

MODERNISM, CRISIS, AND THE ETHICS OF DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION IN FERNANDO DEL PASO'S TOTAL NOVELS

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Abstract: Recent criticism of the Spanish American novela total likens the genre's "totalizing" approach to social representation to that of state-administered nationalism, in which differences are either systematically erased or institutionalized through demographic segmentation in order to construct homogeneous, "democratic" consensus among political agents. In this view, the total novel misappropriates others' voices for the cultural elite's own political and commercial ends. In contrast, the testimonio is held up as a more democratic genre that distributes representational authority among a variety of agents. This essay reevaluates the relationship between the novela total and testimonial modes of discourse, arguing that Mexican author Fernando del Paso's total novels draw on the litigious power of testimonial as well as modernist aesthetics of rupture to disrupt the narrative of democratic consensus constructed by Mexico's Partido Revolucionario Institucional and to postulate a civil society that congeals as a horizontal, aggregative ethical community in opposition to state politics.

Cultural studies debates in recent decades have focused on the ethical quandary related to the trend of "giving a voice to the voiceless" in literature that deals with social issues.¹ While few would dispute the desirability of bringing social inequalities and political marginalization into public view, the symbolic representation of subalterns in narrative has become suspect as yet another mechanism of the lettered center to maintain control over marginalized groups, particularly in literature with national and/or transnational pretensions.² Within this debate, even mechanisms designed to maintain differences in representations of subaltern others, such as the Bakhtinian concept of dialogic narrative, become questionable, as ostensibly "polyphonic voices" incorporated by authors into their works are seen as subject to editorial manipulation and decontextualization to the authors' own ends.

Perhaps nowhere does this dilemma emerge more violently than in the polemic over the so-called *novela total*, a theoretical discourse and novelistic practice that appeared in Spanish America during the 1960s, accompanying movements of cultural renovation and continent-wide demands for more democratic, inclu-

1. This debate came into focus with the 1991 special issue of *Latin American Perspectives* 18 (3–4), entitled "Voices of the Voiceless in Testimonial Literature," although it had been simmering since the 1960s.

2. "Subaltern" refers here to those who are denied full access to political or cultural self-representation.

sive politics. The theory of the “total novel” as laid out by its earliest exponents, Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa and Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, called for the creation of a total novelistic universe, a fictional simulacrum of reality that functioned simultaneously as polyphonic cultural encyclopedia and critical supplement capable of transforming its readers’ worldview.³ Contemporary critics often view this enterprise as a forceful expropriation of the voices and knowledges of multiple others; for these readers, the total novel as a cultural practice is analogous to the procedures of internal colonialism employed by national states to erase cultural differences under the homogeneity of state-administered nationalism or, conversely, the homogenizing market logic of the globalized culture industry and world literature.⁴ In this context, the total novel is read as a technical tour de force that centralizes discursive power under a single author, whose privileged position within the text’s production of social meaning arrogates to himself (almost always “him”) a kind of transcendental subjectivity akin to that claimed for both nationalism and universalistic humanism. These critics view the total novel as the cultural elite’s response to the threats to its hegemony posed, in the literary sphere, by the rise of testimonial modes of discourse that redistribute discursive authority among a variety of social agents.⁵ In short, readers focusing on human rights and political struggle typically dismiss the total novel at best as authorial self-indulgence, and, at worst, as the misappropriation of others’ voices for mercenary ends of self-promotion in political circles and national and foreign literary markets.

In this essay, I reevaluate the position of the total novel with respect to testimonial modes of discourse, modernist formal experimentation, and movements for democratic, cultural plurality that arose during the 1960s in the specific political and cultural context of Mexico. I argue that, contrary to common opinion, the *novela total* and the *testimonio* formed complementary, if heterogeneous, projects at least up through the early 1990s, when traditional Marxist ideology came into question with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the paradoxical hegemony of postmodern theory placed both genres’ possibilities for articulating social truths into question. Until that point, the *testimonio* and the total novel shared the aim

3. The foundational texts of the theory of the total novel are Vargas Llosa’s introduction to Martorell’s *Tirant lo Blanc* (1969) and Fuentes’s *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (1967), although Fuentes prefers the term “new novel” to highlight his modernist genealogy. Fiddian (1989) provides a summary of these authors’ aesthetic proposals, to which Corral (2001) adds the notion of excess and the “collectivization of subjectivities.” Sainz (1983) uses the term “encyclopedic” fiction to describe similar tendencies, while Ercolino (2012) has coined the term “maximalist novel” to refer to the trend of exhaustive or systematic exploration of themes and spaces in more recent works.

4. For example, Long argues repeatedly throughout *Fictions of Totality* that the “incorporative, unifying logic of the totalizing novel” as a genre reproduces that of the postrevolutionary, populist Mexican state. As he concludes, “the totalizing novel is the product of a centralized society whose goal is coherent, self-contained autonomy” (Long 2008, 183).

5. Long states this explicitly (2008, 3), while Beverley (1993), Gugelberger and Kearney (1991), and Yúdice (1991) make similar arguments when discussing the *testimonio*. Colás (1996) has already refuted the prime criticism of the fictional representation of subalterns, underscoring the ultimate symbolic nature of any text, including the *testimonio*, while Moreiras notes that performing literary criticism on the *testimonio* “reabsorbs” it into the system of literary representation (1996, 203); I am interested in recovering the materiality of symbolism within its specific political context.

not only of exposing injustices and inequalities but also of bringing about systematic social change, if by contrasting means.⁶

Although based on real lives, testimonios generally utilized the narrative framework of the bildungsroman to engage their readers' affective mechanisms in order to promote empathetic identification (solidarity) ostensibly leading to coordinated political action across social classes, a process commonly known as *concientización*.⁷ In contrast, the total novel's modernist collage structure, characterized by temporal and spatial fragmentation and a multiplicity of narrators, eschewed direct political engagement through emplotment in order to draw attention to the ways in which sociopolitical systems generate hierarchical power relations and subaltern subject positions, with the tacit goal of destructuring them. If the testimonio generates cognition about social conflict primarily by accessing the reader's emotions and eliciting an affective response, the total novel's systematicity engages the reader at a metacognitive level, giving preference to the configuration of horizontal ethical communities over militant political engagement in ways that, I argue, prefigured the purported emergence of civil society in Mexico during the 1980s as both an alternative and a supplement to formal political action.

