

# INTRODUCTION

Roberto Bolaño's texts form multiple constellations. Like stars, they stand alone but also invite connections that outline images. These connections are spatial, functions of surface and depth. They are also temporal, and their temporality is a function of light, both the time required for it to meet a reader's eyes and the possibility of its encountering multiple readers in multiple places at multiple moments. Different forms of exposure characterize this ever-shifting spatial and temporal network, the exposure of texts to readers, readers to texts, and texts to texts. The network's complexity becomes increasingly visible upon considering the prominence within Bolaño's texts of other texts and their readers. Spatial and temporal shifts shaped Bolaño's life and career as well. Though he never returned to Mexico after leaving there for Spain in 1977, his texts often travel back in time to the years of adolescence and early adulthood he spent there. Other texts return to the Chile of his childhood. Still others feature the Barcelona and Costa Brava of Bolaño's adulthood and final years. Vaster still are the itineraries that take his characters to Eastern European battlefields in World War II, Liberian villages during that country's First Civil War, Chile under Augusto Pinochet's rule, and the northern Mexico of *maquiladoras* and *feminicidio*. Posthumous publications of

texts written before, after, or at the same time as those that made Bolaño a critical and popular success while he was still alive add to the depth of the temporal connections and displacements that make possible his texts' multiple constellations.

The queer exposures this book traces and explicates establish connections among Bolaño's texts in a way that emphasizes openness, instability, and impermanence. Exposure forms a guiding concept for my readings of Bolaño's texts because of the way it combines connotations of passivity and activity both spatial and temporal. An unread text lies exposed, awaiting readers who expose it to their lives and histories as readers, which are in turn exposed to the influence of the previously unread text. Photographers expose their desires when they take pictures of subjects exposed to them, pictures in turn subject to often unpredictable future encounters with viewers. Photographic reproduction enables multiple exposures of the same negative or initial inscription to different processes of enlargement, alteration, printing, and circulation. Characters whose exposure to history enables them to expose and develop new ways of reading history inspired my initial work on Bolaño and my interest in exploring further the analytical potential of an emphasis on exposure. I am speaking, for example, of the mutual exposure between the Mexican student movement and Tlatelolco massacre of 1968 and Auxilio Lacouture, the narrator of the novel *Amuleto (Amulet)* (1999).<sup>1</sup> The distortions of time and space that characterize Lacouture's point of view led me to consider the interpretive possibilities figured within the Spanish word *intemperie*, whose current usage denotes spatial exposure but whose etymology includes words related to time.<sup>2</sup> A focus on queerness emerged through my interest in exposure as I read and reread several of Bolaño's texts, especially two posthumous ones, the short story "Laberinto" ("Labyrinth") (2007) and the novel *Los sinsabores del verdadero policía (Woes of the True Policeman)* (2011). One gay character in each of these texts, J.-J. Goux and Óscar Amalfitano, respectively, struck me as presenting unexpected returns to multiple texts, published both posthumously and during Bolaño's lifetime. The way in which "Labyrinth" and *Woes* shed light on other texts motivated me to read Bolaño's texts again in search of additional queer characters and themes related to nonnormative sexual practices and subject positions.

The book that has resulted from this rereading aims to address the absence of sustained gender- and sexuality-based analysis of multiple

examples of Bolaño's writing,<sup>3</sup> and it concludes that such an analysis is especially well suited to a critical understanding of how narrative and power are topics that function within and among Bolaño's texts. I situate narrative and power historically, relating them to Bolaño's life and to the topics central to much of his writing. I also situate them in relation to Bolaño's readers and critics, who construct narratives that aspire to varying degrees of authoritativeness. In dialogue with these historical and critical contexts, my analysis demonstrates that the constellation of Bolaño's texts made visible by an emphasis on processes of exposure associated with representations of queer sexuality and photography resists totality, teleology, and subjective coherency. This resistance characterizes both my understanding of an especially critical way in which Bolaño's texts can connect with one another and my hope that Bolaño remains radically open to unpredictable future readings.

Goux and Amalfitano helped me notice more of the small but significant group of gay male characters who move within and among several texts by Bolaño, including Ernesto San Epifanio in *Los detectives salvajes* (*The Savage Detectives*) (1998) and *Amulet*; Luis Sebastián Rosado and Piel Divina, also from *Detectives*; Mauricio Silva in the 2001 short story "El Ojo Silva" ("Mauricio ['The Eye'] Silva"); and Joan Padilla in *Woes*. The presence of gay characters is associated with the broader topics of homoeroticism and homosociality, which appear, for example, in the poem "El burro" ("The Donkey") (2000), and in the title of the poetry anthology Bolaño edited in 1979, and which comprises only the work of male poets, *Muchachos desnudos bajo el arcoiris de fuego: Once jóvenes poetas latinoamericanos* (*Naked Youths under a Rainbow of Fire: Eleven Young Latin American Poets*).

An additional topic related broadly to gender and sexuality and more specifically to homosocial bonding is the trafficking in women associated in Bolaño's writing with the development of characters and poetic voices such as Juan García Madero in *Detectives* and the narrator of the poem "Soni" (2000). At the diegetic level of Bolaño's texts and their engagement with social and political themes, my emphasis on queerness highlights how Bolaño's work develops critical representations of homosocial bonding and the trafficking in women in a way that exposes the repressive consequences of normative sexuality. Normativity, which is instantiated in patriarchal and masculinist structures, reproduces dominant social, economic, political, and cultural conditions, including those that permit

deadly violence against marginalized populations, such as the victims of femicide in *2666* (2004), political dissidents in the novels *Estrella distante* (*Distant Star*) (1996) and *Nocturno de Chile* (*By Night in Chile*) (2000), and gay characters like Divina and San Epifanio.

