

## *Introduction*

Mexico has been perceived according to what Rob Shields calls a place-myth.<sup>1</sup> Since the colonial era, Mexico has been an imaginary geography, idealized and demonized in the accounts of conquistadors, a place upon which to project fears and desires, as well as religious, political, and economic anxieties. In different historical moments, for varied reasons, this place-myth continued to attract travelers from other European nations, from North and South America, who came to Mexico in search of utopias and dystopias. The presence of Mexico in Western scientific discourse and arts and humanities has played a fundamental role as a necessary and interdependent counterpart of the configuration of modernity.<sup>2</sup> As an object of study, Mexico constructed academic disciplines, university foundations, professional and artistic reputations, and a market replete with exotic and rare objects deemed by the experts to be worthy of capitalization and conservation.<sup>3</sup>

The travelers studied here reflect the representations of the Mexican place-myth. However, as a symbolic, contested space, Mexico also shaped these travelers and, along with them, their scientific disciplines and artistic practices. For all the authors studied here, the voyage to Mexico was their first trip, or at least the first trip for which they became known in their fields. Mexico made them famous. In this sense, their journey to Mexico represented a watershed moment in their lives. All of the travelers studied here were young; Mexico represented for them a journey of initiation, of radically new experiences that were, consequently, risky, incommensurate, and transformative. In his definition of the “badlands of modernity,” Kevin Hetherington, following Latour, adds the notion of laboratory to the definition of a liminal place or place-myth: “Spaces like the laboratory are socially and technically constructed, contested, heterogenous, partial, contingent, and deferred. They act

as important nodes, obligatory points of passage for the development of new modes of ordering.<sup>4</sup> This idea is easy to understand if we consider that experimentation in liminal places is substantiating, just as it is in laboratories. Narratives produced from laboratory experiments are not regulated only by the conventional language; they also open interstices of historical change and epistemological rupture. The narratives that arise from experimentation in liminal places can be, to greater or lesser extent, consensual in literary language, and yet they also enable transformations in the social order.

My intention is to highlight how journeys to Mexico challenged stereotypical or orientalist images. The experiences of these writers, artists, and scientists created a problematic and conflictive dialogue with metropolitan discourses and dismantled asymmetrical binaries between cultures. These experiences thus underscore Mexico's importance in the configuration of Western science and art. Complementing postcolonial reading of how the metropole represents "otherness" and following Anibal Quijano's understanding of the intrinsic relationship between modernity and coloniality, this book argues that without Mexico there would be no modernity.<sup>5</sup> Mexico appears as a place of initiation, change, problem, and passage: a laboratory of modernity and modern subjectivity. The very definition of Mexico is at stake. Mexico appears in the flow of a discursive battle of modernity/coloniality, in which multiple types of knowledge and discovery compete. This book analyzes objects, instances, and characters that cross through these discursive struggles that overflow the stereotyped metropolitan images of Mexico.

*Impossible Domesticity* examines travelers' narratives that destabilize the fixed categories of nation, race, class, and gender in the experience of traveling. In his classic study *Travel as Metaphor*, Georges Van Den Abbeele notes that all travel requires an *oikos*—Greek for "home," "in relation to which any wandering can be comprehended (enclosed as well as understood)": "The positing of an *oikos*, or *domus* (the Latin translation of *oikos*), is what domesticates the voyage by ascribing certain limits to it. . . . That point then acts as a transcendental point of reference that organizes and domesticates a given area by defining all other points in relation to itself. Such an act of referral makes of all travel a circular voyage insofar as that privileged point of *oikos* is posited as the absolute origin and absolute end of any movement at all."<sup>6</sup> My reading of travel writing implies searching within the text's elements and signs that deauthorize the point of reference of the *oikos* and its circular economy.

