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## Fear, subjectivity, and capital: Sergio Chejfec's *The Dark* and Roberto Bolaño's *2666*

Fermín A. Rodríguez

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On the dark side of the production of citizens and national subjects, the general biologization of politics – which theoretical and aesthetic languages of our time explore under the headings of biopower and biopolitics – is obscurely at work in Latin American modernizations. It could be said, then, that at the end of the twentieth century, according to a long genealogy that goes back to the Latin American liberal elites of the nineteenth century, to govern is to populate. That is, before constructing citizenry, an economy of power must put in place basic needs like health, illness, hunger, habitat, social security or accidents, wealth, lacks and welfare in order to put in place consumption, reproductive politics, immigration control, ways and forms of life. This transforms the political body of a society made up of citizens into a mere population, understood as a multiplicity of living beings codified under the mark of production and capital in their stage of neoliberal reconversion.

Novels like *2666* and *The Dark* explore, in affective terms, that permanent knot in our stomachs produced by tying together fear, subjectivity and capital. In doing so, they fold into the sensitive body of language the same social intensities that roam around the field of the living like wild beasts; that is, the accelerated trembling and throbbing of life. Pierced by the crises of neoliberal government regimes in Latin America, novels like *Boca de lobo* by Sergio Chejfec (2000), translated in 2013 as *The Dark*, and *2666* by Roberto Bolaño (2004), translated in 2008, show, beyond their different aesthetic ideologies, how at the turn of the century, the power over life – the power to create, manage and control populations – makes its way into the world of living work in order to take control of the affective rent generated by bodies that, in their joint action, create and expand potentially autonomous ways of life.<sup>1</sup>

Several factors put the novels in line with the same forces that configure the present: that the figure of exclusion in these novels has the face of a woman, that the biological body of the population is the body of young female workers, and that violence as a condition of the workings of a power exasperated by the market is fundamentally a continuous violence exerted upon a feminine body. In the barren

market, the creation and reproduction of capital are confused and intermixed with the traditionally feminine role of the creation and reproduction of life.<sup>2</sup>

### The Proletarian Girl

*The Dark* by Sergio Chejfec explores in affective terms – that is, in terms of the imminence of meaning – the indeterminate, diffuse violence that floats, threatening, over the world of labor. The novel narrates the stalking, conquest and subsequent abandonment of a female worker’s doubly captured body: at first, by the work in the factory, which physically subjects her to machine-like discipline; and later, by the mechanisms of love and desire, which push her body towards the outside of the factory, where the concealed narrator awaits her, prowling around her and seducing her until finally abandoning her when she is pregnant with a ‘future worker’ who would add his labour power to the collective work.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the novel traverses the commonplaces of social realism – its spaces, social types, the structuring of its desires, its affectations (the ‘physical-emotional problems’ of the ‘back-street seamstress who came to grief,’ as Borges said about Evaristo Carriego’s social poetry), but at the slow and artisanal pace of writing at once lucid and imprecise.<sup>4</sup> Such writing stretches between the impossibility of representing experience and the task of holding onto the words that attempt to do so.

Everything starts with the writer-protagonist who sneaks back to the landscape of love like someone returning to the scene of the crime: a suburban geography, half-done, unfinished, covered with the ruins of a Latin American city that breaks apart over an uncertain territory, without mapping – vacant lots, fragile clusters of homes, deserted dirt roads, empty sheds, isolated ranches, fields covered with weeds, debris and the remains of dead animals. There, on the corner of Los Huérfanos (Avenue of the Orphans) – a name loaded with portents – the narrator meets Delia. When he sees her for the first time, he thinks she is a schoolgirl: she seems very young, and there is a school nearby – a remnant of the modern state, looming in the middle of an expanse abandoned to the ruinous forces of the free market. But ‘unwanted knowledge often comes to us, anyway’: Delia, an almost school-aged girl, didn’t study; she worked in a nearby factory, which went unperceived in a hidden fold of reality.<sup>5</sup> Discovering that she was a worker and falling in love with her are one and the same act: “‘Look at her [...] and a factory worker, at that [...]’”<sup>6</sup> This constitutes one of the first fragments of the narrator’s recitations of an amorous discourse, which seems to be evoking that ‘great power of representation’ that Osvaldo Lamborghini attributed to Argentina, a kind of Peronist novel-country where a woman along the street is always more than just a woman: ‘she is a worker making her way to the factory’.<sup>7</sup> But the unnamed country and city of *The Dark* (in Chejfec, the referential anchors are undermined by work of very precise delocalization and effacement) are not those of the Argentina in the era of historical Peronism and the welfare state, the society of waged labor and of factory discipline: they resemble more closely the country of neoliberal Peronism, where labour’s forces of representation have been dismantled and the workers have become invisible, swallowed by the earth, in keeping with a new distribution of the sensible where the world of labour disappears from the field of experience. At the end of the

nineties, no one represents the workers; collective institutions go under in the midst of an economy that privatizes wealth instead of creating it, in a Darwinist world where inequalities are deepened.<sup>8</sup> The workers – now precarious, impoverished, abandoned to their ‘skill’ to compete in the market – had become imperceptible, clandestine and nocturnal, hidden in the folds of reality that people prefer not to see.

