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2 The Rise of Reading Campaigns in Post-NAFTA Mexico

Emily Hind

> What do you do after having sold blankets, shirts, and sweaters? What do you do?
> —Poet Jaime Sabines in an interview with Ana Cruz, cited in Bravo Varela[1]

Introduction to the Middle Class in Mexico

Until recently, Mexicanist scholars tended to ignore the middle class. This lack of academic interest is perhaps surprising given the group's "enormous faith in education," to borrow the wording from Lawrence James's history of the British middle class (James 593). It may not be a coincidence that praise for recent examination of the enrollment-swelling ranks of the Mexican middle class comes at a time of reduced rosters and resources for the Liberal Arts classroom. Respect for the middle class—the sort that prompts academic volumes on the "global middle classes"—may swing upward when that middle sector's crucial interest in the humanities seems to wane. Certainly, the Mexican middle class has been earning new respect among budget-strapped historians as a politically pushy collective, rather than a force of self-absorbed stagnation. In a "transnational" history collection on the middle class, Suzanne Eineigel and Michael Ervin, with separate articles, challenge the notion of the conservative middle and instead view the group as agents of change immediately following the Mexican Revolution. The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) likes this angle of the "edgy middle," and it gave the 2013 Humanities Book Award to Steven B. Bunker's *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture in the Age of Porfirio Díaz*. Bunker notes that during the Porfiriato, a nineteenth-and early twentieth-century dictatorship, Mexico hosted a bourgeois culture that "was as much a cultural as an economic category" (109). This message earned another award when the Mexico section of LASA bestowed the 2014 prize for the Best Book in the Social Sciences on Louise Walker's *Waking from the Dream: Mexico's Middle Classes After 1968*, which also broadens the definition of the middle class to encompass more than an income-determined classification. Walker writes always in the plural "middle classes" because the concept identifies both "a socioeconomic category and a state of mind" (76).

Still, this remains a touchy subject. The preface to the English-language translation of *Mexico: A Middle Class Society. Poor No More, Developed Not Yet* (2010, 2012) acknowledges the passionate disagreement among Mexicans that the first edition provoked:

> Even thinking about Mexico as a middle class seems odd, out of place and, of course, politically incorrect. Venturing to write that Mexico is now mostly a middle-class country has been deemed a provocation by some analysts and politicians accustomed to crafting their public discourse in terms of a an extended and impossible to overcome poverty. (De la Calle and Rubio no page)

Indeed, the contentious nature of the "*Poor No More*" thesis may explain the reluctance on the part of authors Luis de la Calle and Luis Rubio to specify the income needed to count as middle class. Instead, the meatiest discussions of the topic couch themselves in terms of deciles 1 through 10, and this rhetoric obscures the difference, for example, between the wealthiest man in Mexico, Carlos Slim Helú, whose fortune *Forbes* magazine estimates at US$77 billion, and the next-to-nothing (or flatly nothing?) sum that the lowest percentile in Mexico possesses. Rihan Yeh analyzes the reaction to De la Calle and Rubio's declaration that Mexico is now a middle-class country in terms of the "we" employed by Internet readers of an article summarizing the books' findings. Those who agree with the "*Poor No More*" optimism define themselves as members of this new identity, against naysayer web users' absence of a "collective subjectivity, whether of the middle class or the pueblo" (197). In line with the revisionist histories then, the contemporary Web users who support the middle class "we" demonstrate the implicit political power of this classification, regardless of its statistical accuracy.

Certainly, the numbers spark debate. A governmental research unit, the National Institute for Statistics and Geography (INEGI), argues that using data such as expenses per capita rather than income results in better information because informants have fewer incentives to "underdeclare" what they spend ("Cuantificando" 2). Spending power interests the relevant analysts, and for example De la Calle and Rubio cite the findings from the Mexican Association of Market Research to frame their argument in terms of consumer rankings. These categories range from the lowest groups of D/E to the highest of A/B; the largest sector of Mexico, 35.8 percent in 2008, falls in the D+ category, $6,800 to $11,599 (De la Calle and Rubio 9).

In his interview-girded study, Dennis Gilbert defines the Mexican middle class as households with incomes at least 50 percent higher than the median (12). Gilbert, to his surprise, discovers growth among this group at the turn of the twenty-first century: "The middle class has fared better in the Neoliberal Era than is commonly believed. By 2000, it was notably bigger, better educated, and more affluent than it was in the early 1980s—trends all the more remarkable given Mexico's uneven economic performance"

(100). INEGI backs Gilbert's early conclusion and in data gathered from 2000 to 2010 the governmental group finds that the national middle class rose by 4 percentage points ("Cuantificando" 5). The INEGI report avoids a definition of the middle class among strict salary numbers and contemplates seven strata; in 2010 the strata of the "middle class" include 42.4 percent of homes, with 39.2 percent of the total national population (3). Given governmental and other researchers' reluctance to settle on precise income levels among their definitions, and given the overwhelming attention paid to consumption habits, education, profession, and assorted household circumstances, it seems that even the mathematically inclined experts prefer a nuanced verbal approach. In the midst of the statistics, they seem mindful of the need to coach aspiration. The circumspect vocabulary may have to do with the possibility of conjuring a "we" into existence by force of suggestion, and it may take into account the moral force that literary critic Kathleen Woodward calls "statistical panic." As Woodward explains, "It is statistics, rather than economics, that should be known as the dismal science" (179). Woodward claims that statistics today inform decisions based on risk calculations of the sort that emerged from the field of epidemiology (199). Possibly, academics and governmental analysts handle statistics gingerly because of the latter's tendency to evoke a "dismal" mood. If a particular frame of mind denotes the middle class, proper management of the always emotionally tinged statistics may help to conjure precisely the sector these invested experts hope to see develop.

What is the Mexican middle-class mindset? One crucial trait is optimism, to judge from a 2011 poll that asked Mexicans to classify their social rank; while 1% labeled themselves as "rich" and 16 percent as "poor," an astonishing 82 percent ranked themselves in the middle class (Castañeda 61). Other countries evince similar statistics; the Latinobarómetro poll from 2007 revealed that nearly four of every five respondents in Chile, Argentina, and Panama considered him or herself part of middle class (Hopenhayn 11). Hard times do not necessarily cancel the majority claim. In the midst of the Great Depression, a 1939 Gallup Poll found that more than 75 percent of the U.S. public rated themselves as middle class, "even when they considered themselves poor" (Hornstein 201–202). The very amorphousness of the category constitutes part of its power (Hornstein 206). In fact, middle-classness may be so persistent because it confounds itself with national identity, an identification that challenges politicians and academics who stake "Mexicanness" in a rhetoric of discouraged financial struggle. That rhetoric may reflect an older tradition that may be giving way to a new national self-image, whether or not the "real" numbers justify the optimism. Aforementioned historian Louise Walker locates this shift toward a middle-class national identity earlier than some readers might expect. In 2013, she shook up the Mexicanist field by proposing that in the mid-twentieth-century, the ruling PRI (Party of the Institutional Revolution) achieved its remarkable stability by forging a pact with the middle classes, who in turn

dominated the collective Mexican identity: "[T]he middle classes came to represent the modern, developed Mexico, symbolizing the goal toward which all Mexicans ought to strive" (9).