*Impossible Domesticity* proposes to read this economy against the grain, thinking of the trajectory per se—the itinerary—as a place of encounter for multiple possible economies. Humboldt is paradigmatic in

this regard. After five years in the Spanish colonies (from 1799 to 1804), Humboldt returned to Europe with dozens of boxes full of botanical, astronomical, and geological treasures. These crates contained the merchandise that guaranteed the success of his endeavor and the credibility of his scientific publications: six thousand equatorial plants, seeds, sea-shells, insects, and geological specimens never before brought to Europe from Chimborazo, New Granada, and the beaches of the Amazon.<sup>7</sup> Acutely aware of the importance of his treasures, Humboldt lugged them through the Andes and up the Orinoco River. There is, nonetheless, an agonistic aspect to this fruitless eagerness to capture, transport, and measure everything. The agency of the objects Humboldt collected was not easily domesticated.<sup>8</sup> Humboldt's archive is brimming with excess material, the difficulties of new scenarios, and his near-countless itineraries. These are objects that belong to a "messy archive," creating chaos and disorder where knowledge should be classified and organized. As Martin F. Manalansan IV argues in talking about the messiness of archives: "By refusing legibility and establishing an alternative (dis)order of things," such objects resist the orders of documentation.<sup>9</sup>

In my reading, all these authors evidence an impossible domesticity in their writings. Van Den Abbeele sustains that the beginning and end of every journey needs an *oikos*, the economy of which regulates the value of the trajectory. This is tantamount to saying that the point of departure determines the appraisal of every experience along the way. In contrast, like Humboldt, the travelers studied here are subjected to economies that oppose and resist the economy of home, stability, and security. In this way, they allow themselves to be modified by the travel experiences that destabilize their scientific disciplines, their professional formation, their political ideas, their national origin, and their class, race, and gender identity.

Through a reading of the flow of experience and the materiality of the travel, of the interaction of multiple and contradictory economies at stake, this book seeks to complement readings of the predominant postcolonial criticism of travel writing that follows Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978).<sup>10</sup> The postcolonial critique highlighted the Western imperialist vision of travel narratives, arguing that such narratives revealed only the traveler's subjectivity, and the discourses and institutions of the metropolises the travelers came from—the *oikos*—thanks to the rhetorical machinery they used to describe the territories and cultures they visited. *Impossible Domesticity* proposes a new reading of these narratives by posing questions that incorporate but also transcend the traveler's imperial subjectivity. This book thus proposes a way of interpreting the agency exerted by territories and cultures. In this sense, *Impossible Do-*

*mesticity* examines the types of knowledge that interact, critically and asymmetrically, in travel narratives. These other types of knowledge seep through the porousness, the hybrid elasticity, of travel narratives and enable decolonial readings.

*Impossible Domesticity* deals with travelers from a wide range of professions, scientific disciplines, and artistic practices. Studying them is a multifaceted task. More than examining each discipline, this book aims to understand the multiple constructions of Mexico as an object and the conflicts that their constitutive heterogeneity engenders between types of knowledge. In many cases, these narratives are paratextual to the disciplines; they reveal their seams, beginnings, ruptures, and epistemological transformations. The genre's heterogeneity itself defies categorization: travel books are part of literature, understood broadly, and also continue the tradition of *The Odyssey*, *Don Quixote*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Moby Dick*.<sup>11</sup> Scientific expeditions, imperial expansion, adventure, and colonialization of exotic lands made nonfiction travel narratives into bestsellers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Travel writing accompanied the birth of modern disciplines such as archeology, anthropology, and psychology.<sup>12</sup> In this book, the genre of travel writing is understood in a broad sense, including stories, fictional or not, written about Mexico by foreigners. The corpus of the book therefore includes treatises, letters, newspaper articles, chronicles, conferences, fiction, and poetry to the degree that these texts represent the Mexican experience and the knowledge derived from it.

The multiplicity of discourses running through travel narratives enables readings that locate the knots and fissures in the modernity/coloniality rhetoric. The main decolonial premise is that there can be no modernity without coloniality. The ore extracted from America was the base of the primitive accumulation of capital that initiated the global capitalist economy. America was not incorporated into a global capitalist economy; it brought it to life. Decolonial criticism further posits that the "New World" invented modernity because it emerged as a space of the new that questioned the tradition of authority of the ancient classics, founding the spirit of the modern as an orientation toward the future. The golden age migrates from the past to the future. In this tremendous global shift, the New World redefines Europe. Modernity/coloniality invented racism to legitimize the ideology of inequality and hierarchy between Europe and its others. Decolonial theory questions the postcolonial notion according to which, for the construction of the world-system, America is a peripheral—not central—material reality.<sup>13</sup> America is not the eccentric support for the construction of a center but rather the very font from which the center, modernity, emerges: "Coloniality names the

underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today of which historical colonialisms have been a constitutive, although downplayed, dimension. The concept as used herein, and by the collective modernity/coloniality, is not intended to be a totalitarian concept, but rather one that specifies a particular project: that of the idea of modernity and its constitutive and darker side, coloniality, that emerged with the history of European invasions of Abya Yala, Tawantinsuyu, and Anahuac, and the formation of the Americas and the Caribbean; and the massive trade of enslaved Africans.”<sup>14</sup>

