden behind the crimes, a swollen or inflated part that is the seat of libido. The *lamella*, which Žižek (2007,

208) calls “an uncanny excess of life,” is the terrible thing that Florita sees in the face of boredom.

Florita’s gesture brings out the non-historical within or hidden behind the context of the crimes, faces obsequious to our inclinations that are not sick (as in exceptional), but ordinary. The crimes have nothing to do with the law, which has failed to perform its dual function, neither repressing desire nor “supplement[ing] the impossibility involved in the very nature of desire by a symbolic interdiction” (Zupančič 2003, 178). The *lamella* “moves like the amoeba” (Lacan 1998, 197) through this unstructured, porous environment, like Bolaño’s unconscious killer through the desert of boredom. Lacan (1998, 197) asks his audience to “suppose [the *lamella*] comes and envelops your face while you are quietly asleep,” and Žižek (2007, 208) writes, “This excess inscribes itself into the human body in the guise of a wound.” Both of these terrifying images, the parasite and the wound, find expression in the description Florita gives González Rodríguez of her visions.

Herlinghaus (2013, 218) writes, “[Bolaño] takes Sergio’s literary ‘alter ego’ to its limit,” but that González Rodríguez “is incapable of making sense of the allusions that Florita is conveying to him,” by which Herlinghaus means the closeness of the killings to the vampirism of maquiladoras. Apropos a discussion of how Western modernity continues to prepare certain people for violent acts via rituals of subjection that are vigorously denied, but ultimately constitutive, Herlinghaus (2013, 220-21) describes the maquiladoras and how “the assumption that unskilled female workers from the South must, per force of an inborn logic, be ‘turned over’ after showing exhaustion, equals a preestablished condition of ‘guiltiness’ that is rooted in their natural disposability.” González Rodríguez may not make sense of the way that Florita’s heavy, metallic image bears this out, but he is affected by Florita’s version of the myth of the *lamella*, which only ever serves to point towards a central void and is incapable of being made sense of. “Beyond representation as it is in its monstrosity,” Žižek

(2007, 209) writes that “*lamella* nonetheless remains within the domain of the Imaginary, although as a kind of limit-image: the image to cancel all images, the image that endeavours to stretch the imagination to the very border of the irrepresentable.” Bolaño takes González Rodríguez to this limit, beyond which no narrative, either Bolaño’s or González Rodríguez’s, can progress. Reaching the threshold of a limit-image, there is the option to construct an artificial vista, or there is the compulsion to turn around and see how everything carries the irrevocable mark of excess and to render this an aspect of reality.

The *lamella* points towards a central void and cannot be made sense of, the Real of desire that becomes palpable—if only as a vague sense of terror, the likes of which haunts Bolaño’s characters—in the feeling of being parasitised by desire. The Real of desire becomes palpable in the experience of the other life that Zupančič (2003, 188) calls “life as support of the ‘Other thing’ involved in desire.” The senselessness of this other life is kept at a distance by the supplements or symbolic interdictions of the law, which condense the impossible involved in desire into a unique representation, a privileged and separate object. These privileged objects are incongruous with *2666*. At the scene of the Penitent’s second desecration, the inspector in charge of the case nudges a chunk of plaster with the toe of his boot, “It looked like a piece of a hand and it was soaked” (365), he thinks. The urine-soaked piece of hand is no longer sacred. The Penitent’s condescension of these sacred objects connects them to the bloody bodies that overwhelm the novel. At the heart of new realism is “the fact that symbolization [...] never succeeds in fully ‘covering’ the Real, that it always involves some unsettled, unredeemed symbolic debt” (Žižek 2005, 241). The task is to contain the terrifying impact of the debt without redeeming it and reducing it to its symbolic status. Zupančič (2003, 188) asks a question that can be said to innervate the body of work being traced in this thesis: “Now, the question is how [...] to render this emptiness [the Real of desire] without interposing the surface of representation?” Besides amounting to Bolaño’s

indictment of systemic disregard for human life, the mutilated bodies of women and girls in *2666* are exposed fragments of the Real and the femicide is an unsettled, unredeemed symbolic debt.

Zupančič (2003, 188) writes that sculptor Rachel Whiteread's work casting the space within objects "would doubtlessly have drawn Lacan's attention, had he lived to see it." Her work approaches the way that Bolaño matches the repetitive discovery of dead bodies in *2666* with forensic details that overemphasise the material condition of the body to point towards the black hole of the crimes, which is the potential in desire for—and to create—excess. Regarding Whiteread, Zupančič writes:

She takes a created object, for instance, a closet, a room, or a house, all of these belonging to those objects that give body to the emptiness in their center; one could say that what she starts with is nothing else but different representations of the Thing which, because of their incorporation in our daily life and routine, have somehow lost the power to fascinate us as such. What she then does is to fill up the empty space and then remove the something that has previously delimited and "given body" to this empty space. (Zupančič 2003, 188-89)

According to Zupančič, Whiteread's sculptures fill out a host of objects whose archetype is the Lacanian vase so that we are no longer kept at a distance from the impossible Thing that desire aims at. Instead, we are confronted with "the thickest absence or void" (Zupančič 2003, 189), the literal excess of our desire. Although there are criticisms of the way Zupančič uses Whiteread with Lacan, some of which are discussed below, the affective impact of Whiteread's casts, as Zupančič describes it, induces terror when applied to the content of *2666*.

Zupančič (2003, 189) writes that in Whiteread's work "the Thing no longer appears as something existing beyond symbolic reality, something that can only be represented in the reality in a negative form. It has been 'condescended' to reality, without simply merging with it." This has drawn criticism from Johanna Malt, who (2007, 63) writes that Zupančič "comes

dangerously close to attributing an actual content to [the Thing].” Malt (2007, 64-65) writes, “Claiming to put any real object in the place of the Thing would amount to a fantasy, or even a kind of fetishism.” However, the object that Zupančič sees in Whiteread’s work has not merged with reality in the way that fantasy is supposed to fill out the void of the Real. It cannot fall prey to the illusion that it is more than its materiality. Rather, Zupančič’s point is that Whiteread’s inversions present, if only for a moment, sheer, stupid materiality in which the libido can find no purchase. The result is that this thick absence creates a space for thinking more pressing than a mirror hanging over a hole, illustrating the fact that the infinity of desire coincides with excess. Malt (2007, 57, emphasis in original) writes that a cast by Whiteread “makes present *only* that which is absent from the original object,” just as Žižek (2007, 210) writes that “*lamella* is a kind of positive obverse of castration,” where castration, as it appears in Lacanian psychoanalysis, initiates desire. Whiteread’s work manifests the massive potential of desire, although Zupančič (2003, 189-90) suggests the effect is comical because desire appears to have been overshot. In *2666*, the surplus, which Zupančič (2003, 189) calls “a ‘stumbling block’ of reality,” is not just evident in the bodies we, through the Santa Teresa police and others, stumble upon regularly, but in the way we cannot but assume the presence of so many more in Bolaño’s desert of boredom.

Although neither Whiteread’s nor Bolaño’s work circumvents representation, Zupančič (2003, 189) writes that “Whiteread’s sculptures offer a very suggestive topological illustration of what the ‘realization of desire’ means when it cannot take the path of the representation.” The repeated descriptions of broken bodies: the two women disfigured by huge emotional investments in Norton’s dream and the movie *Fate* watches, the corpse Espinoza imagines in the Hotel México’s sauna, the pieces of plaster effigies that hydrate and swell in the Penitent’s urine to become like flesh, the swollen but otherwise ordinary faces of killers, and the 109 brutalised bodies, form a very suggestive illustration of that for which the

myth of the *lamella* stands. In both cases, a unique representation or privileged object yields to a potentially infinite metonymy of signifiers and objects. Žižek (2007, 208) writes that the *lamella* “is an entity of pure surface, without the density of substance, an infinitely plastic object that can not only incessantly change its form, but can even transpose itself from one to another medium.” This description of the infinite plasticity of the *lamella* justifies the collection of motifs experienced by characters in separate sections of *2666* as audio-visual content, imaginings, and as the hard evidence of crimes.

The body of sixteen-year-old Michele Sánchez Castillo is the first corpse that González Rodríguez has ever seen. Given permission to approach and photograph the crime scene, several reporters including González Rodríguez witness an atrocious collage of objects including “an iron bar [...], bloodstained and with bits of scalp adhering to it,” and the body itself, which is “wrapped in old quilts, next to a stack of tires,” exhibiting “facial trauma and minor lacerations to the chest, as well as a fatal fracture of the skull just behind the right ear” (559). Despite what seems like a wealth of evidence, all these details join with the apparently antithetical web of spectral motifs in pointing towards the black hole of the crimes. However, the affective impact of the material remnants of the crimes is like that of Whiteread’s casts, confronting us with the thickest absence of meaning.

Using his own cross-medium comparison as a way into the crimes, Herlinghaus (2013, 210) associates Bolaño’s minimalism in “The Part about the Crimes” with “the more recent video- and installation works of the Mexican artist Teresa Margolles.” Herlinghaus focuses on Bolaño’s parataxis: the way the fragments in the fourth part of *2666* collude without a clear connection. In “The Part about the Crimes,” Herlinghaus (2013, 212) writes, “There are just loose ends, paratactically linked, without any major clue or plot.” To this parataxis, Herlinghaus compares Margolles’s installations:

Thematizing a chilling presence of the Juárez femicides in the daily living spaces of the border, Margolles' art is minimalist in its formal surfaces. It finds its "space" beyond conciliatory symbolization [...] as it addresses violent death by combining forensic evidence with materials, and images of desert space, and other "urban" exterritorialities. (Herlinghaus 2013, 210-11)

However, the *lamella*, which moves like the amoeba between mediums, applies to Margolles's work in much the same way as it has been applied to Bolaño's work in this chapter. To be precise, Margolles's work allows us to experience a part of the violence that cannot be contextualised or localised, pointing instead towards the Real in its most terrifying dimension.

Margolles is a mortuary technician, but, like many of Bolaño's characters in *2666*, her experience of the Real of the crimes, which extends beyond the femicide to other forms of crime in the region, has challenged the idea that the advance of knowledge and science is enough to explain and curb such violence moving forward. In "The Part about the Crimes," Bolaño reproduces a considerable, but far from complete, catalogue of the material present at the crime scenes in a way that divorces these facts from the forensic context in which they should be used to form a bigger picture. Similarly, some of Margolles's work uses pieces of windshield glass shattered during drive-by shootings, mud, dirt, and miscellanea from crime scenes, along with parts taken from corpses at the morgue, including quantities of blood and skin, and pieces of flesh. Rebecca Scott Bray (2013, 41) describes two exhibitions of such work in New York; in the first, *Operativo*, Margolles included "four snippets drawn from newspaper and television reports that referenced drug murders and the gun trade between the United States and Mexico," along with "a list of homicides from the *El Debate* newspaper documenting death's brute facts: name, location, cause of death." In the second exhibition, *Operativo 2*, Margolles exhibited *Pintura de Sangre/Painting of Blood 2008*, a mud- and blood-stained canvas soaked in a crime scene in north-western Mexico. Scott Bray (2013, 41-42) writes that "Margolles dispensed with these facts and exhibited *Pintura de*

Sangre/Painting of Blood 2008, proposing that while facts can freight the details of death (name, location, cause) and its numbers, they cannot consign these facts to meaning.” The shift in emphasis between the two exhibitions from facts to what can be called the Real of the crimes creates a tension similar to that which is present in *2666* between context and the non-historical within context itself.

This chapter has argued that Bolaño, by refusing to consign facts to meaning, points towards the potential in desire for excess and contests an understanding of crimes that establishes Juárez and northern Mexico as the location of an exceptional violence. Similarly, describing the bloody canvas that was part of Margolles’s second exhibition in New York, Scott Bray (2013, 42) writes, “The single canvas in *Operativo 2* is, like violent death, finding its repetition in other sites and further exhibitions.” Before the story of Margolles’s canvases is told, they are, like the *lamella*, entities of pure surface, without density of substance. In this moment, Scott Bray (2013, 42) writes that “they immerse the visitor and orchestrate an experience that is less about representation and more about response.” Scott Bray (2013, 48) writes, “Transposing criminal death scenes to other topographies [...], Margolles implicates other nation-states in the constitutive life of death,” and this chapter has discussed how Bolaño implicates everyone at the level of desire in “The Part about the Crimes” by not supplementing his account of the crimes in a way that would either localise or contextualise guilt and exculpate us.

It has been one of the aims of this discussion to show how works by Bolaño, Whiteread, and Margolles seem to render emptiness by creating forms of excess that insist in bare surfaces of representation. In a way that reinforces the suggestion of a certain shared purpose, Scott Bray offers a final description of the paintings of blood by Margolles:

Margolles’ whispering, smelling and weeping canvasses betray the notion of a portrait as a fixed image, just as they reconfigure the narration of death’s individual identity.

As such, her paintings represent a fugitive forensics, where the paintings' apparent indexical value as pure "evidence" is corrupted and reorganised. They urgently threaten to "bleed" out of their frames. Yet these paintings of blood [...] still make little of that key forensic product of value. Blood, with all its empirical, individualised importance, is here awash in the untranslatable portrait. Similarly, the paintings extend beyond the individual event of death, or its capacity to be situated geographically or jurisdictionally, contained politically or defined and resolved juridically.

Just as Margolles reconfigures the narration of death's individual identity, the identities of victims in "The Part about the Crimes" dissolve as the Real of the *lamella* insists, causing the various forms of broken bodies that appear throughout *2666* to join together and form a single corpse that continues to metastasise. The blood paintings threaten to escape the confines of their frames, and the same urgent threat inheres in the violence committed by the Archiboldians in London, the violence of the Second World War depicted in the final part of *2666*, and the potential violence inherent in the eight hundred thousand pages that hang like a threat over the novel.

If the reader is disappointed by the fact that Fate's "sketch of the industrial landscape in the third world" (295) fails to eventuate, then this disappointment is compounded when, following almost immediately on the interview between Florita and González Rodríguez, Klaus Haas calls another press conference and gets a lukewarm response. The narrator tells us, "The big Mexico City papers"—presumably including *La Razón*, for which González Rodríguez writes—"didn't send any representatives," despite the fact that "Haas, by phone, had promised reporters a statement, a stunning revelation" (573). Later, González Rodríguez is approached by a congresswoman in Mexico City who, as they ride through the suburbs of the Federal District in her Mercedes Benz, speculates about the disappearance of her friend in Santa Teresa: ultimately another loose end. Herlinghaus (2013, 231) writes that "this grand dame who approaches the journalist to offer her help in his further investigations into the

Santa Teresa nightmares, tells Sergio about much of her life, shaped as an ironic, sometimes sarcastic glance into Mexican-ness.” Herlinghaus is wary of this tangential subplot:

In the end, the part of the beautiful, disenchanted, and yet truth-seeking congresswomen could inspire at very least a substantial film script, combining individual drama and horror, crossing the line between public secret and savagery at its most terrible; however, one might ask if this would be an adequate treatment if reality “itself” is more terrible and continues to use cunning strategies against so many peoples’ longing for relief? (Herlinghaus 2013, 231)

Arguably, what Herlinghaus calls “reality ‘itself,’” replete with strategy and malignance, is the Real that always escapes the way that fantasy and reality work together to keep it at bay.

The scintillating story of the congresswomen and Gonzalez Rodriguez working together to solve the case of her missing friend (and perhaps others) is denied us. In the second last paragraph of “The Part about the Crimes,” the congresswoman urges González Rodríguez to keep writing about the femicide: “I want you to strike hard, strike human flesh, unassailable flesh, not shadows” (631). In 2666, this unassailable culprit never steps out of the shadows to relieve us. The Sergio González Rodríguez who appears in “The Part about the Crimes” manifests the kind of movement Margolles makes between *Operativo* and *Operativo 2*, a movement away from facts in the context of journalism towards the Real of the crimes as its presence beyond representation is heralded by various limit-images. Shortly after Florita tells González Rodríguez that the crimes, as they appear in her visions, have nothing to do with the law, the narrator tells us that “the Santa Teresa authorities, in collaboration with Sonora state officials, invited the investigator Albert Kessler to the city” (575). Kessler moves the same way as González Rodríguez, away from facts in the context of forensic science towards the Real of the crimes.

Albert Kessler, the detective’s act, and the scientific miracle of the university discourse

There are scientists who make out that nothing is impossible, in the real – and it takes some nerve to say things like that, or, as I suspect, total ignorance of what one is doing and saying.

— Jacques Lacan, “There can be no crisis of psychoanalysis”

A popular image of Bolaño the author emerged in 2011 with Natasha Wimmer’s English translation of *Between Parentheses*. As a writer of non-fiction, Bolaño cultivated a contentious and contradictory anti-literary approach, suggesting that much of what is considered literary conceals the fear and self-interest that coordinates its meaningfulness and very position as literature. For example, Bolaño (2012, 112) writes, “Prizes, seats (in the Academy), tables, beds, even golden chamber pots belong, of course, to those who are successful or to those who play the part of loyal and obedient clerks.” This statement has to be read not only as an attack on a handful of Bolaño’s literary adversaries (which it is as well) but as an allusion to what can be called Bolaño’s “antiliterature,” a term designed to facilitate a connection with Lacan’s notoriously ambiguous term “antiphilosophy,” which describes the French psychoanalyst’s position against his twentieth-century understanding of philosophy.

The crucial difference between philosophy and what Lacan calls antiphilosophy is not that there is no truth, but that the truth does not wait for the conquest of meaninglessness by the advance of philosophical knowledge to be discovered. Instead, during the clinical encounter, “Lacan wants [...] to produce analytic knowledge (*savoir*) regarding those truths (*vérités*) anchoring the being(s) of speaking subjects” (Johnston 2010, 148-49). Butler and Stephens (2005, 3, emphasis in original) write about the procedure of the Lacanian clinic, “It is in [...] distortions and exaggerations, in the contingencies and inadequacies of expression, that the truth is to be found and relayed. In a sense these distortions *are* the truth.” Similarly,

this textual analysis of 2666 has sought truth in distortion, exaggeration and the inadequacies of different attempts at narrativisation including journalism, which was discussed earlier, and crime fiction, which will be discussed now.

Johnston has written about the ways antiphilosophy has been used by more recent theorists influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis, and (2010, 158) concludes, “Lacan is perhaps best thought of as a kind of ‘slant’ philosopher developing a parafilosophy.” Johnston describes “[Lacan’s] determinate negations of given philosophies rendering possible the birth of novel philosophical trajectories.” Similarly, Bolaño’s determinate negation of forms of narrative renders possible new realism as a novel literary trajectory. Traditional realism fits the mould of philosophical enquiry against which Lacan positions himself. It attempts to reduce the unknown to the known and conquer it. Avoiding the staidness of traditional realism is a fixture of the postmodern landscape. In the introduction to *Adventures in Realism*, Matthew Beaumont (2007, 3-4) writes, “When introductory textbooks on postmodernism do allude specifically to realism they tend to impugn the concept for both its ingenuousness and for its disingenuousness.” The realist author is both “simple-minded,” attempting to render reality truthfully, and “duplicitous” for even suggesting the possibility of such total representation (Beaumont 2007, 4). Instead, the assertion that there is no truth is implied by the proliferation of postmodern language-games.

The ethical stance that underpins new realism runs counter to both the belief by traditional realists that they could make a totality out of reality (which is to work on the side of fantasy in attempting to fill out the black hole of the Real) and the complete disregard by postmodernists for the concept of truth. It is possible to derive the form that new realism should take from Žižek’s discussion of the limitations inherent in attempting to represent an event like the Holocaust and, by extension, an event like the Juárez femicides, which Deckard (2012, 367) calls “the present neoliberal holocaust.” Žižek (2012, 25, emphasis in original)

writes, “The horror of the Holocaust cannot be represented; but this excess of represented content over its aesthetic representation has to infect the aesthetic form itself. What cannot be *described* should be *inscribed* into the artistic form as its uncanny distortion.” The distortions that abound in *2666* point towards the Real of the crimes. The insistence of these distortions manifests an aversion to the forms of supplementation and symbolic interdiction inherent in fantasy that this thesis seeks to trace in new realist fiction, impelled by the fact that such distortions are the Real truths.

Asserting Bolaño’s and Lacan’s commitment to truth contradicts those readings suggesting that either the former’s fiction or the latter’s teaching is an exorbitant, postmodern deferral of meaning. In Bolaño’s case, his postmodernism is disputed by Boxall, who (2013, 10, 15-16) describes *2666* as an example of the “new kinds of realism” emerging in the new century as a result of “a large scale waning of the explanatory power of postmodern critical languages, a thoroughgoing dismantling of the postmodern architecture.” As for Lacan, Žižek (quoted in Johnston 2010, 155) describes “the ‘postmodern theory’ which predominates today” and how its paradigmatic works affirm “the ‘anti-essentialist’ refusal of universal Foundation, the dissolving of ‘Truth’ into an effect of plural language-games,” but argues that “Lacan, however, is not part of this ‘postmodern theory.’” Speaking about Lacan’s commitment to truth, Žižek (quoted in Johnston 2010, 155) describes how the postmodernists who deal with Lacan “are always bothered by what they perceive as some remainder of ‘essentialism.’” Just as some essentialism remains in Lacan, violence insists in *2666* through the forms of excess that are repeated and which defy either contextualisation or localisation to suggest a human potential that is universal.

Both Bolaño and Lacan reject knowledge that appears objective while serving existing power structures. For Lacan, this is a rejection of the university discourse, one of the four discourses that he introduced in Seminar XVIII, presented 1969-70, alongside the

discourse of the master, the hysteric, and the analyst. Žižek (1998, 75) writes, “Lacan’s scheme of the four discourses articulates the four subjective positions within a discursive social link.” The subjective position of the master begins and ends the construction because it is the point where the subject is as close as possible to the ideal of self-coincidence and as far as possible from facing the void at the centre of the desire-machine, or what Florita would call “facing boredom head-on” (433). Žižek (1998, 75) writes that “what characterizes the Master is a speech-act that wholly absorbs me, in which ‘I am what I say,’ in short, a fully realized, self-contained performative.” Such a speech-act is an abrupt gesture by which “the ‘excessive’ Master-Signifier,” which is what Žižek (1998, 76) calls the master’s absorbing performative, interrupts “the chain of ‘ordinary’ signifiers” to redirect it. The discourse of the master is the discourse of traditional realism because the master can claim to make a totality out of something; it involves a mode of subjectivity demonstrated by the mayor of Santa Teresa, who is able to proclaim the end of extraordinary crimes in his city. For either to sustain their subjective position, the mayor of Santa Teresa or the traditional realist must suppress the truths in regards to which Lacan wants to produce analytic knowledge:

In order to sustain this self-identity, [the discourse of the master] excludes the unconscious—the knowledge that is *not known*—as this would jeopardize the ego’s sense of certainty. Therefore, the discourse of the master stands in a particular relation of authority to knowledge, seeking to dominate it, and exclude from consciousness the knowledge of the unconscious. (Newman 2004, 304-05, emphasis in original)

Under the guise of objectivity, the university discourse serves to legitimate whichever arbitrary signifier becomes Master-Signifier, helping to reorganise things and exclude the Real truths.

The university discourse is epitomised by philosophy, but Johnston (2010, 139-40) writes that “Lacan characterizes the reign of (neo-)liberal capitalism as ushering in the dominance of ‘science’ qua the authority of the university discourse,” stressing that “the

knowledge produced by the discourse of the university, with which analytic discourse should not be confused, ultimately buttresses the power of capitalism.” Andrews (2014, xvii) writes, “In [Bolaño’s] fiction it matters greatly that art should not be subservient to the policies of any institution,” but subservience is complicated when it is considered in terms of the structural and often unacknowledged subservience of the discourse of the university to that of the master. Žižek (1998, 78) writes that “the constitutive lie of the university discourse is that it disavows its performative dimension, presenting what effectively amounts to a political decision based on power as a simple insight into the factual state of things.” In “The Part about the Crimes,” the university discourse appears to be divorced from its constitutive lie, failing to secure insight into the factual state of things; its avatars join other recurrent motifs in pointing to the Real of the crimes.

In his reflection on Lacan’s eighteenth seminar, Žižek (2006b, 110) writes that “doubt about the efficiency of the master-figure [...] can be supplemented by the direct rule of the experts legitimized by their knowledge.” Kessler is invited to Santa Teresa precisely to supplement the mayor’s tenuous symbolic interdiction, his proclamation of an end to the serial killings of women. This is not to suggest that the mayor is the master-figure; rather, Kessler is supposed to conceal the fact that rampant capitalism, exemplified by the maquiladora industry, exacerbates the potential in desire for excess. Žižek (2006b, 109) writes that “the expert-rule of bureaucracy” is an outcome of the university discourse; in 2666, avatars of this bureaucracy are working to bolster capitalism before Kessler’s arrival. For example, a woman introduced as the head of Santa Teresa’s newly formed Department of Sex Crimes, who is in fact the only person employed by the Department, tells González Rodríguez that “it wasn’t all bad in Santa Teresa. It wasn’t all bad, where women were concerned” (568). Afterwards, she tells him that Santa Teresa is the Mexican city with the lowest female unemployment rate. We have heard this statistic twice before in 2666. Firstly,

the narrator describes Fate sleeping through a news report in which a reporter mentions “the long list of women killed in Santa Teresa,” which is followed by “a shot of some assembly plants and [the reporter’s] voice-over saying that unemployment was almost nonexistent along that stretch of the border” (258). Secondly, Chucho Flores tells Fate that Santa Teresa has “one of the lowest unemployment rates in Mexico” (286) after Fate first hears about the femicide. It is Kessler, however, who exemplifies the experts legitimised by their knowledge, and who personifies the transition from philosophy to science as the authority of the university discourse.

Kessler is invited to Santa Teresa shortly after the poor attendance at Haas’s third and final press conference reveals that the official story is failing to convince the public. This is the official story that the crimes are the work of a serial killer, an aberration and not a human potential that is universal and a threat to the subject’s or system’s self-identity, exacerbated by a capitalist economy that “thrives on [the] metonymic logic of desire” (Bjerre 2014, 67). Before Haas is known to the Santa Teresa police at large, the official story is outlined in a meeting between the city’s mayor, its police chief, two inspectors, a man from the chamber of commerce, and a judge. One inspector tells the mayor, “We have three clear-cut cases” (470), which sets them against Bolaño’s approach to violence and “tendency to suggest massive proportions” (Herlinghaus 2013, 215). The same inspector says, “We have a serial killer, like in the gringo movies” (470). The implication of this reference to Hollywood is that the serial killer narrative comes preloaded. This is alluded to later, after Kessler’s arrival causes outrage among some locals who rue the choice of the foreigner investigator over the Mexican criminologist Professor Silverio García Correa. Professor García Correa defends Kessler’s appointment by listing the American’s achievements. The Mexican criminologist finishes by telling reporters the following about Kessler:

He’s also a consultant or adviser on some action movies. I haven’t seen any of them

because it's been a long time since I went to the movies and Hollywood trash just puts me to sleep. But according to my grandson, they're plenty of fun and the good guys always win. (Bolaño 2009, 579)

Kessler's role in the official story is to affirm the good guy/bad guy dichotomy against all evidence to the contrary, amidst a narrative that is in the constant state of fragmentation, allowing space for the Real of the crimes to insist and dissolve all identities.

The Santa Teresa authorities do not seem to think that the scandalous press conferences in which Haas declares his innocence will harm the official story, but that Haas's eccentricities will serve to implicate him further. Haas is repeatedly described as blond and very tall, though these and other physical features are repeatedly exaggerated. The last time González Rodríguez visits Haas, the German strikes him "as even colder than before. And taller, too, as if in prison his hormones had gone haywire and he had finally attained his true height" (561). Afterwards, González Rodríguez thinks that "even if [Haas] hadn't been guilty of the most recent killings, he was guilty of *something*" (561, emphasis in original). In her dissertation exploring the true crime novel in Latin America, Gina Louise Robinson Sherriff (2010, 158) writes, "In 2666, Klaus Haas's otherness, namely his non-Mexicanness, automatically turns him into a suspect and allows Santa Teresa to marginalize the threat of serial violence." This is the thrust of the serial killer narrative in its capacity as the official story, but Haas becomes less convincing as the Santa Teresa serial killer each time he convenes the press.