This change in the national imaginary supports the statistic that De la Calle and Rubio celebrate as happily outdated: "just a half-century ago, 80 percent of Mexicans were poor, and thus, so was the entire country" (31). In 2010, the INEGI-interpreted figures assessed 55.1 percent of homes and 59.1 percent of the population as the euphemistically termed "other side of the social spectrum" ("Cuantificando" 3–4). That report chooses its language so carefully because it makes a distinction between the "lower social class" and the "poor." That is, the report views the condition of poverty as statistically more probable, but not an automatically applicable condition among the lower 55.1 percent of homes due to the mitigating factors of government assistance (4). Despite the double-talk that this report engages on one level, on another the urge to separate poverty from the "lower social class" may serve as a place-marker for future improvement. Twenty-first-century Mexican governmental programs such as "Oportunidades" have expanded and provide meaningful assistance to families able to comply with education and health requirements. That type of conditional governmental aid may justify the government researchers' interest in the distinction between poverty and the experience of the "lower" class. Public benefits that hinge on children's school attendance and health checkups seem aimed, however minimally, at paving the way for those children to fare better than their parents in terms of educational achievement and life expectancy.

Nuance is key in the interpretation of the Mexican middle class. When academic and former Secretary of Foreign Affairs (2000–2003) Jorge Castañeda announces triumphantly in his book from 2011, "Mexico today has become finally a middle-class society," he immediately issues a near retraction, perhaps a wise move in view of the storm of opinions that De la Calle and Rubio weathered. According to Castañeda's hedging, the country is not "definitively nor categorically" a middle-class society because Mexico has "barely passed the bar where paradise begins," and the economy is "still highly vulnerable to relapse" (35). Persistent vulnerability appears reflected in more global discussions of the middle class and its mindset. For example, an otherwise cheery book published by the World Bank admits that two thirds of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean concentrate in the "poor and vulnerable classes," even though in 2009, for the first time in history, one in three people in these same regions lived with a per capita income greater than $10 per day, which "integrates" them into the ranks of the middle class (Ferreira et al 146). Here, it seems evident why strict salary divisions do not supply the favored rhetorical strategy. A per capita income of $11 a day is not enough to become middle class in many contexts, and yet conceivably such a minimal fortune could represent a stronger financial foothold for some situations. Regardless of the intricacies of context, it seems precarious in the twenty-first century to claim middle-class

status on $11 per day. With good reason, then, scholars often describe the middle-class mood as teetering between the "enthusiasm of joining in and the fear of falling out" (Franco and Hopenhayn 26).

The following analysis contemplates attempts to manage that mercurial collective mood through pro-reading publicity in Mexico. Twenty-first-century Mexican emphasis on the value of reading has funded traveling book fairs, free books passed out in the metro, expanded school libraries, new public reading rooms, reforms for book markets and education, and intensified interest in organizing the supply of reading materials for elementary school students. The privately and publicly funded publicity surrounding the promotion of reading has met with doubtful educational results. The publicity trades on the middle-class faith in education and likely manages aspirations and anxieties more than it wants to procure sweeping change.

The Underlying Binary: Literacy Skills over Literary Appreciation

In his world history of debt, David Graeber notes the paradox of the best functioning capitalism as a wildly optimistic gamble balanced by predictions of apocalypse. At the same time that healthy capitalism fears dips and dives in the market, it also "enshrines the gambler as an essential part of its operation" (Graeber 357). Evidently, the middle-class optimism regarding education enables pro-reading campaigns to benefit from the pessimistic manipulation of statistics, as per Woodward's notion of "statistical panic," in ways that manage anxiety in a crash-prone system. For instance, note the moral force in statistics employed in iconic advertising for the Mexican bookstore Gandhi. The bright yellow ads featuring black or purple lettering aim to appeal to people who can already read and, especially, to middle-class readers because that group has the disposable income to spend on Mexico's relatively expensive new books. The Gandhi website keeps a marketing archive organized by year of such goading catchphrases as: "Schools should teach reading" (2003), "Break a record: read a book" (2004), "Four hours daily of television and half a book a year. Way to go, Mexico!" (2003), "Come and form part of the 5%" (2004), "Nine of ten Mexicans read. In their dreams" (2008), "Accepting that you don't read is the first step" (2012), "The reader: Endangered species" (2013), and "Like this, but 20 minutes minimum" (2013). That last command alludes to the reading campaigns sponsored by the business association known as the Council of Communication (Consejo de la Comunicación), the self-anointed "Voice of Businesses" (Voz de las Empresas), which advocates a twenty-minute-daily reading habit (Martínez). Following the Council, some governmental messages urge Mexicans to read for twenty minutes each day (Aguilar Sosa). The "twenty minute" standard revises the original promotion of "Just 5 minutes a day" (2009) on a Gandhi billboard that promises, "Immediate results!" (Gandhi). It would seem that the Council of Communication and

the governmental campaigns affected the Gandhi bookstore slogans, and in turn it is a safe bet that the cheeky Gandhi advertising style influenced these other efforts. All sides apparently want to manage the middle-class belief in education as a counterbalancing force to that group's dread of instability, which limits the gambles that this class might otherwise take. In fact, in framing the notion of "statistical panic," Woodward refers to Ulrich Beck's claim that the industrial society has evolved into a risk society, defined as a society that fears risk itself (Woodward 180). This risk society, haplessly subject to unsteady markets, has everything to do with a middle-class mindset because precisely that group has so much to lose, unlike the bottom ranks, and contradictorily, so little wealth to help them recover from major losses, unlike the topmost layers.

Although the words "middle class" never appear in the Mexican pro-reading ads, a slick and almost ineffable image of this status saturates the campaigns. The trick of analyzing this publicity hinges on contemplating, as if from a distance, the middle-class ideal, which is of course never significantly distanced from professional scholarship. Oddly perhaps, given the power of numerically couched forecasts, current middle-class thought on the value of reading retains a nineteenth-century paradigm that happily proposes a difference between disciplined literacy skills and dreamy literary appreciation. In other words, the middle-class mindset suffers significant ambivalence when it comes to the idea of funding "progress-oriented" education that ignores the artistic and aesthetic categories of human achievement. The pro-reading campaigns prove insensitive to that ambivalence in the same way that much presidential discourse fails to acknowledge the benefits of what might be termed imaginative and "inefficient" art appreciation. Of course, to make the argument that art matters for non-statistical reasons is simply to champion middle-class ideals, rather than to analyze them.