In this sense, what attracts the senses of the narrator is not the power of representation that Delia emanates, but rather her problematic presence, which is in a certain sense unreadable for the normalized representations of a long literary tradition. The narrator, distanced from the productive body, does not cease to cite this tradition in order to denote the failure of these representations (‘I’ve read many novels in which . . .’).<sup>9</sup> The meeting – the date – points less to representation than to the defamiliarization that is produced when, in the very heart of the visible, something that ‘we don’t want to know’,<sup>10</sup> ‘that had always been there, but had never been seen’,<sup>11</sup> is there nonetheless. It is discrete, furtive, and opaque, on the verge of presence, manifesting itself like an enigma that rarefies the free flow of reality. Invisible to the entire world, Delia had a way of ‘withdraw[ing] without absenting herself’, in conformity with an abandonment incorporated into the routine contact with the machines, which requires neither active thinking nor its total absence.<sup>12</sup> Out of sight from all, emerging from the entrails of the factory, the girl worker appears on the threshold of recognition and meaning, with the naked truth of production incarnated in her body.

### The Call of the Species

Emerging, as it were, from the nothingness in which she lives, on the border between the visible and the invisible, Delia’s blunt presence divides the narrator between knowledge and desire – a desire that is less a subjective particular than a material and sensorial field, where the corporal-affective inscription of a body yields melodramatically to power. In effect, the motion by which Delia appears before the call of the writer-narrator, meekly succumbing to the desire that pervades her, is not the ideological turn of those who interiorize the rule and submit to their corresponding roles within the social division of work. Nor is it the move of a young proletarian girl who ‘becomes aware’ of exploitation, thanks to an intellectual vanguard devoted to her cause that comes along to tell her which steps to take.

Delia’s move is more affective than ideological, and answers a kind of species call (the title of another novel by Sergio Chejfec, *El llamado de la especie*) that shapes her behavior and marks the rhythm of her steps.<sup>13</sup> Even in the anecdote about Althusser’s interpellation, which *The Dark* vaguely evokes in the meeting between the man walking and the girl worker, power is first in play during the clash between the shouting policeman and the pedestrian who turns to face him, even before the emergence of the subject of ideology.<sup>14</sup> Delia answers a call that places her in the depoliticized field of the living species, fulfilling an animal fable in which a wolf in sheep’s clothing hunts his prey. ‘All my senses were focused on her’, the narrator recalls with open jaws, transforming Delia into not so much an ideological

interpellation as an affective capture, whose target is the body, its material needs and its indeterminate power to act.<sup>15</sup>

In effect Delia is a creature upon a threshold, exposed to the unstable world of need and desire; she is a body open to indeterminacy, with the non-actualized power of affecting and being affected, of absorbing intensity, of encompassing contexts and expressing incipient powers. In her quasi-girl-labourer dispossession, she is charged with virtualities and potentialities that are inseparable from her immediate corporal existence, inscribed upon the shared and pre-individual field of affect.

It is 'as though its body were by love possessed',<sup>16</sup> Marx said about the productive power of living labour – the added value that the discipline of manufacturing separates from the body and transfers to the machine.<sup>17</sup> Dominated by the order of the machines, which isolate the workers and fragment their experience of time, the work of a Fordist labourer like Delia, which is reduced to watching over the machine and making sure it runs smoothly, lacks all of the artisanal qualities associated with tools and the archaic world of trades. From now on in the world of industrial capitalism, regardless of wages, all workers are poor, in that their living skills of labor – their knowledge, energy, time, creative power – have been stripped away by the fixed capital that accumulates in the machines.<sup>18</sup> The more powerful the economic machine is, the more alien and mortifying the older forms of work become. Indeed, classical Marxism makes us aware, in humanistic terms, of the feeling of alienation that nullifies the human 'essence' of the worker – a body separated from its capabilities, which is no longer able to recognize itself in the product of its own work. However, *The Dark* hints at something more: it hints that we will find the basis of the forms of autonomy of the capitalist economy within the radical inhumanity of the workers' existence (a product of the manufacturing discipline which is imposed upon them), and within the laborers' *defamiliarization* towards their own work.<sup>19</sup> We find this in moments when Delia, her body completely occupied by the machine's repetition, gets lost in herself by virtue of an art of withdrawal for which, according to the narrator, 'alienation is not quite the word'. Delia 'transported herself with her mind, just as she seemed to be somewhere else now, as she walked beside me. And it was this gift, this ability to withdraw without absenting herself, to abandon me without leaving my side, that was most aligned with her nature'.<sup>20</sup> More than 'alienation,' which points to a lost human essence, perhaps 'defamiliarization'<sup>21</sup> is the best word to describe the thing that constitutes Delia's 'proletarian disposition'<sup>22</sup> – the power to isolate herself, to break out of the repetition of labor by having her mind elsewhere, to 'transport herself with her mind'.<sup>23</sup> This disposition signals the beginnings of indifference and of a potential refusal to identify herself with labour in its capitalist form.