Haas's first press conference is "attended by four reporters from Mexico City and almost all of the print media of the state of Sonora" (488-89). He convenes the press a second time. According to the narrator, "Not as many reporters came this time" (499), and González Rodríguez is notably absent: "*La Razón*, where Sergio González worked, sent a novice crime reporter, who read the case files on the plane to Hermosillo" (500). In his second press

conference, “Haas asked the reporters how it could be that with the killer (him, in other words) behind bars, murders were still being committed” (499). The authorities answer the question by arresting five members of the Los Bisontes gang, one of whose younger brother is an inmate at the Santa Teresa penitentiary and apparently a “good friend and protégé of Klaus Haas” (538). This results in a conclusion that supports the serial killer narrative:

Very likely, said the police, the series of killings carried out by the Bisontes were murders for hire. According to this version, Haas paid three thousand dollars for each dead woman who resembled his own victims. The news was soon leaked to the press. (Bolaño 2009, 538)

At this time, the mayor of Santa Teresa appears on television and declares “the end of the psychopaths” (539). The public, however, are not convinced: “The dead women of March prompted the Mexico City papers to ask some questions out loud” (559). Afterwards, González returns to write a new story about the killings in Santa Teresa and interviews Florita, whose visions confront him with the terrifying ordinariness of the crimes and the criminals that the discourse of the master excludes from consciousness.

A widening gap between the discourse of the master and the agents of university knowledge is evident in the narrator’s description of the attitude towards Haas’s final press conference: “The reporters who came weren’t expecting anything new, let alone something that would illuminate the dark chasm that the regular appearance of dead women [...] had become” (573). Between the conference being called and held, authorities discover the body of Aurora Ibáñez Medel, a maquiladora worker, and subsequently arrest her husband, who had been laid off from the same maquiladora, and whose motive, according to one of the inspectors, was jealousy: “Not of any man in particular, but all the men she might have encountered or because of his new situation, which was intolerable” (574). The case and its resolution attest to the failure of the serial killer narrative, pointing instead to the dehumanising conditions of life for maquiladora workers. Against this scene, Kessler offers

hope. Specifically, he appears ready to resolve not just the criminal chaos in Santa Teresa, but the refusal of coherent narrative form, let alone genre, in “The Part about the Crimes.” Andrews (2014, 85) writes, “Anyone approaching this part of the novel with expectations shaped by genre fiction is bound to be disappointed,” and the virtue of such disappointment resides in the fact that the alternative, the genre of the detective story, exemplifies a typical way of avoiding the Real of desire by excluding uncomfortable truths.

The detective and the psychoanalyst are similar up to a point; both are supposed to be able to derive meaning from a set of facts, but they diverge in their approach to exercising this power. In terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis, both the practicing analyst and the detective in the context of a logic and deduction story, where Žižek (1991, 57) claims they are freighted with an “ill-famed ‘omniscience’ and ‘infallibility,’” encounter transference. Dylan Evans (1996, 214) writes, “Transference is the attribution of knowledge to the Other, the supposition that the Other is the subject who knows.” In this instance, the Other (with a capital “O”) refers to “another subject, in his radical alterity and unassimilable uniqueness” (Evans 1996, 136); another subject who can entertain the illusion of self-mastery or completeness, and hence infallibility. The detective or analyst to whom such knowledge is attributed is called the “subject supposed to know”:

We [can] specify the function of the detective *qua* “subject supposed to know” in the following way: the scene of the crime contains a diversity of clues, of meaningless, scattered details with no obvious pattern (like “free associations” of the analysand in the psychoanalytic process), and *the detective, solely by means of his presence, guarantees that all these details will retroactively acquire meaning.*” (Žižek 1991, 58, emphasis in original)

By the time Kessler lands at Santa Teresa airport, we are 252 pages into “The Part about the Crimes,” much of which has been the description of meaningless, scattered details like the fact that, when the body of Margarita López Santos is discovered, “Her left hand rested on some guaco leaves” (375). A policeman “was able to identify the guaco plant” (375), but the

medical examiner is unable to determine the cause of death and the case is one of the ninety eight that remain unsolved. These details are the “few details scattered across the darkness” that Mulhall (2009, 151) calls “a snapshot of the scene as a whole”; they do not acquire meaning with Kessler’s arrival.

The epistemological form that a detective like Kessler represents is incompatible with psychoanalysis insofar as the detective’s act culminates in an “insight into the factual state of things” (Žižek 1998, 78). Delivering this insight would amount to what Lacan calls “suggestion,” designating a deviation from authentic psychoanalytic practice:

Lacan argues that the analyst must realise that he only occupies the position of the one who is presumed (by the analysand) to know, without fooling himself that he really does possess the knowledge attributed to him. [...] Suggestion, on the other hand, arises when the analyst assumes the position of one who really *does* know. (Evans 1996, 202, emphasis in original)

The problem with embracing the position of the subject supposed to know is that the transmissible knowledge in which the detective’s subjectivity is grounded is the knowledge of university discourse, enabled by a Master-Signifier and serving to reinforce it by excluding the knowledge of the unconscious. Evans (1996, 54) writes, “The aim of psychoanalytic treatment is to lead the analysand to articulate the truth about his desire.” In the context of *2666*, the truth about our desire is crucial to confronting a global audience with something so terrifying as to be inescapable.

Twenty three pages before the end of “The Part about the Crimes,” the narrator describes an audience gathered at the University of Santa Teresa, awaiting Kessler’s first lecture. The narrator tells us that “never before had the fifteen-hundred-seat university hall been completely filled. According to the most conservative estimates, the number of people who came to listen to Kessler far exceeded three thousand” (610). We are told that “everybody who was anybody in Santa Teresa wanted to meet Kessler” and that the crowd

was full of “stubborn opposition groups,” but that everyone set aside their differences and “settled down to wait for the scientific miracle, the miracle of the human mind set in motion by that modern-day Sherlock Holmes” (610). The audience waits, and so do we, for science, having succeeded philosophy as the authority of the university discourse, to deliver its infallible, all-encompassing fiction of scientific ontology.

Kessler arrives in Santa Teresa in 1997, while his namesake Robert K. Ressler travelled to Juárez at the behest of the Mexican authorities in 1998. Their schedules are similar and they face the same limitations. Valdes (2008, 20) recounts the conversation in which González Rodríguez apparently told Bolaño that Ressler’s “trip was just window dressing” because the former FBI agent turned private consultant was unprepared:

He didn’t bring his own translator. He was paid by the same authorities who might be implicated by his findings. He had to review criminal files in Spanish, a language he didn’t know. He was given a bodyguard who watched everything he did. (Valdes 2008, 20)

Kessler does not speak Spanish. He uses “an English-Spanish dictionary” to look up words (589), and during “a gala dinner at the mayor’s house” (593), Kessler offends some of his hosts by talking to another American in English before them. During the dinner, “The Sonora attorney general presented Kessler with a file,” and afterwards, “Kessler thought how nice and hospitable these people really were, just as he had believed Mexicans to be” (594). Kessler glances at the crime reports, makes a few notes on a map of the city, and travels “in a police car escorted by another police car” around neighbourhoods “where the snatchings most often took place” (605), but his focus seems to be on the hospitality he is shown.

Kessler is taken to try local fare by a group of policemen, and then leaves with “two English-speaking inspectors” to visit Cerro Estrella, the mountains around Santa Teresa where several bodies are discovered. At a bar with a view of the mountains, Kessler tries

bacanora, which the policemen told him “was a drink distilled only in Sonora, from a kind of agave that grew here and nowhere else in Mexico” (599). In the days leading up to his lecture, we are told that “[Kessler] busied himself studying the killings one by one. He busied himself drinking shots of *bacanora*, Christ it was good” (606). The image that emerges of Kessler is that of someone who is willing to be “wined and dined,” someone who is little better than one of the writers who play the role of loyal and obedient clerks, and who is easily fooled. Professor García Correa seems to embody some of the Bolaño’s cynicism when, while defending Kessler’s appointment, he goes “off record” to tell reporters:

Being a criminologist in this country is like being a cryptographer at the North Pole. It’s like being a child in a cell block of pedophiles. It’s like being a beggar in the country of the deaf. It’s like being a condom in the realm of the Amazons. (Bolaño 2009, 578-79)

After Kessler’s tour of Santa Teresa, he speaks to a gathering of journalists and says, “Walking the streets in broad daylight [...] is frightening. I mean: frightening for a man like me” (605). He is quietly derided by his police escorts for his naivety. Kessler continues, “For a woman [...] it’s dangerous to be out at night” (605). When he tells the mayor of Santa Teresa that “police keep out of some neighbourhoods” (605), he is met with false contrition and buck-passing from authorities that are keen to entertain the expert on serial killers because he buttresses the official story.

Bolaño buries the conclusion of Kessler’s “investigation” 343 pages before the modern-day Sherlock Holmes disappears from “The Part about the Crimes.” Oscar Fate overhears a conversation between two men, one young and the other older, in a restaurant at a gas station south of Tucson, Arizona. The older man is Kessler. “The Part about Fate” is set after the events of “The Part about the Crimes,” and Kessler is leaving Mexico for home after a second, unofficial visit to Santa Teresa. The young man that Kessler is with calls him an inspiration and they talk about what type of serial killer is harder to catch. Kessler says, “The

sloppy ones are worse, [...]. It's harder to establish a pattern of behaviour," and, when asked by the younger man whether it is still possible, Kessler says, "Given the means and the time, you can do anything" (265). This is not the case in Santa Teresa, however. Kessler is prompted by the younger man to give "his unofficial opinion about what's going on there":

"All right then," said the white-haired man. "I'll tell you three things I'm sure of: (a) everyone living in that city is outside of society, and everyone, I mean everyone, is like the ancient Christians in the Roman circus; (b) the crimes have different signatures; (c) the city seems to be booming, it seems to be moving ahead in some ineffable way, but the best thing would be for every last one of the people there to head out into the desert some night and cross the border." (Bolaño 2009, 267)

This conclusion refutes the serial killer narrative and attests to the fact that the detective's guarantee is void in "The Part about the Crimes," but points to what Bolaño has achieved with this willingness to disappoint us.

2666 maintains what Žižek (1991, 59) calls the intersubjective dimension of the corpse. When Kessler saw Cerro Estrella, he thought that "it looked like a plaster cast. The black veins must be garbage. The brown veins were houses or shacks perched in precarious and bizarre equilibrium. The red veins might have been scraps of metal rusted from contact with the elements" (598). Kessler's impression of the mountain not only reinforces the heavy, metallic image by which Florita can distinguish the killings in Santa Teresa from others, but recalls the saturated plaster body parts scattered across church floors by the Penitent. The mention of veins makes it seem as though the mountain adds mass to the dimension of the corpse that binds everyone, including Kessler, together. We do not hear the modern-day Sherlock Holmes perform his scientific miracle and Kessler's "unofficial opinion" does not constitute the detective's act:

the detective's act consists in annihilating the libidinal possibility, the "inner" truth that each one in the group might have been the murderer (i.e., that we *are* murderers in the unconscious of our desire, insofar as the actual murderer realizes the desire of the group constituted by the corpse) on the level of "reality" (where the culprit singled

out *is* the murderer and thus the guarantee of *our* innocence. (Žižek 1991, 59, emphasis in original)

Kessler does not annihilate this libidinal possibility for us. Rather, he does what Bolaño has avoided doing elsewhere in *2666* and maintains the consistency of his reality and subjectivity by fantasising that Santa Teresa is the location of an exceptional violence, managing to exclude from consciousness his unofficial opinion about the crimes and make out, as a forensic scientist and subject supposed to know, that nothing is impossible.

It is not enough to say that Kessler's failure corresponds to Ressler's unsuccessful investigations, and that the 109 victims in "The Part about the Crimes" correspond to the number of victims discovered in Juárez over three years, therefore *2666* is a realist novel. Bolaño's novel refers to the external, empirical limitations of Ressler's investigation, but Kessler's thoughts and impressions, as well as his unofficial opinion, reveal the inherent impossibility of making a totality out of the crimes. A mounting symbolic debt overwhelms the stories of characters operating under the guise of objectivity to exclude the Real, working on the side of fantasy and reality, against the ethical imperative of new realism. An uncanny excess of life interrupts the consistency of *2666* with empirical reality, and despite what Kessler might think, is restricted neither to context nor to a particular location.

Alongside the 109 women's deaths in "The Part about the Crimes" there are ordinary faces swollen with joy or sorrow; a reflected face distorted by fear, despair, anxiety, nervousness and madness; a skeleton animated by laughter; and a church desecrator with an enormous bladder, described by witnesses as crying and laughing at the same time. In these examples, the *lamella* insists, moving like the amoeba between the novel's five parts and tracing the lack that grounds the subject of desire. *2666* facilitates our recognition of the potential for the subject of desire to create excess. It includes us in a specific situation where this excess is atrocious violence by refusing to reveal who or what else is behind the crimes.

It is possible to imagine a sixth part of 2666, “The Part about Us,” discernible in the distortions, exaggerations, and inadequacies of expression that distinguish Bolaño’s account of femicide and violence in general from others. “The Part about Us” could comprise the hundreds of thousands of pages that Bolaño might have written about the crimes, but it would not absolve us of guilt, as per the detective’s act. Instead, it would involve us all in the intersubjective dimension of femicide.

Chapter Three

“Everybody’s fucked. Be grateful you left”:

The Symptom in Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *Senselessness*

In their “Best Books of 2008” list, National Public Radio in the United States named Katherine Silver’s English translation of the Honduran-Salvadoran author Horacio Castellanos Moya’s novel *Senselessness* among the five best foreign fiction titles. Bolaño’s *2666* was the other Latin American novel that made the list. *Senselessness* and *2666* are similarly global fictions, set in the context of a regional violence and eschewing context in order to point to the potential in desire for excess that is the symptom of every concrete, historical act of violence. This thesis uses “symptom” in the psychoanalytic sense: “The symptom is the expression of the impossibility of completion that haunts every system” (McGowan 2014, 244). The universality of violence between subjects suggests that we need a symptomatic as well as a historical analysis of acts of violence so as to disrupt any closed system that excludes subjects on the grounds of history, context, location, or even their psychological profile. This thesis looks in particular at the confinement of extreme violence to the Global South by the North. While *2666* discusses the femicide in Ciudad Juárez, referencing *Huesos en el desierto* by Sergio González Rodríguez, *Senselessness* discusses the massacres of the indigenous peoples of Guatemala during its 36-year civil war. Specifically, *Senselessness* refers to the atrocities recorded in the report *Guatemala: Nunca Más* (Guatemala: Never Again) that was compiled by the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala (ODHAG) and published in 1998.

Silver (2009, 6) calls *Senselessness* a “short, breathless novel.” 142 pages long, it is 751 pages shorter than *2666*. Many characters in Bolaño’s long novel try to make sense of the crimes described in its fourth part. Journalist and activist Oscar Fate proposes, for example,

“A sketch of the industrial landscape in the third world, [...] a serious crime story” (295). Though he finds himself in the middle of a group of men who are at the very least complicit in the exploitation and killing of women in Santa Teresa, he never puts pen to paper. Similarly, career criminologist Albert Kessler, a “modern-day Sherlock Holmes” (610), leaves the crowd assembled in the University of Santa Teresa’s lecture hall waiting for a scientific miracle that never comes. The unnamed narrator-protagonist of *Senselessness* is a writer from El Salvador who tells us that he wants as little to do with the violence in Guatemala as possible, despite having accepted an offer to edit “a project that consisted of recovering the memories of the hundreds of survivors of and witnesses to the massacres perpetrated in the throes of the so-called armed conflict between the army and the guerrillas” (5-6). This report is never identified as *Guatemala: Nunca Más* in *Senselessness*, nor is Guatemala ever identified as the country in which it is set. Frans Weiser (2011, 4) writes, “Castellanos Moya is careful to provide enough political and geographical allusions to suggest Guatemala City as the setting,” while Christian Kroll-Bryce (2014, 382) writes, “Even if not explicitly mentioned, it is clear that Castellanos Moya’s novel alludes to the Guatemalan peace process.” Just as Santa Teresa is an obvious allusion to Juárez, the setting of *Senselessness* is obviously Guatemala, and the Guatemalan civil war and subsequent peace process is clearly its context. However, not naming Guatemala, or renaming Juárez, represents an aversion to localising the violence that, though more contained elsewhere, is a universal human potential.

Castellanos Moya has been praised for challenging the assumptions of his Northern readers about Central America:

For a world readership that had grown used to seeing Central American locales both exoticized and pathologized, and had often yielded to simplistic stereotypes of the region and its people, the supple talent of Castellanos Moya has served as a bracing surprise. (Birns 2013, 111)

Just as the setting of *Senselessness* is unspecified, which makes it difficult for the reader to yield so readily to stereotypes of Guatemala, Castellanos Moya's narrator is nameless, which closes the distance between the narrator and the reader so that the reader is compelled to engage with and in the narrator's actions. Stuart Schneiderman (2013, 162) writes that when an author names a character, the reader is renamed, and that "this new name, received by the grace of the author of the fiction, will absolve [the reader] of the obligation to act and to speak in his own name." Schneiderman (2013, 162-3) writes, "This is the lure of the literariness of some fictions; it provides a disinterested aesthetic enjoyment." As we shall see, the potential for such a disinterested aesthetic enjoyment is one of the narrator's reasons for accepting the offer to edit the report that is probably *Guatemala: Nunca Más*; the other reasons are circumstantial. The narrator is forced to flee El Salvador after describing it in an article as "the first Latin American country to have an African president" (37), a claim for which he is accused of racism. He tells us that the article "won me the enmity of half the country" even though he was not referring to the colour of the president's skin, but to "his dictatorial attitude" (37). This correction is supposed to absolve the narrator—who is elitist, racist, and sexist—of guilt. Owing to what he calls "a stupid and dangerous bout of enthusiasm" (5) and the promise of five thousand dollars, the narrator accepts the offer to edit the report.

The narrator expects to spend three months "editing about five hundred pages written by well-known journalists and academics":

I would only have to look it over, a final proofing, it was a really great gig, five thousand dollars just to put the final touches on a project that dozens and dozens of people had participated in, beginning with the group of missionaries who had managed to record the oral testimonies of the Indians, witnesses and survivors, most of whom didn't even speak Spanish very well and who were afraid above all else of anything that had to do with the events they had been victims of, followed by those in charge of transcribing the tapes, and ending with teams of professionals, who would classify and analyze the testimonies and who would then also write up the report. (Castellanos Moya 2008, 6)

Rather than five hundred pages, however, he discovers a bulky stack of one thousand one hundred pages of almost single-spaced text lying on his desk in the sparse, windowless office normally used by the bishop. He is told not to worry, that “three hundred of those pages were lists of massacres and victims’ names and the other eight hundred were very well written,” and that his job “was only to polish and touch up the final version, although of course I had *carte blanche* to change anything I thought necessary” (15). However, just as the discovery of 109 victims in the fourth part of *2666* overwhelms the narrative, the one thousand one hundred pages eventually deprive the narrator of the pleasure he expects to derive from a curated document.

Reflecting on her work translating *Senselessness*, Silver (2009, 7) writes that “there were moments when the translator’s sanity was challenged by the text about a text that was challenging the narrator’s sanity.” This chapter argues that the narrator’s sanity is challenged by his experience of *jouissance*, what Glyn Daly (2014, 80) calls the “paradoxical phenomenon of deriving a kind of satisfaction through suffering, or pleasure through pain.” Daly (2014, 80) writes, “*Jouissance* is something that can be signposted only in relation to a limit imposed by the pleasure principle,” and, as we shall see, pleasure is directly opposed to and disrupted by the experience of *jouissance*. In *Senselessness*, activities that the narrator tells us would normally be pleasurable—thinking about poetry and “improving” the report he is given *carte blanche* to edit as he sees fit, as well as thinking about and having sex—are interrupted by thoughts, and in some cases the enactment, of violence. The violent impulses do not seem to belong to the narrator, but to the soldiers who terrorised the testimonial subjects of the report that is probably *Guatemala: Nunca Más*.

By noon on his first day of work, the narrator is drinking beer with his friend Toto, a self-styled farmer and poet, and trying to describe the dread he has been feeling since crossing the threshold of the cathedral to reach the archbishop’s palace and his office. Like

his reasons for taking the job, the narrator's feelings of dread are circumstantial and libidinal. The narrator calls himself a "depraved atheist" (4). He says that when he knocked on the door of the cathedral, it was "as if I were asking them to open the doors to catacombs I had long feared and abhorred but whose bowels I was now destined to penetrate, that strange sensation of being about to enter a forbidden and undesirable world" (13). The narrator is wary of entering "a world ruled by the laws of Catholicism, which had always produced in me the greatest revulsion" (14), and fearful of reprisal from the country's military. As if his problems in El Salvador were not enough, he says, "I was about to stick my snout into somebody else's wasps' nest, make sure that the Catholic hands about to touch the balls of the military tiger were clean and had even gotten a *manicure*" (5, emphasis in original). *Senselessness* is full of sentences removed from the context in which they were created, chief among them the testimonies of the victims. The sentence, however, of most importance to the present discussion is a line taken from a poem by the seventeenth-century Spanish poet Francisco de Quevedo. Toto warns the narrator not to get too involved in his new job, swills his beer, and puts on an air of mystery: "'To not desire, this alone I now desire,' my buddy recited with a mocking smile, wiping the foam off his mustache, then said, 'Quevedo'" (21). The desire to escape the excessive enjoyment that affects him as a result of taking the testimonies out of the context of the truth commission and obsessing over repeated images of the soldiers' *jouissance* is all that remains for the narrator at end of *Senselessness*.

"To not desire, this alone I now desire"

The story of people's suffering cannot be treated as if it were a page in a book.

— ODHAG, *Guatemala: Never Again!*

The first words of *Senselessness* are not the narrator's. Rather, they belong to an indigenous Cakchiquel Maya man who witnessed the murder of his wife and four children. "*I am not complete in the mind*, said the sentence I highlighted with the yellow marker and even copied into my personal notebook" (1, emphasis in original). Many scholars have emphasised the notebook in which the narrator records lines of testimony. Samuel Steinberg (2014, 176) writes, "The testimonial phrases that occupy his day are recorded not only in his memory but also in his personal notebook and gradually become the narration of his own experience." Steinberg (2014, 187) writes, "Instead of piety, solidarity, and the like, [...] our narrator finds only aesthetic pleasure in the lines he edits, [...]. In effect, he underlines constantly their aesthetic novelty." The narrator himself professes to be unconcerned with the politics of testimony while drinking with Toto. The narrator takes out his notebook and recites three sentences, to which Toto responds apathetically, mumbling "something like 'Cool...,' to be polite" (19). Toto warns the narrator "that editing one thousand one hundred pages of stories about Indians obsessed with terror and death could break even the strongest of spirits" (19). The narrator is quick to correct Toto's mistake: his friend, he tells us, was listening "as if I had read him those sentences out of my notebook to convince him of the righteousness of a just cause I was committing myself to" (20). Rather, the narrator says that "what I really wanted [...] was to show him the richness of the language of his so-called aboriginal compatriots, nothing more, assuming that he as a poet might have been interested in their intense figurative language and curious syntactic constructions" (20). Most scholars agree that the narrator's resistance to empathy is tested during *Senselessness*, although they disagree on the extent of the consequences of this.

By the end of *Senselessness*, the narrator has left Central America to escape the clutches of the military tiger and is in a country that is probably Germany, where something

happens that is open to, and has received, significant interpretation. The narrator meets and confronts the general whose name appears throughout the one thousand one hundred pages in connection with the most heinous crimes. Steinberg (2014, 190) writes, “At the end of [*Senselessness*], the narrator has arrived, through retreat, to a moment of political commitment, useless commitment, comic, pathetic, even.” Believing the general’s impunity to be non-existent in Europe, the narrator accuses him of being, among other things, an assassin. It is implied, however, that the man on the receiving end of the narrator’s anger, who does not understand Spanish, smiles foolishly, and responds to the accusations in German, is in fact not the general. Nevertheless, Steinberg (2014, 191) maintains that the confrontation represents “something courageous” in a novel that otherwise seems like “a rather conservative one.” Kroll-Bryce is more forgiving of the narrator than Steinberg. His article does not mention the narrator’s confrontation with the “general,” but suggests that his decision to flee is evidence of the extent to which he has become, on the one hand, sensitive to the victims and, on the other, aware that what happened to them could happen to him. Kroll-Bryce (2014, 389) writes that “by the end of Castellanos Moya’s novel the narrator realizes, by lending a respectful ear to the voices of the testimonies he is editing and letting these voices inhabit him, that he must disappear himself before being disappeared.” This chapter argues that while the narrator is being inhabited by the voices of the victims, he is being affected by the *jouissance* of the victimisers.

Nanci Buiza (2013, 154) writes, “[*Senselessness*] hinges on poetry as the bearer of affect, which is the mental and emotional experience that allows readers to connect and identify with others.” Buiza (2013, 155-56) makes the point that *Senselessness* explores the tension between the powerful non-indigenous or Ladino population of Guatemala and their “social” and “racial other,” the indigenous Maya majority. During the 1980s, Maya villages in the Guatemalan highlands were targeted by the army for supporting the guerrillas.

However, the physical and experiential distance between Mayas and Ladinos meant the former's stories were not heard until the various truth commissions established after the 1996 peace accord brought them to light. Buiza (2013, 157-59) argues that the narrator, a Salvadoran Ladino, comes to identify with his other by way of an initial concern with the poetry of their testimonies, while other Ladinos like Toto are unwilling to do the same. Their complacency is exacerbated when the narrator learns of the assassination of the bishop who championed the report that is probably *Guatemala: Nunca Más*. Buiza (2013, 165) writes, "The bloodshed at the end of [*Senselessness*] points to the continuation of violence, injustice, and unhealed trauma in the fragmented society of Guatemala." Such context is crucial to understanding the violence in Guatemala. However, Buiza and others agree that before the narrator is able to share in the trauma of his racial other, he takes the one thousand one hundred pages of the victims' testimony out of context.

Before the narrator is affected by the testimony of the victims, Buiza (2013, 156) writes that "he fails to see—to truly read or listen to—their tragic content by decontextualizing them through a narrow focus on their stylistic qualities." Silver (2009, 7) says something similar about the narrator's earlier treatment of the testimonies, which appear italicised in her translation: "These sentences are italicized to emphasize the fact that they have been decontextualized; when the narrator copies them down in his little notebook and obsessively reads them to himself or most inappropriately shares them with others, they become further decontextualized." As the sentences, which the narrator likens to "concentrated capsules of pain" (18), move further away from testimonial subjects such as the Cakchiquel man, the narrator is affected by the *jouissance* of an Other that is irreducible to social or racial differences: the non-historical in the context of state-sanctioned terror. The next two chapters of this thesis look in detail at the notion of the Lacanian Other, which is not

opposed to, but different from, the other of cultural studies. By way of summary, Žižek describes the three dimensions of the Other of Lacanian psychoanalysis:

First there is the imaginary other—other people “like me,” my fellow human beings with whom I am engaged in the mirror-like relationships of competition, mutual recognition, and so on. Then there is the symbolic “big Other”—the “substance” of our social existence, the impersonal set of rules that coordinate our coexistence. Finally, there is the Other *qua* Real, the impossible Thing, the “inhuman partner,” the Other with whom no symmetrical dialogue, mediated by the symbolic Order, is possible. (Žižek 2005, 320)

Through their submission to the big Other; specifically, to the truth commission, the narrator’s racial and social others become fellow human beings with whom we see him empathise. This chapter, however, looks at the soldiers in their capacity as the Other. Specifically, how their experiences, unmediated by the one thousand one hundred pages, affect the narrator’s confrontation with the Real of desire.

Buiza (2013, 156) writes of the narrator: “His gradual change unfolds characterologically as an evolution from a self-centered cynic to a deeply responsive listener who obsesses over the tragedy of the witnesses and survivors of genocide.” Alongside the narrator’s empathetic identification with the victims is a growing fascination with the soldiers that is evident in his behaviour, if not in his narration. This change unfolds psychoanalytically as a transition from pleasure to enjoyment, or *jouissance*. Differentiating pleasure and enjoyment, Daly (2014, 80) writes, “If pleasure functions in terms of balance, achieving discrete objectives and so on, enjoyment is destabilizing and tends towards excess.” The narrator does not want to commit to the righteous cause of his employers. As he tries to convince Toto, his objective is to indulge his passion for literature while copyediting the one thousand one hundred pages. The narrator also derives pleasure from the pursuit of women, but both aesthetic and sexual pleasure yield to enjoyment over the course of *Senselessness*,

closing the distance between the narrator and the soldiers so that neither is properly inhuman or alien to the other:

What *jouissance* bears witness to is not the unbearable difference of the Other but, on the contrary, an unbearable sameness—that is, the very fascination with (the projected sense of) the Other’s enjoyment draws the subject into too close a proximity with their own disturbing excesses. (Daly 2014, 82)

Read in terms of *jouissance*, Castellanos Moya’s novel emerges from the context of Latin American violence as a global fiction. The final section of this chapter argues that the narrator’s confrontation with the general at the end of *Senselessness* carries a message for readers who might put the novel back in the context of Latin American violence.