A clever historical articulation of middle-class support for the two reading levels—both literacy and literary abilities—appears in Thomas Pfau's analysis of *Wordsworth's Profession*. According to Pfau, the British poet's shrewd marketing of texts helped to transform an amorphous public into a "cohesive middle-class community that believed it had distinguished itself through its seemingly unlimited imaginative mobility" (Pfau 9). That is, Wordsworth framed the reading of literature in both transcendent and pragmatic terms by encouraging the middle class to treat poetry on the one hand as an aesthetic object destined for consumption, indicative of the greatness of the consumer's spirit, and on the other hand, as a material to be experienced in "an essential *productive* manner" (7). This bifurcation eventually leads to the Neoliberal Era education discourse that, to judge from the germane publicity, prefers practical skills over less efficient matters of emotional quests, empathetic experiments, canonical mastery, and the creative pause that hunts for deeper meaning. By contrast to that restricted focus, the traditions of the middle class encompass a multicity of approaches. Just like middle-class professionalism that views work as both a spiritual "calling"

and a pragmatic means of social contribution, middle-class reading practices confuse leisure and labor, perhaps as an anxiety-reducing technique and not just as preparation to face the next day better armed with more information. Peter Gay's Eurocentric examination of *The Making of Middle-Class Culture, 1815–1914* notes that in the face of "intractable uncertainties in the public arena," the middle-class Victorians' ideal home life privileged the notion of a "close-knit, harmonious family intent on absorbing high culture in its leisure hours" (285). Gay believes that industrial innovations brought about seemingly unpredictable waves of change, and thus the middle class wished to duck for cover in a counterbalancing realm of free-time study that invested art with both practical and transcendent value. Such an idealized and placid domestic withdrawal, familiar to the middle-class mindset since the nineteenth century then, may have something to do with the current official support in Mexico for literacy skills, especially to the degree that literary imagination can be postulated as divisible from the disciplined act of reading.

At the very least, the split value between practical literacy ability and high-flying literary imagination explains how Peña Nieto won the presidential election in 2012 after proving himself a grossly inept reader of literature, but still a literate man. The presidential candidate's lack of familiarity with a personal library emerged at the International Book Fair in Guadalajara (FIL) with a journalist's "easier" question that asked for books that had influenced Peña Nieto's life. The presidential candidate never lost his reassuring tone of authority, but floundered as he attempted to list authors and titles, eventually confusing fiction writer Carlos Fuentes with historian Enrique Krauze (Guevara Ramos 222). A report on this mistake in *The Economist* couches Peña Nieto's gaffe in terms of the middle class, perhaps because this group is expected to manage both levels, that of intimate personal artistic appreciation and that of school-coached, skills-based experience: "Some middle-class adults set a poor example: book lovers cringed when Enrique Peña Nieto […] seemed stumped when asked at Guadalajara to name three books that had made a mark on him" ("Publishing"). The event is preserved on YouTube with a video that has attracted in almost four years more than three million views ("Libros"). That scandal notwithstanding, Mexican tradition disdains literary learning, as distinguished from basic literacy skills. One historian notes that military figure and sometime president of nineteenth-century Mexico, José Antonio López de Santa Anna, "boasted that he had never read a big book and delegated the writing of letters, the composition of speeches, and the fashioning of public manifestos to underlings" (Ruiz 66). A visit to Chapultepec Castle, a museum in Mexico City where dictator Porfirio Diaz's study is preserved, reveals a plaque on the end-of-the-nineteenth- and beginning-of-the-twentieth-century president's consistent spelling mistakes, which he never bothered to correct. Battle-honed leaders tended to gain power from gutsy, law-breaking moves, and once in power they may have worried that their image as fearsome men

of action would decline if others suspected any submission to the rule of spelling and grammar.

Gabriel Zaid observes that only in the mid-twentieth century did Mexican self-understanding begin to modify the archetypical assumption that "men of books" lack common sense, and it suddenly became important for politicians to hold university degrees (*De los libros* 11). Still, as Zaid points out, a university degree does not guarantee an affinity for books, which explains how the educational rates can rise without handily rescuing the publishing industry. Percentages have grown from 1950—when "barely" one in one hundred young Mexicans pursued the BA degree—to much larger numbers, now with twenty-seven out of every one hundred "university-aged" Mexicans studying this degree (De la Calle and Rubio 83). University education does not necessarily produce bibliophiles as Peña Nieto and former President Vicente Fox prove. Fox's visit to the FIL in Guadalajara elicited a journalist's snide comment that the president shook attending young people's hands and advised them to read, but only hypocritically: "Fox arrived without books and he left the same way. He did not apply the advice he gave the youngsters to himself" (González). The same report adds that the previous president, Ernesto Zedillo, did not visit the book fair at all during his six years in office. As middle-class values help to infuse the FIL with more prestige than ever, the longstanding irrelevance of literary knowledge survives, perhaps because transcendent literary appreciation connotes impractical dreaminess. Reading, if undertaken freely, can serve as much more than a pragmatic encounter with content, and thus the public-service attempt to frame the encounter with the text as purely efficient trips certain inconsistencies in the message.

Reading in Context: Privatization Fears

Perhaps the point of some of the ultimately disjointed reasoning advocated in the pro-literacy advertisements is not to inspire the audience to read—and therefore to turn away from the publicity—but to keep the audience *thinking* about reading and turned toward the ads. In support of this suspicion, the publicity bids for attention by constantly renewing itself. President Vicente Fox's "Toward a Country of Readers" (Hacia un país de lectores) in effect from 2003 to 2007, President Felipe Calderón's "Mexico Reads" (México Lee) from 2008 to 2013, and President Enrique Peña Nieto's general call for "Quality Education" find increasingly faithful counterparts in privately funded campaigns. For instance, since 2010 the previously mentioned Council of Communication has released the successive slogans "Read to Learn" (Leer para aprender), "Have Fun Reading" (Diviértete Leyendo), "Read more" (Leer más), and "What Matters Is in Your Head" (Lo que importa está en tu cabeza). The materials from the Council of Communication sometimes flirt with championing change for the sake of change. Under the slogan "Read + More Is Extraordinary," available on its rangy

and at times ill-connected web pages, some of which use the main address "www.divierteteleyendo.com" (havefunreading.com), the Council publicizes a blankly activist message with an improperly punctuated sentence: "This movement is not a dream, it is a reality. Change begins by reading." Another version of this ad shows the neck-down image a man opening his button-down shirt to reveal a tee that reads: "For you and for me … Change begins by reading. Join the movement." The nature of the change set to occur remains vague. Perhaps in order to keep the social shifts moderate enough to ensure that the Mexican leaders behind the presidency and the Council of Communication will remain in power, publicity for the pro-reading "movement" sometimes flirts with nonsensical praise of the image of reading.