But once she passes outside of the gates of the factory, Delia – or the part of Delia that refuses to work to the rhythm of the machine's repetition – rejoins, exhausted, the field of the reproduction of life, that realm of indistinction between the biological and the social. In this realm, individuals reduced to the opacity of their mere living beings coincide with the malleable material of their bodies and their incorporeal affective reserves (their thoughts, dreams, creativity, sensibility, their erotic fantasies: their virtualities). Outside of the rigidity of the factory, a new spatial

distribution and organization of bodies begins, a territory crisscrossed by the casual networks of solidarity, cooperation and improvisation that sprout from its decomposition. Against a backdrop of the withdrawal of the State and its mechanisms of social inclusion and legal protection, this organization of bodies shelters within its folds diffuse and ubiquitous power mechanisms, along with unknown forms of life based on solidarity and community life of workers.<sup>24</sup>

### The Biopolitical Factory

If the industrial factory and its disciplinary logic constitutes the space where bodies are left encoded under the mark of capital and productivity, their crossing the factory's threshold, going beyond its walls, would in principle set in motion a world outside of the labor cycle – the part of the day that the laborers necessarily dedicate to recuperating, renewing their energy. It is the time 'for growth, development, and healthy maintenance of the body', whose limits are, for Marx, just as much of physical character (food, hygiene, housing, sleep) as affective or 'moral ones'.<sup>25</sup> It is a question of a biopolitical borderline, a physical and affective threshold that traverses the field of what is alive and passes through the sphere of well-being, of the domestic, of satisfaction and of the exhausted body's need for fortifying rest.

In this sense, *The Dark* ceaselessly revolves around the threshold that connects the industrial *disciplinary factory* – a producer of objects and bodies serialized in accordance with the logic of discipline – with the *affective factory*, where life-defining repetitions and differences unfold. In this eminently biopolitical terrain, what is at stake is not so much the transformation of material, but rather the creation and capture of pre-individual affective states and the repetition compulsion proper to the death drive.<sup>26</sup> If the disciplinary factory 'hired them, consumed them, and returned them to a life of repetitive actions',<sup>27</sup> then the biopolitical factory, spread over the entire social body, exploited – that is, hired – the person 'in order to subject them body and soul to a job and, in so doing, squeeze every last drop from them'.<sup>28</sup>

In other words, power has become affective; consequently, being outside of the factory, it does not constitute in and of itself any sort of freedom. If, within the closed space of the factory where Delia submits to the machines' predetermined rhythm, truth 'is measured, counted, and classified',<sup>29</sup> then outside of the factory a process of accumulation inherent to the biopolitical factory is taking place, and is at work twenty-four hours a day – even outside of social disciplinary structures, in the immeasurable, discontinuous field of the reproduction of labour power and the everyday, where Delia simply goes about her life.<sup>30</sup> The entire field of social life is transformed into an economic field, in keeping with an affective economy that, more so than qualified labour, puts the laborers' entire lives to work within imperceptible mechanisms. Indeed, their after-work lives, their routines, affections and skills, their personal lives, are now transformed into labour power. If Delia, feeling jealous, 'was confused by the thought of becoming the object of something at once definite and intangible, as emotions tend to be', it is because power has become affective and operates by transforming the virtuality of affect into emotion.<sup>31</sup> The social link is a libidinal link, and no power will be able to lastingly inscribe itself within the

subject's heart without a particular organization of the affects that transpire just as much inside as outside of factory walls. These affects create a productive atmosphere, rarefied by a predatory liberalism which targets the human 'capital' inseparable from the social body of the worker, the life of the human species and its conditions of biological, economic and political reproduction.<sup>32</sup>

### Overabundance of being

The automatism of the machine extends to the behavioral automatisms of gentle bodies like that of Delia, submerged in the regularities that imperceptibly oversee and model everyday existence. But *The Dark* is not just a story about mere conservation and reproduction. Delia belongs to the world in a material and sensorial way, not just as a subject of necessity, as a mere living body, a prisoner of repetition, forsaken to the productive and reproductive destiny of eating, clothing and housing herself, resting and reproducing. She wouldn't embody so much the nature of lovelornness and necessity as the code of an affective wealth localized within her productive body, a 'ferment of emotions' emerging from the disciplinary world of the factory, albeit with the course of its regularities altered.<sup>33</sup> Insomuch that she circulates through collective networks where relationships are multiplied, and insomuch that she reserves the right to enjoy her own body, Delia embodies an excess which the power over life is constantly trying to recuperate.<sup>34</sup>

But this borderline also separates the work day from what Jacques Rancière calls 'proletarian nights' – intervals of freedom, torn from the succession of labor and rest, where the normal course of things comes to a halt and 'where already the impossible was being prepared, dreamt, and seen', where collective values are solidified and links, unmediated by the relation to capitalist labor, multiply between people.<sup>35</sup> 'I knew Delia would lend me life',<sup>36</sup> confesses the narrator-writer, who vampirically takes possession of the 'overabundance of being' imparted by Delia.<sup>37</sup> Writing transforms this overabundance of being into a literary value, according to what César Aira, referring to exoticism, has elsewhere called *ready-made defamiliarization*: the writer who refuses to defamiliarize his own gaze and stops 'working' in order to leave a radically unknown world in charge of the production of what is new.<sup>38</sup> And there is not even a need to travel: Latin American writers, in the fashion of the walking man of *The Dark*, do not need to journey to distant lands: in their disjointed countries – 'unfinished' ones, as Aira says – they find disjointed halves just peering through the window, indeterminate spaces saturated with suspense that remind us of a black hole. Aira: 'Either a negative sign (barbarism, like in Euclides or Sarmiento) or positive one can be granted to this other country within one's own. Whatever the case, that other country becomes an absolute 'other,' literature, like childhood or love'.<sup>39</sup> For the writer, Delia would be 'a way to see everything anew',<sup>40</sup> a way of revealing not something hidden, but rather something that has become a custom; that is to say, something that is within everyone's sight but goes unperceived since it is not in tune with the routine distribution of the sensible. To quote Viktor Shklovsky, we could say that in order to 'recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*',<sup>41</sup> there are workers like Delia who distribute an 'overabundance of being' to the objects devoured by perceptive automatism.

