

REPRESENTING HISTORY: NEGATIVE HISTORICAL DISCOURSES IN
MEXICAN NARRATIVE AFTER TLATELOLCO

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On October 2, 1968, preceding the Summer Olympic Games in Mexico City, a peaceful protest was held at the *Plaza de las tres culturas* in Tlatelolco which ended with the violent intervention of the Mexican Army. Following the massacre, the state controlled media downplayed the magnitude of the events and instead focused on the upcoming Olympic Games. Thirty-five years after the fact, much of the information regarding the massacre remains classified and the government refuses to admit responsibility for the deaths.

This project examines the literary representations of that history with a particular focus on the creation and manipulation of negative narrative spaces after 1968. Given the absence of a historical representation of Tlatelolco in the PRI constructed national discourse and the dominance of that discourse, the literary works studied in this project aim to represent history in a narrative space inaccessible to it.

In the first chapter I examine Luis González de Alba's testimonial Los Días y los años (1971). This work acts as a meta-history of the current articulation of nation as it bears witness to the mechanisms which were responsible for the unarticulation of Tlatelolco we see today.

Chapter 2 looks at Armando Ramírez's Chin chin el teporocho (1972). The novel draws attention to a textual hole in the narrative which mirrors a historical void in the discourse of the nation. It takes a stance against that

omission by unequivocally making a silent statement against it. It actively unspeaks an institution which has silenced the student movement.

The third chapter examines José Emilio Pacheco's Las batallas en el desierto. This novel deconstructs the historical apparatus of the nation and introduces a series of alternative historical models.

The final chapter looks at the films Rojo Amanecer and El Bulto. Both films are a testament to the absence of the history of 1968. Rojo Amanecer is the first film to be released concerning Tlatelolco and it examines the processes by which the massacre occurred and why it has remained silenced for over twenty years. El Bulto raises the question of how to reincorporate that absent history should it become known.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Juan Rojo was born on February 3, 1975 in Los Angeles, California. He received his B.A. from Clark University in 1997. He then enrolled at Emory University where he received his M.A. in 1999. In August of that same year Mr. Rojo began his Ph.D. in Romance Studies at Cornell University. He was appointed to the faculty of Simon's Rock College as Assistant Professor of Spanish in July of 2003. In September of 2005 he accepted a tenure-track appointment as Assistant Professor of Spanish at Texas Christian University.

To my little girl Alexa.

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Introduction

The summer of 1968 saw in Mexico a great moment in international sports history and a great tragedy. The summer Olympic games were to be held in a Latin American country for the first time ever. In preparation for the games, Mexico undertook a massive building project. Stadiums, dormitories, and other venues went up in anticipation of hosting the international event. That same summer saw the climax of the Student Movement of 1968 which ended with the deaths of hundreds of students at the *Plaza de las tres culturas* in Tlatelolco. The events of October 2, 1968 and the way these were covered by the national media and government agencies brought about a disillusionment in the Mexican intelligentsia which is perhaps most clearly seen when Octavio Paz resigns his position as Ambassador to India in response to the government's actions.

Prior to the events of Tlatelolco, the predominant themes in Mexican literature could be traced to one of two places, one being the Mexican Revolution and the other being the City. The *Novela de la Revolución* was one of the two major sub-genres in Mexico. Works like Azuela's Los de abajo (1915), Rulfo's Pedro Páramo (1955) and Fuentes's La muerte de Artemio Cruz (1962) are novels which have been heralded as among the best in Mexican literature. And while each is published in a distinct era and takes a different approach to this central event, they all nonetheless anchor themselves in examining the events of the Mexican Revolution. Azuela publishes his novel as a type of political pamphlet while Rulfo, on the other hand, looks back at the failed Revolution whose principles still drive the nation's discourse. During the "Boom" Fuentes uses the Revolution as means

to search for universal themes such as the human condition. Following the lead of the *nouveau roman* in Europe, writers like Fuentes were involved in producing the *nueva novela hispanoamericana* which was supposed to break away from the realist approach taken by the previous generations. According to Fuentes, this *nueva novela hispanoameircana* had the ability to

encontrar y levantar sobre un lenguaje los mitos y las profecías de una época cuyo verdadero sello no es la dicotomía capitalismo-socialismo, sino una suma de hechos . . . que están trastornando la vida en las sociedades industriales (Fuentes, 18).

These works certainly succeeded in obtaining recognition from abroad for Latin American Literature.

The 1960's also saw the emergence of the other important sub-genre already mentioned: the *Novela de la Ciudad*. As Mexico City grew not only in size but also in importance, writers began to use the city as a thematic referent from which to compose their works. Additionally, Mexico City became a home space which was often used to define Mexicanness. Brushwood writes:

Nos parece muy razonable que la importancia de la novela reciente –la ciudad verdadera que es el centro de la vida del narrador, la ciudad que es como “mi tierra” del autor– sea uno de los factores que procuran sostener la identidad contra el efecto corrosivo de la identidad inestable producida por la vida moderna (La novela mexicana, 26).

At the same time, the beginnings of a new type of literature known as the *Onda* emerges. The members of the *Onda* were a group of young writers who saw the purpose of their literature as a form of social activism against political

as well as literary norms in an exclusively urban setting. They distanced themselves from the approach of writers like Fuentes and Rulfo in that their works often included urban slang, drugs, and foreign influences, especially from the United States. *Onda* writers, the most well known being Gustavo Sainz and José Agustín, used American rock music and other youth themes. As Carol D'Lugo points out, the *Onda* writers displayed “an ‘importamadrista’ attitude, that is to say, a complete disdain for societal norms and values” (163).

It is in the middle of this moment in Mexico’s literary landscape that the 1968 Student Movement arises. And part of the *Onda* aesthetic; this *importamadrista* attitude which defined the *Onda* writers, will also help define the initial literary production of Tlatelolco. In fact, one can begin to see the themes of Tlatelolco and the Student Movement in the *Onda* writers’ works.

Following the student massacre in Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968, Mexican literature is reshaped. Literary production ceases to be centered around the Mexican Revolution and the City. The aesthetics of the *Onda* continue, but now revolve around the student massacre. As one of the key events in modern Mexican History, the literary production after the events of this infamous date is altered to respond to the government’s actions. Cynthia Steele writes:

Mexican writers and critics tended to see this outpouring of fiction about 1968 as a literary signpost, an indication that the Mexican novel was being renovated by another historic series of events, and that the Novel of Tlatelolco would displace the Novel

of the Revolution and the Novel of the City as the principal genre of Mexican fiction (9).¹

Unfortunately this does not come to be. In fact, while there is a large literary production in response to Tlatelolco, much of it is of poor quality. The response often has more passion than it does literary merit. As a result of this, there is little critical discussion of the literature of Tlatelolco. Aside from what has been written about Elena Poniatowska's La noche de Tlatelolco (1971), there have been almost no studies of the literary works from this period. Additionally, the lack of official material concerning the massacre combined with the absence of serious academic studies of the era leaves us with almost no material at all concerning Tlatelolco. And yet it is important to note that the literary production of Tlatelolco is in many ways a substitute for an official historical account of the time. Poniatowska's text especially has been treated as a referential text.

Paradoxically, the works studied here react to the absence of that history in the national discourse. What is especially intriguing is the way in which these works attempt to renegotiate the role, place, and identity of marginal groups through a reformulation of Mexican History and its historiographical apparatus. However, the novels and films studied here are unable or the authors are unwilling to translate that rereading of Mexican history into a discourse powerful enough to project into the future. Or rather, they refuse to dialogue with the dominant discourse on its own terms. Instead, these texts settle into a position of non-existence within the more powerful

¹ It is important to note that while the Mexican Revolution and Tlatelolco are highly significant as key moments in 20th century Mexico, each has been treated in opposite ways by the Mexican government. The Revolution became the referent for the production of a discourse adopted by the PRI while Tlatelolco became an invisible thorn which has not been acknowledged.

official discourse as a strategy of representation. Luis González de Alba, Armando Ramírez, José Emilio Pacheco, Jorge Fons, and Gabriel Retes produce works in which they create a discursive space from which they can offer an alternative reading of the direction Mexico has taken. Based on memory, diaries, or everyday life portraits they blossom through the appropriation of a negative space of representation. Within these spaces they are sheltered from the reach of the official discourse.

The way in which these works represent history is through the use and manipulation of negativity which, as it pertains to this study, is an idea that because of its nature is difficult to articulate. What is negativity? I had originally conceived the idea as the negation or absence of something or a space created through it. Slowly that space became articulated as death. Death seemed to be the ultimate negativity of existence. Heidegger's notion that death is a fundamental part of human experience in that it always exists as a structural foundation of being opened the possibility of having negativity act as something other than the *lack* of something. According to Heidegger, negativity is an essential part of the apparatus of the *dasein* (being). To exist towards an end is a condition of existence that dictates that one is constantly dying being that death is always conceived as the infinite possibility of the finite subject. The anticipation of death is a freedom towards death.

This articulation of negativity heavily based on death created a major problem in that it left negativity very much dependent on something in order for it to exist. While this directionality is not present in Heidegger's philosophical construct, when applied to literary texts that try to manipulate negativity in a social realm, the directionality of such an operation is inescapable. In other words, death articulated as the negation of life, created a system in which the

Foucaultian model of power relations played out rather nicely. Any attempt to articulate negativity in these terms would ultimately fall victim to cooptive operations. Even if I were to dismiss the Foucaultian model, and focus on negativity as an other of a power center or structure, it would be impossible to escape the obvious Hegelian dialectic which would similarly collapse the arguments involved in this project.

It is at this point that it became clear that negativity and negation are not the same thing. Wolfgang Iser writes that:

. . . in the modern post-Hegelian tradition there is a tendency to reify negativity by conceiving of it as a determined negation or even as a kind of ordained enabling structure. Alternatively, it is defined as an antithesis to the empirical world which, as antithesis, incipiently affirms something that is as yet absent, though heralded (Budick, *xiii*).

Indeed the relation between negativity and negation is one that can easily be reduced to synonymity. However, negation negates. What does negativity do? Negativity takes “nothing” as a noun and transforms it into a verb. What is it “to nothing”? “To nothing” is to escape the Hegelian dialectic so heavily anchored in a one plane existence. In other words, while the Foucaultian model of power relations sees power as part of a single plane of existence in which there is a polar + (assertion) and a – (negation), negativity accesses another plane of existence. Sedgwick approaches this idea within a slightly different system when she writes:

. . . the most salient proposition in *Touching Feeling* is probably *beside*. Invoking a Deleuzian interest in planar relations, the irreducibility spatial positionality of *beside* also seems to offer

some useful resistance to the ease with which *beneath* and *beyond* turn from spatial descriptors to implicit narratives of, respectively, origin and telos (8).

In these constructions, negativity is not the antithesis to the power center nor is the power center the representation of an inevitable *telos* which looms in the horizon. To nothing is to create another plane in which to exist. To negate is to act in accordance to x. To nothing is to act in a way which escapes x. Nothing is what drives the detective novel, the search for something we do not know nor do we know where to find nor if we will find it. Negation is to say that the butler did not do it (because we know the maid did).

In 1937 Xavier Villaurrutia writes in his poem “Nocturno Rosa”:

Yo también hablo de la rosa.
Pero mi rosa no es la rosa fría
ni la de piel de niño,
ni la rosa que gira
tan lentamente que su movimiento
es una misteriosa forma de la quietud.

Villaurrutia begins his poem negating. He tells the world what his rose, his poem is not. It is not the poem of love, nor of beauty. He negates as he tells us these things. But in the final stanza of the poem, Villaurrutia nothings his poetics of nothing. What is his poem, his rose?

Es la rosa del humo,
la rosa de ceniza,
la negra rosa de carbón diamante
que silenciosa horada las tinieblas
y no ocupa lugar en el espacio.

His poem exists in the register of negativity. A rose made of ashes would be one that is dead; it would be a rose that is the negation of a rose that is alive. But Villaurrutia's rose is not dead. It has found a life through the creation of a space in which life is articulated in the realm of negativity. A space that does not take space because it exists in the realm of nothing. Nothing does not take space but at the same time creates space.

In direct relation to this study, negative spaces will be those which exist outside the discursive realm of the state or any of its agents. The end result is the inability of the state to either manipulate or coopt such a discourse. If the dominant discourse, for example, is based on the manipulation of the state controlled media, then an alternative discourse would be silence as discourse. As such, silence would be a discourse which manipulates negativity as a means of production. In this manner, my conception of negativity differs from Adorno's who sees negativity as a critique of ideology. In this case negativity is used as an escape from a specific ideology and a caveat from which to introduce what might be termed as an opposition ideology without the risk of falling into a discursive battle.

According to Iser and Budick:

Even if in its very nature negativity eludes conceptualization, a great deal can be said about and around it, The modern coinage *negativity*, or some equivalent means of eschewing indicative terminology, becomes inevitable when we consider the implications, omissions, or cancellations that are necessarily part of any writing or speaking. These lacunae indicate that practically all formulations (written or spoken) contain a tacit

dimension, so that each manifest text has a kind of latent double (Budick, xii).

While it is true that there is a potential for these tacit dimensions of speech and writing, I disagree that each manifest text has a latent double. Rather, I would argue that each text *can* have a latent double. This same apparatus can be applied to discourse in general. In any discursive operation there can be a latent unspoken shadow. This discursive lacunae can then be seen as a sheltered and affective mode of articulation. Budick and Iser conclude that such a space defies verbalization. In the same manner, a discursive lacunae defies the rules of the dominant discourse. They write that this doubling of language “forms the unwritten and unwriteable—unsaid and unsayable—base of the utterance. But it does not therefore negate the formulations of the text or saying. Rather, it conditions them through blanks and negations” (Budick, xii).

The purpose of this project, then, is to examine the constructions of these negative discourses and their relation to the dominant discourse. Are the factors that prohibit a forward dialogue in these works imposed by the formal political sector, or are they a form of resistance adopted by a de-voiced populace set on disallowing the usurpation of its voice by a more powerful discourse? If so, what are the ramifications of adopting a position of voicelessness as a form of resistance? These are some of the issues that I seek to address.

However these questions, even before yielding an answer, create yet another series of problems that must be dealt with. If we are to talk about history we must first define it. What is history? This question is as complicated as “What is reality?” Yet, in a sense, they are the same question.

History, writes González Echevarría is the “organizing [of] facts in a coherent and harmonious way” (qtd.in Taylor, 14). González Echevarría is, of course, writing with a focus on the type of fusion between fiction and history which occurred in the new world with the arrival of Columbus and the conquistadors that followed. Indeed, this is where Latin American History begins as the European newcomers sailed not only in hopes of *discovering* many things, but also with expectations of what those discoveries might be. History, as it was written then, was a combination of what was indeed discovered combined with the marvelous beliefs Europeans held about what they *might* find in the new world.

The format used in the beginnings of Latin American History was the *carta de relación* which was intended to relate to the crown, as part of an obligation, what was happening in the venture by its subject. The result is that there is an impulse to write what one hopes the crown will find most favorable and what will portray the writer in the best light. This can well be seen in the first encounters Columbus has with the indigenous people of the Caribbean whose language he does not understand but for whom he has no trouble transcribing their utterances as he perceives them. History as such, was indeed also a type of fiction. This is perhaps one of the reasons why texts by Columbus, Las Casas, and Díaz del Castillo are studied both in history and colonial literature classes. Still, this type of history is very specific in context. That is to say, that the relationship between history and fiction was especially ambiguous in the *crónicas* and *relaciones* which formed the history of the arrival of Europeans to the new world.

As the conquest changes to colonization, so too does the way in which the history of Latin America is written. Kathleen Ross points out that by the

mid 16th century, histories continued to be written but now included those “authored by official court historians such as Francisco López de Gómara who had never set foot in America” (1 Cambridge History, 106). At the same time the *crónica*, which was based on first hand accounts, was also being used as a historical text. The result was a battle in which *cronistas* reacted against those who would write a history without first hand knowledge of the events which they considered to be paramount in the telling of an *historia*².

It was not until the late 18th and early 19th centuries that literature began to be seen as separate from history. During the independence period, however, when the novel took center stage in Latin American literature, literary texts often were used as a tool for social transformation. Benítez-Rojo writes that:

It was a time to build nations . . . Each educated person had formulated in his mind an impassioned national project, and the printed word, as an essentially urban sign of order and power, would be deployed for many years to expound such schemes (1 Cambridge History, 419).

Certainly this is the case in Mexico where writers’ loyalties were easily identified through an examination of their literary production. As one reads Azuela’s Los de abajo one cannot help but notice that his view of the Revolution is starkly different than the vision the PRI constructed in the 20th century. Nonetheless the revolution is articulated in the discourse of the nation.

² *Historia* can be translated as both “history” or “story” which further blurs the line between history and literature.

Tlatelolco, on the other hand, has been unarticulated from Mexico's official historical record in many ways. History books often gloss over the events of Tlatelolco, some acknowledge the events but fail to explore the details of them, and others ignore them altogether. On a different level, if one were to visit the national archives in Lecumberri and look up Tlatelolco in their card catalog there would be no entry. If one were to look up "1968", one would find a single entry with a mention of the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. A search in the Benson Latin American Collection library catalog for a history of Tlatelolco will yield 15 entries. Of these only 5 are related to the events of October 2, 1968 and of these 5 none is an official account of said events. The rest deal with the ruins at the *Plaza de las tres culturas*, treaties signed at Tlatelolco during the conquest of Mexico in the 16th Century, and similar entries. By way of comparison, a search for histories of the Mexican Revolution will yield an amazing 154 entries. These can be further sorted into a number of different categories which explore any number of different aspects of the Mexican Revolution. Tlatelolco Histories are very much hard to find. Those that are found are primarily testimonial-based histories which aim to "uncover" the truth whereas histories of the Mexican Revolution often try to focus on a particular aspect of the key historical event.

The lack of Histories specific to Tlatelolco is further compounded by the way Tlatelolco is dealt with in general Histories of Mexico. José Fuentes Mares's *Biografía de una nación. De Cortés a Lopez Portillo* published by Ediciones Oceano, for example, barely touches on the student massacre which, incidentally, took place under the presidency of Díaz Ordaz, Lopez Portillo's predecessor. In fact, it briefly addresses Díaz Ordaz's positive

qualities in terms of his rise to the presidency following the *sexenio* of López Mateos. According to Fuentes Mares:

...el Presidente López Mateos pensó en don Gustavo Díaz Ordaz como su sucesor, poblano astuto, inteligente, enérgico y políticamente fogueado en el desempeño de la secretaría de Gobernación durante el último sexenio. Seguramente el único defecto serio de don Gustavo, como político, haya sido su escaso control de las pasiones, más de una vez volcánicas y siempre cegadoras del entendimiento (291).

He goes on to conclude that Díaz Ordaz would have been remembered as a satisfactory president “si en su camino no se le hubiera cruzado la noche de Tlatelolco” (291). To be fair, Fuentes Mares does present some semblance of criticism of the government’s reactions to the student massacre. That criticism, however, is somewhat muted by the lack of statistics in relation to the size of protest and eventual carnage. He offers no details as to what actually happened. He further ends the Student Movement and the tragedy which surrounds it on the night of the 2nd. He does not address the students that were imprisoned following the massacre nor the reasons for their continued incarceration years later. Fuentes Mares concludes his analysis of the Díaz Ordaz *sexenio* with the following words: “Tlatelolco hizo patente la decrepitud del sistema, invadido de inautenticidades, leyendas y cuentas alegres. Su gran mentira de origen le devoraba las entrañas” (292). This is immediately followed in the next chapter by “El 1o. de diciembre de 1969 Días Ordaz entregó la presidencia a don Luis Echeverría Álvarez . . .” (293) Fuentes Mares obscures 14 months following the Tlatelolco massacre with a turn of a page.

Enrique Semo's eight volume México, un pueblo en la historia manages to include the Student Movement without a direct mention of the massacre itself. Instead it includes the "Manifiesto a la nación" released by the *Consejo Nacional de Huelga* (CNH) in December of 1968. There is no analysis, no commentary, no mention of the actual events by the historian himself. The six pages that the *Manifiesto* encompasses is all that is offered as a history of Tlatelolco. These six pages are counter-balanced by the 20 pages of extracts from Díaz Ordaz's "IV informe de gobierno" in which he makes his case against the Student Movement. Semo treats both parties in the same manner, but much like Fuentes Mares, offers the reader no figures concerning the massacre nor does he engage the massacre with a critical eye. The reader does not know what happened after the massacre. Indeed the reader is left with no knowledge that a massacre even took place. It is not until the end of the book in a "Cronología" section which reads like an afterthought foot note that we are made aware of some of the events surrounding October 2, 1968.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing erasures of Tlatelolco is by Alicia Hernández Chávez in her México. Breve historia contemporánea published by Fondo de Cultura Económica. This volume makes absolutely no mention, allusion, hint, or gesture that might lead the reader to the Student Movement of 1968 and the massacre that followed. What makes this especially perplexing is that in the introduction Hernández Chávez names as one of her main influences Octavio Paz and singles out El laberinto de la soledad and Posdata as some of the key histories of Mexico.

There are also attempts to minimize the gravity of the events of 1968. The most notable is General Luis Gutiérrez Oropeza's Díaz Ordaz. El Hombre. El Gobernante. It is important to note that during Díaz Ordaz's

presidency, General Gutierrez Oropeza was the head of the *Estado Mayor Presidencial*. In this work Gutierrez Oropeza places the blame squarely on the shoulders of the students and UNAM administrators. He writes that:

. . . la noche del 2 de octubre de 1968 quedará en la historia de México con dos sellos: uno, de deslealtad y traición a la Patria por parte de políticos deshonestos; de los criollos de espíritu y de los que viven al amparo de ideas y banderas de países extranjeros, como algunos connotados intelectuales, maestros y estudiantes de la Universidad Autónoma de México que desentendiéndose de su principal misión entraron en el torbellino de las ambiciones y conveniencias que dieron forma a todo este aparato, agrandado por los mercenarios de la pluma. El otro sello es: la hidalguía del Presidente Díaz Ordaz que con su energía y oportuna decisión puso a salvo los valores fundamentales de México (49).

This is of course to be expected from a man with loyalties that are not hidden and as such, one can at least respect the transparency of such loyalty. I might add that Gutierrez Oropeza has also been the target of investigations concerning the student massacre and his role in it. In some respects, his defense of Díaz Ordaz can also be seen as self defense.

Above all these Mexican Histories are the official documents and histories published by the PRI itself. It is the issue of Tlatelolco in the official publications of the PRI which is the most difficult to document. There are countless historical publications which deal with the electoral processes of any number of presidential hopefuls, who opposed which candidates, political platforms for any of the presidents' 6 year terms, and many other topics. But

how to document something that does not exist? That is the question which is hard to deal with. In all of the publications I examined by the PRI, there is not one which focuses on either the Tlatelolco Massacre, the Political Prisoners in Lecumberri, or even the Student Movement of 1968. There is for example the Historia documental del partido de la Revolución published in 1981 which between volume 8 and volume 9 has an almost 12 month gap. The final entry for volume 8 is from February 1968 while the first entry in volume 9 is from 1969.

What minimal mention there is of the Student Movement can be found in a collection of essays titled El partido en el poder. Seis ensayos published in 1990. In this collection there are two essays which, given their focus, ought to have included a mention of Tlatelolco. The first of these “Partido Hegemónico. 1946-1972” again makes no mention of the Student Movement of 1968. It does however deal with the railroad workers and teacher strikes which preceded it. It reads:

En el caso de los trabajadores ferrocarrileros y maestros, el conflicto no pudo solucionarse mediante la negociación; se impuso entonces el sofocamiento de ambos movimientos y el encarcelamiento de sus dirigentes (205).

The mention of these movements from the late 1950's is brief and somewhat dismissive. There is no serious study of the issues at play in either of them. Instead there is a mention of a failed negotiation which *unfortunately* and perhaps inevitably concluded with the imprisonment of the movements' leadership. The rhetoric hints at the same view expressed by Gutierrez Oropeza who claims that the violence against the student was necessary to preserve Mexican core values.

The second essay from this collection “La dificultad del cambio” takes a closer look at the Student Movement, which is to say that it expends almost a half page on it. What is striking about this particular approach to the Student Movement is that it tries to coopt it as a slight deviation on the road of the “Party of the Revolution”. In other words, the Student Movement is presented as a catalyst for the self betterment of the Party. Ignacio Marván explains that 1964 saw the emergence of guerrilla groups which rose as a result of the same lack of political liberties that had hindered the political system (i.e. the PRI). This mutual victimization by some power outside the reach of either entity continues “hasta llegar lamentablemente a lo de 1968 y posteriormente 1971 que se caracteriza por el inicio de asaltos, secuestros y brotes guerrilleros urbanos, algunos de ellos apoyados por grupos internacionales” (258). The essence of Tlatelolco is reduced to a mention of two different years which encompassed many lifetimes of struggle and hundreds if not thousands of these lifetimes being cut short by a system which is presented here as being as much a victim as the dead of Tlatelolco. The section on Tlatelolco is concluded and Mexico moves on better off than it was:

Después de estos acontecimientos se vinieron importantes reformas jurídicas y electorales, abriendo mayores cauces democráticos a la participación de todas las ideologías y a la inconformidad manifiesta. El sistema político avanza después de estos años decisivos de intensas luchas y sacrificio de la izquierda nacional (258).

What we are left with, according to the PRI, is a movement which in essence encapsulated the same ideology of the Party. Furthermore, both of these entities are victimized by the same force which ultimately, one is left to

deduce, lead to the clash between them. This clash is only hinted at by Marván. The end product is the transformation of a clash of ideologies into a single end: the advancement of the PRI.

The lack of official documents concerning the events in question has led to the creation of a void in Mexican historiography. As I already mentioned, the seminal work dealing with Tlatelolco is Poniatowska's La noche de Tlatelolco which is a collected oral history. Poniatowska's work is not exactly a testimonial in that she does not place herself in the events she is describing. She does, however, collect testimonials from a number of sources, some rather anonymous people as well as well known activists such as González de Alba and José Revueltas. Still as one opens the front cover of La noche de Tlatelolco one cannot help but notice the *dedicatoria* which will frame the work in the realm of the testimonial. Poniatowska dedicates the work to her brother Jan who was killed in 1968 in an automobile accident. Though unrelated to the Student Movement, the bond of loss is one that creates a similar bond with those that lost loved ones in Tlatelolco. Her work as a referential text, then is "tainted" by a tragic subjectivity which is evident throughout the work. I write this, not to discount the value of her work, but to question the historiographical apparatus which dictates that a clearly subjective text be the key document to an event as important as the Tlatelolco Massacre.