The texts studied in *Impossible Domesticity* were produced within the networks of a colonial matrix of power. In particular, given the travelers’ different nationalities, social classes, professions, ethnic origins, and genders, the flexibility and porousness of travel narratives reveal the kaleidoscopic visions of modernity and its disciplines. In the following chapters, I study the images of Mexico that these travelers unexpectedly produced and reproduced within the coloniality of power. In constructing the planetary consciousness to which these travelers contributed, Mexico changed the understanding of art, the history of empires, the origin of humankind in America, and the value of the new continent in relation to Europe. Within the networks and tensions of the coloniality of power, new ways of conceiving popular revolutions and social utopias became possible; vanguards and radical artistic ideologies were born.<sup>15</sup>

*Impossible Domesticity* studies the travels of the German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859); the French photographer and archeologist Désiré Charnay (1828–1915); the Scottish wife of the first Spanish diplomat to independent Mexico, Fanny Calderón de la Barca (1804–1882); the US journalist and war correspondent John Reed (1887–1920); the Chilean educator and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957); the French playwright Antonin Artaud (1896–1948); the Beat generation writers Jack Kerouac (1922–1969) and William Burroughs (1914–1997); and the Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño (1953–2003).

The chapters of this book are divided in three sections, each relating to a group of theoretical questions that explain different aspects of the problems discussed thus far. The first section includes three chapters on Humboldt, Charnay, and Calderón. The section focuses on the agency of objects found during the journey. It analyzes the role of things and objects as “quasi subjects” in constant production and the questioning of social relations and disciplines of knowledge as Bill Brown, Bruno Latour, Manalansan IV, and Jean Baudrillard have asserted.<sup>16</sup>

In his *Diary of a Trip to Mexico*, after bemoaning the loss of several trunks with books and treasures shipped from Guayaquil to Acapulco,

Alexander von Humboldt noticed the tidiness of the home of his Mexican hosts. He had never seen anyone more meticulous or any place so “remarkably clean.” Humboldt then spoke of the surprising agency of things: “Unfortunately, upon opening our trunks, we infected the house with cockroaches, scorpions from Guayaquil, ants . . . ! The ships that bring cacao from that port resemble Noah’s ark. Nowhere in the world are parasites and insects more abundant than in Guayaquil. The lizards of the gecko family train at night pursuing the new arrivals.”<sup>17</sup>

This seemingly comical anecdote reveals the anxiety that the transported objects—in this case, trunks full of vermin—provoke. Agents of their own will, they resist scientific discipline and the imperial gaze. Describing the metropolitan scientific traveler’s capacity to bring objects from the periphery, Bruno Latour in *Science in Action* analyzes the process of transportation and translation of objects into a language of reduced scale: maps, illustrations, samples, tables, images, diagrams, measurements, drawings, etchings, and photographs—all new codifications that enable their transportation, storage, and exhibition in centers of calculation, that is, the metropolises of knowledge.<sup>18</sup> The institutions of such places are laboratories, scientific associations, museums, and universities that develop theories about explored territories. The cycles of scientific accumulation are crucial to understanding the condition and logic of the mobility of objects in travel practices. But they also help trace the history of the accumulation of knowledge as distinction and asymmetry of power between the metropolises—where knowledge is accumulated—and their respective peripheries. Thinking about how these objects are translated and displaced forces us to think about the objecthood of things—that is, the condition of the objects per se before, during, and after being transported. This approach allows us to propose a decolonial reading of the objects as carriers of other epistemologies that are in constant friction with metropolitan accumulation. In the above example, the trunks that transport valuable objects for science also move animals that resist scientific pursuits.