In using the term "civil society," I refer specifically to how it was conceived in Mexico during the 1980s by public intellectuals such as Fernando Benítez, Carlos Monsiváis, and Raúl Trejo as an alternative to militant party politics. Although rooted in Gramsci's notion, this Mexican conceptualization of civil society postulated the possibility of an ethical community that existed in parallel dissent with the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)'s state politics and its own Gramscian "corporatist" civil society. In this sense, the Mexican notion of civil society was counterhegemonic; it disrupted the PRI's claims of the "consensual" convergence of civil society and state politics.

I contend that the authors of total novels returned to modernist techniques that emerged from avant-garde experimentation with the aesthetics of rupture—particularly the collage—to promote an ethics arising from the shared heterogeneity of daily life in the midst of crisis. In both the visual arts and literature, the collage is a form designed specifically to eliminate compositional hierarchies and to disrupt *trompe l'oeil*—the illusion of depth—as well as to represent temporal and spatial synchronicity. As I discuss below, the total novel's narrative collage—

6. Moreiras (1996, 192–195) argues that Boom and post-Boom novels (of which the total novel forms a variant) correspond to a particular brand of Cold War cultural nationalism from which the testimonio attempts to break loose through new conceptualizations of identity politics designed to resist the post-Cold War wave of neoliberal globalization. While I do not disagree completely, Moreiras's chronological framework (1960s vs. 1980s) reveals that this division is based on when North American critics began to pay attention to the testimonio rather than its actual emergence, which was nearly coetaneous with the modern novel in Latin America.

7. I refer to the bildungsroman-like structure of early testimonios like Barnett's *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1968) and Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* (1969). Jameson (1992, 127–128) theorizes that structuring the real lives of subalterns within the bildungsroman creates an "anti-autobiography," a subversion of the colonial or first-world bildungsroman as a machine for producing "centered subjects." I propose that this is a mechanism for penetrating "centered" readers' defenses by drawing them into affective identification with the speaker in order to generate political solidarity; it's a viral tactic targeting "centered" readers more than a production-oriented strategy of "literary import substitution," as Jameson frames it.

that crowded jumble of voices, discourses, and events compressed onto a single, synchronous narrative plane—prefigures a social organization that emerges from diverse bodies brushing awkwardly up against each other in the synchronicity of plazas and streets, a collective identity dependent on discontinuous, rhizomatic social assemblages rather than the machined seamlessness of nationalistic essentialism. The total novel engages what French political philosopher Jacques Rancière (2010, 152–168) views as art’s ability to create dissensus, disrupting prevailing categories of action and perception through the strategic use of impropriety and misplacement—qualities that Peter Bürger (1984, 83–94) associated primarily with avant-garde aesthetics but which Rancière extends to any symbolic representation, since representation always maintains a supplementary (decentering or critical) relationship to discourse and reality itself. I argue that the total novel’s modernist temporal and spatial fragmentation disrupts the legitimizing myth of continuity between social relations and political power—in this case, the twentieth-century plotline conjoining Mexico’s PRI with the *pueblo* (body politic), as the object(ive) of the PRI’s “revolutionary” politics. Furthermore, collage flattens hierarchies of knowledge and sociopolitical systems into a single, two-dimensional textual surface, thereby drawing attention to the fictions of depth (historical legitimacy) that uphold them.⁸ Collage’s flatness lays bare the reality that what sustains power and its hierarchies is the continuous exercise and reproduction of power through discursive reiteration and performative reenactment; any apparent social or historical constraints over its actions are those that it imposes itself in order to maintain the appearance of depth and legitimacy in the fabrication of consensus (Rancière 2010, 42–43).

At the same time, the novelistic representation of social relations as a series of haphazard juxtapositions of bodies and discourses prefigures a disordered social ethics located in shared, horizontal domestic space rather than any rooted, arborescent political framework. The narrative structure thus reflects a localized, crowded ethos of everyday bodies pressed up against each other, held together only by the friction of crisis, that strips politics of transcendence, revealing it as nothing more (or less) than power games, and its object(ive), the body politic, as a faceless, pixelated body whose statistical composition allows it be redistributed without resistance, at will. The total novel emerges in reaction against the segmentation and demographic distribution of social bodies into statistic populaces within a people (the *pueblo*) carried out by the state in order to produce the consensual body politic. In this reading, the term “total” refers not to the totalitarian colonization of subjectivities and knowledges but rather to the notion of social bodies as irreducible totalities unified by bodily friction and ethical engagement in opposition to the state’s logic of corporatist segmentation and distribution.

8. Collage shares this making visible of fictionality with what theorists like Robert Scholes and Linda Hutcheon have called metafiction; metafiction, however, is a method of accounting for narrative structure, of making form count, while collage relies on the juxtaposition of unaccountable differences. Collage may function on occasion as metafiction, but it is purposefully unstructured in order to maintain the irreducibility of difference without imposing a hierarchical order of identities.

I am particularly interested in Mexican author Fernando del Paso, who penned three works of maximalist fiction in a modernist literary style often compared to that of James Joyce.⁹ Significantly, each of Del Paso's total novels is set during a moment of political rupture when the Mexican state and its hegemonic cultural discourse entered into representational crisis: *José Trigo* (1966) deals with the Guerras Cristeras of the late 1920s as well as the Nonoalco-Azcapotzalco railroad worker's strike of 1958–1959, both of which ended in severe state repression; *Palinuro de México* (1977) culminates with the protagonist's demise during one of the student marches leading up to the 1968 governmental massacre of students at Tlatelolco; and *Noticias del Imperio* (1987) gives a nuanced interpretation of the 1862–1867 French intervention in Mexico, a key turning point in the formation of the modern, liberal Mexican state. Each of these novels engages the modernist corpus of techniques and texts at multiple thematic and formal nodes, maintaining a complex dissonance between artistic autonomy and sociohistorical representation that disrupts the hierarchical forms of belonging instituted by the Mexican national state—that is, the fabrication of “democratic” consensus through corporatist political negotiation and civic education—while simultaneously disavowing the equally hierarchical oppositional logic constructed by militant political parties with their own set of categories that, as the theoretical negative of the state, mirror it. In other words, Fernando del Paso's total novels invalidate politics rooted in either history or theory as modes for dissension in Mexico, locating political engagement instead on a synchronous, surface plane of nodal interactions between everyday people linked by the friction of contact on the street, the common experience of containment/repression, and a shared ethics of co-responsibility that arises from covalence (living and working together) rather than any a priori value judgment. Nevertheless, such a disavowal is itself a political act, as it resists the reduction of social bodies to “the people” as the sum of demographic categories and of politics to the administration or policing of these demographic segments; this dissension, or rendering visible of the “gaps within the sensible,” is the definition that Rancière provides of politics (30–39).