Poniatowska's text is not alone in the realm of unofficial histories of Tlatelolco. To these we can add González de Alba's Los Días y los años, Juan Miguel de Mora's Tlatelolco T-68. ¡Por fin toda la verdad!, Carlos Monsiváis's Días de guardar, as well as other works by José Revueltas, Heberto Castillo, Ramón Ramírez, and Gastón García Cantú. All of these

authors try to tell their version of the history of Tlatelolco. What they each have in common is that they tend to be articulated as testimonials of one form or another. Most are written within the first two or three years following the massacre. Some, in fact, were written in cell blocks immediately following Tlatelolco. In his most recent book, González de Alba recalls that:

Comenzamos a elaborar nuestras convicciones en las largas tardes de ocio que da la cárcel. Sin datos, sin investigación, sin entrevistas a los contrarios, sin el trabajo detectivesco e histórico que los hechos merecían, llegamos a conclusiones similares dentro y fuera de la cárcel: por razones inefables el gobierno había montado una gran provocación a partir del 26 de julio (Las mentiras, 93).

González de Alba encapsulates the testimonial nature of many of these texts. They are written (or perhaps told would be a better choice of word) by those who not only witnessed the events, but were very much involved in their development.

Another point of importance is that after the initial boom in the production of testimonial histories, the publication of new ones slowed to a crawl. Most of what is available today are reprints of the original texts. Some have been edited and reprinted up to 20 times. One has to wonder if nothing new has been found about the Tlatelolco massacre in the last 35 years. As, González de Alba points out, the testimonial works published in the wake of the massacre lacked the investigative work necessary to truly address the issue of Tlatelolco. Likewise, most of what we now have are texts with a similar point of view which come to similar conclusions. Has the investigation of Tlatelolco proved so difficult that no new information has been found by

either government agencies nor historians? The answer would almost certainly be “no” yet there is no way to document such an assertion. Such is the reason why I intend to focus on literary texts, the production of which has continued since the Tlatelolco Massacre.

Most recently Julio Scherer García has authored two original works concerning Tlatelolco: Parte de guerra. Tlatelolco 1968. Documentos del general Marcelino García Barragán. Los hechos y la historia published in 1999 with Carlos Monsiváis and Los Patriotas: De Tlatelolco a la guerra sucia published in 2004. These texts however, are still testimonial in nature and have the task of “uncovering” the truth of Tlatelolco which makes them fall among a chorus of works which try to do just that. What is still missing is an official acknowledgement which can begin to legitimize some of these testimonial histories.

What will most concern this study, then, is Mexican history and the way in which it is articulated and represented in literary narratives such as novels, testimonials, and films. After the Mexican Revolution, which is in many ways the birth of the contemporary Mexican State on a discursive level, the practice of representing history in literature does not stop. Key novels of that period are a mixture of fact and fiction in which the author is writing a historical vision of the events through the fictionalization of characters or events, as is the case with Azuela’s Los de abajo or Guzmán’s El águila y la serpiente (1928). This phenomenon, argues Kathy Taylor, follows the tradition of Lizardi’s El periquillo sarniento (1816), considered to be the first Mexican novel. In his novel resembling a picaresque adventure, Lizardi fictionalizes his own life experience. Taylor goes on to explain that:

Many novels of the Mexican Revolution, by continuing this testimonial tradition in Mexican literature, also fall into a hybrid category of narrative. The writer as reporter, historian, and novelist adds, to his observations of the events, the organization, interpretation, and style appropriate to his individual sensibility, the social context in which he writes, and the corresponding effect that he hopes to create. The resulting mixture of history and fiction, of reportage and invention, leads to a debate on the generic classification of the work (Taylor, 16).

This tradition is one that goes back as far as the early *cronistas* such as Bernal Díaz del Castillo and Bernardino de Sahagún. In these novels, the presence of historical events intertwined with fictionalized first person experiences clouds the division between both types of works.

Indeed this tradition of historical representation in fiction continues, albeit without the use of fictionalized experiences from the authors, with writers like Elena Garro and Los recuerdos del porvenir (1963) which deals with the *Cristero* uprising through magical realism, and perhaps most notably with Juan Rulfo whose experiences as a child during the Mexican Revolution greatly influenced him when he penned Pedro Páramo.

Still, we must ask the question, what is the purpose of fiction approaching history? The answer seems to lie in the way in which, conversely, history approaches fiction in Mexico. After the Mexican Revolution, Mexico, specifically the ruling political regime, constructs a political and historical discourse in which the state and *its* discourse becomes the embodiment of the revolutionary ideals. The PRI presents itself as the *Partido de la Revolución* which then identifies itself as the political embodiment of the

Revolution. The failure of the agrarian reforms notwithstanding, Mexico is transformed into the pinnacle of a post-revolutionary state, as can be observed by the political platforms published every six years by the PRI which have as their center-piece a *return* to the ideals of the Revolution and a continuation of its agrarian reforms. Mexico's history becomes the history of the success of the revolution and the progress from it. In essence, given the agrarian realities in rural Mexico, Mexico becomes discourse and that discourse dictates that those who turn against the current regime are in fact turning against the principles of the Revolution and by extension turning against Mexico itself.

History, writes de Certeau:

symbolizes a society capable of managing the space that it provides for itself, of replacing the obscurity of the lived body with the expression of a 'will to know' or a 'will to dominate' the body, of changing inherited traditions into a textual product or, in short, of being turned into a blank page that it should itself be able to write (6).

In other words, historical discourse is not a tool by which we seek to learn or understand our history, but rather it is a tool by which we try to master it, to make it fit into what best serves the continuity of any given entity. These words ring true when we consider Mexico's historical discourse. History is a process by which the ruling party organizes the past in a package that embodies Revolutionary progress. Historical discourse, according to de Certeau, is guided by contemporary models of interpretation. He concludes that the historian's discourse "is therefore deployed 'next to' the present time, in a staging of the past which is analogous to that which, drawn also through a relation to the present, the prospectivist produces in terms of the future" (8).

Thus, any interpretation of history is guided by a series of variables, all of which, are anchored to the present time and have as an ultimate goal projection into the future.

According to de Certeau, this is a central fault in historical discourse; it is at the mercy of ideology. Nonetheless, de Certeau's examination of the problems of historiography still finds itself firmly cemented within and influenced by the limits of that very discourse. That is to say, he examines the problems of historiography through a history of historiography. While he is deeply engaged in the study of historical discourse, he is also using that very discourse to illustrate and validate his conclusions. Thus regardless of any other ideological leaning, the one ideology that remains inescapable is that of historiography itself, or to be more specific to this discussion, western historiography. Historical discourse as such remains a heavily privileged entity. As a result there is an assumption being made: that history must be narrated in order to be represented. Historical discourse limits representations of history to historical narration in historical narratives. Hayden White, for example, writes that history is "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse" (White, *ix*). I will argue that history need not necessarily be a textual narrative or narrated at all but that through a narrative or visual narrative, it can be represented.

But again, we must ask, why is it necessary to disguise history in fiction? Why not simply challenge history through a similarly historical discourse? The answer lies in the inherent problems involved when a minor discourse tries to challenge a dominant one. In the case of Mexico this is especially true. One only has to look at the Revolution as its biggest example

of a minor discourse which is coopted and used by a dominant political regime. Foucault writes that

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. Should it be said that one is always “inside” power, there is no “escaping” it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned, because one is subject to the law in any case? Or that, history being the ruse of reason, power is the ruse of history, always emerging the winner? This would be to misunderstand the strictly relational character of power relationships. Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network (History of Sexuality, 94).

In other words, to speak against a ruling regime is to give that regime an enemy against which it can define itself. Foucault is essentially describing a Hegelian dialect from which there is no escape. The dominant Mexican historical discourse needs an antagonistic anti-discourse to re-establish itself as the one true dominant discourse. Furthermore, if indeed the debate were to take place using the same discourse and format used by the state, it would be tantamount to admitting defeat.

According to Jean Francois Lyotard’s theoretical vision, in the interrelation of discourses, each has its own set of rules. He writes that in any dialogue between heterogeneous discourses, what he calls *differend* is in play:

As distinguished from litigation, a differend [*différend*] would be a case of conflict between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments (*xi*).

In the case concerning this study, I would like to look at the discourse of the state and its representations and the discourse of a minor power or resistance. As the more powerful discourse would dictate the terms by which a dialogue is to take place and given that those same terms would be contested, the minor discourse would not have access to nor be represented by the major discourse. According to Lyotard, it is precisely in that inability to communicate with the other's discourse that a *differend* takes place.

I would like to call a *differend* [*différend*] the case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim...A case of differend between two parties takes place when the "regulation" of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom...The differend is signaled by this inability to prove (9-10).

De Certeau would seem to be cognizant of this potentially colonizing operation as he illustrates this point in relation to medical discourse:

medical discourse has its own code spelled out by madmen. In order to speak, the madman must answer the questions asked of him. Therefore, in a psychiatric hospital it is observed that in the course of a month or two following the internment of a patient, a leveling of his discourse or an effacement of his idiosyncrasies takes place. The patient can only speak in the code that the

hospital provides for him. He is alienated in the answers to questions, to bodies of knowledge that alone allow his enunciation (251).

The power of the Mexican state and the discourse it produces dictates the terms by which a discussion must inevitably take place. The avoidance of a discourse which can be easily coopted, then, is a way of avoiding that discursive operation.

It is within this conception of history and historical discourse that I examine the literary works about to be mentioned. The function of these literary works, however, has not been established. Are they *other* historical discourses or representations of these? This last question is especially important because it sets the work as either an affective entity or simply an effect of some other force. As a representation of a historical discourse or a historical reality, the novels function as portrait. That is to say that apart from simply representing that reality, there is nothing more that needs to be done. Thus, the fact that these novels do not engage with or project into the future comes as no surprise. On the other hand, as *other* historical discourses, these novels have to be more than mere representations. The works studied here do much more than represent history, they (re)present it. They wake a historical moment and attack it from the confines of their respective negative spaces. Having said that, my position is clearly that these works function as *other* historical discourses. In 1970, Monsiváis writes: “No han cesado las discusiones sobre Tlatelolco, pero tampoco han disminuido las referencias optimistas, luminosas, en relación al futuro” (Días de guardar, 18). While these works keep the discussion alive, what they do not do is look toward the future in that fashion.

My goal in this project is not to assert that literary representations of history are ideologically innocent or uncorrupted. Indeed there can be no question that each of the works studied here has a clear ideological bias. Nor do I intent to propose that history can be best represented in literary texts. What I suggest is that the political realities following the student massacre in Mexico created an atmosphere in which representation of these events through traditional historical narratives was an impossibility. Given the status of the state-controlled media and the projection of a conciliatory and inclusive discourse following Díaz Ordaz's *sexenio*, the only viable option in representing a position other than the one endorsed by the state was through literary texts.

History in this study is not meant to be discounted as an unreliable discourse nor is it my intention to present literature as a non-privileged entity. Rather, I intend to present literature as another form of historical representation, one which can complement, expand, contradict, deny, undermine, or ignore the state sponsored versions, but that ultimately adds another voice to Mexican historiography.

In this study, I look at four works in which history is addressed in distinct fashions. Yet in each case it is done so through the manipulation of some type of negativity as in Villaurrutia's poetry. In each case there is an alternate history or historical model that is introduced. In the first chapter I examine Luis González de Alba's testimonial Los Días y los años (1971). This work was written entirely behind the walls of Lecumberri following the student massacre in Tlatelolco. In it González de Alba narrates his life behind bars. He describes in detail the continuation of the Student Movement in prison. He also is able to give an account of the events leading to the student massacre

from an insider's perspective. Furthermore, González de Alba humanizes this history by inserting himself in the events, not always as a political subject, but as a person with family, friends, hopes, and dreams; all of which have been impacted by his involvement in the Student Movement. This work acts as a history of a movement that will be discarded by the dominant discourse. As such, it acts as a preserved history, one that fills the void left by the official PRI discourse. It also acts as a meta-history of the current articulation of the nation as it bears witness to the mechanisms which were responsible for the unarticulation of Tlatelolco which we see today. What is particularly interesting about this text is that it is written from inside Lecumberri. As such, it is written within a negative space. In other words, González de Alba, no longer an active member of the Student Movement outside, appropriates his new position as a civilly dead subject to produce a work that will act as a history of the movement. The operation is carried out by a man who has nothing left to lose as he is now within the grasp of the state. In response to the state's strategy of incarcerating those who were instrumental to the Student Movement as a way of silencing it, González de Alba uses the same position that would silence him and turns into an affective space of production.

The historical void which González de Alba tries to fill is once again addressed in chapter two with a study of Armando Ramírez's Chin chin el teporocho (1972). We can see another way to approach a representation of history that separates itself from official Mexican historical discourse. Chin chin el teporocho is a novel that only briefly intersects the student massacre of 1968. The story deals mostly with the life of a young man and his exploits in Tepito, a lower class barrio in the area of Tlatelolco. The main story is constructed around the relationship between Rogelio and Michele (sic). It is

told in the first person by a protagonist who does so as he recalls his youth and eventual spiral towards becoming a *teporocho* or drunk. Additionally, the story is told through an intermediary who acts as a receptacle to the tale of the protagonist. Our knowledge of the events of Tlatelolco comes as a passing mention of the protest. Seemingly the novel's focus is entirely elsewhere until we realize that there is nothing else in it that is of greater interest. As we read on, we come to realize that the story goes nowhere. There is no direction, no end and no beginning. The only thing that we are able to register is the absence of these entities as well as the absence of an engagement with one of the most important events of its time or at least of the weeks in which the story takes place. It is through the absence of engagement that we see the representation of history. The novel is constructed so that most of the action takes place during the days leading up to the massacre. The final section of the novel takes place in the days following. There is a textual marker which announces the date of October 2, 1968 but little else except that a cousin went to the protest and later died. The novel, then, is able to draw attention to a textual hole in the novel which mirrors a historical void in the discourse of the nation. It takes a stance against that omission by unequivocally making a silent statement against it. It actively unspeaks an institution which has silenced the Student Movement. As such, negativity works in this case as an affective force. By not saying something, by creating a hole in a text, the novel is able to take a stance in relation to a dominant discourse which cannot respond.

Moving beyond the specific events of Tlatelolco, chapter three looks at a novel by José Emilio Pacheco titled Las batallas en el desierto (1981). In this novel history is written through the memories of a man who as a young

boy falls in love with his best friend's mother. At the climax of the novel, she is killed and the young protagonist finds out that she has been erased from the official discourse by her lover who happens to be a member of the ruling party. Carlitos, in turn, refuses to accept that she never existed but also refuses to believe that she is dead. He also finds out that his classmates were prohibited from speaking about the events in her home about which they all somehow found out. Of course, they do not follow those orders and invent various possibilities about her death as they gossip to one another. While there is indeed a history being written through the narrative, the discourse produced is not an official historical discourse. Rather, it is a discourse that attempts to represent history in one of its many possible embodiments. Carlos produces his discourse outside the limits of the Mexican national discourse. He removes himself from a space in which the only discourse that can be produced either validates or is erased by a dominant regime. He instead creates a narrative space in which a discourse that narrates history is not necessarily historical discourse. Pacheco creates a discourse that is not bound to temporality nor to ideological consistency. Here, not only is history represented by non-traditional means, namely through memory and gossip, but the Mexican historical apparatus is also questioned. The history constructed in the novel stretches the limits of historical discourse in that it goes beyond ideologically privileged positions. That is to say that it is not bound by the limits imposed by the PRI government and its articulation of the ideals of the Mexican Revolution.

All three of these works, in one way or another use negativity as a way to either address the events of Tlatelolco or question the historical apparatus that allowed for Tlatelolco to be erased from the Mexican Historical landscape.

Chapter four looks at the way in which the strategies observed in the previous chapters are applied in the film Rojo Amanecer (1989) by Jorge Fons and in Gabriel Retes's El Bulto (1991), and the possible ramifications of uncovering the History of Tlatelolco. Rojo Amanecer is the first non-documentary film shot about the events of Tlatelolco, which in itself is a testament to the way in which this history has been omitted in the national discourse. It is further characterized by using a minimalist style of film making known as *cine imperfecto* or imperfect cinema. The film encapsulates the events of Tlatelolco in the twenty-four hour period between the mornings of October 2 and October 3, 1968. A middle class family residing in the apartment complex bordering the plaza will bear witness to the carnage. The use of negativity in the film revolves around what the audience does not see, namely the events to which the family is witness. All we have access to is their reaction and aural cues that suggest what is going on outside our field of vision. The film mirrors the way in which Mexico has learned of the massacre which would be mostly by witness accounts and not through official channels. This is clearly represented in the film when, after the massacre, the family turns on the television and hears the voice of Jacobo Zabludowski (a mainstay of PRI controlled news media) reporting the news which in no way matches the experience of the witnesses in the apartment. The strategies already explored in textual terms, are seen here, or rather unseen, in a visual medium.

El Bulto, on the other hand, takes a different approach in that it nearly divorces itself from the events of 1968. The film presents a man who is beaten into a coma in 1971 and awakes 20 years later still a man from the generation of 1968. He symbolizes a history that must be reinserted into the current historical reality which has gone on without him. His historical

existence is one that is made possible through the negativity of his coma. He existed untouched, uncontaminated, shielded by negativity from Mexican progress for 20 years.

These five works are able to represent history in ways which diminish the potential for a *differend*. They do so without entering into dialogue or argument with the official discourse promoted by the state. Instead they create a space from which historical representation can be carried out without the need to resort to a historical narrative easily coopted by the Mexican regime, a danger which was more than realistic following the student massacre. Monsiváis observes that “A partir de 1968 los caminos posibles parecen ser la asimilación sin condiciones al régimen o el marginamiento con sus consecuencias previsibles” (17). These works fall into the marginal, but I would suggest that they do so in an unpredictable manner. The power relation that Foucault describes is avoided as is the Hegelian dialectic. These works are not historical narratives but instead are works of fiction which are able to represent a history. They stretch the boundaries of history within a Mexican literary tradition that has been anchored, perhaps for too long, to an event which has become representative of both the nation’s defeat and victory.

*Cuando todos se hallaban reunidos,
los hombres en armas de guerra
cerraron salidas, entradas y pasos.
Entonces se oyó el estruendo,
se alzaron los gritos.*
-Lectura de los "Cantares mexicanos":
Manuscrito de Tlatelolco
José Emilio Pacheco

Chapter 1

The Scars of Time: Luis González de Alba and Lecumberri Prison

On October 2, 1968, a peaceful protest was held at the *Plaza de las tres culturas* in the area of Mexico City commonly known as Tlatelolco. This protest turned out to be the defining moment of the Student Movement of 1968. As many as 5,000 protestors lined the plaza to hear speeches by student leaders and UNAM administrators. According to the Mexican government, the crowd was ordered to disperse, at which point rebel snipers opened fire on government troops resulting in a blood bath.³ These troops returned fire with machine guns and tanks and according to government sources killed forty-three people.⁴ This figure, however has been disputed not only by the members of the Student Movement, but by many others including Octavio Paz and Elena Poniatowska. Meyer, Sherman and Deeds write that "few knowledgeable Mexicans accepted mortality figures under three or four-

³ This account is contradicted by a recent associated press story that declares that government snipers were responsible for opening fire at Tlatelolco. The story published on October 1, 2003 states that "A massacre of student protesters 35 years ago was touched off when at least 360 snipers under government command fired into the crowd, according to once-secret government files obtained by The Associated Press".

⁴ Forty-three was the final estimate of the death toll given by the Mexican government. The original figure was eight dead. What actually happened is hard to decipher since a great majority of the documents concerning the events of Tlatelolco have been classified by the Mexican government. In fact, final figures have yet to be tabulated since according to activists in Mexico, many deaths and disappearances have taken place since 1968.

hundred” (645). After all was concluded, the army and police units had arrested a still undetermined number of young men and women.

Among the hundreds of the students arrested on October 2, 1968 was Luis González de Alba who, as a key member of the Student Movement, is able to give a detailed recollection of the events leading to the 1968 massacre. Los días y los años (1971) is a work that combines various elements of the 1968 Student Movement and the agents that opposed it, both from within and without. The story is told in the first person by the author himself. The testimonial⁵ is composed of at least three levels or layers of narration. The first and most striking deals with González de Alba’s everyday life in prison. Through it he tells of his activities, other prisoners and their activities, as well as the organization of the political prisoners and the adaptation of the Student Movement from a political entity heavily reliant on street demonstrations to one then housed in the prison system. The second layer details the 1968 Student Movement before and up to the Tlatelolco massacre. Here the author explains the political machinations of the students as well as the counter-moves by the various opposing factions. At the same time, he tries to dispel various notions and propaganda put forth by the Mexican government. In the third layer, one that is constantly mixed in with the previous two, we see the less political life of the author. He talks about the love of his life and the things in which he finds solace and beauty. It is also marked with a more poetic language than the other two layers. This narrative layer is perhaps why some have viewed this work as a novel rather than a testimonial. Regardless of the more stylized

⁵ While some have referred to this work as an autobiographical novel, the narrative is more concerned with telling the story of the Student Movement than it is in developing a plot line around the events of October 2, 1968. As a result, I am more comfortable treating this as a testimonial.

language found in this layer of the work, the narrative remains true to a single goal, which is to narrate the events leading up to and following the Tlatelolco massacre.

However, beyond simply being a series of notes about the struggles of a man in the middle of a movement, this work shows a tremendous amount of historical foresight. On the one hand, González de Alba sets out to record the history of a movement of which he is a part. And at the same time, the testimonial works as a meta-history of the 1968 Student Movement. Of these two it is hard to decide which is more important. It is true that without testimonials like Los días y los años the events of Tlatelolco might have never been recorded. Juan Villoro writes that:

During the student movement there was very little news coverage of the students' demands. The books by Elena Poniatowska (*La noche de Tlatelolco*), Luis González de Alba (*Los días y [los años]*), and Carlos Monsiváis (*Días de guardar*) contributed to fixing a memory that was at risk of falling into oblivion. There the true story about the movement appeared (Corona and Jörgensen, 65).

As such, the value of González de Alba's work is highly significant if even as just an artifact of a key moment in Mexico's history. This is especially true when one considers the fervor with which the events are still being contested today, so much so that Subcomandante Marcos has drawn a rhetorical line from the Mexican Revolution, through the 1968 Student Movement, to the Chiapas uprisings.⁶ To examine this work as only an artifact, however, would

⁶ On October 2, 1998, Marcos releases a decree addressed "To the Generation of Dignity of 1968" where he addresses them as "brothers and sisters". In this decree Marcos parallels the political repression of 1968 to the government's actions in Chiapas in 1998. He writes: "Those who resist. Those who, even though they died, survived '68, those who we see here beside

be to greatly diminish its value. It would be a mistake to dismiss the value of González de Alba's work as a meta-history of the movement. In other words, Los días y los años through narrating the history of the Student Movement also outlines the many reasons that it was narrated out of the state's historical construction which in turn bears witness to the writing of History. González de Alba is at once a historian and a witness to the historical process by which he is to be written out of the national discourse. This testimonial offers us a unique look at the history of the Student Movement of 1968 and the way in which Mexican History has portrayed it. It is at once a history that is in and out of the national historical discourse.

Lastly, González de Alba creates a work in which a strategy based on the manipulation of negativity proves to be a viable form of resistance both in terms of praxis and discourse. In this testimonial the civilly impotent subject appropriates the object (Lecumberri Prison) that represents the very system responsible for his incarceration and the killings of hundreds of student protestors and turns it into a space of production. Within this space he is at once out of the state's punishing reach and within the very belly of the beast. Such a position simultaneously affords him a viable space from which to produce without being further punished and paradoxically places him within a new machinery of punishment.

Along with other student leaders, González de Alba traces the history of the Student Movement from within the prison walls and it is perhaps with this layer of narration that I should begin this study given that it will provide a background to the events that take place as the author is in jail. Of interest is

us, even though we are different and distinct. To all of them. We, the Zapatistas, salute them. 1968. 1998" (Subcomandante Marcos, 153).

that the author seems to go out of his way to narrate the events in a fragmented fashion. There is no chronology that can be deciphered. The clash between members of the *vocacionales* 2 and 5 that mark the genesis of the events leading to the Tlatelolco massacre does not appear until page 23 of Los Días y los años. Furthermore, the clash is narrated without much of what Bakhtin calls “surplus of vision”; that is to say, the narrator’s field of vision is, in this particularly important moment, limited to the experience of the moment being narrated. There is no benefit of hindsight afforded to it. The description of the events of July 22, 1968 clearly appear with the author being well aware of their significance as the point of departure of the events that eventually landed him in Lecumberri prison. It is this moment which sets in motion the intervention by police which will get terribly out of hand and ultimately lead to the bloody climax on October 2nd. But the tone of the description lacks the weight that these events should be afforded with the benefit of hindsight. Strictly speaking, this description is not based on a witnessing of the events. This is obvious as the author is able to recall what happened when students from the *vocacionales* sought refuge in the schools themselves and were followed and beaten by the police.

Perseguidos por los granaderos, los estudiantes se refugiaron en las vocacionales; pero las escuelas no fueron obstáculo, en su interior los granaderos la emprendieron no sólo con alumnos, sino con maestros y maestras que igualmente fueron golpeados sin conocer la causa de la agresión (González de Alba, 23).

The description is neither a witness account nor an all-encompassing chronicle. Rather it occupies a space somewhere in between. The voice knows of events to which it was not a witness but lacks the awareness of their

significance and magnitude to the point that while the author is aware of the focus this event will draw in the future, he is happy to recall himself as at the time being more concerned with other matters:

-Pues en todos los periódicos les siguen echando leña a los estudiantes y vagos que agreden a la policía.

-¿Y qué esperabas?

-¿Pagas el estacionamiento?

-Y yo por qué, el carro lo traes tú. Además en la calle hay lugar.

-Bueno, yo lo pago; pero tú disparas los refrescos. (González de Alba, 23).

This approach to the narration of this particular event has a number of effects both on the way the narrative will be written and on how it will be received as well as on how the Student Movement of 1968 can be articulated.

First of all, approaching the events of July 22nd as González de Alba does, without resorting to Bakhtin's "surplus of vision" dictates that this piece of work will be written without an all encompassing goal in plain view. That is that it will be written with the bias of the author exposed to the reader.

González de Alba is not making a claim of supreme knowledge of the events that will lead to the Tlatelolco massacre. He is *only* putting forth his own interpretation of said events. It is an interpretation that gains credibility and legitimacy, however, not through institutional means⁷ or through political affiliations, but rather through the power of the witness. Though as was already stated, González de Alba is not a witness to all the events that have taken place. He is not, for example, in the *vocacionales* while students and

⁷ We must keep in mind that this text was written long before Rigoberta Menchú's Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia and thus before the genre enjoyed the institutional legitimation that it does today.

teachers are being beaten by the *granaderos*. It would seem, then, that to use the term testimonial while conceding that the author is not an actual witness to the events he describes is a contradiction. But it is in this ambivalent space in which the narrator is able to combine two very important aspects of writing. In testimonial writing, argues John Beverley,

the narrator speaks for, or in the name of, a community or group, approximating in this way the symbolic function of the epic hero, without at the same time assuming his hierarchical and patriarchal status (Gugelberger, 27).