Given their myriad itineraries, the travelers’ objects studied in the first section resist fixation and problematize domesticity and the security of home. The travel narratives selected allow an examination of these objects in the constant disarrangement of the habitual, creating what Manalansan IV calls “the queer messiness of the archive.”<sup>19</sup> Domesticity, habit, classification, and normativity are concepts problematized by the movement of travel—by their constant dislocation and permanent translation. In this context, Manalansan’s proposal is especially relevant, in the sense that it conjoins movement and archive in capacities that are at once creative and destabilizing, that is, “queer”:

I would argue that mess is a word that can creatively illuminate the idea of queerness in general and queer archives in particular. My assertion of queer and queering as mess and messing up comes out of a critical reading of queer theory, popular culture, vernacular language, and everyday life. My use of queer and mess is not limited to bodies, objects, and desires but also relates to processes, behaviors, and situations. “Queering” and “messing up” are activities and actions as much as “queer” and “mess” can be about states/status, positions, identities, and orientations. . . . While people may balk at the idea of mess as “constituting” queer, it is precisely the discomfort elicited and provoked by the idea and realities of mess that is at the heart my formulation and provocation.<sup>20</sup>

*Impossible Domesticity* employs a queer reading of the travelers’ archive.<sup>21</sup>

Chapter 1 holds that, conventional thinking notwithstanding, Humboldt was not the second discoverer of the New World. Rather, it was Mexico that situated Humboldt in the global center of the scientific and political scene. In his desire to see the world as a naturalist, Humboldt had planned two earlier trips—one to Egypt with Napoleon’s navy (1798–1801) and another to India and the South Pacific with Captain Nicholas Baudin (1800–1803). Both plans were scrapped: the English blockage made expeditions to Egypt difficult, and Baudin fell ill and died before embarking. So, Humboldt finally headed to America. Since much of the continent was a Spanish colony, he had to request permission from the Bourbon monarch Charles IV. It was granted to him on the condition that he serve as the crown’s “inspector of mines,” though Humboldt still had to finance the entire trip using his personal inheritance. The trip to Mexico was a watershed moment for Humboldt, but also for the Spanish colonies and for the place of the New World in planetary consciousness.<sup>22</sup> Humboldt entered into the debate Clavijero and Jefferson carried on with Buffon and DePauw regarding the inferiority of humankind and nature in America to their European counterparts. Using the metaphor of Borges’s “Aleph,” chapter 1 studies Humboldt’s works on Mexico from a kaleidoscopic perspective. The German traveler endeavored to offer knowledge about everything in Mexico. Humboldt examined the country from various angles, interests, and temporalities. Yet the object of study, “Mexico,” could not be easily subjected to a single discipline or community of readers. What Humboldt’s books show is precisely the impossibility of a closed and fixed archive. His story is excessive because the grandiosity of the archive and the agency of the collected objects must be translated according to the interests of multiple interlocutors across the world: European scientists and naturalists; the Spanish king; British investors interested in exploiting Mexican mines;

Jefferson, who harbored interests in expanding into Mexican territory; local creole and mestizo scientists who opened to him archives, museums, and libraries in Mexico; Latin American political leaders working toward independence; abolitionist philanthropists; and the general public. Humboldt became the most important scientist of his time, and the most famous man after Napoleon Bonaparte, thanks to his trip to Mexico and other parts of the New World during a crucial historical moment for the West.