As is the case with gay characters and topics related to queer and normative sexuality, photographs, photographers, and photography also appear repeatedly in Bolaño's work. Some of the most interesting examples include "Labyrinth," "Mauricio ('The Eye') Silva," and another short story, "Fotos" ("Photos") (2001), as well as *Distant Star*. My analysis expands the category of photography beyond such concrete examples to include as well motifs of immobility and descriptions of moments of contemplation, both of which simulate photographic exposure and its products. Stylistic affinities between Bolaño's texts and photography include multilayered framing devices, fragmentary sentence and paragraph structures, detailed visual language, and shifting chronologies that blur narrative boundaries of past, present, and future. These motifs and stylistics are especially notable in *Detectives* and *2666*; several poems, such as "Amanecer" ("Daybreak") (1978); and the long prose poem originally titled "Gente que se aleja" ("People Walking Away") (2007) and published during Bolaño's lifetime as *Amberes* (*Antwerp*) (2002). My analysis foregrounds the way photography interrupts the present by exposing it to the persistence of past moments and the possibility of future readings. This effect of photography serves as an important guide to my approach, which is also informed by the nonlinear temporality of Bolaño's composition and publication history—for example, the simultaneous production of many texts, the way different texts cite one another and share characters and plotlines, and the posthumous publication of several texts.

Important to my emphasis on photography is the interplay of image and text, and the different ways in which they work in tandem or in tension with one another.<sup>4</sup> Related to this interplay, my focus on queerness and photography relies upon and advances the idea that Bolaño's texts lend themselves to readings that are open-ended and unpredictable. Several scholars have studied this aspect of Bolaño's writing. Analyses of visual representation in Bolaño underline its destabilizing, fracturing, and dispersive effects.<sup>5</sup> Expansion and incompleteness are hallmarks of Chris Andrews's work on Bolaño.<sup>6</sup> Oswaldo Zavala explains the importance of openness and interconnectedness in relation to the development of

characters, “whose constitution is vulnerable, ambiguous and constantly reformulated.”<sup>7</sup> Fernando Moreno’s analyses of Bolaño emphasize how the latter’s writing resists textual unity,<sup>8</sup> and how it underscores incompleteness, doubling, and a profound questioning of literary representation and experience.<sup>9</sup> Other scholars consider the relation between the complexity of Bolaño’s work and the topics of intertextuality,<sup>10</sup> constant interconnection,<sup>11</sup> an aesthetics defined by rewriting and palimpsests,<sup>12</sup> and a rhizomatic reading of the long-developed and repeatedly appearing character, “B.”<sup>13</sup>

The way in which queer theory elucidates the open-endedness and unpredictability of readings of Bolaño’s writing is connected with a general critique of categories and their purported stability, a critique that stems from and reinforces the antinormative stance queer theory develops dialectically along the border between what is allegedly normal or abnormal. In a pioneering text of the critique of classificatory power, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that normative sexuality is inextricably linked with that which is deemed abnormal. Sedgwick introduces the concept of the “*nonce* taxonomy,”<sup>14</sup> which is an insistence upon difference that resists normativizing categories. The *nonce* taxonomy is a strategy used to elucidate the ways in which the production of knowledge can be “narrowly and severely normative, [and] difference-eradicating.”<sup>15</sup> The strategy of the *nonce* taxonomy taps into “rich, unsystematic resources [ . . . ] for mapping out the possibilities, dangers, and stimulations of [the] human social landscape.”<sup>16</sup> Certain writers, according to Sedgwick, embody this project of *nonce* taxonomy, of “the making and unmaking and remaking and redissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings concerning all the kinds it may take to make up a world.”<sup>17</sup> A queer reading of his work shows that Bolaño is one of these writers. A brief reference to this book’s first chapter helps support this argument.

In the first chapter I conduct a close reading of “Labyrinth,” a story whose narrator invents a series of stories based on a photograph he explicates for the reader. He exercises narrative control over the figures in the image, a type of control similar to that which must be performed in the pronouncement of a taxonomy or the definition of a category. Liliane Louvel proposes that photographs present a site of temptation for and resistance to such control. In her discussion of photographs within texts, she writes: “Photography irrepressively triggers the spectator’s speech.”<sup>18</sup>

Bolaño's story is, in some ways, then, an example of what Louvel describes as "the more or less heavy saturation of a text by [a] photographic image,"<sup>19</sup> its narrator's speech in part produced by and in part struggling for control over the photograph at the center of the story's structure, characterization, and plot. Louvel describes this struggle as potentially extreme, the photograph capable of "perform[ing] an act of violence on the text."<sup>20</sup> In her visual analysis of *2666*, Anna Kraus also describes the disruptive effect an image can have on the text that purports or attempts to control it, an effect that can undermine the autonomy or authority of both image and text. Kraus writes, "Once the relationships inscribed in different textual levels, between cause and effect, model and copy, object and the representation of the object for the subject, are destabilized, other recognizable structures also begin to vacillate."<sup>21</sup> The state of instability Kraus describes is similar to the productive uncertainty my analysis associates with *intemperie*, a form of exposure that makes possible the kind of critical mapping Sedgwick describes as part of the *nonce* taxonomy.