He is not a witness to everything, but rather a witness who also functions as an interlocutor for an undefined yet ever present group. He is at once a witness and a narrator who is able to borrow and appropriate the power of the witness from countless others. At the same time, the narrator is careful to avoid writing as a hegemonic other. He assumes the freedom of narrating what was witnessed by others while ultimately anchoring the narration to his unique and limited experience. He concludes the description of July 22, 1968 by stating that: "En la calle se comentaba que la manifestación había sido disuelta por la policía, pero no sabíamos cuál de las dos manifestaciones (González de Alba, 23). In the end we are still left with the mystery afforded by the narrator's limited experience of the events.

Secondly, besides exposing himself as a narrator with limits, the approach to the narration of the events of July 22, 1968 also affects how this narrative will be read. The lack of chronology and the fragmented text force the reader to work through the material. It makes the reader involved in the deciphering process, thus building a sense of community with the reader of the text that is implied in its very structure. This is very much tied-in with the

adoption of a testimonial narrative through which the narrator makes himself a part of a larger community while at the same time he is able to retain the ability to narrate from the point of view of a witness. Furthermore, this also separates it from other discourses that might appear suspect as the press was at that time.

Lastly and more importantly, the lack of chronology and fragmented text allows for the Student Movement of 1968 to be articulated in a fashion that does not limit it to the events between July 22 and October 2, 1968. In this fashion, the Student Movement, beyond being ever-present in various sociopolitical sectors in Mexico, can also be articulated as having begun before a specific date. More importantly, it does not accept October 2, 1968 as the climax and end of the movement. Instead, it allows for the movement to continue beyond that date. It allows for the Student Movement to be present in and out of Lecumberri. This is of extreme importance when we consider that one of the goals that the prisoners in Lecumberri strive for is the continuation of the movement despite their current imprisonment.

As the description of the Student Movement continues, the first exploitation of negativity as an affective force becomes obvious when almost immediately the reader is faced with self doubt that is transformed into an argument. As González de Alba narrates the history of the movement, he manages to recreate a type of philosophical dialogue in order to help him dispel certain notions about the students. There is a constant self questioning that as a result creates an image that is at times schizophrenic, at times defeating, but rarely dogmatic. He writes:

El Movimiento tuvo sus causas propias e independientes
aunque mucha gente se muriera de ganas de meter la mano

dentro. Es indudable que hubo ese tipo de gente y que mucha estaba dentro del mismo gobierno; pero siempre hicimos lo que nos pareció correcto (18).

This type of seemingly open dialogue offers a counterpoint to the discourse of the Mexican regime. All the while that the author is in dialogue with his comrades or himself, he is also in dialogue with their antagonists, namely Díaz Ordaz, the president of the Republic as well as any that might be associated with the regime. This strategy works hand in hand with the lack of chronology being that by the time we read about Díaz Ordaz claiming that the violence is being instigated by members of the Student Movement, that claim has already been considered, questioned, argued, and dismissed by González de Alba in a manner that portrays the Student Movement as a self assessing entity. At the same time he gives a detailed account of the way in which the Student Movement was organized thus further installing it as a legitimate well organized movement rather than as the collection hoodlums portrayed by the state censored press.

...pero en el CNH las posiciones raras apestaban a leguas, como cuando el mismo Ajax se soltó diciendo que había que crear una organización militar. Cualquiera fulano de ese tipo se hacía sospechoso de inmediato. La verdad es que con el sistema del CNH y las asambleas diarias en cada escuela nadie podía andar chueco, y si lo hacía se quedaba solo, pues nunca iba a lograr que todo el CNH aceptara una porquería (González de Alba, 18).

The democratic qualities of the Student Movement are presented in a passing manner but with great effect. The strategy also illustrates the manner in which

information is disseminated from the CNH to the individual schools without presenting a single person or group of people as ring leaders. “Para maniobras poco claras éramos demasiados: más de doscientos delegados y unas ochenta escuelas” (González de Alba, 18). Equally pervasive in this dialogue are the rifts between the factions that make up the Student Movement. As such, a hegemonic discourse is avoided while maintaining a united front. This is a particularly effective strategy because this text is very much constructed by a hegemonic discourse. It is, as one might expect, completely sympathetic to the Student Movement while it vilifies the Mexican government. Still, González de Alba tries to hide the hegemonic nature of his discourse behind an apparent fragmentation in the make up of the Student Movement and of the political prisoners in Lecumberri. The approach is opposite of the one used by hegemonic regimes which produce what is meant to be a single united discourse. In the case of the Mexican regime which clearly ruled over a divided country, it is ironic that its discourse is presented as a hegemonic construct while a clearly hegemonic one as in González de Alba’s and the Student Movement works hard to present itself as a non-hegemonic text.

Still, this staged dialogue in González de Alba also serves another purpose. While the Student Movement of 1968 was indeed a popular movement, it was still largely a movement run by middle class youth. In other words, there was a breach between the students and lower class citizens who saw them as misguided hippies enamored of radicalism for the sake of radicalism or students wanting to show off their intellectual muscle without knowledge of the real world. What González de Alba tries to show is that knowledge is being used for practical purposes. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick asks

“What does knowledge *do*?” (124), a question that undoubtedly was asked by many during the height of the Student Movement. She goes on to write: “I suppose this ought to seem quite an unremarkable epiphany: that knowledge *does* rather than simply *is* it is by now very routine to discover” (124).

Nonetheless, this discovery is one that was probably not as routine as one might hope. Certainly as one thumbs through Poniatowska’s La noche de Tlatelolco one can see that one question that arises is: *what exactly are these kids trying to do?* González de Alba stages a dialogue in which the purpose of knowledge is displayed, namely the pursuit of justice and a greater good.

As González de Alba confronts the accusations of the government through the format and structure of Los Días y los años, he also does so with content as is the case with the description of the silent march of September 13, 1968. In response to the Regime’s accusations that student protests are causing damage to Mexico, the students plan to march to the *Zócalo* in complete silence. The logic, writes González de Alba, was that:

La solución debería ser global y pronto se planteó: una manifestación que fuera diferente, que fuera una muestra innegable de disciplina y control, que levantara los ánimos y nos diera otra vez la vanguardia. Una manifestación en absoluto silencio (González de Alba, 115).

González de Alba articulates the response which the silent march represented. The silent march has become one of the symbols of the 1968 Student Movement. However, the reasons behind the march are rarely mentioned. It is in response to the claims of Díaz Ordaz that this march is organized. Not two weeks prior to it, in his State of the Union Address, Díaz Ordaz proclaims: “It is obvious that hands other than those of students were

involved in the recent disturbances; but it is also a fact that . . . a good number of students took part in the affair . . . ” (Quoted in Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 644). These agents will later be identified as any number of subversive entities ranging from communists to fascists to the CIA to the FBI.⁸ The silent march marks a response to the regime by a systematic negativity. The state’s ability to diffuse information through a variety of means, especially through its manipulation of the press, is met by an unstoppable response: active silence. As we will later find out, a vocal response is not always the most effective solution.⁹ Another option would of course be to do nothing at all to dispel the notion of student protestors as hoodlums. The silent march, however, combines passive resistance with active response.

This strategy allows for the students to dictate the terms under which a dialogue is to take place rather than relying on the terms put forth by the government. According to Jean Francois Lyotard’s theoretical vision, in the interrelation of discourses, each one has its own set of rules. He writes that in any dialogue between heterogeneous discourses, what he calls *differend* occurs.

As distinguished from litigation, a differend [*différend*] would be a case of conflict between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments (*xi*).

According to Lyotard, it is precisely within this inability to communicate with the other’s discourse that a *differend* takes place.

⁸ Not surprisingly, FBI, CIA, and NSA documents all had different conclusions concerning the possible influence of foreign agencies in the 1968 Student Movement which Raúl Jardón well documents in *El espionaje contra el movimiento estudiantil*.

⁹ I am referring here to the interrogations in which only the damning portions of the students’ confessions are recorded. These will be dealt with later in this chapter.

I would like to call a *differend* [différend] the case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim...A case of differend between two parties takes place when the “regulation” of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom . . . The differend is signaled by this inability to prove (9-10).

So while the students are able to voice their objections in an effective manner through the use of slogans, chants, protests, and marches, these are then signified in the state’s system of signification as proof of the students inability to dialogue with the regime. Any response is then re-signified and is in a sense transformed as discursive violence or it is simply not signified in such a system of signification. In the text we see a different operation than the one described by Lyotard in his theorization of discursive situations. In staging the silent march, the students avoid falling into a discursive battle because there is no discourse as conceived by the regime. The chants and slogans are set aside and a new form of enunciation is introduced which lies outside the reaches of the Mexican state. The silent march challenges the regime to respond in a similar manner which of course it cannot do. Negativity, in avoiding the discursive differend, becomes an active force. Silence becomes affect. The response to Díaz Ordaz’s state of the union speech is heard without a sound. Meyer Sherman, and Deeds point out that “While some of the speech was conciliatory, most of it was hard line” (644). The hardline was about to get harder indeed. Unable to adequately respond to the silent march, the regime retorts through other means. During the silent march special police units

invaded University City causing extensive damage in what was supposed to look like the result of students rioting.

Durante la manifestación, unos veinte individuos en uniforme blanco y portando ametralladoras, con disciplina, habilidad y rapidez rompieron parabrisas dañaron carrocerías a golpes y echaron azúcar en los tanques de gasolina de 123 autos que estaban en el estacionamiento de Antropología (Cazes, 168).

This was only a preview of the tactics that were later used in Tlatelolco by the *Batallón Olimpia* and later on June 10, 1971 by the *Halcones* in San Cosme. Still, the tactics used by the Mexican authorities underline their very inability to adequately respond to the students' tactics.

Ultimately the story is drawn to Tlatelolco where, unbeknownst to the students, the last major demonstration is to take place. The details of that demonstration, as I have already mentioned, continue to be shrouded in mystery. Suffice it to say for now that there was a clash between the army and the student protesters in which many people were killed. I would instead like to focus on the events following the massacre in which the narrator tells of how precisely he came to be a prisoner in Lecumberri.

The aftermath of the Tlatelolco massacre is marked by chaos, fear, and uncertainty. The tone of confidence with which most of the testimonial is written is now lost. Beyond the lack of confidence, for the first time we see the helplessness of the author in trying to articulate his position within the legitimate political realm. Following his arrest, while he is being processed, González de Alba recalls the frustration over the manner in which his interrogation is handled. He is unable to give a statement out of his own

volition. Instead, the processing takes the tone of a confession, albeit, through an interlocutor.

La secretaria encargada de levantar el acta, no transcribía directamente mis palabras, sino el texto que le dictaba el agente del Ministerio Público quien constantemente añadía de su propia cosecha lo que le parecía conveniente, me interpretaba a su criterio y extraía de lo dicho por mí lo que encontraba más acusador (González de Alba, 198).

He is unable to speak with his own voice, though he is identified in the declaration, ironically enough, as “el de la voz”. Beyond having things added to his testimony, he is further distraught when his account of the intervention of the *Batallón Olimpia* is left out as he is told that falsehoods would not be recorded. This operation is precisely what Lyotard calls *differend*. His ability to speak within a certain code is highly limited. As he tries to respond within that code he is at once rebuffed and in the final product there is no record of his protestations; thus they never really occurred. We come to see that the judicial discourse will only reflect a certain plane of existence. The same can be held true of Mexican historical discourse since they both have but a single goal: the support of the Mexican regime. The narrator, passionate as he is throughout the work, in this instance is left to recall: “Yo rectificaba cuando la adulteración de mis palabras era completa” (González de Alba, 198). He is fully aware of his limited power over this discourse and so he resigns himself to near passivity.

The confidence portrayed when speaking of the regime ultimately crumbles away when confronted by the real life manifestation of that regime.

Confusion sets in on the narrator as well as sense of helplessness as he describes a beating:

Apreté los dientes con toda la fuerza que tenía, el estómago se me contrajo otra vez y con más fuerza, sentí que casi se me pegaba con la espalda y volví a apretar los dientes en un esfuerzo desesperado por no vomitar...Ya no quería ser puesto en libertad, lo único que deseaba en ese momento era una celda vacía y la rutina cotidiana de una cárcel (González de Alba, 201).

Faced with the opportunity to speak his piece and set the record straight, González de Alba is so completely unable to penetrate its code and be adequately signified that he ultimately gives up and hopes to simply be. Oddly enough, he comes to be in prison because he is unable to represent himself within the confines of the legal discourse.

Additionally, it is interesting to look at this episode because as we reach the final sentence we are not sure if the narrator is describing his arrest or the attempt to break up the hunger strike with which the narrative opens. The narrative begins on January 1, 1970. It is the first of many jumps in chronology that we encounter. This is the least of our confusions. The testimonial begins with the author recalling the repression of a hunger strike in Lecumberri prison. This is part of the second level of narration. The reader is unsure of what is happening. We are thrust into the world of the narrator without an introduction or any type of explanation. The hunger strike, as we begin the journey, is in its 22nd day and it will last a total of forty-two. It begins on December 10, 1969 and will come to an end on January 22, 1970. The purpose of the strike was unclear at best. For example, José Revueltas, who

was imprisoned at the same time as González de Alba, presumes it was intended to gain freedom for the political prisoners at Lecumberri prison as well as others at various prisons around the country. He writes in a letter to Arthur Miller and the International Pen Club dated December 22, 1969: “Les escribo esta carta el día en que entramos en los trece días de huelga de hambre. Seguiremos así hasta el último momento: obtener la libertad o no obtenerla, con las consecuencias del caso” (Revueltas, 221). Yet in his *Manifiesto de huelga de hambre* he writes:

Nuestra huelga es contra la huelga de libertades y derechos democráticos; contra la huelga de dignidad pública; contra la huelga de patria en que nos quiere mantener un sistema de opresión abyecta y desmoralizante, falta de libertad, falta de grandeza y de su futuro (Revueltas, 220).

There is no demand for freedom in this manifesto. It would seem to suggest a more far reaching goal for the hunger strike, perhaps a symbolic statement against tyranny and oppression. Certainly both statements are hardly at odds with each other but for there to be no mention of a goal of freedom in the manifesto would seem to imply that the ultimate goal was another one altogether. And while liberty would have of course been welcomed by the prisoners, to be set free under the right conditions would have been more advantageous to keeping the Student Movement alive. This is especially true when we consider that freedom had at that point been offered to the students, was originally accepted, and then turned down when the conditions were not acceptable. González de Alba writes of an offer made by the government as it tried to avert a hunger strike planned for October of 1969. He says that:

. . . podíamos quedar en libertad si aceptábamos salir al extranjero. En vista de que afuera las condiciones organizativas eran realmente deplorables (no podíamos ni soñar con un embajador secuestrado)¹⁰, y que por nuestros cargos podemos esperar sentencias cercanas a los treinta años de prisión, decidimos aceptar la proposición (68).

After accepting the offer, it is then decided to refuse it since all of the prisoners would have to leave the country, even those that were arrested for being in the wrong place at the wrong time as well as those who were unable to make the trip due to medical conditions. Still, once the government relented and allowed those prisoners to be set free but not exiled, they are told that they must pay for the trip themselves. When the prisoners turn to their schools for funds, the information becomes public and the government reneges.

If indeed the goal of the hunger strike was to gain freedom, the hunger strike would be counter-productive, as González de Alba points out:

Nosotros estábamos convencidos de que con la huelga de hambre no sólo no saldríamos libres, sino que en caso de que el gobierno tuviera intención de soltar un grupo en Navidad, como el año anterior, estando en huelga no saldría nadie (68).

The goal of the hunger strike is somewhat unclear. On the one hand, Revueltas seems to fall on both sides of the issue. He both wants to be set free and make a more far reaching statement even if it is at the expense of freedom. On the other hand, González de Alba is not only not sure if that is the real goal, but concludes that the probability of attaining it would only be

¹⁰ González de Alba alludes here to the events that took place in Brazil on September 3, 1969 when U.S. ambassador Charles Burke Elbrick was kidnapped and held hostage by the Marxist revolutionary group MR-8. Ambassador Elbrick was held until the release of fifteen political prisoners on September 7, 1969.

diminished by the hunger strike. What he sees as the ultimate goal then, is to create a feeling camaraderie among the inside and the outside of Lecumberri Prison:

Pero lo que nos importaba al lanzarnos a la huelga era la creación de un estímulo central, único en torno al cual los Comités de Lucha pudieran organizarse y salir del estancamiento en que permanecían todas las direcciones estudiantiles (González de Alba, 68).

That being said, the Hunger strike was begun on December 10, 1969. The timing of which was hardly conducive to mobilizing university student who were on Christmas vacation. This concern is voiced by González de Alba as well as José Revueltas among others who felt that it would be best to postpone the beginning of the hunger strike. Nonetheless they all decide to join with the majority realizing that to be split on the issue would cause even more harm than to start the hunger strike just before Christmas. The issue appears to be complicated by a number of competing factions within the prisoners at Lecumberri. González de Alba writes that “las concepciones acerca de la función de una huelga de hambre eran radicalmente distintas” (66). He goes on to explain the composition of those competing factions.¹¹ These are reduced to the members of the communist party, the ex-members of the CNH and the *circunstanciales* (those imprisoned for being in the wrong place at the wrong time).

¹¹ González de Alba reduces the factions in his wing of the prison to three. Though as we read the text, we are made aware that aside from these “in-house” divisions, there are others based on the wing in which the prisoners reside. He writes, for example, about each wing’s reaction to the decision to go on a hunger strikes as follows: “La ‘M’ está de acuerdo en que sea en enero y la ‘N’ está en contra de la huelga por ser un método pasivo de lucha, así que el acuerdo de la ‘M’ hará mayoría” (González de Alba, 65).

Ultimately, the decision to go ahead with the hunger strike is made and all three of the factions have no choice but to participate. The end result is an unclear series of goals in relation to the hunger strike. The adopted declaration makes use of both the cry for freedom as well as the mobilization of students as its goal. It reads:

Nos dirigimos as ustedes con la finalidad de comunicarles que una mayoría de los presos políticos de la cárcel de Lecumberri del Distrito Federal, hemos decidido declararnos en *huelga de hambre* por tiempo indefinido, enarbolando la demanda de *libertad incondicional de todos los procesados por motivos políticos o a pretexto de ellos*, en todo el país.

Empleamos este método de lucha, no como una medida desesperada para obtener la libertad; nuestra perspectiva es lograr la movilización y el apoyo de todos los compañeros que, preocupados por el destino de las libertades democráticas en el país, son conscientes de la desesperante situación política en que se debate actualmente la nación (Revueltas, 340).

Both goals, while logical, of course have been more or less unfounded by González de Alba on account of the timing of the strike. As such, when the hunger strike goes forward, it does so with the support of those would have waited for a better time.

All of this is background information for the beginning of Los días y los años. The opening pages of the narrative throw us in the middle of events that we have no way of identifying. As we later find out, this crash into the narrative mirrors González de Alba's experience when he is put in prison. In the same manner that he is thrown in jail without any idea of what to expect

and then slowly becomes more and more adept at managing that space, so too are we thrown into a narrative that makes no sense. The reader is forced to learn his way around the jail. Only after a few pages do we begin to find our bearings and start to make sense (if I dare use the word) of what we are reading. As I mentioned before, this tactic allows the reader an active role in the construction of the testimonial. We must try to understand what we are reading and as a result become active participants in the construction of meaning in the text.

Once inside Lecumberri we begin to decipher the subculture of prison, at least part of it. González de Alba makes the reader well aware of the various subdivisions of the population of Lecumberri. These divisions are further underlined by the physical attributes of the prison. That is to say that each wing of the prison is occupied by similar inmates. In the opening pages, as the narrator is reliving the hunger strike, he writes:

Ha sucedido algo que no me explico en este momento: los presos que entraron a robar y golpear son de las crujías “E” y “D”, donde se encuentran los juzgados por robo y delitos de sangre; pero no he visto a ninguno de la “A”, la de reincidentes, que en todo el penal es da la más triste fama (9-10).

The narrator is not only aware of the social distinction of the prison but also of the mystery that it remains to an outsider which forces him to not only tell the reader how the prison is divided in terms of offenses but also how these are perceived by the inmates themselves.

Immediately in the narration the reader encounters a number of almost paradoxical events. The description of the hunger strike within the prison serves as a tool by which we are made aware of the methods through which

the prison guards have attempted to quell the political prisoners: through the use of other prisoners. As the narrator and his companions are now within the grasp of the state, and further, civilly dead, there should be little that can be done to them in the way of punishment. This is especially true given the means by which they have chosen to protest their incarceration. A hunger strike, rather than being an oppositional form of resistance, is a force that grows stronger through negativity. Much like a hole grows larger the more you take from it, so too does a hunger strike grow through negativity. As the bodies of the prisoners decay from lack of nourishment, the strike grows stronger. The state, then must find a way to combat it. The result is the use of other prisoners as tools of the state.

This use of prisoners in this manner produces or rather underlines the different rules under which they now live. At the same time they are being attacked by other prisoners, the political prisoners are also being robbed by them. González de Alba recreates a conversation between two other political prisoners in which one says: “-Aquí mismo en la reja muchos se quedaron mirando cómo salían máquinas, televisores, y otras cosas que les hubiera gustado tener . . .” (14). Later when they look over their empty cells they wonder why the items that were not stolen were instead broken or thrown about. Seemingly lost in the rubble is the fact that they have been robbed and cannot do anything about it. At first one can surmise that their lack of options is due to the fact that the attack was brought about by those that would be responsible for protecting them. And while the contempt towards them by the prison guards can certainly be attributed as the reason for their helplessness, this is more a symptom than the cause itself. That is to say that, the reason that the guards are able to display such contempt is that, once inside, the

prisoners are in fact no longer civil subjects and thus no longer afforded the same rights as they had previously enjoyed. In other words, while indeed their possessions are being stolen, they are being stolen in another world. In this world, the rules by which thefts are processed are quite different from the outside. Where or to whom can the prisoners turn? What expectations can be reasonable within prison?

Certainly to be attacked by other inmates with the endorsement of the prison should not be a reasonable expectation. Indeed, individuals are sent to prison as a form of punishment but should being in jail not be punishment enough. According to Levy and Miller the answer is “no”. In fact, prison creates the necessity for a new system of punishment and reward in which everything beyond an inmate staying in his cell every instant can be seen as a reward. In such a system, they write, punishments “are simply the absence of rewards for good behavior” (Levy and Miller, 107). This is clearly not the case during the events of January 1, 1970. What we see here is the construction of new form of punishment inside of the already present prison machinery of punishment and it would seem that the prisoners have been victimized by the new apparatus in force within the prison walls. While in this case, the hunger strike resulted in a failure, it nonetheless underscores the viability of manipulating negativity as a force in a manner similar to that seen with the silent march. Through this tactic in which the prisoners themselves direct the punishment toward themselves, the machinery of punishment cannot adequately respond. The response to the political prisoners has to be on more or less the terms they dictated, albeit unknowingly. In other words, in response to their actions, the prison responds through its own manipulation of negativity: the mobilization of other prisoners as tools of the state. One could

argue that indeed the use of prisoners to perform certain duties within the confines of a jail is not uncommon. However, this particular use is much more unorthodox than others we see. While there is mention of prisoners performing duties such as selling soft drinks, cleaning, and supervising other prisoners, these functions are more or less service posts and very much necessary within the realm and purpose of the jail. That is to say that the functions that the prisoners perform are in a sense designed to keep the prisoners separate from the outside world. Levy and Miller write:

Operating a prison is a complicated affair. Prisons are “total institutions” in that they comprise self-contained and nearly self sufficient communities unto themselves. For inmates, contact with the outside world is minimal and for that reason . . . many of their needs must be satisfied by the institution (199).

The institution here, of course, refers to the inmates themselves. The only contact that the prisoners have to the outside world comes from visitors. Adding merchants to the jail would be a violation of the purpose of the prison. The outside world would be impregnating itself into prison life. As such, the use of prisoners to perform certain service functions serves two purposes: 1. It seals the prisoners from the outside world and 2. It maintains and supports the institution.

The use of prisoners to crush the hunger strike, however, is a function of a different nature. In this case the prisoners act as proxies of the state in a negative space. This is highly significant due to the fact that the state is forced to use methods that are outside its limits. And while in this case they were successful, the fact that the political prisoners, like many before them, were able to find an enclave from which to resist, opens the door to the creation and

manipulation of negative spaces as a strategy of resistance. This strategy is in fact employed, though irregularly and incoherently throughout the Student Movement of 1968. The pages in Los días y los años bear witness to the events of the Student Movement while at the same time they present the strategies employed during the movement. As a participant in the events and narrator of the testimonial, González de Alba is often not aware of the very strategy that is being put to work. Nonetheless, a close examination of the text will in fact reveal how the manipulation of negativity well served the Student Movement as in the case of the silent march and the hunger strike and Lecumberri.

Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of the way negativity is manipulated is the work itself. Published in 1971, Los días y los años was written while González de Alba was a prisoner in Lecumberri. The jail itself, then, becomes a space of production from which he can write his account of the events leading up to and following the night of October 2, 1968. In a very real sense it is a product of negativity which counterpoints the accepted and legitimate modes of communication afforded to the prisoners. As an example we can recall the confessions in which the students are only allowed to “say” what best serves the regime. The writings of González de Alba turn out to be a series of illegitimate writings from a prisoner who is further discredited by the regime by failing to recognize him as a political prisoner.¹²

On a second front, the work of González de Alba can be seen as a last ditch effort to revive a movement that had come to a crashing halt on October 2, 1968. One of the objectives of the narrative is in fact to draw a rhetorical

¹² This is not surprising since there are never political prisoners as far as ruling regimes are concerned. Mexico, however, has never admitted to having had political prisoners during or after the 1968 Student Movement.

line that gives continuity to the Student Movement of 1968 on the outside and before Tlatelolco to what it transformed into after Tlatelolco and inside the walls of Lecumberri. In this sense, González de Alba is writing from the grave of the movement. His words might very well not be falling on deaf ears, but rather are coming from a dead locus of enunciation.

Lastly, the author's point of reference is one that does not exist as far as the regime is concerned. Even now we are witnesses to the constructed national discourse which does not include the history of the Student Movement in its official History. This was especially resonant to me when I visited the *Plaza de las tres culturas* a few years ago and found the orphaned monument in utter disregard. The monument lay there alone, dirty, and forgotten much in the same way the 1968 Student Movement lays in the Mexican Historical discourse. It is in this manner that González de Alba's work is especially poignant for it dares to write a meta-history from a non-existent plane. Paradoxically it is that position of non-existence which allows for the articulation of the affective forces responsible for the unarticulation of the Student Movement.

Los días y los años is a work that ties in the author's memory to a buried history; a history which has never been formally articulated. The testimonial acts as a scar in time. It is the sole proof of an unacknowledged wound. The author, in a poetic moment writes "Éstos son los días que después se recuerdan como una cicatriz" (González de Alba, 145). And later in the final paragraph-long sentence of the testimonial, González de Alba lists a number of incoherent memories which he concludes in saying "son ya esa cicatriz" (207). We are left to ponder the significance of these last four words

and the only conclusion is that in fact the whole testimonial is that scar which desperately tries to remind us that the wound was real.