The scene of the narrator prowling around the edge of the factory while Delia is having lunch localizes a type of power which is unlike the power that discloses: this type of power disciplines and keeps watch; it stalks and controls that brief interval of free time that precedes the departure from the factory. In the scene where the workers are grouped together during their break, what comes into play is the spectacle of labour power reproducing itself, recuperating, taking a break before returning to the machines. The narrator – stalking them, imperceptibly, from the field of life – steals with his gaze one of those moments which resembles the ‘little thefts’ mentioned by Marx, which capital inflicts upon the workers’ free time to eat and rest: those “petty pilferings of minutes”, “snatching a few times”, or, in the technical language of the workers, “nibbling and cribbling at meal times”.<sup>42</sup> They are those moments of appropriation of a time span incorporated into the process of production, when ‘food is given to the labourer as to a mere means of production, as coal is supplied to the boiler, grease and oil to the machinery’.<sup>43</sup>

Separated from the narrator by a gate, Delia and her coworkers are an endangered species, and ‘I don’t think I would be doing them any great injustice if I said they behaved like a herd’.<sup>44</sup> Unlike discipline, which is imposed on the individual body of the worker from the inside, this external violence, which does not perceive itself as political violence, is directed towards the time of reproduction of labor power, and has as a target the living body of a group reduced to a mere collection of living beings. These beings are motionless and absent like animals in a cage, ‘not something connected with institutions or hierarchies, like a labour union in a factory, but rather a being made up of numerous similar individuals with a molecular life of its own’.<sup>45</sup> What the narrator perceives, in accord with the regimen of vision that his gaze embodies, is far from representing qualified workers, possessors of a technical knowledge, of thought, of rights, of unconsumed energy. Rather, we find here a creation of populations, which starts with the fixed and attentive gaze directed towards a pre-individualized ‘collective body’, a collection of living individuals, thrown into the sphere of animals by a type of control that depoliticizes them, reducing them to impotence, stripping them of even their working clothes, stuck to a body that has been left naked because the work uniform has turned into their second skin.<sup>46</sup>

This stalking of the ‘collective body’ of labour announces the assault on Delia’s individualized body, a body on its path to emancipation which, once it has left the factory, keeps for itself an excess of life that can be understood as pleasure, like a power open to indetermination or a virtual intensity detached from economic reality where the conservation of the species is at stake. The narrator pounces upon this potential with the fury of a wild animal, to ‘overwhelm, destroy, annihilate’ Delia, who is suddenly and brutally transformed from the girl he adored into his enemy.<sup>47</sup> Once an opaque subject – fascinating and unattainable, a ‘victim of love, or passion’<sup>48</sup> inhabited by an insatiable desire hidden within the inner night of her body – Delia is now transformed into a ‘victim of a rape’<sup>49</sup> that comes from the field of life; she is a vulnerable being, pleading and trembling, reduced to a weak and battered animal that no longer offers any resistance. And what is at stake, then, in



that determination ‘to cross through her, to feel her come apart in my hands’, to split her in two and toss around in that ‘mass of flesh’, if it is not the necessity to ‘catch her, trap her, and subject her more forcefully still’;<sup>50</sup> to capture the thing that, deep inside of Delia, ‘literally, in her internal parts, her innards, as they say’,<sup>51</sup> harbors the force of life and of living work? What name can we give to that violent force of appropriation, that normalizing power ‘completely different from desire, and of course from passion’,<sup>52</sup> which leaves her passions reduced to a mere ‘tremor within her [... that] had, ultimately, turned into a child’,<sup>53</sup> and which, in its fury, ends up expelling all desire from Delia, silencing the potential rebellious protest of life?

The werewolf that bellows to ‘perpetuate’ its species tears Delia from the realm of pleasure and throws her into the realms of necessity, of abandonment and, now, of desire as lack.<sup>54</sup> Delia, a worker who is pregnant with a child – a future worker to feed – embodies abandonment itself within the absolute core of the labour world. And now she will end up abandoned, crushed against her biological body, condemned to life more than to death within the realm of the species’ natural life, quite far from the realm of the dreaming workers who sought emancipation in another country—that is, as Rancière recalls, the self-transformation of slave into man. The mother of an orphan son, she will cease to resist nature, in order to be transformed into ‘only one thing in life’.<sup>55</sup> She has received a brutal blow: she has experienced social precariousness and a lack of protection within a body that becomes vulnerable and insecure. In the eventuality of love, she has come to know fragility and the uncertainties that mark the internal articulation of the productive order, in accord with an economic power that produces insecurity, instability and aggressive behavior. This power, which exists on the limit between citizenry and law, extends over life the Malthusian fields of exploitation and the extermination of the living body of labour and affect. The fear of death harbored by a slave, who worked in order to no longer be afraid, now becomes the fear of a life abandoned and left naked.<sup>56</sup>