For Louvel, in relation to fiction, photography "serves as an instrument of revelation, in keeping with the technical developing process and the slow apparition of the image."<sup>22</sup> And, "it entails a process of recognition."<sup>23</sup> "Labyrinth" presents the struggle between text and image in such a way as to guide the reader gradually toward the recognition of several intertwined and uneven power dynamics, especially between men and women, heteronormative and queer, and European and Latin American intellectuals.<sup>24</sup> Especially important for my reading of the story is the way in which a relatively passive (and patient) gay male character, Goux, seems to surreptitiously set in motion the processes of revelation and recognition that circulate within the story while also challenging the narrator to tell his tale. A queer reading of "Labyrinth" thus reveals the limits of categorical control exercised by the narrator or, for that matter, the author, and shows how a literary text can establish the conditions for making visible a *nonce* taxonomy.

Alejandra Oyarce Orrego warns scholars against establishing a domesticating archive of Bolaño's work, noting how it "seeks to change our way of reading."<sup>25</sup> My interpretation of the change in reading method Oyarce Orrego identifies sets my project apart from previous scholarship. In addition to being the first scholarly work to consider queerness in relation to a large selection of Bolaño's texts, and to consider queerness and

photography together, this book also reads openness and interrelationality more as a method than as a description. These aspects of my analysis lead me to ask, What happens when Bolaño's texts are exposed to one another, and exposed queerly, that is, exposed in a way that foregrounds queerness's and photography's capacities to resist the logics of boundary and binding germane to the categories of totality, teleology, and subjective coherency? In short, I respond that queer exposure explicates Bolaño's complex negotiation and frequent though not always consistent critique of dominant, normative narratives and subjectivities, thereby signaling points of rupture and potential transformation that resist the reproduction of the logics of boundary and binding. This critique emerges within a state of intermediacy, acknowledging established narratives of power, resisting them, and refusing to cede to different ones.

Also aiming for such a state of intermediacy is the critical reading method I center around the processes of exposure associated with queerness and photography. This method intends to provide readers and scholars with a singularly critical and versatile way of comprehending not only Bolaño's interconnected texts, whose complex, multiform nature is often confounding, but also the potentially unbound nature of interconnection itself. Interconnection need not be bound, not by its service to a region, a nation, a world, or an oeuvre, and not even within the "expanding horizon" of a literary universe, to paraphrase the excellent comprehensive study of Bolaño's work by Andrews.<sup>26</sup> My reading of queer sexuality and photography with Bolaño associates interconnection's resistance to boundaries with Elizabeth Freeman's conception of the term "erotics," which she opposes to desire.<sup>27</sup> For Freeman, desire is a function of totality and erotics an operation of contingency. I present Bolaño's texts as generative of readings that emerge from an erotic encounter among them.

The resistance to normativity intrinsic to queerness is also part and parcel of the way in which I read Bolaño's texts as forming multiple possible constellations. My use of the term "constellation" comes in large part from my reading of Eduardo Cadava's work on photography, which, like Freeman's presentation of queer temporality as "queer intemperativity,"<sup>28</sup> presents connections among elements, such as texts, as assemblages resistant to totalizing and linear chronologies. Informed also by Jack Halberstam's work on the assemblage, I consider Bolaño's texts not only in erotic encounter with one another but also as photographing one another. Thus

the texts expose one another in an operation that relies upon imagining them in a shifting and interchangeable network of cameras, negatives, and prints. In the resulting unstable network, mechanisms of reproduction are interchangeable with their products, and a constellation of literary texts constantly produces different spaces and temporalities from which to establish meaning. A helpfully succinct way of formulating how I consider relations among Bolaño's texts can be found in Kate Jenckes's reading of Bolaño's short story "Dentista" ("Dentist") (2001), in which she describes how two characters find themselves waiting in a dentist's office, in "a stance of expectancy and exposure to the others that inhabit all buildings."<sup>29</sup> My reading of Bolaño demonstrates how such a stance is a function of the queer exposures that inhabit and permit encounters within the edifice or constellation of his texts.

The work of groundbreaking scholars on literary representations of queerness in Latin America has explained how texts from the late nineteenth century to the 1980s represent homoerotic desire in varying degrees of directness and along a spectrum ranging from intolerance and exclusion to acceptance and the formation of openly gay voices.<sup>30</sup> This work has also read representations of queerness in Latin American literature with an emphasis on the formation of queer subjects, including narrators, authors, or both.<sup>31</sup> The visibility of queerness and the development of queer subjectivities are important topics for my engagement with Bolaño's texts, but elucidating them is not my only goal, nor is it what primarily informs my methodology.

Of greater importance to my project are studies of Latin American literature and culture that emphasize how queerness is generally associated with resistance: it is at once liminal and foundationally disruptive;<sup>32</sup> it resists categorization,<sup>33</sup> and it provides a point of departure for critiques of power and dominant masculinity.<sup>34</sup> Robert Richmond Ellis's discussion of the "Latino/Hispanic lesbian and gay *ambiente*" argues that the *ambiente* "is a common space arising through a reciprocity of praxes,"<sup>35</sup> and that "queer critique [ . . . ] turns first from heteroconfigurations to those marked 'queer' or different and turns subsequently to the queerness or difference within all sexualities. Ultimately, however, it turns on itself, questioning the very epistemological structure implied by an ontology of identity."<sup>36</sup> Ellis's emphasis on common space and the epistemologically resistant power of queer theory helps inform my reading of Bolaño



because I propose that a queer reading presents his texts as comprising and suggesting a constantly renegotiated spatial and temporal constellation, thereby questioning the validity and usefulness of attributing an identity to it. Using the words José Quiroga does in his description of how participants in a 1993 pride parade in Argentina handed out masks to passersby they hoped would join them, my method may be paraphrased as one that “produc[es] a zone of contact that mediate[s] rupture” and “operat[es] from the point of view of structural play, instead of from the blinders given by systems and taxonomies.”<sup>37</sup>