*The disaster is separate;
That which is most separate.
-The Writing of The Disaster
Maurice Blanchot*

Chapter 2

Politics of Absence in Chin chin el teporocho

After the massacre of October 2nd, details were hard to find. Aside from first-hand accounts, there was very little to no official information which conclusively set a referential record for future generations. The state censored press was not a viable option to express dissenting views against the government. One possible exception was the newspaper El Excélsior, run by Julio Scherer García, which routinely published articles by Heberto Castillo, Carlos Monsiváis, and other intellectuals set on speaking against the status quo. Still, one newspaper was not enough to provide an adequate forum for a disenfranchised sector of Mexico's intelligentsia. One possible remedy was through literary publications. Indeed the literary production immediately following Tlatelolco surged. Unfortunately, the quantity of such production did not necessarily equate to quality, as Cynthia Steele points out. Furthermore, and perhaps due to their quality, most works were published in very small press runs and many did not survive to a second printing. Such was not the case with González de Alba's work, which today has been reprinted 20 times.

Yet another work addressing the Tlatelolco massacre which managed to survive to a second reprinting and beyond was Armando Ramírez's Chin chin el teporocho. First published 1972 by Novaro and later by Grijalbo, Chin chin el teporocho is an exception to the many novels published following Tlatelolco in that it does not directly deal with the events of October 2nd. In

fact, this novel is not widely considered a part of the handful of novels that were later known as the “novelas de Tlatelolco”. According to Gonzalo Martré, the novel uses the 1968 Student Movement as nothing more than a background or pretense through which the author is able to formulate a story. He further claims that the novel makes no emotional, moral, or political commitment to the movement nor to the events surrounding the student massacre (132). What Martré fails to recognize is that not all political commitment can be expressed outwardly. While indeed the presence of the Student Movement can be seen in only a few pages, its influence is much more prevalent. In fact, the construction and narration of the novel serve to accentuate these events precisely by not giving them a place within. In terms of narration, the student massacre is given only a minimal passing mention and in terms of construction, it is a glowing hole that is impossible to miss and which is surrounded by the novel. As such, the lack of attention given to these events is very much a form of political commitment. Written soon after the massacre, Chin chin el teporocho is an attempt to represent a historical vision at a time when History is only being written by the ruling political regime and all other attempts are shut down.

The novel opens with an unknown and nameless first person narrator running into some of his friends. This anonymous narrator will soon become the audience for a drunken man to tell his life story. The title of the novel is the nickname of the drunken man. There is really only one voice running through the novel. Yet this voice is highly mediated and camouflaged. In the simplest of terms, there is a narrator who listens to a secondary narrator (el teporocho) who recalls his youth. Rogelio, as the teporocho was known once upon a time, details his life as a young man in Tepito, a lower class

neighborhood in Mexico City. His memories begin at a party in his neighborhood. From there, Rogelio takes us on a voyage that encompasses drinking at parties, his job, drinking at parties, romance, drinking at parties, and getting over the hangover that inevitably follows. He falls in love at first sight with Michele, the daughter of a Spanish shop owner in his neighborhood. Michele agrees to be his girlfriend but under a number of conditions, the least of which are that her father not find out and that he stops drinking. The story is complicated by the relationship between Michele's sister and Rubén, whom Rogelio suspects of murdering his cousin. After finally convincing Michele to sleep with him, they are discovered by her father who then arranges their marriage. They move in to Michele's house, and she soon becomes pregnant. During his stay, Rogelio discovers that Michele's father is having a homosexual affair with Rubén when he surprises them in the back of the shop during one of their encounters. A shouting match ensues followed by a fight in which Rogelio kills his cousin's alleged murderer. Michele's father orders him out and Michele remains loyal to her father, driving Rogelio to leave alone and to become a drunk or *teporocho*, thus taking us to the beginning of the novel.

At work in the narrative is the creation of a number of alternate spaces; spaces that stray from accepted norms; spaces that flourish outside the limits of pre-established frameworks. These types of spaces are not uncommon and, according to Foucault, are necessary for the power center to prosper. He writes that:

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. Should it be said that one is always "inside" power, there is no "escaping" it, there is no absolute outside

where it is concerned, because one is subject to the law in any case? Or that, history being the ruse of reason, power is the ruse of history, always emerging the winner? This would be to misunderstand the strictly relational character of power relationships. Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network (1 History of Sexuality, 94).

Such spaces or points of resistance present the center with the opportunity to define itself against something. What Chin chin el teporocho does, however, is access a register out of the reach of the center which neither validates it nor confronts it, thus presenting it an opportunity to validate itself. Even before the tangled narration begins, the author tries to hide the novel in a web of anonymities. He writes in the “Carta del Autor” which precedes the novel:

Srs. Editores

Cuando ciertos amigos en ciertas ocasiones cuentan ciertas cosas en ciertos momentos se establece una cierta comunicacion intima muy identificandonos muy camelot

muy a lo que yo ya te pique yo te adivine eso es lo que quiero lograr con el lector eso(?) lo que hace soñor morir sufrir ver y despertar aunque huelo sucio (sin puntuación) a grosero (sin gramatica) a que me ves si asi soy no veo porque cambiaria si me puedo identificar con todos y tal ver con tan nadie

A.R.R

El autor¹³

Through this introduction to the text, the author manages to hide the genesis of the narration in the endless possibilities that happenstance affords. The ever trickling possibilities serve the purpose of diluting whatever message might be in the novel while at the same time creating a bridge between the novel and the reader. The “certain” characters through which such understanding takes place can easily be transported to the everyday life of the average Mexican citizen. At the same time, this “carta” introduces yet another character/narrator/author to the text further adding to an already confusing and unstable locus of narration. On the most banal level there exists a man named Armando Ramírez who penned the work Chin chin el teporocho. That literal Author, however, cannot be confused with the literary author who penned the letter, as this is very much part of the literary work and serves the function of framing the novel in a specific aesthetics, namely an aesthetics which lacks proper punctuation and grammar. Under these two authors we then have a primary narrator whom we see briefly as the novel opens and underneath him a secondary narrator who tells the story of his youth when he was very much a different person.

Lastly, this letter situates, or rather insinuates the meaning of the text only through the understanding achieved between friends in the ambiguous space the literary author attempts to create.¹⁴ That is to say that the author aims to produce meaning more or less through the unspoken. Speech, writes Pierre Macherey “eventually has nothing more to tell us: we investigate the

¹³ The novel is written almost exclusively without accent marks and with a highly inconsistent punctuation. All quotes from here on will lack proper accentuation marks.

¹⁴ I will from here on refer to the literal author as “Author” and the literary author as “author”.

silence, for it is the silence that is doing the speaking” (86). In this case, the silence works in two ways. On the one hand, the author is looking to make a connection with the reader based on an intimacy he hopes to establish. But on the other, we also see the use of the “albur” or double talk that is common in Mexico. While the term double talk is usually a fair translation, for the purposes of this study it is insufficient. The double or triple meanings that are peppered in the novel, including the opening letter, are not solely based on multiple meanings of words. Rather, the double meanings depend equally, if not more so, on the context, body language, character, disposition, facial expression, etc. of the person speaking. Strictly speaking, then, the “albur” is not a form of double talking at all. It is instead a form of communication that very much relies on the unspoken in order to produce meaning beyond the words.

What, then, is the purpose of the silence? Is the silence an affect or effect? According to Maurice Blanchot silence is a common reaction to a disaster which is so terrible that it becomes unmentionable, unthinkable. As such, it would seem that silence is very much an effect a disaster. But what of silence as discourse? Blanchot writes that:

The discourse on passivity necessarily betrays passivity, but it can effectively indicate certain of the traits that cause its faithlessness: not only is discourse active; it unfolds and develops according to the rules that assure it a certain coherence (16).

In the same manner, the discourse of silence betrays silence and silence as discourse would further escape it. What we see in Chin chin el teporocho is just that: silence as discourse. Blanchot goes on to write that:

Silence is perhaps a word, a paradoxical word, the silence of the word *silence*, yet surely we feel that it is linked to the cry, the voiceless cry, which breaks with all utterances, which is addressed to no one and which no one receives, the cry that lapses and decries (51).

What we will see in this novel is a voiceless cry that reaches no one (the censor) and yet is able to decrie the tragedy of Tlatelolco.

Framing the novel, as Ramírez does, with ambiguity in regards to what will be said and what will be actively “unsaid” is an interesting strategy that immediately establishes a negative space as a space of production. While one might infer, following a Hegelian logic, that to unsay is to try to erase or otherwise limit what has been said, in this case to unsay is to communicate, to speak beyond saying. However, it is a form of communication that cannot be engaged as one would others. In other words, the unspoken cannot be censored as other modes of communication might. One cannot react to the novel by prohibiting it from saying something because the novel is communicating precisely by not saying something; it communicates by unspeaking a critique of the way in which the history of Tlatelolco has not been articulated. It appropriates the end of censorship and reworks it as a means of production. As one reads over histories of Mexico, it cannot be ignored that the history of Tlatelolco has been omitted. The official reports say little to nothing about the events of October 2nd. The news reports that followed the massacre were permeated with news of the upcoming Olympic Games. Tlatelolco was censored out of the national discourse. Chin chin el teporocho inverts that operation by calling attention to the same events specifically by not mentioning them in a work that is clearly constructed around them.

Beyond creating an alternate mode of communication through unspeaking, the intimacy and understanding the author hopes to create between the text and the reader is also shared by the secondary narrator (el teporocho) who narrates the story itself. Here it is important to differentiate between the primary narrator in the novel who makes the story possible being that he is the person to whom the story is told, and the secondary narrator who is the character whose life story occupies the bulk of the novel. The opening pages of the novel include a note resembling a footnote in which the primary narrator states: "las omisiones, errores, y demas defectos que le encuentren a esta mi 'obsesion' echelen la culpa al AUTOR. Es que saben, estaba borracho de realidad . . ." (15). This adds yet another level of confusion the narrative being that we are now made aware that at least the primary narrator is aware of his function and of the reader. The teporocho says before he begins his story:

Mira cuate, amigo, mano, ñero, maestro o como te digan, yo te voy a contar mi vida, pero para que puedas captar mi existencia necesitas antes de leerme, hacer cualquier cosa, lo que sea, para que te des cuenta cabal de lo que ha sido mi vida, puedes fumarte un efectivo cigarro o tomate un buen trago de Teporocho o has el amor, mi hermano hombre, mi hermana mujer (15).

This time it is the secondary narrator who sees himself as the author within the novel who introduces the need to go beyond the text in order for the reader to gain a true understanding of his life. At the same time, he acknowledges the dynamic quality of the text. That is to say, he recognizes the give and take between the reader and the text which ultimately is responsible for the

production of meaning. Perhaps of greater importance is the awareness that he has of the reader as opposed to his audience (the young man to whom he is telling his life story). This awareness of the reader has an interesting effect on the narration in that we are no longer dealing with a character who is unaware and thus unaffected by the reader. Instead we have two narrators, one who is profoundly aware and concerned for the reader and another who is aware but seems less than concerned.

The teporocho's story begins as Rogelio arrives at a party. There is no introduction of any sort. The reader is simply presented with a continuing action. Ultimately, we find that this is hardly an issue which warrants concern since Rogelio's life follows a predictable pattern. Any events prior to the arrival at the party will undoubtedly replay themselves again. In fact, as the story progresses, we see that Rogelio is very much a prisoner of said pattern. His drinking, parties, women, job, all form a pattern which he seems powerless to affect. This becomes apparent in the first few pages of the novel as Rogelio describes his Monday routine.

Al día siguiente me levanto a las seis de la mañana, me lavo la cara y los brazos me hecho un poco de agua en el cabello para peinarme, desayuno, me dirigo a la parada del camion . . .pienso con tristesa, —siempre todos los lunes me sucede— que hay que ir a trabajar, oír los gritos del gerente, subirse al camion . . .(25).

The description of his dreaded Monday goes on for two pages but suddenly we find ourselves at the dinner table after work. "Acabamos de llegar de trabajar, mientras nos sentamos a la mesa, sueño con la linda figurita, tengo duda, creo que no va a salir" (27). Rogelio has apparently day-dreamed

through the entire day, which is indicative of just how trapped he really is. In fact he wishes that he could escape from his daily routine but concludes that he is condemned to a life-time of being a worker.

Of particular interest in this passage is the way in which the narrative blends the dreadful anticipation of going to work on a Monday morning with the act itself. Not only is the reader unsure of where the line is drawn between dream and reality, but in fact so is Rogelio. His only concern is getting through the week so he can get paid, get drunk with his friends, and then go back and do it all over again. He says:

que cuando llega el día sábado y cobro mi raya, me lleno de ansiedad y salgo huyendo, corriendo como desesperado para reunirme con mis amigos, para irnos a divertir, a bailar, a emborracharnos, a buscar una puta, a vivir de verdad aunque solo sea sábado en la noche y el domingo todo el día (27).

Rogelio's attitude, ironically, is not one of total resignation. He is fully aware of how much he despises his position and is desperately trying to escape even if that escape is only temporary. Come Saturday he is not happy but anxious. He is desperately trying to leave everything behind for just a few moments. And being that he cannot leave his job nor can he simply vanish from the world, he does the next best thing: he retreats into a world of debauchery. He says he wants to be with his friends, have fun, and dance. And while he does find value in all of these endeavors, in a sense they are all simply means to reach the ultimate end: getting drunk. That is the only space that cannot be invaded or violated by the outside world. To Rogelio, drinking represents a temporary escape into nothingness. The operation is a specialized inversion of what Octavio Paz calls *el ninguneo*. Paz writes that "El ninguneo es una

operación que consiste en hacer de Alguien, Ninguno. La nada de pronto se individualiza, se hace cuerpo y ojos, se hace Ninguno” (Laberinto, 49).

Rogelio is a visible yet ignorable subject. Given his service position, it could be said that he is *ninguneado* by the public at large. He works at a supermarket where he constantly hears the screams of people, presumably customers asking for the locations of certain products, who see him as an other unworthy of normal conversation, hence their screams. Rogelio’s escape is to recreate the operation already mentioned in spatial terms. He creates a space in which he can do as he pleases, where he has no worries and no vulnerabilities; in short, he creates a space which does not exist and within which he also does not exist.

Rogelio’s eventual fall into a perpetual state of inebriation allows him to occupy this space exclusively. Once clearly anchored to a life of constant drunkenness to the extreme, his position is so far outside of the realm of comfort, so abject, that he is outside the willing reach of the center. Rogelio meditates over what it actually means to be a teporocho. And while its description is marred by negativity, it does provide a possible space within that negativity to exist without outside interference. The implications of being a teporocho, says Rogelio, are that:

Ya te da lo mismo, morirte, que cagarte con los pantalones puestos o tragar en un basurero junto a la mierda con moscas a su alrededor u orinarse en las calles del centro de la ciudad frente a un policia y contestarle que esta regando las florecitas, cuando este le pregunta que porque lo hizo, ser teporocho es llegar a ser nadie, es no importarte nada, ni tu vida, ni tus hijos, ni tu esposa, es perderlo todo, es llegar a no tener ni madre (82).

In this grotesque description we see the way in which, through negativity, the subject can more or less step out of accepted norms without further retribution. The police officer can question the man but he either cannot do anything about it or is simply unwilling to do so. The reason for this social exemption is that his negativity acts almost as a repulsive force, but not quite. In the same manner a person walks by a homeless man and pretends not to see him, so too does the police officer walk away, not because he does not see him but because he would rather not see him. In Rogelio's case, this operation is dictated by his choice to be what he is. Such negativity places him outside the reach of a figure that represents authority. When Foucault states that the center needs a resistance in order to define itself, this type of scenario is not what is described. According to the Foucaultian model, a point of resistance that surfaces as such is identified and confronted. It is then either eliminated or coopted in a manner which further strengthens and defines the center.

The above example where a man is caught urinating in public can be viewed as a prime example of how power centers can redefine themselves using a point of resistance. The police officer acts as a representation of the center. He can position himself as a force that is against public indecency or vagrancy rather than a potential inconvenience or as an agent that at its best can write *you* a speeding ticket or at its worst can harass you and take your money. It should be noted here that a police officer in Mexico City is, in the public eye, viewed as more of a criminal than a protector of the laws. The same holds true in the novel where the police later extort Rogelio.

Stopping a man from urinating in the street can be used as an image which can be held up to the light. This is not to say that this is the image that a citizen will walk away with. Instead it is an image that can be counted on to

serve as a representation of the type of police agency that is in place in Mexico City. The other side that most Mexicans know can then be dismissed as the work of a few bad apples. The man in this example, however, is so marred by negativity that the policeman would rather ignore him than arrest him or try to extort money from him, money that he clearly does not have. Through this negativity the subject is able to disappear from the reach of the power center. It is not dead but dead enough to be outside the reach or willing gaze of the center. Kristeva writes in the opening of Powers of Horror:

There looms, within abjection, one of these violent dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced (1).

What Kristeva describes in terms of the human psyche is here played out in a human/power relations game. There is a subject breaking with norms that the center dares not approach.

It should be understood that the affective negative space that occupies the teporocho is so visible because of the discursive operation taking place. I do not argue that a citizen in the real world should be inclined to follow the lead of the character in the novel as a way establishing a political enclave from which to resist the state without it being able to reach him. What I propose is that the novel uses the character as a symbol through which we can read the application and manipulation of negativity as a form of resistance which breaks the Foucaultian model already proposed. While indeed the voyage from

Rogelio as a young man to the teporocho as still a young yet wasted being is tragic, it is nonetheless the symbolic power of his negativity which can be used and, to some extent, admired. The teporocho's encounter with the police officer is certainly tragic as we see a man who is in such a lowly state, both mentally and physically, that he has little control over his destiny. He does, however, manage to retain control of an immediate agency in regards to the apparatus of power represented by the policeman.

In contrast to this encounter, there are three other run-ins with the police that we see in the novel, each of them progressively worse. The first of these takes place ironically enough, at the park while Rogelio is necking with Michele. They are confronted by a police officer who lets them know that by making out in public "dan mal espectáculo" (43) and that walking on the grass is not allowed. He threatens to take them to the police station until Rogelio slips him the infamous *mordida*. The second of these encounters finds Rogelio, Michele, and Agnes going to the movies and buying tickets from a scalper. He is taken into custody, this time apparently by a detective who manages to extort him for more money. This time around the *mordida* is quite a bit higher: 259 pesos. The last of these encounters with the police takes place as he is walking with a friend and is stopped by a policeman who accuses him of selling marihuana. After not finding any, the policeman threatens to plant drugs on him unless he pays them some money. When he is unable to do so they take him in. At the police station the same process repeats itself. The officer there tells his cousin that they need 2,000 pesos in order to let him go. After finally paying the money they are set free.

This sequence of police encounters marks an interesting pattern of systematic corruption which in itself is nothing new to anyone who has spent

any considerable amount of time in Mexico City. However, these also illustrate the convergence of two distinct spaces: that of the formal (the state represented by the police) and that of the informal (represented by the negotiation of freedom through the *mordida*). In all three situations, the resolution revolves around bribery. The increasing amounts, while indeed seem to be related to the gravity of the offense, also have to do with the level of authority with which Rogelio is dealing. The farther up the system he goes, the more it costs to get out. The ladder is such that there is no escaping it. As he gets passed from one level of the police system to the next, there is no break in the thread of corruption.

What almost gets lost in these encounters is the lack of surprise on the part of Rogelio and openness on the part of the police. There is no attempt to hide any of the corruption. Furthermore, the distinction between right and wrong, if I may be permitted to use these terms without sounding naïve, is also lost on the subjects taking part in them. In the third police encounter when Rogelio is accused of selling drugs, he is commended by the officer for being a man and not giving up the information so easily. The policeman says:

- . . . sabes que chavo eres machin no sueltas prenda facil, te voy a hablar derecho nosotros te podemos desafanar de esta bronca, si te pones guapo con una corta feria.
- de donde quieren que saque el dinero.
- es tu problema ñero, nosotros te hablamos a lo derecho, ahora es cosa tuya si te pones guapo, o prefieres irte a chingar un cayo (158-59).

The fairness which is offered to Rogelio is so only in this context. There is a separate set of rules in effect in the exchange between Rogelio and the police

officer, a set of rules that would not work in the state-recognized official realm but that is nonetheless a product of that system. In the official realm, Rogelio would be expected to stand trial and take a chance on possibly being convicted of a crime he did not commit. Through the informal mechanism, he is able to go free. At first glance, it would appear that Rogelio has been victimized by the very negativity through which the teporocho was able to escape. However, one has to wonder if this system does not afford him a possibility he would otherwise not have. Does the informal system serve as a leveling of the playing field? In societies where money is power and those who have it can afford to escape military service, ensure admission to prestigious universities for their children, or retain attorneys able to clear them of almost any charge, does the *mordida* function as a way of affording lower class citizens a similar escape? In this case, the resolution would suggest that in the end, Rogelio ultimately benefits from the transaction taking place in the negative realm.

The subject of the *mordida* has been studied by John Cross in [Informal Politics](#). Cross argues that power exists both in the formal and informal sectors of Mexican society. But while formal power is active, informal power tends to be characterized more as a reactive force. Still as the study goes on, one cannot help to notice that the reaction is in fact coming from the formal center of power as it adapts in order to regulate informal economies. This point becomes even clearer when the author explains that informal economic circles are not composed by subjects who might be the losers of the economy game who were unable to secure a space within the formal economic structures, but rather political actors who have instead carved out a space in which they have more control than they would have had in the formal sector.

Because street vending is both highly prevalent and illegal in Mexico City, regulation of it has taken place in the informal realm through bribery. The *mordida* is emblematic of a non-space of interaction, not between the formal and informal sectors but between the informal entities and the representatives of the formal polity performing informal actions. Throughout this process the informal street vendors continue to go unregistered and unregulated, thus maintaining an informal quality and at the same time managing to curve or at least systematically evade formal influence.

In the same vein, Rogelio is able to negotiate his release from prison informally. He never makes it to the tribunal where might have been found guilty and sent to prison. Instead he is able to influence the formal sector through informal means. These means occur in a negative space that cannot be openly acknowledged by the power center, nor can it be influenced by the official discourse. Rogelio is extorted. There is no question about that. However, that extortion can come to represent a space through which those without access to higher levels of power can resist or even disappear from the grasp of the state.

What is interesting is that once inside the jailhouse we see the adaptation of that same system by those that occupy a different space. When Rogelio enters he is immediately greeted by an inmate who asks for his shoes. When Rogelio refuses to give them up, he is beaten while those shoes are taken from him anyway. He then is again commended, this time by the inmate for not giving up the shoes so easily. He is told: “—eres aferrado chavo igual que tu compa, ¿sabes que? Me caiste bien porque no te abriste a los trancazos . . . no te preocupes chavo al rato que vengan otros con zapatos nuevos, los primeros son para ti” (162). While in both cases he is rewarded

for displaying hyper-masculine traits, the rewards work only within their given spaces. In the encounter with the police, we can infer that the reward is actually letting him go when the money is produced since it is quite possible that a man viewed as effeminate might have been extorted and then thrown in jail whether he came up with the money or not as a way of *chingarlo* for being a *maricón*. Similarly, as with the informal economy constructed around the judicial system, there is another one behind bars. And through the successful manipulation of it, Rogelio does indeed get the next pair of shoes.

As we can see by these encounters, negativity provides Rogelio with some type of shelter. While the drive to this end might appear to be a free-fall over which he has no control, it is important to note that Rogelio's longing for escape is not as mindless as it might appear at first glance. Getting drunk and living a promiscuous life as a mode of escape can certainly bring that thought. However, we can also appreciate how Rogelio is wanting make his place of escape somewhat meaningful as is evident by his short meditation on dancing:

. . .nosotros, llegamos y sacamos a bailar unas chavas, y uno comienza a moverse . . . moviendo el cuerpo conforme lo sientas que las notas musicales toquen las fibras de tu cuerpo y la furia ritmica que llevas dentro del cuerpo se desencadene, y te haga danzar sin preocuparte de nada . . . lo importante es que te comuniques, que sientas la musica, dejala que se poseione de tu cuerpo, abandonalo a la musica, dejalo que naufrague liberalo de esa tension a que lo tienes sometido constantemente durante todo el día . . . (31)

Within this meditation we also see the symbolic of dancing which comes to represent a freedom that is otherwise unattainable yet resembles a

metaphysical existence that can be attained only momentarily. Rogelio loses focus on the girl with whom he is dancing almost as if she were not there. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it is almost as if *he* were not there. He is once again creating the place to which he can escape, a space that is only his and where he can disappear.

Additionally, Rogelio seeks to loosen the chains that control him all day long. Presumably he is making an allusion to his job. However, one can surmise that these chains are socio-political as well as cultural. Given the setting of the novel around the student protests preceding the 1968 massacre in Tlatelolco, Rogelio's need to break the chains that imprison him can be easily seen as a representation of the rebellion in the Student Movement. His choice of music includes American rock, which further draws parallels to the students.

Nevertheless Rogelio remains indifferent in regards to the plight of the university students. This unqualified lack of political commitment can be attributed to two factors of which he seems unaware. The first are the chains from which he is trying break free: a deeply imbedded nationalism he fails to recognize. The second is a fracture between the distinct spaces that form Mexican state.

While the Student Movement of 1968 was able to unite a number of different factions under an umbrella of representation, this unity was tenuous at best. Setting aside the divisions and breaks within the movement itself, there was also a lack of communication between the university students and the general populace represented here by Rogelio. This breakdown in communication is perhaps best captured by Elena Poniatowska in her now canonical work La noche de Tlatelolco. Poniatowska's book is very much

aligned with the Student Movement. Much of it aims to create a bond with the youth involved. It also aims to bring to light the tragedy of October 2, 1968. In it, however, Poniadowska is also able to capture various fractures in the popular movement. These were especially prevalent among some of the working class participants who saw the students as nothing more than misguided kids with no real-world knowledge. This break in communication does not go unnoticed in Chin chin el teporocho. The division is best illustrated by Rogelio's cousin Sonia when she asks him to introduce her to a friend:

- oyes roge, ¿es tu amigo antonio?
- cual antonio?
- al que le dicen el kaliman
- si pero casi no le hablo.
- presentamelo ¿no?
- pare que quieres que te lo presente?
- es que me gusta y me lo quiero amarrar.
- y marcos ya no es tu novio?
- no ya lo corte.
- al que tenias en la escuela?
- bueno ese es el de la escuela, es aparte (69)

Sonia differentiates between home and school as two distinct spaces that do not intersect and have nothing in common and are therefore subject to different sets of rules. This same division can be seen with Michele's sister, whose persona at school is quite different from her persona at home. She is a church-going catholic who lectures both Rogelio and his cousin on how to be righteous. But when she is away from home she is romantically involved with

Rogelio behind her sister's back. The fracture between school and home in the novel parallels the fracture between the students and a sector of the population who did not understand the students' demands or who saw the students as hippies lacking a respect for the prior generation. This position was most memorably played out by Mario Moreno Cantinflas in his film Conserje en condominio (1973).¹⁵

At the same time, Rogelio is also subject to a inherent nationalism that binds his judgment. When he is asked if he thinks the students will boycott the Olympic Games, he responds: “—no creo, ellos tambien son deportistas y tambien son patriotas saben que desprestigiarian al pais, si hicieran eso” (116). His assertion that the students are also patriots carries with it the implicit affirmation that he also sees himself as a patriot. Rogelio, then, seems to be holding the nation and the political regime as equal entities. That is to say that, in his judgment, to protest against the policies of the current political administration is in fact to protest against the nation itself. This apparent show of political fervor is especially important given Rogelio's permeating nihilism. The fact that he is willing to take a position on this issue serves to underscore the state's hegemonic reach. Its influence is so powerful so as to make a person's null or idle position fall in favor of the state.