Ileana Rodríguez looks at *Senselessness* as part of a trilogy of texts that depict Guatemala during the civil war as a criminal state. She argues that the society which Castellanos Moya and the two other writers depict is perverse and representative of what the Guatemalan people endured at the end of the twentieth century. Rodríguez (2014, 93) uses perversion “in the strict sense proposed by psychoanalysis”; she acknowledges that “perversion is a mental structure, not a type of social behaviour,” but argues that “it completely interferes with and disturbs the constitution of the social link.” Put simply, Rodríguez (2014, 93) writes, “The pervert resists the law, and the only law he accepts is a set of fantastic rules that he creates himself. Perverts enjoy transgressing, and only transgression accounts for their enjoyment.” As evidence of enjoyment in transgression, she (2014, 94) gives two examples from *Senselessness*. In the first, Castellanos Moya’s narrator describes how the Cakchiquel man had watched “as soldiers of his country’s army scornfully and in cold blood chopped each of his four small children to pieces with machetes” (2). In the second, the narrator wonders at “the mental state of thousands of soldiers and paramilitary men who had with relish cut to pieces their so-called compatriots” (2). In the expressions “scornfully” and “with relish,” Rodríguez (2014, 95) identifies “the indices of *jouissance*.”

Her contention is that the perverse mentality of the army not only resisted the law, but replaced it with its own set of fantastic rules and abandoned Guatemala to *jouissance*. She does not discuss how the soldiers' transgressions affect Castellanos Moya's narrator, but his numerous transgressions occur outside of the context of a criminal state and appeal to the universal in such a perverse regime.

While the narrator is on a date with a woman named Pilar, the first "good-looking girl" (33) he has come across since beginning work at the archbishop's palace, he takes his notebook from the pocket of his corduroy jacket and reads her several lines of testimony. Like Toto, Pilar is unenthused, so the narrator reads the last of the sentences to himself: "*While the cadavers they were burning, everyone clapped and began to eat...*" (36). Cannibalism is an example of transgression that Rodríguez does not give when describing the army's brutal counterinsurgency campaign in the Guatemalan highlands, but Jean Franco (2013, 52) writes that "in the civil war in Guatemala, cannibalism was more than a trope. It was a practice imposed by some members of the army." It is not known when the narrator copied this sentence into his notebook or if he is aware of the context, but the *jouissance* that is caught up in the image has begun to destabilise his sexual pleasure. When he discovers that Pilar has taken him to a vegetarian restaurant, the narrator says that "only a mind accustomed to absurd abstractions and fashionable activism could prefer that insipid food to a good cut of tender juicy meat" (35). Earlier, the narrator tells us that he is looking for "tender slabs of young flesh to lift my spirits" (29). In both instances, flesh is equated with the object of the narrator's desire. However, when the narrator objectifies women, turning them into slabs of flesh, he re-enacts the violence meted out by the soldiers who killed the Cakchiquel man's four children and "then turned on his wife, the poor woman already in shock because she too had been forced to watch as the soldiers turned her small children into palpitating pieces of human flesh" (2). The narrator's objectification of women is not only misogynistic and

vulgar; it suggests that he identifies with those who were instrumental in escalating the violence imposed by a criminal state.

After their dinner, Pilar and the narrator share a taxi, and Pilar asks if the narrator would like to come up to her apartment for one last drink. Climbing the stairs behind Pilar, the narrator tells us that he has his “greedy eyes on her swaying ass I was tempted to grab,” but that “I deferred my attack until we were in the kitchen and after she had taken a couple of beers out of the refrigerator” (42). That he would refer to the anticipated sexual intercourse as an attack is telling because it is when they start touching and undressing each other that the narrator’s enjoyment comes to mirror that of the soldiers again. The narrator describes kissing and caressing Pilar, and “then tightly squeezing her lovely buttocks, which would soon have to become meat to sink my teeth into, which I longed to do” (43). The narrator goes from being tempted to grab Pilar’s buttocks to wanting to sink his teeth into them. That is, from turning women into slabs of flesh like the soldiers had done to the Cakchiquel man’s family to eating the flesh, because not only does Pilar have to become meat, she has to become meat for him to eat. However, Pilar rejects the narrator’s sexual advances and stops him before his fascination with the soldiers’ *jouissance* can draw him into a confrontation with his own excess of life.

Before they leave for Pilar’s apartment, the narrator tells us that “a good romp in the hay, if it were possible, would calm my nerves and gratify my senses after a week of being shut in a room reading about cadavers and torture” (41). However, during their encounter the narrator comes closer than ever before to the *jouissance* contained in the one thousand one hundred pages, but is saved when Pilar’s rejection allows him to return to a state of pleasure. Even though he calls this interruption a “dirty trick,” the narrator says that the morning after he “remained serenely between the sheets in my apartment in the Engels building, dozing, receiving in my cupped hands the warmth of my testicles, happy in the knowledge that it was

Friday” (47). Evans (1996, 150) writes, “Pleasure is the safeguard of a state of homeostasis and constancy which *jouissance* constantly threatens to disrupt and traumatise,” and the narrator’s serenity and happiness suggests an undisturbed state of homeostasis. Later, the narrator seduces Pilar’s roommate, Fátima, but their “romp in the hay” does nothing to calm his nerves. Rather, it is during this encounter that the narrator begins to experience physical manifestations of the *jouissance* contained in the testimonies. Previously, the narrator had been kept at a distance from *jouissance* by his sexual appetite, literary sensibilities, and his (mis)understanding of the task at hand.

When the narrator arrives at work the Friday after Pilar’s “dirty trick,” he claims he cannot concentrate on the testimonies because he is more concerned by a defamatory article about him in one of the local papers. Again, however, we see the soldiers’ *jouissance* affect him. He tells us that he has seen the author of the libellous article twice in his life, and that “I remember nothing but his bald spot, and the impertinence and resentment he brandished about once he’d downed his first drink, nothing else, just his bald spot with a few graying tufts around the edges” (50-51). Due to what he calls “a highly inexplicable and circumstantial association of ideas” (51), the narrator creates a visceral connection between his resentful colleague and a line from the testimonies:

There in Izote the brains they were thrown about, smashed with logs they spilled them, which I repeated with increasing fury until I could see those magnificent logs making pieces of gray hair tufts anointed with brains fly through the air. (Castellanos Moya 2008, 51, emphasis in original)

The narrator has yet to confront the traumatic proximity of his own enjoyment to the soldiers’ *jouissance*: the logs swing and make contact, but he is a spectator rather than actor in the imagined scenario. However, adding one more to the list of victims’ names making up three hundred of the one thousand one hundred pages before him foreshadows the point that the conclusion of *Senselessness* makes clear. There is something symptomatic in the violence

that requires confronting the space left open in the event, its history and context, for the subject.

At this stage of *Senselessness*, the notebook represents the symptom of the truth commission because it is suffused with the narrator's desire. In the narrator's hands, or concealed in the pocket of his jacket, the notebook exceeds the attempt to provide closure by recording, transcribing, classifying, and analysing testimonies, then writing and finally publishing the report. Again, Toto is prophetic when he tells the narrator, "I should forget about my work as soon as I was out of the office, pointing accusingly at my notebook, I should be grateful that for security reasons they didn't allow me to take the manuscript out of the palace" (19). The notebook not only allows the narrator to poeticise and alter the testimony of the victims, but to add the author of the libellous article to their number as if three hundred pages listing the details of victims that had yet to be acknowledged, let alone compensated, was not enough. The day the narrator reads about himself in the press, he meets the bishop, his boss, for the first time. Unexpectedly, the bishop is "a tall robust man with a bearing that commanded respect, like the godfathers of *La Cosa Nostra* as well as the high ecclesiastical dignitaries of the Vatican" (55). The narrator is intimidated by this holy man, who "could very well play Marlon Brando's role in *The Godfather*, perhaps with even more conviction" (55-56), and tries to prove himself:

I explained to him that the report could be divided into four volumes, the first two containing the bulk of the aftermath of the massacres of villagers, the third containing the historical context, and the fourth consisting of a list of the massacres and their victims, and that in this way the one thousand one hundred pages would be more manageable for the reader. (Castellanos Moya 2008, 56)

Like Oscar Fate's serious crime story, or Albert Kessler's scientific miracle, the reader never gets to see the narrator's manageable, four-volume report because it does not fit with what *Senselessness* is saying, not just about the crimes in Guatemala, but about violence in general.

Arguing that the narrator resorts to imagination to supplement the report when it fails to stimulate him, Buiza (2013, 159) writes, “It is important to note that such a lack of detail is a symptom of the diluted power of human rights reports, which often drown the victims’ testimonial voice in statistical and historical data.” The crux of Buiza’s article is that the narrator is only able to emphatically identify with the testimonial subjects when his imagination permits him to recontextualise the testimonies as literature. The Australian anthropologist Michael Taussig, whose work is discussed in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis, says something similar to Buiza about attempts to systematically study violence in Colombia. Taussig (2003, 86-87) writes, “Most books on violence published in Colombia [...] are statistical encounters with death and consist largely of squabbles with other people’s measurements. [...] Obsession with measurements obliterates even the glimmers of such an understanding of the desire to transgress.” The narrator of *Senselessness* is obsessed not with measuring violence but with imagining it. He and the soldiers are alike in their desire to transgress and on this ground it is possible to discern what often goes unmeasured and unmanaged; namely, what is symptomatic in violence.

The narrator’s most concerted attempt to recontextualise the report begins when he recalls “one testimony that seemed like the plot of a novel I had once read and that on that Sunday morning came back to me along with an urge to take it on and release all restraints on my imagination” (59-60). He is encouraged by the fact that “no such novel existed, only the desire to write it, to turn tragedy on its head, to turn myself into the suffering ghost of the civil registrar in a town called Totonicapán” (60). While alive, this unfortunate civil registrar is tortured by machete-wielding soldiers for refusing to turn over Totonicapán’s register of the dead to their lieutenant, but the narrator’s novel “would begin at the precise instant the lieutenant, with one stroke of the machete, split open the head of the civil registrar as if it had been a coconut from which he would remove the delicious white pulpy flesh” (61). The

narrator says that “the restless soul of the civil registrar would start to tell his story, [...] for I am not a total stranger to magical realism” (61). Castellanos Moya (2009, n. pag.) made his opinion of magical realism clear during an interview with the online magazine *Guernica*, in which he gave the following as justification for the turn away from the genre in Latin America: “Our reality has not been magical.” If an obsession with measurements, statistics and historical data elides the possibility of either empathy for the victims or understanding the desire to transgress that compels people to victimise, then magical realism threatens to de-realise the reality of violence.

The narrator would magnify the reality of violence in his story, whereas elsewhere in *Senselessness* Castellanos Moya does not exaggerate events that took place in Guatemala, but, as Frans Weiser (2011, 4) points out, takes the testimony of victims “virtually verbatim” from *Guatemala: Nunca Más*. Buiza (2013, 161) suggests that “[the narrator’s] desire to write a novel about a grieving soul shows that he is beginning to understand the kernel of the victims’ pain.” However, the story of the civil registrar of Totonicapán is suffused with both the narrator’s pleasure and his enjoyment. As a stylist, he is pleased to be able to make the registrar’s testimony more literary, but again he is parasitised by excess. The narrator tries to maintain a certain distance from the violence by imagining the registrar’s head as a coconut, but a disconcerting admission undermines his efforts. When the registrar’s head is split open, the lieutenant “would remove the delicious white pulpy flesh, not the bloody palpitating brains, which may also seem appetizing to some palates, I must admit without any bias” (61). It is clear that the narrator not only begins to understand the victims’ pain, but that he begins to share the soldiers’ enjoyment. The narrator’s idea for a story shows him moving toward an emphatic identification with the testimonial subjects, but at the same time he is moving in the opposite direction and heaping violence upon a document of violence, the content of which he is supposed to edit, not contribute to.

Indices of *jouissance*, like those Rodríguez (2014, 95) identifies in the description of soldiers murdering the Cakchiquel man's family, surround both the narrator's vision for the story about the registrar's ghost and his conversation with the bishop about the report. While the narrator shares his idea about the structure of the report, the bishop pays careful attention to the narrator's hands, making him uncomfortable. He says it is "something that had never happened to me, to feel exposed through my hand movements—*damn!*—as if I were suddenly confessing all my sins through my hand movements" (56, emphasis in original). Indeed, the narrator's hands register his guilt inasmuch as Žižek (2006c, 65) writes that "'self-consciousness' is in psychoanalysis an object—for example, a tic, a symptom which articulates the falsity of my position, of which I am unaware." Talking with the bishop and suffering his gaze, the narrator is unaware of the closing distance between his and the soldiers' enjoyment, the true proximity of their positions. He says:

The bishop stared at me, an indecipherable look in his eyes behind his glasses with tinted lenses and tortoise-shell frames, a look that made me afraid he might see me as a deluded literati seeking poetry where there were only brutal denunciations of crimes against humanity carried out by the army against the indigenous communities of his country, that he would think that I was a simple stylist who wasn't paying attention to the content of the report. (Castellanos Moya 2008, 57)

It is less the aesthetic pleasure that the narrator derives from editing the testimonies than the excessive enjoyment attached to his position that he fears will be discovered. Later, the narrator embodies the soldiers' enjoyment by acting out a scenario apparently repeated several times in the testimony, in which a child is killed by being swung against a beam. The narrator says, "I came back to my senses and I noticed that I had been about to bash my arm, which I had been swinging violently over my head, against the headrest of my bunk" (125). At this stage the narrator is aware of his proximity to a disturbing excess.

Before the narrator tells us the story of the registrar's ghost, he is in bed "fantasizing about Pilar, but not managing to concentrate long enough to jack off properly" (59). His

thoughts move between the names of two other women, but land on the testimony that at first seems like the plot of a novel he had read, but which he later realises is one that he wants to write. Unlike the names and faces of the women, the registrar, whose fingers are cut off one by one and who is then beaten, only to have his head split open (all of which the narrator envisions twice in great detail), holds the narrator's full attention. Having constructed what he calls "a story of suspense and adventure," the narrator tells himself to stop his foolishness and leaps out of bed "determined to control once and for all my fantasies, committed to my goal of not jacking off so as not to squander my mental energy" (62). Although thinking about the women after whom he lusts fails to arouse the narrator, imagining the details of the torture and murder of Totoncapán's civil registrar seems to excite him to the point that he has to commit to a goal of not masturbating; he even takes a shower to help control himself. The pleasure that the narrator takes from his sexual objectives, and the consistency sexuality affords his sense of self and reality, is destabilised by *jouissance* and has almost collapsed two chapters later.

The eighth chapter of *Senselessness* begins like the sixth, with the narrator in bed, only this time he is joined by Fátima. Realising his earlier fantasy has neither calmed his nerves nor gratified his senses:

Lying in the bed, the recently possessed body snoring beside me, I was taken by surprise by an idea, an idea that suddenly blinded me, the idea that hell is the mind not the flesh, I became aware of this at that moment, the idea that hell resided in my agitated mind—distraught—and not in the sweating flesh, for in no other way could I explain the fact that there I was in the Engels building, unable to enjoy the splendor of Fátima's milky-white skin, a skin that in other circumstances would have delighted all my senses, but whose proximity had now plunged me into a state of such dire agitation that I would have given anything for her not to be there, for nothing to have happened between us, for everything to have been just one more of my fantasies. (Castellanos Moya 2008, 81)

Despite what the narrator says, the solution to his problem is not to forego reality for fantasy.

The problem is that fantasy and reality have failed to work together to contain his pleasure, to

direct his desire toward discrete sexual objectives and keep him at a distance from *jouissance*. Cottrel (2014, 89) writes, “The role fantasy plays is twofold: universal and particular. Fantasy is a universal structure that indexes, points or directs our desire towards a physical manifestation that occupies desire.” During the narrator and Fátima’s vaunted “romp in the hay,” the particular object that occupied his desire, “Fátima’s milky-white skin” (81), is penetrated by *jouissance* and his distance from the soldiers shrinks.

Barely an hour before the narrator’s revelation, he and Fátima had apparently been kissing and touching each other passionately on the couch in his apartment. The narrator says that “what should have followed [...] was to get totally undressed and lick each other all over until we consummated the act of love”; instead, Fátima asked him “if I’d rather she suck it or masturbate me” (82). The narrator opts for the former, and, although he confesses to enjoying himself, he is perturbed by the “awkward and unprecedented situation” (84). The situation goes from bad to worse. The narrator describes how Fátima had “finished taking off the garments she was still wearing, including a pair of military boots and thick socks that seemed to me vulgar and unattractive garments to wear under a summer skirt” (85). Not only do Fátima’s military boots offend the narrator’s sense of propriety, they signal his proximity to the soldiers at the very moment of *jouissance*. The narrator says that Fátima’s supposedly inappropriate choice of footwear

acquired a sinister dimension when an odor issued forth from those military boots that tore my nasal passages to pieces and made me feel the strongest possible revulsion, an odor that undoubtedly permeated her feet, perhaps beautiful and appetizing from afar, but which I didn’t even dare to look at because I had thrown my head back against the couch, my eyes closed, my face wearing the enthralled expression of a man overwhelmed by pleasure, when the truth was that the most diverse images and thoughts were racing through my mind, thoughts and images I clung to tenaciously so as not to succumb to the overpowering assault on my nostrils emanating from the odor of Fátima’s feet. (Castellanos Moya 2008, 85)

There are two meanings to this sinister dimension: one pertains to the hell of the flesh, and another pertains to the hell of the mind.

The narrator claims to wear “the enthralled expression of a man overwhelmed by pleasure, when the truth was that the most diverse images and thoughts were racing through my mind” (85). However, we cannot take him at his word when he says that he is not enjoying himself, that his expression of pleasure masks the fact that he is offended by Fátima’s initial refusal to sleep with him and by the odour of her feet. What the narrator says serves to trace a space within the sexual act that is filled with *jouissance*, just as Rodríguez (2014, 95) writes that scorn and relish point to the soldiers’ *jouissance*, an enjoyment that exceeds what is, in the context of the criminal state, their duty. The situation between the narrator and Fátima is an exacerbated form of what happened in his mind when, instead of sex, violence—the torture and murder of Totonicapán’s civil registrar—came to occupy his desire. Images of the soldiers’ enjoyment occupy the narrator’s mind and distract from what had earlier occupied him: “No other circumstance explained how I could have been unaware of the precise instant [Fátima] stopped blowing me and in one abrupt movement climbed on top of me” (85). It is not the over-proximity of Fátima’s feet that the narrator finds repugnant, but their proximity to the pieces of palpitating flesh that indicated the soldiers’ *jouissance*. The truth is that the narrator’s pleasure has been disrupted and traumatised by an association of Fátima and the sexual act with the soldiers and their acts of violence, indicating that his desire has gone beyond the pleasure principle and is unmediated. Lying awake beside Fátima, he says “that body I had so strongly desired had only made me understand the vulnerability of pleasure, its fragile and crumbling nature” (82). This announces the shift from desire to drive, from lack to surplus, which is confirmed when the excess inscribes itself into his body in the guise of a wound.

Žižek (2008, 81) writes, “Symptom as *sinthome* is a certain signifying formation penetrated with enjoyment.” The awkward situation with Fátima is one such signifying formation penetrated with the narrator’s enjoyment. In bed beside Fátima, the narrator’s state of mind is best illustrated by Toto (or Quevedo): “To not desire, this alone I now desire.” He wants to avoid *jouissance*; this is clear when he says, “I would have given anything for [Fátima] not to be there, for nothing to have happened between us, for everything to have been just one more of my fantasies” (81). It becomes clearer that morning at the archbishop’s palace: “What a surprise I had that morning when I found out that the beautiful and mysterious woman I saw infrequently in the corridors of the archbishop’s palace was the same girl whose testimony I was proofing” (95). Other testimonies like that of the Cakchiquel man are fodder for the narrator’s imagination, but this woman’s was “given so strikingly and with so many details that it had impelled me to leave the bishop’s office where I was working to find some fresh air and less disturbing emotions” (96). Outside the narrator meets Pilar, through whom he finds out that the woman’s name is Teresa and that she is a testimonial subject. Pilar offers to introduce the narrator to Teresa, but he declines and tells us, “I planned to keep as far away from her as possible throughout my stay at the archbishop’s palace” (99). The narrator is not averse to meeting Teresa because he cannot confront the reality of her situation, but because something of himself inheres in the image of her suffering that should not be there: *jouissance*.

Immediately after declining Pilar’s offer to introduce him to Teresa, the narrator thinks that “the imagination is a bitch in heat, without understanding exactly why precisely at that moment hammering in my head was the thought that the imagination is a bitch in heat” (97). The vulgarity of his sentiment does not disguise the fact that the narrator is rebuking himself for having transgressed the limits of the testimonies time and again by imposing himself on them. The narrator says that “later I understood that this thought’s intromission

had to do with me and the sweet thing previously splayed open by torturers and nothing to do with the woman now walking down the corridor” (97). The word “intromission,” which refers to the penetration of the penis into an orifice, signals a tacit acknowledgment by the narrator of the proximity of his enjoyment and the enjoyment of the soldiers who beat and raped Teresa: it bears witness to their unbearable sameness.

Referring to Teresa, Steinberg (2014, 189) writes that “the narrator loses his immunity as he edits the gruesome testimony of a young woman who works in the Palace.” Specifically, Steinberg (2014, 190) writes that the narrator loses “the immunity that had protected him from the testimonies as a political signifier.” The narrator’s politicisation is grounded not only in his being affected by the testimonies, but in his increasing awareness of how his desire has affected the testimonies. Compelling the narrator’s transformation is his confrontation with the fact that the testimonies have become his *sinthome* to the extent that “the *sinthome* is a certain signifier which is not enchained in a network but immediately filled, penetrated with enjoyment” (Žižek 2008, 82). The decontextualised testimonies are filled, penetrated by the narrator’s enjoyment. Steinberg (2014, 190) writes that the narrator’s is “a doubly lost immunity” because, having been so affected by Teresa’s testimony, he then discovers that he has contracted a venereal disease. Regarding the *sinthome*, Žižek (2008, 82) writes that “its status is by definition ‘psychosomatic,’ that of a terrifying bodily mark which is merely a mute attestation bearing witness to a disgusting enjoyment, without representing anything or anyone.” The narrator worries that his hand movements will expose him to the bishop’s scrutiny, but it is his venereal disease that ultimately articulates the falsity of his position to himself.

Having narrowly avoided meeting one of the flesh-and-blood people behind the testimonies, the narrator holes up in his office, where he continues to edit the report and fill his notebook. However, the narrator is no longer able to take pleasure in the testimonies. He

is quickly distracted by an itch at the tip of his penis and rushes to the bathroom to investigate:

I didn't need to squeeze it very hard to make a white drop appear, which left me dumbstruck, my mouth hanging open, as if I had been put under a spell, because never in my life had I had a venereal disease, because I believed I would never in my entire life catch such a disease; the greatly feared drop of pus was there, looking at me accusatorily, while I had the sensation that the floor was collapsing under my feet, the vertigo of someone who has crossed a forbidden boundary, for until then I had believed that men were divided into two groups, the dirty and the virtuous, and it was precisely the possession of this drop or the lack thereof that constituted the line separating them. (Castellanos Moya 2008, 103-4)

Žižek often gives one or another literary character's wound as an example par excellence of their symptom. For example, Žižek (2008, 84) uses the character Amfortas in Wagner's *Parsifal* this way: "The wound is Amfortas's symptom—it embodies his filthy, nauseous enjoyment." If we trade Amfortas for the narrator of *Senselessness*, Žižek's claim about the status of Amfortas's wound as his symptom is particularly useful. The greatly feared drop of pus is the narrator's symptom—it embodies his disgusting enjoyment.

Žižek (2008, 85) writes that "in so far as it sticks out from the [...] reality of the body, the wound is 'a little piece of the real,' a disgusting protuberance which cannot be integrated into the totality of 'our own body.'" It is the little drop of the Real at the tip of the narrator's penis that registers his guilt. Žižek finds similar externalisations of the intimate truth about a subject in works as varied as Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) and Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951). During a session described in *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud notices a symptomatic act: his analysand, a young married woman, tells him she cut her finger while trimming the nail; specifically, her ring-finger, while trimming the nail on her wedding anniversary. Apropos these coincidences, Žižek (1993, 65, emphasis in original) writes, "A trifling slip, a tiny cut on the ring finger, can well condense an entire chain of articulated *reasoning* about the subject's most intimate fate." The "pearl of pus

between [the narrator's] legs" (105) is an example of what Žižek (1993, 252n28, emphasis in original) calls "the Hitchcockian object"; it "gives body to an unbearable gaze which catches sight of the unbearable truth about the subject." Žižek gives as an example of the Hitchcockian object the pair of glasses belonging to Miriam, a character in *Stranger on a Train*, who is murdered by another character, Bruno:

Let us recall the victim's pair of glasses in the first murder in *Strangers on a Train*: while Bruno is strangling Miriam [...] we see the distorted reflection of the crime in her glasses, which fell to the ground when Bruno first attacked her. The glasses are the "third party," the witness to the murder, the object which gives body to a gaze. (Žižek 1993, 252n28)

Precisely because the drop of pus is the third party, the witness to the narrator's disgusting enjoyment, it can look at the narrator "accusatorily" (103). The drop is "the very product of [the narrator's] self-awareness, its objective correlative" (Žižek 1993, 67), and its proximity is utterly unbearable.

In *Senselessness*, the narrator's journey comes to resemble the patient's journey through psychoanalysis. The scene in the bathroom is the moment of transition from the first to the second stage of treatment. Žižek (1999, 299) writes, "At the beginning [of psychoanalysis], the patient is troubled by some obscure, indecipherable but persistent message—the symptom—which, as it were, bombards him from outside." The moment the narrator becomes more than a simple stylist and makes a libidinal investment in the content of the report is couched in defensive terms: it is "due to a highly inexplicable and circumstantial association of ideas" (51) that the narrator imagines the murder of the journalist who insulted him. The mental association seems like a symptomatic act in light of the way that the narrator's sexual desire is displaced or, more accurately, penetrated by the soldiers' enjoyment. Pilar's "lovely buttocks" (43) and "Fátima's milky-white skin" (81) turn into palpating pieces of human flesh, which first attract and then repel him. This repulsion is

registered when the narrator describes the intromission of a thought: Teresa “splayed open by torturers” (97). The implication of the term “intromission” is that the image forced its way into the narrator’s mind, bombarded him from outside. The drop of pus that confronts the narrator bears witness to more than unsafe sex, its presence is proof that he has been violated by an excess of life. The symptom now bombards him from inside.

Žižek (1999, 299-300) writes that “at the conclusion of [psychoanalytic] treatment, the patient is able to assume this message [the symptom] as his own, to pronounce it in the first person singular.” At no point in *Senselessness* does the narrator announce “I am a murderer,” bearing witness to the shared feeling of guilt proper to the intersubjective dimension of the murder. However, during a psychotic episode towards the end of the book he accomplishes something similar in effect: identifying, and provoking us to identify, with the symptom. Žižek suggests the form such identification might take in a way that allows us to make sense of the narrator’s actions at the end of the novel:

There is, perhaps, an experience in the field of politics that entails a kind of “identification with the symptom”: the well-known pathetic experience “We are all that!,” the experience of identification when we are confronted with a phenomenon that functions as an intrusion of unbearable truth, as an index of the fact that the social mechanism “doesn’t work.” (Žižek 1991, 140)

It is possible to understand two lines of testimony that the narrator finds himself repeating after his retreat as a political act of identifying with the symptom: “*They were people just like us we were afraid of*” (137) and “*We all know who are the assassins*” (139-141). The second line refers to the fact that many of those responsible for the atrocities committed during the Guatemalan Civil War and identified in *Guatemala: Nunca Más* walk free, and simultaneously calls on us to understand ourselves as subjects of desire and our part in the events of mass murder that *Senselessness* narrates.