FROM TRANS-SUBJECTIVITY TO CROWDED VOICES

As many critics have made clear, the main challenge in representing subalterns, even in autobiographical or testimonial self-representation, is to avoid constituting transcendental subject positions within or beyond the text, locating the narrator, the author or editor (*gestor*), and/or the reader in positions that subordinate others to them, arrogating for themselves the other's constitutive role in

9. Fiddian (1989, 2000) has written most extensively on the connections between the two authors. His association of Del Paso with Joyce's aesthetics is disputed by Sánchez Prado (2008), however, who proposes that Del Paso counters a more generalized Joycean tendency in Mexican fiction with a return to earlier satirical models in *Palinuro de México*. Price (2012b) dialogues with both critics to arrive at a middle ground. I follow Fiddian (1990, 2000), Mansour (1986), Mata (1991), and Sáenz (1994), among others, in associating Del Paso's novels with the novela total genre pioneered by the writers of the Boom. As Fiddian affirms, Del Paso's “obra completa es un monumento a las posibilidades de la novela total” (1990, 151).

dialectical thought and ethical obligation. Avant-garde art and writing attempted to address this foundational problem, which they associated with nineteenth-century realism and naturalism, through dehumanization—that is, a shift toward the systematic (form) through techniques of defamiliarization. Dehumanization de-faced the human, revealing characters as symbols (positions in a representational system), language as an emblematic order, and art as a social and political institution. In short, dehumanization made visible the systematicity of power relations and the production of subaltern positions, but it did not directly foment ethical self-awareness or engagement with others.

By the 1930s, moreover, avant-garde aesthetics had largely been expropriated for institutional purposes. In Mexico, this is particularly clear in the state sponsorship and commercial success of avant-garde artists considered emblematic of “revolutionary” aesthetics, among them Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Rufino Tamayo, and Juan O’Gorman. Furthermore, the influence of Soviet militant communism and its privileging of socialist realism reined in the autonomist tendencies of avant-garde art, demanding that socially minded artists restore the “face” to social subjects, although it still favored representation of systematic processes of social subjectification over individual subjectivities. This tension between the demands of realistic social representation and artistic autonomy or critical distance surfaced in heated debates between artistic figures and factions in Mexico throughout the first half of the twentieth century, coming to a head with the 1959 triumph of the Cuban Revolution, which led to a critical reevaluation of the legacy of the 1910–1920 Mexican Revolution as well as continent-wide questioning of the possibilities and roles of art in promoting revolutionary social change. Although there were many precursors, the *testimonio* and the *novela total* emerged as theorized genres nearly simultaneously, if not symmetrically, in Cuba (Miguel Barnet), Mexico (Ricardo Pozas, Elena Poniatowska, Carlos Fuentes, and Fernando del Paso), and Peru (Mario Vargas Llosa) in response to these continental debates.

It would be simple to locate the *testimonio* as the response of the faction most closely affiliated with socialist realism and the *novela total* as the rejoinder of the autonomists as a rejection of social realism; however, this division would be overly reductive. The *testimonio* returns to realism as nonfictional (auto)biographical representation rather than the fictional realism that was the dominant mode in the Latin American regionalist and *indigenista* writing of the 1920s through the 1940s; it rejects the transcendental subject position of the omniscient narrator, a rejection that is only possible because the avant-garde made visible the colonizing pretensions of that narrative position and of nineteenth-century realism as a sociopolitical institution closely linked to liberal capitalism (Bürger 1984, 47–54). Furthermore, the repudiation of the transcendental subject position implicit in realist objectivism also constitutes a rejection of *militancia* in party politics, with its vertical power structure and strictly regulated discursive hierarchy (capped by the transcendental position of political theorist), that dominated the Latin American left throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

The *testimonio* did not completely liberate the subaltern from a symbolic status, since it positioned a single narrator as the material representative of an

entire social class, often the pre-proletarian peasants who would ostensibly be transformed into class-conscious modern workers, but it nevertheless humanized the speakers as persons (rather than mere statistics or objects of theory) with concerns—racial, gender, and sexual discrimination, for instance—that often fell outside the spectrum of class struggle. Although testimonios typically cohered with Marxist thought in their representations of power relations, they also had moments of dissonance (unorthodox spiritualities and sexualities, to provide two examples) that were not easily reconciled with the militant strain of Marxist ideology that predominated in 1960s Latin America. Furthermore, simply speaking out of order—even through the mediation of an editor—created dissensus within the political hierarchy, whose leaders often viewed their role as the *concientización* (making aware of oppression) of the masses, not the converse. These leaders' technocratic approach to social theory frequently discounted the possibility that the masses might have something to teach them about the workings of power. In this sense, the testimonio should be viewed historically as a genre of rupture as well as a vehicle for constructing an oppositional consensus leading to coordinated political action.

On the other hand, the *novela total* is clearly rooted in social reality despite its founders' proclamations of artistic autonomy. Given the subject matter of his novels, it would be highly ingenuous to read Vargas Llosa's literary "creationism" as a simple Oedipal replacing of God within a fictional universe. When Vargas Llosa speaks of "deicide," he is plotting the annihilation of a certain kind of subject position, not its straightforward replacement.¹⁰ In the total novel, the narrator(s)' subject positions are self-consciously supplementary, not originary; they are the tumultuous, crowded selves of modernist fiction rather than the unabashedly omniscient narrator of realism.¹¹ As Rancière might put it, that the total novel is explicitly supplementary to social reality "severs objectivity from its account," revealing the constructed nature of the social order and belying it as "fact" (Corcoran 2010, 7). The total novel's crowded narrative collage is inclusive but not homogenizing; even when using a third-person narrator, it maintains, even exposes or exhibits, the traces of the irreducible singularity of myriad others that mark every speaking subject.

Carlos Fuentes, in *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*, was careful to emphasize this plurivocal, crowded, or aggregative supplementarity as the structural basis of the total novel: social heterogeneity, which he also describes as "antifonías totalizantes" (totalizing antiphonies) (1969, 29) and "una confrontación dialéctica permanente" (a permanent dialectical confrontation) (35), served to directly challenge "monolithic power" (86). "Antiphonic" plurality disrupts the choral logic of power, particularly in a society that claims democratic political representation;

10. Significantly, Vargas Llosa describes authors like Martorell, Balzac, Dickens, Flaubert, and Tolstoy, whose works he considers precursors to the total novel, as "suplantadores de Dios" (usurpers of God), and he compares the total novelist to Borges's mapmaker who wanted to create a 1:1 scale map of the world (1992, 11).