Equally impressive in this exchange is Rogelio's naiveté concerning the state of the Mexican market and American influence. When asked if he thinks that the United States is involved in the student protests he responds:

-pues quien sabe, con eso de que se cree el quijote de la
mancha se imagina, que indochina, santo domingo, medio

¹⁵ Through his early career, Cantinflas was a rebel who did not acquiesce to socially acceptable norms. In this film however, as well as in others that followed, Cantinflas sides with the normative forces of the era admonishing Mexico's youth to respect traditions and symbols of authority.

oriente, es su muy amada dulcinea, y cree que esta en peligro, y quiere pasar como un heroe, pero lo unico que logra es mancharse...(116)

Rogelio is able to comment on the despotic nature of U.S. policy around the world without making a explicit reference to it. The comparison of the U.S. to Don Quijote de la Mancha is clear. However, the play with the word “mancha” has a broader reach. The mexicanism “manchar” signals a despotic or abusive nature by the one who *se mancha*. In this case, the ideal represented by Don Quijote, who in his own world tries to rescue his beloved Dulcinea, is counterpointed by the U.S. which also tries to rescue these various regions from any number of agents (then communism, today terrorism) but only manages to *mancharse*. There is also an interesting parallel between Don Quijote who invents his beloved Dulcinea in order to rescue her, and the U.S. who could be accused of inventing crisis in order to “rescue” a specific region and maintain a presence in the area.

While Rogelio is clearly aware of the far-reaching influence of U.S. foreign policy, he seems to be blind of the same U.S. influence in Mexico and himself (his love of American rock music). This is especially troublesome when we take into account what he does for a living: he is a stock boy in a Mexican super-market. As he recalls what he does for a living he also names the number of products he has to price every day.

...y la rutina de siempre, levantarse ir a la parada del camión, checar mi tarjeta de asistencias, marcar precios al fab ajax, lux, mun, gerber, nabisco, kleenex, colgate, choco milk, oko, nestle, escuchar y atender las preguntas de las señoras: ¿en donde esta el shampoo albertoVo5, los lapices labiales, lapices para

las cejas, para los pardos revlon, las medias y panty medias
cannon mills, o las cremas helen-curtis-rubenstein-maxfactor-
pons-nivea-teatrical-etc...(26)

The American influence in this passage is impossible to miss, however, Rogelio has managed to do just that. His knowledge of, not only U.S. operations all over the world, but also the attitude which drives them is not keen enough to examine that very influence in his homeland. Part of this may be that the products he mentions are very much used as a way of defining a community. According to García Canclini, in the age of globalization, a city is defined, among other factors, “by the way in which it is traversed by migrants and tourists, messages and goods from other countries, we construct what is ours with greater intensity against the backdrop of what we imagine about others” (Consumers, 62). In other words, Rogelio’s inability to examine U.S. influence in Mexico might well have to do with him defining his community with U.S. consumer products as a backdrop.

One cannot simply assume that Rogelio is a person who is generally unaware of the events of his time or his own history. As his memories show, this is a young man who has a reasonably well rounded awareness of political and historical events. This is obvious as he recalls:

Despues de haber dejado a michele, me dirigi a la vecindad,
habia baile, no me acordaba hoy es quince de septiembre, hoy a
la media noche se cumpliran ciento cincuenta y ocho años, de
aquel grito de don miguel hidalgo y costilla . . . (128)

He is not only aware of the date and its significance but also the exact anniversary that it represents. One could argue that this is simply a man who has gone through the educational system in Mexico where the War of

Independence and Mexican Revolution are the core of Social Studies. As a child he simply learned dates, memorized them and is now able to spew them out without much thought. However his brief reflection on the significance of the date would contradict that argument. It is telling that though Rogelio tells us that he had forgotten the date, yet he nonetheless tells us that it is the 15th (the eve of Mexican Independence Day). The parallels between the events behind the *grito the dolores* and the Student Movement of 1968 are brought to the surface with Rogelio's remembrance. In both cases there is a struggle against an oppressive government. In both cases there is a betrayal. The *grito* was supposed to take place days later but was moved up when Spanish troops learned of the planned revolt and began to arrest those involved. The Tlatelolco massacre involved undercover police agents infiltrating the students and targeting student leaders when the shooting began.

Why does Rogelio forget that it is Independence Day? There are a number of elements that are key to the academic formation of a Mexican student. Among these are of course, Mexican Independence, Benito Juárez, *Los Niños Héroes*, among other figures and events that are emblematic of Mexico. These symbols are constantly reinforced both in schools and through the national discourse. Juárez, for example, is glorified for being the first Mexican president from an Indian heritage. However the place of non-mestizos in Mexico is very much on the margin. The same can be held true of Mexican Independence. While it is celebrated every year, the focus would appear to be on the performance of the *grito* rather than the ideals behind it. Rogelio is able to recall that the *grito* is to take place but the ideals and rhetoric shared by both Mexican Independence and the Student Movement do not register. The students, after all, are seeking to break free from what they

see as an oppressive government. Rogelio is unable to see the parallels between the *grito de dolores* and the current political struggle embodied by the Student Movement. It is as if the significance of Mexican Independence is the celebration rather than the actual political cause it embodies. Rogelio expresses his indifference to both the Student Movement and the event itself:

. . . ahora la gente en el zocalo tambien habia concurrido...,pero al menos a mi me parecia en menor cantidad, seria por el conflicto estudiantil o porque los estudiantes habian organizado sus fiestas patrias, en sus recintos escolares, a la media noche el presidente dio el grito de independencia, lo estaban transmitiendo en la television y la radio, cuando hizo ordenar la banderita e hizo repicar la campana del palacio nacional situado al costado de la catedral y nosotros en nuestras casas, humildes o ricas o de clase media, en cabarets, prostibulos, en basureros o en chozas, en barrancas o cuevas, o en la carcel o en el cuartel, todos gritamos –¡viva mexico hijos de la chingada! – (129)

One can read Rogelio's indifference to the date as well as the attitude which might encapsulate the Mexican populace's attitude toward the holiday. However, Rogelio's nihilism is one that rests on the side of the state. His indifference is used as a plus by the political regime. He will still cheer on and be a part of the performance that is Mexican Independence day.

In fact, this is not the only time when we see Rogelio's lack of conviction used as a positive position. He is constantly being driven in any number of directions. For example we see how he is dragged to church in order to please Agnes, Michele's sister and then again when Michele's father

insists that they all go to church. He admits that he is a Catholic, though only through heritage. That is to say, he is Catholic only because he was raised in a Catholic home. Here we once again see the *ninguneo* of Rogelio. While a worker he is treated as an inferior, a nobody who warrants little attention. In the case of Michele's family, he is treated in a similar fashion. He is not consulted when it comes to going to church nor is he consulted when it comes to his wedding or even the birth of his child. Writes Paz about this type of operation: "Sería un error pensar que los demás le impiden existir. Simplemente disimulan su existencia, obran como si no existiera; Lo nulifican, lo anulan, lo ningunean" (Laberinto, 49). Rogelio is simply not considered. He is not invited to come to church and to say that he is expected to come would not be entirely correct. Rogelio will go or he will simply not be (with Michele).

Ultimately all these episodes pass through an anti-climatic moment of the novel which is the 1968 student massacre in Tlatelolco on its way to the resolution. The Tlatelolco massacre is approached in two different ways: textually and meta-textually. What we hear about the massacre comes from Sonia, Rogelio's cousin, who was at the protest and dies shortly after as a result of a blow she took to the head. The declaration takes place from Sonia's bed, outside the public realm. The division between the public and private is further underscored when the news of Sonia's death is known.

Cuando hube terminado de leer el periodico, mi tia entro a la vivienda con lagrimas en los ojos le habian mandado hablar por telefono – telefono a los del ocho – eran del sanatorio, presentia lo inevitable y le tenia miedo a pesar de saber que es irremediable...sonia murio –
Sonia prima mia, descanza en paz (167-68).

There are a number of things in this passage that garner attention. The first is the incongruence between public and private realms. Rogelio is reading the newspaper when his aunt walks in. The newspapers on the morning of October 3rd were inconsistent at best. The tragedy of the prior evening is largely lost due to the lack of consensus between the various newspapers.¹⁶ Poniatowska collects the various headlines from that morning that show just how little consensus there really was. Among them I include the following:

EXCÉLSIOR: Recio Combate al Dispersar el Ejército un mitin de Huelgistas.

20 Muertos, 75 Heridos, 400 presos.

Fernando M. Garza, director de Prensa de la Presidencia de la República.

EL UNIVERSAL: Tlatelolco, Campo de Batalla.

Durante Varias Horas Terroristas y Soldados Sostuvieron Rudo Combate.

29 Muertos y más de 80 Heridos en Ambos Bandos; 1 000 Detenidos.

LA PRENSA: Muchos Muertos y Heridos; habla García Barragán.

Balacera del Ejército con Estudiantes.

OVACIONES: Sangriento Tiroteo en la Plaza de las 3 Culturas.

Decenas de Francotiradores se enfrentaron a las Tropas.

Precieron 23 personas, 52 lesionados, mil detenidos y más vehículos quemados (Poniatowska, 164-65).

¹⁶Later, that same dissolution of tragedy will be accomplished through censorship.

The tenor of these headlines point to a terrorist attack as a sabotage to the Olympic Games. The same way in which Rogelio glosses over his cousin's death is symbolic of the way in which the Mexican press tried to focus the attention away from the massacre and direct it to the Summer Games which were just two weeks away. The television was equally controlled or at the very least censored by the Mexican government which did not want the news of the massacre to become public before it could have an explanation ready. Jacobo Zabludovski, who for years had been seen as a supporter of the regime, recalled in a 1998 interview with the Mexican newspaper La Jornada that on the of October 3, 1968, then Mexican President Díaz Ordaz called to ask him why he had worn a black neck-tie on the previous evening's news broadcast. One is left to assume that perhaps Díaz Ordaz thought that Zabludovski was showing a sign of sympathy or mourning for the dead of Tlatelolco. The press, following Tlatelolco, could not be counted on to report the news to the people. Similarly, in Ramírez's novel, the tragic news comes to the family only after Rogelio is done reading the paper when a phone call placed to his aunt brings the full weight of the tragedy crashing down on their home.

The fact that this event is given only three pages in the entire novel is what has driven critics to assume that Ramírez uses the student massacre as a background and that the novel lacks political commitment. But if we take into account that this novel is permeated by negativity, then we can set the frame by which we need to look at the massacre in the novel. The lack of narrative space given to the massacre acts as a hole in the narration. It is a historical and narrative void that begs for attention. This approach is consistent with the forms of resistance we have seen throughout the work. By not addressing the massacre, the narrator forms a question in the mind of the

reader. By not taking a stance, the narrator is avoiding a reaction from the apparatus of censorship. This is where the unsaid most clearly comes into play. The novel is able to pose a message which is unreachable by the mechanisms of censorship. It speaks where “speaking might not stop at the word — the word which is, or is to be, spoken, or taken back”. It speaks, to borrow from Blanchot, “suggesting that something not being said is speaking” (21). The stance the narrator takes up is done so through this mechanism that the regime is unable to confront. A censor cannot order the publisher, writer, or Author to not say something because nothing has been said. It is through that unsaying that the novel manages to make a statement about the Tlatelolco massacre. The narrative hole mirrors the historical void present in today’s Mexican national discourse. It also mirrors the void present immediately following the Tlatelolco massacre in the Mexican press.

The conclusion of the novel finds the narrator, the *teporocho*, finding his way to where he is going to sleep, an alley that he calls “el callejon de salsipuedes.” He marches into the alley and whispers his last words

...me dan lastima aquellos que tratan de arreglar el mundo cuando lo unico que hace falta es hacerse ¡pendejos! ¡digo! sino es que se ofenden, ya no queda mas, que dejarse arrastrar hasta dejar de subsistir, ¿para que defenderse? ¿para que luchar? Es mejor acostumbrarse a la idea que ya nos murimos (179).

This last assertion from *el teporocho* is a pessimistic conclusion to an already dark novel. However, woven within this negativity is a space that allows us to participate. It is quite different to be dragged by a system that one opposes than to simply be a part of it. While the now unrecognizable Rogelio affirms

that he is dead, it is that death which allows him to walk around and tell his story. It is that grotesque state of being that allows the narration to take place. When he falters in trying to tell us his story, Rogelio does not try to step back into the light so he can continue. Instead he plunges deeper into his drunken stupor by drinking more. Then and only then can he continue with his life story. What is at play in this novel is the appropriation of negativity as a space of production and contestation. Negativity provides a viable strategy of resistance that breaks away from the Foucaultian model of power relations. It allows for the creation of a framework of resistance that abides only by its own rules.

*dudo si responder
a la muda pregunta con un grito
por temor de saber que ya no existo
-Nocturno Eterno
Xavier Villaurrutia*

Chapter 3

Life After Death: Memory Beyond Discourse

Some of the criticism regarding Armando Ramírez's Chin chin el teporocho which questioned the novel's treatment as a *novela de Tlatelolco* raises the question of what exactly makes a novel relevant to a discussion of literature shaped by the events of 1968. In the case of Los Días y los años the issue does not arise since the testimonial is most clearly a work affected by the Tlatelolco massacre. In the case of Chin chin el teporocho the issue is clouded by the approach the novel takes in relation to the student massacre. There is no exposition of the issues involved as part of the Student Movement nor is there an explanation of the government's actions and Student Movement's reactions. There is only a passing mention of the highly domesticized effects of the Tlatelolco massacre on a particular family. That is to say, the effects of Tlatelolco in the novel are at a micro level as opposed to macro. The impact, while certainly tragic and poignant, does not begin to approach the true magnitude of the effects the student massacre had at a national level. As I have tried to show, said approach is very much a strategy by which the author is able to make a political statement about the massacre and the way it has been portrayed by the Mexican political system. Still, the criticism does raise the question: Must a work directly deal with the events of

October 2, 1968 in order to be considered important in a discussion of Tlatelolco? Can a work be relevant to Tlatelolco even if it does not address it specifically in its plot and/or structure? I will sidestep these questions by instead submitting that a novel need not necessarily be a *novela de Tlatelolco* in order to effectively deal with some of the issues raised by the student massacre and the literary production that followed.

Tlatelolco was a flash point in Mexican literature by which a surge in production took place. That this production was largely of poor quality and to a great extent either dismissed or forgotten, as Steele attests, does not reduce the lasting influence of Tlatelolco on Mexican authors. In recent years, for example, there have been works published by Jorge Volpi and Carlos Monsiváis along with Julio Scherer García concerning the intellectuals of the Tlatelolco generation and the history of Tlatelolco, respectively.¹⁷ Still, after the initial influx of Tlatelolco literature, there have been only a few works published. Part of the reason for this might be that perhaps the focus has been too narrow in judging works which may have been influenced by Tlatelolco. Such is the case of José Emilio Pacheco's Las batallas en el desierto (1981). While this novel has nothing directly to do with the events of October 2, 1968 (indeed the novel is set well before the 1960's) it does nonetheless reflect some of the issues that arose as a result of the student massacre, and perhaps the novel as a whole allegorizes the failure of the state that marks the most pervasive legacy of 1968. The plot itself cannot make any direct references to the student massacre nor the Student Movement without an anachronistic approach to the narration. But it does nonetheless have as a

¹⁷ La imaginación y el poder. Una historia intelectual de 1968 by Volpi and Los patriotas: De Tlatelolco a la guerra sucia by Monsiváis and Scherer García.

central theme Mexican History and its historicity. The issues raised by the novel strike a chord in terms of the way in which Mexican History has managed to erase the dead of Tlatelolco.

Pacheco's literary work is marked by the events of 1968. Ronald Friis points out that:

The events of 1968, both in Mexico and abroad constitute a political turning point for Pacheco's work. In the aftermath of the slaughter of student protestors at Tlatelolco, Pacheco's texts experiment with new forms and tones that, like the beliefs of the sixties counterculture, rebel against poetry's institutions of authority (175).

Certainly in the immediate aftermath of Tlatelolco, Pacheco's poetry explicitly engages the issues of Tlatelolco with pomes like "Lectura de los 'Cantares mexicanos': Manuscrito de Tlatelolco" or "1968" in which he spoke against the student massacre and signaled an end to what might be described as an age of innocence in Mexico. In fact, Pacheco is mentioned by Elena Poniatowska as one of the first artists who followed Octavio Paz's lead in taking a position against the Díaz Ordaz administration. Pacheco, however, evolves his articulation of disdain in relation to the student massacre. Once we see his initial outpour of explicit protest we begin to see a more subtle and sophisticated approach to these events. In his poem "Desde entonces" published one year prior to Las batallas en el desierto in a collection by the same name, Pacheco recalls the idealism of his youth:

Hubo una edad (siglos atrás, nadie lo recuerda)
en que estuvimos juntos, meses enteros,
desde el amanecer hasta la media noche.

Hablamos todo lo que había que hablar.

Hicimos todo lo que había que hacer.

The idealism of that youth is replaced by simple words and Pacheco concludes :

“ausencia”, “olvido”, “desamor”, “lejanía”.

Y nunca más, nunca más

nunca, nunca.

As Friis well argues “the solidarity of that time is portrayed as an ideal” to which the poet does not wish to return. “This” he continues “is because the oneness was necessitated by bloodshed. Events such as Tlatelolco still resonate in the poet’s life and work and are indirectly recalled in the title *Desde entonces*” (152). We might surmise that that “entonces” is the same one mentioned in “1968” where Pacheco states that “un lapso de la historia ha terminado”.

Another less subtle allusion to the 1968 massacre is seen a prose poem titled “Intercambio” also from Desde entonces in which Pacheco writes:

No hemos cumplido cuarenta años y ya hay en nuestra
generación demasiados poetas muertos. Muertos en la guerilla,
la tortura, el accidente, el suicidio . . .

All of this points to Pacheco as an author and poet who 12 years after the student massacre is still highly troubled by the events of Tlatelolco and who sees that moment as a marker for the loss of innocence.

To be or not to be? That is the question that haunts Carlos in José Emilio Pacheco’s Las batallas en el desierto (1981).¹⁸ In the balance is

¹⁸ The second edition published in 1999 contains revisions made by Pacheco himself. Though all the quotes used in this study come from the first edition, I will note where there are changes between the two.

Carlos's existence, his representation in the historical discourse of Mexico. On the one hand he could choose to challenge the dominant historical discourse produced by the PRI and face the possibility of being erased from History. On the other he can choose to remain alive and be a part of a discourse that denies him agency but makes use of his subjectivity in order to further itself. To be recognized within the PRI's historical discourse, or to be interpellated, as Althusser might say, is in fact another form of death. Such a process, I would argue, would simply silence the subject. It denies him a voice beyond the one that the ruling discourse represents. It gives the subject a voice—to borrow from de Certeau's The Writing of History—on the condition that the same subject remain forever silent, unable to pose a challenge or add to what has already been written. Instead, Carlos chooses to erase himself onto a dead narrative space and retain some degree of historical agency. In his debate we are witnesses to a possible means by which a subject outside the ruling power schemes is able to gain access to some form of historical representation. He chooses to not allow himself to be used as a brick in the construction of the national historical discourse as projected by the PRI. The apparent binary question of existence vs. death is broken by the creation of such a space. Through Carlos's ambivalent narration, this narrative space comes to life outside the limits of Mexican History as conceived by the rhetoric of the ruling political party.

Las batallas en el desierto is a perverse coming of age story that takes place totally within the memory of the narrator as he recalls his childhood in Mexico City some time after the second World War.¹⁹ The protagonist, a

¹⁹ Cynthia Steele concludes that the action of the novel takes place in 1948. She writes that “in spite of the narrators alleged confusion about the year in which the story transpired, two historical allusions situate it in 1948, two years into Aleman's presidency” (92). I would argue that given the scope of the novel, the exact year is unimportant. Though Carlos probably

young boy of grade-school age named Carlitos, finds himself in the middle of a Mexico fully involved in a progressive project of industrialization and corruption. His only contact with the Mexican ruling class is through his friendship with Jim, a boy whose mother is having an affair with a high ranking PRI official. After meeting Jim's mother (Mariana), Carlitos falls in love with her and after his family becomes aware of his feelings he is ostracized by them and later absolved and treated by the church and the psychological communities. As the novel nears the end, Carlitos is transferred to another school so as to avoid being further perverted by Mariana. One day, as he rides the bus, he meets one of his old schoolmates (Rosales). He confesses to Carlitos that his former classmates have all learned of his love for Mariana and tells him of her untimely death (apparently at the hands of her lover though staged as a suicide). Appalled, he runs to the building where she used to live only to find out that instead her being dead, there is no sign that she ever existed. No one remembers her and every clue of her life has been erased. This causes Carlitos to fall into a state of confusion. He questions his own memories, which as a result destabilize the narration, given that the novel is composed of those very memories that are then framed by their very negation. It is as if his own existence were tied to Mariana's. Without her, there can be no memory of that time and, paradoxically, there can be no narration.

“Me acuerdo, no me acuerdo: ¿qué año era aquél?” (9) says a grown up Carlos as the novel opens. The phrase is resonant of Shakespeare's “To be or not to be, that is the question.” As in Hamlet's meditation, there is an

should remember the precise year, his desire/inability to remember the date with such precision once again points to the ambiguous status of memory as an alternative discourse to formal History.

implicit debate of whether Carlos chooses to exist or not. While Hamlet debates ending his life, Carlos's trepidation likewise represents a choice between existence and non-existence, albeit through discourse. Given that the novel takes place in the realm of memory, the constitution of the subject is directly tied to Carlos's ability to remember or not remember the happenings of the novel. In fact, his ability to remember is the constitutive drive behind the novel as a whole. To remember allows the narrative to continue while to not remember silences it and even negates it. And while certainly his desire to remember is to a great extent related to his ability to remember, more than being a testament to Carlos's ultimate power over the narration, the ambiguity with which the novel opens also marks the radical status of memory as a historical discourse. In other words, Carlos's power over the narration is not absolute even though the novel is driven by his memories. He has the ability to recall but that ability is not the whole of his desire to remember. He can access the markers in time such as that it was the year of polio or hoof in mouth disease. But his desire to recall what year it was goes unfulfilled, thus staking the narrative on his ability rather than his desire to access his own memories.

Furthermore, we also see a distinction between memory as a historical discourse and Mexican History. Though they both share the same subject, memory is not limited to an ideological timeline, which is to say that memory needs not support the political regime. It does not need to have the same consistency as does Mexican History. Mexican History, on the other hand, has to support the national discourse. Carlos is able to recall the manner in which this is achieved:

Sin embargo había esperanza. Nuestros libros de texto afirmaban: visto en el mapa México tiene forma de cornucopia o cuerno de la abundancia. Para el impensable 1980 se auguraba –sin especificar como íbamos a lograrlo –un porvenir de plenitud y bienestar universales (11).²⁰

Carlos's recollection begins to question the assertions made by the national discourse as seen in his textbook but falls short of outwardly doing so. Memory acts here as a force that presents no definite center. It is more an essence or an afterthought than a force that can be easily identified and either corrected or erased. Memory exists on a different plane from history. This can partially be attributed to memory being unreliable and unfixed which in turn marks a discourse based in memory as inherently unstable as the novel clearly is. This is indeed a quality that can be exploited in the construction of such a narrative. While both history and memory can be aimed at an ideological end, only memory can do so without self consistency. By this, it should be understood that Mexican History aims to organize events into a "factual" and ideologically acceptable discourse at the macro level. As such, it must maintain a certain path which can incorporate the values introduced in the Mexican Revolution and mold them into a discourse which points to the current regime as the keeper of those values. Memory, however, does not. It could be argued that memory possesses many of the same attributes. Still, memory does not have to organize events into a line which best provides directionality toward the self reproduction of the political regime. It does not necessarily organize as much as it provides markers that may or may not remain true to any one path. Equally, memory does not aim to be an all

²⁰ The second edition now reads: "Para el impensable año dos mil..."

encompassing entity. It allows for a multiplicity of options, not one of them more truthful than the rest. In other words, there exists the possibility that one memory might differ from another person's recollection, but these do not have to be reconciled in order for the individual to be certain of his own. Nor does one memory stand above all others as an official historical construction might.

The second part of the sentence in which he asks "¿qué año era aquél?" situates Carlos's memory as part of a historical context. At the same time that the narrator invokes the power of memory, he is also aware that there must be a coinciding historical moment, a quantitative figure on which his childhood memories *should* be anchored. There is for example his memory of school, a type of personal bench-mark that to some extent should center the memory to a specific time. Nonetheless, the two variants of narration find themselves out of phase. While he can recall who his teacher was and who his friends were, he is unable to completely reconcile both discourses. On the one hand there is an official history that is exemplified by progress and wealth:

La cara del Señorpresidente en dondequiera: dibujos inmensos, retratos idealizados, fotos ubicuas, alegorías de progreso con Miguel Alemán como Dios Padre, caricaturas laudatorias, monumentos (10).

While on the other hand, the memories recalled juxtapose an alternative set of images:

Fue el año de la poliomielitis: escuelas llenas de niños con aparatos ortopédicos; de la fiebre aftosa: en todo el país fusilaban por decenas de miles reses enfermas; de las

inundaciones: el centro de la ciudad se convertía otra vez en laguna, la gente iba por las calles en lanchas (10).

The national project is portrayed as being out of touch with the populace. The official voice of Mexican History appears to be superimposed over the voice that grows out of personal memory. As such, the dialogue between the two cannot be carried out and the prospect of one complementing the other is impossible to consider. In the memory of Carlos, the official discourse that aims to describe the future as the pinnacle of progress is unable to support or incorporate the harsh realities presented in the memories of the narrator. Yet these images of antiquity could easily be coopted as points of reference from which progress must embark and head away. These specific images, however, work against the notion that any progress is being made. The “centro” as a lake conveys the visual cue of stagnation, of water that does not flow and which has no outlet. It further casts the reader’s gaze towards an ancient past in which this part of the city was indeed a lake, a time which is often projected as the glory days of Mexico.