Demonstrating how the constellation of Bolaño’s texts presents a means of challenging spatial and temporal boundaries, including those of literary history, and of developing an erotic understanding of interconnection finds common ground with Sara Ahmed’s queer critique of phenomenology. She emphasizes the spatiality of queerness in order to challenge normative ways of perceiving how bodies “are sexualized through how they inhabit space.”<sup>38</sup> Regarding the body and its temporal trajectory, defined often by loss and the persistence of the past, Ahmed writes: “The body emerges from [a] history of doing, which is also a history of not doing, of paths not taken, which also involves the loss, impossible to know or to even register, of what might have followed from such paths. As such, the body is directed as a condition of its arrival, as a direction that gives the body its line.”<sup>39</sup> Direction and line tend to organize bodies in normative ways through a process of failing or refusing to register those “paths not taken.” My reading of Bolaño presents queer critique as one of those paths. Furthermore, I argue that bodily stability, direction, and line are something his work frustrates, at the level of individual texts and, more importantly for my analysis, as a product of erotic encounters among multiple texts. Like Ahmed, Halberstam also develops the temporal and spatial elements of queer theory, defining queer as something that “refers to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time.”<sup>40</sup> Similar to the direction and line that Ahmed critiques, Halberstam discusses the normative time of capitalism, describing those who “benefit from it” as subjects who “experience [the logic of capital accumulation] as inevitable, and [ . . . ] therefore able to ignore, repress, or erase the demands made on them and others by an unjust system.”<sup>41</sup> For Ahmed and Halberstam, queer sexuality and queer theory critically reveal the outlines of normatively

delineated spaces and prefigured temporal lines, networks of power that function within and among Bolaño's texts, and, I argue, that which a queer reading elucidates as functions of resistance more often than as functions of reproducing normativity.

What lies on the other side, or sides, of these outlines? What is produced by erotic interconnection, other than radical openness? Bolaño's texts do not provide simple answers. Quiroga's zones of contact of play and rupture, mentioned earlier, and José Esteban Muñoz's concept of disidentification, however, provide additional useful points of departure. In the 1999 book of the same title, Muñoz defines disidentification as a "hermeneutic performance of decoding."<sup>42</sup> As such, disidentification contests dominant discourse as an urgently needed resistant stance invested in "cultural, material, and psychic survival."<sup>43</sup> As a strategy "called on by minoritarian subjects throughout their everyday life," disidentification "suggest[s], rehearse[s], and articulate[s]" what Muñoz calls "counter-publics,"<sup>44</sup> resistant spaces that present possibilities of political transformation. Muñoz develops the potentially positive contributions of queer critique further in his later book, *Cruising Utopia* (2009). Though I do not believe that Bolaño's texts present clear or even partially articulated possibilities of utopia, I find helpful Muñoz's emphasis on "astonishment" and how it disrupts complacent and normative comprehensions of temporality in general and the present in particular.<sup>45</sup> Engaging with Ernst Bloch's concept of "astonished contemplation,"<sup>46</sup> Muñoz aims to develop a critical vantage point from which readers see across not only different spaces but also different times, a "theory of queer futurity that is attentive to the past for the purposes of critiquing a present."<sup>47</sup> As Muñoz insists, "The present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds."<sup>48</sup> As in *Disidentifications*, in *Cruising Utopia* Muñoz argues that queer theory is a hermeneutic. He proposes that critical contemplation emerges during moments of "ecstatic time," which are "signaled at the moment one feels ecstasy [. . .] during moments of contemplation when one looks back at a scene from one's past, present, or future."<sup>49</sup> Several characters within Bolaño's texts experience moments of ecstatic time, perhaps most notably Lacouture and the narrative voices in multiple poems. In "La visita al convaleciente" ("Visit to the Convalescent") (2000), for example, ecstatic time also manifests itself in the form of a temporal space perceived but not

inhabited by the poem's narrator and characters. Like Ahmed's allusion to "twisted" lines made visible by "twisted" sexuality,<sup>50</sup> Muñoz's ecstatic time "contains the potential to help us encounter a queer temporality, a thing that is not the linearity that many of us have been calling straight time."<sup>51</sup> Muñoz's use of the term "ecstasy" contributes to my thinking not only of how characters, voices, moments, and spaces function in different texts by Bolaño but also to my emphasis on temporality and how it is registered. Muñoz writes, "Knowing ecstasy is having a sense of timeliness's motion, comprehending a temporal unity which includes the past (having-been), the future (the not-yet), and the present (the making-present)."<sup>52</sup> While I find very helpful the combination of past, present, and future that comprises "timeliness's motion," I am skeptical about the concept of a "temporal unity," a skepticism I develop throughout this project in my emphasis on reading and rereading, processes elucidated in part within Bolaño's texts, especially in the case of Amalfitano's reading and translating practices.