For instance, a recent poster available on the Council of Communication's website shows a drawing of a storybook queen laid out in a would-be enticing book next to the caption, "Princess, witch, sorceress, fairy godmother. Let's promote equality. Change begins by reading. 20 minutes a day." The notion of reading twenty minutes a day defies the imaginative release that reading can offer from the measured work world and insinuates a reinsertion of that regulation. Furthermore, equality among princesses, witches, and fairy godmothers disregards the exceptional role that each of these archetypical literary characters plays. In the same advertising series, a pseudo-human rights discourse imparts scrambled logic in poster that asks, "Oz, Narnia, Wonderland, Crypton. What worlds will you leave your children? Change begins by reading. 20 minutes a day." The insinuation that middle-class parents leave a fictional world to offspring perhaps ignores the need for human rights discourse in the here and now. The almost parodic social justice discourse may elicit less wariness from a cynical public when it simply repeats the official message. In the explanation of the "What Matters Is in Your Head" phase of the campaign, slated to run from October 2104 through March 2015, the Council of Communication claims that reading habits support the goal of achieving a "quality education" in Mexico (Nuñez Siller). In the same way, the watchdog force Mexicanos Primero (Mexicans First) has declared on its website that "Only Quality Education Changes Mexico" (Sólo la Educación de calidad cambia a México). This same non-profit group researched the information presented in the muckraking documentary on Mexican public education, *¡De Panzazo!* (Barely Passing) (2012). Like the government, Mexicans First trusts in standardized test scores, and on the ten guiding principles stated on the group's website, belief number six reasons in painful hyperbole, "What isn't evaluated can't be improved."

The principle of statistical panic warns that the test scores used to inform public opinion may facilitate a negative assessment, and certainly the tests as they are crunched into easily publicized statistics can be slanted to whip up panic among parents that their children are not learning the skills needed to survive and rise in a complex economy. Standardized test scores in Mexico have been falling even as the pro-reading publicity has intensified, which

means that the pro-reading publicity has it both ways when it bemoans the test scores and thereby bolsters the urgency of the moral message, which instead of conveniently solving the "problem" defends the continuing campaigns ("Read MORE"). In example of the declining test results, the Mexican national ENLACE study found in 2008 that 47.7 percent of tested students failed to read at an adequate level; four years later, the number of poor readers expanded to reach the 50 percent mark. That is, in 2013 of more than one million students tested, 50 percent could not understand what they read in Spanish—or to put this finding another way, about half the students tested in Mexico scored at "insufficient and elemental" reading levels (Enlace). Another study, this one from the Mexican Foundation for the Promotion of Reading (Fundación Mexicana para el Fomento de la Lectura), claimed in 2012 that national reading habits have declined from the year 2006. The 2012 numbers calculate that total book readers fell 10 percent from 2006 to 2012, and that more than half the national population "does not read books anymore" (Fundación 21). Even an online article sponsored by a television channel spreads the intended-as-dismal news that according to UNESCO findings, only 2 percent of Mexicans have a "real habit of reading" (Ortiz). Perhaps the most-often cited incendiary statistic repeats the governmental finding that per capita for those over twelve years of age the national average of books read per year stands at 2.9 (CONACULTA 36). Fortunately for the national mental health, not all onlookers succumb to the numerically based anxiety.

Susan Meyers, for one, doubts these "rhetorics of literacy crisis" (31). The non-readers blamed for the national "problem" are not illiterate, in Meyers's view, "but rather strategic in the ways in which they invest their energies in literate skills that serve their specific needs" (32). The sheer quantity of text-based materials about the alleged Mexican illiteracy crisis certainly ought to give pause to the panicked. This abundance of written text, which by definition requires a literate public, anticipates the existence of some positive literacy findings, which include a UNESCO report from 2011 that pegged literacy rates in Mexico at 93.4 percent of persons over age fifteen, and 98.5 percent of people aged fifteen to twenty-four (UNESCO). Turn-of-the-previous-century cultural critics would have rejoiced over those numbers. From 1895 to 1910 only a small percentage of Mexicans could read; during that period national literacy rates slowly grew from 14.4 percent to 19.7 percent (Gonzales citing Vaughan 526). After the Mexican Revolution, the newly created Department of Public Education (SEP) saw illiteracy as a threat to patriotic spirit and aimed to teach people who resided in the countryside "not only to read and write but also to embrace their place in the new nation" (Joseph and Buchenau 109). Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos spearheaded the effort to alphabetize post-Revolutionary Mexico, and this longtime book lover made cheap editions of "classics" available to those would-be readers aspiring to the middle classes. By 1960, the newly nationalist population scored a record high literacy rate of 62.2 percent (Greer

467). Nevertheless, contemporary public discussion in Mexico laments the fact that the country's test scores do not compare favorably with those of Sweden, Finland, Japan, Canada, or the U.K. Instead of post-Revolutionary patriotism and an appreciation of the literary canon, the contemporary terms of the crisis turn on productivity, that is, literacy skills defined in isolation from less "efficient" elements of literary appreciation.

In evidence of this pro-productivity angle, Peña Nieto's National Plan for Development, 2013–2018, released on May 20, 2013, sets the third of five national goals as creating a "Mexico with Quality Education," ahead of improving the economy at number four. This ambitioned national education seems more attuned to the "Mechanical" than "Liberal" Arts in the presidential wording:

> Lack of education is a barrier to the country's productive development as it limits people's ability to communicate efficiently, work in teams, solve problems, effectively use informational technology to adopt high-level processes and technologies, as well as to understand the environment in which we live and innovate.
>
> (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo)

In order to persuade the audience attuned to middle-class ideals regarding this would-be non-transcendent, grittily pragmatic education, the administration employs the fearsome lash of statistical panic. On September 8, 2013, the first year of President Enrique Peña Nieto's term, Secretary of the Treasury Luis Videgaray emphasized gloomy percentages in nine of the ten financially oriented points, beginning with the idea that in the last thirty years the national economy grew, on average, "a mediocre 2%," thanks to the lack of growth in productivity, which contracted yearly since 1990 by –0.4 percent (Córdova). Treasury Secretary Videgaray continued to spin a dreadful statistical narrative: 45.5 percent of the Mexican population lives in poverty, the same percentage as thirty years ago; 61.2 percent of Mexicans lack access to social security; 60 percent of the population works in the informal economy, where business productivity is 45 percent less than the formal sector; public spending as a percentage of GDP is only 19.5 percent, against 27.1 percent in the rest of Latin America and 46.5 percent in the other OCDE countries (Córdova). By the time Videgaray arrived at point eight out of ten, anxiety had been primed as the interpretative key for the news that 30 percent of the adult population in Mexico is obese.