### A Worker is Being Murdered

The fear of sacred objects, of committing sins, of blood, of bullets, of the living and the dead. The fear of open spaces, of closed spaces, of the streets, of crossing bridges, of the night, of flowers, trees and colors. Even the rain and the sea can be a cause of illness and can become aggressive, just as much as meteorological phenomena. The fear of everything, of doctors, of children and of animals, of hair, of words and of clothing - the fear of even fear itself, as seen in those who suffer from phobophobia. In the museum of nineteenth-century psychiatry, on the threshold of indistinction between law and medicine, a psychiatrist and a court clerk look over a never-ending list of terrors, as if there were a science of fear that sought to calm us, cataloguing as illness an irreconcilable excess that traverses our bodies. Like a shiver, this fear passes through the pores of a life actively abandoned to its fate, exposed to an affective reality; it is felt more than lived, virtual more than real, and hides an indeterminate and ubiquitous violence within its folds.<sup>57</sup>

Thrown like a discursive net over a territory void of all meaning, the list of phobias fleetingly traverses the terror-laden atmosphere that saturates *2666*, the unfinished

novel by Roberto Bolaño, only to end up vanishing into the indefinite and ominous desert that separates Mexico from the United States. The title's date is a border of the present, the terminal borderline of advanced capitalism, and it alludes to the end of the world or of a world – a globalized landscape where time stands still and the great tale of modernization seems to have come to a halt at one sole event. This event is repeated incessantly; it is a vicious cycle in which hundreds of women – which are, in a way, all the same – are impersonally and brutally raped and killed.

There is not a single aspect of life in Santa Teresa, with the femicides of Ciudad Juárez echoing in the background, which has not been taken control of by an assembly-line production of fears. A symptom of a reality shattered by advanced capitalism, fear becomes a constitutive function of a power that induces and designs means of insecurity around bodies reduced to eliminable waste – bodies that are exposed to a kind of intangible violence, imminent and abstract, caused by economic activity which, if it were not for the politics of perception of novels like *2666* and *The Dark*, would not be perceived as political violence.

But if our optophobia, which is the fear of opening one's eyes, would subside for an instant or two and we could gain entry into the secret of evil, something would come to light – something beyond the political enigma, beyond the passionate nature of the crimes, beyond the identity of an uncatchable serial killer and of the psychiatric diagnosis which would rationally explain his deviant behavior. What would come to light is that, under the other sky of Santa Teresa, they are killing factory workers.<sup>58</sup>

### The Labour of Fear

Workers like Delia are societally invisible, unaccounted for; they are women that vanish into thin air in order to reappear some time later murdered with impunity, tossed into the middle of the desert, into vacant lots, landfills, desolated roads, ditches and irrigation canals. These workers move within an uncertain space between the workday and ways of life and culture, between the transnational and the local, between employment and unemployment. They had just arrived in Santa Teresa looking for work in the maquiladoras, or trying to cross over into the United States, following currents of bodies and things that circulate across borders which are more biopolitical thresholds than geographic demarcation lines. Capitalism always dreamed of third-world youth, submissive, malleable, unskilled and hard-working – the politeness of the patriarchal family and traditions of abuse that would supply the maquiladoras of global industry with meek and cheap labour.<sup>59</sup> It is often said, in this sense, that labor is *feminized*, in that it puts into play the creation, multiplication and exploitation of that which is produced in the field of life – a field where the limits between the economic, the social, the political and the cultural tend to dissolve into the fabric of the living.<sup>60</sup> The reproduction of capital gets mixed up with the mass production of populations of economic refugees, who find themselves abandoned in a permanent state of exception within a biopolitical territory where the rule of law has been suspended, where one can kill – women workers – without committing murder.<sup>61</sup> The landfills, vacant lots, shanty towns, urbanizations, the outlying districts of Santa Teresa in *2666* –with the maquiladoras

rising up in the background from the Sonoran Desert like gothic castles – make up an ecosystem of fear, an eminently biopolitical space from which the neoliberal State has withdrawn its control, abandoned to the forces of the free market and organized crime.<sup>62</sup> They are the new blanks on the maps, unmapped black holes where the living dead of global capitalism vegetate, exiled into a temporary community which is defined in terms of the possibility of crossing the border into the United States.<sup>63</sup>

There, work no longer protects: in Santa Teresa, in Mexico, in the Latin America of the years of globalization, in the Latin-Americanized First World, no job is completely secure. We are all exposed to unemployment, we are all about to lose our jobs, to be labeled redundant; we are all ‘potential illegals here’.<sup>64</sup> Life, then, is afraid, a permanent fear of low intensity, delocalized and intangible, which clothes our bodies and takes control of us until we are absorbed by it and have merged into it.