Chapter 2 studies Désiré Charnay's trips to Mexico and the transfer of archaeological objects to the centers of calculation. In addition to his natal France, Charnay lived in England, Germany, and New Orleans in the United States, where he worked as a schoolteacher. In 1850, after reading John Stephen's *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, he decided to secure funding from the French government to follow in the explorer's footsteps. Charnay's fame arose from his expedition to Mexico, during which he produced the narratives and photographs for his first book *Cités et ruines américaines: Mitla, Palenque, Izamal, Chichen-Itzá, Uxmal* (1862–1863). His photos, the first of these archeological sites, opened the door to his subsequent trips to Madagascar, Java, and Australia. As traveling explorers, Humboldt and Charnay shared persistence and dedication, characteristic traits of what I refer to as the “ideology of the hero of science.” In the light of this ideology, their narratives enumerate the grand obstacles they overcame in the name of science, as they provided important documentation for the archeology of Mexico. Their relationships with scientific networks reveal how science drew on knowledge about Mexico (and other places in Latin America) throughout the nineteenth century and how European institutions legitimized the specific disciplines of Mesoamerican archeology. These obstacles tell us of objects that resist domestication and how they should be molded in the rhetoric of martyrdom or scientific heroism as a way of legitimizing the work. The explorers' narratives also sparked new discourses of political identity around what was called national archeological patrimony. Charnay's contemporary Auguste Le Plongeon presents an interesting example. President Porfirio Díaz prohibited Le Plongeon from taking away the statue of the Mesoamerican rain deity Chac Mool, which the explorer claimed to have “discovered.” Le Plongeon engaged in a long, and unsuccessful, dispute with the Mexican government; his determination kept him and his wife, Alice Dixon, in Mexico for twelve years.<sup>23</sup> Charnay similarly discussed how the Mexican government controlled and supervised his excavations.<sup>24</sup>

Chapter 2 studies Charnay's photography as an object of circulation and production of knowledge about archeological ruins. Of all the trav-



elers in this book, Charnay is the one most closely linked to an imperial ideology and the European political and economic power over Mexico. In this regard, I study how Charnay's trip coincided with the political and economic interests of Maximilian von Habsburg and Napoleon III, who sponsored the Austrian nobleman in Mexico. The importance of guides in locating and excavating ruins is clear in Charnay's narratives. In addition to guiding the traveler through the countryside, they conserved the oral registry of travelers in the area, which helped establish a map and a chronology of the archaeologists' competition in the ruins and, therefore, of the process of artifact extraction and metropolitan scientific accumulation.

In Chapter 3, I study the letters that Fanny Calderón wrote to her relatives during her stay in Mexico. Like Charnay, Fanny Calderón, a descendent of Scottish nobility, had already emigrated before traveling to Mexico. As was the case for the Frenchman, the trip would make her name. Upon the death of her father, her mother and siblings settled in Boston in 1831. Fanny continued her education in a school for young ladies in New England. Fanny Erskine Inglis met William Prescott, who introduced her to her future husband, the Spaniard Ángel Calderón de Barca. In 1838, they were married. The following year, they moved to Mexico, where Ángel became Spain's first diplomat after the Mexican independence. The trip was an initiation for Fanny Calderón—a recently married woman on a diplomatic mission in a country she knew nothing about. She wrote *Life in Mexico* based on her letters to home and it became her most widely read book. *Life in Mexico* solidified her links with the Bostonian Hispanists, led by Prescott, Washington Irving, and George Ticknor. In the context of the Mexican-American War over Texas (1846–1848), the Hispanists played a crucial role in US–Latin American relations. As I assert in chapter 3, Mexico brought a deep change in Fanny Calderón's white, feminine, and imperial subjectivity. From overt racism in the first chapters—evident in the abject descriptions of Mexicans—she gradually moved to a playful and impassioned acceptance of local tastes and customs in the final chapters. Her progressive addiction to a nonhuman object—pulque—is proof of this transformation. The “disgust” for this beverage she describes in the first chapters is symptomatic of her rejection of what she considered threateningly alien to her socioeconomic and racial identity.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the final chapters of *Life in Mexico* narrate a new construction of the object pulque, transformed now into part of her routine, a vital necessity. A redefinition of the limits between the familiar and the alien occur in the body-object-sign relationship. Although indicative of a pathological need, her addiction to pulque also suggests a new way of thinking about identity as the

incorporation of what is initially perceived as alien. My reading of Fanny Calderón's Mexican transformation thus departs from more established critical visions of the Scottish-Bostonian-Spanish traveler.<sup>26</sup>

The second section, encompassing chapters 4 and 5 on Reed and Mistral, respectively, addresses the study of revolutionary and postrevolutionary Mexico as a utopian enclave. The politics and pedagogy of utopia and arcadia are studied here in light of postulates from Ernst Bloch, Fredric Jameson, and Roger Bartra.<sup>27</sup>

