

Preface

There are interruptions: moments in which one of the machines that makes time function stops—it can be the machine of work, or of School. There are likewise moments when the masses in the street oppose their agenda to that of governmental apparatuses. These “moments” are not only ephemeral instances that interrupt the temporal flow, which is later normalized. They are also effective mutations of the landscape of the visible, the seeable, and the sayable, transformations of the world of the possible. —JACQUES RANCIÈRE, “Desarrollar la temporalidad de los momentos de igualdad”

The moment of '68 is a figure saturated by projections and evaluations: *point of origin, watershed of history, democratizing instance, historical failure*. However, the more we look and read, the more its contours, its dates, its coherence are blurred. In writing *Amulet*, this great poetic gesture about '68 Mexico, Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño plays with this confusion. His protagonist, Auxilio Lacouture, inspired by Alcira Soust, a Uruguayan poet who lived in Mexico without papers, is obsessed with how, in attempting to remember them, dates intertwine in a curious process of becoming: “The year 1968 became the year 1964 and the year 1960 became the year 1956. But it also became the years 1970 and 1973 and the years 1975 and 1976.”¹ Locked in the women’s bathroom at the School of Philosophy and Letters during the military occupation of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM, National Autonomous University of Mexico), Alcira-Auxilio feels “as if time were coming apart” and '68 becomes a lookout point of history.² One of the keys to *Amulet*, published thirty years after the student popular movement, resides in the emphasis on the disproportion that is involved in all acts of imagining the past. This implies a compelling critical gesture: not thinking about the past, en masse, as great failure or defeat that uses the present as a measure for projecting another future; but on the contrary, the text destabilizes all notions of progressive linearity in time, making us think about the singularity connected to the ways of making history perceptible, the leap implied by the passage from experience to its narrativization. This strikes me as important because the Mexican '68 (or “the '68s” everywhere) are encircled by a certain moralizing way of assessing it (did it fail, did it triumph, did it lead to a “transition,” was it fruitful?), which

disregards the singular character of the event as mobilizing an entire political context, more than as a process that should lead to concrete results. As Jacques Rancière suggests in the epigraph that opens this chapter, there are moments in history in which certain interruptions take place and open up a transformation of language and a visibility of the political that is difficult to translate into an evaluative form. This also relates to a reconfiguration of the political that is key to 1968 around the world.

This book seeks to investigate some of the ways in which the emancipation and reconfiguration of the political took place, during and after '68. This involves bringing the question of emancipation to the realm of memory—a possible *emancipation* of memories of '68—and also to the reconfiguration of a series of movements that express the unique polyphony of the moment. It is a matter of avoiding a sense of property and ownership over meanings, expressed through certain *camouflaged or visible monopolies over words* about '68, thereby opening up and multiplying the archives, voices, and images that helped identify crucial problems of the time, such as self-management, the democratization of knowledge, a mass exodus into the streets, the circulation of words in numerous assemblies, the opening up of diverse processes of liberation from heteropatriarchal schemes of life, the permanent provocation of singular encounters, and so on. Thus 1968 emerges here as *the name and locus* of a series of revolts that seek a different language in which to discuss and perform modes of emancipation and liberation. It is a moment profoundly marked by changes to the way we understand the meaning and function of the word *revolution*, which we could see as in transition from noun (*revolution* as state takeover) to verb (*revolutionize*). One of the many crucial edges of '68 was the fact that the word *revolution* was grounded in everyday practices that affected a range of public, private, and common spaces. This was expressed through various *problematic units* particular to the time, which served to define the specific characteristics of each movement in different parts of the world. When I speak of problematic units, I am referring to several key forms of expression that composed new political horizons out of a desire to ascertain the meaning of self-management, practices of equality, participation in everyday acts, horizontality, creative forms of organization, and the displacement of the roles and functions performed by sectors of authority and of knowledge.

In thinking about this book, the notion of the constellation comes to mind as a way of naming what emerges here as '68: to follow the trace that links different flickering points in a multiplicity of concepts, images, bodies, and memories that emerge as modes of continuing it in thought, in image, and in a distant present. The idea of approaching 1968 as a constellation (and less

as a monumental and fixed instant of history) reconfigures 1968 as the name and place of an event that is constantly reconstructed, debated, and re-created. Hence, I do not think of this book as a way of accounting for the moment, in the sense of what a historian or a sociologist does, often reconstructing events from the demand for the truth required by the discipline. Incorporating those readings, but attempting to take them elsewhere, my desire has been to suspend a certain criterion of positivist veracity expressed in the proposal to “account for” what was right or wrong in a moment. In attending to the possibility of constructing a ’68 constellation composed of a series of materials that open up different disciplines, I investigate the ways ’68 is expressed, continued, and thought about on various planes: philosophical, essayistic, testimonial, visual. Thus, more than an analysis of an archive that ’68 creates as an object, I look into how the *’68 effect* is configured and how it affects certain practices of writing, visualization, and subjectivization: that is, how ’68 is repeated as a gesture that not only destabilizes politics and bodies but also institutes different forms of critical language, thought, cinematography, and pedagogy. Thus, I was interested in bringing to the structure of the book something that in ’68 was a key for reflecting on self-management and the democratization of knowledge: interdisciplinarity, or dialogue among different languages and practices as a way of taking on a university that reiterated the technocratic mandate of hyperspecialization, which partitioned knowledge to the point that it lost sight of its connection to social problems.