11. I borrow Shameem Black's notion of "crowded selves" as modernist narrative devices that "work to elude complete recuperation into Orientalist, primitivist, sexist, classist, or other modes of representational constraint" (2010, 10).

as Rancière argues, the mere presence of dissonant voices places into question the order of reasons—the consensus—that upholds the fiction of democracy. As Corcoran summarizes,

the egalitarian effects of politics, showing that the uncounted also partake of political speech, rebounds on the order of earned titles and supposed dispositions that aim at stitching up social space. It shows that the fact of ruling is not underpinned by an order of reasons. What underpins the rule of some is only the fact *that* they rule, beneath which there is nothing but the title of the equality of speech—and thus, the capacity for politics—which in itself belongs to all and no one in particular. (2010, 7; emphasis in original)

The total novel's use of form to create dissonance opens up a space for dissent, that equality of speech: not the indistinguishable voice of the crowd, but crowded voices.

CONSENSUS IN POSTREVOLUTIONARY MEXICO

This matter of dissenting voices becomes particularly important in Mexican political history following the revolution, when the national state became highly adept at fabricating consensus. Acknowledging and reiterating the speech of the social other disrupts established orders, but the other's speech is also the object of political theory. In the fabrication of consensus and consent, the other's speech is neutralized most effectively through incorporation, as the political history of Mexico has made clear time and again. Beyond mere expropriation, Mexico's Partido Revolucionario Institucional was a master of incorporation, of placing bodies and language within legal entities affiliated with the party in a hierarchical distribution. In the PRI's corporatist consensus, expropriation was the price of incorporation.

Postrevolutionary consensus emerged in Mexico as a machine for reconciling political (and personality) differences internally, behind closed doors, rather than on the battlefield, where as many as one million Mexicans died between 1910 and 1920. Although they vied ruthlessly for power, presidents Álvaro Obregón (1920–1924), Plutarco Elías Calles (1924–1928, and from behind the scenes until 1934), Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940), and Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940–1946) each built upon the machinery of consensus forged by his predecessor, constructing continuity despite disunity. Particularly important were Obregón's negotiations with the Confederación Regional de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CROM), which brought labor unions into partnership with the state, and Calles's founding of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (changing names twice to become the PRI under Ávila Camacho in 1946), which united in its ranks nearly every existing political party in Mexico at that time, including even the Communist Party.¹² Lázaro Cárdenas consolidated the state's relation with socialist dissenters, creating the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM) under Vicente Lombardo Tolezano and the Confederación Nacional Campesino (CNC), which encompassed

12. Consult Luis Garrido's *El Partido de la Revolución Institucionalizada* (1986) on the intense negotiations leading to the formation of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario.

the discourse of land reform. Calles's and Cárdenas's concessions to socialism catalyzed conservative opposition, which Ávila Camacho disarmed by declaring himself openly Catholic, renaming the state party the PRI, guaranteeing the sanctity of private property (including that of the Catholic Church), and signing wartime agreements with the United States that kicked off the "Mexican miracle" of rapid economic growth. By the time Ávila Camacho stepped down, alliances had been built with all of the most powerful sectors in Mexican society, guaranteeing the PRI's hold on power and establishing political consensus in which all disagreements regarding policy and personnel were negotiated internally, with the president mediating.

This consensus was by no means democratic: it was an enforced consensus in which successive political leaders used violence and coercion as well as diplomacy and clientelistic interest bargaining to maintain the calm. Nevertheless, the revolutionary government had to simulate the appearance of democracy to achieve legitimacy as the embodiment of the Mexican people and the negation of Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship, duly holding elections and prohibiting multiple presidential terms (one of the trigger issues that set off the 1910 Madero Rebellion).¹³ Voting held an important symbolic function, but the democracy in question was not electoral; effective democracy was postponed in favor of enforced coalition governance underpinned by the promise of material democracy—modernization and the distribution of benefits allocated by social sector—and a notion of racial consensus in which *mestizaje* was promoted through civic education as the mark of shared citizenship.

Political scientists call this system of democracy through collective bargaining "noncompetitive" or "single-party" state corporatism. In the PRI's corporatism, a series of state institutions were created to negotiate consensus with their respective constituents as well as to generate a narrative of collective embodiment and encompassment that would produce consensual subjects through civic education and induction into these institutions. The Mexican state under the PRI was a machine designed to fabricate consensus within the appearance of an electoral, material, and racial democracy that effectively silenced anyone who was not authorized to speak. Individuals who lay outside of the corporate sectors recognized by the state were accounted for, but did not count. In effect, they were invisible.

The 1927–1929 Guerras Cristeras and the 1928 assassination of Obregón were the first events to make visible the fabrication of this consensus and those whom it excluded, but they also conveniently justified heavy-handed tactics to restore order. The state was able to delegitimize the Cristeros as licit interlocutors because of their use of violence, their apparent or real unwillingness to negotiate, and their real or fabricated links to the nineteenth-century conservatives whom the regime blamed for the long string of civil wars that plagued Mexico throughout the preceding century. Likewise, when Obregón ran for a second term, Calles painted him as the "last caudillo" holding back Mexican democracy; his fortuitous death, supposedly at the hands of a religious fanatic, was thus necessary to move

13. Regarding the ritualistic structure of the PRI's electoral campaigns, consult Adler de Lomnitz, Salazar Elena, and Adler (2010).

forward into a new era of revolutionary politics. With the military defeat of the Cristeros and the concessions made to the Catholic Church under Ávila Camacho, the state was able to assert near-complete consensus, a claim that was sustained by the economic growth during the 1940s and 1950s commonly known as the Mexican miracle. However, the 1958–1959 railroad workers' strike disrupted anew this narrative, revealing that many Mexicans had been excluded from the material democracy and that the system of state corporatism was rife with corruption, benefitting labor leaders but not necessarily their constituents. The use of violent repression further undermined the legitimacy of the PRI's rule, which, rather than democratic consensus, was revealed to be rooted in its capacity for violence.

Tellingly, Fernando del Paso's first novel, *José Trigo*, returns precisely to these two crisis events—the Guerras Cristeras and the 1958–59 railroad workers' strike—that uncovered the fissures within the PRI's claims to total political encompassment through democratic consensus. In fact, both the novela total and the testimonio emerged as genres in Mexico at this juncture. The railroad workers' strike and the conditions of extreme poverty in the countryside, which led to massive migration to urban centers, began to reveal that the PRI's consensus-producing machinery was dedicated primarily to maintaining itself in power rather than benefitting its constituents. Furthermore, left-leaning intellectuals, many of whom had initially supported the state (particularly under Lázaro Cárdenas), were emboldened by the 1959 triumph of the Cuban Revolution. These intellectuals accused the PRI of hijacking the Mexican Revolution for its own gain, an accusation that gained traction following the 1968 massacre of students at Tlatelolco, and they began to publish a series of essays, chronicles, testimonios, and novels that looked to make visible the PRI's failings. The 1960s and 1970s were the prime decades for these works of dissent, many of which are now considered, ironically, Mexican classics: among them, Carlos Fuentes's *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962), Elena Garro's *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, Elena Poniatowska's testimonial *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* (1969) and *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971), and Fernando del Paso's *José Trigo* (1966) and *Palinuro de México* (1977).