For both Reed and Mistral, the Mexican Revolution and the educational reforms that followed engendered utopian narratives that represented Mexico as a laboratory of change toward a more just society for peasants, women, and children. Both authors constituted themselves as witnesses of an enclave that was at once utopian and arcadian. We can see in their writings this temporal oscillation, between the present, on the one hand, in which change is being constructed for future generations (utopia), and, on the other, the rural and bucolic past, inhabited by the "noble savage" or the primitive man, uncontaminated by civilization (arcadia). Both authors thus projected one of the most forceful and persistent images of Mexico in the West, reproducing a key figure in the modernity/coloniality dialect that, as Bartra notes, has always accompanied the changes and the progress of European civilization: "The wild men of Europe zealously guard the secrets of Western identity. Their presence has faithfully accompanied the advances of civilization. Behind each landmark set in place by the march of European culture a savage is hidden, watching over the frontiers of civilized existence."<sup>28</sup>

For Reed, Pancho Villa is the centaur that Bartra analyzes in Piero di Cosimo's painting from the Italian Renaissance—tender, ferocious, and above all uncorrupted by modernity. For Mistral, utopia and arcadia become tangible in the rural school, where Indigenous children are led by the Christlike figure of modern Mexico, the teacher. Both Mistral and Reed were cast in the model of Romantic and primitive figures: for Reed, the revolutionary rebel; for Mistral, the saintly virgin mother. The analysis below shows the fissures and the contradictions within these images and their contextualization reveals a resistance to fixed classifications. For both authors, the trip to Mexico was the point of departure in a journey from which they would never return. The Mexico they visited distanced them definitively from their respective countries and made them critics of domesticity and nationality.

Chapter 4 studies John Reed's travels, describing a constant itinerary, not only because of the changing nature of the material his journalistic writing describes but also because of the impossible domestication of the traveler, as is evidenced by his death in Moscow, which forces us

to rethink the question of the traveler's *oikos* or *domus*. Before going to Mexico, Reed wrote "War in Paterson" while covering the silk factory workers' strike in New Jersey.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, it was the trip to the Mexican Revolution that launched his career as a war correspondent and revolutionary journalist. Following Pancho Villa's army through northern Mexico, Reed wrote war chronicles for the *Metropolitan Magazine* and the *Masses*, which he later published in his 1914 book *Insurgent Mexico*. Danger, adventure, and a romantic vision of Villa and his men characterize these chronicles. Reed followed the journalistic style of Richard H. Davis, who had famously covered the American "Rough Riders," led by Theodore Roosevelt, who fought in the Spanish-American War. The "Romantic" war narrative—which forged the fame of war-heroes-cum-politicians—was the model for the chronicles of war, one of the most important arenas for the diatribes of presidential campaigns. The trip to Mexico established a path for Reed, professionally, politically, and ideologically: just a year later, he traveled to Moscow to write the epic narrative of the Russian Revolution, *Ten Days that Shook the World* (1918). Chapter 4 studies Reed as the war correspondent in labor strikes, World War I, and the Russian Revolution. It situates the narratives about Mexico and Pancho Villa in Reed's complete works. My interest here is to examine the deep connections between the news industry and the lucrative business that media companies made with war narratives. Reed, however, opposed the US interventionist policies in Mexico that sought to protect American economic interests. He was one of the few journalists of his time who went to the battle lines to witness and suffer violence. He describes barely dodging bullets, execution, and prison. His trip as a war correspondent, and the literary journalism he practiced, allowed him to dissent from the official discourses and explain the causes and circumstances of war through formal and informal interviews, always with firsthand knowledge of its main actors—which in Mexico were peasants, women soldiers, and bandits. Revolution, in his case, becomes a contested symbolic site in which everyday actors also participate. In terms of journalistic and literary genres, Reed's writings oscillate between the arcadian and utopian, epic and comedy, the rural past and the modern future.

Chapter 5 examines Gabriela Mistral's trip to Mexico to participate in the postrevolutionary educational reform. After the Mexican Revolution, the secretary of education and intellectual leader José Vasconcelos invited many academics, scientists, and educators to help construct a modern nation from the ruins of the revolution. As part of his plan to modernize the country, and specifically to professionalize women teachers, he also invited the Chilean Gabriela Mistral. Her residence

from 1923 to 1925 inspired her to write poems and essays that described Mexico as an arcadian society and, at the same time, a “utopian enclave” that retained the innocence, purity, and uncontaminated authenticity of the New World while struggling to become a more just and independent future society.

