CHAPTER 5

“Under the Paving Stones, the Beach!”
Chance, Passive Decision,
Democracy, July–November 1968

Future there is, if there ever is, when chance is no longer barred. There would be no future without chance.

—Jacques Derrida

As we saw in Chapter 4, there is no humanism without sovereign will and no sovereign reason without the determination and policing of its zones of exception. It is humanist reason that polices the friend-enemy relation at the cultural level, while normalizing that level in such a way that there can be no opening to the event, that is, no opening to that which has not been set up in advance or has no forewarning. In contrast, in this chapter I explore the possibility of exceeding the fully determined opposition of sovereign decisionism by circumnavigating the reduction of the field of the political to the relation between friend and enemy. In order to do this, I trace the relation between contingency, chance, and what Jacques Derrida (1997) has called the passive decision—basic hospitality or receptivity to the affirmation or “yes” that comes down from the other—as a means of uncovering a notion of the political that is not governed by the determined character of all sovereign decisionism. What is at stake in this turn is our ability to account for the relation between reason and the emergence of something that takes place yet that really, reasonably, has no place to take place. Within the advent of the impossible, the passive decision is central to any unconditional thought of the democratic event.

The questions raised so far in relation to sovereign force and exceptionality in twentieth-century Mexico bring us inevitably to the question of 1968. They bring us to the problem of 1968 but the return of the date and its anniversaries over the course of the last four decades also brings us to the repeated inquiry
into the unconditional critique of sovereignty in relation to the horizon and potentiality of democracy. There really is no avoiding it any longer. After all, this exploration of the democratic event has been with us, in the wake of the original date, since my initial approximation in Chapter 1 to the complexity of the months preceding the 2006 Mexican presidential elections. The legacy of 1968 has been with us since the very beginning or at least since the turns and returns that that particular beginning in 2005, together with the historical and conceptual contingencies it has enabled, were set in motion.

Before we begin our approach to the relation between contingency, chance, and the passive decision, we should first clarify what the historical sequence we call “1968” means in Mexico. This skeletal examination will then enable us to account for the world it moved against, its intellectual and political legacy, the conceptual and political limitations presented by its subjectivization a posteriori, and the need to move toward an evaluation of the passive decision as a key component of the affirmation and originality of 1968. In order to do this, we will turn to Luis González de Alba’s *Los días y los años* (*The Days and Years*), which is surely one of the most powerful and yet fragile literary figurations of social activism ever penned. Though a product of incarceration, we will be able to read this work from within a register of freedom that far exceeds the constraints of sovereign decisionism. Within this reading we momentarily encounter a free zone in Lecumberri Prison: a declaration of love, a call to the friend, an address to the other in the night in a writing that does not resign itself to containment or sovereign administration of the friend-enemy antagonism. Rather, in *Los días y los años* we encounter the demise of the friend-enemy antagonism thanks to the gradual emergence of the Parisian slogan, “Under the Paving Stones, the Beach!”

**“Chance Must Be Systematically Explored”: A Skeletal Sequence**

By Friday July 26, 1968, the political science students at the National University (UNAM) had been on strike for weeks, protesting the ongoing incarceration of Demetrio Vallejo and Valentín Campa, the leaders of the rail workers’ strike of 1958–59. In particular they were protesting Articles 145 and 145bis of the penal code. These were the articles of “social dissolution” that subjected people who met with a group of 3 or more individuals to discuss ideas or programs that might affect sovereign rule with 2 to 12 years in prison. These articles were the juridical justification for the rail union leader’s decade-long imprisonment. The articles of social dissolution were remarkable pieces of legislation because they allowed the authorities to imprison virtually anyone for virtually anything and were used as such by the state. What they did was provide sovereign force with a veneer of legal legitimacy. In pure exceptionality force without law gives rise to