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"A ustedes les consta': The Chronicle in Mexico turns 500"

At my university I teach a course on Spanish American nonfiction writing, and on the first day of class I ask my students to tell me what kinds of texts or visual productions they classify as nonfiction. They immediately mention history books, newspapers, biography and autobiography, essays, writing in the natural sciences, the t.v. news and documentary films. When I ask them why they read or view nonfiction materials, they almost invariably say that it is because they want to know something. They want to know about events, people and places outside of their own experience, and they think of nonfiction as a source of knowledge. This much seems like common sense. Expanding on this common sense notion, the students make a connection between nonfiction, facts, evidence and truth, and they distinguish it rather sharply from its opposite, fiction. However, it doesn't take the class more than a few minutes of further reflection and conversation to begin to suspect what philosophers, historians, literary scholars, linguists and anthropologists have long debated: that common sense is neither so common nor so sensible as it seems, that the age-old division between nonfiction and fiction is a complex and contested field in Western theories of representation, and that our "natural" desire to know is constantly being challenged by our equally strong tendency for skepticism toward the discourses of knowledge.

Indeed, skepticism toward what we know and how we know about the world underlies the work done today in all of the field represented at this conference. We only have to recall Roland Barthes's debunking of our common sense "mythologies" and what we "take for granted" about the world, Edmundo O'Gorman's treatise on the "invention" of America as an historical process, and Hayden White's thesis that history writing inscribes what he calls the "fictions of factual representation" to see how pervasive the problematizing of common sense, fact, history, fiction and nonfiction has become in the past 40 to 50 years. If we also consider the practice of novel writing in Latin America, North American New Journalism, current developments in anthropology and ethnography and theories of postmodernism, we may well wonder over the very survival of the categories of fiction and nonfiction in the popular imagination and in academic discourse. But survive they do. Ever since Aristotle, the history-poetry or nonfiction-fiction dichotomy has proved to be a durable feature of Western modes of representation. For all that it has been debated, deconstructed and debunked in recent years, as readers we rather stubbornly cling to this useful if suspect pair of terms to organize the many texts--linguistic and visual--that surround us. Writers, too, are reluctant to relinquish the prerogative to choose the authority of fact or the freedom of fiction even when they recognize that both the authority and the freedom are relative and constrained.

My own interest in the debate over nonfiction and fiction grew out of my work on the writing of Elena Poniatowska, and my reading of Latin American testimonio and documentary literature such as the plays of Vicente Leñero and the narrative poetry of Ernesto Cardenal. When I first read Poniatowska's highly acclaimed book Hasta no verte Jesús mío I read it unproblematically as a novel, a work of fiction. However, it didn't take me long to discover that for most readers Hasta no verte Jesús mío is a "novela-testimonio" or a "testimonio novelado"; a creative and confusing reworking of oral interviews into a life story that blurs the line between fiction and nonfiction to good advantage. There is little on the surface of the text to prevent its being read as a novel. It incorporates none of the conventional markers of history-writing or true-to-life stories. But the most provocative and challenging questions about its writing and its impact on readers have come from attending to the textual traces of the originary conversations between Josefina Bórquez and Elena Poniatowska and from confronting the hybrid nature of the narrative. By virtue of its hybrid form Hasta no verte Jesús mío, like so much contemporary writing and filmmaking, encourages us to rethink our ready-made definitions of fiction and nonfiction without expecting us to give them up altogether.