“We all know who are the assassins!”

A whole network of strategies—simple ignorance; treating it as some deplorable horror that does not, however, really concern us, since it is some savage ritual from which we can distance ourselves; “sincere compassion” for the victims—allow us to evade the fact that the persecution of Jews pertains to a certain repressed truth of our civilization.

— Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry*

Discovering the truth is painful, but it is without doubt a healthy and liberating action.

— ODHAG, *Guatemala: Never Again!*

According to the narrator, the author of the violence meted out by half a dozen soldiers against Teresa, and by countless members of the military intelligence apparatus against similarly innocent citizens, was “a lieutenant named Octavio Pérez Mena” (97). The narrator says that Pérez Mena was “an officer [Teresa] had recognized from archive photos and who had made himself out to be the good guy, the one she should confess to so that those half-dozen beasts would stop raping her and beating her” (97). In time, the narrator says, Pérez Mena “would become the chief of military intelligence, for torture is the measure of intelligence in the military” (97). Just as the character Albert Kessler in *2666* is Bolaño’s obvious allusion to Robert K. Ressler, Octavio Pérez Mena is Castellanos Moya’s allusion to Otto Pérez Molina, president of Guatemala from 2012 until his resignation this year. Pérez Molina has been accused of committing numerous human rights violations during his time in

the Guatemalan Army where he served, among other things, as Director of Military Intelligence.

The proximity of Castellanos Moya's Pérez Mena and Pérez Molina allows critics to read *Senselessness* as a veiled criticism of the dire situation in Guatemala at the time of the novel's publication. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to go into great detail about the rise and recent fall of Pérez Molina; however, some discussion of the event is necessary. Pérez Molina retired as a general from the Guatemalan Army in 2000 and turned to politics, founding the *Partido Patriota* (Patriot Party) in 2001. As its leader, he ran for president in the 2007 general election and lost, but ran again in 2011 and this time won. In September of this year, Pérez Molina resigned in the wake of corruption charges, weekly protests in the streets of Guatemala City, and others around the country. In an article for the *New Yorker* entitled "From President to Prison," Francisco Goldman describes how far Pérez Molina (2015, par. 1) has fallen: "Otto Pérez Molina, who resigned from the Guatemalan Presidency on Wednesday night, almost at the stroke of midnight, now sits as an ordinary accused criminal in Guatemala's Matamoros Prison, in Guatemala City." At the time *Senselessness* was being written, however, Pérez Molina's political career was ascending, an alarming development for those seeking justice for the victims of the state-sanctioned terror carried out by the army half a decade after the publication of *Guatemala: Nunca Más*.

An ongoing fear of the perpetrators emerged as an effect of the violence in *Guatemala: Nunca Más*: "Witnesses reported being terrified by the fact that perpetrators known to affected families lived in the same communities and often retained positions of power" (ODHAG 1999, 14). The case of Pérez Molina exemplifies such an instance given his military connections, increasing political influence, and, ultimately, his four-year presidency. Goldman writes, "Otto Pérez Molina is an embodiment of the role the Army has played in Guatemala in the past half-century":

He is a former soldier of the dreaded Kaibil special forces, an alumnus of the U.S. School of the Americas, an officer who rose to the top of a murky military-intelligence apparatus now regarded—inside Guatemala and out—as synonymous with murder, disappearances, torture, clandestine prisons and graves, as well as with corruption. (Goldman 2015, par. 26)

With this in mind, it is easy to understand why many scholars have placed Pérez Molina at the centre of the accusations that the narrator lets fly at the end of *Senselessness*.

In the last chapter of *Senselessness*, the narrator is in the country that is probably Germany, drinking in a bar with a friend or relative called Cousin Quique. Reminiscent of the narrator's earlier self, Cousin Quique is distracted by and follows "a good-looking Dutch girl he wanted to get into bed, for women were his obsession and his weakness" (135). While the narrator is alone at the bar, he realises "to my amazement that leaning against the bar to my right and drinking was General Octavio Pérez Mena himself" (140). The narrator says that Pérez Mena

was now looking at me insolently through the mirror and when I responded with a threatening scowl, for the beers I'd drunk were many and his impunity here nonexistent, he turned away to avoid me, that sissy, which only added fuel to my ire and gave me the courage to shout at him, raising my mug in the air, *We all know who are the assassins!* for this was the toast that torturer deserved, to which he responded with the foolish smile of someone who doesn't understand the language he is being addressed in, as if in this way he could throw me off track, what a fool he must have thought me. (Castellanos Moya 2008, 140)

Regarding this scene, Ana Patricia Rodríguez (2013, 34) writes, "In an act of poetic justice, [*Senselessness*] identifies [Octavio Pérez Mena/Otto Pérez Molina] as a war criminal." Similarly, Steinberg (2014, 190) applauds the narrator's arrival "through retreat, to a moment of political commitment, useless commitment, comic, pathetic, even." Both are valuable readings, especially since Pérez Molina faced charges of fraud, illicit association and corruption, but has yet to answer to his crimes against humanity. However, the narrator's anger is also directed at himself. As we shall see, *jouissance* bears witness to his and Pérez

Mena's unbearable sameness towards the end of *Senselessness*, which can be read as an appeal to the universal in any particular act of violence.

Thirty five pages before Pérez Mena enters *Senselessness*, if only in the narrator's mind, the narrator is desperate to rid himself of the bodily attestation to his fall from virtue: the dreaded drop of pus. He has lost focus and "wasn't making much progress on copyediting the report"; he intends to tell the bishop "that the fault lay with Fátima" (105). However, the narrator says that "my strategy for repudiating Fátima could wait, [...] first I had to stop the infection, [...] to find a pharmacist who could give me a prescription for the strongest possible penicillin to treat the disease I had caught" (105). The narrator leaves the archbishop's palace for the last time in *Senselessness*, but is not cured of his infection by the soldiers' enjoyment. The Lacanian shift from desire to drive involves a shift in the subject's attitude toward *jouissance*. Žižek (1999, 293, emphasis in original) writes that "desire desperately strives to achieve *jouissance*, its ultimate object which forever eludes it; while drive, on the contrary, involves the opposite impossibility—not the impossibility of attaining *jouissance*, but the impossibility of getting *rid of it*." And so, Žižek (1999, 305, emphasis in original) writes that "when drive subjectivizes itself, [...] the subject *disengages* itself from its flow. The subjectivization of drive is this very withdrawal, this pulling away from the Thing that I myself am, this realization that *the Monster out there is myself*." At the beginning of the penultimate chapter of *Senselessness*, the narrator says, "As if free of fear I awoke that first morning in my assigned room at the spiritual retreat center, where they had brought me the previous day" (121). The narrator had been the one to inform his employers "of my need to shut myself away to work someplace far from worldly cares, someplace where I could focus twenty-four hours a day without any interruptions on the job I had been hired to do" (121). The self-proclaimed atheist's decision to cloister himself in a spiritual retreat centre suggests the emergence of the subject of drive as much as it does paranoia.

Describing his first shift at the archbishop's palace, the narrator reveals his revulsion for the laws of Catholicism (14), but a hundred pages later he has sought refuge in a "spiritual retreat center located in a forested area on the outskirts of the city, a large modern building comprised of forty identical rooms in the shape of a cross" (121-22). The prohibitive laws of Catholicism offer the narrator the opposite of what one would expect: not the typical renunciation of earthly pleasures, but a return to the state of homeostasis maintained by pleasure. Žižek (1999, 297) writes, "The Christian Church as a social institution effectively functions as the guarantee of human desire. [...] In its long history, it has also developed a series of strategies for 'domesticating' the excess of *jouissance*." However, as the narrator jogs around the cross-shaped building, the retreat centre's emptiness and isolation makes him paranoid, and he shuts himself in his room with the testimonies. At dinner, he is "chewing over those parts of the report that had made an impact on me" (123), repeating lines of testimony from the decontextualised document filled with his enjoyment.

The narrator confirms that "solitude can break even the palest of spirits" after three days of spiritual retreat spent "deeply immersed in copyediting the report, sleeping fitfully in that small bunk, lacking even the most minimum of pleasures, for I wasn't even granted the relief of jacking off due to the disease afflicting me" (124-25). In place of pleasure is *jouissance*. The narrator says that

my mind began to become so perturbed that the same image kept asserting itself whenever I took a break, an image that recurred several times in the report and that little by little invaded me until it had taken complete possession of me, at which point I stood up and began to pace around the small space of my room, between the desk and the bunk, like one possessed, as if I were that lieutenant who had brutally burst into the hut of that indigenous family, grabbed in my iron hand by the heel that baby only a few months old, raised it over my head and begun to swing it around through the air, faster and faster, as if it were David's sling from which a rock would be launched, swinging it around at a dizzying speed under the horrified gaze of the parents and siblings until the baby's head suddenly crashed against a beam inside the hut, exploding, the brains spraying out everywhere. (Castellanos Moya 2008, 125)

In this scene, the narrator and the soldiers are almost identical. The narrator now acts out grabbing the baby in his own hand and crashing its head into a beam, whereas before he imagined the murder weapon acting autonomously against the man who defamed him. The narrator is possessed by *jouissance*.

For the second time in as many pages, the narrator finds himself possessed by the image of an Other's enjoyment:

I stood up, I became Lieutenant Octavio Pérez Mena, the official in charge of the unit assigned to the massacre, I returned to the hut of those fucking Indians who would understand the hell that awaited them only when they saw flying through the air the baby I held by the ankles so I could smash its head of tender flesh against the wood beam. And it was the splattering of palpitating brains that brought me back to my senses: I found myself in the middle of the room, shaking, sweating, a little dizzy because of the vertiginous movements of swinging the baby over my head, but at the same time with a feeling of lightness, as if I had taken a load off my back, as if my transformation into the lieutenant who exploded the heads of newborn babies against beams had been a catharsis, freeing me from the pain accumulated over the one thousand one hundred pages, which I soon dug into again, in a repetitive cycle of prolonged concentration broken by intervals of the same macabre fantasy. (Castellanos Moya 2008, 126)

In the first example, the narrator uses the past subjunctive form to express the counterfactual condition of his transformation: he acts “as if I were that lieutenant” (125). In the second example, he uses the first person singular: “I became Lieutenant Octavio Pérez Mena” (126). The narrator pronounces the symptom in the first person singular, but not in the context of psychoanalytic treatment, where the patient is helped to assume the symptom as his own. Evans (1996, 61) writes “In the course of psychoanalytic treatment, [...] the analysand must go on to ‘traverse the fundamental fantasy’”; specifically, that “the treatment must produce some modification of the subject’s fundamental mode of defence, some alteration in his mode of *jouissance*.” Alone in the spiritual retreat centre with the testimonies, the narrator is unable to traverse the “macabre fantasy” (126) and is bound to repeat the violence of the past.

The transformative experience that the narrator calls a “catharsis” (126) is in fact an explosion of *jouissance*. He has transgressed the limit imposed by the pleasure principle and the “feeling of lightness” (126), of relief, recalls the feelings of orgasm that Bolaño (2009, 74-75) described in the first part of *2666* when the Archimboldians abandoned their discrete sexual objectives for destabilising enjoyment. When the Archimboldians finished beating their taxi driver, “Pelletier felt as if he had come,” “Espinoza felt the same,” and “Norton [...] seemed to have experienced multiple orgasms”; Bolaño (2009, 75) writes, “Their skin felt smooth, extremely soft to the touch, although in fact the three of them were sweating.” In the same way, the narrator of *Senselessness* finds himself “in the middle of the room, shaking, sweating, a little dizzy because of the vertiginous movements of swinging the baby over my head, but at the same time with a feeling of lightness” (126). Moreover, each excerpt abounds in the kind of auratic intensities that Zupančič (2001, par. 9) attributes to the image of evil: they “‘shine’ and stand out” at the very moment of radical evil, as Zupančič (2001, par. 19) defines it; that is, when the narrator of *Senselessness* and the Archimboldians “have consented to [their] inclinations functioning as the only possible motives of [their] actions.” In *Senselessness*, we do not see the narrator alter his mode of *jouissance* and return to a state of pleasure and homeostasis, but we do follow him as he tries to escape from himself and his excess of life. The two lines of testimony that the narrator repeats in the final chapter of *Senselessness* are a message addressed to us.

The twelfth chapter of *Senselessness* begins with the narrator leaning on the bar in a tavern at four in the morning, surrounded by people celebrating a carnival that he finds inexplicable given the inclement weather. Nearly 10,000 kilometres away from the archbishop’s palace in what is probably Guatemala, the narrator has a thought that suggests the paradox of the symptom. “The symptom is the expression of the impossibility of completion that haunts every system”; however, McGowan (2014, 244) writes, “Identifying

with the symptom highlights the necessity of this enjoyment and carves out a political path that promises to augment our enjoyment.” The narrator’s thought challenges us to take this political path, which requires that we do not localise the violence in places like Guatemala:

Planet Earth doesn’t want to know anything nor does she understand what the comet tells her, for she is happy in her orbit and hates to be disturbed by someone who appears only every once in a while from who knows where. (Castellanos Moya 2008, 133)

Planet Earth stands for the subject. If, as is the case in *Senselessness*, the violence in places like Guatemala is made known to the subject, it is preferable to imagine such violence as an otherworldly intrusion, to act as if it came from who knows where. Thus, the comet is the symptom in its capacity as that which bombards the subject from outside and disrupts its homeostatic orbit; specifically, its movement from one discreet object of desire to the next. Of course, the symptom only appears to bombard the subject from outside. Psychoanalysis requires that the subject recognise the symptom as its own, including what is symptomatic in violence; namely, *jouissance*. However, the subject has ways of avoiding the Real of desire. These include the university discourse and the detective’s act, which were discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis, and imaging an Other as the sole bearer of *jouissance*, which is the focus of the chapters that follow.

Still leaning on the bar, the narrator catches sight of himself in the mirror behind the bottles of liquor. This moment sets the scene for the appearance of Pérez Mena beside the narrator, an improbable meeting that in fact represents an impossible encounter with the Thing that the narrator himself is. He says that

my attention was focused on my own face reflected in the mirror, concentrating as I was on each and every one of my features, on the expression on my face, which suddenly looked different to me, as if he who was there wasn’t me, as if that face for an instant were somebody else’s, a stranger’s, and not my everyday face, an instant when I was unrecognizable to myself and that caused me to panic. (Castellanos Moya 2008, 133-34)

It is as if his face has become the wound that is his symptom, the “disgusting protuberance which cannot be integrated into the totality of ‘[his] own body’” (Žižek 2008, 85). The narrator now looks at himself accusatorily as the drop of pus had from the end of his penis in the bathroom of the archbishop’s palace. His face is another of the ordinary faces that Florita Almada, the television psychic from 2666, sees when she envisions the killers of women in Santa Teresa, which are swollen or inflated with an excess of life (Bolaño 2009, 571-72). Cousin Quique offers little distraction from the narrator’s reflection because he is busy trying to court the good-looking Dutch girl.

As was the case with Toto, Pilar, the bishop, and others, Cousin Quique is perturbed by the narrator bringing out his notebook and repeating lines of testimony. The narrator recalls thinking:

I was the comet and Cousin Quique Planet Earth, which was why he seemed so bored when I tried to explain to him my experiences of copyediting those one thousand one hundred pages, because for him it concerned a remote galaxy that he no longer had anything to do with. (Castellanos Moya 2008, 135)

Cousin Quique’s distance is both historical and non-historical. Cousin Quique no longer has anything to do with the violence in Central America because he now lives in Europe: he owns an apartment in the country that is probably Germany and the narrator says, “Cousin Quique spoke German fluently” (134). The narrator’s comparison of himself to the comet and Cousin Quique to Planet Earth can be read as a reference to the fact that Cousin Quique remains a subject of desire, grounded in a constitutive lack that sex promises to fill, while the narrator has transgressed the limit imposed by the pleasure principle.

Cousin Quique leaves the narrator alone at the bar again, staring into the mirror but “convinced that nothing bad would happen and that if I just stared hard enough at my eyes I would discover something or at least conjure up the possibility of finding somebody other

than myself” (136-37). Focussed on the mirror, the narrator says that “there settled into my mind the sentence that said, *They were people like us we were afraid of*, which I repeated without taking my eyes off myself” (137). This line from the testimony of a victim whose name we never learn is also both historical and non-historical. Another historical figure appears briefly in *Senselessness*: Rigoberta Menchú, the indigenous Guatemalan woman who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 and was the subject of the testimonial biography *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. Weiser (2011, 12) describes a section in *Senselessness* where “[Castellanos Moya] refers to Rigoberta Menchú, once again not naming the historical referent yet providing ample hints regarding [her] identity.” The narrator’s description of Menchú does the champion of human rights little justice: he calls her “a short round chubby indigenous woman” (78) and uses her as a foil to extol the virtues of the Europeans who met her with openness and reciprocity. However, Menchú (1992, 146) gives context to the fear that turned neighbours against each other in communities targeted by the military: “There have been ‘ears’ in a lot of villages—people who sell themselves to the government. [...] The government uses them to get information from the community and this causes many deaths.” A dispassionate editor would know that the sentence now settled in the narrator’s head evidences a systematic attempt by the military to divide and conquer, but we have seen that the narrator is far from dispassionate.

All that remains of the one thousand one hundred pages jettisoned by the narrator during his flight from the spiritual retreat centre is the symptom. Steinberg (2014, 176) writes that the testimonial phrases which fill the narrator’s notebook eventually narrate his own experience, plagued as he is by the fear of becoming a victim himself. However, the notebook can also be read as a “signifying formation penetrated with enjoyment” (Žižek 2008, 81). The narrator says that he has “not yet lost my habit of pulling out my small notebook to read those sentences that moved me so much, many of which I already knew by heart” (135). If the

narrator's memorisation of the sentences testifies to his empathetic identification with the victims, it also "bear[s] witness to a disgusting enjoyment, without representing anything or anyone" (Žižek 2008, 82). For example, he says, "I unavoidably took out my little notebook, for no specific reason, like the addict who lights another cigarette with the butt of the previous one" (138). The non-historical truth of the phrase: "*They were people like us we were afraid of*" (137) is the unbearable sameness imposed by *jouissance* on the community of desiring subjects: the inner, libidinal truth that "we *are* murders in the unconscious of our desire" (Žižek 1991, 59, emphasis in original). In a last-ditch attempt to maintain what distance remains between his and the soldiers' enjoyment, the narrator conjures Pérez Mena so that he can rebuke this consummate villain and avoid identifying with the symptom and augmenting his enjoyment.

The fact that the general is not physically present in the bar with the narrator is confirmed by many critics. Rodríguez (2013, 34) writes that "the writer-editor imagines personally seeing General Octavio Pérez Mena" and Steinberg (2014, 190) writes that the narrator "imagines he has met with Octavio Pérez Mena." Specifically, the general is the narrator's fantasy object. Cottrel (2014, 90) writes that "fantasy is a psychological structure that manifests itself in a phenomenological form," just as the narrator's desire to avoid guilt manifests itself in the form of Pérez Mena. The spectre of the general is similar to the detective's solution: it is "nothing but a kind of realized hallucination" through which the narrator "proves by facts" what would otherwise remain a hallucinatory projection of guilt onto a scapegoat, i.e., he proves that the scapegoat is effectively guilty" (Žižek 1991, 59). Whether the object of hallucination is a product of the narrator's imagination or, more likely, a bystander who bears some resemblance to Pérez Mena, it fails to contain the projection of the narrator's guilt. Who or whatever is on the receiving end of the narrator's rage does not understand Spanish, says something by way of response in German, and afterwards to the

bartender “in a language beyond [the narrator’s] comprehension” (141). The reader is less likely to be convinced by the narrator’s solution than by a detective’s because the detective is taken by the reader as the “subject supposed to know” (Žižek 1991, 59). In *Senselessness*, the reader is denied the pleasure of being let off the hook by the detective. When, as the narrator escapes the tavern like he escaped the archbishop’s palace, the spiritual retreat centre, and Central America, he screams: “*We all know who are the assassins!*” (141) into the freezing night, the message is addressed to us.

“*We all know who are the assassins!*” (141) can signal the experience of identification that Žižek (1991, 140) says is inherent in declaring: “We are all that!” if we consider that Pérez Mena’s appearance at the bar beside the narrator “functions as an intrusion of unbearable truth, as an index of the fact that the social mechanism ‘doesn’t work.’” Read in this way, the General is our drop of pus: he embodies our disgusting enjoyment. To suggest that his violence is entirely a product of location, context, and/or psychological makeup is to avoid the Real of desire. The last two sentences of *Senselessness*, taken from Toto’s email informing the narrator of the bishop’s assassination, attest to the futility of either contextualising or localising violence. Toto writes, “Everybody’s fucked. Be grateful you left” (142), but we have seen that no matter how hard the narrator tries he is unable to escape the unbearable sameness imposed by *jouissance*. However, on the other end of the spectrum from ignorance is radical evil, which Zupančič (2001, par. 19) says “refers, firstly, to the fact that our inclinations are the only determining causes of our actions and, secondly, to the fact that we have consented to our inclinations functioning as the only possible motives of our actions.” To read the line, “Everybody’s fucked” (142) as though it applies to everybody, anywhere is to consent to *jouissance* acting as our only motivation.

Cousin Quique and the revellers embody traits earlier possessed by the narrator and act as a yardstick for his journey: a series of withdrawals that suggest the futility of trying to

get rid of *jouissance*. With Pérez Mena's appearance, the narrator's journey ends. Moreover, the symptom emerges in Europe. Because the country is unnamed, it stands more generally for the North and facilitates the repudiation of any ontological distinction between North and South. The revellers represent a community of desiring subjects, a remote galaxy that the narrator threatens as a symptom bearer first by looking Cousin Quique in the eyes and repeating: "*They were people like us we were afraid of*" (137). When Cousin Quique leaves the bar with the Dutch girl, he is replaced for the narrator by the apparition of Pérez Mena, who is unwilling or unable to be scapegoated. When the narrator is outside among the "multitude of strangers who were drinking and singing in the freezing dawn," he says "I shouted again and again at the top of my lungs, *We all know who are the assassins!*, a shout that fired up my passions and went wholly unnoticed in the midst of the hubbub of so-called Carnival" (141). The true moment of political commitment awaits the multitude of strangers whose carnival represents the fundamental fantasy that must be traversed if they (and we) are to augment their enjoyment.

Chapter Four

“The other essential game”: Gender Violence in Evelio Rosero’s *The Armies*

In the previous chapters of this thesis, *2666* and *Senselessness* were discussed in terms of how each novel balances the representation of subjective and objective violence; they are global fictions insofar as they point to the universal in violence. This chapter looks at gender violence as the product of a fantasmatic relationship with the object that the (male) subject supposes another (female) subject to possess. It will revisit *2666* and *Senselessness* because both books afford readers the opportunity to confront the consequences for women of a certain symptom-formation; that is, the fact that fantasy and reality work together “through the binding of our enjoyment to a certain signifying, symbolic formation which assures a minimum of consistency to our being-in-the-world” (Žižek 2008, 81). It will then focus on Colombian writer Evelio Rosero, whose short story “Brides by Night” (1998) and novel *The Armies* draw attention to gender violence in the context of the Colombian conflicts. An essential game that occupies the men in Rosero’s writing involves the kind of exploitation that often takes place out of the public eye, where it is eclipsed by more lurid, subjective violence. Rosero represents violence in a way that acknowledges the severity of the conflicts in Colombia, but challenges the tendency to look to his country for an exceptional Colombian violence. First, however, this chapter will discuss the concept of the Lacanian Other to understand the role that fantasy plays in the reality of objective and subjective gender violence.

Insofar as the object-cause of desire does not exist in reality, it insists in fantasy. Specifically, it insists in the fantasy of the Lacanian Other. Elizabeth Wright (2000, 37)

points out that the Lacanian Other “is not the Other of discourses such as social anthropology and cultural studies.” The latter refers to groups of individuals who share, or are presumed to share, some commonality that differentiates them from the group or groups doing the “othering” from a position of power and as a way of (often unconsciously) reinforcing their power. The Other of cultural studies and social anthropology often refers to the victims of discrimination so as to critically analyse the context of power relations that culminate in victimisation with an eye to changing them. For example, Sarah Pollack (2009, 347) describes readers in the United States occupying a position of power, calling the United States reader “a major actor—who is also acted upon—in determining the perceived parameters, meaning, and value of, in this case, the limited body of works by Latin American authors available in English translation.” She (2009, 347) writes that Gabriel García Márquez’s magical realist novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Roberto Bolaño’s visceral realist novel *The Savage Detectives* were well received by readers in the United States because each “foment a (pre)conception of alterity that satisfies the fantasies and collective imagination of U.S. cultural consumers.” In other words, United States readers embraced novels published almost four decades apart because they did not require them to change their opinion of the Latin American Other. The Other of cultural studies and social anthropology is crucial to identifying and changing unequal systems of power, but it is not the Lacanian Other.

On the one hand, the Lacanian Other is the “big Other,” the order of language that organises the subject’s being-in-the-world by allowing it to pursue the object-cause of desire, the severed organ that broke the surface tension of the imaginary bubble where subject and object were indistinguishable. The subject consists in its belief that the object exists somewhere in the big Other, but the one word missing from language names the object-cause of desire. Elizabeth Wright describes the Other of psychoanalysis:

The Other is not so much that which determines reality and directs our choices, but a structure that works through a constitutive lack via a promise it cannot fulfil. Hence the Other works through a kind of deceit which, if not recognised and capitalised upon, has catastrophic results for self and society. (Wright 2000, 37-38)

The Other of cultural studies and social anthropology works through a kind of deceit that magnifies the differences of a group of people to such an extent that they are perceived as ontologically inferior to another group. The Other of psychoanalysis works through the constitutive lack by helping the subject reframe it as loss, which results in the fantasy that another subject has (found or stolen) what I have lost. Unwittingly, this other subject becomes the Other insofar as they are now burdened by the promise to satisfy desire.

Lacan implies the adverse effects on self and society of this kind of deceit when discussing envy in his eleventh seminar. He (1998, 116) describes “the envy that makes the subject pale before the image of a completeness closed upon itself, before the idea that the *petit a*, the separated *a* from which he is hanging, may be for another the possession that gives satisfaction.” Emphasising the catastrophic implications of envy, Cottrel (2014, 91) writes, “The distinction between our own lack of impossible enjoyment and the non-lacking status of the Other opens the possibility of a violence predicated on destroying the enjoyment we fantasize this Other to possess at our expense.” This violence is the non-historical, non-contextual within the violence that manifests in various forms of discrimination:

The logic of fantasy in relation to lack suggests that, if I am lacking, it is because some other nefarious figure has stolen it, and thus the lack of lack, as it were, becomes an object of possession under capitalism. This rendering is consistent with Žižek’s assertion that fantasy leads to all varieties of discrimination: racism, ageism, and homophobia, among others. (Cottrel 2014, 91)

The next chapter of this thesis will discuss a collective libidinal investment by the Global North in the South that produces places of exception ranging from Mexico’s northern border to the mountains of Colombia.

Mexican writer Yuri Herrera's novel *Signs Preceding the End of the World*, originally published in 2009 and translated into English by Lisa Dillman in 2015, suggests that finding oneself in the position of the non-lacking Other is traumatic, even catastrophic. Herrera's protagonist is a young Mexican woman named Makina who crosses into the United States to find her brother. Makina draws attention to the discrimination faced by Mexican immigrants when she and half a dozen Mexican-looking men are accused of being "illegals" by an American police officer. The officer discovers a book of poetry on one of the men, hands the man a pen and paper and demands that he write a poem. Makina takes the pen from the man's trembling hand, writes ten lines on the sheet of paper and hands it to the officer, who reads aloud:

We are to blame for this destruction, we who don't speak your tongue and don't know how to keep quiet either. We who didn't come by boat, who dirty up your doorsteps with our dust, who break your barbed wire. We who came to take your jobs, who dream of wiping your shit, who long to work all hours. We who fill your shiny clean streets with the smell of food, who bought you violence you'd never known, who deliver your dope, who deserve to be chained by neck and feet. We who are happy to die for you, what else could we do? We, the ones who are waiting for who knows what. We, the dark, the short, the greasy, the shifty, the fat, the anemic. We the barbarians. (Herrera 2015, 99-100)

Makina's poem not only calls attention to the range of cultural stereotypes about Mexicans and the context of racial profiling by law enforcement agencies in the United States, but to the problem of desire and the structure of fantasy.