### Latin American Psycho

Although the violence that viciously attacks the body of the young women workers in Santa Teresa is shown as something very concrete, this does not dissolve the affective quality of the occurrence; it does not hinder its virtual reality, a felt quality that floats like an atmosphere of threat over everyday life that the novel refrains from actualizing. The certainty that ‘nothing was ever finished business’ in Mexico – for example, the lack of interest, the fallibility, the negligence, the slowness or the complicity of the police and the judiciary – guides an incomplete detective story which leaves the murders unsolved in the field of indetermination and impunity.<sup>65</sup>

In the Mexico of *2666*, the sensation of defenselessness before an invisible danger, falling like a shadow over a territory abandoned by the State, never dissipates (and, leaving everything without clarification, cultivating the charge of hallucination and excess that entails the impossible, demands such precision and attention to detail so as to scrupulously invent everything there is to know). Against the performativity of capital, against the affective capture of bodies separated by economic terror from what they are capable of, texts like that of Bolaño pit a perceptive materialism capable of capturing the effects of capitalist hegemony over bodies, making visible the relation between state sovereignty, legal systems and capital.<sup>66</sup>

The murder or murders of women, vaguely linked to the absent figure of a German novelist whose tracks vanish in Mexico, has the mobility, flexibility and immateriality of the flows of capital and labor set free by the post-Fordist economy. The primary suspect is a foreigner called Klaus Hass, a sinister German giant – tall, blond and thin – who works in the importation and exportation of computer parts. He embodies the specter of global powers, which, just like the murderer, are extraterritorial and are not localized anywhere. His computer store is an enclave of modernization, a black hole that attracts unwary working women – not represented or protected by a union – like Estrella Ruiz Sandoval.

Estrella circulated, as did Delia, between the exploitation she suffered in the maquiladora and the world of that little ‘free’ time she had left between one shift and

another, which she divided between outings to the cinema with her friends and some computer classes that become the most concrete clue behind the murders. She was seventeen years old, and she had plans for the future; she wanted to study and leave behind the world of the maquiladora for the ‘cognitive’ work of digital machines; she planned to leave behind the assembly line for the chains of communication and affective networks of ‘immaterial’ labor, which envelop those who put their whole lives to work.<sup>67</sup>

Like the stroller-writer of *The Dark*, the murderer of 2666, concealed within the border between industrial and ‘affective’ labor, lies in anticipation at the exit of the maquiladora, in the new borderline of a capital which absorbs the creativity, desire and impulses that blanket the field of life. The monster of capital – the classic capitalist ‘vampire’ of gothic Marxism, a body without life that ‘only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks’ – no longer hides (only) within the walls of the Fordist factory.<sup>68</sup> Today’s ‘post-Fordist’ beast stalks the streets, the neighborhoods of workers, the shantytowns, in the affective factory of the reproduction of life, with the same ‘were-wolf hunger for surplus-labour’ of classical capitalism.<sup>69</sup> It is just as greedy as that of prolonging the working-day ‘beyond the limits of the natural day, into the night’, and devotes itself to fulfilling the cruel and implausible dream of lengthening, without the slightest inconvenience, a worker’s production time, in order to absorb the surplus labor twenty-four hours a day – even if this produces, in good Malthusian logic, the exhaustion and death of labour power.<sup>70</sup>

### The Joke and Its Relation to Biopower

Estrella dies in August of 1995. She ‘hadn’t only been raped “three ways” but also strangled’.<sup>71</sup> Just like the police officer who entertains himself by counting the stab wounds that a woman’s body received before being strangled to death, and who ‘got bored when he reached thirty five’,<sup>72</sup> whoever inspects from beginning to end the series of one hundred and nine corpses of women murdered between 1993 and 1997 (but there were others before, and there will be others after: the series is open by definition) that accumulate in the pages of ‘The Part About the Crimes’ will at some point lose count. Like eyes that close in the face of danger, the impassive and anesthetic words with which the corpses are recorded, deprived of any human compassion, are intrinsic to a forensic report that crushes the monstrosity of the phenomenon under the weight of a statistical gaze, a fundamental part of mass societies. We find ourselves in the vicinity of a pure death impulse, a kind of blind machinic insistence, pre-individual and asubjective, which paradoxically designates its opposite: a Thanatic excess of life that survives by repeating itself compulsively; a blind and destructive élan vital which exceeds the limits of the individual and collective bios, and which the succession of murders, in their cruelty, literally supplies with the flesh that escapes from the body through torn orifices, slashes and wounds.

The constant trickle of forensic reports – precise, impersonal, purged of affects and emotions, as if they had been written up by a descendent of Rulfo’s narrators –

crushes the victims' legal-political identity upon an anatomical substratum without a personal form. It reduces women from individual subjects to a mere 'species', torn from the field of law and thrown like a corpse into a terrain where the organic is indiscernible from the inorganic, and where violating both rights and women makes not a bit of difference.<sup>73</sup>

Because in order to be eliminated in a non-criminal way, in order to have their names and histories erased from public representation, the women workers of Santa Teresa had to first have been converted into residual lives by a power that has left them naked, socially invisibilized behind a veil of impunity, abandoned in the field of life without personal attributes, in a permanent and generalized state of exception. It is a power which grows like tentacles from the scene of the decomposition of national policies. It is abandoned to a global criminal economy which feeds off of a marginalized and lumpenized population, shot through from beginning to end by transnational networks of corruption, drug trafficking and organized crime. In González Rodríguez's words, 'the world [is] reduced to a crime tabloid article'.<sup>74</sup>