The category of nonfiction continues to condition the writer's art and to attract the reader's attention for a number of reasons, even as we recognize the increasingly elusive nature of the real and of the referent in contemporary theory. Linda Hutcheon identifies one example of the continuing relevance of the fact-fiction binary and our persistent desire to know in what she calls historiographic metafiction; novels such as Gabriel García Márquez's Cien años de soledad and E.L. Doctorow's Ragtime. Like other

theorists accept that we can only know about the past indirectly through its textualized remains; and the documents and reports of the past are necessarily reconstructions through language of irrecoverable events. Nevertheless, the process of narrativization of the past--story telling--remains a central form of human comprehension in spite of the unbridgeable gap between our narrative and the real events that they seek to trace. Many critics have also observed that during periods of crisis there is an increase in the production of nonfiction writing, a phenomenon that points us toward both the epistemological and the political reasons for the durability of nonfiction. We desire to know and we desire to act through narrative in the face of the dual nature of crisis, which presents both a threat and an opportunity for change. John Hollowell associates nonfiction with crisis in U.S. culture of the 1960s in his well-known study of *New Journalism*, and Claudia Schaefer, following Hollowell, describes the writing of Cristina Pacheco and Guadalupe Loaeza as "chronicles of crisis." Latin American testimonial writing also addresses the threat and the opportunity of crisis and it places special demands on us to read the testimonial act of witnessing as nonfiction. Within a context of repression and official violence and censorship, the truth claim of testimonio is compelling in spite of what we might otherwise think about the reliability of memory and the constructed, contingent nature of facts and evidence.

In this paper I will focus on a particular practice of nonfiction writing in Mexico, the chronicle, which is approaching 500 years of continuous presence and transformation. I have chosen three texts about the 1985 Mexico City earthquake to ask some basic questions about how they define, select and organize facts and evidence into a narrative that appeals to a contemporary notion of nonfiction discourse in the context of Mexican journalism. Zona de desastre by Cristina Pacheco, "Los días del terremoto" by Carlos Monsiváis and Nada, nadie: Las voces del temblor by Elena Poniatowska were all written and published within two years of the events of September 19 and 20, 1985. My longer-term goal is to study how nonfiction has been constructed in Mexico by writers and readers throughout the twentieth century, and this paper is therefore a small piece of a larger historical project.

Carlos Monsiváis, the foremost cronista of Mexican society in the past 30 years, offers a definition of the chronicle in two essays: a lengthy prologue to his 1980 anthology, A ustedes les consta: Antología de la crónica en México, and a 1987 article entitled "De la santa doctrina al espíritu público (Sobre las funciones de la crónica en México)." For Monsiváis the chronicle is a literary reconstruction of events, characters and atmospheres in which attention to language and form prevails over the immediate demands of reporting information (Monsiváis 1980, 13). It is a flexible prose genre, bordering on the short story and also closely associated with the practice of journalism. Over time it has been read variously as an account of contemporary events, as a primary source for later projects of history-writing, and also, more recently, as "literature" (Monsiváis 1987, 754). Monsiváis also pays tribute to the commonly accepted observation that the crónicas de Indias are foundational texts of Latin American narrative, and the chronicle in general has played an important role in the consolidation of national identities. Other descriptions of the chronicle in literary histories and anthologies generally come close to the formulation supplied by Monsiváis. With regard to the question of the nonfiction status of the crónica, modern studies of colonial texts foreground their problematic blend of factual and fictional discourses, but discussions of present-day chronicles tend to overlook the issue, perhaps taking for granted that a genre so closely allied with journalism will be read as nonfiction. On the whole the chronicle has received relatively little attention by critics, an observation which must be placed in the context of the traditional neglect of nonfiction genres, including the essay and the autobiography, in Latin America.

In studying the writing of Cristina Pacheco, Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Monsiváis the particular--and peculiar--set of conditions pertaining to the Mexican press must be admitted. Histories and overviews of print journalism in Mexico such as the book El periodismo político en México (1983) by Petra María Secanella document the story of a press that is largely controlled by the government and by business interests; that is, a press that is highly dependent on and subordinate to those in power. Some of the long-established practices that foster this dependency are governmental subsidies to newspapers, subsidies and bribes to individual journalists, governmental control of supplies of newsprint, ownership of large newspaper chains by a handful of families, the acceptance by newspapers of paid headlines and articles, the payment of a commission to individual reporters on space sold in their assigned sections, and low salaries which lead to the wide acceptance of such payments. It is commonly acknowledged that these conditions have created a largely conservative press that rarely challenges the status quo and is not known for a tradition of investigative reporting. Assuming certain conventions of accuracy and objectivity for journalism, it could be said that any reporting done under such conditions bears a tenuous relationship with "nonfiction," and dissenting views of the press within Mexico and other Latin American countries both

criticize and thematize the official lie and the growing mistrust of official sources of information. The paradox of a nonfiction medium which trades in the most explicit forms of distortion and deception, opens the door to alternative modes of representation such as the crónica and the testimonio.