The new peasant school was to be the foundation. Mistral created a Romantic image of primitive Mexico for the rest of Latin America. In her eyes, the woman teacher was a maternal figure for the modern nation. Although she had traveled extensively through Chile as a primary school educator and administrator, she had never gone abroad prior to receiving Vasconcelos’s invitation. Her trip to Mexico was the beginning of a career that would bring fame to her work as lifelong consul for Chile; in 1945, she became the first Latin American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. Thanks to this trip, her voice of provincial teacher could be heard throughout the Spanish-speaking world. In Mexico, Mistral became the icon of teaching as a woman’s profession, of the traditional roles of mother-virgin. At the same time, she took up the cause of women working outside the home as teachers.

This chapter examines the tension between the image of the celibate woman and that of the mother during the intense professionalization of female teachers in the Mexican education reforms. I also explore the role Mistral played in women’s historical shift from domesticity to the labor force, especially in rural schools over the course of Vasconcelos’s education crusade. In addition, I address how the dreams of postrevolutionary modernity forged by Vasconcelos and Mistral fell apart in communities where agrarian reform had yet to be carried out and where labor laws regarding gender equality in schools were mere utopian aspirations. This abundance of plans for peasant schools amid the massive professionalization of women in education provoked an excess that called into question the official discourses of the Mexican nation. I interpret these dreams and this excess as part of the queer archive.

The third and final section includes chapters on Artaud, the Beatniks, and Roberto Bolaño. These chapters take on the spatial question of art and literature, investigating the definitions of art and poetics that these writers associate with Mexico, mostly in terms of the desert and the frontier. This section analyzes the relationship between these texts and space, following the theories of Rob Shields, Turner, and Bourdieu.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, Artaud, Burroughs, Kerouac, and Bolaño’s experiences in Mexico are read according to Halberstam and Ahmed’s critical framework of “queer” failures and “unhappy” subjects.<sup>31</sup>

In the case of the authors in this section, defiance of the bourgeois (hetero)normativity was capitalized in a literature that unsettled estab-

lished models. Halberstam proposes a queer reading of how artistic production explores alternatives to “the usual traps and impasses of binary formulations”.<sup>32</sup> “I argue that success in a heteronormative, capitalist society equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation. . . . *The Queer Art of Failure* dismantles the logics of success and failure with which we currently live. Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways.”<sup>33</sup>

In this sense, failure is not restricted to queer as a nonbinary sexual orientation but rather as part of a subjectivity that separates from and challenges cultural binaries such as civilization and barbarism, order and chaos, West and non-West, capitalism and communism, and so forth. For Halberstam, “failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers.”<sup>34</sup>

The space of home, its objects and bodies disciplined in sedentarieness and routine, vanishes in the travel experience that jeopardizes fixed securities. As Sarah Ahmed notes, in capitalist societies happiness is associated with stable spaces and objects that reproduce the status quo. Artaud’s trip to Tarahumara territory, his writings in psychiatric hospitals, the on-the-road trips of the Beatniks repudiated by the domesticity of Cold War US society, the vagabondage of the *realvisceralistas*, and the “savagely” poets in Roberto Bolaño’s work all produce writing that resists and questions “the foggy fantasy of the happiness” of the warmth of home, that is “domestic bliss.”<sup>35</sup> At the same time, their writing proposes a new philosophy of failure, happiness, and adventure, one that yields literary, not economic or social, profits. This existential and artistic experimentation of rebels becomes symbolic capital that guarantees reproduction of the artistic field. These travelers are part of what Ahmed would call “the unhappy archive,” which is not necessarily “unhappy” but rather evidence of an alternative history of happiness, formed by those who “enter this history only as troublemakers, dissenters, killers of joy.”<sup>36</sup> My reading brings together travelers like Artaud, the Beatniks, and the realvisceralistas, for whom travel signified a way to question conventions of happiness and their associated spaces and objects.