Lacan (1998, ix) is unequivocal about the status of the object as cause of desire in psychoanalysis: what he calls the *objet a* is "that which is lacking." Not only does the *objet a* have no physical properties, it cannot be possessed by a person or group, although, as was noted earlier, the subject is tempted to assume that it "may be for another the possession that gives satisfaction" (Lacan 1998, 116). In place of any stable property emerges a web of prejudices like the one Makina describes, a fantasmatic frame that holds the Other in place of

the constitutive lack. The way fantasy and reality work together to position the Other as worthy of hate is mirrored in the position of the beloved. Žižek (2009b, 48) insists that love and hate entail similar violence; specifically, that “finding oneself in the position of the beloved is [...] violent, traumatic even [because] being loved makes me feel directly the gap between what I am as a determinate being and the unfathomable X in me which causes love.” In all of the novels that this thesis has analysed, gender violence runs parallel to concrete, historical examples of violence. The implication is that gender or racial violence is in part a result of the production of Others in response to the ambiguous status of the object-cause of desire.

Lacan (1998, 268) says, “I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you—the *objet petit a*—I mutilate you.” Men, specifically the male subject of desire, are more likely to commit the kind of violence alluded to by Lacan’s reference to mutilation, as Amy Hollywood (2002, 156) makes clear when she writes, “Male subjects [...] only relate to the object *a*, not to woman herself.” Gender violence is not inevitable, but Hollywood (2002, 156-57) writes that “only when the fantasmatic nature of relationships between the sexes is recognized, does love of the Other become possible.” In *2666*, Bolaño prioritises the collision of objective and subjective gender violence within a fantasmatic relationship of love for a woman as Other. The first part of *2666*, “The Part about the Critics,” narrates the series of circumstances by which the femicide begins to affect the incestuous group of Western European academics known as the Archimboldians. In the Archimboldians’ Santa Teresa hotel, Liz Norton dreams that she looks at herself in the hotel room mirror and sees not herself but a woman similar to her who is dead. The dream is coupled with the recent memory of her two suitors, Jean-Claude Pelletier and Manuel Espinoza, savagely beating the trio’s taxi driver on a street in London: a violent assault that brought them far greater enjoyment than the threesome that was the outcome they ostensibly

desired. The woman whom Norton confronts in the hotel mirror is a fantasy object, a person burdened by the promise to satisfy Pelletier and Espinoza's desire. Norton is no longer one of the Archimboldians but the Other, she has "fall[en] prey to the illusion that [she] is more than [her] pragmatic material" (Cottrel 2014, 89). Norton's dream presages the catastrophe that awaits her as the Other, which is magnified in the form of the femicide.

In one of the last interviews Bolaño gave, the writer was asked what he thought hell would be like. Bolaño (2012, 365-66) replied, "Like Ciudad Juárez, which is our curse and our mirror, the unquiet mirror of our frustrations and of our vile interpretation of our freedom and of our desires." By dint of the sheer number of crimes against women for which the fourth part of *2666* is named, gender violence becomes what Žižek (2009b, 1) calls "directly visible 'subjective' violence." The case of Aurora Ibáñez Medel, a thirty-four-year old maquiladora worker whose body was discovered by the Santa Teresa police dumped by the side of a highway, was discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. The crime was easily solved; Aurora's husband had been laid off from the maquiladora where his wife still worked and, according to the police, killed her out of jealousy: "Not of any man in particular, but of all the men she might have encountered or because of his new situation, which was intolerable" (574). Aurora's murder was "violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent" (Žižek 2009b, 1): on one level, Aurora's husband, and on another level, the exploitative international labour market that relies on free trade zones in developing countries where low-wage, more often than not female workers assemble products for the global commodity market. This context, the dehumanising circumstances of unstable, un- or under-employment, which is largely responsible for the kinds of civil unrest exemplified by Aurora's husband's "jealousy," meets with harsh criticism in *2666*. However, *2666* is equally concerned with the implications of Lacan's (1998, 116) "true envy." The violence Norton dreams is predicated on her having been elevated by Pelletier and Espinoza to the non-lacking status of the Other.

It is crucial to recall what Žižek (2007, 222) says about dreams in the conclusion of his contribution to *Adventures in Realism*, that “it is in dreams that we encounter the Real. It is not that dreams are for those who cannot endure reality; reality itself is for those who cannot endure (the Real that announces itself in) their dreams.” In *2666*, Bolaño facilitates an encounter with the Real by crashing the reality of the Archimboldians and others on the rocks of *jouissance*, managing to make (gender) violence a global concern. Similarly, Castellanos Moya forces an unlikely protagonist, an aesthete with little interest in, or sympathy for, the victims of crimes committed by the government of a foreign country, to come to terms with a 36-year civil war corresponding to Guatemala’s. The previous chapter of this thesis discussed *Senselessness* as the story of a subject affected by “the excessive presence of some Thing that is inherently ‘impossible’ and should not be here, in our present reality” (Žižek 1999, 304). Specifically, *Senselessness* is the story of the narrator’s *jouissance*, the painful pleasure of exceeding not only the limits of his work for the Archdiocese of the country that is probably Guatemala, but the coordinates of his identity as a desiring subject: his sexuality and literariness. In the tavern of the probably German town where *Senselessness* ends, the narrator, unable to hold the attention of the busy bartender for more than a few seconds, looks at himself in the barroom mirror. Faced with the realisation that the impossible, excessive Thing is ultimately the narrator himself, he finds Octavio Pérez Mena. Whether it is Pérez Mena, an unfortunate habitué, or a hallucination is beside the point. Pérez Mena is the narrator’s last-ditch attempt to avoid the Real of desire, to stave off the emergence of the subject of drive and the dissolution of his reality.

Like Bolaño, Castellanos Moya is concerned with representing subjective gender violence. Take, for example, the case of Teresa in *Senselessness* who “was arrested during the brutal repression of student protests right downtown in the capital city” and “underwent the worst degradations, including being daily and systematically raped by her torturers” (96).

Throughout *Senselessness*, the narrator is fascinated with the enjoyment that transformed soldiers into rapists and torturers, with those who dismembered indigenous men, women, and children, who turned people into palpitating pieces of flesh, who cooked and ate cadavers. This inflects the narrator's treatment of women, who are increasingly objectified but fail to satisfy the narrator's desire, which is drawing him into closer and closer proximity with the soldiers who enjoy in a way that he cannot, and would not consciously, enjoy himself. The narrator goes from admiring women to entertaining aggressive sexual fantasies about them, until finally engaging in extraordinary, albeit imagined, acts of aggression against villagers as though he were not only a soldier, but the lieutenant in charge of the soldiers. It is through objective, and then subjective, gender violence that the narrator approaches the Real of desire: the constitutive lack that appears in reality as excess.

Žižek (2008, 81) writes that “symptom is the way we—the subjects—‘avoid madness,’ the way we ‘choose something (the symptom-formation) instead of nothing (radical psychotic autism, the destruction of the symbolic order).” In the last instance, the narrator of *Senselessness* chooses something instead of nothing by binding his enjoyment to the figure of Pérez Mena instead of assuming it as his own. It seems like madness or the eponymous senselessness, but Pérez Mena is the “realized hallucination” of a narrator acting as a detective “to dissolve the impasse of universalized, free-floating guilt by localizing it in a single subject” (Žižek 1991, 59). *Senselessness* points out the need for us to understand that which is symptomatic in violence, particularly the kind of violence that is often confined to places of exception like Central America and northern Mexico, while evincing the psychological turmoil that awaits identification with the symptom. Another example of the apparently violent South is Colombia and Colombian literature often exaggerates subjective violence there to satisfy the fantasies and collective imagination of cultural consumers in the North.

Colombia began the twentieth century fighting a civil war, the Thousand Days' War, and has been engaged in ongoing conflict since the middle of that century. Since 1964, Colombia has been caught in a vortex created by the undeclared civil war and the United States-led war on drugs. For much of the two decades before 1964, supporters of the Colombian Conservative Party fought supporters of the Colombian Liberal Party in a civil war known as *La Violencia* (The Violence). The name testifies to the fact that bloodshed became routine: violence during *La Violencia* was excessive but not necessarily aberrant. In the foreword to *Flight of the Condor: Stories of Violence and War from Colombia* (2007), Hugo Chaparro Valderrama describes a history of violence that is often, and unfairly, peoples' first and only impression of Colombia:

Many factors have contributed to making violence the cliché with which Colombia tends to be identified, disregarding other dimensions of its reality, among them the displacement of whole towns threatened by war, the terrorist strategy of the mafia, the increasing power of the guerrilla groups that utilize drug trafficking and kidnapping to finance themselves, the ongoing war between left-wing guerrillas and right-wing paramilitaries, and the role of a State incapable of putting an end to the brutality. (Chaparro Valderrama 2007, xix-xx)

This quote suggests how nebulous Colombia's conflicts are becoming: drug cartel enforcers are terrorists, while guerrillas are drug traffickers; the cartel's private armies are often indistinguishable from paramilitaries motivated by political agendas, and the paramilitaries are increasingly difficult to distinguish from the Colombian army.

Attesting to these complexities, Elizabeth Lozano (2008, 287) writes, "Many Colombian observers argue that 'Colombia' is a plurality, *Las Colombias*":

We have deep historical divisions in the country, most notably between rural and urban settings, among five distinct geographic regions, and between a large impoverished majority and a wealthy minority. These divisions and fragmentation contribute significantly to social, economic, political, and cultural frictions. They may also help explain why the Colombian civil war is in actuality a plurality of conflicts. As suggested above, the protracted war between the army and the insurgency exists side by side a so-called "war on drugs," and these in turn produce a war on civilians,

who are caught between drug lords, army, paramilitaries, guerrillas, and opportunistic criminals. (Lozano 2008, 287)

This “war on civilians” occupies the foreground of *The Armies*, which tells the story of a retired school teacher called Ismael Pasos. Affectionately known as *profesor*, Ismael taught many of the people in San José, the small, rural town where *The Armies* is set. Like the settings of *2666* and *Senselessness*, Rosero’s San José cannot be definitively located. In an interview with Maya Jaggi for the *Independent*, Rosero (quoted in Jaggi 2009, par. 5) says that San José “can stand for any village in Colombia. I took everyday life, idyllic as it seemed, and sabotaged it as violence came in.” The obvious signals of violence appear in San José over a quarter of the way through *The Armies*: a gunshot, then machine gun bursts. The fifty-odd pages that precede the first gunshot, however, illustrate an objective violence that is experienced as subjective in the final, harrowing scene of *The Armies*. It is violence against Ismael’s neighbour Geraldina that begins when she finds herself in the position of the beloved.

Ismael says that the newspapers describe San José as a strategic location, surrounded by “hundreds of hectares of coca” that “have made of this territory what the protagonists of the war also call ‘the corridor,’ dominion over which they fight for tooth and nail, and which causes the war to surface in everyone’s pores” (116). In *Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of a Limpieza in Colombia* (2003), the Australian anthropologist Michael Taussig (2003, 16) also describes “a struggle [between guerrilla and paramilitaries] for ‘the corridor’ for cocaine and heroin coming down the mountains in the center of the country to the mangrove swamps of the Pacific coast and thence by fast launches to Central America.” *Law in a Lawless Land* is Taussig’s account of two weeks in May 2001 that he spent “in a Colombian town taken over by paramilitaries imposing law and order through selective assassinations—what Colombians call a *limpieza*” (Taussig 2003, xi). In *The Armies*, the soldiers who move like shadows

through San José could be paramilitaries, guerrillas, the army, or some combination of the three. It is not clear if the residents of San José are the victims of a *limpieza*, but their situation is similar to that described by Taussig, who writes that

by mid-2001, when I was keeping my diary of the *limpieza*, the paras not only indulged in spectacular massacres of defenceless villagers, but came to towns and stayed, leaving the town to watch with bated breath, to wonder who would be assassinated next and how to make sense of what was going on. (Taussig 2003, xii-xiii)

By the end of *The Armies*, many in San José have been killed or kidnapped and some fleeing residents tell Ismael to be careful because his name is on the soldiers' list. Ismael tells us, "I would like to know what is written on that paper with the names, that 'list.' It is a blank sheet of paper, for God's sake. A paper where all the names they want can fit" (204). The soldiers bring subjective violence to San José as they check names off the death list, but gender violence is there before, during, and after taking up arms.

Lozano (2008, 287) writes, "Like most contemporary wars, our Colombian armed conflicts are strongly inflected by issues of sex and gender." She (2008, 289) writes that "rape and other forms of violence against women do not require a state of war. They often precede war and continue after war." Forms of gender violence are present before the fighting in the streets of San José and after the guns fall silent. *The Armies* opens with Ismael and his wife, Otilía, tending to their garden. The idyll that sets the beginning of the book—an Edenic garden—is filled with *jouissance* before it is transformed by artillery fire, or as an adumbration of this violence. From the top of a ladder, under the guise of picking oranges, Ismael watches Geraldina sunbathing naked. Ismael notices Geraldina's son, Eusebito, watching the family's maid, Graciélita. From beneath a table, Eusebito steals glances at Graciélita as her skirt lifts with the effort of washing dishes. In Eusebito's actions, Ismael recognises "the other essential game, the paroxysm that made him identical to me, despite his

youth” (5). Desire bears witness to Ismael’s and Eusebito’s sameness, and as voyeurism and violence merge, the distance between Ismael and the soldiers shrinks. By the end of *The Armies*, Ismael has endured the catastrophic results of the essential game played between the subject of desire and the Other, a game of love and hate.

“The paroxysm that made him identical to me”

I hope you understand all the horror that I am, inside, “or all the love”—this last I say out loud, laughing—I hope you are drawing near in sympathy with me.

— Evelio Rosero, *The Armies*

Before discussing *The Armies*, it is useful to consider Rosero’s short story “Brides by Night,” which was originally published in the collection *Las equinas más largas* (1998) and later included in *Flight of the Condor*. “Brides by Night” differs significantly from other stories in *Flight of the Condor*. Chaparro Valderrama (2007, xviii) describes one group of stories in which “we find variations of the same theme: the political violence that engulfed Colombia from the 1940s to the mid-1960s.” Other stories focus on the violence that continued despite the official end of *La Violencia*. Finally, there are stories that are less obviously political:

These plots elude literary nationalism: aside from the local color that identifies them as stories that only could have been written in Colombia, they are able to engage a readership outside of the borders of the country through the elemental fears they reveal. (Chaparro Valderrama 2007, xxi)

“Brides by Night” is a fable in which the fate of two sentient mannequins illustrates the fate of the Other. Among stories where victims and victimisers are identified by colour or creed, or where it is insinuated, for example, that the new paramilitaries are the same old *pájaros*, or

right-wing militias, who fought for the Conservative Party during *La Violencia*, “Brides by Night” could have been written anywhere.

In “Brides by Night,” one of two identical mannequins describes being delivered to a women’s clothing store and installed in a display window decorated like a church. There, two women dress the mannequins in bridal gowns. That night, an old man—reminiscent of Ismael—arrives in a chauffeured limousine: “He enters the shop and tells the saleswomen that he wants to purchase the bridal gowns *and you may as well throw in the mannequins*” (143, emphasis in original). In the backseat of the limousine, the old man’s trembling hands reach under the mannequins’ gowns: “He unties the bows; he slaps us lightly. His swift, burning slaps make us blush. ‘What delectable brides,’ he says” (143). The limousine arrives at a mansion in the suburbs of an unspecified city where a group of men await the passenger and his brides. After hours of kissing and caressing the mannequins, the men descend into violence:

Finally they slap us, they hurl us among them, as if we were dolls, and in the course of so much flight our gowns lift up and they peer at us and explore us as if we didn’t notice, and they give us champagne to drink and the champagne spills all over our breasts, and they tear off our garments amidst biting and smacking, and they fight over us but then they smile and insult us as if they’ve abhorred us from the moment they were born, and they rip us to pieces with their kicking; they rend us open until we break, such that our arms and legs and heads end up in disarray, in a heap. (Rosero 2007, 143-44)

“Brides by Night” illustrates the love that aims at the *objet a* from the perspective of a subject caught in the crossfire. Moreover, it anticipates Rosero’s efforts in *The Armies*, referring obliquely to violence in and out of the Colombian context.

“Brides by Night” is barely three pages long and makes no mention of the Colombian conflicts or any state of war. “War” implies a system in which two or more sides commit finite resources to each other’s destruction and where resolution is inevitable. The Thousand

Days' War, for example, is over and testifies to the possibility of completion that inheres in its name. *La Violencia* is over, but the prevalence of violence in Colombia today suggests "*La Violencia*" failed to contain its subject matter. Chaparro Valderrama (2007, xiii) writes, "In the face of a reality condemned by war, fiction is a way to comprehend its calamities." Faced with a reality condemned by violence, the term "war" is a way to contain violence to history. "Brides by Night" is a story of violence from Colombia, but is not a story of Colombian violence. The image of heaped mannequin limbs that ends "Brides by Night" recalls the butchered bodies that abound elsewhere in *Flight of the Condor*, but engages something at once specific to the Colombian conflict and universal about it.

Lozano (2008, 283) writes, "The term *desechable* (disposable) is an eloquent discursive expression indicative of the unravelling of Colombia's social fabric. *Desechable* literally identifies a person considered to be disposable, like a plastic cup." Taussig describes the epicentre of the *limpieza* recorded in his diary as a squatter settlement on the edge of town called Carlos Alfredo Díaz (CAD). There, "Children carry guns bigger than themselves. You can buy fragmentation grenades there for the equivalent of ten U.S. dollars" (Taussig 2003, 59). The residents of CAD are the objects of the *jouissance* of the town: elevated to the status of enemy who does not lack, the object-cause of the *limpieza*. Discussing the squatter settlement with a lawyer, Taussig learns that CAD is only the tip of the iceberg:

There are trails, he says, concealed in the cane fields connecting CAD with a flat-topped mountain several miles due north along the valley floor. The mountain is called Navarro, and it rises from plains at the southern edge of Cali. Entirely artificial, this mountain is made of garbage. All the city's garbage goes there. Face furrowed with anxiety, he tells me Navarro is even worse than CAD, and people walk between the two places to escape other gangs and the law. CAD has a flourishing market in drugs and weapons, but the mountain is an even bigger one. (Taussig 2003, 114-15)

The mountain is artificial and so is the status attached to Navarro. The Navarro dump attracts solid waste from the nearly two and a half million residents of Santiago de Cali and many of

those who frequent the dump are waste-pickers, not drug dealers or arms smugglers. As these innocent workers pick through Navarro for valuables they get more than they bargained for, unknowingly attracting what Žižek (2008, 126) calls the “object in subject,” which is worthless and mortifying.

Describing the *limpieza*, Taussig (2003, 112) writes that “there often seems no clear division between the criminal underworld and the law-abiding world resting upon it. The distinction is a necessary fiction. In reality what exists is a ragged continuum.” As evidence of the pervasiveness of the term *desechable*, Lozano (2008, 283) recalls a homeless man approaching her in downtown Bogotá: “He begged, ‘please give something to this disposable man.’” Mannequins are disposable, lifeless things used in place of people: they display clothing or, as was the case in the 1950s, they populate fake towns in the Utah and Nevada deserts to display the potential effects of an atomic blast. Rosero’s decision to write about mannequins draws attention to the politics of disposability that the paramilitaries use to justify their *limpiezas* as a public service tantamount to garbage collection. It points to the non-historical in the context of disposability, the unfathomable X on account of which a subject is excepted from ordinary rules and human rights. Such a libidinal investment allows people like the lawyer who tells Taussig about CAD and Navarro to distinguish himself from the Other who populates the aforementioned places of exception. The next chapter of this thesis will argue that Colombia is a place of exception for the North similar to the CAD squatter settlement or Navarro dump: a place that has “fall[en] prey to the illusion that it is more than its pragmatic material” (Cottrel 2014, 89). In places of exception, life is held to be excessive in all of its forms: the people are “red-blooded”; to paraphrase Makina (Herrera 2015, 100), they “are the barbarians” and their death is sanctioned.

Referring to an Amnesty International report, Lozano (2008, 288) writes, “The overwhelming majority of casualties in war are men—killed by men—while women are

raped, physically and otherwise—by men.” She (2008, 289) calls gender violence invisible: “By ‘invisible’ violence I am referring to acts of daily aggression which pass unnoticed in a given context, not exceptional enough to register in our awareness.” Lacan (1998, 116) describes fantasy culminating in “the image of a completeness closed upon itself.” To the extent that the universality of violence against women punctures the image of an essentially Colombian violence closed upon and feeding off itself, gender violence is a symptom of Colombian violence. McGowan (2014, 244) writes, “The symptom is the expression of the impossibility of completion that haunts every system.” Gender violence haunts the conception of Colombian violence and “Brides by Night” acts as a symptom of *Flight of the Condor*. Unlike “Brides by Night,” *The Armies* is set in Colombia and captures the atmosphere of confusion in which the paramilitaries perform their *limpizas*. Both *The Armies* and *Law in a Lawless Land* describe bewildered residents who wake up one morning to find men with guns moving through their town: “Nobody seems to have a clear idea of who they are, what they are, and what they want” (Taussig 2003, 22). They are the saboteurs of Rosero’s Colombian idyll, an army of hate that intrudes on love, kidnapping Otilía and killing most of Ismael’s oldest friends. However, *The Armies* ends where it began, in Ismael’s garden, only now Ismael is free to cross into Geraldina’s garden: the wall, the orange trees, and an unfortunate cat obliterated by a stray mortar shell. *The Armies* ends with the express purpose of showing that paradise is always already lost.

After a series of skirmishes between soldiers who appear as shadows or dark silhouettes, during which one side or another moves along the streets and through the houses of San José killing indiscriminately, the guns fall silent. Suspecting that everyone else has fled or been killed, Ismael leaves the house for the ruined garden, hoping against hope to find Geraldina and “what was absurd, find her alive” (212). Ismael pauses at Geraldina’s living room window, where, he tells us, “I caught a glimpse of the profile of several men, all

standing still, contemplating something with exaggerated attention, more than absorbed: gathered like parishioners in church at the hour of Elevation” (213). Inexorably, Ismael moves towards the group, which resembles the group of men who wait in the suburban mansion for the mannequins in “Brides by Night.” He says, “Forgetting myself entirely, searching only for Geraldina, I found myself advancing towards them” (213). Soon, Ismael is close enough to see what has drawn their attention:

Between the arms of a wicker rocking chair was—fully open, exhausted—Geraldina naked, her head lolling from side to side, and on top of her one of the men embracing her, one of the men delving into Geraldina, one of the men was raping her: it still took me a while to realise it was Geraldina’s corpse, it was her corpse, exposed before the men who waited. (Rosero 2010, 213-14)

This discovery marks the second time that Ismael recognises the consequences of his own desire in the figure of a corpse. To paraphrase Bolaño (2012, 365-66), each corpse is the unquiet mirror of Ismael’s desire, behind which the Real accumulates.

Before he finds Geraldina and is joined in the essential game by new players, Ismael discovers that the game has come to an end for Eusebito:

There was the pool; I looked into it as into a pit: amid the dead leaves that the wind blew in there, amid the bird droppings, the scattered rubbish, near the petrified corpses of the macaws, incredibly pale, face down, lay Eusebito’s corpse and he was paler still because naked, his arms under his head, the blood like a thread seemed to still flow from his ear; a hen pecked about, the last hen, and she inexorably approached his face. (Rosero 2010, 213)

The body of Eusebito “is a Thing in the Lacanian sense: the material leftover, the materialization of the terrifying, impossible *jouissance*” (Žižek 2008, 76). By looking at the body, Ismael begins to “gain an insight into the forbidden domain, into a space that should be left unseen”: he experiences the garden, the contents of the pool, and then in quick succession the scene of Geraldina’s absolute exploitation, approaching the latter inexorably like the hen towards Eusebito’s body, as “a kind of petrified forest of [his] enjoyment” (Žižek 2008, 76).

Although the thread of blood flowing from Eusebito's ear confirms that he was either shot by the soldiers or that he fell hard into the pool during the chaos, he was already a victim of Ismael's desire.

Jøker Bjerre (2014, 66) begins the entry on desire in *The Žižek Dictionary*: "Desire, according to Lacan, is always the desire of the Other, which means that it is a fundamentally intersubjective phenomenon and has a rather elusive character." Desire being the desire of the Other does not only mean that the subject of desire is conditioned to look outside of itself for some external object believed to possess or embody the *objet a*. Jøker Bjerre (2014, 67) writes that becoming a subject "entails learning how to desire." An individual learns how to desire from other desiring subjects and in accordance with an intersubjective, if unconscious, framework. Thanks to the interconnectedness of desiring subjects, their reliance on language, Žižek can claim that a symptom is shared by a community of desiring subjects so that the Other of psychoanalysis, those supposedly possessed of that community's enjoyment, are vulnerable to the same discriminations as the Other of cultural studies. At the beginning of *The Armies*, Gracielita is watched by Eusebito and vicariously by Ismael; that is, Ismael goads Eusebito into objectifying Gracielita in a way that confirms Hollywood's (2002, 156) claim: "Male subjects [...] only relate to the object *a*, not to woman herself." Ismael, the retired school teacher, continues to teach, training Eusebito's eyes on that which is in Gracielita more than herself.

Ismael imagines Eusebito's eyes moving from object to object, observing "all of [Gracielita's] face in profile, her eyes as if absolved, steeped in who knows what dreams, then the calves, the round knees, the whole legs, just the thighs, and if he's lucky, beyond, up into the depths" (5). The male desire burdens Gracielita with unfathomable depth; to be precise, her body is a space for the male fantasy of an ontologically distinct, unfathomable femininity. Hollywood (2002, 156) identifies "the illusion of terrifying female power that in

part fuels men's desire to dominate and oppress women." She (2002, 161) writes that "woman has a supplementary *jouissance* that cannot be contained within the phallic realm and that, by virtue of its existence, reveals the partial and fragmentary character of the realm." The phallic realm is the big Other; the phallus is the privileged object that the subject imagines losing during what Lacan (1998, 83) calls a "primal separation" or "self-mutilation" tantamount to castration. Hollywood (2002, 156) writes that "feminine *jouissance* is frightening and threatening to male subjectivity—or, to be more exact, to the male ego created by the coalescing of [*objet a*] and [the big Other]." That is, women, ostensibly always already castrated, represent the Real of man's desire: that he lacks and has lost nothing. By way of avoiding the Real of desire, the male fantasy establishes women as the non-lacking Other and in doing so exposes them to violence, trauma, and catastrophe.

Evincing the illusion of frightening femininity, Ismael describes looking at Geraldina and "suffering at the vision of two thighs open showing infinity inside" (30). Like the mannequins in "Brides by Night," at the same time as Gracielita is venerated, she is being made vulnerable to aggression. Whereas Gracielita is taken to pieces by Eusebito's and, vicariously, Ismael's eyes, the mannequins are taken down from the pedestal where they are behind glass and torn limb from limb. Geraldina is fully opened and exhausted in the terrifying culmination of what began in "Brides by Night." Lozano (2008, 288) writes, "Assaults against women are often sexualized; killing is often times beside the point. Death may occur as a consequence of the body's violation but the symbolic power of that violation remains center." It is more than likely that the soldiers killed Geraldina, and entirely possible that her death was a consequence of the rape, but there is something outside of the context of rape as a weapon of war, Colombian or otherwise, that emerges in the men's meaningless persistence and Ismael's inexorable approach. Because, as Lozano (2008, 289) makes clear,

gender violence does not require a state of war, it is not enough to consider Geraldina's rape an act of war.