Excess poses a challenge to unity. Notably, it is in the cases of queer taxonomies in Bolaño's writing in which excess and the possibilities arising from a *nonce* taxonomy are clearly visible.<sup>53</sup> Two taxonomies of gay poets appear in Bolaño's texts: in *Detectives*, pronounced by San Epifanio, and in *Woes*, pronounced by Joan Padilla. Here is San Epifanio's, as recounted by García Madero: "Within the vast ocean of poetry he [San Epifanio] identified various currents: faggots, queers, sissies, freaks, butches, fairies, nymphs, and philenes. Walt Whitman, for example, was a faggot poet. [ . . . ] Borges was a philene, or in other words he might be a faggot one minute and simply asexual the next. [ . . . ] Guillén, Aleixandre, and Alberti could be considered a sissy, a butch, and a queer, respectively" (72).<sup>54</sup> I analyze these taxonomies in detail in later chapters on *Detectives* and *Woes*, but I cite this passage here in order to begin defining the queer poetics I develop through my reading of Bolaño, not least in relation to excess. The ocean at the beginning of San Epifanio's pronouncement suggests something excessive and uncontainable. The taxonomy itself mocks the way in which enumeration suggests totality through its stereotypical and reductive classification along an axis of sexual passivity and activity. Finally, there is the excess produced by the repetition of the taxonomies in two different texts, one posthumously published thirteen years after the other.

The taxonomy's mockery of reductive classificatory discourse also sends up relations of power whose fault lines are visible at the encounter of normative and different, setting the stage for a "zone of contact" that makes visible the possibility of play in the repressive structure, to paraphrase Quiroga.<sup>55</sup> San Epifanio's list also acknowledges differences within what might be called the category of the queer, recalling Ellis's observations about the *ambiente* and its multifaceted recognition of sexual difference. These differences are often considered along geographical boundaries, including those that distinguish between queer theory as developed in the United States and as developed in Latin America.

The expansiveness suggested by San Epifanio's taxonomy and Ellis's *ambiente* acknowledges queer theory's incorporation of gender critique in both the United States and Latin America. As María Amelia Viteri, José Fernando Serrano, and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz explain: "Queer readings do not exclude topics related to gender and sexuality but instead depend on them in order to formulate critiques of heteronormative systems. Positions against such regulatory systems are present in the humanities, arts, and social sciences in Latin America."<sup>56</sup> Recognizing debates about the importation of the word "queer" to Latin America, Viteri, Serrano, and Vidal-Ortiz sustain its contestatory power, presenting "queerness as a function of critical displacements in relation to the State, religious institutions and notions of citizenship on behalf of abject[ed] subjects."<sup>57</sup> For Viteri, Serrano, and Vidal-Ortiz, the term "queer" embodies the need for theorizing, in Latin America, understandings of sexual subject positions not already named,<sup>58</sup> in short, something like an understanding of a *nonce* taxonomy.

Paola Arboleda Ríos's analysis of the use of the English-language term "queer" in Latin America is generally more critical than that of Viteri, Serrano, and Vidal-Ortiz. Arboleda Ríos focuses on Néstor Perlongher, Reinaldo Arenas, and Pedro Lemebel in order to draw out a specifically Latin American configuration of sexual identity that may or may not overlap with queerness as theorized in the United States. For example, in reference to Arenas, Arboleda Ríos writes: "the fact is that there is not only one Latin-American-becoming-homosexual but instead innumerable becomings [that are] non-heteronormative, which simply do not fit within certain theoretical models and which require their own discourses that are un-located [un-crazied] and dis-locatedly [dis-crazedly] queer."<sup>59</sup>

In addition to the productive play on words that associates craziness, queerness, and location (*loca* is a term San Epifanio uses, for instance), also notable is Arboleda Ríos's emphasis on displacement, an operation that in Bolaño, together with queerness and photography, becomes strongly temporal.<sup>60</sup> In response to the use of "queer" in Latin America, Amy Kaminsky proposes the neologism, *encuirar*. She writes, "Reminiscent of the verb to undress and evocative of the act of laying bare, *encuirar* means to dis-cover reality, to remove the cover of heteronormativity."<sup>61</sup> While my analysis challenges the possibilities of every truly uncovering and revealing, it does develop the topic of exposure, though in a more dialectical way than Kaminsky's explanation of her neologism implies. Brad Epps's critique of the employment of queer theory in Latin America is useful for separating the saturated familiarity of the term "queer" in the United States from its primarily academic and theoretical realm in Latin America, a realm in which the pejorative uses of the term are practically unknown.<sup>62</sup> Thus, according to Epps, its disruptive potential is certainly not felt as strongly in Latin America on the whole. Productively and importantly, Epps warns against the normalization and institutionalization of the term.<sup>63</sup> By combining queerness as a topic and developing it as a critical reading method, I aim to demonstrate how queer theory and the use of the term "queer" relate to Bolaño's texts in a way that sustains and reveals new facets of the theory and the term's critical force.

In my development of a queer poetics, which I construct on the basis of a critical reading of Bolaño's texts, I maintain the use of the English word "queer" because of its ongoing critical potential in regard to its own denotations, to which Judith Butler;<sup>64</sup> Viteri, Serrano, and Vidal-Ortiz; and even Arboleda Ríos attest. I also find the theorizations of queerness that use the English word, including those of Muñoz, Freeman, and Halberstam, particularly productive because of their emphasis on queerness's disruptive temporal consequences. This emphasis, as my reading of Bolaño shows, sustains a critique of dominant chronologies that often hide difference and possible moments of transformation. Though I maintain the English word "queer" throughout my analysis, I often associate it with a Spanish word I do not translate, *intemperie*. The most closely related English word, "intemperate," denotes excessiveness, something beyond established norms, but only the Spanish original combines excessiveness with spatial and temporal exposure.