The moral authority drawn from epidemiology that Woodward traces to statistical panic seems tailor-made for fat panic. The statistic was meant to justify Peña Nieto's proposed and ultimately approved value-added (IVA) tax on soft drinks and junk food. Books once again escaped the IVA tax, perhaps because on a metaphorical level reading is seen to combat "fat." The class status associated with books seems key here: reading is not a physically laborious activity; it does not actually "burn fat," and yet the reading

campaigns feature almost no overweight models, with the exception of the occasional portly (and older) celebrity. Not one photograph of a noticeably fat child or teen appears in the pro-reading campaigns, in a country with something like one-third of children rated as overweight by the number-crunchers. This insinuated healthy quality attributed to books begs the question of whether Mexico is prepared for the consequences if more citizens begin to "get in shape" and read.

To judge from the numbers, Mexico cannot reliably uphold the literacy contract, which Meyers defines as "an implicit agreement in which schools require student compliance and promise economic reward in return" (63). Mexico is the only country in an OECD report from 2012 with an unemployment rate among tertiary-educated individuals that is higher (at 5 percent) than the rate for those who attained an upper secondary education (at 4.6 percent) and for those without an upper secondary education (who are unemployed at a 4 percent rate) (OECD 5).The OECD notes that this employment pattern in Mexico has remained stable for more than a decade (5). Data gathered by researchers Moreno-Brid and Ros notes that for the groups with a relatively high educational level—at least a decade of school—the percentage of young people employed in the low-productivity occupations of the informal sector in Mexico increased from 1989 to 2002; among those young people with thirteen and more years of formal schooling, their numbers in the informal sector rose a whopping 40 percent (Moreno-Brid and Ros 237). In fact, the authors note, because these groups are the only ones for which the unemployment rate expanded, it seems that "the best trained young people are not finding jobs appropriate to their qualifications" (237). Escobar Latapí and Pedraza Espinoza use the word "cerrazón" (impasse) to describe the contemporary constriction in Mexico of employment opportunities in the private sector for students who are not already economically privileged (369). They cite statistics that suggest that university degrees are increasingly necessary but less "sufficient" in themselves to predict continued membership in highest levels of the middle class (377).

Interestingly, the very categories of the Council of Communication's Reading Olympics (Olimpiada de la lectura)—the fourth of which concluded on November 24, 2014—divide public and private schools and set up certain connotations through the distinct categories of competition that distribute teams of readers from third through sixth grades, in groups of eight students and one teacher, among the ranks of "urban public school, rural public school, private school, and indigenous school." The arrangement hints that these classifications respect qualitatively different levels of education that would compete unfairly without initially separate ranks. It is possible that the prevailing contemporary context encourages the assumption that "private schools" mean the best ones. The tight overlap between government and business messages suggests a problem here: business leaders may not have public welfare in mind as they pose their advertising as a public service. After all, what better faction than private interests to suggest the

superiority of the private? A conflation of public and private roles repeatedly figures in the Council of Communication press releases. The Council celebrates its educational campaigns with events that host marquee political guests, and on April 15, 2013, Peña Nieto opened the official Mexican residence, Los Pinos, to host the ceremony marking the change of leadership for the Council of Communication ("Propone"). Peña Nieto convened his cabinet secretaries of the Interior, Finance, Education, and Labor to witness the change of power in the Council from Pablo González Guajardo of Kimberly Clark Mexico to Ángel Alverde Losada of Office Depot. The confusion thickens in light of the Council's website, which sometimes insinuates responsibility for publicly funded events: note the post of an advertisement for a Mexico City Book Fair slated for October, 2014, organized by Mexico City's local Secretary of Culture.

A similar blurring of public and private resources emerges with the Council's website publicity for the "Read MORE" challenge of 2014; the Council lists 117 participating businesses, among which appear the public Department of Transportation for the State of Puebla, and corporations such as American Express, the television conglomerates Azteca and Televisa, cement maker Cemex, the grocery chains Comercial Mexicana, Grupo Chedraui, and Walmart, technology companies Dell, Hewlett-Packard, IBM, Microsoft, GE, and Google, and many other capitalist enterprises ("Reto 'Leer MAS' 2013"). These brands surely seek to promote more than just reading habits as they reiterate the governmental message; they inevitably promote the very concept of brands, and their brands in particular, as solutions to an implied problem.

Some articulate observers of Peña Nieto's plan for "Moving Mexico" fear that the president means to throw support toward the privatization of the school system (Martin). The middle-class opinion may fall either way on this issue. By the 1980s degrees from public institutions had already undergone a cultural devaluation in Mexico, which coincided with a rise in private school enrollments: "Enrollment in private postsecondary institutions increased 92 percent between 1980 and 1990; in comparison, enrollment in public institutions increased 40 percent" (Walker 167). Another statistic shows that from 1984 to 2000, the portion of elementary school students in private institutions grew nationally "by more than half" (Gilbert 99). In the last few decades, the average number of years of formal education among Mexicans has doubled, reaching 8.3 years in 2006, and overall educational coverage has tripled, when measured from 1980 to 2009 (De la Calle and Rubio 47). Private education has helped to fill the gap, although at a hefty price tag. This costly education helps to explain why, among the "university aged" group of young people in Mexico, only 8 percent of the enrolled university body issues from the 40 percent of the poorest Mexicans, while 32 percent of the university enrollment stems from 40 percent of medium income families (De la Calle and Rubio 83). It takes money to study, and yet not all expensive education is worth the investment.

An editorial from 2013 Printed in the leftist newspaper *La Jornada* points out that private schools do not necessarily outperform public ones. A comparison of the standardized ENLACE test results reveals that between 15 percent and 35 percent of the private schools elicit good evaluations, while 65 percent of them score below the average for public schools (Calderón Alzati). The editorial fears that if 17 percent more students enroll in private school, and thus end up comprising 33 percent of the total eligible population in private schools, the resulting "supermillionaire" education business would spell trouble: its "total economic and social cost to the country would certainly be disastrous" (Calderón Alzati). Exactly why that shift toward privatization would be calamitous remains unspecified, but others share the concern. Joining the chorus of worriers, Escobar Latapí and Pedraza Espinoza's heavily researched study of the Mexican middle class cautions that private education is not necessarily better than public. They note that some private universities have opened multiple campuses, as many as ten and thirty branches in two instances, which dilutes these costly institutions' "promises of privilege" (Escobar Latapí and Pedraza Espinoza 372). The holdout private universities that remain more exclusive and, therefore, difficult to enter for applicants who do not already come from a privileged background only aggravate the education divide. The researchers summarize the dilemma as follows: "for the lower middle class, sending children to a second-rank private institution has become a forced option" (Escobar Latapí and Pedraza Espinoza 390). These same academics warn that it would be of serious consequence for the middle class's "constitution, reproduction, and cost of living" if the Mexican government were to withdraw support from higher public education (378). The pro-reading publicity may manage this diffuse anxiety regarding increased education costs by conflating the "Voice of Businesses" with that of the government and declaring a relatively empty but highly self-serving call for change.