What we see here is the incongruence between the narrator’s memory and the historical discourse of the nation which in itself should be no surprise given that memory and history are two distinct entities. The degree to which these two differ in the novel however is more than should be expected. In an exposition of the possible distinction between memory and history, Dominick LaCapra writes that two opposing tendencies have been posited about the subject, the first of which sees memory as that which opposes history and the second that memory is the essence of history (16). He concludes that:

The first tendency often leads to a neopositivistic understanding of history as a dry and sober matter of fact and analysis and to a

suspicion of memory as inherently uncritical and close to myth. Memory not only plays tricks; it is purportedly constituted by its tricks, which make it unreliable as a historical source (History and Memory, 16).

I will reject, as does LaCapra, this binary. I will submit that the narrator's memory, tricks and all, can serve as a *reliable* historical source. Moreover, the idea that Mexican History can be conceived as a matter of fact analysis is highly questionable. As the novel shows, the formal historical construct at play here aims to produce a continuing telic discourse which leads to the support of the political agency that generates it.

LaCapra goes on to write that:

The second tendency induces a fictionalizing of not mythologizing idea of history that is insensitive to the tricks memory plays and to the reasons for those tricks. Instead there is a tendency to go with memory's flow, mingle fact and fancy, provide ingratiating personal anecdotes or autobiographical sketches, moot the question of the relation between history and fiction (History and Memory, 16).

This conception of history in relation to the events of Tlatelolco is essentially what we have now given the lack of representation in the formal discourse. In Las batallas en el desierto this notion of history is non-existent. The realm of memory in this novel wants to be integrated into the historical realm.

Unfortunately, that integration is blocked by the inability of both realities to come together. LaCapra concludes that memory and history are overlapping constructs, both going beyond and falling short of the other. He proposes that even in all its unreliability, "Memory is a crucial source for history and has

complicated relations to documentary sources” (History and Memory, 19). This is perhaps one of the reasons why Carlos is unable to reconcile his own personal memories with the existing historical discourse: he is not such a crucial source nor are those that surround him. As it appears in the novel, memory and history are two distinct and separate entities which have two equally divided referents. They do not, as LaCapra concludes the history and memory do, meet each other in an intersecting and mutually inclusive manner.

What we instead witness is that the memories of the narrator are not the least bit affective to the discourse of the State. His memories, as vivid as they are and as disconnected from the official record, have no power over the construction of the national project or History. In fact, as we process his recollections, we are witnesses to his inability to resist the power of symbolic construction of the state in its attempt to use him as a tool of that very discourse that does not reflect (nor does it mean to reflect) his reality. This is the key to the power of the Mexican historical construct as projected by the State. As was stated above, Mexican History appears to be superimposed over reality. In fact, the history of the time as conceived by the PRI is the only “reality” in the construction of the national project. As the dominant discourse, it reflects the *only* reality of the nation at a discursive level. Whatever poses an articulated challenge is confronted and either erased or coopted as a means of self reproduction. As an example, we see how the protagonist is forced to participate in the production of that discourse whenever he is present at one of the many inaugurations of roads, stadiums or whatever the current project that embodies progress happens to be. He recalls:

a cada rato suspendían las clases para llevarnos a la inauguración de carreteras, avenidas, presas, parques deportivos, hospitales, ministerios, edificios inmensos.

Por regla general eran nada más un montón de piedras. El presidente inauguraba enormes monumentos inconclusos así mismo. Horas y horas bajo el sol sin movernos ni tomar agua...esperando la llegada de Miguel Alemán (16).

The hegemonic discourse vividly describes the state of the nation as it sees fit. Carlitos, being outside of the ruling power schemes is unable to affect or challenge that discourse. Cynthia Steele writes:

Armand Mattelart has described how the media appeals to the public's desire for a utopia of political freedom and participation, social harmony, and plenty. In reality, the public's role is reduced to passive participation, and history becomes an object to be consumed like any other (96).

The masses' role in Las batallas en el desierto does indeed boil down to passive participation. In this case, however, History is not ingested by the people, as Steele concludes. Rather, History ingests the people. The people or, in this case Carlitos, are voiced by the state in its own support. The image of Carlitos standing long hours in the sun without moving creates an image of zombie-like masses, building blocks of the regime. Carlitos is not being muted, he is being robbed of his voice in order to produce a discourse that can then be traced back to him. In other words, the dominant discourse has the ability to portray a reality that goes unchallenged. This lack of action or reaction on the part of Carlitos is an acceptance of the historical truth presented by the PRI. While this inaction does suggest a type of agency in

that Carlitos chooses not to do anything about it, it nonetheless frames that agency under the threat of repercussions on the one hand and reward on the other. In other words, Carlitos is there as part of a class which suggests a disciplinary action should he disrupt the proceedings. The reward, as any child can easily attest, is that he is not in school and anything, even if it is as boring as standing under the hot sun, is better than being in class. It is important to note that the masses do consume the images presented by the regime.

It is not surprising then, that as the novel continues, we are once again witnesses to Carlitos's inability to gain access to the other discourses in the novel. The scandal that ensues from his falling in love with Mariana drives his parents to seek some kind of solution to the problem. Not only do they try to learn what is wrong with Carlitos, but in a sense each is trying to decide what is the problem. His mother remains true to her discourse by deciding that all of Carlitos's problems stem from the urban decay which the city embodies and is personified by his brother Héctor. Her solution is to take him to a priest to seek counsel, an act that reveals that her discourse is not hers *per se*, but that it is also handed down by another power center. Thus his mother's attempt at saving her son's soul is also an attempt to actively support a discourse that validates her status as a decent woman. Her compliance is necessary for her to remain represented within religious discourse in a positive light. Similarly Carlitos once again falls in line with a discourse that builds itself from his inability to react against it. His constant inner assertion that he has done nothing wrong is not strong enough to keep him from admitting his guilt to the priest by means of a confession. Though he cannot comprehend how the devil would personally take time to tempt him, he nonetheless performs his penance and is cleansed.

His father, however, sees Carlitos's problem as stemming from a psychological condition and takes him to a psychiatrist. He is forced to partake in a series of tests that will determine the nature of his mental disorder. Within these structures, Carlitos is unable to participate, and is instead categorized according to their limitations. His inability to exert any kind of power over the situation is clearly expressed in his recollections of the events:

Me dieron ganas de gritarles: imbéciles, siquiera pónganse de acuerdo antes de seguir diciendo pendejadas en un lenguaje que ni ustedes mismos entienden. ¿Por qué tienen que pegarle etiquetas a todo? ¿Por qué no se dan cuenta de que uno simplemente se enamora de alguien? (47).

He is unable to penetrate the language of the institution that by design, negates his voice of agency. De Certeau points out that:

medical discourse has its own code spelled out by madmen. In order to speak, the madman must answer the questions asked of him. Therefore, in a psychiatric hospital it is observed that in the course of a month or two following the internment of a patient, a leveling of his discourse or an effacement of his idiosyncrasies takes place. The patient can only speak in the code that the hospital provides for him. He is alienated in the answers to questions, to bodies of knowledge that alone allow his enunciation (251).

Carlitos is unable to voice his thoughts within structures that medicalize his speech (in the case of the psychiatrist) or cast him as a sinner (in that of the church). What is of perhaps most importance, however, is his conformity to

those roles that he is asked to play. In the case of the priest, Carlitos ultimately admits to having committed a sin and in the case of the psychiatrist, though we learn of what he wanted to yell, he nonetheless says nothing. He simply stays until he is asked to leave. He is at the mercy of the discourses that surround him even though he tries to resist by not fully giving himself over to them. As we later find out, that is not the issue of importance. As long as he does not actively resist the discourse, his hesitation will not be registered and he will be allowed to continue so long as he is willing to partake in the rituals that mark an articulated acceptance of any given power center as is the case with him saying his penance or standing under the hot sun in support of a progressive project of the State.

It is important to underline that in both cases Carlitos is used to further build on a specific discourse. In the case of the psychiatrist it is especially evident that there is a discourse in place which has the goal of further projecting a specific ideology. Carlos recalls the debate between psychologists regarding his possible diagnosis.

Es un problema edípico clarísimo, doctor. El niño tiene una inteligencia muy por debajo de lo normal. Está sobreprotegido y es sumiso. Madre castrante, tal vez escena primaria: fue a ver a esa señora a sabiendas de que podría encontrarla con su amante. Discúlpeme Elisita, pero creo todo lo contrario: el chico es listísimo y extraordinariamente precoz, tanto que a los quince años podría convertirse en un perfecto idiota. La conducta atípica se debe a que padece desprotección, rigor excesivo de ambos progenitores, agudos sentimientos de inferioridad: Es, no

olvide, de muy corta estatura para su edad y resulta el último de los hermanos varones (46).

It is clear that each has not only their own opinion regarding Carlitos's ailment, but also that these conflicting diagnosis form part of a broader ideological rupture in each of the psychiatrists' school of thought which is evident by the supporting evidence each puts forth. This is further underscores the idea that each discourse means to solidify its own ideology and is able to arrange the facts in a manner which best serves a particular set of principles.

Until now, Carlitos's encounter with the ruling discourse has only led to his cooption. He has supported the ruling party even though he is aware of the disjuncture between reality and the discourse that represents it. He has given in to the medical discourse without any real form of resistance. And he has also allowed himself to be appropriated by the religious discourse that casts him as a sinner. These series of cooptions lead to his first real experience of resistance and erasure. Though he is willing to submit himself outwardly to these discourses, inwardly he remains defiant. Unfortunately for him, while the church and psychiatrists do not register it, his parents do and decide to transfer him to another school. The process that is described by de Certeau within the medical field plays itself out in a sociopolitical context as well. Carlitos is taken out of his comfortable surroundings and his past is erased. That is to say that any physical connection with that past must be broken. While there still is a memory of those ties, they remain unimportant. What matters is that those ties are not obvious at first glance and that they stay unarticulated. He is placed outside his body of knowledge.

One should note the importance placed on upward social mobility. Carlitos's family desires to join the ranks of the upper class, the embodiment

of the ruling discourse. His mother's stance that he has somehow threatened the family name (though she associates it more with her than anyone else) creates a blemish that cannot be reconciled with the structures they wish to be part of. He recalls that:

Mi madre insistía que en la nuestra –es decir, la suya- era una de las mejores familias de Guadalajara. Nunca un escándalo como el mío. Hombres honrados y trabajadores. Mujeres devotas, esposas abnegadas, madres ejemplares. Hijos obedientes y respetuosos. Pero vino la venganza de la indiada y el peladaje contra la decencia y la buena cuna (49).

The mother clearly establishes a binary of value between mestizos and those of indian heritage. It is a division that she is set on distinguishing further by rising to the upper class. Thus, the threat to the family name must be rewritten and the sin erased so as to distance itself from their current status. They must be a decent family with a clean name to be a part of the upper class. In order to insure that such an incident does not repeat itself, the family removes him from his former space and away from his temptress. As soon as the family is able, the need to be a part of the higher social sector also entails a change of physical space.

Already established in the novel, there is a distinction between the spaces of the lower classes (*La colonia Roma*) and the upper class (*La colonia de los doctores*). It is interesting that Carlitos's only encounter with the upper class is in the house of a rich family where they only speak English in front of him, thus asserting a division illustrated by language, yet set within economic terms. Carlitos recalls:

Cenamos. Sus padres no me dirigieron la palabra y hablaron todo el tiempo en inglés. Honey, how do you like the little Spic? He's a midget, isn't he? Oh Jack, please. Maybe the poor kid is catching on. Don't worry, dear, he wouldn't understand a thing. Al día siguiente Harry me dijo: Voy a darte un consejo: aprende a usar lo cubiertos. Anoche comiste filete con el tenedor del pescado (25).

In this way place and language become markers of class and economic status and language symbolically can be seen as voice. It is no surprise then, that Carlitos's father learns to speak within those structures. Through his English night classes he is able to cross over to the center ring of Mexico's economy, hence facilitating the family's progress as well as Carlitos's removal from the offending space. Thus, the father's acquisition of the English language gives him with the ability to speak, and, by extension, that voice is also given to Carlitos as long as he can support the discourse that comes with it. That is to say that he is unable to alter the already written history in which he is participating without giving up the benefits afforded by that discourse. He must tow the line or else face the consequences as will be the case with Mariana.

In order for Carlitos to gain a voice, he is displaced within the economic elite. The only way to keep it is to adopt the position of the ruling class. His newly formulated voice is given only within the ruling structure and therefore not valid within the old spaces. Carlitos cannot speak against the state or its institutions through state structures or elite means. His representation in that national discourse is dependent on his remaining in the upper class and on his support of the discourse it produces. In the same manner, his family assumes

that he has been cured of the disease or sin that affected him because he no longer displays “symptoms” of it. Internally, however, Carlitos continues to insist that he did in fact fall in love with Mariana. He nonetheless realizes that this is not what leads to the problems with his family. His love for Mariana is inconsequential as long as it remains unvoiced, in other words, out of the discursive realm. It represents a threat to that discourse only once it is externalized.

Al pensar en Mariana el impulso de ir a su encuentro se mezclaba a la sensación de la molestia y ridículo. Qué estupidez meterme en un lío que pude haber evitado con sólo resistirme a mi imbécil declaración de amor. Tarde para arrepentirme: hice lo que debía y ni siquiera ahora, tantos años después, voy a negar que me enamoré de Mariana (57).

Carlitos adopts this strategy in hopes of avoiding any further problems with his family.

The concluding chapters find Carlitos, now a member of the upper class and completely divorced from his former space, running into one of his former classmates, Rosales, selling *chicles* on a bus. This chance encounter clearly marks the contrast between Carlitos’s new life as a *niño bien* who spends his free time playing tennis at the Junior Club to Rosales who has to sell gum on the bus in order to eat. Rosales’s conversation with Carlitos introduces to him for the first time an option in the writing of History that to this point we had not seen: Mariana’s complete erasure from the historical realm and the brutality of the process that it entailed.

Mariana comes to represent a number of things. In this case, she occupied the same position as Carlitos in that her contact to the upper class

was dependent on her silence and passivity. It would appear that her strategy for representation was the same as Carlitos's. She simply does not voice her internal position. Her initial death and subsequent erasure, then, are promulgated by her speaking up against her lover (a representative of the ruling regime) about the corruption of the Mexican government in a public space. Rosales explains to Carlos that:

Parece que hubo un pleito o algo con el Señor ése del que Jim decía que era su padre y no era. Estaban él y la señora— se llamaba Mariana ¿no es cierto?— en un cabaret, en un restorán, o en una fiesta muy elegante en Las Lomas. Discutieron por algo que ella dijo de los robos en el gobierno, de cómo se derrochaba el dinero arrebatado de los pobres. Al Señor no le gustó que le alzara la voz allí delante de sus amigos poderosísimos: ministros, extranjeros millonarios, grandes socios de sus enjuagues, en fin. Y la abofeteó delante de todo el mundo y le gritó que ella no tenía derecho de hablar de honradez porque era una puta. Mariana se levantó y se fue a su casa en un libre y se tomó un frasco de Nembutal o se abrió las venas con una hoja de rasurar o se pegó un tiro o hizo todo eso junto, no sé bien como estuvo. El caso es que al despertar Jim la encontró muerta, bañada de sangre (62).

Mariana's key mistake is not in having those feelings but in articulating them. The wording of the story is key in that she raises her voice thus bringing to the discursive realm what had previously gone unvoiced and unregistered. Her position shifts from silent mistress and complicit agent to articulated resistance. Her discourse, unthreatening as it is given the space in which it

occurs, still is identified and must be dealt with. Her now voiced displeasure becomes a thorn in the fabric of the discourse constructed within that space. As a member of that space, she has transgressed her own limitations especially when we consider that her access to it is in the form of a trophy mistress. Mariana represents a forceful resistance to the dominant historical discourse. As such the only option to maintain the current discourse intact or to “normalize history” is to erase her.

Also of interest in the passage is the way in which Mariana’s death is described. The cause of death ranges from sleeping pills to a self inflicted gun-shot and each lead to young Jim finding her covered in blood the following morning, a tricky proposition if she indeed took sleeping pills. It is nonetheless a testament to the multiplicity of options afforded by Rosales’s recollection of the gossip. He is not sure which one is true so he simply recalls all three possibilities. Rosales’s gossip based recollection of Mariana’s potential multiple suicide methods is juxtaposed by the singular negation of her existence by *el Señor*. This in turn marks the difference between an informal unwritten historical discourse and an official one.

The news of Mariana’s death has a profound impact on young Carlitos. On one level, she is his first love. On a more important level, however, Mariana symbolizes Carlitos’s first encounter with a historical consciousness. It is through her that he is first able to project his historical discourse beyond the present.

Una vez, al abrir Jim un clóset, cayó una foto de Mariana a los seis meses, desnuda sobre una piel de tigre. Sentí una gran ternura al pensar en lo que por obvio nunca se piensa: Mariana también fue niña, también tuvo mi edad, también sería una

mujer como mi madre y después una anciana como mi abuela
(35).

Her death marks a breakage in Carlitos's historical reality. Her eventual erasure symbolizes a necessary reformulation of his historiographical apparatus. Mariana becomes the lens through which he perceives his own personal history. Without her he must rework his own memories in order to make them fit into an existing historical construct which he ultimately refuses to do leading him to reject everything he knows except the knowledge of her and his love for her.

The news that Mariana has died also brings with it Carlitos's realization that he is a prisoner to the historical discourse to which he is now tied. We also learn that there is an informal oral history being constructed within the lower classes in opposition to the state's erasure of Mariana:

Para todos nosotros fue lo más horrible que nos ha pasado en la vida. Su mamá le dejó a Jim una carta en inglés y le explicaba lo que te conté. Creo que también escribió otros recados —a lo mejor había uno para ti, cómo saberlo— aunque se hicieron humo, pues el Señor de inmediato le echó tierra al asunto y nos prohibieron hacer comentarios entre nosotros y sobre todo en nuestras casa. Pero ya ves cómo vuelan los chismes y qué difícil es guardar un secreto (63).

This oral history is now also beyond Carlitos's reach. He can no longer manipulate its telling as he might have done before in the one space where he had some semblance of agency. Where he once was a member of the same class as Rosales, or at least perceived by his class mates as such, he might have had more influence over that discourse. Now, as a member of the upper

class, he is no longer able to exert that type of control. The fact that rumors of his love for Mariana have been able to circulate without his being able to do anything about it is a testament to the autonomy of informal history from the official state-sponsored History. As a member of the upper class one might think that he would be able to overpower the informal history under construction. He cannot. The informal structures exist on a plane other than that on which the state can exert control. It likewise shows the way in which multiple possibilities can exist in the unofficial historical realm.

It is important to note that Carlos did in fact have some control over that discourse at one point:

. . . cuando Rosales, que nunca se había metido conmigo gritó:
Ey, miren: esos dos son putos. Vamos a darles pamba a los
putos. Me le fui encima a golpes.. Pásate a tu madre, pinche
buey, y verás que tan puto, indio pendejo (24).²¹

His ability to manipulate the informal sector of society and its discourse rendered him some kind of authority. He is unwilling to accept that Mariana is anyone's lover, for example. He is also able to shield Jim (Mariana's son and his best friend) from some of the comments that he might have found too offensive. Once Carlitos is out of that medium, however, he is unable to affect or control that discourse. In fact, we realize, as does he, that he is unable to manipulate any one discourse. His acceptance of economic prosperity carries the endorsement of the discourse that makes it possible.

Carlitos eventually realizes that his ability to speak within the discourse of the ruling classes limits his ability to construct his own history. Instead, he

²¹ In the second edition, the passage reads: "Hey, miren: esos dos son putos. Vamos a darles pamba a los putos. Me le fui encima a golpes. Pásame a tu madre, pinche buey, y veras qué tan puto, indio pendejo."

is forced to accept the history that is imposed upon him. By accepting the discourse, he exchanges economic well-being for historical agency. The past in which he lived has been erased along with the possibility of constructing a future. The State's usurpation of both his past and the symbol of Carlitos's historical consciousness renders him a non-historical figure. He is, in essence, impotent in a historical context. He is unable to produce or partake in the birth of a history that is truly his.

At the same time we discover that Carlitos is impotent, a condition that he does not update as he recalls the events. Perversely enough, it is with the help of the priest that he discovers his inability to produce *la materia prima* as he describes it. All he can do is go through the motions without being able to reach an orgasm:

...a escondidas y con gran asombro del periodiquero, compraba
Vea y Vodevil, practicaba los malos tactos sin conseguir el
derrame. La imagen de Mariana reaparecía por encima de
Tongolele, Kalantán, Su Muy Key. No me había curado: el amor
es una enfermedad en un mundo en que lo único natural es el
odio (56).

As such, Carlos will be unable to assume his proper role in Mexican society as a man. He will be unable to father any children or to be a real man in a society where value is measured through public hypermasculinity. While there is no mention of Carlos's ultimate family standing, there is a mention of his brother Héctor as a "caballero católico, padre de once hijos, gran señor de la extrema derecha mexicana" (51). We see the proper measure of a man whose offspring is comparable to Abraham's.

In the same manner in which Carlos is unable to form part of Mexican society, he is unable to produce an individual historical discourse that can match the one that has already been written for him. What is interesting about this phenomenon is Carlos's negation of the discourse of official history and the events it describes. He is unwilling to accept the rewriting of Mariana out of existence, but he also refuses to accept her death. He is, in fact, creating an alternate (albeit private and perhaps melancholic) history that is sheltered from its official negation. Carlos preserves Mariana's memory completely separate of any of the discourses that surround him. On the one hand, it is not surprising that he does not accept that Mariana never existed. However, it does come as a surprise that he will not believe Rosales's account of Mariana's death. He emphatically states that:

Demolieron la escuela, demolieron el edificio de Mariana, demolieron, mi casa, demolieron la colonia Roma. Se acabó esa ciudad²². Terminó aquél país. No hay memoria del México de aquellos años. Y a nadie le importa: de ese horror quién puede tener nostalgia. Todo pasó como pasan los discos de la sinfonola. Nunca sabré si aún vive Mariana. Si viviera tendría sesenta años (67-68).²³

This conclusion can be read in two complementing ways. On one level this is a melancholic process intended to preserve a buried history. He has, through melancholia, incorporated the lost object: the memory of Mariana as the symbol of historical agency. Carlitos first refuses to accept that she never

²² One can see the resonance of Pacheco's prose poem "Ayer y hoy" in this phrase. The poem reads: "Ni la misma casa ni la misma ciudad, ni los mismos amores ni las mismas costumbres, ni los mismos libros ni los mismos amigos: de aquella época lo único que conservo es mi nombre". The poem is enveloped in a gaze at the 1968 massacre which suggests that this conclusion is also influenced by the same events.

²³ In the second edition, the passage reads: "Si viviera tendría ochenta años".

existed and then refuses to believe that she is dead. The hope of her living, then, is tied to his need to keep his own memories. LaCapra suggests that a divorce of history and memory is a way by which one might mitigate a trauma (23) . Carlos takes this possible operation a step further by not only splitting the two but negating the official historical history which would have negated the memory of Mariana. By refusing to accept her death and negating the memory of that time he is at once sheltering the memory from death and negating the process by which her existence was erased. There is no city and there is no memory of those days nor the agents that acted against them in that time. In other words, faced with remembering a past in which he must question the existence of Mariana, he instead refuses to acknowledge those memories with the exception of Mariana. If in fact there is no memory of the Mexico of those days, then the novel cannot exist. Negating memory takes us back to the first words of the novel “Me acuerdo, no me acuerdo” and settles the debate with “no me acuerdo” as the victor. The novel is then framed by self negation. It becomes the ramblings of a man who is unable to even recall if what he is telling us is true. He is unwilling to concede his own personal history to official PRI historical discourse. It is of great importance then, that, unable to produce his own history, Carlos is unwilling or unable to produce, partake in, or support any history at all. Carlos has learned that the dominant discourse can only react to that which is external as was the case of his “sickness” and Mariana’s accusations of corruption by the Mexican government. What remains internalized is of no concern; it poses no challenge. Thus, Carlos places the memory of Mariana as far away from the external world as possible.

The second way to approach the conclusion of the novel is by paying close attention to the verbal tense of the last sentence, which has the end result of producing a hypothetical situation. Through this hypothetical situation I would argue that the narrator is producing a different type of history, one which cannot be engaged in the same terms as a counter history. In other words, Carlos constructs a history that cannot be erased because it does not exist in the now or then, but in a hypothetical now. The inaccessibility of this space is compounded by the framing of the novel in the ambiguous and tenuous memory of the narrator. There is a concerted effort by the narrator to relive history through a quixotic memory. This memory becomes the key to survival. The subject, unable to write a history that is aimed to overtake the official history in the present and project towards the future, instead assembles and reassembles the past in an almost pathological way. The fact that he still holds out hope that Mariana might be alive dictates that there is still hope for historical agency. If that which was usurped can be rectified, if that which was erased can be re-instituted, if history could rejoin memory, then his memory can be restored.

The creation of this other space is reminiscent of Villaurrutia's poetry that is in itself a space of contestation. In his poem "Nocturno eterno", verses of which serve as epigraph to this chapter, Villaurrutia constructs the space of negativity in which reality is transformed. Dialogue within the poem rests on a renegotiation of the conditions of existence. The poem is framed by imminence. Its verses all lead to something that is not enunciated:

cuando la vida o lo que así llamamos inutilmente
y que no llega sino con un nombre innombrable
se desnuda para saltar al lecho

y ahogarse en el alcohol o quemarse en la nieve

cuando la ví cuando la vid cuando la vida

quiere entregarse cobardemente y a oscuras

sin decirnos siquiera el precio de su nombre (32)

The “when” that begins each stanza is never resolved, yet there is an unarticulated essence that follows as part of the poem, perhaps in another register. The creation of such space drives the poet to whisper: “dudo si responder/ a la muda pregunta con un grito/ por temor de saber que yo no existo” (33). In response to an unspoken question, a scream would not answer it. Reality must be renegotiated to adequately dialogue with this new space. In the same manner, Carlos invites us to enter into his space. Much like the unspoken question has no spoken answer, so too does a non-existent memory have no way of being erased. Carlitos has taken his memories and hidden them in a non-existent space to which only he has access. Rather than having those memories coopted by a historical construction or having them erased, he takes them out of the discursive realm and hides them within his troubled psyche. Any engagement must then take place according to different rules.

Can there be a space that denies its existence and at the same offers an alternative to the state? Carlos’s creation of a negative space would suggest that there is. It creates an advantage within negativity. That is the advantage of having no voice. Carlitos begins this journey under the hot sun as a coopted being and without any resistance. He quickly finds himself in a similar position in the psychiatrist’s office and in the church. In these instances he continues to submit to their discourses but begins to resist them

inwardly still without presenting an articulated resistance. The final step comes as the novel concludes and Carlos now uses that former passive state to shelter the memory of Mariana. This ability, as Pacheco illustrates, allows Carlitos to move without outward recognition. Of course, what the text does not and cannot answer is where does it all end? Or better yet, where does it all begin once again? Is it all for naught? Are the battles really over nothing as the title or the narrator's memories of the battles would seem to imply?