Positioned within *intemperie*, queer characters in Bolaño tend to wait, to observe, and to read. Therefore, related to Muñoz's discussions of contemplation and ecstasy is a term important to the queer poetics I develop through my reading of Bolaño, *esperanza queer*, a phenomenon within Bolaño's texts that I also employ as a method of reading, and that plays on the fact that the Spanish verb *esperar* means to hope and to wait, words whose noun forms in Spanish are, respectively, *esperanza* and *espera*. Although to my mind Bolaño's *esperanza queer* ends up being more about waiting than hoping, I believe that Muñoz's observations about how to "stage utopia" offer a suggestive and not overly optimistic way of combining waiting with hope. In his critique of a dominant narrative that presents queerness as a passing phase,<sup>65</sup> Muñoz proposes that "utopia is a stage, not merely a temporal stage, like a phase, but also a spatial one."<sup>66</sup> Referring to a stage of performance in the moment just before the show begins, he describes "the affective particularity of that moment of hope and potential transformation that is also the temporality of performance."<sup>67</sup> Bolaño's constellation of texts as something spatial and temporal is the stage of my analysis. Patience, hope, rereading, potential transformation, and attention to forgotten pasts reside there. Reading queerly within and from Bolaño makes visible a critical temporality and a critical literary historical practice.

Reading Bolaño critically and interpreting his texts as a staging of queer hope and queer waiting is supported by emphasizing certain affects and emotional states, especially those associated with sadness, melancholy, and loss. Examples of sadness include the tears attributed to no one identifiable as a soundtrack to the poem "Visit" and, in *Detectives*, the descriptions of how Ulises Lima's crying disturbs Norman Bolzman's sleep. Heartbreak and loneliness feature in several poems from Bolaño's first years in Spain. Impunity, injustice, and state criminality allow and reproduce violence on a massive scale, which in turn results in the pain, sadness, and grief that circulate within and among, especially, *Distant Star*, *By Night in Chile*, *Amulet*, and *2666*.

Particularly regarding melancholy, Bolaño's texts often associate it with waiting, contemplation, immobility,<sup>68</sup> and exposure. Based on her reference to Sigmund Freud's work on mourning and melancholia, specifically where Freud refers to mourning as "'letting go' of the lost object,"<sup>69</sup> Ahmed associates linear temporality with mourning. In

a critique of Freud's association of melancholy with pathology, Ahmed describes melancholy as productively disruptive by virtue of its ability to allow what is lost to persist in and interrupt the present. "Melancholia," writes Ahmed, "is a way of keeping the other, and with it the past, alive in the present [ . . . ]. In this model, keeping the past alive, even as that which has been lost, is ethical: the object is not severed from history, or encrypted, but can acquire new meanings and possibilities in the present."<sup>70</sup> The potentiality of melancholy often figures within Bolaño's texts in the form of reading; my methodology draws on this potentiality in its emphasis on rereading. Characters who read also wait, and they expose themselves to the unpredictability of others and to the future.

Butler associates exposure with vulnerability in a way that emphasizes the interrelational potential of exposure. Though she does not emphasize something similar to Ahmed's critique of the way Freud's conception of mourning reinforces linearity, in *Precarious Life* (2004), Butler does theorize mourning as intersubjective, and not just pertaining to an individual ego, let alone its preservation as such. For Butler, mourning is a process that does not enable separation from the other but that, on the contrary, proposes "finding a basis for community" in "our vulnerability to loss and the task of mourning that follows."<sup>71</sup> Butler describes loss as bodily, intersubjective, and as a process of exposure: "Each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies—as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure."<sup>72</sup> The critique of identity and individual subjectivity implicit in Butler's emphasis on the social relates to a subject's inner division—in which "grief contains the possibility of apprehending a mode of dispossession that is fundamental to who I am"—and to the necessary connections with others, being that we are "implicated in lives that are not our own."<sup>73</sup> The effects of grief and mourning are unpredictable but tied to a recognition of transformation. Butler writes, "Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance. There is losing, as we know, but there is also the transformative effect of loss, and this latter cannot be charted or planned."<sup>74</sup> This

unpredictability returns Butler to her emphasis on intersubjectivity and community, which she does not define categorically but instead speculatively: “For if I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, and I am nowhere without you. I cannot muster the ‘we’ except by finding the way in which I am tied to ‘you,’ by trying to translate but finding my own language must break up and yield if I am to know you. You are what I gain through this disorientation and loss. This is how the human comes into being, again and again, as that which we have yet to know.”<sup>75</sup> Literary texts stage lives neither wholly possessed by readers nor authors. They experiment with, challenge, and often reaffirm a cohesively defined embodiment or conception of subjectivity. Regarding experimentation and challenge, I find Jenckes’s emphasis on exposure in her critique of a teleological understanding of the human to be helpful for thinking through the openness of reading that a queer approach to Bolaño elucidates and enacts. For Jenckes, a teleological understanding of the human “[performs] a kind of sepulture of finitude, foreclosing the possibility of being exposed to something not accounted for by pre-established structures of knowledge.”<sup>76</sup> Regarding the reaffirmation of a cohesive subjectivity, it is important to note that it often enacts the foreclosure Jenckes warns against, reproducing a politics of exclusion.