Pacheco, Poniatowska and Monsiváis hold an ambiguous and conflictive relationship to the mainstream of Mexican journalism. They are insiders in that they have published in a wide variety of newspapers over the years, and other journalists often quote them as expert sources on cultural, social and political issues. But they have also earned the authority to speak and write against the mainstream, as voices of opposition, because of their association with the more independent publications such as Unomásuno, Proceso and La Jornada, their attention to traditionally marginalized subjects and, especially, their well-known chronicles about events which the government has tried to cover up or blatantly misrepresent: the 1968 student movement, the 1984 gas explosions in San Juan Ixhuatepec, and the 1985 earthquake. In a world of deliberate deception masquerading as nonfiction, the stakes are high for alternative accounts that claim to provide a corrective version of events.

The question that this paper poses is how the three texts under study constitute themselves as nonfiction discourse and establish a pact with the reader to be received as such. A second question concerns the ways in which--deliberately or not--the texts may simultaneously undermine the reader's confidence in their nonfiction status. I will look at four key elements in each chronicle: the signature of the author or authors, the framing of the texts, the constitution of facts and the presentation of evidence. Although the meaning of authorship is constantly under debate and it varies among different discourses, for a contemporary audience the name of an author usually indicates that a chronicle may be read as fact. In Mexico the names of Pacheco, Poniatowska and Monsiváis are associated with many nonfiction projects including print and television interviews, investigative reporting, social and cultural commentary, and testimonio in addition to chronicles. Fifty years from now their signatures may mean less to a reader. Or, as in the case of Hasta no verte Jesús mío, a closer look at the text may raise a host of questions about the author's signature as guarantor. But for today's reader of these three earthquake chronicles the writer's authority to set down facts is very likely to be taken for granted at least initially.

Fiction and nonfiction texts are distinguished in part by the ways in which they are framed. Beyond the author's signature other framing devices, or their absence, create a necessary context for reading. Titles and subtitles, introductions, tables of content, footnotes, indexes, photographs, maps, appended documents and bibliographies all may bring the weight of fact to bear, and I will comment on this for each text. Finally, within the current debate over history and history-writing, facts and evidence have come under considerable scrutiny. The heroic notion of value-free facts, bare facts or "just the facts" has lost the pride of place that it once held in a more positivistic age. The definition of a fact as an event under (verbal) description underscores the figurative or enfigured form of factual records. It reminds us that facts are always at one or many steps remove from the event itself (Hayden White, 15). This goes beyond simply acknowledging a "subjective" element in the selection and presentation of facts, to a recognition that facts themselves are "discourse-defined," to quote again from Linda Hutcheon, and all discourse is interpretation.

It follows that the constitution, use and authority of evidence, which is a set of facts assembled in the service of a claim, must be subject to the same interrogation. Tensions over the reliability and authority of evidence are not a new phenomenon, but evidentiary procedures have undergone a significant change in this century. The PMLA devoted its January 1996 issue to exactly this question: the status of evidence. James Wilkinson's essay "A Choice of Fictions: Historians, Memory and Evidence" shows how the "facts" that may be used as evidence change over time and are specific to particular discourses. For example, the eighteenth and nineteenth century privileging of written documents by historians, has expanded with the expanding definition of history itself to include fields like cultural history, women's history and ethnic history. But along with the growth of the body of acceptable documentation such as scientific data, medical records, folktales, material culture, music and film, doubts over how to interpret evidence have also grown. Wilkinson concludes that in order to evaluate evidence some standard of truth, some "foundational view of history" must be employed (89), but his article stops short of providing such a standard. In her introduction to the PMLA issue Heather Dubrow further notes that political imperatives for privileging certain kinds of evidence sometimes come into conflict with constructivist approaches to facts. This conflict can be seen but is little studied in the readings of testimonio done by North American academics, in which the imperative to accept the authority of oppositional discourse resists the skepticism commonly directed toward other, perhaps less urgent, texts. As I talk about the nonfiction status of the three earthquake chronicles these questions about facts and evidence will come into play.