Comenzaban las batallas en el desierto. Le decíamos así porque era un patio de tierra colorada, polvo de tezontle o ladrillo, sin árboles ni plantas, solo una caja de cemento al fondo (15).

In this playground there is nothing but red dirt. Yet in the imagination of young Carlitos it becomes a desert in which glorious battles in a far away land will take place. Inaccessible as this place might be to an outsider, it provides endless possibilities to Carlitos and his classmates.

Is the battle really over nothing? Yes and no. The question is in fact an invitation to rethink the process of the creation of a negative space. The title of the work simply marks the non-spaces where the battle is taking place and how these spaces are accessed. Carlos's narrative cannot be reduced to an anti-discourse. It is the creation of a discourse that exists, not in opposition to the center. It is a space where negativity opens the doors to another form of thought. Or, as Heidegger puts it, - "Ontology and logic, to be sure, have exacted a great deal from the 'not,' and have thus made its possibilities visible in a piecemeal fashion. . ." (qtd. in Agamben 3). It is a poetic space of nothingness that enables the battle to be fought and that space is what enables the production of a discourse which can be represent Mexican History

without narrating it and without it being coopted or erased by the discourse of the nation as produced by the PRI.

I would like to close this chapter by suggesting that the themes present in Las batallas en el desierto are highly relevant to a discussion of Tlatelolco. What this novel questions is not the specifics of 1968 but the process by which Mexican History is able to erase Tlatelolco from the official discourse of the nation. In the same way that Mariana's death is erased, so too were the dead of Tlatelolco. Interestingly enough, it is in a similar fashion that both her death and the student's deaths are passed along. Mariana's memory lives on through the gossip that spreads through the lower class neighborhoods instead of the official realm. Likewise, the experience and history of the Students Movement has been expressed mostly through testimonial literature. In both cases, there is no official acknowledgement of the gravity of the events. Mariana, then, can be read as a symbol of the many dead of Tlatelolco. It is interesting that like the students, her death is a direct result of her protest against government corruption. The greater shame is that in not acknowledging her death she is then completely erased from the historical realm. Lastly, what this novel raises is the potential problems of being forced to shelter a history outside the public realm. What we see in the final pages is a grown Carlos still holding on to the possibility that Mariana might still be alive. While now a man, he has clearly not grown as he is still fixated on his childhood love. What might the acceptance of the truth concerning her death do to his fragile psyche? We can only surmise the devastating effects.

*si
una nación entera se avergüenza
es león que se agazapa
para saltar.
-Intermitencias del Oeste (3)
Octavio Paz*

Chapter 4

Rojo Amanecer and El Bulto: History and Its Imperfect (Re)visions

Until now the focus of this study has been the use and manipulation of negativity in written narratives. I would like to shift my attention to this same mechanism within film. Of particular interest are Fons's Rojo Amanecer (1989) and Retes's El Bulto (1991). In both of these films, not only is the concept of negativity manipulated in a manner distinct from the texts previously studied, but they also begin to ask the type of questions I introduced in the conclusion of the previous chapter, namely what are the ramifications of using negativity as a viable space of historical production and representation and the larger question of whether we are fully prepared to uncover the history of Tlatelolco.

Rojo Amanecer is set in a small apartment in the building adjacent to the *Plaza de las tres culturas*. In the household there is a typical middle class Mexican family composed of two parents, four children and their maternal grandfather. The father (Humberto) is a low level bureaucrat in the Mexican government. The mother (Alicia) is a house-wife and her father (Don Roque) is a veteran of the Mexican Revolution. There are two grade-school children (Carlitos and Graciela) and two teenage sons (Jorge and Sergio), both of whom are involved in the Student Movement. The action of the film begins at

6:40 on the morning of October 2, 1968. At the breakfast table the family argues about their concern over the two elder sons' involvement in the Student Movement. The father recounts the idealism of his youth and admonishes Jorge and Sergio telling them that "les van a dar un escarmiento. Con el gobierno no se juega . . ." (Robles, 28). The grandfather is even more incensed and beyond not warning his grand-sons further wishes they be taught a lesson.

The action becomes more tense as Don Roque and his youngest grandson spot sharp-shooters setting up on the roof the building.²⁴ Other elements further warn of the coming danger as the telephone stops working and the electricity is cut off. The mother tries to remain calm but is clearly alarmed by the series of events. She is at the window watching with Carlitos when the rally is taking place below and the violence erupts. Hours later Jorge and Sergio return home with four people, one of whom has been seriously wounded. Shortly after, the father arrives and all remain in the apartment in panic planning to help the students escape the following day. Early the next morning they are discovered by two members of the *Batallón Olimpia* and are murdered in their apartment. The lone survivor is young Carlitos who is hidden by Don Roque before the men enter the apartment. As the film closes, Carlitos exits the apartment and slowly walks down the stairs and into the open as a street cleaner begins to perform the mundane action of cleaning the plaza.²⁵

²⁴ It is important to note that the snipers are not uniformed soldiers but rather people in civilian clothes which we are left to assume are members of the *Batallón Olimpia*.

²⁵ This appears to be an allusion to Octavio Paz's poem "Intermitencias del Oeste (3) (México: Olimpiada de 1968)". In it Paz contemplates the loss of innocence marked by the massacre. The allusion seems to be to the verses "(Los empleados / municipales lavan la sangre / en la Plaza de los Sacrificios)".

In Rojo Amanecer negativity is used in a number of ways as a means to present to the audience a (re)vision of Mexican History. The narrative techniques already explored in the previous chapters are employed in the visual field. For example, a similar appropriation of space that occurs in Los Días y los años occurs with this film. While González de Alba writes his testimony from inside the prison walls of Lecumberri, Fons's film falls within the parameters of what is known as *cine imperfecto*. This type of cinema, writes Jorge Muñoz, “busca evitar la perfección del cine Hollywood, y en cambio, utilizando los medios disponibles, recrear, y reescribir las historias latinoamericanas censuradas y borradas por los gobiernos corruptos que silencian al pueblo” (562). In the same manner that González de Alba uses the prison as a space of production, so too does Fons adapt to the economic realities which stand in the way of a movie like Rojo Amanecer. That is to say, the use of *cine imperfecto* is an effect of underfunding that is then transformed into affect by adapting an aesthetics that fits the film's funding.

We also see a similar strategy as the one employed in Chin chin el teporocho where there is a hole in the narrative which draws our attention to a similar void in the national discourse. The film acts as a visual record of the experience of a family beginning the day of the student massacre in Tlatelolco and concluding the morning after. They are witnesses to the events that unfold outside their window. What the audience does not see is the violence of the events themselves. Not until the final scene are we witnesses to the antagonists' actions when they enter the small apartment where most of the action takes place. The movie itself only implies violence through most of its running. We do not see tanks, we only hear them. We do not see the massacre, we only see the students who take refuge in the apartment after

said events. As such, the audience is shielded from the events around which the film is constructed. Like in Chin chin el teporocho, where there is no textual space dedicated to Tlatelolco, in Rojo Amanecer there is no visual space dedicated to it either. Instead, the director presents us with images and sounds which entice the viewer with the violence beyond the screen. This approach is also a way in which Fons manages to keep suspense in the film. Because the average viewer will likely know how the events unfold, Fons is able to hold our attention by withholding the sight of violence.

The final scene in Rojo Amanecer shows the lone witness to the student massacre walking away from the building in what can only be described as a state of shock. This young witness is our only possible access to the events of Tlatelolco. As a result we are left with no real witness to the massacre in the apartment nor the one in the plaza. The little boy who does witness the events, albeit through infantile eyes, is left to survey the aftermath through which we can surmise he will one day be able to piece together an incoherent private history based on his memories. What remains is that potential reconstruction as the sole history of Tlatelolco. In a manner similar to Carlitos in Las batallas en el desierto, access to the historical record will have to take place in the memory of a young child. We can assume that this memory will be forever scarred by the trauma of the events that mark him as the lone historical artifact of the time.

Stylistically, Rojo Amanecer embodies the appropriation of a negative space into an affective product. It is a film that follows in the tradition of the *New Latin American Cinema* which in turn followed in the tradition of Italian *neorealism* that aimed to “create national cinema in the face of underdevelopment and the failures of industrial efforts” (1 Martin, 140) in post-

World War II Italy. *Neorealism* left behind the Hollywood model of film making in that it set out to represent the unrepresented Italian reality following Italy's defeat. Poverty, Mafia influence, and failure took center stage in *neorealist* films, as did the modes of production which often included non-actors, small budgets and location shooting (1 Martin, 140). Millicent Marcus notes that:

. . . the neorealists' commitment to social change did not endear them to the guardians of the postwar status quo. Despite their reluctance, for the most part, to embrace a Marxist perspective, the filmmakers maintained a resolutely antiestablishment stance and presented an image of Italy that was anything but comforting to Italian officialdom (26).

Many of these same characteristics will also carry over to the *New Latin American Cinema*.

Influenced by the *neorealist* movement, Latin American film makers adopt the aesthetics and social consciousness in films which likewise try to distance themselves from the filmic status quo of the 1960's. Ana M. López writes that: "the New Latin American Cinema posits the cinema as a response to and an activator of a different kind of nationhood or a subject position of nationality than the one sponsored by dominant cultural forces" (1 Martin, 141-42). The wording of such a position is important because one must note that this type of cinema is not a response to dominant discourses. The agent of the production of this particular cinema is this "other" construction of nationhood, marking the cinema itself not as a counter cinema (one that responds to an existing cinema or social agents), but rather an "other" cinema (one which is inherently able to actuate its own voice and position).

Much in the same way in which *neorealism* resurfaced in Italy in the 1960's, so too can we examine a film like Rojo Amanecer as one which recaptures the aesthetics and social consciousness of the New Latin American Cinema. This is a film which stands alone in dealing with the events of Tlatelolco. As David William Foster points out:

Jorge Fons's *Rojo Amanecer* occupies a unique place in Mexican filmography: it is the only film dealing directly with the massacre of students in Tlatelolco, the Plaza de las Tres Culturas (Plaza of the Three Cultures) on the evening of October 2, 1968 (Mexico City, 2-3).

This is indeed true. However, the reason for which it is true has more to do with censorship and finances than it does with the reluctance of filmmakers to engage in such a venture. Foster goes on to write that "Although there is extensive literary and sociohistorical material on the Tlatelolco massacre, the problems of recreating such an event on film have discouraged— or prevented— other filmmakers from undertaking such a project . . ." (Mexico City, 3). The problems of recreating scenes from the *Plaza de las tres culturas* are directly tied in to budget constraints as well as the inability of gaining permission to film such scenes. Both of these problems are related since the odds of securing financing for a film which may never be shown would compel many to step away from such a project.

On the one hand, securing permission to film these scenes would have been impossible. Even today, as we see Rojo Amanecer, one cannot help but notice that the violence in it does not come from the military but rather from unaffiliated third parties who we are left to assume are members of either the infamous *Batallón Olimpia* or some other type of paramilitary unit. There is no

direct implication of culpability and, in fact, there were some scenes that were deleted from the film when it was shown in Mexican movie theaters and in its current DVD release. The fact that this movie was even made and allowed to see the light of day is almost a matter of political happenstance. Carlos Mendoza concludes that the film was allowed to proceed because at the time it was submitted, then Mexican president Salinas de Gortari could not afford another political battle. Mendoza writes that “se contó también con el tiempo a favor, porque Salinas durante los primeros meses estaba bastante débil por el fraude electoral” (Rodríguez Cruz, 58). It is in this manner that 20 years after the events of Tlatelolco, a film dealing with the events of October 2, 1968 is finally made.

In the realm of finances is perhaps where the most creativity was to be employed and where the adaptation of negativity truly takes place. The film, which is set almost entirely within the confines of an apartment, was produced with a with a budget of 310,000 pesos. Of course to say that there was a budget for that amount would almost be a fallacy. Rojo Amanecer was hardly budgeted at all. The film was produced privately after it was not accepted by any of the producers to whom Héctor Bonilla and Jorge Fons pitched it. Said budget consisted of Héctor Bonilla’s personal finances, loans from friends, and even a mortgage on a home. In other words, the making of the film was plagued with an almost prohibitive political and financial situation. Fons recalls that:

Héctor Bonilla . . . tenía una serie de amigos que le habían prometido que cuando hiciera su película, la que fuera, le iban a prestar. Cuando supieron que era de Tlatelolco no quisieron, excepto uno, que le llevó 25 mil pesos en una bolsa de pan y le

dijo “Toma, no me firmes nada, no quiero saber nada, estás loco, y no quiero ni que me lo regreses, adiós” (Rodríguez Cruz, 91).

Clearly, the political climate was non-conducive to financing a film dealing with the Tlatelolco massacre. As such the only recourse to the film was to envelope it in a style that best fit its financial reality.

Fons uses a style known as imperfect cinema. In 1969, following the tradition of the Italian *neorealists* who heavily influenced him, Julio Garcia Espinoza²⁶ proposes a new form of cinema which he calls “imperfect cinema” or *cine imperfecto*. In “For an Imperfect Cinema” Julio García Espinoza argues that the real objective of imperfect cinema is to present the process of a problem rather than the problem itself. He writes that, while a film might denounce a certain problem, it ought not do it by beautifully illustrating ideas already possessed by the viewer. Instead, he proposes that by showing the process of a problem, the filmmaker is submitting it to judgment without an *a priori* verdict (1 Martin, 81). The style of Rojo Amanecer is such a testament to the problems of representing the history of Tlatelolco in that it symbolizes the state’s control over the nation’s media to the extent that 20 years after the fact, only a low budget film can be produced about Tlatelolco.

It is through this style that Fons is able to create a film in which neither the audience nor any of the survivors witness the whole violence in the film. There are however, cues which suggest to both the audience and Carlitos what is happening and what will happen. Rojo Amanecer begins on the

²⁶ Garcia Espinoza was of the most influential figures in the New Latin American Cinema. He, along with Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, produced El Megano (1954), considered to be one of the precursor films to the New Latin American Cinema (1 Martin, 140).

morning of October 2, 1968 with the ticking of an alarm clock which serves as an auditory foreshadowing of the impending events. Muñoz writes:

La importancia al tiempo y al sonido está presente en toda la cinta, ya que durante la presentación del reparto y en gran parte del film registramos el “tic-tac” de un reloj que parece tener la ominosa calidad de una bomba de tiempo activada y que nos anuncia los trágicos acontecimientos por venir (563).

The clock also serves as a marker of the way in which the audience will know what happens in the film. While we do not see the hands of the clock move, we are nonetheless aware of the passage of time due to the incessant sound of the seconds ticking away. Similarly, what access the audience will have to the actual events occurring in the *Plaza de las tres culturas* will also come to us without us seeing them. We will see the reaction of the family members to that violence but we will not see the events which drive the film.

The film is marked by this absence of external shots. With the exception of the closing sequence, the film takes place exclusively inside that apartment. This fact draws the criticism of Ayala Blanco who complains: “Acéptese como norma inflexible que la cámara nunca saldrá del claustro del estrecho apartamento tlatelolca, salvo en la bajada final del chamaco” (Ayala Blanco, 21). He further admonishes the lack of outside shots as evidence of lack of political commitment as they do not show the plaza where the massacre took place. The reasons behind these apparent flaws are both strategic and of circumstance. On the one hand, the political and economic realities of the time did not permit the filming of a scene shot at the Plaza with hundreds of actors playing the parts of wounded students. This, writes Fons would have been impossible:

. . . si pensamos que es un filme que debe finalizar en la tarde en la Plaza de las Tres Culturas y que se debe contemplar al Batallón Olimpia, al ejército, a los estudiantes y a los líderes, entonces se convierte en una producción que se escapa de las posibilidades económicas de nuestro cine (Rodríguez Cruz, 89). Furthermore, a scene showing the plaza would have inevitably included shots of the military forces either carrying out the massacre or facilitating it. This would have been tantamount to filming a home movie to store in a vault as it would have never passed the eye of the censors. In fact, the release of the film in its final form was still problematic. Scenes were deleted and dialogue taken out. David R. Maciel Writes that “Going to great lengths to minimize the role of the military is consistent throughout the movie. The principal villains in the censored version of *Rojo Amanecer* are the secret police and not the army” (Hershfield and Maciel, 218).²⁷ Still, the film does manage to present to us a way of perceiving the violence which is done through the eyes of the family in the apartment.

While this strategy resonates with Chin chin el teporocho in the way in which it deals with the massacre, it does nonetheless differ in many ways. Ramírez draws attention to the 1968 massacre by barely giving it textual space, Rojo Amanecer, on the other hand, is a film that does not escape Tlatelolco as its focus. While October 2nd passes by almost unnoticed in Ramírez’s work, Fons sets his film in the 24 hour period in which the massacre

²⁷ Maciel later concludes that this goes to further underscore the still present censorship. He writes that “By denouncing and focusing on atrocities carried out by the secret police, the film is fully in keeping with the current political climate and suits the state’s purposes. Since the secret police organizations have come under intense criticism by national as well as international groups for human rights violations, it could be argued that by allowing the exhibition of *Rojo Amanecer*, the state not only appears to be moving toward political democratization but also is sensitive to the national concern for human rights” (Hershfield and Maciel, 218).

takes place. Still, the basic notion of how to transmit a message is very similar. The textual hole which represents a historical void in Chin chin el teporocho is mirrored by a visual frustration in Rojo Amanecer. It is important to note that there are witnesses to the events of Tlatelolco in the film but we never see those events. In the scene where the massacre begins, for example, we see Alicia and Carlitos looking out their window with an expression of horror as the shooting begins. The camera is in front of them. We are able to see their expressions of horror but are not able to see what precisely causes that very horror. Being that the film is essentially told from the point of view of the family, this absence of visual violence acts as a foreshadowing of the family's eventual demise. The audience is not shown the violent scenes because ultimately there will be no witnesses left other than Carlitos and he will not be in a state to recount it.

The final sequence of events leads to the death of the family and the students in the apartment with the single exception of the little boy Carlitos who is in hiding when the carnage takes place. This suggests that ultimately there will only be two witnesses to the violence of the day: Carlitos and the audience. What is particularly striking is that neither we nor the young child have access to a recollection of all the events. Carlitos witnesses the rally outside his window which we do not see and the audience witnesses the carnage that takes place inside his apartment which he does not. As a result neither we nor Carlitos can piece together the events around which the film is constructed and it is only through cooperation that a history can be pieced together from both perspectives. However, as Carlitos comes out of hiding, he does so only to be faced with the tragic sight of his dead family. He slowly walks down the stairs and into the plaza away from his home. That is the final

shot before the credits begin to roll. One must ask: what is the symbolic value of Carlitos? This final scene is telling of the state of the history of Tlatelolco. As Carlitos walks into the unknown, he carries within him the history of the events of the previous 24 hours. In a very real sense, Carlitos is a walking history. This point is further underscored by Carlitos telling his grandfather that his favorite school subject is History. He tells his grandfather: "Tuvimos Historia. Es la clase que más me gusta...Vimos otra vez lo de la independencia . . ." (Robles, 40). Carlitos will now act as the sole historical agent in the film. What is of particular interest is that he has been conditioned in school in the ways of the great national ethos. It is noteworthy to see that the topic of his history class is the Mexican Independence, certainly an important subject to be covered in a Mexican school. However, Carlitos gives away another sign by saying that they covered it "otra vez". The discourse of the nation is passed on by reinforcing certain key events which glorify the nation state: the Independence and the Revolution. It is ironic that in both of these events, an armed uprising is indeed glorified, but a peaceful protest will be buried.

Carlitos as the lone historical agent becomes a problematic figure. What kind of history, if any, will he be able to represent? Recall? In a manner similar to Carlitos in Las batallas en el desierto, this young boy can be expected to hide his history in a troubled psyche and scarred memory. Will he be able or willing to recall the memory of such a time in which his family was exterminated? Still, there is no access to that memory in this film. Carlitos walks into the unknown as the film draws to a close. He walks away orphaned, and with him, so too does the history of Tlatelolco.

While the outside forces and secret police are clearly vilified in this film, far from representing a clear cut dichotomy between students and government forces, Rojo Amanecer illustrates many subdivisions of the factors working against the students. Indeed, as the movie opens, we are almost immediately made aware of the differences between what are essentially four generations. One is represented by the grandfather who throughout the film wishes that his two older grandchildren were more respectful of the authority figures embodied by government agents as well as the image of Mexico which has been etched into him through the Revolution. The parents, however, while still disapproving of the activities of their older sons, nonetheless manage to support them as best they can. In fact, they are the only characters in the film that oscillate between two distinct positions. The third is represented by the two university students who are very much involved in the Student Movement. The two youngest children represent the fourth generation, one that while at best is only vaguely aware of the events taking place, will one day presumably have to try to piece together the history of 1968.

However, beyond the students' politics, there are other generational issues that cause conflict in the home. There is the long hair, American music, and the appropriation of foreign heroes such as "el Che" Guevara to which the parents and the grandfather object. In the same way that Los Días y los años seems to go out of its way to portray a movement that is something less than hegemonic, so too does Rojo Amanecer present us with a family that is not at all unified behind a single cause, though ironically they become equally victimized by the apparatus of power. Foster writes that:

. . . too late, they discover that the sons who are involved in the protest movement are right after all about the degree to which

Mexico under Díaz Ordaz, and under the PRI's hold on government, has drifted toward the same sort of police tactic that Mexico officially deplored with reference to the military dictatorships elsewhere in Latin America (Mexico City, 7).

While Foster's assertion is a bit idealistic in his belief that a sort of political epiphany takes place within the confines of the apartment, it does ring partially true. Still, we cannot forget that the parents do seem to be aware of the police tactics that might be employed by the government. That is not to say that they expect the carnage of October 2nd but rather that they are a bit more aware of the political climate than Foster suggests and perhaps even sympathetic to the students' cause, but also jaded by Mexico's history as can be observed by Humberto's plea to his sons.

¡Yo fui almanista! ¡Hace unos treinta años éramos igual de idealistas que ustedes! Salimos a la calle, a defender el voto hasta con metralletas. ¿Y qué pasó? El gobierno impuso el fraude y a Almazán lo compraron, para que se callara la boca. Así es la política: pura porquería . . .(Robles, 30).

Humberto, at least, seems to have been in the same position as his sons and, while trying to be understanding, he is also trying to warn them and discourage them from continuing with the movement.

Still, one could certainly argue that the family presented here is set against the students' cause and that the support they show is directed toward their children rather than the cause itself. The film takes a realist view of the 1968 massacre. While it would be naïve to submit that this film has no ideological leaning or that it means to present an objective reconstruction of the events, what can be said is that it aims to not come across as propaganda.

In fact, in a scathing critique of the film, Ayala Blanco writes that the film “desea quedar bien con todo el mundo (gobierno, ejército, policía, medios informativos, ex militantes, padres retrógrados, derecha, izquierda)” (21). While I disagree that the film tries to please everyone, it does nonetheless present a number of different points of view that seemingly detract from the students’ cause. It is similar to what we see in Los Días y los años where González de Alba almost painstakingly shows us the fragmented nature of the Student Movement within the walls of Lecumberri. Here, we see a fragmented family in relation to the same movement.

The symbolism of this fragmentation is double. On the one hand it represents the victims of Tlatelolco. Maciel writes that “the violence directed at the family is analogous to the massacre directed at the hundreds of victims by the repressive army and police forces” (2 Martin, 113). In other words, inside the confines of the apartment we see the various victims of the massacre that included, not only students directly involved in the movement, but also those that offered help to them such as the parents, those that happened to be there by happenstance as perhaps the grandfather might well be, and perhaps most importantly, the innocents such as young Graciela.

On the other hand, the family’s fragmented nature can also be related to the nation as a whole and their reaction to the massacre and eventual victimization by the same forces that carried it out. This could then be read as a warning against complacency. It is noteworthy that the family only becomes united after the massacre has been carried out near their home. To be more precise, they become united when they directly witness the violence and its effects. And while it could be said that this might have been their first

knowledge of the violence, it becomes clear, at least in Alicia's case, that she is keenly aware of it elsewhere in the city when she warns her children that:

Tu papá tiene razón. Con el gobierno no se juega. Ya ves cuantos muertos hay, cuantos desaparecidos, cuantos estudiantes en la cárcel. Ellos quieren terminar con esto antes de las Olimpiadas (Robles, 34).

The violence that erupts outside her window, then, is the first of which she has first hand knowledge. What is especially important is that it is immediate to her, not because of the proximity, but because she is a witness to the events and later because it invades her home in the form of a bullet that hits the image of the sacred heart on the wall which in a sense breaks the sanctity of her household and symbolically pierces their shielded innocence. In the same way, the massacre of Tlatelolco affected the nation. While this was not the first massacre in Mexico's recent history, Foster well points out that:

. . . the attack took place in a highly visible place: it is one thing to massacre peasants in a village that most people may never have even heard about, but it was quite something else to fire on students in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, in full view of the TV cameras photographers' cameras, and the residents of the high-rise buildings in the neighborhood (Mexico City, 4).

As such, while the family is indeed victimized, they also represent the process by which the massacre takes place. That is to say that they represent both the ends and the means of the Tlatelolco massacre. It is the complacency to the previous violence and comfort that they are outside the realm in which that violence takes place that ultimately leads the family to their death.

With the death of the family we are left to ponder the question: What is the state of history in this film? I would argue that, like Carlitos, it is equally orphaned. It is disconnected and absent in the same unknown to which Carlitos flees. Symbolically, the history of Tlatelolco lays in a troubled memory. In this case, it resides in an infantile memory which is unlikely to coincide with the state sponsored History. While indeed there is hope of a reinscription of the history of Tlatelolco through Carlitos, that hope is nonetheless problematic as this history will have to be reconstructed and also inserted into an already existing historical discourse. When will that hope materialize? When will Carlitos be able to access an/or recount this history? Perhaps a bigger question is: where will Carlitos go and how will he come back? The issue of historicity also comes into play. How reliable will his memory be? Indeed these are a lot of questions, all of which remain unanswered. All we can know is that there exists another history that is unreachable which in turn mirrors the history we know exists but to which we do not have access.