Subjectivities and the power relations that define them are frequently presented and contested, and occasionally reproduced, within and among Bolaño’s texts. They are thus an important topic for my analysis. Equally central and more clearly related to my methodology is my consideration of the constellation of Bolaño’s texts as critically intersubjective. Texts exposed to one another are mutually implicated and the conclusions that may arise from this interrelation are provisional and open to change. Points of bodily contact, as it were, among Bolaño’s texts often become visible through their thematic treatment of sadness, loss, and melancholy, topics related centrally in several texts to queerness. The affective transformations Butler associates with mourning and that Muñoz associates with hope find points of contact and common ground within Bolaño’s texts in spaces and moments defined by queer waiting and queer hope. These moments interrupt presence and definition, including the kind of presence that Jenckes refers to as the “imagined closeness of prosopopeia” in her reading of Juan Gelman’s poetry.<sup>77</sup> For Jenckes, to turn away from that closeness is to approach “a space of *des-esperanza* and possibility.”<sup>78</sup>



This despair, or *des-esperanza*, helps me express what I mean by queer *espera* and *esperanza*, a waiting for exposure to the other and a type of hope characterized, queerly, by the despair of its unrealizability, which in turn is a form of openness to an incalculable, non-prefigured realization.

I am not the only reader of Bolaño to emphasize queerness in relation to his texts. In an analysis that demonstrates how Bolaño is indebted to Manuel Puig in terms of how the latter has enabled the former, among others, to address queer themes, José Amícola also emphasizes how *Woes* critiques traditional conceptions of masculinity and presents sexuality as mutable.<sup>79</sup> Bolaño's figuration of the transgender performance artist Lorenza Böttner, in *Distant Star*, provides Carl Fischer with a point of comparison to Pedro Lemebel's *Loco afán: Crónicas de sidario* (Mad Urge: AIDS Chronicles) (1996). Nichola Birns mentions queerness briefly in his analysis of "Mauricio ('The Eye') Silva" and other texts, presenting it, as does Amícola, as a way of critiquing dominant forms of masculinity.<sup>80</sup> Birns's analysis introduces an important function of queerness in Bolaño's work and a topic I develop as well: the way its critique of dominant masculinity sometimes serves as a critique of the Latin American revolutionary movements that Bolaño refers to in several texts, including *Distant Star*, *Detectives*, *Woes*, and "Visit."<sup>81</sup>

Birns's emphasis on Bolaño's queer critique of dominant masculinity and its association with the exclusionary aspects of left-wing revolutionary politics in Latin America help me consider a particularly Latin American element of Bolaño's thematics, the violent defeat of the left in the 1960s and 1970s and its aftermath, a central element of which in turn is the neoliberal transition. One of the most developed arguments around a queer reading of Bolaño is Gabriele Bizzarri's. Bizzarri identifies "emblemas" of "lo hispanoamericano,"<sup>82</sup> including revolution, whose apparent second-nature association with Latin American difference is no longer as automatically accepted, and in fact called into question by queer readings of Latin American texts.<sup>83</sup> Bizzarri focuses on Lemebel's and Bolaño's uses of language, proposing that both authors "utilize the anti-normative potential of their language, their appeal to what is unstable or provisional, to unmask the power structures that have become encysted in the identitarian formulas locked into the postcolonial sphere, and which produce a paradoxically categorical, dogmatic, and because of that, politically neutralized use of those solutions: in this sense, both

Lemebel and Bolaño seem to imagine a transversal and errant *queer América*, one that is linguistically off limits to any colonizing gesture, first and foremost, the ordering gesture of systematic meaning.<sup>84</sup> Bizzarri's readings of "Mauricio ('The Eye') Silva," *Woes*, and *Distant Star* establish a convincingly queer reading of Bolaño whose result is a strong critique of the foundations of two emblems of *lo latinoamericano*: the imagined city (Santa Teresa) and the revolutionary subject (The Eye and Juan Stein, read in light of Lorenza Böttner). His emphasis on The Eye, Amalfitano, and Böttner leads Bizzarri to conclude that "the textual rule of queerness in Bolaño [is] a productively disturbing phenomenon that initiates the proposal of a Latin American 'third way,' bent, transversal, and twisted in regard to the main road of its grand narratives."<sup>85</sup> My reading of Bolaño coincides with Bizzarri's general conclusion about the disruptive consequences of queerness in the former's texts. In addition to considering queerness alongside photography in relation to exposure, my analysis distinguishes itself from Bizzarri's in its scope; in its emphasis on the suspended, intermediary spaces and times of queer *espera* and *esperanza*; and in its emphasis on reading and rereading Bolaño's texts as elements within a constellation.

In an early explanation of the critical value of the term "queer," Butler writes: "If the term 'queer' is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes."<sup>86</sup> In Bolaño's texts, such political purposes include an extended way of negotiating and rethinking recent decades of Latin American history, especially as related to political violence, neoliberalism, and transnational capital. Patrick Dove defines this period as one of interregnum in which sovereignty and literature's representative authority find themselves in a crisis whose resolution remains unclear.<sup>87</sup> Periodizing his study in the post-Cold War era, Héctor Hoyos theorizes a dialectical relation between Latin American and global literatures in which the specificity of the former is not lost through its dialogue with and inclusion in the latter.<sup>88</sup> Jenckes develops a critique of claims in relation to injustice and their reliance upon coherent subjectivities and presence in her thinking through of "posthuman witnessing." These critics, whose studies feature

analyses of Bolaño's texts, share with one another and with me an interest in historicizing Bolaño within a contemporary moment whose parameters are elusive. Examples of how my reading of Bolaño's work demonstrates the importance of its emphasis on the processes of exposure related to queerness and photography provide points of contact with and departure from their analyses. For instance, queerness and photography present, in Bolaño, a critique of Latin American revolution and counterrevolution that, like Dove's interregnum, resists teleological closure and totalizing explanation. Ghostly returns and chronotopes associated with androgyny and critiques of normative masculinity and subjective coherence in Bolaño's poetry present a type of witnessing that, to paraphrase Jenckes, keeps open the incalculable and the unsettled.<sup>89</sup> A queer reading of the post-Cold War period is mobilized by Bolaño's writing in the figure of the Amalfitano of *Woes*, whose construction as a gay character—an important difference from his portrayal in *2666*—appears in the first part of the former novel titled "La caída del muro de Berlín" ("The Fall of the Berlin Wall"). Keeping in mind Butler's association of queerness with political purpose, my analysis emphasizes the centrality of nonnormative sexuality and a gender-based critique to the understanding of relations of power and literary representation. The queer poetics I develop through my reading of Bolaño unbind a body of work and its association with spatial, temporal, and literary historical contexts.

