

Prohesion

We have wanted to show what is the only end awaiting the criminal.

—*El automóvil gris*

The Public Registry of Vehicles (REPUVE) has the objective of guaranteeing public security through the provision of legal certainty to those acts carried out with vehicles circulating within national territory.

—REPUVE white paper

3.1 EL AUTOMÓVIL GRIS

One of the most successful films of the Mexican silent era premiered on December 11, 1919, at twenty movie houses in Mexico City. *El automóvil gris* (The gray automobile) depicted the story of the Gray Automobile Gang, a group of prison escapees who terrorized Mexico City's elite at the height of the Mexican Revolution in 1915 by donning uniforms of the Constitutionalist Army and serving false search warrants to rob people's homes. Originally twelve episodes, the shortened version of the film that survives today is split evenly between dramatizing the gang's various robberies, kidnappings, and murders and its eventual apprehension by the inspector Juan Manuel Cabrera, who portrays himself in the film. Imagined as a work of cinema verité, broadcasting events of contemporary concern to Mexican society at a time of immense social upheaval, *El automóvil gris* was a sensation, highlighted by its notorious final scene, actual footage of the execution of Gray Automobile Gang members by firing squad.¹

Over the years, *El automóvil gris* has captured the imagination of moviegoers, film buffs, students of Mexican history, and scholars from

different fields by preserving a unique moment in Mexican history. But while the film was promoted on the basis of its authenticity, it is better described as a “spectacle of representational authenticity.”² In other words, *El automóvil gris*, the movie, takes considerable artistic license with *El automóvil gris*, the story. The film was financed by Pablo González Garza, a general in Venustiano Carranza’s Constitutionalist Army, sent to pacify Mexico City following its occupation by Pancho Villa’s and Emiliano Zapata’s armies. González, who would later orchestrate the assassination of Zapata, is portrayed in the film passionately exhorting the police forces to pursue the gang. During the Gray Automobile Gang’s reign of mischief, however, it was widely believed that González was the operation’s mastermind. Whatever that claim’s veracity, the film glosses over military and police complicity in the crimes of the gang, which served search warrants signed by actual military authorities.³ The film thus functions as a political tool. Produced by a military general of dubious repute, the film attempts to rehabilitate his image and legitimize the nascent Mexican state by portraying the military and police as honest, hardworking protectors of the social order.⁴

For the purposes of the present work, *El automóvil gris* proves interesting for what it reveals about the Mexican elite’s view of the automobile when the film came out. The motorcar, still a novel technology, was seen as a threat to the social order. Combined with telegraphic communications and a lack of clear identifying documents, it empowered wrongdoers to prey on the public and stay one step ahead of the law. Only through the heroic efforts of honest authorities such as General González Garza, Inspector Cabrera, and police officers skilled in the use of modern transportation and communication technologies could the criminality cultivated by the motorcar be controlled. “A useless endeavor,” the film confidently professes at its conclusion, “the fate [execution by firing squad] awaiting all guilty men is a moral lesson that work is the only noble path in life.”

But the insecurity of the automobile in Mexico was not so easily tamed. Today, the car remains a threat to security. Its value as a manufactured object makes it a frequent target of thieves.⁵ Its mobility is critical to drug trafficking to the United States as well as arms to Mexico, attacks by drug cartels against other cartels as well as the police and military, and abductions. Its propensity for immobility and congestion is exploited by cartels to create roadblocks to impede police and military forces during shootouts.⁶ Its enclosure of space provides the cover necessary for illicit trafficking and hiding corpses for authorities



FIGURE 5. Ciudad Administrativa in Zacatecas, 2013. Photo by Benjaz1213.

to uncover. And its combustibility has been used on at least one occasion to produce car bombs to punish state authorities seen to favor one cartel over another.⁷

The federal government's response to this insecurity—the Public Registry of Vehicles (REPUVE)—is currently on display in various states across the country. One of Mexico's first REPUVE registration sites was in the north-central state of Zacatecas. In the eponymous capital, named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993 for its rich colonial architecture and urban layout, the REPUVE module can be found in La Ciudad de Gobierno, or Government City (fig. 5), a brand-new complex of shiny governmental office buildings on the city's outskirts, a location intended to simultaneously facilitate citizens' completion of their civic obligations and bolster the city's tourism by directing bureaucratic traffic out of the historic downtown. Within the impressive complex, the REPUVE module—housed in two semitrailers outside the Secretariat of Finances building—casts a humble shadow. Armed with computers, satellite antennae, and other advanced information technologies, these trailers comprise a starting point in the state's fight against automotive insecurity (fig. 6).