The ambiguity Rosero brings to the Colombian conflicts remains in the final, harrowing scene of *The Armies*. Geraldina's attackers are seen in profile so the reader cannot decipher which group, if any, enjoys symbolic power through their act of violation. Moreover, Lozano (2008, 288) writes, "Not surprisingly, [assault against women] is done in public, with the aim of intimidating the community," but the men who assault Geraldina are inside her house and, as far as the reader can tell, the community of San José consists of Ismael and the rapists. The men are gathered "like parishioners in church at the hour of Elevation" (213); that is, in silence as if before a consecrated object. Ismael thinks that "these men must be waiting their turn" (213); there is an order to the obscene situation, though it appears utterly incongruous with it. The impression is that of a performance, like the ceremony of elevation, this one addressed not to God, but to the big Other that commands enjoyment and reduces the desiring subject to a "blind compulsion to repeat more and more intense pleasures" (Žižek 1999, 390). Žižek (1999, 390, emphasis in original) calls the human universe "inherently *compulsive*," and writes: "Crucial here is the inherent stupidity of this compulsion: it stands for the way each of us is caught in the inexplicable spell of idiotic *jouissance*." Psychoanalysis insists on the stupidity of human desire as opposed to demand, which involves the satisfaction of a biological need such as the need for food that compels the hen towards Eusebito's corpse. Renata Salecl (1998, 123) writes, "Psychoanalysis has always held the subject responsible for his or her *jouissance*." The men, including Ismael, are not directed by some animal instinct, they are under the spell of *jouissance*, but this in no way excuses their violence.

Žižek (1999, 390) writes, "I am able to exert control over myself only in so far as some fundamental obstacle makes it impossible for me to 'do anything I want.'" In *The*

Armies, the wall between Ismael's house and Geraldina's represents an obstacle that makes it possible for Ismael to assume his desire for Geraldina: "I ask nothing more of life than this possibility, to see this woman without her knowing that I'm looking at her; to see this woman when she knows I'm looking, but to see her: my only explanation for staying alive" (28). Insofar as Ismael describes his voyeurism as his only reason for living, he voices his symptom-formation. The shamelessness of Ismael's voyeurism seems like an identification with the symptom, but it is not so. The way Ismael organises his enjoyment is suffused with fantasy, with the belief that his voyeurism is harmless and that the subject of desire can attain full satisfaction from an object and ask nothing more of it. *The Armies* makes clear that this has never been the case by showing that *jouissance* has always already sabotaged Ismael's paradise of voyeuristic pleasure.

Ismael describes meeting his wife, Otilía, forty years earlier in the bus terminal of her home town. He was attracted by "her dreamy black eyes, her wide forehead, her narrow waist," and her "ample backside," but distracted "from her uncommon rustic beauty" by the presence of an archetypal *narcotraficante*, an older man, rather fat, dressed in white, wearing a white hat, with a white handkerchief in his breast pocket, and silver rings "on the fingers of each hand" (13). These Pablo Escobar-type figures proliferate in books and media concerned with satisfying the North's preconception of Colombian violence, but Ismael tells us that this man "gave the impression of total innocence: his blue eyes wandered all over the place: sweet and calm" (14). While the man looked around, Ismael says that "another man, exactly the opposite, young and bone-jutting thin, barefoot, in a T-shirt and frayed shorts, walked up to him, put a revolver to his forehead and pulled the trigger" (14). Just as the dead narco was innocent, Ismael recalls being surprised that "the murderer was not a young man at all; he must have been no more than eleven or twelve" (15). Like many of Colombia's drug cartel assassins, this one was a child, though neither he nor his latest crime is glorified in *The*

Armies as they would be in the popular Colombian “sicaresque” novels, which recount the adventures of the usually adolescent *sicarios* (hitmen) hired by the drug cartels. Before the murderer throws his gun away, he looks at Ismael, who tells us that “never before in my life had I been struck by such a dead look”; Ismael says, “Several men gathered round the corpse, no-one decided to give chase to the murderer: either we were all afraid, or it did not really seem to matter to anyone” (15). The murder matters to Ismael, however, because his voyeurism is inflected by this exposure to subjective violence.

Ismael describes leaving the bloody scene for the bus station toilet, where he opened the door to the only cubicle and found Otilía “just as she was sitting down, her dress bunched up around her waist, two thighs as pale as they were naked narrowing in terror” (15-16). Excusing himself, Ismael says that he

immediately closed the door at a speed calculated to allow me to take another look at her, the implacable roundness of her rump bursting out from under the hitched up skirt, her near nudity, her eyes—a rumble of fear and surprise and a hint of remote pleasure in the light of her pupils at knowing herself admired; of that I am now sure. (Rosero 2010, 16)

When the assassin points his revolver at the man’s head and fires, it is as if he targets what is in the narco more than the narco: the unfathomable X in the narco boss that causes excessive libidinal investment and by which the narco, a non-lacking Other, enjoys at the assassin’s (or his employer’s) expense. When Ismael gazes at Otilía, something similar happens.

Like the assassin’s gun, Ismael’s desire aims at something more than Otilía, what Žižek (2008, 126) calls the “object in subject.” Caught by the Other’s desire, Otilía is subject to all manner of exploitation, from elevation to desecration. She remains a space for Ismael’s fantasies insofar as Ismael’s voyeurism remains within the register of desire. Žižek (2005, 163) writes that “by way of assuming the inquisitive attitude of the voyeur, we are looking in what we see for the fascinating X, for some trace of what is hidden ‘behind the curtain.’” It is

not until Geraldina's rape that drive subjectivises itself. When Otilía disappears, feared kidnapped, Ismael claims that he will stay in San José until he finds her, but at the end of *The Armies*, he is "searching only for Geraldina" (213). As we will see, Geraldina has long been the object of Ismael's voyeurism, the space for his fantasy of the feminine X. Regarding events forty years earlier, Ismael says, "Soon the murder and the incident in the toilet were forgotten—but only apparently, because they went on recurring, becoming associated, in an almost absurd way, in my memory: first death, then nakedness" (16). With the rape of Geraldina's corpse by the soldiers, death and nakedness, murder and voyeurism, recur in a single event and Ismael bears witness to the unbearable sameness of his and the Other's enjoyment, their essential game of exploitation.

According to the metonymy of desire, Otilía is replaced by Geraldina as the object of Ismael's desire. Ismael laments: "[Otilía] is not the same girl she was at twenty sitting down on a public toilet, her eyes like lighthouse beams over the hitched up island, the join of her legs, the triangle of her sex—indescribable animal—no" (17). Forty years have passed and Ismael struggles to describe Geraldina with a rush of equally awkward animal metaphors:

She raised arms and legs in every direction. I thought I saw an iridescent insect inside of her: suddenly she leapt to her feet, a resplendent grasshopper, but immediately she metamorphosed into nothing more and nothing less than a naked woman when she looked towards us, and began to walk in our direction, sure in her feline slowness. (Rosero 2010, 6)

Geraldina arrives at the wall where Ismael is perched and embraces her husband, Eusebio. They tease Ismael, who tells us "Geraldina laughed out loud: it was an unexpected flock of doves exploding at the edge of the wall" (8). Aside from reinforcing Rosero's parody of magical realism, which will be discussed in the next chapter, the clumsy language and confused imagery identifies Ismael as a subject of desire. Žižek (1999, 305) writes, "When desire subjectivizes itself, [...] the flow of words is set in motion," and calls this flow of

words “the idiotic babble of *jouissance*.” Lacan (1998, 182) says, up to the point where the subject of drive emerges, “What the voyeur is looking for and finds is merely a shadow, a shadow behind the curtain. There he will phantasize any magic of presence.” Ismael says that Geraldina approaches he and Eusebio “sometimes wrapped in the shade of the guayacan trees that grew by the house” and “sometimes as if consumed by the sun, which instead of shining brightly seemed to darken her with pure light” (6). “And that,” Ismael continues, “is how we watched her advance, just like a shadow” (6). That is the only way Ismael as voyeur and desiring subject can bear witnessing the object: from a safe distance.

In *New Trends in Contemporary Latin American Narrative* (2014), Lotte Buiting discusses Geraldina’s rape and the closing paragraph of *The Armies* in terms of Freud’s theory of melancholia and the Freudian death drive. According to Tony Thwaites (2007, 80), the death drives proposed by Freud in 1920 “are blindly implacable forces of dissolution analogous to the bodily imperatives of decay and death.” Set against the life drives, which direct us in the pursuit of pleasure, the death drives seem evil and serve to reinforce the dichotomy between good and evil, a fantasy that guarantees complacency and generates vulnerability. Oversimplifying, or fantasising, the Freudian death drive is both attractive and problematic:

Much of [Freud’s] later work [...] is concerned deeply with the unparalleled violence of twentieth-century society, and the idea of a destructive drive is no doubt an attractive, if dark, way of attempting to give some psychoanalytic explanation of this. But it is, after all, a simple, polar schema, with all the mythical resonance of two eternally opposed principles at war within the human soul. (Thwaites 2007, 83)

Just as drive is not separate from desire, but the dimension in which the potential in desire for excess manifests itself to the subject, the death drive is nothing but an excess of life. Drive has no positive qualities of its own. Lacan (1998, 198) used the myth of the *lamella* to summon “the libido, *qua* pure life instinct, that is to say, immortal life, or irrepressible life,

life that has need of no organ, simplified, indestructible life.” For Žižek (2007, 208), the *lamella* corresponds exactly to the death drive: “This blind indestructible insistence of the libido is what Freud called ‘death drive,’ and one should bear in mind that ‘death drive’ is, paradoxically, the Freudian name for its very opposite, the way immortality appears within psychoanalysis.” However, the crucial addition of politics to the dimension of the death drive is of most interest to the present reading of *The Armies*.

The last paragraph of *The Armies* finds Ismael surrounded by Geraldina’s rapists. At gunpoint, they demand to know Ismael’s name. The last sentence reads, “I shall tell them I have no name and I shall laugh again; they will think I am mocking them and they will shoot: this is how it will be” (215). Buiting argues that, following Otilía’s disappearance, Ismael displays the distinguishing features of melancholia, as described by Freud in his 1917 essay “Mourning and Melancholia.” Freud (quoted in Buiting 2014, 140) writes that melancholia “culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.” Feeling guilty for being alive and blaming himself for Otilía’s disappearance, Buiting (2014, 141) calls Ismael’s final act a “suicidal gesture.” Buiting (2014, 142-43) writes, “Ismael’s dangerous flirtation with death seems to be induced by the death drive, not because he entertains an unconscious wish to die but because the death drive propels him to strive for an almost complete cessation of tension.” Ismael may be a melancholic, but death is not the only way to escape violence. The death drive as understood by Lacan and politicised by Žižek entails a chance to change the current configuration of desire and exploitation.

Buiting (2014, 143) writes that the scene of Geraldina’s rape “epitomizes the workings of the death drive” insofar as it culminates in Ismael punishing himself:

[Ismael] thinks he detects in himself a fleeting flicker of lust, which repulses him. For the briefest of moments, he imagines himself *understanding* the impulse that led the soldiers to act the way they do. [...] His understanding comes to him in the form of

self-admonition; he aggressively forces himself to imagine his partaking in the atrocious scene. (Buiting 2014, 143-44, emphasis in original)

This is certainly true, but aside from his self-admonishing thoughts, Ismael inhabits an incredible position. Beyond understanding the soldiers' impulse, when Ismael recognises Geraldina's body slumped in the wicker chair and realises what the men are doing he becomes a third party that witnesses the over-proximity of his and the soldiers' enjoyment. This is the (impossible) moment of the emergence of the subject of drive; that is, the subject who, deprived of its support in fantasy, recognises the stupidity of the human subject's inherent compulsion as distinct from and far in excess of animal instinct. Apropos Lacan, Žižek (1999, 107) writes that "human desire (in contrast to animal instinct) is always, constitutively, mediated by reference to Nothingness: the true-object cause of desire (as opposed to the objects that satisfy our needs) is, by definition, a 'metonymy of lack.'" The force of this big "N" Nothingness, otherwise known as the Real of desire, is too much for Ismael to bear. However, it is by passing through the Real that the subject is emptied of the illusion that reality is unchangeable and equips itself to change reality. In assuming that positive, political change requires negation or effacement, Žižek is similar to the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben.

In *The Remnants of Auschwitz* (1999), Agamben writes (1999, 13) that "the survivors [of Auschwitz] bore witness to something it is impossible to bear witness to." Using Agamben, Buiting (2014, 145) calls Ismael "the impossible, true witness" of *The Armies*. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss Agamben's concept of the witness in any great detail, and Buiting in no way suggests that Auschwitz is comparable to any other event in history. However, Buiting (2014, 147) writes, "The novel's final words narrate Ismael's death by anticipation—'this is how it will be' (215)—and thereby place Ismael in an impossible speaking position. Yet that very impossibility is precisely what bearing witness entails."

Agamben (1999, 39) contends that our language “must give way to a non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness” so that something new can emerge, and with it the possibility of bearing witness. Ultimately, Buiting (2014, 147-48) argues that Ismael’s impossible speaking position shows Rosero breaking from the history of attempts to represent violence, calling on us to envisage new ways of witnessing.

Fabio Vighi (2014, 15-16) suggests that some of Žižek’s theoretical work has an “unmistakable Agambenian flavour,” and writes that “Žižek endorses Agamben’s insight into the necessity of a disjunctive gesture rather than a synthetic one.” Here and in the next chapter of this thesis, it is argued that Ismael’s suicidal gesture should be read as the separation of a subject of drive from a reality in which enjoyment is bound to a certain object, such that what appeared to be love of another person is revealed to have missed the point. Whether we think Ismael is an impossible witness or simply intuitive, the death that he has resolved to suffer at the hands of the soldiers is a second death following the first, the death of the desiring subject. Žižek (1999, 154) writes that “what ‘Death’ [in Lacanian psychoanalysis] stands for in its most radical is not merely the passing of earthly life, but the ‘night of the world,’ the self-withdrawal, the absolute contraction of subjectivity, the severing of its links with ‘reality.’” After witnessing Geraldina’s rape, Ismael renounces his symptom-formation and severs his links with reality, but in the silence that follows it is possible to discern the outline of an ethical edifice that applies more generally to the way we as subjects organise our (lack of) enjoyment.

Ismael admits asking nothing more of life than to see Geraldina, but he can never see enough to satisfy his desire. From the top of the wall between him and Geraldina, Ismael tells us, “She did not yet perceive that my nostrils and my whole spirit were dilating to take in the aromas of her body, a blending of soap and sweat and inaccessible bone” (9). From soap to sweat to bone, Ismael’s thoughts trace the path of desire from love to mutilation of an object.

As Buiting (2014, 144) points out, “[Ismael’s] account of the rape of Geraldina’s dead body is reminiscent of a moment in the past in which he objectified her.” In this earlier moment, Ismael stares at Geraldina across a café table:

All of her is the most intimate desire because I look at her, I admire her, the same as the rest of them look at her, admire her, much younger than me, the little boys—yes, she shouts, and I hear her, she wants to be looked at, admired, pursued, caught, turned over, bitten and licked, killed, revived and killed again for generations. (Rosero 2010, 29)

This is an exemplary fantasy image because the enjoyment derived from it is projected onto the Other: it is implied that Geraldina wants these things to happen. The death drive inheres in the extension of the scene to infinity. The fantasy image conveys the “blind indestructible insistence of the libido [that] Freud called ‘death drive’” (Žižek 2007, 208). When the obstacles—the garden wall, the café table—to the actualisation of the scene collapse and Ismael sees too much, he assumes the Other’s desire as his own.

Amid the barrage of self-admonition that follows his discovery of Geraldina, Ismael occupies an impossible third party perspective, from which he and the rapists are indistinguishable, possessed by the object-cause of desire and propelled by it to exceed all limits. Helpless to intervene, Ismael says “I listen to myself demean myself,” and that “I see myself lying in wait for Geraldina’s naked corpse, the nakedness of the corpse that still glows” (214). Ismael wonders whether he, like the other men, is waiting his turn to rape Geraldina: “I have just asked myself that, before the corpse, while hearing her sound of a manipulated, inanimate doll” (214). The shift from the register of desire to drive is a perspectival shift that alters the nature of the voyeur’s fascinating X: the Thing (infinity, unfathomable depth, or an iridescent insect) that Ismael imagines between Geraldina’s thighs. Putting it in terms of vision, Žižek writes that

the Thing is first constructed as an inaccessible X around which my desire circulates, as the blind spot I want to see but simultaneously dread and avoid seeing, too strong for my eyes; then, in the shift towards drive, I (the subject) “make myself seen” as the Thing—in a reflexive turn, I see *myself* as It, the traumatic object-Thing I didn’t want to see. (Žižek 1999, 300-1, emphasis in original)

Lacan’s (1998, 198) myth of the *lamella* told the story of the traumatic object-Thing. Žižek (2007, 208, emphasis in original) writes, “A *lamella* is indivisible, indestructible, and immortal. More precisely, it is *undead*.” The traumatic object-Thing in the rape scene is not Geraldina’s corpse, which might appear to be immortal, especially as Ismael describes it “imitating perfectly what could be Geraldina’s passionate embrace” (214). Instead, it is Ismael as he sees himself under the spell of *jouissance*, wild as the hen that pecks its way towards the body of Eusebito, which mortifies him.

Buiting (2014, 142) writes, “Death is [...] the heavily implied ending of [*The Armies*],” but that it “sneaks up on [Ismael].” On two occasions, people are surprised that Ismael was not killed in his sleep (187, 192). Later, one soldier tells another not to bother killing Ismael: “He looks dead” (198). The other soldier asks, “Hey, old man, are you alive, or are you dead?” (198). Lacan’s myth of the *lamella*, expanded by Žižek in his own work, helps to answer the last soldier’s questions: Ismael is the living dead, a manipulated but animate doll. Lacan (1998, 197) asks his audience to “suppose [the *lamella*] comes and envelops your face while you are quietly asleep.” In similarly terrifying terms, Žižek (1999, 390, emphasis in original) describes the desiring subject wearing the *lamella*-libido like a mask: “When the mask—the dead object—comes alive by taking possession of us, its hold on us is effectively that of a ‘living dead,’ of a monstrous *automaton* imposing itself on us.” It is this that Ismael discerns in the faces of Geraldina’s rapists as they, like automatons, wait their turn. As though awakening from a hypnotic trance, one of the rapists tells the others to stop. Ismael says, “The three or four left do not respond, they are each an island, a drooling profile:

I wonder if it is not my own profile, worse than looking in the mirror” (214). With Ismael’s reflexive turn, the subject of drive emerges.

The shift towards drive accounts for the fact that we do not hear Ismael tell the soldiers his name, though his silence almost certainly condemns him to death. As opposed to desire, Žižek (1999, 305, emphasis in original) writes that “when drive subjectivizes itself, when the subject sees itself as the dreadful Thing, this other subjectivization is [...] signalled by the onset of *silence*.” When the soldiers ask Ismael his name, he says, “I shall tell them I am Jesus Christ, I shall tell them I am Simón Bolívar, I shall tell them I am called Nobody” (215). The death drive dissolves all identities; having seen the essential game of desire played out in full, the man called Ismael, supported in a symbolic universe by a voyeuristic symptom-formation, dies. Literally, “Nobody” remains: the subject chooses Nothingness instead of something.

Ismael’s Act

Ismael’s symptom is conceived of as an essential game, not an essentially Colombian game, but one that is essentially male. Because, as Hollywood (2002, 156) makes clear, the male subject of desire is like every other subject of desire insofar as he pins his hopes on the *objet a*, not to be found in or through the actually existing object or objectified subject, Ismael’s symptom is universal. Žižek (1999, 224) identifies universality with the point of exclusion; that is, the constitutive lack that fantasy and reality work together to exclude by the dazzling image of an object-cause of desire. Ismael’s choice of nothing instead of something accomplishes what the narrator of *Senselessness* failed in the final instance to accomplish; read as a disjunctive gesture, *The Armies* ends with a properly Lacanian act. Vighi (2003, 106) writes, “According to Žižek’s psychoanalytic reading, the dimension of the act proper is

always governed by the death-drive, which signifies nothing but the necessity for the subject of the act to experience the symbolic breakdown of its own subjective economy.” The image of Ismael’s own drooling profile reflected in the scene of Geraldina’s rape, which is the unquiet mirror of his desire, prompts the uncoupling of fantasy and reality. Lacan and in particular Žižek (1999, 154) believe that “negativity, a negative gesture of withdrawal precedes any positive gesture of enthusiastic identification with a Cause.” Ismael accomplishes such a negative gesture of withdrawal; he confronts his (and our) constitutive lack and *The Armies* universalises its plea for a global Cause.

The big “C” Cause should incur the full weight of its being reached as a result of having confronted the Real of desire. It should not be confused with a certain constellation of causes that advocate tolerance of others without confronting the fact that the Other and all the forms its promise takes does not exist except as a symptom. Some of these causes are discussed in the next chapter, which looks at what Žižek (2000, 5) calls “reverse racism,” where, to paraphrase Hollywood (2002, 156), Northern subjects relate to the *objet a*, not to the Southern subjects themselves. Apropos Žižek, Vighi (2003, 117) writes that “the political act proper always originates in the antagonistic abyss of the subject.” If, as this chapter has argued, “Brides by Night” acts as a symptom of *Flight of the Condor* to show that gender violence haunts to the conception of Colombian (or any other local) violence, then *The Armies* has shown one subject identifying with the symptom. Ismael’s act, indeed any Lacanian act, is valuable as an adumbration and impetus of our own.

Ultimately, the progeny of a Lacanian act must choose between radical evil and augmenting their enjoyment:

A radically evil man is not someone whose only motive is to do “bad things,” or someone who couldn’t care less about the law. It is rather someone who willingly conforms to the law, provided that he can get the slightest benefit out of it. (Zupančič 2001, par. 19)

A radically evil person refuses the lesson offered by the Lacanian act and not only continues to imagine that the object-cause of desire is lost, but to bind their enjoyment to the figure of another subject who has (found, stolen, or never lost) it. Any such relationship between subjects is another iteration of the essential game, filled with *jouissance* and inevitably catastrophic insofar as the object in subject aimed at in the Other elides the subjectivity of that person or group. Behind the *objet a*, or, like Atlas, beneath its crushing weight, a subject with no access to the perspective from which they appear Other suffers for the benefit of another subject who avoids the Real of desire.

Chapter Five

“Whoever they belong to, they’re the same hands”:

The Armies and Colombia as a Place of Exception

The writer is a human consequence of those around him, or those who were around him. I’m sure I haven’t only written about myself. Those things you mention, death and illness, the world conspiring against a person, are universal in any literature, here or in Cuzco, Moscow, or Detroit.

— Evelio Rosero, “Evelio Rosero by Antonio Ungar”

When a bomb explodes in Ismael’s garden it destroys the wall against which he had previously leaned to ogle Geraldina and shakes the foundations upon which his utopian fantasy rests. Before the obvious signals of violence interrupt it, Ismael establishes the parameters of his utopia: “I ask nothing more of life than this possibility, to see this woman without her knowing that I’m looking at her; to see this woman when she knows I’m looking, but to see her” (28). In *Living in the End Times* (2010), Žižek describes the characteristic of utopian fantasies while discussing another author’s account of a trip to an African wilderness park. The other author, himself a Lacanian, recalls stopping twenty metres from three lions, which act as though the tourists did not exist:

The fact that the animals ignore the intruding tourists is crucial—it points to a double movement of de-realization that characterizes utopian fantasies: the scene presented is a fantasy (even if it “really happened” as in the case here—what makes it into a fantasy is the libidinal investment that determines its meaning); we (the participants) de-realize ourselves, reducing ourselves to a pure de-substantialized gaze ignored by the objects of the gaze—as if we are not a part of the reality we observe (despite disturbing the wildlife park’s rhythm with our vehicles), but rather a spectral presence unseen by living beings—we are reduced to spectral entities observing “the world without us.” (Žižek 2010, 82)

Ismael gazes at Geraldina, to paraphrase Žižek (2010, 82), as an external observer of the paradise barred to him. When Ismael is no longer barred from the paradise of erotic *jouissance*, he realises himself. He is no longer a spectral entity but an excessive presence, a drooling profile and participant in the rape of Geraldina.

For Žižek (2010, x), utopian fantasies and their in or ex- habitants are one reason why “the global capitalist system is approaching an apocalyptic zero-point.” Fantasies of worlds without us give rise to jealousy and contribute to what Žižek (2010, x) calls “the explosive growth of social divisions and exclusions.” Lacan (1998, 116, emphasis in original) tells us not to confuse envy with jealousy: “What a small child, or whoever, *envies* is not at all necessarily what he might want.” Despite Lacan’s caution, Žižek (2010, 81) describes the jealous subject as one whose desire is conditioned by the fantasy that the Other possesses the *objet a*. Like the child that Lacan mentions, the jealous subject may not covet the form of enjoyment the Other’s possession takes and may even hate it. Žižek politicises the concept of jealousy, bringing all varieties of discrimination together for analysis as ways for groups of people to organise their enjoyment along similar lines and construct social realities:

In jealousy, the subject *creates/imagines a paradise* (a utopia of full *jouissance*) from which he is excluded. The same definition applies to what one can call political jealousy, from anti-Semitic fantasies about the excessive enjoyment of the Jews to Christian fundamentalists’ fantasies about the weird sexual practices of gays and lesbians. (Žižek 2010, 81, emphasis in original)

The first few pages of *The Armies* introduce a paradise of erotic *jouissance* from which Ismael is excluded and, simultaneously, a paradise of exotic *jouissance* from which the North is excluded.

In the previous chapter, it was argued that witnessing Geraldina’s rape caused Ismael to shift from the subjectivity of desire to the subjectivity of drive. The subject of desire is one whose symptom remains intact; that is, for whom fantasy and reality continue to work

together. Ken Byrne and Stephen Healy (2006, 243) write, “Another key element of fantasy is that it produces, paradoxically, the object that frustrates its consummation: the symptom.” The destruction of the wall that frustrates the consummation of Ismael’s desire marks the beginning of the end of *The Armies*, the slow but sure onset of silence and death—Ismael’s decision to tell the soldiers “I am called Nobody” (215). Again, Žižek (2008, 81) writes that “symptom is the way we—the subjects—‘avoid madness,’ the way we ‘choose something (the symptom-formation) instead of nothing (radical psychotic autism, the destruction of the symbolic universe).” This chapter aims to identify the political potential inherent in Ismael’s decision to choose nothing, which is Žižek’s definition of an authentic Act. Ismael’s Act is “a non-response, which short-circuits the dimensions of form and content, meaning and being” (Kunkle 2014, 3). Kunkel (2014, 5) writes, “Every ethical edifice [...] is grounded in an abyssal Act. [...] Real change must coincide with our acceptance that there is no Other.” It is possible to discern the outline of an ethical edifice in Ismael’s suicidal gesture if we understand it as an Act brought about by a particular acceptance that the Other does not exist.

At the same time as *The Armies* describes the effects of Colombia’s conflicts on civilians caught in the eye of the storm, it unravels Ismael’s fantasmatic relationship of love for Geraldina as the Other. Ismael navigates the battlefield that San José becomes as though impervious to gunfire and grenades, captivated by Geraldina’s feminine *jouissance*. Renata Salecl (1998, 70) writes, “When Lacan speaks about feminine *jouissance* he emphasizes the impossibility of defining what it is.” We perceive this impossibility in Ismael’s repeated attempts to describe what is in Geraldina more than herself: an iridescent insect emerges from the infinity between her thighs; laughter escapes her like a flock of doves. The point is that feminine *jouissance* is impossible to define because it does not exist as anything other than the way in which Ismael binds his enjoyment to something instead of letting it slip into nothing. Geraldina’s rape reveals the consequences for women of such a symptom-formation,

and this chapter will discuss the consequences for the South of a certain symptom-formation that is revealed in *The Armies*' sustained critique of exoticism.

The end of *The Armies* expresses a crucial truth about the Other. After discussing how subjectivity depends on the *jouissance* of the Other, Néstor Braunstein (2003, 111) writes, "Let us be clear: the *jouissance* of the Other is not in the Other (who anyway does not exist) but in the subject himself." This chapter argues that the North organises its lack of enjoyment around the image of a Southern Other who enjoys in its stead. In *The Armies*, but also *Senselessness* and particularly *2666*, it is possible to discern the influence of this logic on individual characters, or groups of characters, and find numerous examples of flaws in the logic.

The way Santa Teresa reflects, for example, the coincidence of violence and sexual desire or frustration on a street in London attenuates the distinction between North and South. Juárez, on which Santa Teresa is based, is the southern half of a binational metropolitan area where the distinction is implausible but nonetheless devastatingly effective. Just across the Rio Grande from Juárez is the northern half of the city: El Paso in Texas. Last year, Washington-based CQ Press ranked El Paso the safest city of its size in the United States, a title it has held since 2011. The year before El Paso was first honoured, 3,111 homicides were reported in Juárez (Volk 2015, 22), making the city the murder capital of the world for the third year in a row (Gillman and Jochum 2015, 4). This paradox, a city split between life and death, is sustained by violence that is both subjective and objective; specifically, a libidinal investment in the million-odd people who live in Juárez as the Other.