COMMON GROUND

Given the omnivorous scope of Del Paso's novels, his deployment of techniques associated with literary high modernism, and his frequent insistence on the fictional world's creative autonomy, it may surprise some readers that his novels foreground the testimonio as a mode for coming into and representing knowledge of others. *José Trigo* is framed as a series of intercalated interviews with people living at the Nonoalco railroad workers' camp, and the first-person voice the framing narrator (there are many others) assumes is that of an interviewer who, contrary to criticisms often leveled at the testimonial process, never attempts to efface his role in the production of meaning, but neither does he claim to hold a privileged or transcendental position with respect to the stories and facts that he gathers. Rather than this narrator, the character José Trigo occupies the symbolic position of truth: he is the sole witness to the murder of labor leader Luciano at the hands of Anastasio, another railroad boss who has been corrupted by govern-

ment agents and thus represents the contradictions of *charrismo*, or the collusion of union leaders with the government in exchange for personal benefits.¹⁴ The interviewer/narrator never succeeds in finding José Trigo, who has fled the camp to avoid the repercussions of his act of witnessing.

The perennial absence of this truth position means that the interviewer (as well as the reader) can only piece together the story (or history) in a provisional way, assembling a communal collage through fragments provided by the other characters he interviews, clippings from newspaper articles, and ironically placed snippets of official discourse. This piecemeal collage delegitimizes both the official version of events (that Luciano was killed by his own men for embezzling union funds) and the hierarchical structure of the labor union and its consequent subordination to the corporatist interest-bargaining mechanisms that the PRI used to maintain the appearance of democracy, trading concessions for votes and enriching labor leaders in the process. The plurivocal testimonial collage flattens the pyramidal organization of the chapters (there are seven ascending chapters, a *puente* or platform, and seven descending chapters), whose blatantly contrived symmetry reflects the arbitrary, ritualized verticality of the corporatist state. The content of the chapters corresponds in no way to the form beyond arbitrary symmetry. The state is thus shown to have no social continuity or historical depth: it is simply the imposition of hierarchical structure through the assertion (enactment) of power.

The reader stands in for the absent witness in this assemblage of meanings; she or he is called upon to bear witness to the machinery of political subjectification and coercion employed by the PRI to produce consensus, but also to take the place of the absent José Trigo in the community united by the common sense of containment and loss of visibility resulting from corporatist politics. Nevertheless, the reader holds only a supplemental relation to this originary witness and therefore lacks authority to speak truth, particularly since José Trigo's testimony remains unvoiced, if acknowledged. The reader can never predicate from atop that central pyramid as the source of meaning; he or she can only write biography, reiterating or refuting another's self-narration, never autobiography in any convincing fashion. Furthermore, the missing (but acknowledged) testimony means that the reader is proscribed from achieving dialectical transcendence as the producer of history: judgment (political action) is suspended pending further investigation. The reader is thus inducted into an ethical community, whose membership depends only on corporal or discursive contact within an event, the railroad workers' strike (or the concentricity of its echoes), but he or she cannot hold any privileged position above that community, ethical or otherwise.

In this way, civil society congeals not as the precursor to the body politic, catalyzed by the self-stratifying, rallying power of political leadership or cultural hegemony, but rather in reaction to a crisis event that becomes such through its

14. Luciano is based on real-life labor leader Demetrio Vallejo, while Anastasio is loosely associated with Jesús Díaz de León, the corrupt secretary-general of the Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros. Díaz de León's predilection for Mexican rodeo became associated metaphorically (the acts of roping, harnessing, muzzling, even castrating cattle) with corrupt tactics for neutralizing labor unions now known collectively as *charrismo*.

possibilities for transformation, for the disruption of the seamless continuum that state politics claims with respect to its “constituents.” In Fernando del Paso’s novels, at least, civil society forms from a collective, litigious (in Rancière’s terms) voicing of agency—taking to the streets, graffitiing edifices—in the face of state politics. The crisis event precipitates civil society as an irreducible totality in opposition to state politics and its corporatist logic of segmentation.

If the role of the witness and the interview as narrative procedure are diminished in *Palinuro de México* due to its reduced cast, the medical student protagonist, who often narrates in the first person, nevertheless attests to the tenuous position of the middle class during the supposed Mexican economic miracle, and he becomes a firsthand witness/narrator and victim of the governmental repression of the 1968 student movements. Like Virgil’s character, Del Paso’s Palinuro is a helmsman without a rudder; unable to control the direction of the ship, he is reduced to hapless witness to his own inevitable failure, which culminates in his pathetic death after being run over by a tank during the protest march of August 27, 1968. Ironically, his failure to achieve entry into either the material democracy of the economic Mexican miracle or political democracy through collective political action endows him with national symbolism. Palinuro of Mexico incarnates the body politic not through any qualities of his own but only in a negative sense: his exemplary failure to achieve Mexicanness as an incarnated citizen fully integrated into the political economy serves to unmask the body politic, the object (and objective) of the state, as a virtual configuration, uninhabitable by real bodies.

In *Palinuro de México*, the crisis event, the violent repression of the 1968 student protests, is approached through allegory, in that unbearable, interrupted witnessing of the dissection of a cadaver, of the student body, of Palinuro’s double. Like the discourse of nationalist politics, medicine is only palatable as theory: as the narrator explains, “entre la mitología de la palabra bisturí y la resección del estómago [. . .] había una distancia enorme” (Del Paso 1987, 91).¹⁵ Indigestible contradictions appear when theory is put into practice, when he realizes that the enactment of theory requires the disassembling of real bodies, of his own body:

El cadáver, por una extraña coincidencia, era el de un muchacho que debió tener la edad y la estatura de Palinuro. Que debió quizás tener las ilusiones de Palinuro cuando estaba vivo. La coincidencia fue todavía más lejos: Palinuro descubrió que el color de la piel, los ojos y el pelo era similar al de los suyos. Y si el parecido de la nariz, la frente o la boca casi no existía, había sin embargo otras semejanzas que no se podían poner en duda: entre el corazón del muchacho, sus intestinos, sus huesos, su lengua y su vejiga y el corazón, los intestinos, los huesos, la lengua y la vejiga de Palinuro, no había ninguna diferencia notable. (Del Paso 1987, 93)¹⁶

15. “There was an enormous distance [. . .] between the mythology of the word ‘scalpel’ and dissecting a stomach” (Del Paso 1987, 91). All translations are my own unless noted otherwise.