Chapter 6 studies Antonin Artaud’s chaotic and exuberant journey. For Artaud, the voyage to the land of the Tarahumara was crucial to prove his theory on theater and its double. For Artaud, theater was a port that allowed hidden life to flow from its signs and beings. As he wrote in *Les Tarahumaras* (1937), this hidden life could be seen on the surface in Mexico. From the era’s artistic point of view, Mexico was the terrain of

magical dreams—the primitive and darker aspect of the repressed mentality of the West. Herein lies the interrelationship between surrealism and ethnology.<sup>37</sup> Artaud traveled to northwestern Mexico in 1936 to stay with the Tarahumara nation and experiment with peyote. Mexico, and the Mexican desert specifically, is often seen in Western eyes as an area of experimentation and liminality. An exoticist reading situates Artaud within the orientalist tradition. Yet, his travel narrative and his letters to psychiatrists and friends show a man torn, in search of something transcendent, which he thought he had discovered in the peyote ritual. In each of the successive versions of his narrative, Artaud gave free rein to his schizophrenia. Following his trip and return to France, he was interned in seven psychiatric hospitals. It was until the end of his life that he wrote about his trip to Mexico. He went over the experiences again and again, rewriting, clinging to them like a castaway, but at the same time revealing the impossibility of the focus of his trip.

Chapter 7 revisits William S. Burroughs's Latin American travel diaries and Kerouac's novels and poetry about Mexico in order to understand how visions of Mexico (involving sex, drugs, criminality, spirituality) predicated a critical questioning of the policies of the Cold War and North American conservatism. For the members of the Beat generation, and Jack Kerouac in particular, Mexico meant, as it also did for many contemporary tourists, a place of recreation, though they did not seek the safety of resorts for foreigners. For the Beats, a generation struck by the war policies of the United States and the censorship of the Cold War era, Mexico offered an escape, a reminder that another world was possible. Deeply American, Kerouac crossed the United States from east to west to learn its past and present and recognize its people, as he recounts in his famous book *On the Road* (1957). Nonetheless, the trip across the United States is a failure due to constant economic insecurity, police persecution, derision from abandoned wives, and paternal neglect. Consequently, following his heroes in cowboy stories, Kerouac went to Mexico to dodge the law and seek adventure. As an alternative literary movement in the postwar United States, the Beat generation—represented by Kerouac, Burroughs, Joan Vollmer, and Allen Ginsberg—saw counterculture in Mexico, a dystopian place where one could experiment with drugs, non-heteronormative sexualities, and criminality. They perceived the Mexican frontier as the ideal place for unregulated artistic creation, one in which normative points of reference would disappear.

Chapter 8 examines the work of Roberto Bolaño to show Mexico as the territorialization of poetry. For Bolaño, Mexico represents horror, damnation, and its antidote. The ideology of the accursed poet, which runs through all of Bolaño's writing, repeatedly comes to life in Mexico.

The vagabond poets in *The Savage Detectives* (1998) drift to the northern border, which also is the site of the massive femicides featured in his novel *2666* (2004). Bolaño began his literary career in Mexico, where his rejection of the status quo in literary circles earned him ostracism. In his work, Mexico is a dystopian place, excessive, and variegated, not only in literary and intellectual milieus, but also in terms of the atrocious murders of hundreds of women along the US border. In contrast to Mistral's utopian voyage to Mexico, Bolaño depicts the other face of the Mexican frontier: as the place where the neoliberal economy wreaks havoc, revealing an open colonial wound.<sup>38</sup> In contrast to the view of Mexico as a regenerator of humanity (held by Artaud and at times the Beats), Mexico becomes a site of human waste and gory capitalism.<sup>39</sup> For Bolaño, it is the symbolic and actual place of literature and horror. From different angles, Mexico continues to be narrated and lived as a laboratory of modernity/coloniality.<sup>40</sup>

All the travelers in *Impossible Domesticity* describe lived experiences that upend the certainties and happiness of the *oikos*. In the travel narratives of these writers, the object "Mexico" is defined in a variegated symbolic struggle that overturns Manichaean binaries and constantly recreates them in the logic of modernity/coloniality. Many, though not all, of the travelers here write from liminal situations marked by race, provincialism, homosexuality, insanity, foreignness, alcoholism, drug addiction, ideological persecution, war, scientific vilification, and/or illness. *Impossible Domesticity* explores this liminal, or chaotic, place as a possibility, a crack, from which to understand other visions and perspectives that fracture the homogeneity of imperial travel narratives.