This last scene is one that was censored marking yet another victim to the imperfections of Rojo Amanecer. The “imperfections” of the film are many. Among these we can certainly count the inability of the film maker to film scenes in the plaza, which in turn dictates the action of the film. Also among them is the rudimentary quality of the film itself. But that in itself is the advantage of imperfect cinema. Sanchez writes that beyond the impossibility of financing a film in which thousands of actors would have to be employed to capture the events of Tlatelolco “el drama real se transformaría muy posiblemente en un espectáculo y –como diría Borges– el tigre de verdad sería el que no está en el verso” (Robles, 11). In other words, the danger in

producing a larger than life Hollywood style epic would be to transform the Tlatelolco massacre in a type of circus. To borrow from Fatimah Tobing Rony, to do so would be to perform taxidermy on the events of Tlatelolco.²⁸ Tobing Rony posits that to conduct cinema in such a fashion aims to be more real than the original. To do so, she explains, would be to accept the events as dead and that are now just a matter of study. She argues that in order to recreate, in this case the events of Tlatelolco, one must accept their death for it is in that manner that we can then appreciate the spectacle of its life-like reproduction (Tobing Rony, 101). This taxidermic approach, she argues creates a rift between the object of study and the camera, thus making an “other” of the original subject. Lastly, it turns the spectacle into an object of study of the same type one might find in a museum. She writes that “It is a paradox of this cinema of romantic preservationism that the reaction— ‘that person is alive!’ —is most easily elicited if the subjects filmed are represented as existing in a former epoch” (Tobing Rony, 102). The clear danger here, would of course be the freezing Tlatelolco in a far away time which no longer pertains to the present. Ironically enough, Tlatelolco is hardly in the past at all as a historical event. It exists more in memory than it does in Mexican historical discourse.

Of course Tobing Rony, when describing taxidermy, is writing about ethnographic cinema and not what one might call fictional cinema. One could well argue, then, that taxidermy as she describes it does not apply to Rojo Amanecer given that this is clearly a different genre of film. The connection, however, can be made through the testimonial quality of Rojo Amanecer. This is not to suggest that this film qualifies as a testimonial but rather that the film

²⁸ I would like to credit Edna Rodriguez-Plate for introducing me to this idea.

is made with the idea of testimony in mind. This is, after all, the first film made about Tlatelolco though it was released 20 years after the fact. As such, Fons inscribes it with a testimonial tone.

Rojo Amanecer is a film which defies political and economic realities in order to present a (re)vision of the history of Tlatelolco. It does so in the form of appropriating a cinematic aesthetics that serves that purpose. The use of imperfect cinema carries along with it a series of political connotations which situate the film in a negative narrative space. This type of cinema, writes García Espinoza, is popular art which he carefully distinguishes from mass art. He writes that “Popular art needs and consequently tends to develop the personal individual taste of a people. On the other hand, mass art (or art for the masses), requires the people have no taste” (1 Martin, 76).

This film’s main purpose is not to entertain but rather to proclaim an injustice and explore a series of variables which led to it. Both in form and in content, the film takes advantage of absence. On one side the absence of money leads to a less than aesthetically perfect film which through its very nature speaks to the political climate which discourages funds from being invested into such a project. On the other hand, the absence of a visual record on which the audience can focus parallels the way in which Mexicans have experience the history of Tlatelolco, namely through the absence of information and through a manipulation of the facts by the state controlled media. Ultimately, the film well illustrates a void in the national discourse, a void which recently, then Mexican Presidential Candidate Vicente Fox, promised to fill. Not surprisingly, that promise has not been kept. García Espinoza suggests that imperfect cinema needs not be concerned with quality or technique but that instead it should strive to work in “co-operation” with

revolutionaries. Rujo Amanecer does just that. It inserts itself into a chorus of poetry, novels, graphic, and testimonials of Tlatelolco. It does so with a grasp of the advantages of a negative space of representation and in doing so disappears, not into nothingness, but as Garcia Espinoza well points out, it disappears into a chorus, it disappears into everything.

Another film which approaches the history and historicity of Tlatelolco is El Bulto. In it, a young photographer is injured during the 1971 protest in San Cosme. He is left in a state of coma for the next 20 years. In that time his son (Daniel) and daughter (Sonia) grow up and his wife re-marries. He is cared for by both children who resent having to give up their time to be with a father they do not really know. When “el Bulto”, as they refer to him, wakes up 20 years after he went to sleep, everyone is overjoyed and welcomes him back into the family, a family that he never left yet lost him for 20 years. Soon after, the family and “el Bulto” (Lauro) come to the gripping and frightening realization that they must both adapt to each other and that such an operation might be more difficult to accomplish than previously thought. His wife (Alba) is now living with another man. His children have grown up without his guidance and he is even faced with a son he never knew he had as Daniel was conceived shortly before his injuries left him comatose. Lauro’s father has died leaving him everything. Politically, he is faced with a new nation, one that now includes NAFTA and a neoliberal notion of progress as its driving forces.

Lauro finds himself a man out of time and is unable to adjust rapidly into his new surroundings. He tries in vain to assert authority as a father and as a husband. The only person to whom he speaks about his condition is his doctor. He is further struck by the way in which the friends from his youth

have, in his eyes, betrayed the ideals to which he still clings. This is the case especially with his brother-in-law Toño. He even contemplates death as an escape from his new alien life after he has a falling out with both Daniel and Sonia, his girlfriend, his sister, and her husband Toño. His one anchor is Alberto who works as a newspaper editor and who gives him a column so he may tell his story. The movie ends with Lauro reconciling himself with everyone through his column at his daughter's house warming party. There he meets his wife's new husband and seems to come to terms with his new existence. Still, he is unable to completely fit in as the movie closes with an impromptu rap about him which he joins with a clear rock n' roll style monologue.

While Lauro is clearly a man of 1968, the film aims to create some distance between itself and the events of Tlatelolco yet still retains some connection to them. As such, rather than anchoring itself on Tlatelolco, it does so on a different massacre that was nonetheless related. That is to say that the event which is the catalyst to the action in the film is not Tlatelolco nor is the agent a member of the *Batallón Olimpia* but instead it is an *Halcón* in San Cosme. The themes of Tlatelolco are clearly present but their articulation has shifted to the point where Tlatelolco is now a referent from which to propose another series of arguments. In this case, the state of coma to which Lauro was relegated and his inclusion into a world twenty years later is a way to examine the possibility of reinserting a history which had been absent for 20 years. The film does not dismiss the important events of Tlatelolco and San Cosme but instead directs its gaze towards the future.

Lauro's story acts as an allegory of Mexico. His family symbolizes the nation that must now find a way to include a new history, here represented by

Lauro. This film is no longer concerned with the same issues addressed by González de Alba, namely the reconstruction and preservation of the history of the Student Movement. Nor does it appear to be concerned with uncovering the facts of the massacre. It is more concerned with the possible inclusion of that history and ideals into the current time and political landscape. The protective operation we see in Las batallas en el desierto or in Rojo Amanecer is no longer taking place. El Bulto moves beyond that. The history once protected in the comatose Lauro is now alive and clashing with the status quo and with those who in the 1970's were radical enough to have called it their own.

Further distancing itself from the events of the late 1960's and early 70's, the opening of the film is shot in black and white. In this sequence we see a squad of *Halcones* practicing attack maneuvers with bamboo sticks in preparation for their offensive. The rest of the film, however, is shot in color thus establishing a clear visual cue that distinguishes one era from another. The cries that are being repeated by the *Halcones* also sound dated. "Son comunistas" shouts the *Halcón* leader as justification for the impending attack. As Lauro will find out after he awakens, that charge hardly carries the same weight in a world where the USSR has collapsed and Russia is involved in a free market economic system that means to mimic the one in place in the U.S.

Still, while the events of Tlatelolco do not appear to have a central role in this film, its history is very much central to its development. Lauro comes to represent that very history. He is in fact a living history. Let us note that Lauro suffers his injuries while working as a photographer. Presumably, he is documenting the events of June 10, 1971. His profession is one dedicated to capturing and preserving a historical moment. Oddly enough, we do not see a

mission of attempting to uncover the circumstances that led to his near death. Nor do we see the evidence that he might have taken by means of his camera. There is no need to uncover a history because Lauro is that history personified. Furthermore, Lauro represents a protected history. Not a history that has been coopted, adjusted, or manipulated in any way but rather a history that has been symbolically suspended in a cocoon of death for 20 years.

Even before Lauro awakens, we are able to witness how people relate and think of him. His son, for example, sees him as little more than a nuisance. He complains about the time he must commit to him but ultimately decides that it is just a custom to which he has to adhere. The conversation that surrounds his survival has more to do with external realities such as interest rates and the price of therapists than it does much else. Lauro in this sense is less than a person. He is not exactly alive but certainly not dead. His presence is felt but it is static. His awakening brings about many changes. It becomes apparent that the possibility of Lauro coming back had not seemed plausible. The kids do not know how to break the news to their grandmother nor their mother. Only as a secondary thought do they consider that the news might even be harder to take for Lauro himself. It is not until that moment that they start to realize that he is a living breathing person.

The scene in which Sonia tries to prepare her grandmother for the eventual return of her son is highly significant in terms of the status of Lauro in the family.

Sonia: ¿y si se despertara mi papá, abuela?

Abuela: Hay hija, hace mucho tiempo dejé de pensar en eso.

Sonia: Bueno, piénsalo ahorita. Si despertara, ¿qué pasaría?

Abuela: ¿Qué quieres que pase? Nada.

Her response is telling of the fact that they do not expect he will ever awaken. He is there asleep and while there is hope that he will one day awaken, the expectation is that he will not and there are no preparations for that eventuality. Furthermore, she believes that nothing will change in the event that he does come back to life. Lauro's presence is perhaps best described by his nickname of "el Bulto". He is nothing more than a lump, a nuisance, a thing that simply is but has no consciousness and no say in the affairs of the family. He is not nothing but falls short of being somebody.

As a living history, this reaction to Lauro is telling of a set of values in relation to the history of Tlatelolco and San Cosme. In a very real sense, history is portrayed as non-affective. The history of that era is there somewhere but the family is unaware of the potential ramifications of its coming back to life. History as such has no affect. It is there to be shaped rather than being a referent from which conclusions can be drawn. In a sense there is a desire for a recuperation for the purpose of recuperation. In other words, the family would like to have him back but has grown so accustomed to being without him that, without articulating it, hope that if he were to come back, life will go on just as it did before. The question is raised of what exactly is at stake in trying to uncover the history of Tlatelolco. Is the operation one that only means to recover certain facts without the expectation that these might well change how we view the world today?

It is not a coincidence that the family is having this discussion while watching a soap opera in which the same story-lines are played and replayed. Life goes on no matter what. And, the grandmother would seem to think, life

will go on in a similar fashion if “el Bulto” comes back to life. Unfortunately for the family, these expectations are far from the truth.

Perhaps the most significant (certainly the most entertaining) way the relation between Lauro and the rest of the world is illustrated is by a montage of visits from his friends and family, all of whom, in their own way, try to acclimate him to the new times. Each tells him what they feel are the most important things he should know in order to best fit in. His sister for example tells him that: “Somos el prototipo de la belleza en el mundo. Acabamos de ganar el título Miss Universo”. He is equally bombarded with other more political statements which seem to contradict each other. His sister again says “Con eso del tratado de Libre Comercio nos va a ir de maravilla”. Meanwhile another friend tells him “Sobre el tratado de libre comercio nadie sabe nada de nada”. And perhaps the most telling of all signs of the times comes when he is told that “En fútbol, ya hasta los gringos nos ganaron”.

All of this reflects the way in which the family views him, and by extension, the way history is viewed, namely a one way street. Lauro awakens to be welcomed into a new time but those living in that time want little interference from the history that Lauro represents. All want to indoctrinate him into the current setting but none are prepared to deal with him as someone who also has something to offer. The most poignant of the comments comes from the friend that tells him “Como escribió José Emilio Pacheco, mano: ‘Ya somos lo que detestabamos hace veinte años’”. Indeed that may be true, but what goes apparently unnoticed by this friend is that Lauro is still a man from 20 years before. And while his friend might have had the 20 years to look back on and reflect on what he has now become, Lauro has not had that ability to look at his current situation with the benefit of

hindsight. Furthermore, he is still the man he was 20 years before which in turn would dictate that he must hate the friends he used to have being that, according to his friend, they are now what they hated 20 years ago.

What becomes evident is that Lauro has a different set of values than those shared by his friends. Though perhaps it might be more accurate to say that the history he carries and the values contained by it are different than the values of his new reality. In other words, we must ask if Lauro and the history he represents are at all affective or is history an effect of current political forces. Would he indeed be the same man with the same values had he been awake for all those years or was he simply spared the inevitable cooption the others experienced? Indeed a key question is if Toño still shares the same values as Lauro or if he has sold out as Lauro decrees. In a key confrontation, Lauro accuses him of being a bourgeois and having no principles. Toño, on the other hand attributes his success to the ultimate goal of progress and further discredits him by telling him that if he had been alive for those 20 years, he would be doing the same thing Toño is now doing. Lauro is equally at odds with his children who he sees as having no political consciousness. But what is truly different is the set of values each era placed highest. Lauro is a product of 1968 and the student protests of the time. His support of communism as the ultimate goal was central to radical thinking of the 1970's. This is seen quite clearly in his reaction to the outcome of the Vietnam war.

Lauro: . . . y en Vietnam, ¿quién ganó?

Alberto: Ganamos.

Lauro: Lógico.

Alberto: Hay sí, (mocking him) lógico.

Lauro is clearly still tied to the thinking of the 1970's in which radical thinking saw communism as the ultimate and inevitable goal of mankind. His children, who he accuses of having no political consciousness, are involved in a play which denounces the destruction of the environment. This would appear to be the same type of grass roots activity in which Lauro was involved at their age. Toño, on the other hand, is poised to be reformer from within. It appears that while each has different priorities, they nonetheless see themselves as having a political consciousness. When they reconcile, he tells Lauro that "lo que cambia no son nuestras ideas sino como aplicarlas en un momento histórico diferente". In a family drama this is the type of happy ending which would make the most sense.

Patricia Hart writes that the film "serves to make the point that it is only through affection, flexibility, apology, and love that people of opposing ideologies can ever be reconciled" (Cabello-Castallet, 34). However, with respect to the film's investment in a historiographical discussion, this approach appears to be a first step towards cooption. The next step will be an invitation to join him in politics to which Lauro responds that he would rather be an independent (a doomed proposition for a politician in Mexico).²⁹

It is of great interest, then, that Lauro, the once radical activist of the 1970's, is unable to find himself twenty years later. While he seems dangerously radical to some, to others he is quite the opposite. Daniel, for example asks if he is really "el anciano" which he appears to represent. The issue is highly complicated due to the complexity of the times which Lauro is unable to grasp. Part of it is represented by his fear of leaving the house.

²⁹ Recently, plans were announced for a sequel to *El Bulto* called *El Bulto para presidente*. It would be of interest to see how that film will address the issues of historicity in specific relation to politics in Mexico.

Later it can be seen to be a fear of modernity as it is manifested in the streets of Mexico City which continued to grow at an alarming pace since the time Lauro went into his coma. Another part has to do with a type of tunnel vision Lauro has of the world. In other words, an activist like Lauro had but one cause in which to insert himself. In fact, the ideals were perfectly clear and outlined in chants and slogans. In the world he awakens, these causes are less clear, a point best illustrated by his friend Alberto who tells him that it is very hard to distinguish between guerrilla and terrorist. He tells him that the systems of misinformation have been greatly improved through satellites and computers, both of these symbols of modernity which others like Toño embrace as symbols of progress.

Lauro is unable to reconcile this lack of simplicity into his activist thinking. This is seen in a number of ways in the film. Lauro tries to reestablish himself as husband to his wife. He tells her that he understands she needed the company of a man but now he is there and she is, he tells her, “mi mujer”. He also tries to establish the same authority with his children by telling them what they can and cannot do which also has negative results. It is interesting to note that the once activist is very much cemented in a patriarchal mindset. He seems unaware of, or fails to recognize even the most minimal feminist thinking as activism. Though we do not see or hear this, we might conclude that he would react to it with the same disdain others reacted to him as a “radical”, with all the negative connotations the word may carry. Ultimately he tries to assert an authority based on politics upon Toño who he accuses of being a sell-out for not continuing the same fight he had fought twenty years before. This scene is counterpointed by a similar yet laughable discourse from one of his friends who tells him that “seguiremos luchando, Lauro. Los de

siempre. Los pocos que quedamos. No conocemos otro modo de vivir”.

While that exchange is used for comic relief, coming from Lauro it is an entirely different thing. Lauro is very much trying to impose an authority based on the values of 1968 to his current world. He sees himself as an uncorrupted subject among the corrupted masses. The reaction is understandable but also somewhat troubling. Is this the reaction that we are to expect to the unveiling of a history so many have searched for so long? I ask the question again, are we prepared to find out what really happened during and after the Student Movement of 1968? Will we want to know if that knowledge brings with it an authority to which we do not want to submit?

One of the key issues in the conflict has to do with the lack of mourning involved. Lauro has not been dead nor has he been alive. The family is able to speak of his loss but they are able to do so with the assurance that he is not totally lost. As a result there is no real mourning. In a sense, this is analogous to the historical situation in present day Mexico. As there has been no official acknowledgment of the events of Tlatelolco, there has likewise been no institutional or national mourning. In addition, there has been no one to blame nor anyone to accept responsibility. There is a distinct difference to the way in which this type of scenario has been played in other countries such as Chile and Argentina where this type of institutional *mea culpa* has taken place at least at a discursive level with the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. I cannot suggest that those responsible have been brought to justice as is clear with the recent public spectacle surrounding the arrest of Pinochet. Still, the commissions have performed a key function in bringing a sense of closure to the events of the dirty wars. Again, I am not suggesting that these countries have been transparent in the investigation of the crimes committed during the

military regimes, simply that there has been a mechanism through which an institutional gesture has been made to right the wrongs of years past. This, in a sense, legitimizes the many dead of the dirty wars. That same type of institutional legitimization of the dead has not taken place in Mexico. I would suggest that this lack of action has much to do with the need to avoid a similar type of embarrassment that occurred with the arrest of Pinochet and the possibility of sending a man to jail who is essentially on his death bed.

Many of the men responsible for Tlatelolco are still alive today. Would bringing them to justice do more harm than good in the eyes of the current political regime? Would the realities be worse than we expect them to be? Would it be best to postpone justice until the men responsible are no longer living? This is indeed a question that needs to be addressed in a longer study.

Lauro represents a battle which will decide who must adjust to whom. Must the ideals of 1968 adjust to the present or must it be the opposite? Indeed the question itself suggests that a compromise is inevitable and that in itself must be questioned. Must an inclusion of an awakened history necessarily involve a type of renegotiation in historical terms? Or must we be willing to re-evaluate the current political and historical apparatus from 1968 onward?

This film proposes various strategies as a way to deal with the inclusion of a new history into the existing historical apparatus. It suggests that just as there are a number of competing histories, there are also a number of competing factions with which this new history must be reconciled. History as such becomes much more fluid than the constructions previously explored. Additionally, the film implies that history may function in the same way that

discourse does according to Bakhtin. That is to say, history is an intersection of variables which may never be able to dialogue with each other.

Both films offer a different visions of Mexican History. What they have in common is that in both cases that history is carried within a subject scarred by a traumatic event. In the case of Rojo Amanecer, Carlitos walks away bearing the weight of that history on his shoulders. Released 20 years after the massacre, the point of view of the film suggests that this vision of Tlatelolco is the now grown Carlitos who may well represent a generation of citizens whose life experiences and memories clash with the official word concerning Tlatelolco. This is after all a type of testimonial of the events of 1968. Francisco Sánchez writes in the introduction to Rojo Amanecer: Bengalas en el cielo that:

Las voces de *Rojo Amanecer* forman parte de un coro colectivo, el mismo que en parte recopiló Elena Poniatowska en su bravo testimonio de *La noche de Tlatelolco*. Sin que implique plagio ninguno, algunos ecos de este *collage* se dejan oír en el guión de *Rojo Amanecer*, así como, inevitablemente, de obras de Ramón Ramírez, Luís González de Alba, Carlos Monsiváis, José Revueltas, Oriana Fallaci y Gerardo de la Torre entre otras varias (13).

Here Sánchez inserts this film into the vast collection of testimonials by those who were involved in the Student Movement of 1968. Indeed the film does function as a testimonial in that the voice we hear comes from a single point of view. True, there are a number of different factions within the family that would seem to discredit the notion that this is a single point of view. However, the film is not a testimonial in the same sense that is Los Días y los años as

one that is deeply invested in the machinations and inner workings of the Student Movement and its cause. Rojo Amanecer is not trying to divulge an inner history of the Student Movement. Instead it is representing the Tlatelolco massacre from a family point of view. The fact that the two older sons are members of the movement only helps counterpoint the grandfather and parents who are set against their involvement in the protest. The film, then, represents Tlatelolco through what García Canclini calls history of daily intimacy (Stock, 256). This family is one of many that experienced the massacre who are then silenced in their death and interpellated thereafter.

El Bulto takes a similar approach in that history is also carried by a man scarred by trauma. The difference, of course, is that Lauro is not awake during the 20 years following Tlatelolco and as a result, his loss is one that is *pos priori*. In other words, he does not witness the process by which his memories are erased from the national discourse, but awakens to a world already constructed over his memories, a world to which he will never totally belong. Let us note for example that as Lauro awakens he is never really able to re-insert himself without any negotiation and that there are spaces to which he will not be able to do so at all, namely the space of husband to his former wife. In the same way then, history may never be able to reconcile with all the possible historical constructions. Perhaps the effort of reconciling is indeed a lost cause.

I would argue that both films are pointing to a new construction of history through secondary means. It is of interest, for example, that Lauro is able to reinsert himself into both the familiar and political space through a newspaper column. It is through this type of construction of history that we may perhaps be able to uncover and reconcile the history of Tlatelolco which

will one day be known and that perhaps will shake the epistemological foundations of the discourse of the nation. Similarly, as I have suggested, the reconstruction of history in Rojo Amanecer may only be accomplished through a dialogue between audience and the lone survivor of the carnage: Carlitos.

The works that we have seen in this study have been narrow in their scope and are very much influenced by the Student Movement of 1968. And while they may be key in preserving and uncovering a history and examining the historical and political processes that led to the erasure of Tlatelolco, they may not be able to help in the reinclusion of said histories into the current historical moment. What we do know, however, to borrow from Donald Rumsfeld, is that there are “unknown unknowns” for which we cannot be prepared. The moral of these films may well be that one thing we cannot do is expect that, once a history is uncovered, we will be able to continue in the same way we have for thirty years.

*¿Quién? ¿Quiénes? Nadie. Al día siguiente, nadie.
La plaza amaneció barrida; los periódicos
dieron como noticia principal
el estado del tiempo.
Y en la televisión, en el radio, en el cine
no hubo ningún cambio de programa,
ningún anuncio intercalado ni un
minuto de silencio en el banquete.
(Pues prosiguió el banquete.)
-Memorial de Tlatelolco
Rosario Castellanos*

Conclusion

During my last trip to Mexico, I visited the *Plaza de la tres culturas* where now stands a humble monument to the dead of Tlatelolco. As I surveyed the plaza I could not help but notice the state of the monument which stood almost hidden from view, invisible. In many ways, this memorial parallels the history of Tlatelolco. It was erected in 1993 funded privately with the help of the late Rosario Castellanos. This is all there is to mark the tragedy which took place on the evening of October 2, 1968. What was especially poignant about that moment was the realization that as alone, dirty, and forgotten as the monument stood in the plaza, it nonetheless was a larger presence than is the history of the massacre in the official Mexican discourse.

This project has dealt with a number of issues all surrounding the use of negativity in relation to a historical apparatus. But at the center of the debate has been the absence of a history, one which might be characterized as a void but which in fact is not a void at all. It is just an absence. All of the primary texts have in one form or another dealt with this absence through a strategy of negativity. The driving force behind each of these being the 1968 student massacre in Tlatelolco and the absence of its history in the national

historical record. Los Días y los años, examined in the first chapter, for example, is a history which means to fill a historical void which 30 years later does not exist. There is only the absence of that history. Chin chin el teporocho on the other hand, takes a different approach to this absent history by drawing attention to that same historical void González de Alba tries to fill. The strategy by Ramírez is to actively unspeak against the erasure of the events of Tlatelolco. Pacheco goes a step further by questioning the historical apparatus which makes it possible to write a historical narrative that can so easily exclude the same events. More than simply questioning the events of Tlatelolco, Las batallas en el desierto deconstructs the historical apparatus of the nation and introduces a series of alternative historical models. The final chapter in this study looks at the films Rojo Amanecer and El Bulto in which the narrative strategies which manipulate negativity are employed in the visual field. Both films are a testament to the absence of the history of 1968. Rojo Amanecer is the first film to be released concerning Tlatelolco and it examines the processes by which the massacre occurred and why it has remained silenced for over twenty years. El Bulto raises the question of how to reincorporate that absent history should it become known.

In looking back through this project, it became evident that there are two traumatic operations taking place: loss and absence. While loss is usually associated with trauma, absence is not. However, in the case of Tlatelolco, both operations function as a type of trauma. Loss is rather easy to understand. There is the loss of human life at Tlatelolco, the loss of freedom by those later jailed, the loss of innocence. All these are clear losses suffered by the Mexican people. There are events that mark the loss of something or someone. Loss, writes LaCapra “is situated on a historical level and is the

consequence of particular events” (Writing History, 64). There can be no argument that a loss is a result of an event or that even the loss itself is an event which exists in a historical plane. But in the case of Tlatelolco the issue of loss is complicated by the usurpation of the event itself. In other words, since the Mexican government refuses to acknowledge the magnitude of Tlatelolco, there is no event to which one can point as the catalyst of the loss.

The result of having no event to point to which can serve as the historical moment responsible for the loss is that loss is transformed into absence and that absence does not allow itself to be mourned because one can only mourn what has been lost. Who are the dead of Tlatelolco? There are families now who still do not know where their sons and daughters are today. They have not been able to mourn because their loss has not been acknowledged nor articulated. As the historical event of loss is absent, it envelops the loss of the families in that very absence.

There has been no mechanism through which Mexico has been allowed to mourn the dead of Tlatelolco, certainly not in the way it has happened in other Latin American countries such as Argentina or Chile. These countries have instituted Truth and Reconciliation Commissions which have allowed for people to find a sense of closure to their trauma. Through them there is an acceptance of culpability which, though it hardly rests on anyone’s shoulders, proclaims that an injustice took place and that losses were suffered as a result. And while men like Pinochet might still walk free, mourning can take place for those that were lost. But why is it necessary to mourn the losses of Tlatelolco? LaCapra writes that:

Historical losses call for mourning—and possibly for critique and transformative sociopolitical practice. When absence,

approximated to loss, becomes the object of mourning, the mourning may (perhaps must) become impossible and turn continually back into endless melancholy (Writing History, 68).

Without mourning the loss, Mexico mourns an absence of something which has not been articulated. Mexico mourns, not its dead, but their absence from the discourse of the nation.

What is the state of the history of Tlatelolco? It is there and it is not there just like the dead of Tlatelolco are dead and are not...anything. The history of Tlatelolco exists in the poetry, novels, posters, documentaries, memories, and testimonials of Tlatelolco but remains absent from the PRI construction of nation. Like the monument, it exists absent from the center, *ninguneada* by the political powers. The narratives studied here all try to construct a history in that space of the *ninguneo*, the nothing space to which Tlatelolco has been relegated. There is a tragedy which has been erased, written over, and absented from existence. That is the tragedy of Tlatelolco. Sadly there is another tragedy which is that if and when that absence is ever filled, it will be filled with a loss.

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