FIGURE 6. REPUVE registration site in Zacatecas, 2011. Photo by Keith Guzik, © 2015.

Citizens concerned about the safety of their vehicles come to the module for RFID tags, or *chips* as they are called colloquially, which enable the location of their vehicles in case of theft (fig. 7). To receive a *chip*, a driver must present five forms of documentation: a bill of sale from the purchase of the vehicle, a vehicle registration, a driver's license, a proof of residency, and an official form of identification—which data specialists in the trailers use to verify the driver's and vehicle's history.

Outside the trailers, REPUVE technicians inspect the vehicle, photographing its front, rear, and sides and locating three instances of its vehicle identification number (VIN), one of which is recorded via an impression made using transparent tape and chalk. After the driver's documents have been reviewed, and the identity of the vehicle verified, the data operators enter the vehicle's details in the computer and print out the RFID tag, which contains the vehicle's VIN, the tag's identification number, and the corresponding REPUVE file number. One of the technicians then applies *el chip* to the inside windshield above the rearview mirror, and the technicians then test it using a handheld RFID reader (figs. 8–15). The registration process complete, the tag can now be registered whenever the vehicle passes REPUVE readers installed along roadsides and other transit points. In this way, the fight against automotive insecurity in Mexico is transferred from the heroic police officers of *El automóvil gris* to the mundane surveillant technologies of the Public Registry of Vehicles.

This chapter focuses on the tension between the disruptive collective agency engendered by the automobile and the efforts of Mexican



FIGURE 7. REPUE RFID tag. Photo by Keith Guzik, © 2015.

authorities to control it. It describes how automobility⁸ has served at different times in Mexican history as an engine of insecurity, threatening the physical safety of motorists and the ecological welfare of the natural environment. In response to the insecurity produced by the motorcar, authorities have turned to the law to keep their hands firmly on the wheel. At the dawn of the automobile in early twentieth-century Mexico, the administration of automobiles focused on ensuring personal safety (and collecting taxes) by disciplining motorists to be responsible drivers. To do this, the state imposed three basic requirements for the operation of a motor vehicle: *registration* of both cars and drivers into state registries, *inspection* of the functionality of automobiles and the competence of drivers, and *regulation* of motorists' compliance with traffic rules.

Beginning in the 1980s, a new legal regime emerged that sought to reduce the pollution “risk” of automobiles. In this model, *registration* still recorded the correspondence between cars and drivers, but emissions testing now recorded a mostly invisible discharge from cars made visible during *inspections* through diagnostic machinery and translated onto vehicle surfaces through inspection stickers. *Regulation* under this risk model of automotive governance did not involve overseeing vehicles



FIGURE 8. Initial review of documents during REPUVE registration. Photo by Keith Guzik, © 2015.



FIGURE 9. Photographing vehicle during REPUVE registration. Photo by Keith Guzik, © 2015.



FIGURE 10. Locating VIN number during REPUVE registration. Photo by Keith Guzik, © 2015.



FIGURE 11. Recording VIN number during REPUVE registration. Photo by Keith Guzik, © 2015.



FIGURE 12. Transferring VIN number during REPUVE registration. Photo by Keith Guzik, © 2015.



FIGURE 13. Inputting driver and vehicle data during REPUVE registration. Photo by Keith Guzik, © 2015.



FIGURE 14. Adhering RFID tag during REPUVE registration. Photo by Keith Guzik, © 2015.



FIGURE 15. Verifying RFID tag during REPUVE registration. Photo by Keith Guzik, © 2015.

to ensure drivers' compliance with traffic rules, but rather supervising them to ensure drivers' abnegation from an activity—automobility—posing a risk to the natural environment.

In the REPUVE, meanwhile, the concern of the state is not on personal safety or environmental pollution, but “legal certainty” (*certeza jurídica*), the assurance that the automobile possesses proper legal status. To achieve certainty, a *registration* is made not only of the correspondence between cars and drivers, but of all records concerning a vehicle generated by public and private entities administering automobility, a massive integration of data made possible by the REPUVE database. *Inspections*, for their part, are not directed to the functionality or emissions of vehicles but to their identity as established by vehicle identification numbers carried on vehicle bodies. Finally, *regulation* is conducted not under the watchful gaze of human traffic officers but

via the transmission of digital signals received by RFID tags adhered to vehicles at inspection sites.