In this sense, there is no enigma to discover, nor is there an ideology to interpret. Power is not hidden, and it can go unperceived from being too evident. Advanced capitalism stopped worrying about making people believe, or about persuading and convincing. It acts of its own accord, without needing to turn to any sort of discursive justification, from the moment when that which keeps reality bound together is not a systematic body of ideas, an 'omniscient' ideology, but rather the very operations of management and control which function on the level of the material routines of life. The thing that threatens the life of Santa Teresa is what Marx called 'the dull compulsion of the economic' – an impersonal force of domination that structures social life and makes it seem like hierarchies and violence are natural and necessary.<sup>75</sup>

The biopolitical humour that, between bursts of laughter, is shared by the police and court officers investigating the case defines women as 'a more or less organized bunch of cells' around the black hole of their sex organ. Women, as another joke goes, are like laws: they're made to be violated. Their brain is divided into several parts, depending on how hard you hit it, and, like a squash ball, the harder you smack it, the faster they return.<sup>76</sup> Marked by the biopolitical imagination, these jokes are fragments of a fiction where this truth is told in lies and laughter, in a bestialized language, loaded with intensities that roam around society like wild beasts on the loose.

### Dangerous Women

Enveloped in these fragments of corrupt affective language – among garbage scraps, industrial waste and debris, with the whole of death fully exposed – the savagely stabbed bodies of women lie unburied on barren land, mutilated, eviscerated, scorched, with the nipples and genitals bitten off into pieces, 'as if a street dog had gnawed at her'.<sup>77</sup> Often times, the corpses that apparently did not even deserve

burial are in plain view, so that they are found as soon as possible – or so it is suspected, as if power had the constant need to produce and exhibit nudity in order to terrorize us and preserve hierarchies, showing life on the verge of misery and danger, a target of abuse, physical force and misogynistic violence.

Is life more powerful than nudity? The violent extension of capitalism into the totality of the living, its stalking and exploitation of the bodies' potential for creation and transformation, is the reaction to a will to live – a will that came before the power that seeks to capture these bodies, assigning to them places and behaviors, regulating their movement, and stopping their escape. The women factory workers, waitresses, nurses, prostitutes and students set against the fear of death a 'pure will, pure explosion force, pure thirst for pleasure' of nomadic and itinerant bodies, difficult to settle into place as a labor power, in exodus with regard to the traditional role of women.<sup>78</sup> 'They shouldn't have gone out in those types of bodies' – or that's what they wanted to say, according to Monsiváis: those court officials, police officers, and state religious authorities that place the blame on the victims of the crimes for having worn provocative clothing and displayed sensual bodies.<sup>79</sup> It is a question of a desire that cannot be suppressed, a surplus of life and affect that passes over the identifications that subject a body to a role. A dead body cannot find enjoyment, thus the perturbing threat of the excess pleasure of the other is eliminated.

So, if things are really going to be named based on our fear of them, when it comes time to medicalize an irreducible malaise, it would first of all be necessary to speak of gynophobia, ergophobia, and tropophobia, which are the fear of women, work and moving or making changes. They shape 'a goddam hole. A goddam gash, like the crack in the earth's crust they've got in California the San Bernadino fault'<sup>80</sup> – a triangle inside of which a life that has become precarious incessantly slips away, a superfluous life, deprived of certainties, the object of calculations and appropriation by the dehumanizing action of a capital that, in conflict with the will to live, has placed terror and instability in the center of the productive process.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Chejfec's aesthetic ideology is very far from the assertiveness and referentiality of Bolaño's literature. To the post-boom tradition of Bolaño, Chejfec opposes a minor use of literature working on the indeterminacy and ambiguity of meaning. See Sergio Chejfec, 'El viaje como aventura y abandono' *Página 12* (20 December 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Hardt, 'Affective Labor', *Boundary 2* 26:2 (1999), pp.89–100.

<sup>3</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, trans. Heather Cleary (Rochester: Open Letter, 2013) [Boca de lobo. Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2000], p.52.

<sup>4</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Evaristo Carriego*, trans. Norman Thomas Di Giovanni (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984), p.79.

<sup>5</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.6.

<sup>6</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.7.

<sup>7</sup> César Aira, 'Prólogo', in Osvaldo Lamborghini, *Novelas y cuentos* (Barcelona: Ediciones del Serba, 1988), p.12.

<sup>8</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.157–159.

<sup>9</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.3.

<sup>10</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.7.

<sup>11</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.40.

<sup>12</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.57.

<sup>13</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *El llamado de la especie* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Jon Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2011), p.190.