As Hoyos's text suggests, it is not Bolaño, but the "Bolaño phenomenon," one should move "beyond."<sup>90</sup> My project intends to stay with Bolaño, to treat his texts carefully and avoid contributing to the phenomenon Hoyos and Sarah Pollack are among the best at warning us about.<sup>91</sup> The Bolaño I stay with is a queered, irresolute Bolaño, suspended, waiting for constant returns to and from his texts. In his salutary focus on the fact that many writers have been eclipsed by Bolaño's fame, especially outside of Latin America, Hoyos writes that "going beyond Bolaño entails engaging Aira, Vallejo, Eltit, Buarque, and others."<sup>92</sup> I propose that staying with a Bolaño addressed by a queer poetics could help us read other writers in critical, novel, and unpredictable ways. For example, Bizzarri's and Fischer's engagement with both Bolaño's and Lemebel's work, and Amícola's work on Bolaño and Puig are existing examples of scholarship that takes a queer reading of Bolaño as its starting point. I hope that my work on Bolaño will help future investigations as well,

especially in relation to how queer theory can strengthen and reformulate critiques of spatiotemporal boundaries and of the related topics of totality, coherency, and teleology. Several possible topics come to mind, for instance: the work on temporality and corporeality in José Lezama Lima, Virgilio Piñera, and Reinaldo Arenas, which David Tenorio has begun;<sup>93</sup> Luis Zapata's hilarious take on literary critical discourse in his novel *Autobiografía póstuma* (Posthumous Autobiography) (2014), and how it exposes anew his pioneering *El vampiro de la colonia Roma* (The Vampire of the Roma Neighborhood) (1979); and a reconsideration of lesbianism in the Mexican short story that recognizes and challenges the genealogies so brilliantly enacted in María Elvira Bermúdez's "Detente, sombra" (Stay, Shadow) (1962) and its intertext, Sor Juana's "Soneto 165" ("Sonnet 165") (1692). The range of topics, time periods, places, formal and narrative elements, and characters—fictional and historical—that Bolaño's texts present provide many points of departure for additional developments in understanding how queer theory incurs productively into discussions of politics and representation. The present book thus aims to explicate this range in order to achieve the following: to understand Bolaño better, to establish the critical potential of a queer poetics formulated in relation to his texts, and to foster multiple instances of future scholarly inquiry. An additional aim of this book, which is also relevant for scholarly inquiry that is not solely dedicated to Bolaño, relates to how I have written and organized it. Through its particular form and style—the juxtaposition of close readings of several texts often analyzed more than once and in different chapters—the book advocates for and exemplifies close reading as a queer, performative practice, one that is especially critical of normative ways of reading, as in regard to oeuvre, chronology, biography, generic conventions, and territorial boundaries.

The book is organized around readings of several of Bolaño's texts that draw conclusions from an approach that foregrounds queer sexuality, photography, and often both. Though not exhaustive, the selection of Bolaño's texts I analyze is extensive. The texts chosen for analysis represent normative and nonnormative sexualities, photography, or both. Some exhibit a photographic style but do not represent photography directly. I begin with a posthumous text in part because I wish to emphasize the value of reading Bolaño's texts out of chronological order, either in terms of composition or publication, and in part because of the way in which

my reading of “Labyrinth” establishes parameters of analysis that persist throughout the book. Two chapters about poetry follow the chapter about “Labyrinth” because they help clarify the importance for my overall analysis of several topics, including autobiography, representations of normative sexuality, homoeroticism, and critiques of subjective coherency. A chapter about the figure of the detective in poems and a short story follows from the previous chapters about poetry and sets the stage for the final chapters’ readings, respectively, of *Detectives* and *2666*, texts that present multiple and often condensed considerations of several topics I develop in previous chapters. The book’s final chapter concludes with a reading of *Woes*, like *2666* a posthumous text, and one whose connections with *2666* form the ending of my analysis, an ending that aims not to be a definitive conclusion.

Óscar Amalfitano appears in *2666* and *Woes*. His queerness and his privileged reading status as one of Bolaño’s detectives—perhaps the true policeman of *Woes*’s title, and perhaps the most dedicated detective of those who populate Bolaño’s texts—makes him a crucially important character for my book’s final chapter and its conclusions throughout. His role as translator, reader, exile, and gay man places him at a point from which those in any way associated with him and his multiple trajectories, including different backstories within and among the two novels that feature him, advance critiques and contemplations of almost every key theme and motif of Bolaño’s writing, such as reflections, constellations, revolutionary politics, violence, capitalism, the desire for mastery, and the “non-power” of poetry presented in *Amulet*. Amalfitano embodies queer time. His story alludes to the possibilities of queer *esperanza*, or queer hope, which shimmers within the space and time of patient waiting, or queer *espera*, where figures and figurations, including literary texts, forever remain exposed in a radical state of *intemperie*.