Steady-State Activist Advertising: Heated Desire and Cool Imagination

The propagandistic recommendation to read twenty minutes a day, as if reading were a chore or duty in the first instance, promotes disciplined literacy skills over meandering literary ones. The need to restrain "inefficient" or "unproductive" reading pleasure seems to influence a trio of posters produced by the Council of Communication for elementary school students in the "Have Fun Reading" campaign. These posters impart reading tips that fall under a central subheading, which at first glance reinforces the literary and not literacy angle: "You have a magical power: to turn letters into stories!" The notion of magic would seem to lend support to dreamily indulgent "literary" pursuits. However, another underlying message curbs this would-be freedom in fantasy. The poster for students in fifth and sixth grades advertises the limitations of this "magic" power as hemmed in by

conformist consumption: "If you don't know what to read, go to a bookstore and ask for the most popular book. For sure it's the one in style." The idea that reading is fun if a would-be reader buys *the* fashionable book—and thus reads not necessarily what s/he wants to read, but what everyone else is *capable* of reading due to high prices, monopolistic markets, and the strong influence of television and cinema over book sales—seems to touch on routine matters of consumption rather than creative literary experiments with imagination. Reading as cast by advertising in the role of "trendy activity" provides an impossible escape from capitalism, an only hypothetically "magical" release that actually responds to financially entangled consumer styles.

The literacy argument that poses reading as productive labor, which dutifully restrains the literary imagination, finds support in the mathematical accounts kept by the campaign. The Council's publicity uses famous athletes to promote reading, including professional soccer and football players, cheerleaders, and more, and under this sporty approach, books seem to point the way to winning "scores." Logically then, in view of the "training" that sports demand, the "Read MORE!" (Leer MÁS) posters that the Council produced for the 2013 campaign allege productivity in the surpassed goal of "5,377,009.5" hours spent reading and more than 90 books recommended. In February 2014, the Read MORE website announced that the 2013 goal had ultimately been exceeded by one million hours: the total reading time added up to "8 million 994 thousand 346 hours" and in two years reached the grand total of "15 million 669 thousand 278 hours of reading, impacting more than 380 collaborators and families" ("Reto 'Leer MAS' 2013"). The new goal, established for 2014, aimed for nine million hours, which would add up to a three-year total of "twenty-three million hours of reading" ("Reto 'LEER MAS' 2013"). Because these hours are probably not all coming from the work day, but borrowed from leisure time, the publicity must convince people to invest free time into the newly defined "discipline" or even "competition" of reading. Not surprisingly, the dominant angle for this efficiency-minded and pleasure-oppressing argument favors elements drawn from visual media. For example, the Council of Communication's advertising often features a backwards "E" in the capitalized variations of the word "READ." Many of the videos place the word "READ" (LEER or LEE) near the bottom of the screen and allow the letter "E" to rotate and finally end up in reverse, with cartoon-inspired spunk. The posters also harness graffiti-like energy by flipping the "E" backwards. Visual media further informs the selection of celebrities from the big and small screens featured in many of the ads. Perhaps the most bizarre example of movie stardom appears in the latest round of publicity, released in October 2014, with a poster that pairs a photo of a Star Wars storm trooper with the slogan "What Matters Is In Your Head" (as usual, the command "READ" reverses the "E"). Fans of Star Wars will know that storm troopers do not have much of anything in their robotic heads, except for Darth Vader's orders.[2]

Lest it seem that only private initiative engages in such nonsensical ploys, an example from the State of Mexico's "Read to learN" ("Leer para creceR") program riffs on the Council's design and capitalizes the first and last letters of the slogan, which make little sense in literary terms because no resulting pun emerges. Possibly, the last letter means to illustrate growth, but such clumsy capitalization falls short of an easily legible literary trope. Under this unliterary pro-reading title, the state government program requires students to fill out online book reports. A search on YouTube for official campaign materials turns up as the top result a homemade video narrated by an adult male, Irving Hernández, who explains to parents—and obviously to students as well—how to cheat on the book reports by cutting and pasting from already-completed texts available on the web ("YouTube Leer para Crecer o Crecer para Leer Edo mex."). As of March 9, 2015, this website had attracted 41,582 visits, 9 thumbs down, and 15 thumbs up. Would-be cheaters must have access to an Internet connection in order to complete their online homework, which suggests middle-class status. It may be that parents and students from the middle classes are interested in learning how to cheat because the family's literacy skills already strike them as satisfactory, or at least that is the suspicion that Meyers's analysis coaches.

Incidentally, the matter of whether a tutorial on cheating attracts hits mostly from parents or mostly from students brings up the confusing issue of the target audience for these various messages. Does the Star Wars storm trooper speak to the middle-aged generation that received the film when it first appeared or to the younger demographic that watches the prequels? Historically speaking, the answer is a double "yes." When it comes to reading, the Mexican middle class does not necessarily require age-specific publicity, at least according to the history lesson from cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis, who reviews a one-size-fits-all approach prevalent in the comic book industry of mid-twentieth-century Mexico; comic book censors practiced a paradoxical tolerance for texts "Suitable for children aged eight to eighty" (589). In the same style, much of the contemporary pro-literacy advertisements simply appeal to the ability to read, and anyone with that skill is welcome to admire the literacy cause. After all, until the 1990s Mexican publishers did not bother to cultivate much in the way of reading materials for children and bookstores did not offer much space for these materials.

Exceptions exist to the "age eight to eighty" rule of thumb. The latest round of publicity, for the first time, has the Council of Communication framing young people as the target "agents of change" who can spread the pleasure of reading to "children and society" ("'Lo que importa'"). Interestingly, the publicity report stresses the idea of young people's engagement or ability to "commit" (comprometerse), a verb perhaps closely associated in mid-twentieth-century Mexico with political radicalism (Nuñez Stiller). According to the sloppily drafted copy, the pro-reading materials mean to attract young people by imitating their values, and applauding "individuality," as well as teens' "freedom" to "express themselves, dress, and be

young;" for critics, it will be obvious that these lauded qualities advance a consumption value, expressed as respect for stylistic diversity and a fashionably "retro" nostalgia for mid-century ideals of committed activism. This confusion of hot political activism and cool consumption standards recalls the twenty-first-century $500 peso bill, which today features communist party members and sexual adventurers Frida Kahlo (on one face of the bill) and Diego Rivera (on the flip side). It seems that Rivera and Kahlo are supposed to convey an idealized middle-class willingness to take creative risks that turn out to be massively profitable. Sarah Brouillette's ideas help to signal the problems inherent in posing Kahlo and Rivera as model "creative" types. Brouillette notes that the mystique of the nineteenth-century bohemian artist serves the Neoliberal ideal of flexibility; although the iconoclast artist appears at odds with the capitalist system that turns artwork into money, the artist's very precariousness and vulnerability as an informally employed but driven worker postulates the reputed "psychology of creativity" as best stimulated under conditions of insecurity and overload; the artist fails to distinguish labor from leisure and forges a feverish career of alleged self-sufficiency that demands careful distance from collective politics and social responsibility (52, 56). Such an image fails to account for Kahlo's and Rivera's interest in Communism, but the Mexican government apparently overlooks that allegiance in the first place. Despite the post-NAFTA placement of artists on the $500-peso bill, it would be incorrect to assume that the middle-class values art only for its ability to generate monetary profit from uncertain labor conditions.