16. “The cadaver, due to a strange coincidence, was that of a boy who was nearly the same age and stature as Palinuro. Who may have had the same dreams as Palinuro when he was alive. The coincidence went even further: Palinuro discovered that the color of his skin, his eyes, and his hair were similar to that of his own. And if the similarities between their noses, foreheads, and mouths were almost non-existent, there were nevertheless other, undeniable similarities: between the boy’s heart, intestines, bones, tongue, and bladder and Palinuro’s heart, intestines, bones, tongue and bladder, there were no notable differences” (Del Paso 1987, 93).

Dissection homogenizes real bodies, standardizing the differences between them through segmentation; the only allowable variance is kind (part), any deviance from the set is deemed pathological. Medical theory requires the removal of the face or skin, the humiliating exposure of organs to public view, their labeling and distribution into a series of containers. As Gutiérrez Cham (2009, 76–77) points out, the body orders the production of meaning in *Palinuro*, but it is only its infinite divisibility that allows for that production of meaning, that theorization of the body. As he summarizes, “abrir, fragmentar, observar, son sinónimos de conocimiento” (Gutiérrez Cham 2009, 84).¹⁷ Theory cleaves bodies and their organs; the effects of theory are dissection, dismemberment, the objectification of isolated organs.¹⁸

In keeping with a long satirical tradition, medicine stands in for biopolitics; rather than some Deleuzian self-immanent “body without organs” equivalent to civil society, the body politic is revealed as organs without bodies, displaced organs distributed grotesquely and arbitrarily, if purposefully, into a series of flasks and dumpsters. *Palinuro de México* shows that the body politic can never be a living, experiencing, full body; it is a dissected cadaver, dismembered with surgical precision and segmented into statistic populaces whose parts can never again make the whole. Tellingly, *Palinuro*’s own body is only politicized through death, as a cadaver, when he is struck by the tank—only when the flow of desires across his body has been permanently disrupted can it be fixed as the object of politics. The dissected bodies find their complement in the politicized student bodies, whose organs are also exposed violently to public view during the massacre.

Applying theory to real bodies renders them abject to themselves, making them indigestible, which is represented through *Palinuro*’s vomiting of half-digested food immediately after. *Palinuro*’s organism refuses to absorb this segmented body. The reiterated metaphor of cannibalistic incorporation is key: the constitution of the body politic requires the cannibalization of these dissected cadavers, sublimating them into the perfectly segregated, corporative national state. On the other hand, social bodies cannot be consumed fully by the body politic due to their differences, their indigestible singularities. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 360) point out, “sovereignty only reigns over what it is capable of internalizing, of appropriating locally”—that is, what it is able to capture in a biotic, metabolic sense, through engulfment and digestion. What cannot be assimilated, segmented, and reconstituted must therefore be abjected from the body politic, represented in the novel in the recurring tropes of vomit and diarrhea.¹⁹ Nationalistic endocannibalism leads thus not to incorporation but to indigestion, to ex-corporation (Del Paso 1987, 123). And there can be no hierarchies in the abjected; debasement and decomposition become means to an equality that has nothing to do with ideology. With no essentialism possible, all those leftover bits of discourse, the unincorporated voices, the traces of the other, the characters that exist only as possibilities or contingencies, manifest themselves as crowded nar-

17. “Opening, fragmenting, observing, are synonymous with knowledge” (Gutiérrez Cham 2009, 84).

18. Tellingly, Ibsen (2010, 140) finds a powerful metaphor for colonialism in scenes depicting mutilation, dissection, and collecting in *Noticias del Imperio*.

19. Regarding the notion of abjection, see the introduction to Kristeva’s *The Powers of Horror*.

rative voices, voices that coexist horizontally on the page as a map of civil society. In *Palinuro de México*, abjection from the body politic becomes the condition or common ground for the emergence of unstratified civil society.

Political activity of any type, on the other hand, is incapable of constituting or representing civil society. The tank that crushes Palinuro also drives over a Mexican flag and a poster of Che Guevara, defacing both (Del Paso 1987, 619). Neither nationalist nor oppositional politics are effective mechanisms for engaging or transforming the corporatist state. Palinuro stands in as the politicized double of the unnamed main narrator, a doubling that the narrator acknowledges explicitly. Palinuro's death, combined with his apolitical double's continued survival (although in exile), suggests the death of politics in Mexico, a conclusion that is reinforced by the farcical figure of Scaramouche: "Entonces, Señor Obrero, cuando yo le digo que la Revolución, en México, es el opio del pueblo; cuando le digo que el MURO es un grupo fascista financiado por la CIA y aliado al Opus Dei; cuando yo le grito que los sindicatos están vendidos y le pregunto qué sabe usted del Che Guevara. ¿No me oye usted?" (Del Paso 1987, 598).²⁰ The political ideology behind Palinuro's presence at the protests becomes irrelevant; what is important is his death, a collective martyrdom that becomes a powerful performance of dissent invalidating the PRI's claims to total consensus. As the narrator states in one moment, Palinuro "fracasó siempre con más ruido del estrictamente necesario" (Del Paso 1987, 279).²¹ The stridency of failure, reminiscent in itself of Mexico's avant-garde movement most closely associated with the aesthetics of rupture, the *estridentistas*, thus takes central stage as a political act, the only truly political act possible in "democratic" consensus: dissensus.

This death of politics is not the end of Mexico, however. Palinuro is (re)born at the end of the novel, brought to life by an act of collective witnessing. Palinuro's representativity depends wholly on his position with respect to this community of witnesses, most of whom are literary characters from the satirical and avant-garde traditions. In a play on Levinasian ethics, Palinuro is called into being by the cacophonous gazes of myriad witnesses, cultural godparents representing the nongenealogical (viral) transmission of dissent. Palinuro is born into ethical obligation within this community of witnesses, but the obligation is to dissent, not to incorporate. The chronological inversion turns the novel into something resembling Jameson's anti-bildungsroman: the birth as ending reflects not a coming into "centered" consciousness but rather emergence into an open, irreducible community whose only requirement for membership is vocal, litigious presence. In this way, the state's virtual body politic is countered by a civil society formed catalytically through the shared experience of abjection and dissent.