In the REPUVE, then, one discerns a distinct mode of governmentality. If personal safety was pursued by creating a registry of car-driver couplings and overseeing the conduct of machines and drivers (an operation concerned with the conduct of automobiles), and environmental pollution was combatted by diagnosing vehicular emissions and producing visualizations of them for others to see (an operation focused on the essence of automobility rather than its conduct), then “legal certainty” is sought by integrating data about vehicles and adhering that data to the vehicles themselves (an operation that moves the power of the state from the conduct and essence of vehicles to the body of automobility). This double operation at the heart of the REPUVE—of making the multiple records of vehicles more *cohesive* and having those data become *adhesive* to the materiality of automobility—is what I call *prohesion*, an emergent logic of power distinct from traditional surveillance and discernible in other security measures in contemporary Mexico, where authorities attempt to control collective agency by making its material more amenable to governance. By reducing the state’s dependence on unreliable, corruptible human subjects and increasing its use of more objective surveillance technologies, prohesion offers the prospect of increasing the state’s control over the disruptive collective agencies at the heart of insecurity in Mexico.

3.2 AUTOMOBILITY IN MEXICO

The question of when the automobile appeared in Mexico is a matter of speculation. A motorcar was first officially recorded in the country in 1898, a handmade French machine named the Dellanu Villeville, which the Texas millionaire Manuel Cuesta purchased and transported to Guadalajara.⁹ There are accounts of another motor vehicle rambling its way through the dusty streets of Mexico City in 1895, commanded by one Fernando de Teresa, but no official records exist.¹⁰ Regardless of their origin, the first automobiles in Mexico found themselves competing for space on roadways with both more traditional modes of transportation (mule trains, horse-drawn carriages) and more modern ones (steam and electric railcars).¹¹ Those experimenting with the new form of locomotion had substantial financial resources. An imported automobile was a primary status symbol for upper-class families that marked their separation from the

rest of society.¹² During the early days of the automobile in Mexico, only 215 units were sold per year.¹³

The number of vehicles in Mexico soon began to rise, however, from roughly 8,000 units in 1920 to 105,470 in 1940.¹⁴ By the mid-1950s, the country counted nearly 500,000 vehicles, second only to Brazil among its Latin American neighbors.¹⁵ The car's growing popularity involved more than the curiosity of the moneyed classes. One of the chief technological achievements of Porfirio Díaz's rule in Mexico was the electrification of Mexico City's rail system, which ably served the urban population's transportation needs. Strikes began disabling the system in 1916 and 1917, however, fueling the need for a commuting alternative. As a personalized mode of transportation not immediately subject to labor strife, the automobile offered a more reliable mode of transportation.¹⁶ Outside the nation's capital, meanwhile, the national economy had long been challenged by geography. Without large rivers that could accommodate the transportation requirements of the country's major industries, Mexico proved a prime location for the growth of trucking.¹⁷ Finally, a shared border with the world's leading manufacturer of automobiles provided the country with an ample source of vehicles.¹⁸

In his seminal work on the role of the automobile in modern society, John Urry uses the term "automobility" to describe the system of inter-related institutions, industries, historical processes, cultural practices, and emotions that have arisen around the automobile. In modern and postindustrial society, he writes, the car stands as

1. the quintessential *manufactured object* produced by the leading industrial sectors and the iconic firms within 20th-century capitalism . . . ;
2. the major item of *individual consumption* after housing which provides status to its owner/user through its sign-values . . . ;
3. an extraordinarily powerful *complex* constituted through technical and social interlinkages with other industries [car parts, road building, advertising, oil production] . . . ;
4. the predominant global form of "quasi-private" *mobility* that subordinates other mobilities of walking, cycling, travelling by rail and so on . . . ;
5. the dominant *culture* that sustains major discourses of what constitutes the good life . . . ; [and]
6. the single most important cause of *environmental resource-use*.¹⁹