- <sup>15</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.8.
- <sup>16</sup> Karl Marx, 'The Fragment on Machines', in *The Grundrisse* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p.74.
- <sup>17</sup> Marx took the quotation from Goethe's *Faust*, which uses it like that refrain of a folk song, describing, between the patrons' bursts of laughter, the agony of a poisoned rat: 'He ran round, he ran out, he drank of every puddle; he gnawed and scratched the whole house, but his fury availed nothing; he gave many a bound of agony; the poor beast was soon done for, as if he had love in his body', (J.W. Goethe, *Faust: A Dramatic Poem*, trans. A. Hayward [London: Moxon, 1855], p.61). For an account of Marx's 'political economy of the dead' see David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2012).
- <sup>18</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of the Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), pp.129–152.
- <sup>19</sup> Franco Berardi, *The Soul At Work. From Alienation to Autonomy*, trans. F. Cadel and G. Mecchia (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), p.46.
- <sup>20</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.57.
- <sup>21</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.57.
- <sup>22</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.58.
- <sup>23</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.57.
- <sup>24</sup> Alejandra Laera, 'Los trabajos: creación y escritura en *Boca de lobo* y otras novelas', in Sergio Chejfec: *Trayectorias de una escritura. Ensayos críticos*, comp. by Diana Niebyski (Pittsburgh: ILLI, 2012), pp.201–218.
- <sup>25</sup> Karl Marx, 'The Working-Day', in *Capital. Volume One*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Marx/Engels Internet Archive 1995, 1999), <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-cl/index.htm>>
- <sup>26</sup> Michael Hardt, 'Affective Labor', pp. 95–98.
- <sup>27</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.129.
- <sup>28</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.129.
- <sup>29</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.8.
- <sup>30</sup> Franco Berardi, *The Soul*, p.192.
- <sup>31</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.8.
- <sup>32</sup> Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Affects: The Politics of the Language Economy*, trans. G. Mecchia (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), p.81.
- <sup>33</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.71.
- <sup>34</sup> Ben Anderson, 'Modulating the excess of Affect', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. M. Gregg and G. Segworth (Durham: Duke UP, 2010), p.167.
- <sup>35</sup> Jacques Rancière, Preface to *The Nights of Labor: The Worker's Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. John Drury (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), pp. vii–xii.
- <sup>36</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.101.
- <sup>37</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.59.
- <sup>38</sup> César Aira, 'Prólogo'.
- <sup>39</sup> César Aira, 'Prólogo', p.78.
- <sup>40</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.98.
- <sup>41</sup> César Aira, 'Prólogo', p.12.
- <sup>42</sup> Karl Marx, 'The Working-Day.'
- <sup>43</sup> Karl Marx, 'The Working-Day.'
- <sup>44</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.22.
- <sup>45</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.22.
- <sup>46</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.35.
- <sup>47</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.83.
- <sup>48</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.87.
- <sup>49</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.87.
- <sup>50</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.87.
- <sup>51</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.84.
- <sup>52</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.83.
- <sup>53</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.45.
- <sup>54</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.87.
- <sup>55</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, p.56.
- <sup>56</sup> Paolo Virno, 'The Ambivalence of Disenchantment', in *Radical Thought in Italy. A Potential Politics*, eds. M. Hardt and P. Virno, trans. M. Boscagli, C. Casarino, P. Colilli, E. Emory, M. Hardt, M. Turits (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, [1996] 2006), pp.16–17.
- <sup>57</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *2666*, trans. Natasha Wimmer (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), pp.381–383.
- <sup>58</sup> For an analysis of the entwining of Ciudad Juárez, global economy and organized crime, see the insightful *The Femicide Machine* by Sergio González Rodríguez (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2012). In *2666*, it is precisely Sergio González, characterized by Bolaño as an arts writer investigating the crimes for a newspaper of Mexico City, who receives from a prostitute the revelation of the fact that the victims were factory workers, not prostitutes.
- <sup>59</sup> Leslie Salzinger, *Genders in Production: Making Workers in Mexico's Global Factories* (Los Angeles: California University Press, 2003).
- <sup>60</sup> Antonio Negri, 'Value and Affect', *Boundary 2* 26:2 (1999); pp.89–100.
- <sup>61</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), p.73.
- <sup>62</sup> Sergio González Rodríguez, *The Femicide Machine*, trans. Michael Oarker-Stainback (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2012) [*Huesos en el desierto*], pp.29–36.
- <sup>63</sup> Carlos Monsiváis, 'El femicidio y la conversión de Ciudad Juárez en territorio de la impunidad,' special issue of *Metapolítica. Las muertas de Juárez*, ed. Sergio González Rodríguez (Fuera de Serie, 2003), p.15.
- <sup>64</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *2666*, p.463.
- <sup>65</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *2666*, p.489.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap-Harvard, 2009), p.5.

<sup>67</sup> Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Language. From the New Economy to the War Economy*, trans. G. Conti (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), pp.41–50.

<sup>68</sup> Karl Marx, 'The Working-Day'.

<sup>69</sup> Karl Marx, 'The Working-Day'.

<sup>70</sup> Karl Marx, 'The Working-Day'.

<sup>71</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *2666*, p.461.

<sup>72</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *2666*, p.580.

<sup>73</sup> Gabriel Giorgi, 'Lo que queda de una vida: cadáver, anonimia, comunidad', in *Revista Diecisiete. Teoría crítica, psicoanálisis, pensamiento* (México:

Instituto de Estudios Críticos, 2012). Accesible online at: <<http://anormalesoriginales.wordpress.com/articulos-relacionados-2/lo-que-queda-de-una-vida-cadaver-anonimia-comunidad/>>.

<sup>74</sup> Sergio González Rodríguez, *The Femicide Machine*, p.20.

<sup>75</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Ideology* (London, New York: Verso, 2007), p.35.

<sup>76</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *2666*, pp.552–553.

<sup>77</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *2666*, p.461.

<sup>78</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *2666*, p.593.

<sup>79</sup> Carlos Monsiváis, 'El femicidio', p.14.

<sup>80</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *2666*, p.441.

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