Matthew Heineman's 2015 documentary film *Cartel Land* looks at two responses to the drug violence in Mexico, one by citizens of the west-central Mexican state of Michoacán and the other by Americans along the Arizona border. The film's opening credits roll, and the

camera takes an aerial shot of the Mexico-United States barrier as it cleaves an otherwise continuous landscape of mesquite thickets. In reality, the border fence is a staggered series of different fences. Fantasy structures the effectiveness implied in images of the border fence stretching from horizon to horizon inasmuch as the series of steel constructions is “marked by [the] structure [of fantasy] as being more than its materiality, as being endowed with the promise to satisfy the desire that necessitates it” (Cottrel 2014, 89). The image of a non-lacking Southern Other baying at the gates fulfils the lack that constitutes the North’s social reality. Were the fence to disappear (or appear for what it is), it is not a blood-dimmed tide of the Other’s deadly *jouissance* that would be loosed on the North but an excess of the Real in reality. The following passage from *The Abyss of Freedom* (1997) prompts further comparison of the Mexico-United States barrier and the workings of fantasy:

Lacan’s fundamental thesis is that a minimum of “idealization,” of the interposition of a fantasmatic frame by means of which the subject assumes a distance vis-à-vis the Real, is constitutive of our sense of reality—“reality” occurs insofar as it is not (it does not come) “too close.” (Žižek 1997, 23)

The erasure of Ismael’s fantasmatic frame reveals that his is the true face of *jouissance*. The realisation is “worse than looking in the mirror” (214). The subject of desire has much at stake in the obstacles to such a confrontation and in making sure, as Žižek (1997, 23) indicates in his parenthetical remark, that reality does not come too close.

As *Cartel Land* continues and the camera follows the border fence, the voice of Tim “Nailer” Foley says, “There’s an imaginary line out there between right and wrong, good and evil.” The official synopsis tells us that Foley “heads a small paramilitary group called Arizona Border Recon, whose goal is to stop Mexico’s drug wars from seeping across our border.” Foley continues, “I believe what I am doing is good, and what I am standing up against is evil.” Foley mistakes the border between Mexico and the United States for a border that separates one ontological state of being and another. As discussed in the second chapter

of this thesis, the mayor of Santa Teresa tries to make a similar distinction in the fourth part of *2666* by appearing on national television to announce the end of the serial killings. “The serial killings of women have been successfully resolved,” he says, “Everything that happens from now on falls under the category of ordinary crimes” (539). The ninety four pages of “The Part about the Crimes” that follow the mayor’s announcement, over the course of which the bodies of twenty nine women are discovered, systematically refute the official distinction between ordinary and extraordinary crimes.

In his book *Lacan at the Scene* (2009), Henry Bond performs Lacanian readings of original crime scene photographs; specifically, police photographs of murder scenes. A full discussion of his contribution is beyond the scope of this chapter, suffice it to say that his readings challenge the notion of good and evil as fixed coordinates (affixed to self and Other, respectively). Bond ends his study with an observation that is particularly relevant to the present discussion:

And it is a long-held fallacious belief in a neat divide between *the everyday* and *the extraordinary* that this study has corrected or resolved for me. The borderland between these two conveniently tagged “thematic areas” is unlike the—recently completed—undeniably imposing steel fence along Arizona’s border with Mexico, and more like one along the network of winding narrow paths in the arid mountainous regions of the Hindu Kush, where the borders between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan are sometimes marked only by an improvised pile of rocks, or a rusting illegible sign hanging from a stunted tree. (Bond 2009, 176, emphasis in original)

It is the (fallacious) belief in a divide between good and evil that makes the Mexico-United States barrier so heavily libidinally invested. The militarisation of borders protests too much, as it were. The suffering that the process imposes—epitomised by the paradox of the 850-square-kilometer El Paso-Juárez binational metropolitan area—is its own obscene justification. Salecl (1998, 122) writes, “The pain of the victim constitutes the ontological proof of the existence of the Other for the racist.” The terrifying but necessary conclusion to be drawn from this is that their suffering bears the traces of our *jouissance*.

In *The Fragile Absolute* (2000), Žižek discusses the different modes of modern racism in terms of the Yugoslav Wars, which plunged the states established after the collapse of the former Yugoslavia into a decade of violence. There are three modes that fall under the rubric of subjective and objective violence. The first is subjective: performed by clearly identifiable agents whose identity and activities are a reaction to the foreign Other. The second and third are less obvious but equally invested in the production of Others, what Žižek (2009b, 1) calls a “violence that sustains our very efforts to fight violence and promote tolerance.” Foley represents the first mode of racism, which Žižek (2000, 4-5) calls “the old-fashioned unabashed rejection of the (despotic, barbarian, orthodox, Muslim, corrupt, Oriental...) Balkan Other on behalf of authentic (Western, civilized, democratic, Christian...) values.” Arizona Border Recon on the side of the civilized, democratic North defends the line “between right and wrong, good and evil,” standing up against the exceptional barbarism of Mexican criminals. In *Narcoepics*, Herlinghaus (2013, 103, emphasis in original) writes, “It is not far-fetched to compare the major Colombian and Mexican players in the international drug market [...] with those adventurous and violent *entrepreneurs* who once acted as early capitalism’s pioneers in the process of the ‘original accumulation’ of capital.” Though Mexican drug cartels apply the economic model of supply and demand to their business, their capitalism is a threat to the “authentic” capitalism of the North. The second, less obvious mode of racism grounds American investigator Albert Kessler’s unofficial opinion about the situation in Santa Teresa, which Oscar Fate overhears in the second part of *2666*.

Headed for the Arizona-Mexico border, Fate hears Kessler tell a young colleague that Santa Teresa “seems to be moving ahead in some ineffable way, but the best thing would be for every last one of the people there to head out into the desert some night and cross the border” (267). Kessler’s opinion reinforces the line between good and evil, although it appears sympathetic to those the fantasy condemns to a violence the North can only imagine.

For Kessler, Santa Teresa is a place of exception. He tells his colleague that “everyone living in that city is outside of society, and everyone, I mean everyone, is like the ancient Christians in the Roman circus” (267). Here again, the Other’s suffering is proof of its existence for the racist Kessler, who justifies his failure to make any sense of the crimes by drawing a neat divide between ordinary and extraordinary criminals.

Before his appraisal of the situation in Santa Teresa, Kessler assures his colleague that a pattern of criminal behaviour can *always* be established: “Given the means and the time, you can do anything” (265). That said, Kessler delivers a contradiction that can only be explained by his belief in the existence of the Other. Kessler tells his friend that the first time he travelled to Santa Teresa, “I tried to help, but the situation was impossible” (267). When asked why he returned to Mexico, Kessler replies, “To have a look, I guess” (267); that is to say, to spectate like the audience in a Roman amphitheatre. Žižek (2000, 6, emphasis in original) writes, “*The Balkans constitute a place of exception with regard to which the tolerant multiculturalist is allowed to act out his/her repressed racism.*” To accept that a tolerant multiculturalist can exercise racism, one must understand that, for Žižek, citizens of the North operate in a context defined by the hegemony of liberal-multiculturalism. Liberalism, as Žižek understands it, emphasises the rights of individuals but makes it harder to think and act politically; that is, collectively. The ideology of liberal-multiculturalism preaches respect for the Other as exceptional as long as the Other does not encroach on the multiculturalist’s own identity.

Žižek describes the position of some in Western Europe who were horrified but helpless spectators of the impossible situation in the Balkans; it is the same position Kessler occupies as he opines that everyone in Santa Teresa is doomed from the safety of the “good,” Northern side of the border:

Then there is the “reflexive” Politically Correct racism: the multiculturalist perception of the Balkans as the terrain of ethnic horrors and intolerance, of primitive irrational warring passions, to be opposed to the post-nation-state liberal-democratic process of solving conflicts through rational negotiation, compromise and mutual respect. Here racism is, as it were, elevated to the second power: it is attributed to the Other, while we occupy the convenient position of a neutral benevolent observer, righteously dismayed at the horrors going on “down there.” (Žižek 2000, 4-5)

The end of *The Armies* and *Senselessness* reveal what is at stake in the ability of the subject to attribute *jouissance* to the Other at the same time as both novels refer repeatedly to the horrors that await those caught in the melee of the South. Kessler expresses sympathy for those in Santa Teresa, but remains certain that nothing can be done for them. Kessler’s opinion, and the very image of Santa Teresa as a place of exception, is disputed by the first obviously violent act in *2666*, which takes place some 8,000 kilometres away from Santa Teresa in London.

The first act of subjective violence in *2666* conceals an incremental, objective violence. It is an adumbration of the femicide but, importantly, it is also a space in the context of those crimes for the universal subject in whom the *jouissance* of the Other resides. Over a hundred pages into “The Part about the Critics,” the Archimboldians arrive in Mexico and the femicide becomes a backdrop to the dissolution of the group and of Pelletier’s and Espinoza’s realities. Before the young Mexican conference-goer tells the critics that Benno von Archimboldi has appeared in Mexico City on his way to Santa Teresa, the love triangle of Norton, Pelletier and Espinoza is circuitously satisfied by an act of ethnic violence on the streets of London. Beating a Pakistani taxi driver nearly to death seems to have nothing to do with the femicide, but the act implies what is not historical and not contextual in violence. Specifically, it shows that the Lacanian Other as a universal form attracts violence, which is later articulated in the various forms of violence performed by clearly identifiable agents who act as though they are an instrument of a certain (racist, sexist) ideology.

Salecl and Žižek agree on what is universal in violence and it is through them that the idea of traversing a fantasy, such as the fantasy of Latin American violence, becomes a political imperative. Salecl (1998, 120) writes, “In hate speech, one encounters the same logic that is found in all forms of violence.” The assault in London combines hate speech and physical violence. While they kick the driver, Pelletier and Espinoza tell him to “shove Islam up [his] ass” (74). They tell him that one kick “is for Salmon Rushdie,” another “is for the feminists of Paris,” and yet another “is for the feminists of New York” (74). Žižek (2005, 236) writes, “At its most radical level, violence is precisely an endeavour to strike a blow at [the] unbearable surplus-enjoyment contained in the Other.” Salecl (1998, 120) agrees: “The target of violence is the unsymbolizable kernel in the other: the object *a*—the object cause of desire. It is around this object that the subject forms its fantasy, its scenario of provisional wholeness.” The scenario of wholeness is provisional on fantasy and reality working together to make the lack that constitutes subjectivity and social reality appear as loss.

For a few days after the assault, “Pelletier and Espinoza were, quite independently, filled with remorse by the business with the Pakistani driver” (79). The Europeans absolve themselves of guilt by appealing to the big Other, which Žižek (2010, 338, emphasis added) calls “the thick symbolic texture of knowledge, expectations, *prejudices*, and so on.” They regret the assault, but “deep inside they were convinced that it was the Pakistani who was the real reactionary and misogynist, the violent one, the intolerant and offensive one, that the Pakistani had asked for it a thousand times over” (80). Pelletier and Espinoza bind their enjoyment to a certain symbolic formation of anti-Islamic rhetoric and liberal-multiculturalism. Offended by the driver’s misogyny, the two men nevertheless imagine Norton as a kind of *femme fatale*, an archetype that the big Other offers alongside that of the stereotypical Muslim. Repeatedly referring to Norton as “the Gorgon/Medusa” (76, 80), they insert themselves into what Žižek (1999, 304) calls: “The standard heterosexual ‘fatal

attraction' scene," which "is that of male desire captivated and fascinated by a deadly *jouissance féminine*." From the moment the two men fall in love with Norton, she is no longer one of the Archimboldians but the Other.

Salecl describes the proximity of love and hate, two fantasmatic relationships between a subject and an object in subject, which is to say two relationships that exclude the subjectivity of the person loved or hated. Salecl (1998, 52, 68) writes that "hatred is always the counterpart of love," and continues: "A man falls in love with a woman because he perceives in her something that she actually does not have, the object *a*, the object cause of desire." The first chapter of this thesis discussed the dreams that Norton has shortly after the Archimboldians arrive in Santa Teresa. In the first dream, Norton stands in her hotel room at the point where she can see herself in its two mirrors and realises that the woman reflected in the second mirror is not her: she is just like her, but dead. In her dream, the mirror is the unquiet mirror of Pelletier and Espinoza's (vile) interpretation of love. Pelletier and Espinoza imagine Norton as the Gorgon whose gaze turns men to stone, but it is their desire for the *objet a* that announces itself in the mortified image of Norton: the first dead woman in 2666. The Real of desire announces itself again in Norton's next dream, during which she imagines picking up a tree and moving it around the countryside, no spot entirely satisfying her. Norton recalls that sometimes the tree "had no roots, other times it trailed long roots like snakes or the locks of a Gorgon" (131). Pelletier and Espinoza imagine Norton as the Other, as Medusa and a siren whose song caused the assault in London; they do not, as Ismael does in *The Armies*, turn to see themselves as the monsters.

The final form of racism that Žižek describes sounds a lot like love since the subjectivity of the person or people who suffer it is elided or ignored in favour of an unfathomable property invisible to them: an image of and for the Other (for whom it masks the lack). Žižek (2000, 5) writes, "Finally, there is the reverse racism which celebrates the

exotic authenticity of the Balkan Other, as in the notion of Serbs who, in contrast to inhibited, anaemic Western Europeans, still exhibit a prodigious lust for life.” As Pelletier and Espinoza do to Norton until she leaves them in Santa Teresa, Ismael projects his enjoyment onto Geraldina as the female Other who exhibits a prodigious lust for life until the last pages of *The Armies*. Ismael catches sight of Geraldina’s vagina and describes “her other mouth on the verge of her most intimate voice: ‘Look at me, then,’ shouted her other voice, and shouted it despite my age, or probably, because of it: Look at me, if you dare” (9-10). This thesis reads the other, intimate voice as what Lacan (1997, 139) calls “the intimate exteriority or ‘extimacy,’” that which is in the subject for the Other as the object-cause of desire. Žižek (1999, 45) calls it “a non-assimilable foreign body at the very core of the subject.” Geraldina cannot give or get rid of the gift of her person, for which she suffers, exposed as a disgusting remainder to Ismael, who is not disgusted by the mere presence of a person’s remains, but, in a reflexive turn, by the remains of his desire for the person. *The Armies* culminates in Ismael occupying an impossible third party perspective, from which he realises that the Other enjoying itself at his expense is none other than himself.

The following section of this chapter identifies the fantasmatic frame within which the Colombian Other appears for a particular Northern audience as the inhabitant of a place of exception where magic and violence vie for the position of master signifier. Rosero is an admirer of Gabriel García Márquez, “A goldsmith of words” (Rosero 2010, n. pag.), and the first quarter of *The Armies* is full of allusions to, among other things, the flora and fauna of Macondo, the setting of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. In the following three quarters of the novel, however, San José succumbs to the reality of indiscriminate violence that is well documented in Colombian history. The distinction between realism and fantastic literature awaits any novel that leaves Latin America, but Rosero (2010, n. pag.) writes, “[*The Armies*] is no nightmare, it is reality itself knocking on your door with its knuckles, three hard knocks,

knocks with the sound bones make—death.” This chapter will abstract Ismael’s renunciation of the object of his desire to show that, concurrent with his Act, *The Armies* points to the possibility and necessity of short-circuiting the pendulum swing from the utopian fantasy of love and the exotic to the nightmare of hate and extreme violence.

“Like the ancient Christians in the Roman circus”

From the top of his garden wall, Ismael ogles Geraldina, who walks out to the terrace and lies down naked on a blanket in the sun. Before this, however, the reader is treated to an explosion of “local colour” that involves them in a type of voyeurism. *The Armies* begins:

And this is how it was: at the Brazilian’s house the macaws laughed all the time; I heard them from the top of my garden wall, when I was up the ladder, picking my oranges, tossing them into the big palm-leaf basket; now and again I sensed the cats behind me watching from high up in the almond trees. [...] Further back, my wife fed the fish in the pond. (Rosero 2010, 1)

The reader’s attention is drawn to a series of objects familiar to the Northern audience that embraced *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and continues to hope for, if not expect, more magical realism from Colombians like Rosero. The macaws are a staple: the residents of Macondo and Arab merchants swap the colourful birds for glass beads, clocks, bells, and other “knickknacks” (García Márquez 1972, 39-40, 47, 57, 75). The palm-leaf basket is metonymic of exoticism as Sarah Pollack (2009, 362) understands it in her article “Latin America Translated (Again)”: it is an object “offering both the pleasures of the savage and the superiority of the civilized.” The founder of Macondo, José Arcadio Buendía, decides to line the streets of the town with almond trees—like those from which the cats peer at Ismael—while his wife, Úrsula Iguarán, makes candied fish to supplement the family’s income—just as Otilía tends to the fish in the pond. The beginning of *The Armies* suggests that San José is a place, like Macondo, where anything can happen.

An outspoken critic of magical realism, Chilean writer Alberto Fuguet (2001, 69) describes “García Márquez’s magical and invented town of Macondo where levitation mingled with eternal rain and the eccentric, the overfolkloric, was the only way to grasp a world where true civilization would never be established.” One form the North’s racism takes is a love that is reached by what Žižek (2009b, 126) calls “the elevation of the Other as leading a life that is more harmonious, organic, less competitive, and aiming at cooperation rather than domination.” At the beginning of *The Armies*, the lives of Ismael, Otilía, Eusebio, Geraldina, Eusebito, and Graciélita are elevated in such a way that they contrast favourably with life in the (anaemic) North. Ismael and Otilía live in harmony with nature, tending to their orange trees and goldfish under the watchful eyes of the cats. Rosero implies that Ismael and the cats have a telepathic connection, but dashes any hope for feline versions of the “trained monkey who read minds” that gypsies bring to Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (García Márquez 1972, 16). Ismael wonders what the cats might be trying to tell him: “Nothing,” he says, “there was no understanding them” (1). When a pain in Ismael’s knee becomes unbearable, he visits a folk healer high in the mountains. With a gourd of cane liquor for anaesthetic, the healer manipulates bone and cartilage and cures Ismael’s knee. In exchange, Ismael agrees to bring the folk healer a chicken. Ismael, Geraldina, and Eusebio are sexually uninhibited. Neither Geraldina nor Eusebio are perturbed by Ismael’s voyeurism: it seems as if they enjoy it in ways we cannot, committed as we are to the protection of individuals’ rights to privacy and personal space.

Cottrel (2014, 90) writes that “while fantasy might not provide us with the object itself, it can provide something of equal consequence: the scene of attaining the privileged object that renders attainment as a possibility.” Read in this way, the beginning of *The Armies* is fantasy par excellence. The organic unity of exotic cultures, their spiritual authenticity and lack of sexual inhibition, implies a non-lacking Other with access to some ineffable object

that the North lost in the civilising process. Importantly, however, the same object threatens to transform a utopia of *jouissance* into a dystopia. The Southern Other is outside of society, and there they remain as the North, like spectators in a Roman circus, watches the South's (inauthentic and only ever temporary) civilization collapse, as it does in *The Armies*, to reveal (fantasy disguised as) the underlying truth that the Other exists. The first page of *The Armies* establishes two voyeuristic relationships: Ismael's and the reader's. Before the radical movement of (re-)realisation that destroys Ismael's utopian fantasy, Geraldina is exploited as the object of his desire. Similarly, the rustics of San José are exploited as the objects on which Northern readers project the fantasies that support their desire. As the title of Salecl's book—*(Per)versions of Love and Hate*—suggests, love and hate for the Other are two sides of the same coin, both perversions of the relationship between subjects that psychoanalysis seeks to establish. Lacan (1998, 276) concludes his eleventh seminar offering his pupils hope that psychoanalysis may make love, not a perversion of it but the real thing, possible: "Love, which, it seems to some I have down-graded, can be posited only in that beyond, where, at first, it renounces its object." Ismael's love for Geraldina ends when its object comes too close, but as Ismael's fantasmatic frame disintegrates the reader's fantasmatic frame is being pulled out from under them.

The fantasmatic frame through which Colombia is viewed tends to include an Other who occupies one or another extreme set of conditions, but precludes the possibility of striking a balance between the extremes. The salience of the fantasised Colombia is exemplified by one of the reactions to it: the McOndo literary movement that emerged in 1996 with the publication of an anthology of the same name, edited and introduced by Fuguet and Sergio Gómez, another Chilean writer. Fuguet (2001, 69) writes, "The word 'McOndo' itself began as a joke": the word evokes Macondo at the same time as it evokes McDonald's restaurants and condominiums. For Fuguet (2001, 69), the McOndo movement "was a

defensive and somewhat adolescent response to the user-friendly magical-realism software that politically correct writers were using to spin tales that would give audiences exactly what they expected: an exotic land where anything goes and eventually nothing matters.” Fuguet’s reference to software recalls the Lacanian big Other, the repository of knowledge, expectations, and prejudices into which the subject is installed. In the Lacanian sense, nothing matters because fantasy divests the subject of substance and the possibility of their substantial presence in the picture constituted by their fantasmatic frame.

Pollack (2009, 347) ascribes much of the international success of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Bolaño’s *The Savage Detectives* to the fact that each novel “foments a (pre)conception of alterity that satisfies the fantasies and collective imagination of U.S. cultural consumers.” The popularity of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* outside of Colombia and Latin America owes much to the appetite for local colour. As for *The Savage Detectives*, translated into English thirty-seven years after García Márquez’s novel, Pollack (2009, 359) suspects that many non-Latin Americans were reading it as voyeurs: “This is Latin America, after all, a space in which to satisfy one’s desires for rebellions and adventures of all stripes: political, sexual, spiritual, substance-induced, literary.” At the end of her article, Pollack (2009, 363) writes, “With the release in 2008 of an English translation of *2666*—the novel regarded as his chef-d’oeuvre by Spanish-language readers and critics—it will be fascinating to see whether Bolaño’s work is reassessed.” Bolaño places the subject of desire at the centre of femicide, an atrocity grounded in gendered violence and, beneath or beyond context, on the abyssal ground where love and hate coalesce in the image of the Other and its *jouissance*. This thesis has argued that by doing so, Bolaño universalises violence and holds an unquiet mirror up to the world.

The last two decades saw the emergence in Colombian literature of a subgenre catering to an appetite for stories about sex, substances, and violence known as the

“sicaresque,” which Catalina Quesada (2013, 218) calls “a kind of picaresque, in which the hero is the drug cartel assassin, not the *picaro* (rogue).” Looming above the *sicarios*, as the drug cartel assassins are known, and stories about them is the figure of Pablo Escobar, the drug lord who, Chaparro Valderrama (2007, xix) writes, was “Colombia’s most famous Mafioso”: a man “responsible for a daring criminal enterprise as fantastical as it was sinister.” The previous chapter of this thesis discussed the scene in *The Armies* that subverts the (anti-)heroic image of the *sicario* and the drug lord. The drug lord who distracts Ismael at the train station where he first meets Otilía is innocent and childlike, while the kid that shoots the drug lord in the head is dead-eyed and “bone-jutting thin” (14). Refused the glamorised violence of the sicaresque, the reader finds little support for a political adventure in *The Armies*. The soldiers who move like shadows through San José could be paramilitaries, guerrillas, or the army. Whoever they are, they fail to satisfy anyone’s political agenda, left or right, and their violence is indiscriminate but unromanticised. Perhaps Rosero, like Bolaño, is disillusioned with the politics of the left and the right after experiencing the bloodletting between them in Colombia as Bolaño experienced it in Chile. If this is the case then Rosero, whose international success (unlike Bolaño’s) is only burgeoning, has yet to be let off the hook for his abstention from the field of politics.

Anne McLean’s translation of *The Armies* won the 2009 *Independent Foreign Fiction Prize*. In terms of his international exposure, Rosero, like Bolaño, is a writer for the globalised age. However, unlike Bolaño (2012, 357), who, when asked, “Are you Chilean, Spanish, or Mexican?” answered, “I’m Latin American,” certain critics seem to want Rosero to act as an ambassador for Colombia. Scott Esposito (2009, n. pag.) begins his review of *The Armies* with the comment: “Colombia is almost certainly among the most difficult places on Earth for an outsider to understand.” Thus, Esposito (2009, n. pag.) writes, “Reading [*The Armies*], one hopes for a document that will articulate the fabric of everyday life in this

extreme environment.” *The Armies* did not meet Esposito’s expectations. Discussing the scene where Father Albornoz, San José’s priest, comforts a group of parishioners while Ismael watches from the steps of the presbytery, Esposito (2009, n. pag.) identifies “the kind of failure *The Armies* indulges in too often.” Esposito (2009, n. pag.) writes of Ismael, “His thoughts feel too scripted, his response to the priest’s display far too rational and measured, and they fail to convey anything particular to separate the Colombian experience from similar ones in other parts of the world.” Ismael’s response is too rational for Esposito, but the alternative is often to reinforce the perception of Colombia as a place of exception where the actors and victims of violence are ruled by “primitive irrational warring passions” (Žižek 2000, 5). *The Armies* is careful not to contribute to the cliché of Colombia as essentially violent.

To the extent that Rosero and other Colombian writers are subject to criticism for failing to exceptionalise the Colombian experience, they remain under the shadow of García Márquez, which is to say the shadow of an image of the father of magical realism that looms large in the North. Considering Colombia’s history of violence, Chaparro Valderrama (2007, xvi) writes, “The response of Colombian literature to such an astonishing reality has been to depict it in a no less astonishing way.” For example, he describes the response of García Márquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* to a massacre of striking banana plantation workers by the Colombian army in 1928:

In the author’s fictional retelling of the event he magnified the severity of the massacre to satisfy the aesthetic purposes of his work, and his readers, taking a poetic truth for a literal one, quoted excerpts of the novel as if it were a history book. (Chaparro Valderrama 2007, xvi)

In spite of the popularity of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, its depiction of catastrophic violence failed to translate into action because a collective libidinal investment like that which transforms the Mexico-United States barrier into something more than itself is

responsible for making violence the cliché with which Colombia is identified. The cliché works like the border fence, reinforcing the ontological distinction between the North and South.

Quesada (2013, 217) includes Rosero alongside five other Colombian writers who “recreate some of the many forms national violence takes.” She also reiterates the danger of writing violence in a way that conforms to the cliché of Colombian violence:

On occasion, this proliferation of literary representations of violence in its different manifestations (guerrillas, paramilitary, drug-trafficking, murderers for hire) can become a new kind of exoticism for European and North American readers. It can be seen as a macabre, but also attractive and even harmless, trait since it is confined to a distant Third World. (Quesada 2013, 218)

As is suggested by the title of *The Armies*, there is a great deal of ambiguity about who is attacking San José and each mention of the present or previous attacks makes things more uncertain. Ismael first mentions the violence when he describes how and why Graciélita came to work for Geraldina’s family: “Orphaned early—her parents had died when our town was last attacked by whichever army it was, whether the paramilitaries or guerrillas” (3). Later, Ismael recognises one of his former pupils: “When she was a little girl, at primary school, behind the dusty schoolyard cacao tree, I saw her hitch up the skirt of her uniform and show herself split in the middle to a little boy”; the same boy “was not yet twenty when he was killed, in the street, by a stray bullet, without anyone knowing who, where from, how” (26). Captain Berrío, stationed in San José and the only soldier with a name, stops his jeep in the plaza, the enemy at his heels, and sees Ismael surrounded by other unarmed civilians: “‘Guerrillas,’ he shouts all of a sudden, pointing at us, ‘you are the guerrillas’” (97). The fact that no one in *The Armies* is what Žižek (2009b, 1) would call a “clearly identifiable agent of violence,” and the obverse implication that no one is innocent, supports reading the novel as an appeal for us to traverse the fantasy of Latin American violence. The representation of

violence void of overly identifiable Colombian traits not only draws attention to gendered violence and the universal in it, but accords with reality.