The impact of automobility on Mexican society is unmistakable. The automobile's promise as a manufactured object has driven the country's economic policy since the first half of the twentieth century. While the first cars arrived in Mexico across the northern border with the United States,²⁰ the postrevolutionary government of Plutarco Elías Calles recognized the automobile's potential to advance industrialization and made development of a car industry a centerpiece of its import-substitution economy.²¹ Mexico's large population already promised manufacturers a healthy market, and the country's substantial oil reserves, privately held until Lázaro Cárdenas's nationalization in 1938, provided the raw materials necessary to fuel cars and construct highways.²² But to increase the country's appeal to foreign manufacturers, the Calles government offered favorable trade tariffs for companies establishing operations in Mexico and assurances that the inexpensive labor force grouped into party-affiliated unions would not disrupt production. Ford was the first producer to build a plant in Mexico, in 1925, receiving a 50 percent reduction in import tariffs.²³ Other manufacturers followed. By 1946, ten companies were assembling cars in Mexico, in plants located largely in and around Mexico City.²⁴

While these operations met the government's immediate interest in establishing an automotive industry, the companies operated solely as assemblers, using knockdown kits produced in the United States to build cars for sale in Mexico.²⁵ This arrangement not only limited the extent of industrialization within Mexico but also led to a trade imbalance with the United States that deprived Mexico of needed foreign currency.²⁶ In response, the Mexican state began exerting increased control over the industry, primarily through import restrictions, local-content requirements, and price controls. In 1950, a government executive order imposed maximum prices on wholesale and retail items.²⁷ At the end of the decade, import quotas were reduced and the use of locally produced parts was decreed for the first time.²⁸

Given persistent problems with balance of trade, the government moved in the 1970s to increase exports from the automotive sector. Companies located in Mexico and exporting to the United States were offered substantial subsidies to help offset US import tariffs.²⁹ In 1977, an executive decree required each producer in the country to balance its automotive trade and placed strict limits on foreign-owned investments not dedicated to export production.³⁰ During this time as well, the first *maquiladoras*, or assembly plants, were established in northern Mexico to produce auto parts for export.³¹ In time, the number of *maquiladoras*

in the automotive sector increased, owing to the reduced presence of labor unions, lower transportation costs to the United States, and ease of access to customs offices.³² As a result, the number of automobiles exported from Mexico grew from 2,000 in 1972 to 58,423 in 1985, with Volkswagen and Nissan serving as industry leaders.³³

These efforts succeeded in establishing an active automotive industry in Mexico, especially in parts production. But the statist import-substitution model of economic development began giving way in the 1980s to larger forces in international political economy. A rising yen, in the case of Japanese producers, and the need to reduce costs to remain competitive with Japanese producers, in the case of US and European companies,³⁴ led automotive multinationals to move more labor-intensive aspects of production to industrializing countries like Mexico. Attempting to adjust policy to fit the shifting world economy, the Mexican government as part of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) negotiations at the end of the 1980s, eliminated local-content requirements and rules governing foreign ownership of production plants.³⁵ These policy changes helped reestablish Mexico as an attractive base of operations for auto producers. Today, Mexico ranks eighth in the world in number of automobiles produced, around 2.9 million units per year,³⁶ and second in exports to the United States.³⁷ Thus, over the course of the twentieth century, Mexico transformed its relationship to the automobile as a manufactured object. Solely an importer at the start of the century, the country at its conclusion stood as one of the world's largest exporters, transforming its image as a backward, rural society to one at the cutting edge of the global economy.

Automobility has affected Mexico in ways beyond industrialization and consumption. At the most basic level, the motorcar has transformed time and space. Whereas urban life was once concentrated in city centers, the automobile enabled the growth of well-to-do suburbs on urban peripheries. Between 1920 and 1960, the urban area of Mexico City grew ninefold, and the very notion of the city changed. Formally comprised of sixteen *delegaciones*, or boroughs, *el distrito federal* has expanded to include over forty municipalities in the states of Mexico and Hidalgo, a conurbation referred to as the metropolitan zone, the urban area, the urban area of Mexico City, or the metropolitan zone of the Valley of Mexico.³⁸ The automobile not only expanded the boundaries of urban areas but also split them apart through its associated highways and central arteries. And as much as this spatial growth owes to the time ostensibly saved by the automobile in traversing long

distances, this time is ultimately lost in the uncompensated hours and energy that people spend sitting in traffic.³⁹