Cristina Pacheco, long-time collaborator in Siempre!, Unomásuno, and La Jornada, is best known for her articles and her t.v. interviews with the Mexican urban "pueblo." By her own admission her writing seeks to represent the majority of Mexico City residents who are poor and who are subject to the violence, misery and invisibility that extreme poverty inflicts. In the brief notes and introductions that frame many of her published collections of stories and articles, she reiterates her solidarity with the underprivileged classes, and especially with poor women, and she declares her commitment to telling their stories. Essays on Pacheco by Claudia Schaefer (1991) and Linda Egan (1997) raise questions about the ideology that underlies this apparently progressive or even radical project. They conclude that the predominant image of the poor in books such as El cuarto de azotea, Para vivir aquí and Sopita de fideos is one of patient, long-suffering, good-hearted victims whose daily struggle for survival is a purely individual, private affair. Pacheco personifies Mexico City as a "wounded being" according to Schaefer, or she depicts it as an urban wasteland inhabited by unidentified, interchangeable characters (Egan 133). Her writing permits her middle-class readers to take refuge in the figure of the chronicler, who resolutely avoids a critical engagement with the possible causes of the suffering that she documents. I fundamentally agree with this interpretation of Pacheco's writing, and I see the same ideology operating as well in Zona de desastre. Both Schaefer and Egan also question the classification of Pacheco's texts, with Schaefer describing her brand of literary journalism as a blend of objective recording and imaginative invention, while Egan more bluntly refers to her books as collections of short fiction. My purpose is to examine more closely Zona de desastre, a text with an irrefutable "real life" referent, in order to see how it constructs its facts to describe the events of September through December 1985, and how these facts comprise evidence for a particular view of Mexico City society that is consistent with the rest of the writer's work.

Zona de desastre is minimally framed by a fragment of the poem "Terremoto" from Pablo Neruda's Canto general and a one-page introduction signed with Pacheco's initials and dated January 1986. The first sentence of the introduction pays tribute to the dilemma faced by all writers, and especially by writers of nonfiction: "Escribir nos vuelve protagonistas de una pugna interminable entre la realidad y las palabras que empleamos para intentar describirla" (11). How a text engages in that conflict will mark it as fiction or nonfiction according to the conventions of a given time and place, and the gesture here toward the inadequacy of words to capture reality seems to promise to complicate that engagement. Pacheco goes on to make an explicit claim for nonfiction status and an advocacy role for Zona de desastre by describing it as a "testimonio de los hechos" and an effort to "recoger la voz de quienes más sufrieron con el desastre y siguen padeciendo las consecuencias" (11). The privileging of facts as provided by eyewitnesses is an obvious ploy, and the emphasis on the voices of the suffering also creates a pact with the reader in this age of testimonio.