The relative inarticulateness of many press releases about the Council of Communication elicits criticism from Juan Domingo Argüelles, who grouses, "Reading's biggest problem is that people who don't read recommend it" ("Al compás"). Domingo Argüelles recognizes the incompatibility of imaginative literary reading with much of the pro-reading approach when he notes that the literacy push aims for a superficial "culture *express*: memorized, quantitative, and epidermal"—perhaps a perfect summary of the "rushed culture" that shrugs at the incongruent presence of Kahlo and Rivera on capitalist currency ("Educación y lectura"). Further evidence of "epidermal" literacy programs appears with a spot from 2010 sponsored by Council of Communication that depicts an anonymous father reading a fairy tale to his son and daughter on a picnic blanket. The acted-out picture book that the father shares takes reading to the level of theater. Computer graphics complete the conversion of the father into the antagonist hairy beast mentioned in the narrative, and thereby the home audience is meant to understand how this banal reading could be gripping. Even more interesting than the all-in-good fun, no-thanks-to-Freud wolf-father, is the remarkably redundant "magic" that the computer animation attributes to the power of reading. The graphics for the spot draw over the natural setting and impose an assortment of animated birds, flowers, bunnies, and red apples. While it may be true that some parks in Mexico lack birds, flowers, rabbits, and

fruit, for the purposes of pro-reading publicity it seems unimaginative to add these elements to already manicured outdoor scenery.

The implicitly applied restrictions on the literary imagination find a different articulation with a representative spot from the third phase of the Council of Communication's "Have Fun Reading" series. Soap opera and movie actor Ana Claudia Talancón, who laughs for the camera with nary a book in sight, smiles winsomely through the declamation of the first two lines of "Hombres necios" (Stubborn men), the famous feminist poem by colonial writer Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. For its levity and brevity, the spot hints that Talancón may not be able to recite more than the first two lines of the text. Perhaps only similarly curtailed portraits of the power of imagination would select an actor as an ideal spokesperson for reading. The technique of intermittently allowing Talancón to voice over her own seductive presence makes for a relatively inarticulate image of someone at times overcome with the giggles. Because the spot begins with a clapperboard and Talancón claims that she reads often due to her work, the aesthetics emphasize the role of performer over that of reader. This implicit issue of personal finances, nonetheless, turns reading into the perfect plug for a movie star. In the public eye, a celebrity *is* his or her job, and this lucrative personification of work can be envied as a spectacular achievement, which explains how, in the would-be pragmatic context of the campaign, the call to invest twenty minutes of leisure time in disciplined "work" can come to seem reasonable.

This star power of personifying professionalism that may explain why the "Have Fun Reading" series produces another video with the famous *lucha libre* wrestler "Místico" (Mystic), who stars in an exaggerated version of Talancón's spot. Due to Místico's fragmented testimonial voice-over, and because the celebrity speaks through a mask that obscures entirely his mouth and facial expression, the spectator must take it on faith that Místico is, in fact, articulating his love of reading rather than gesticulating erratically in front of the camera. Near the end of the spot, without fully tensing his muscles, Místico raises both fists in a friendly boxing stance; this gesture baffles. The "fun" of reading is never described explicitly as a fight, and the narrative never specifies the connection. To counter the nonsensical qualities, Místico employs redundancy and so verbally, at least, stays on message. The wrestler lists the repetitive reasons that he likes to read: "It is a way of learning, cultivating myself, bettering myself." Místico concludes the spot with another rhetorical trio by recommending that parents share with children twenty minutes a day of reading so that the kids can "learn, imagine, and have fun." Místico's script seems to aim for a presentation of the act of reading—suitable for ages eight to eighty—as both magically imaginative and a substance tightly controlled by redundant phrasing and the twenty-minute-a-day habit.

Some lines from Místico's dialogue reoccur with a "Have Fun Reading" spot anchored by married actors Ingrid Coronado and Fernando del Solar. The latter adds to Místico's message that reading to children, "is a very

cool [muy padre] way to stimulate their imagination." The middle-class's consumerist, fashionable longing to be cool *and* hot, that is, both coolly consuming and hotly fashionable, is—in a word—hallucinatory. The very point of imagination, as opposed to other forms of thought, is that it roams freely, not coolly or fashionably. Although the Council of Communication and even the Mexican government may want to restrain the "unproductive" and fantasizing impulse of reading—of reading just to read—sooner or later more than literacy goals end up implicated. That indulgence is what addictive leisure habits, rather than disciplined work practices, trigger. With only a little exaggeration, it can be said that enjoyable reading activity cultivates a certain kind of madness, captured in the excessive fantasies of the protagonists of *Don Quijote* and *Madame Bovary*, who see giants where there are windmills or romantic heroes where there are only regular joes. It wouldn't do to have the middle-class mindset latch on to such wildly creative escapism, for one thing because such excess might relax the group and weaken the panic at the statistics needed to curb the gambling impulse. In other words, self-motivated love of literature risks more than the pragmatic skills of the Council's campaign that simply want to imagine extra birds in a park. The "Have Fun Reading" campaign unconvincingly, for book lovers, points to a limited "literacy" ability rather than "literary" imagination; such a limited literacy is perhaps meant to provide a tame kind of aspiration to social mobility, the mildly fantastic sort of aspiration imagined as separate from quantifiable material improvement in the way that imagining flowers in a park harmlessly decorates the tangible urban environment. What the propaganda may fear is that pleasurable, undisciplined engagement with literature can spark more than fantasies of change. Of course literature, being what it is, refuses efficient proof of such a claim. As Zaid puts this dilemma for the literary critic who would errantly wish to borrow scientific discourse, "Believing or not in books as a means of action is above all just that: to believe or not to believe" (*Los demasiados libros* 51).