If *Palinuro de México* invalidates theory and its dissection of social bodies as a mode for political engagement, *Noticias del imperio* performs the same operation

20. "So, Mr. Worker, when I tell you that the Revolution, in Mexico, is the opium of the masses; when I tell you that the MURO is a fascist group financed by the CIA and allied with Opus Dei; when I shout at you that the labor unions have sold out and I ask you whether or not you have heard from Che Guevara recently. You don't hear what I am saying?" (Del Paso 1987, 598).

21. "He always failed with more commotion than that which was strictly necessary" (Del Paso 1987, 279).

on history. Engaging historical tropes and figures claimed as foundational precursors by both the PRI and oppositional parties, this novel deconstructs strategies for asserting political legitimacy through genealogical rooting in perspectives of Mexican history as a series of incomplete popular revolutions that X party must bring to fruition. The crisis event in this case is the 1862–1867 French intervention in Mexico, which deposed Mexico's only indigenous president, Benito Juárez, and installed Austro-Hungarian nobles Maximilian and Carlota as monarchs of the Second Mexican Empire.

A century after the death of Benito Juárez, when Del Paso was writing *Noticias del Imperio*, Juárez had been canonized as a national monument. An all-too-material phantasmal presence whose name and likeness are ubiquitous throughout postrevolutionary Mexico on street signs, schools, and public plazas, he came to represent a discursive position of moral authority in textbook histories—an emblem of inextinguishable nationalism and racial equality under *mestizaje*. Del Paso's novel demolishes Juárez's statue in order to restore his face, to humanize him as subject (Price 2012a, 73–77).²² No longer a bronze bust, he becomes a testifying subject who is subject to judgment along with the foundational conjuncture known as La Reforma, which instituted the liberal state in Mexico. In *Noticias del Imperio*, the simplistic, textbook representation of the French Intervention as nothing more than European neocolonialism is undermined, as Juárez and Maximilian are shown to have (too) much in common, particularly in terms of political ideology. Likewise, the racial dichotomy between the two comes into question since Maximilian and Carlota manage to elicit the loyalty of many indigenous people by reenacting the colonial trope of the benevolent Spanish monarch as protector of indigenous rights and communal lands (since the liberals wished to privatize all communal lands in order to tax them), and one of Maximilian's most loyal supporters in the novel is a Mayo indigenous man.

Juárez does not come off badly in Del Paso's novel, but he is invalidated as a model for democratic politics. If Maximilian was a tyrant invested by foreign military force, he was also invited by Mexico's conservatives to assume the throne, and, paradoxically, he espoused liberal ideals very similar to those that Juárez had promulgated in the Constitution of 1857, which ended up alienating him from his conservative supporters. Juárez, on the other hand, initially came into power by constitutional disposition rather than democratic elections (Del Paso 1988, 43). As president of the Supreme Court, he was next in line when President Ignacio Comonfort resigned at the outset of the Guerra de la Reforma in 1857. Although he was finally elected president democratically after winning the war in 1861, Juárez faced a divided nation, and the conservatives never accepted the election results. In Del Paso's novel, neither state—Maximilian's empire or Juárez's republic—can claim popular embodiment or full democratic representation.²³

22. Price (2012a, 61–67) argues that Del Paso also restores the humanity of Maximilian and Carlota, who have traditionally been demonized in Mexican historiography, to achieve closure on a traumatic history of imperialist interventions.

23. As Ibsen (2006, 94) notes, for example, the illiterate narrator of the chapter entitled “La ciudad y los pregonos” cares little which party rules, since in either case he is deprived of self-representation.

Additionally, Juárez relinquishes the moral high ground upon ordering Maximilian's execution in retribution for a similar command given by Maximilian earlier in the campaign. His reasons are never clarified fully, but there is a murky notion that the sacrifice of his rival is necessary to implement the liberal constitution of 1857: it is a constituting violence that empowers him to bring the new state into being. Furthermore, Maximilian agrees to the sacrifice in order to bring about the shared dream of a liberal, egalitarian Mexico. The question the novel poses then becomes this: if Maximilian and Juárez were on the same page politically and both exercised sovereign power to exempt themselves from constitutional law and human rights (ordering executions), where then do the differences lie?

The answer would seemingly be in race, which is how the PRI has framed it. In the PRI's history of Mexico, Benito Juárez embodies the notion of racial democracy—the social ascendancy of the *indio*—that formed the cornerstone of its construction of consensus. Tellingly, Juárez is invested as the only indigenous founding father of modern Mexico in many of the national history-themed murals commissioned by the state in the postrevolutionary period. As I have already discussed, however, *Noticias del Imperio* problematizes this narrative, reminding us that Juárez came into that foundational power through violence: by winning the Guerra de la Reforma and executing Maximilian. In this way, the notion of Mexican racial democracy as peaceful consensus reaching across ethnicities to form mestizo nationalism and thus put an end to racial violence is shown to be rooted in violence itself, even if that violence is portrayed as a justifiable reaction against the colonialism that instituted racial inequalities in Mexico in the first place. Implicit is a chain of the violent transmission of power that belies claims of liberal, democratic representation. In *Noticias del Imperio*, Benito Juárez represents historical continuity with the PRI not as the resolution of the legacy of colonial racial inequalities through racial democracy, but rather as the emblem of sovereign power and its ability to exempt itself from the strictures of constitutional law. In this sense, the *Imperio* of the title, which can be translated “rule” as well as “empire,” applies to Juárez and the liberal state as much as to Maximilian and Carlota.

Having nullified the dominant, Manichean interpretations of the historical crisis of the French Intervention as a straightforward manifestation of European neocolonialism, an ideological conflict between liberals and conservatives, or a racial struggle between the conservative criollo minority allied with the French and the majority indigenous and mestizo populations who supported Juárez, there can be no causal reading of the conflict other than a struggle over sovereign power. Ruling is thus a question not of legal rights or moral position but of power acquired by force. In this way, Del Paso's novel negates the postulation of the state as the organic product of history: there is no causal link between Mexico's history and the forms that power takes.