Pacheco's narrative of the earthquake and its aftermath starts with an entry encompassing the period from Thursday, September 19 to Monday, September 23. These five days comprehend the initial, devastating impact of the quake, the most intensive period of search and rescue of survivors and bodies, and the preliminary inventory of loss of life and damage to the city's infrastructure. In her opening overview of the collective experience, Pacheco anthropomorphizes the city as a wounded giant, a moribund monster, and she divides its human inhabitants into "nosotros" and "ellos." "We" are the ordinary people, that is, the poor; and "they" are understood to be the wealthy, especially those whose business interests were responsible for destroying the living urban organism long before the earthquake brought its skeleton crashing down. For the most part the rich escaped the worst of the destruction in 1985 because wealthy neighborhoods like Las Lomas, San Angel and Coyoacán suffered little damage from the quake. Within a page or two of the first section, however, there is a shift in usage so that "we" become the city's better-off residents, and "they" are now the poor, the ones who lived and have died miserably and anonymously. This slippage creates an ambiguous message of solidarity dissolving to distance on the part of the narrator, who remains largely invisible and impersonal throughout the book. The reporter as rescuer of other voices betrays her own ambivalent relationship to the victims of this specific catastrophe and of Mexico City's perennially disastrous reality.

After the first chapter, the rest of the book follows a similar pattern to Pacheco's other writings. In representing the life of the city, whether it be the daily grind of work, familial relations and quiet desperation in her other books, or the spectacular effects of crisis in Zona de desastre, Pacheco constructs her facts out of the testimony of individual and anonymous, but supposedly "real" voices who describe their individual acts with an emphasis on the accidental and the pathetic. She divides the narrative into twenty-five very brief self-contained stories whose clearly marked beginning and ending points suggest a

vision of human life as a closed circle or an isolated trajectory. The events of September through December 1985 are thus constituted according to a logic of irremediable and private suffering under the control of mysterious forces. The predominant tone is one of nostalgia, as conveyed by the inventory of lost buildings and lost possessions and the realization that "Nada volverá a ser igual" (20).

The "raw material"--already discourse-defined-- with which Zona de desastre constructs its facts consists of a certain weight of data (numbers of dead and wounded, numbers and names of buildings destroyed) as well as the transcribed fragments of interviews conducted by the writer and descriptions of sights available to any eyewitness. But the quality of "correspondence" that Hayden White defines for both fiction and nonfiction writing is remarkably weak in Zona de desastre. Streets and neighborhoods often go unidentified, interview subjects are called by first name only, references to the process of investigation and the role of the interviewer are few and vague, and after the first chapter the passage of time--the very chronos of "crónica"--goes undocumented. At least one section, "La condena," is a largely or wholly invented story about the final thoughts of a man who is stabbed to death on the street several days after the earthquake. Even if this story is based on a documented crime, the way that Pacheco tells it highlights private experiences for which there is no plausible record. Pacheco also includes the story of an especially daring young rescue worker popularly known as "La Pulga." She claims that no one knows his real name, choosing the romance of legend over the demanding banality of facts. La Pulga reappears in Nada, nadie identified by his full name, Marcos Efrén Zariñana.

Pacheco's signature on her text, the claim made in the introduction and the historically verifiable subject matter make an initial appeal to the reader to receive Zona de desastre as a nonfiction representation of the 1985 earthquake. However, the way that the facts are constituted tends to undermine that claim, and taken altogether they constitute evidence of the same image of Mexico City that is consistently evoked in Pacheco's writing: a fragmented landscape populated by anonymous victims--an orphan, a grieving mother, a traumatized seamstress--none of whom can comprehend the cause of their suffering nor conceive of a possible solution. As a document of an historical event of some consequence for Mexico Zona de desastre disappoints, but as a story it may entertain the reader, who is lucky to have escaped the earthquake and the text unharmed.

Elena Poniatowska's Nada, nadie: Las voces del temblor and Carlos Monsiváis's earthquake chronicle offer a striking contrast in structure and ideology to Pacheco's Zona de desastre. I will look at them together because of certain similarities in their design and in their highly critical account of the corruption and incompetence of the Mexican government as revealed--literally uncovered--by the 1985 earthquake. Both of the writers published portions of their earthquake chronicles in newspapers during the immediate aftermath of the September 19 disaster. Poniatowska has explained that her first reports appeared in Novedades, for which she has written for many years, but by early October, less than two weeks after the disaster, the editors at Novedades informed her that they wouldn't publish any more of her earthquake articles. They claimed that public interest in the topic had waned. Poniatowska, understanding that some kind of pressure had been exerted on the newspaper, took her articles to the recently established daily La Jornada and saw them printed there through October and November of 1985. The title of the newspaper series was "Combatir el olvido," which commemorates the impulse that lies behind much testimonial literature as a counter-discourse to official history and the silences that it imposes.