Conclusion: On Vitamins, Small Business Owners, and the Movies

Apropos of the benefits to the status quo of controlled imagination, my analysis only appears to switch topics when it turns to Peter Cahn's cynical article on "multilevel marketing" by Mexican companies such as the vitamin supplier Omnilife. Jorge Vergara's notorious company, as demonstrated by Cahn's article, convinces desperately hopeful would-be salespeople to invest money in Omnilife health products in order to peddle them in a vaguely pyramidal scheme. According to Cahn, the publicity for Omnilife endows the items for sale with sacred qualities, which means to lift the products from the realm of "crass materialism," in a gesture reminiscent of Pfau's analysis of Wordsworth's attention to audience (433). On an intuitive level, a fundamental similarity conjoins Omnilife's message

of aspiration and that of the reading campaigns. Vergara markets not just vitamins, but optimism: customers hope to make money, and rise in status, by taking the supplements which give the health to sell them, in a possibly deluded but effectively self-perpetuating cycle that many literature professors may recognize when they total the costs incurred to support their professional reading habit. The attraction of Omnilife vitamins and Wordsworth's lyrics involves suspended disbelief in the uncertain payoff of faith, or as Cahn puts it, the possibly misplaced trust in "nebulous promises of access to consumption" (431). Among those with a reasonably adequate diet and competent literacy skills, neither ingesting vitamins nor reading books is strictly necessary. Ergo, the vitamin pitch and the recent pro-reading publicity seek to convince observers that by investing precious resources in vitamins (especially on top of good health) or by reading (drawing on already extant literacy skills), the disciplined customer manifests admirable aspirations; he or she gambles on the shadow of statistical hope of becoming a better producer, and thus a more powerful consumer, which is to say, a more legitimate and less vulnerable member of the ambitioned middle class.

In the end, the anxiety-producing image of the entrenched happy gambler in capitalism, whose most foolish risks put us all in financial danger, brings me full circle to 2010, with the start of the reading campaigns undertaken by the Council of Communication. Another Council-sponsored campaign began around the same time: the pro-Mexican entrepreneurship and small businesses ads of the "Pepe y Toño" series. This message is ongoing with the pro-reading publicity, and for example during the months surrounding June 2014, Mexico City news kiosks, such as those along the Paseo de la Reforma, the Zona Rosa, and the Historic Center, featured images of elderly Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska promoting reading, or images of anonymous models testifying as to the advantages of having taken the leap of starting a business. To review the origins of the pro-business campaign, a spot from 2010 shows fictional business owners Pepe and Toño, and eventually many others, laying hands on one another's shoulders in single file, which in the initial shots seems playful (Pepe y Toño). The final, marching band-inspired trick imagery, as perceived in the insinuated camerawork of an extreme long shot, reveals the pattern formed by this mass of people: a system of gears. A similar spot appears from the Televisa Foundation (Fundación Televisa), the charitable counterpart to the Mexican communications powerhouse Televisa, which created the video "Because there are more and more of us" (Porque cada vez somos más); there, a backwards domino effect shows single-file lines of people magically rising from the ground and back onto their feet. The voice-over explains the effect of what happens when one person decides not to do drugs and convinces someone else to abstain, and as one person refuses to accept corruption and encourages someone else to repeat the act, and so forth. The benevolently framed pitch for the Council of Communication's notion of happy citizen-cogs and Televisa Foundation's

idea about vulnerable citizen-dominos who on a good day enjoy reversed gravity, hints at the risks of good faith citizenship.

The very dreaminess of committing to a daily reading habit if one cannot afford books or the time to read them, and the notion of founding a business, if one lacks startup resources and knowledge, suggests that this publicity is perhaps not directed at changing a daily reality but at managing hope and fear. On this note of functional escapism, it is interesting to trace a parallel between the campaigns and commercial Mexican film. Ignacio Sánchez Prado points out that domestic box office hits, *Sólo con tu pareja* (1991), *Ladies' Night* (2003), which incidentally stars Ana Claudia Talancón, *Cansada de besar sapos* (Tired of Kissing Frogs, 2006), and *Amores perros* (2000), use the figure of the publicist or the setting of the advertising agency to connote glamorous Mexico—or at least a glossily middle-class Mexico City (Kindle Locations 1624–1625). In other words, successful Mexican movies promoted the profession of advertising, whose real-life results appear for middle-class moviegoers as they step outside the movie theater and onto the street level in Mexico City. (The same screen-to-sidewalk parallel appears for those Mexicans who cannot afford the movie theater ticket, but consume the same cinema on inexpensive pirated DVDs and then travel to set locations such as the Historic Center of Mexico City.) Now the smash hit *Nosotros los Nobles* (The Noble Family, 2013) follows a wealthy Mexican character with aspirations to start his own business, as he takes entrepreneurial lessons from a street-smart lower-class youth who instantly dismisses unprofitable (read: impractical) ideas. After hearing Sánchez Prado's and Bruce Robbins's musings regarding the contemporary idealization of the entrepreneur at the Modern Language Association's annual conference in January 2015, I am inspired to ask if the figure of the Mexican publicist in film is evolving into the entrepreneur, a message that would find reinforcement in the Pepe y Toño campaign.

Despite the fantasy aesthetics and contradictions, the twenty-first-century publicity campaigns and films remind us that contemporary Mexican statistics provoke real ambitions and anxieties. On the one hand, healthy capitalism does not trust that it will be around forever—and on the other hand, we have to keep the faith. In point of fact, the first line of actor Mauricio Barcelata's testimonial in the Council's reading campaign claims: "For me, reading is … magic." An animated fish illustrates the point by jumping out and back in the open picture book that Barcelata holds. The implicit lesson suggests that you can teach a man to read a fish, but you can't expect him to eat it. The middle class must constantly reimagine itself, always optimistically training for the best, always anxiously "accumulating hours" as protection from the worst. Government and business interests are probably well advised to continue to channel the faith of the non-reading 50 percent into a public dream, as if into a glass half-full, all the while benefitting from an almost imperceptible stasis amid the volatile fashions that the middle-class mindset helps to conjure. That mindset sustains this delicate arrangement.

Notes

1. All translations are mine. To find the publicity materials discussed, use the campaign catchphrases as keywords in Google search. The "images" section of the Google search engine and the YouTube website turn up the posters and videos, whereas general Google searches will lead to more text-rich materials. The main relevant websites are listed in the bibliography.
2. My description refers to the version of this poster on the Web. During my comings and goings at the TAXCO bus station in Mexico City, from the end of January through the end of June 2015, I spotted an eye-level and plexiglass encased poster of the storm trooper image near a street corner. The poster adds another line to the "What Matters ..." slogan: "Armour protects you. Reading too." This argument still does not make much sense. The storm troopers' armour protects the soldiers so that they may work, mindlessly, for Darth Vader, the antagonist of Star Wars.

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