Fittingly, *Noticias del Imperio* returns to the testimonial mode as the counter to single-author history and its legitimizing genealogies of power. Empress Carlota and a series of other narrators provide firsthand “testimonial” perspectives on the French intervention, although a synthetic, historian narrator is not excluded as one of a series of crowded voices. The fictionalization of historical peoples' testimonies serves not to disallow their stories as speculation but to highlight that

the acts of witnessing and testifying are equally or more important than what is said; it is the act of attesting itself that creates dissensus, placing sanctioned discourses into question (Ibsen 2010, 126–132). Furthermore, Del Paso offsets the fictional passages by including fragments of historical documents and directly quoting historical personages. The archives themselves are called to bear witness in a trial that puts under judgment not only neocolonial imperialism but also the notion of history as what endows the nation with depth, its idiosyncrasy or essence. Not only do the Franco-Austrian invaders come under judgment, foregrounded by Emperor Maximilian's trial and execution near the end of the novel, but the motives and rectitude of Benito Juárez and other ostensibly pure Mexican heroes—those held up in Mexican schoolbooks as the precursors of the Revolution—also enter into doubt. Juárez's own words are turned against him: when he tells Maximilian in a letter that "History will judge us" (Del Paso 1988, 261), the inverse is also implied. We the readers will also judge history, as the chapter title, "¿Qué vamos a hacer contigo, Benito?" (What will we do with you, Benito?) drives home (Del Paso 1988, 617). The reader cannot help but weigh the evidences presented, and he or she will likely come to conclusions different from those presented in the official version of events.²⁴ Once again, the reader is forced to assume an unprivileged, insecure ethical stance when confronted with the contradictions within one of the foundational narratives of Mexican political history.

Playing Maximilian's ghost off against "la sombra eterna de Benito Juárez" (the eternal shadow of Benito Juárez) (Del Paso 1988, 551) reveals that consensus occurs only retrospectively, as historical interpretation, never as the "natural" outcome of a crisis event. All consensus is fabricated, orchestrated after the fact by sovereign power to legitimate its rule. Writing in the wake of the 1982 peso crisis, at the height of the Mexican drive to constitute a new civil society rooted in popular movements rather than party politics, Del Paso postulates that sovereign power, the notion that some have a right to rule others, is the product of a demented imagination that has outlived any validity that it may once have had: "Carlota sobrevivió no sólo a Maximiliano, Juárez, Napoleón, Eugenia y todos los demás, sino también a toda una época, a todo un concepto de la historia y del destino del hombre y de la idea que tenía de sí mismo y del Universo" (Del Paso 1988, 630).²⁵ But imagination—"la loca de la casa" (the madwoman in the attic) (Del Paso 1988, 644)—is also what destabilizes sovereign power and the orders of reason (histories) that sustain it. Artistic imagination is dissent; it is what makes visible

24. Bruce-Novoa (1990), Corral Peña (1997), Fell (1991), Fiddian (2000), Guerrero (2006), Hancock (1991), Ibsen (2006, 2010), Mata (1991), Menton (1991), Price (2012a), Solares-Larrave (1999), and Thomas (1995) all locate *Noticias del Imperio* within the postmodern tendency of the "new historical novel" or what Hutcheon called "historiographic metafiction." As Ibsen (2010, 150) summarizes, "Del Paso's novel produces a conception of historical practice in which different voices, discourses, and visual traces come together in a montage that dehierarchizes privileged discourses and resists narrative closure."

25. "Carlota outlived not only Maximilian, Juárez, Napoleon, Eugenia and all the rest, but also an entire epoch, a whole concept of history and of Man's destiny and the idea that he had of himself and the Universe" (Del Paso 1988, 630). Another of Carlota's monologues describes the apocalyptic demise of the sovereign as institution, providing a long list of European monarchs who have died or gone mad, thus transforming Maximilian and Carlota from exceptions into representatives of an entire class of power relations (Del Paso 1988, 547–551).

those gaps in the sensible (what we take for real, the given). And, beyond revealing those gaps, imagination exploits and expands them into utopian spaces that it inhabits virally, replicating exponentially. The late twentieth-century Mexican dream of an unstated body called civil society is just such a viral space leveraged by imagination in the face of authoritarian politics.

CATEGORICAL DIFFERENCE AND THE UNSTATED BODY

Faced with the political, social, and racial inequalities that led to the Mexican Revolution, the PRI was necessarily highly attuned to the problem of difference, which it addressed through the fabrication of corporatist consensus. Differences were identified in order to be categorized in demographic units that were then affiliated with particular state institutions created specifically to encompass them. Political consensus was achieved through the process of clientelistic interest bargaining between the state and these constituent institutions (a process that often included a certain dose of repressive coercion) and the production of patriotic subjects through civic education and induction into the party structure. In this apparently all-inclusive superstructure that simulated democracy, exclusions were rendered a matter of ethics rather than politics—the fact that some people (the indigenous, for example) were excluded from full self-representation was portrayed as a matter of coming up short before the law, not a failure in the constitutional structure of the state itself.

The *testimonio* as a genre carried out contradictory roles under this kind of consensus. On one level, it worked straightforwardly as dissensus, that litigious, public speech that makes visible the fact that many are excluded from the kind of self-representation that democratic consensus supposedly guarantees for all. Given the PRI's dexterity in encompassing difference, however, drawing categorical differences of any kind also ran the risk of activating the PRI's corporatist machinery for the production of institutionalized difference. Indeed, in the 1980s, the chronicles and *testimonios* that brought the plight of the urban poor as an "unincorporated" demographic into public view (particularly following the 1985 Mexico City earthquake) had just this effect, motivating the PRI under Carlos Salinas to create the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (PRONASOL) to encompass them (see Haber 2007, 85–89).

The total novel's rejection of categorical differences—of demographic segmentation and the stratification of social bodies—provided an antidote to the PRI's encompassment of politicized speech, maintaining the litigious power of testimony as a refusal of corporatist representation by disallowing any organic continuity between political and social bodies. Without the systematicity of the total novel, the testimonial falls prey to the demographic logic that upholds both the corporatist state and globalized neoliberal capitalism (with its market segmentation). Without the testimonial, however, the total novel can appear as what many critics read it to be: a literary appropriation of multiple voices that mirrors the PRI's corporatist encompassment of social demographics. It is only when the two modes of discourse are read side by side or are embedded within each other (as in Del Paso's total novels or Poniatowska's collective testimonials) that they configure

this kind of indivisible civil society that cannot be reified demographically as the sum of constituent parts composing the body politic, a civil society rooted in an ethics of aggregative, collage-like plurality in which difference is never categorical and each voice maintains its irreducible totality, in short, an unstated social body. And this civil society is crowdsourced: like the recent #Yosoy132 movement that grew out of it, it maintains its political force precisely because of its unstratified inclusiveness, its litigious public presence, and its ability to renounce political affiliations. As Rancière has argued, this kind of postpolitical, horizontal popular resistance may be the only kind of political activism that can effectively disrupt the seemingly inexorable inertia of consensus under material democracy.

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