Monsiváis published parts of what would later become "Los días del terremoto" in Proceso, Cuadernos Políticos and El Cotidiano. It is one of seven chronicles on recent social movements collected into the volume Entrada libre: Crónicas de la sociedad que se organiza. Linda Egan, whose doctoral dissertation is the most complete and perceptive study of Monsiváis to date, considers Entrada libre to be part of one single Text composed of his four books published from 1970 to 1987. She likens the overarching plot to that of a long suspense novel in which Mexican society, under threat of death, struggles to remake itself by reversing the hierarchies of power and the powers of fear. Entrada libre, the denouement of the story, is the most optimistic and the most straightforwardly journalistic of the four installments. It shows seven instances of popular mobilization, resistance and collective consciousness-raising, and its language is consistently factual and referential.

In his prologue to Entrada libre Carlos Monsiváis introduces the predominant theme of the book: the future of democracy in Mexico. Monsiváis states that Mexico's ruling classes are paternalistic and incapable of governing the majority of the people, whom they regard with contempt. But at the grassroots level people are beginning to exercise democracy "desde abajo and sin pedir permiso" (11) in the form of new social movements around the issues of the environment, urban life, and women's and minority rights. Some of these movements arose out of "las lecciones de los sismos de 1985...esta gran vivencia

comunitaria" (12-13). Monsiváis leads off the volume with the earthquake chronicle, because he views the experiences of the capital city in 1985 as a significant turning point for Mexico. The prologue is written as a broad social commentary, and throughout the book Monsiváis reserves a strong editorial voice for himself. Nada, nadie begins more simply with a page of acknowledgments and a list of names of those who conducted interviews and wrote pieces for the book. This chronicle is the result of a process of collaboration between Elena Poniatowska and the members of her writers workshop, and throughout the text their names accompany their contributions. The abundance of proper names in Nada, nadie--full names of interviewers and of testimonial subjects alike--is one obvious element that anchors the story to an identifiable and verifiable reality. In history-writing proper names conventionally have a stable relationship to their historical referents, and neither Poniatowska nor Monsiváis play any games with the names that they record. Furthermore, in narrating an event that made the identification of bodies an excruciating and uncertain process and that forced many unnamed bodies to be buried in common graves, the insistence on naming is also a gesture of resistance to official negligence.

Both "Los días del terremoto" and Nada, nadie reconstruct the events of fall 1985 in roughly chronological order. In Poniatowska's account of September 19 the minutes before the 7:19 a.m. quake and the minutes and hours of that first day are meticulously measured, and Monsiváis marks September 19, 7:19 a.m. as the moment of fear. Shared facts include descriptions of rescue efforts, the anguish of loss, the joy and guilt of survival, the formation of the brigades of volunteers, the many errors committed by the government and the army, inventories of buildings destroyed and public services interrupted, the situation at the Juarez and General Hospitals, the crucial role of young people, and the plight of the seamstresses, whom Monsiváis calls "el epifoco moral del sismo" (92). The predominant tone combines horror at the devastation with admiration for the people's new-found solidarity, evoking crisis as both threat and opportunity. A final common thread is sustained criticism of the government and analysis of the human causes that increased the suffering occasioned by natural disaster.

Monsiváis and Poniatowska compose their earthquake chronicles as montages combining interviews and many other kinds of texts. The montage structure permits the strategic deployment of juxtaposition, repetition and accumulation of data and facts in an open-ended narrative that demands an active reader. For example, the transitions from one section to another are frequently abrupt and the threads of individual stories may be cut off only to reappear later. The reader's memory and capacity to make meaningful connections must come into play in response to these gaps.