On a personal note, it should be said that a book develops in many periods, to the rhythm of countless conversations, readings, experiences, and encounters. The writing of the book was interrupted by the emergence of Occupy Wall Street (OWS) in 2011, a moment in which ’68 became present in many forms in the imaginary and poetics capable of naming the innovative nature of these movements. Participating in the movement suspended my writing for a long time, since, in addition to lacking time in the first months of an intense moment of projects and assemblies, I began to feel a strong distance from what I was writing. The proximity between many issues that we were putting forward connected to the idea of a democracy of knowledge, to the encounters among different people and the potential for dialogue—an entire series of points that were crucial in my project about ’68. Suddenly, I felt full of questions, and the idea of writing in an individual way became something distant. At the same time, the sense of opening that the movements brought amid a fossilized, politically neoliberal scene at the center of capital made me want to dig deeper into some of the leading ideas of this project: Revueltas’s cognitive democracy and the role of the encounters that provide one of the most singular characteristics

of these movements. Conversations among those who do not usually converge are some of the sparks in such moments.

As I reconnected with the project, all these learning experiences made me think of the kind of book I wanted to write. In order to analyze the idea of a democracy of knowledge and bring other voices to the stage, following some traces, like the “workshop on words” (“taller de palabras”) at Lecumberri Prison that Revueltas names in “Imprisoned Words,” or to look at the different memories of women who participated in different ways, I had to look for what was not in the usual writings and archives.³ In conversation with me about this, Vicente Rubio-Pueyo came up with the idea of video-recording the interviews, and we embarked on a parallel project of creating what we see as an open archive of memories, thus continuing the research into the Mexican ’68 in another way: assembling an archive of voices and memories of ’68 that were not always the same, opening the space of the word toward other zones, taking the form of the assembly to the practice of memory. With the help of Ángel Luis Lara and Luis Hernández Navarro, we embarked on a series of conversations, editing them as video interviews with the help of Lur Elaizola and Yolanda Pividal. This took the shape of a virtual archive (<https://www.mexico68conversaciones.com/>) that we called *Mexico ’68: Model for Assembly; Archive of Memories from the Margins*, borrowing from Julio Cortázar’s experimental novel published in 1968, and also following the title used by Héctor Aguilar Camín.⁴ As we embarked on the process of listening to different people, new ideas and suggestions planted the seeds that would help me continue the process of writing this book. In part, I could not have continued without this other side of the process, the *conversation* and the act of poring over the words of those who had made fundamental contributions but who had not written their “book about ’68,” as others had done. The work of gathering voices coincided with the unexpected emergence of #YoSoy132, which brought up ’68 as an inspiring reference, making similar demands for opening the language of information, for a change in the script, and denouncing the political monopoly of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI, Institutional Revolutionary Party) and the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN, National Action Party). Comrades from 132 traveled to New York as part of this collective feeling that the new movements opened, making dialogue and different assessments possible.

My return to a more systematic process of writing this book in 2013 (two years after the beginning of OWS and once the movement had lost the intensity of its first two years) during the course of a Princeton graduate seminar about ’68 was a way of demanding that I think about various times and problems simultaneously, but now with the pleasant feeling of patience that the distance

of time provides. This allowed me to see in a more nuanced way the relevance of these historical instances that, like '68, are able to gather many peoples, groups, and sectors, as well as the need to insist on the form of elaborating their memories from polyphony and the desire for connectivity. We live in an age in which the necrological apparatuses of the state, the *narcos*, the war machines, insist on continuing to punctuate the circuits for demanding justice, democracy, and equality with an accumulation of corpses. Nevertheless, sometimes it seems that we pass from one demand to the next, from one necrologic to another, *losing sight of the need for struggles to construct a common language, a historicity that enables exiting the unusual presentism with which neoliberalism punctuates life*. In this sense, bringing to the present the memory of moments that were so profound in their demand for another form of politics, another way of participating from within the everyday and from within the social fabric, from dialogue and cooperation, continues to be relevant. To attempt to cross the horizon of fixed identities with which a certain politics maintains controllable order implies reflecting on the encounter between different people as an essential element of the political. Here *equality* is not the demand of a small group but rather *a demand for the reconfiguration of the stage that makes the political possible*. On this stage, words and images exist as elements with which we narrate the possibility of change, the historicity of the present in constant dialogue with the past, the relationships of learning that we establish, almost without thinking, between pasts and presents, times and places, which all of a sudden connect and generate critical constellations.