As though describing the situation in San José, Taussig describes the confusion that reigns in the town where he spent two weeks witnessing a *limpieza*:

Nobody seems to have a clear idea of who they are, what they are, and what they want. Nobody knows what to do. People here are much too scared to confront them, organize against them, or join them. What's more, they seem to disappear and appear at will within the town itself, like phantoms. (Taussig 2003, 22)

Twenty six pages from the end of *The Armies*, Ismael and a group of locals discover that “the streets are being invaded by slow silent figures, which emerge blurry from the last horizon of the corners, appear here, there, almost lazy, vanish for a time and reappear, numerous, from the edges of the cliff” (189). Again, we do not know if the armies are paramilitaries, guerrillas, or something else. Whoever they are, they come across the same as the soldiers whose *limpieza* Taussig (2003, 133) describes: “A void that kills.” Naming a culprit would be counterproductive to Rosero's attempt in *The Armies* to represent the atmosphere of utter confusion that prevails in conflicts like Colombia's that span generations, accumulating influence and direction from across the globe. Worse still, it would obscure the ethical edifice that appears before the reader after Ismael's abyssal Act alters every object of desire.

Naming a culprit would constitute a version of the detective's act, which “compromises the ‘inner,’ libidinal truth and discharges us of all guilt for the realization of our desire, insofar as this realization is imputed to the culprit alone” (Žižek 1991, 59). Depending on one's political preference, the guerrillas and/or the paramilitary may appear so utterly unjustified in their actions that they reinforce the distinction between violence in the service of good and violence for the *jouissance* of evil. Here, one should recall the narrator of *Senselessness*, who becomes so fascinated by the enjoyment that transformed soldiers into

rapists and sadistic torturers that he is compelled to repeat their violence in a series of psychotic episodes that culminate in the near-complete destruction of his symbolic universe. To avoid a fate worse than death, the narrator externalises his *jouissance* in the Other during an imaginary meeting with Octavio Pérez Mena, the architect of genocide. Esposito (2009, n. pag.) writes, “Undoubtedly there is something universal about Ismael’s story, [...] but more often than not the commonness of Ismael’s thoughts and actions feel less like an appeal to the universal in strife than a failure of the imagination.” It is in the absence of specificity that universality emerges in *The Armies* and with it the possibility of action. By the end of *The Armies*, Ismael, calling himself “Nobody,” knows that he is culpable and pays the price for the access to his desire.

The Armies is far from an exhaustive review of the conflict in any part of Colombia. It does, however, share some of the insights that have emerged from another resource that contributes to understanding often overlooked aspects of conflicts, Colombian and other. In 2007 and 2008, the Colombian artist Juan Manuel Echavarría ran workshops designed to encourage Colombian ex-combatants to paint images of their own participation in the violence. Ninety of the paintings were included in the exhibition *The War We Have Not Seen* that opened in October 2009 at the Museum of Modern Art in Bogotá, curated by the Uruguayan artist Ana Tiscornia. In the exhibition catalogue, Tiscornia suggests that the paintings cut through the spectacle of Colombian violence as it appears in the media, but also, as this chapter suggests, in literature:

These visual confessions—terrifying, many of them beautiful, heartbreakingly cruel, extremely naïve, painful, irritating, unbearably sad, certain of them sophisticated, all of them unprecedented—have the power to position us inside a semiotic framework unlike that of the alienating media spectacle, that by bombarding the thoughts and impulses that lead to a transformative action with photographic images more than information, seems destined to lead only to a kind of indecent voyeurism or, in the best of cases, to a gradual acceptance of the abnormal as normal. (Tiscornia 2009, 25-26)

The media spectacle that Tiscornia mentions reinforces the primacy of subjective violence and seems to prove that it belongs to the Other as a logical consequence of their access to *jouissance*. Complacency, accepting the abnormal as normal, is a product of objective violence: attachment to the binary of abnormal and normal that localises abnormality to a particular place, person, or group of persons so that it remains there/theirs exclusively. Neither *The Armies* nor the ex-combatants' paintings foreground violence. Both, intentionally or not, move audiences from a utopia to a dystopia of *jouissance*.

Historian and art critic Álvaro Medina is another contributor to the exhibition catalogue of *The War We Have Not Seen*. The thirty-odd ex-combatants who participated in Echavarría's workshops had no formal training in art and Medina makes a connection between them and the peasant painters who were driven to illustrate their experiences of the Colombian mountains and jungles. The connection gives rise to questions of authenticity. Medina describes the school of unscrupulous artists who, in the 1960s and 1970s, copied the peasant painters of the early twentieth century, reproducing their settings, which Medina (2009, 70) writes, were "so similar to that of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*," for commercial gain. Contrasted with authentic peasant painters, Medina (2009, 69) calls the imitators unimaginative: they are "gratuitous but not substantial." He (2009, 71) writes, "Their efforts gave rise to a candy-colored world of cookie cutter houses, trees, mountains, skies and clouds." Thrown into a world of laughing macaws, orange and almond trees, cats and fish, the reader can be forgiven for thinking that San José is a gratuitous cookie cutter copy of Macondo. However, just as *The Armies* does, many of the ex-combatants' paintings, by dint of their construction, sabotage what at first glance appears to be a utopia of full *jouissance*.

Medina (2009, 71) draws a distinction between the industrious imitators and the ex-combatants assembled by Echavarría: "The painters in *The War We Have Not Seen* don't

imagine, they testify.” Something similar can be said of Rosero, who is hesitant to bring his armies into the open or obsess over the spectacle of violence in the way the narrator of *Senselessness* would have in his story about the civil registrar tortured by machete-wielding soldiers. As Medina (2009, 71) says of the participants in *The War We Have Not Seen*, Rosero is “motivated above all by fundamental ideas, so important they command interest inside and outside Colombia.” *The Armies* is about the nonexistence of the Other, which, as Medina notes, is an effect of the ex-combatants’ art as well:

As with naive painting, when it’s good it has a seductive charm; the initial approximation to these works of art tends to be equally naive. The colors attract, the drawing provokes a smile, the image hypnotizes, and the whole is pleasant. It is a visually good-natured world. But then, with the second approach, the horror becomes evident and the viewer loses his or her original innocence. Smiles evaporate. The work is no longer innocent. We stand before meticulously represented episodes in which blood flowed and death reigned in territories that look like paradise. (Medina 2009, 72)

In two different modes of narration, “The goodness, the tropical country, stands out and immediately astonishes. The badness, the violence, is discovered later, although it lies at the heart of the work” (Medina 2009, 73). The loss of innocence is crucial to traversing the fantasy; it is the moment we become part of the reality we observe.

Also contributing to the exhibition catalogue of *The War We Have Not Seen* is María Clemencia Castro Vergara, a psychologist and psychoanalyst who directs the Research Project on Psychoanalysis, Violence and War at the National University of Colombia. In her essay, Vergara (2009, 53) discusses what she calls “traces of the humane” in the paintings, including one painting where an eye draws the spectator in:

The person observing the painting, believing him or herself [to be] outside of the terrible scene, is being observed, confronted head on. Whoever the painting stares at inevitably becomes a witness. Moreover, to observe and then discover oneself observed leaves one trapped within the painting. So what actually is the scene? This artistic ruse seems to claim that no one, regardless of how involved they think they are, can remain outside war. (Vergara 2009, 53-54)

The captivating image of the eye ruptures the consistency of the painting as an object in context, beckoning to us despite ourselves, despite our fantasmatic frame and the distance it allows us to keep from the object-Other of the painting. In Lacanian theory, the scopic drive is that which motivates us to look and take pleasure in looking. Lacan (1998, 76-77) writes that “what specifies the scopic field and engenders the satisfaction proper to it is the fact that, for structural reasons, the fall of the subject always remains unperceived, for it is reduced to zero.” The eye in the painting Vergara describes perceives the subject, which gives rise to the possibility of producing from scratch (zero) another, engaged subject.

The painting Vergara describes induces what Žižek (2006c, 4, emphasis in original) calls “an insurmountable *parallax gap*, the confrontation of two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible.” One perspective holds to the world without us: the subject observes this world but cannot affect (or be affected by)—in the case of the painting by an ex-combatant in Colombia’s conflicts—the horrors going on “down there.” The other perspective reveals the role of the subject of desire in the horror. Ismael’s reflexive turn at the end of *The Armies* is the occurrence of a parallax gap. One perspective holds to its object—the body of Geraldina between the arms of a wicker rocking chair—and the other brings Ismael too close to his own disturbing excess. Žižek writes:

The “minimal difference” which sustains the parallax gap is thus the difference on account of which the “same” series of real occurrences which, in the eyes of a neutral observer, are just part of ordinary reality are, in the eyes of an engaged participant, inscriptions of fidelity to an Event. (Žižek 2006c, 167)

The confrontation of Ismael’s two perspectives produces a subject committed to act, to non-response and annihilation rather than to the continuation of desire as desire of and for the Other. Moments before Ismael discovers what has become of Geraldina, he finds Eusebito dead at the bottom of the empty pool. Staring into the pool “as into a pit” (213), Ismael reveals the fate of the objects that had been metonymic of the exotic Other and that continue

to be metonymic of the Colombian Other who, if not surrounded by magic, must be beset by violence. Ismael notices “the petrified corpses of the macaws” (213) joining Eusebito in his makeshift tomb.

Halfway through *The Armies*, a bomb drops in Ismael’s garden. The macaws are killed by the force of the explosion. The same explosion destroys the wall (the barrier to the realm of feminine *jouissance*) between Ismael and Geraldina. With the last obstacle to Ismael’s inexorable journey of realisation removed, readers return to the parodic slice of provincial Colombia that begins the novel, approaching the familiar objects from *One Hundred Years of Solitude* a second time. Ismael stumbles outside to see the extent of the damage: “At the back, the wall that separates my property from the Brazilian’s smokes where it has been blasted in half: there is a breach the size of two men, there are pieces of the ladder scattered all over” (104). Ismael says, “I found the fountain—of polished sandstone—blown apart; on the ground shiny with water the orange fish still quiver” (104). He throws the gold fish into the sky and, shortly after, discovers that “half the trunk of one of the orange trees, split lengthwise, still trembles and vibrates like a harp, coming apart inch by inch; there are piles of smashed oranges, sprinkled like a strange multitude of yellow drops all over the garden” (104). Making his way through the fresh ruins of Eden, Ismael discovers four or six soldiers: “They jump into my garden, pointing their rifles at me” (104). They leave Ismael alone and he continues toward the breach in the wall through thickening smoke:

The smoke is coming from another of the trees, burnt and split from the top; further down, on the very white pulp of the trunk stripped of its bark, I see a bloodstain, and, on top of the roots, pierced with splinters, the corpse of one of the cats. [...] I enter my neighbour’s garden, which has not suffered as much damage as mine—except for the absence of the macaws, their laughter, their strolls, although I soon find them, stiff, floating in the pool. (Rosero 2010, 106)

Rosero is careful not to spare any aspect of his Colombian idyll from the peculiarly grotesque ravishes of Colombian violence, the point being that the subject Žižek (2006c, 167) calls a “neutral observer” produces an Other for whom such extremes are ordinary reality.

The reduction of the contents of the garden to a smear of blood and pulp coating rubble and splintered wood is an expression of the hysterical reaction of the subject of analysis to the ambiguity of the *objet a*, to not knowing what object is in it more than itself. The garden is traumatised by the reader’s second approach to it: “*I give myself to you*, the patient says again, *but this gift of my person—as they say—Oh, mystery! is changed inexplicably into a gift of shit*” (Lacan 1998, 268, emphasis in original). Lacan knew that for psychoanalysis to be successful the patient had to pass through their fantasmatic relationship with the analyst by abolishing the object-cause of the analyst’s desire for them. This was only possible because, ideally, the analyst had traversed the fantasy him or herself. Žižek describes the analyst’s post-fantasmatic relationship with the Other:

The desire of the analyst (insofar as it is “pure” desire) is consequently not a particular desire (for example, the desire of interpretation, the desire to reveal the analysand’s symptomatic knot by way of interpretation), but [...] quite simply non-pathological desire, a desire which is not tied to any fantasmatic “pathological” object, but which is supported by the empty place in the Other. (Žižek 2005, 46)

The task is to aim for a similarly pure desire. It is a labour of love to empty the Other of its contents, which becomes all the more important considering a situation like Colombia, where the exotic has turned to shit before the eyes of a Northern audience that accepts things the way they are.

Žižek (2010, 23) describes “an excessive excremental zero-value element which, while formally part of the system, has no proper place within it.” When a particular person or group of persons comes to occupy this position outside of the system/society they become (as Kessler intuitively, but accepts as inevitable) like the Christians in the Roman circus. The

spectacle of the Other's *jouissance*, confined to places of exception like the coliseums of the Roman Empire, belies the fact that the excess of *jouissance* pertains to the whole of the system/society that exists with reference to such places. The problem is that most obvious *jouissance* of the community that organises its enjoyment around the image of the Other as enemy. However, there are other particular desires that, like the desire of interpretation, induce *jouissance* within the community that organises its enjoyment around efforts to promote tolerance of the Other. Their desires are tied to, as Žižek (2005, 46) writes, fantasmatic pathological objects that give rise to the image of exotic authenticity. These objects have no place in the North, where they would be diluted by the pressures of an anaemic society; no longer sublime, zero-value elements, they would be adulterated and commodified, joining an ever-growing glut of kitschy objects and options for consumption.

Once again, Salecl and Žižek agree that it is not enough to promote tolerance of the Other, the crucial step is to choose neither love nor hate in the current configuration of the dyad. Salecl diagnoses the problem and points to psychoanalysis as the solution:

If a community's victim can be said to be its symptom, it then becomes evident that the community holds itself together by means of a vital attachment to an intense negative pleasure—or *jouissance*. Psychoanalysis has always held the subject responsible for his or her *jouissance*. (Salecl 1998, 123)

Intense negative pleasure saturates what Tiscornia (2009, 26) calls the “alienating media spectacle” precisely because the audience themselves experience alienation. Beaming images of suffering into people's living rooms, laptops and devices has the opposite effect; far from reality coming too close, it allows the audience to de-realise themselves and affirms the existence of the Other. Žižek (2010, 23, emphasis in original) writes that the first step toward letting go of the Other should be “to *universalize* their excremental status to the whole of humanity.” He (2010, 24-25) argues that “the shit of the earth is the universal subject,” but that “elevating the exotic Other into an indifferent divinity is strictly equal to treating it like

shit.” It is necessary for Žižek to talk in terms of excrement because by its very nature shit is something the subject is able to exclude, to enjoy getting rid of. The subject treats the Other like shit instead of (or by way of avoiding) treating him or herself like shit.

In the penultimate chapter of *The Armies*, Ismael sits on a rock to watch the last few stragglers leave San José: “I shall eat what they have left in their kitchens, I shall sleep in their beds, I shall recognize their stories by their vestiges, guessing at their lives by the clothes they left behind, *my time shall be another time*” (206, emphasis added). In his book *Out of Time* (2011), Lacanian film theorist Todd McGowan discusses the role that time plays in the subjectivities of desire and drive. McGowan (2011, 26) writes, “Time inserts itself between the desiring subject and the object that would appear to satisfy that desire: desire exists in the interval between an initial awareness of the object of desire and the moment of obtaining that object.” At the beginning of *The Armies*, Geraldina is close enough to Ismael for him to lean, outstretched, over the wall and hand her an orange, but the distance between him and the Other remains the same: they are “separated by the wall, and time” (7). Geraldina takes the orange from Ismael and her cheeks redden with embarrassment when she feels his eyes on her body, but Ismael says, “My old man’s face, my future corpse, my saintliness in old age quietened her” (8-9). Ismael’s symptom is an amalgam comprised of the wall between him and Geraldina and his belief that, close as he is to the end of his life, there is no time for anything to go wrong.

After the explosion in his garden, Ismael notices that “the octagonal living-room clock—its face of painted glass, an Alka-Seltzer promotion that Otilía bought in Popayán—has split into a thousand lines, the hour stopped forever at five o’clock on the dot” (103). The events that take place in the perpetual five o’clock that follows suggest that the relatively straightforward time through which desire moves from object to object is now the telescoped time of the death drive, where objects are revisited and others disappear. As suggested by the

title of his book, McGowan (2011, xi) believes that the subject of drive exists outside of time: “Rather than looking forward to a future in which desire might be realized, the subject of the death drive views past, present, and future on the same plane.” Sitting on the rock, Ismael imagines Otilía in front of him, “And with her some children who must be my grandchildren and who look at me appalled, all holding hands” (207). The horrified looks of his future grandchildren refer to the shame he is about to experience at witnessing his own participation in Geraldina’s rape. To paraphrase Žižek (2010, 29, emphasis in original), “[Ismael’s] discovery *changes the past*, deprives the lost object of the *objet a*.” Ismael’s past is recast in terms of a present where love and hate converge. Similarly, the future is emptied of its content. Before Otilía, Ismael imagines seeing his daughter, who left long ago for the city. She sits down beside him and he tells her, “I hope you understand all the horror that I am, inside, ‘or all the love’—this last I say out loud, laughing—I hope you are drawing near in sympathy with me” (206-7). In this moment out of time, a truth emerges that affects Ismael’s past, present, and future identity.

Žižek (2008, 116, emphasis in original) writes that the “ego-ideal” is a “symbolic identification, identification with the very place *from where* we are being observed, *from where* we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love.” Other people determine the content of the subject’s ego-ideal. For example, Otilía is aware of Ismael’s indiscretions, but nevertheless affirms the pleasure he takes in voyeurism by helping him reduce himself to a pure, harmless gaze. Otilía calls Ismael a “pitiful old man” (12) and tells him that “you’ve never stopped spying on women. I would have left you forty years ago if I thought you would take things any further. But no. [...] You were and are just a naïve, inoffensive peeping Tom” (17). Ismael protests: “You’ve made me ashamed to face people” (23), he tells Otilía, but immediately afterwards is spying on Geraldina across the table at a café in plain sight of her and two of his former pupils. The pitiful, naïve old man who is

nevertheless inoffensive, who exercises saintly forbearance in the face of feminine *jouissance*, is Ismael's ego-ideal. However, the battle for San José destroys what Žižek (2008, 46) calls the "exterior symbolic network offering [Ismael] the points of symbolic identification, conferring on him certain symbolic mandates" that are supports of and obstacles to his desire. Žižek (1991, 62) writes that psychoanalysis should bring the subject into confrontation with "a truth that would hurt him/her by demolishing his/her ego-ideal." From where Ismael looks at himself in the last scene of *The Armies*, he appears identical to the soldiers gathered around Geraldina's corpse.

The Armies unties Ismael's symptomal knot: the concatenation of objects and events that turn in on themselves and perpetuate desire. One part of his symptomal knot is feminine *jouissance*; the other parts are the fantasmatic obstacles barring his way to the utopia of full, feminine *jouissance*. Ismael's existence is provisional on Geraldina as the Other. She is his "only explanation for staying alive" (28). When the obstacles are removed and Ismael really sees Geraldina, not as the Other but as a woman, deprived of the *objet a*, Ismael moves beyond desire. Renouncing his object, Ismael is in a position to actually love, suspended there between the knowledge that he will die—that "they will shoot," that "this is how it will be" (215)—and the bullets leaving the soldiers' guns.

After what he calls the "promising start" of *The Armies*, Esposito (2009, n. pag.) writes that his interest waned with the arrival of the soldiers in San José; that is, right when things should start to get interesting. Esposito writes:

One wishes that the sense of perversion that pollutes [the] early pages [of *The Armies*] would have stained more of the novel, for it is in these early pages that Rosero captures the strange yet not wholly inaccessible moral space that is emblematic of a part of the world where well-armed, privately financed armies regularly fight to the death for tiny, impoverished towns and villages. (Esposito 2009, n. pag.)

Just as there are well-armed, privately financed armies—Arizona Border Recon and the Mexican cartels—on either side of the Mexico-United States barrier, the strange, almost inaccessible space is not one of exception but is universal. Perversions (of love and hate) continue to the end of *The Armies* as the reader draws nearer and nearer to Ismael, if not in sympathy, then in their symptoms. In *Tarrying with the Negative* (1993), Žižek says something that touches the perverse core of how and why the North enjoys the South. Discussing not just the Balkans but all of the countries that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Žižek (1993, 200) writes, “Eastern Europe functions for the West as its Ego-Ideal: the point from which the West sees itself in a likable, idealized form, as worthy of love.” The ultimate perversion is the possibility that Northern readers derive what Salecl (1998, 123) calls an “intense negative enjoyment” when he or she looks at or imagines him or herself from a place of exception as an anaemic person who is nevertheless rational and able to live in peace. Ismael—a naïve, inoffensive old man—ogles the Other while the North—neutral, benevolent observers—awaits the violence it has come to expect from Colombia and other parts of the South. Colombian violence appears to prove the existence of the Other, but it is the subject’s *jouissance* that is borne out by images of violence that have been used to the point of becoming cliché.

Conclusion

All of the novels that have been discussed in this thesis shift the focus from Latin American violence to global violence. They offer positions from which it is difficult to extricate subjectivity from violence that appears foreign because of its scale, because it takes place elsewhere, or because it has been so thoroughly contextualised that it appears to have been settled: the causes and culprits of the violence proven by facts. This thesis has shown how the novels have decontextualised violence. It has argued that they have opened a space for readers to recognise themselves as subjects of desire invested in the *jouissance* of the Other and associated social fantasies.

In *2666*, the rapid growth and industrialisation of Mexican border cities is repeated like a mantra by those who are questioned about the femicide by characters such as Fate, Kessler, and González Rodríguez:

“This is a big city, a real city,” said Chucho Flores. “We have everything. Factories, maquiladoras, one of the lowest unemployment rates in Mexico, a cocaine cartel, a constant flow of workers from other cities, Central American immigrants, an urban infrastructure that can’t support the level of demographic growth. We have plenty of money and bureaucracy, we have violence and the desire to work in peace.” (Bolaño 2009, 286).

However, no character is able to make sense of these and other details scattered throughout the 893 pages of *2666* and provide the kind of narrative closure expected of detective stories or investigative journalism. Instead, Bolaño foregrounds the potential in desire for excess among a group of Northern academics. The Archimboldians are driven towards an epicentre of subjective violence by unrelated desires that shift and are whipped into frenzies like the sands of Bolaño’s desert of boredom. “The Part about the Critics” includes a critique of the distinction between civilised and uncivilised or savage that carries through into “The Part

about the Crimes,” denying the reader the possible recourse to an image of the dangerous Other.

Castellanos Moya’s and Rosero’s novels are significantly shorter than Bolaño’s, however both of them also effectively undertake the difficult process of universalising violence. *The Armies* never really focuses on Colombian violence, purposefully obscuring the agents of the violence that grips San José by describing them as though they were ghost armies. Indeed, Rosero has been criticised for not doing enough to contextualise the real and omnipresent threat of violence faced by the residents of rural Colombia. However, what Rosero has done in *The Armies*, and by the inclusion of “Brides by Night” in the evocatively titled collection *Flight of the Condor: Stories of Violence and War from Colombia*, is, firstly, to foreground the issue of gender (as opposed to Colombian) violence. What happens to Geraldina does not evoke anything specific to the cocaine war or guerrilla warfare, just as Ismael is not a Colombian or Latin American caricature. Insofar as violence against women is not restricted to a place or moment of exception and has as much to do with objective as subjective violence, its presence is perhaps more discomfiting than knowing, for example, the number of people killed in a particular massacre because it points towards the subjectivity of desire. The focus on Ismael’s voyeurism has allowed for a reading of *The Armies* as an unquiet mirror of that desire which inheres in the North’s fascination with the Colombian conflicts.

Senselessness unsettles the historical and contextual project that culminated in *Guatemala: Nunca Más* by having its narrator aestheticize what was and is real suffering. Like Ismael, the unnamed narrator-protagonist of *Senselessness* follows a trajectory from sexual desire and external observation to *jouissance* and culpability. Looking in detail at *Senselessness* as a critique of the way that the records of violence are necessarily modified in the process of narrativisation is a future avenue of investigation. Tellingly, the most intense

violence in *2666*, which is signalled by the state of the women's bodies discovered in "The Part about the Crimes," is not an exaggeration but a faithful reproduction of what González Rodríguez recorded in *Huesos en el desierto*. Similarly, Castellanos Moya's descriptions of atrocities ranging from torture and cannibalism to infanticide are taken almost word for word from *Guatemala: Nunca Más*. Reading *Senselessness* through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis suggested that Castellanos Moya's narrator embodied what is symptomatic in violence; specifically, the excessive enjoyment that inevitably inserts itself into demonstrably unpleasant situations, acting on the soldiers who committed the crimes and others like the narrator. Although avowedly void of the ethics or morality expected of someone who would be part of a truth commission run by the Catholic Church, the narrator is affected when he reads the testimony of the victims. His compulsion to repeat and enjoy the violence of the past confounds the order of good versus evil. *Senselessness* and *The Armies* suggest that the price the subject must pay for access to the secret of the world hidden in violence is subjective destitution at the same time as they move the reader in that direction.

Both Bolaño and Žižek have been criticised for failing to offer any way out of the subjective destitution that emerges as the end point of their creative and critical projects. In her article "Questions for Bolaño," Franco (2009, 210) describes "the post-political world of Bolaño's novels," a world in which "politics as such are almost completely absent." Discussing *2666*, she (2009, 213) writes that Bolaño "re-imagines the banality of evil but cannot imagine state justice or international human rights," and instead "presents the reader with a universe where law is in abeyance and where random violence is everywhere." In contrast, Andrews (2014, 166) writes, "By [...] showing how normal human desires and fears can lead people to participate in atrocities, Bolaño's fiction anatomizes evil and advances towards a post-theological understanding of its causes." However, this heuristic process is only ever partial. According to Andrews (2014, 166), the reader is never given Bolaño's

answer to the question of evil because “getting to the bottom of it would diminish the unresolved suspense that is a hallmark of Bolaño’s storytelling.” It would also veil the Real of desire and contribute to the kind of inertia and isolation of many in the North that this thesis has argued Bolaño, Castellanos Moya, and Rosero confront in each of their novels.

The Archimboldians and Oscar Fate, Castellanos Moya’s narrator, and Ismael Pasos are fictional constructs. They would not appear in a contextual or historical account of the Juárez femicide, the Guatemalan civil war/genocide and its aftermath, or the Colombian conflicts. Nevertheless, their stories are important because they reveal the libidinal economy of human desires, fears, and *jouissance*. This thesis has chosen to focus on these non-historical, decontextualised characters and their relationships, guided by the psychoanalytic principle that the structural necessity of lack lies at the heart of antagonism as it divides the subject internally and extends into every intersubjective relation. Through this approach, it has used Bolaño’s, Castellanos Moya’s, and Rosero’s writing to model the various aspects of Žižek’s thesis on violence. Castellanos Moya’s narrator exemplifies the fascinating lure of subjective violence and the over-proximity, or even the sameness, of supposedly neutral observers and agents of violence. So too, “The Part about the Critics” forces the reader to step back and disentangle themselves from the directly visible, more explicitly narrated violence of “The Part about the Crimes.” Finally, Ismael opts out of the cycle of violence after having assumed his place in it, if only superficially. His suicidal gesture is, for the most part, inimitable. However, the impossible position he is able to briefly occupy, from which he bears witness to the Real of desire and divests from the fantasy of the Other, is one that we should strive to occupy ourselves. Psychoanalysis has contributed to the field of social critique by continuing to foreground the issue of subjective responsibility for scapegoats and stereotypes, and *2666*, *Senselessness*, and *The Armies* challenge stereotypes pertaining to

Mexico, Central and South America, allowing the reader to begin to traverse the fantasy of Latin American violence.

Echoing the criticisms of Bolaño's unwillingness to support a political project or propose his own, Ian Parker (2004, 110) writes that "Žižek is well-suited to trends in academic cultural theory that would like to restrict themselves to interpreting the world and to treat the idea of changing it as passé." This thesis, however, has worked through some of the supposed incompatibilities between Žižek's critical methodology and other fields such as postcolonial studies that involve explicit political practice. Specifically, it has challenged fantasies about the Latin American Other where they find support in the libidinal economy as well as where they are shaped by concrete cultural contexts. The creative efforts of Bolaño, Castellanos Moya, and Rosero are not abstractions of reality of the kind exemplified by the story about the suffering ghost of the civil registrar of Totonicapán that the narrator of *Senselessness* desires to write. As new realist writers, their sympathies are for the unfinished. They refuse to try and make sense for us of some of the worst atrocities of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but they are not cynical or averse to trying to change the world. Rather, they attempt to universalise violence by having characters and narrators engage in it outside or on the edges of the context of Latin American violence. In doing so, their message is aimed at a pervasive Northern cynicism that allows some to find comfort and closure in the contexts of exception. There is no point knowing the nightmare that the Other faces if it leads only to the stultifying conclusion that reality in the North is a benevolent dream.

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