Like Cristina Pacheco, Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Monsiváis retrieve the facts of the 1985 earthquake from the testimonies of those who suffered most and those who participated as volunteers in the rescue efforts. Their interview subjects are citizens from many social classes, but the texts make it clear that poor and lower middle-class neighborhoods suffered the most extreme damage. Representatives of business, government authorities, police officers and soldiers are generally excluded as sources of information. The official line appears, usually ironically or parodically framed, in the form of transcribed speeches or passages from newspaper accounts that cite government sources. In answer to criticisms of the newspaper series "Combatir el olvido," near the end of Nada, nadie Poniatowska justifies her exclusion of official voices. First she puts into doubt the fundamental credibility of those who initially denied the need for outside aid and who called for a quick return to normality in the face of a disaster which they were radically unprepared to meet. She also states that "Por lo demás, los funcionarios han tenido todos los medios de información a su servicio (visuales y escritos) y han podido...explicar con lujo de detalles lo que hicieron o quisieran haber hecho" (307). This laying bare of the selection process of the testimonies forces the reader to question the seemingly transparent logic of privileging the voices of the "nobodies." The text aims to persuade the reader to agree with the decisions made by Poniatowska, but it doesn't completely efface the selectivity of the story's facts nor what that selectivity reminds us about all projects of history-writing.

"Los días del temblor" and Nada, nadie use similar materials in different proportions: oral interviews, newspaper headlines and articles, excerpts from speeches by politicians, narrative passages written by Monsiváis and Poniatowska and photographs all figure into the montage structure. Nada, nadie is substantially comprised of interview material, while "Los días del temblor" contains extensive summary and editorial passages. Monsiváis thus functions as the "author" of his text in a traditional sense, although he incorporates heterogeneous materials authored by others as well. In both books, however, documentation itself is consistently foregrounded and sources are identified, which strengthens the claim to nonfiction status. The reproduction of photographs also lends evidence of another sort to the facts gleaned from a variety of eyewitness accounts. Although the evidentiary uses of photography are

problematical and open to doubt, the images of collapsed buildings, rescue efforts, corpses and tent cities appeal to our fascination with the photographic image and its power to frame and freeze a past moment. The art critic Andy Grundberg writes that "Photography's distinction has always been its connection to the world outside of the imagination . . . A photograph traces something real" (172). He goes on to observe that photos suggest much but explain very little, and for that reason textual captions play a crucial role in our "reading" of photographic images. The photographs used in Nada, nadie and "Los días del temblor" are black and white shots taken of an event in progress with relatively little time to set up the image. In their very imperfection they resist aestheticizing the image and they somehow seem to be exempt from manipulation. Like the photos that we see everyday in the newspapers they ask to be read as unproblematic documentation verifying the events being reported. Captions taken from the text of the chronicles strengthen the link between visual and verbal representations, mutually supporting the roles that they play.

Nada, nadie and "Los días del terremoto" construct and present evidence for a particular claim about Mexican society during and after the 1985 earthquakes. After the repression of 1968 and the crises of the 1970s and early 1980s, the popular response to the earthquakes seemed to fill the vacuum left by a negligent, corrupt and criminally unprepared government. As Monsiváis states explicitly in his prologue, civil society took shape and took control in the aftermath of the disaster. Dozens of Poniatowska's witnesses testify to the same phenomenon. By integrating a wealth of identifiable source materials into a flexible, fragmented, in some senses unfinished verbal and visual montage, the writers offer a convincing formulation of nonfiction discourse and they demonstrate its potential for criticism and analysis. In contrast, Linda Egan cimpares Pacheco's writing with the more closed, monologic form of chronicle-writing practiced nearly a century ago. "Los días del temblor" and Nada, nadie play more effectively on the tensions between our desire to know and our skepticism, and between representation and the inadequacy of representation; tensions which are lived out but not resolved in the writing and reading of nonfiction.

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