Similarly, the constant din of automobility in urban areas keeps people tense and disrupts sleep.⁴⁰ Not only is silence forgotten, but when it is encountered, in rural areas for instance, it provokes anxiety rather than calm.⁴¹ And behind the wheel, drivers become obsessed with arriving at destinations in the least amount of time possible, a mind-set that transforms other vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians into obstacles to overcome.⁴² In these ways, the automobile has transformed the national character of Mexico.⁴³

The influence of automobility has extended to language as well. As Federico Fernández Christlieb notes in his excellent history of the automobile in Mexico, “After money and sex, no object has given birth to as much popular vocabulary and slang as the car.”⁴⁴ Fernández offers *luz verde* (being given the green light) and *en curva* (being thrown a curve) as examples. But a more illuminating phrase from Mexican Spanish might be *tantas curvas y yo sin frenos* (so many curves and I don’t have brakes). This crude expression combines the linguistic influences of both sex and the automobile, revealing national, patriarchal tendencies to objectify women (by comparing them to the physical landscape) and excuse men for improper conduct (by explaining away their lack of self-restraint).

The automobile, in this sense, is not merely a means of transportation, but a means of cultural representation central to Mexican national identity. Films—such as *Mecánica nacional*, a boorish 1971 comedy following the weekend excursion of a Mexico City repair shop owner’s family to an automobile race, and *Y tu mamá también*, the first international hit of Alfonso Cuarón, a coming-of-age tale that also centers around a road trip from Mexico City—use the automobile to reflect on the state of Mexican society. The humble Volkswagen Beetle, meanwhile, produced in Puebla until 2003 and lovingly referred to as *el vocho*, has found itself the inspiration of leading contemporary artists from Mexico. Damián Ortega’s *Cosmic Thing* (2002) installation features a disassembled Beetle suspended in air (fig. 16), Betsabeé Romero’s works frequently center on Beetles (fig. 17), and Margarita Cabrera’s *Yellow Bug* (2004) offers a life-sized, soft sculpture of the iconic car (fig. 18). These works speak to the central place of the automobile in representing everyday life in Mexico. *El vochol*, an actual Beetle fully decorated in the beads representative of Huichol art, an indigenous group from northern Mexico, takes this idea a step further, integrating the automobile into the cultural expression of a people known for their nomadic lifestyle (fig. 19).

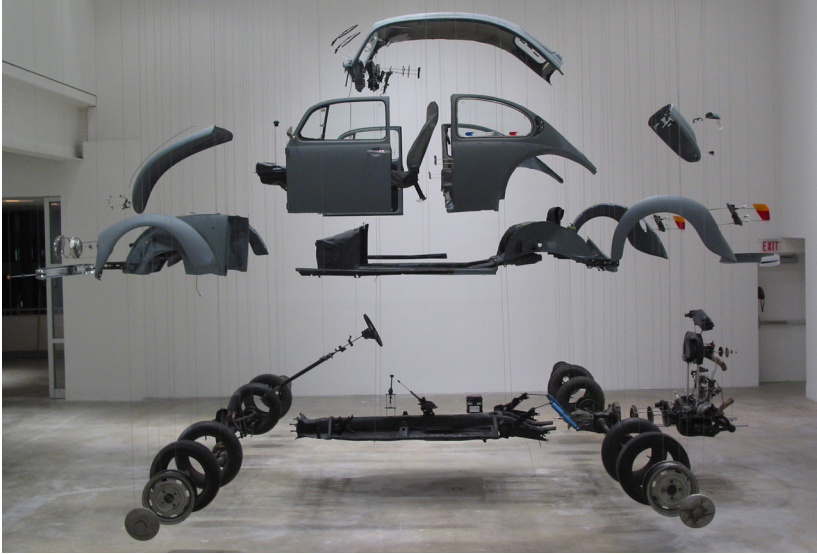


FIGURE 16. *Cosmic Thing*, 2002, by Damían Ortega. Image courtesy of the artist and Kurimanzutto, Mexico City.



FIGURE 17. *Arquitectura rústica para carros inseguros*, 2003, by Betsabé Romero. Image courtesy of the artist.



FIGURE 18. *Yellow Bug*, 2004, by Margarita Cabrera. Image provided by Art © Margarita Cabrera/licensed by VAGA, New York.



FIGURE 19. *El vachol*, 2010, by eight anonymous Huichol artists. Courtesy of Asociación de Amigos del Museo de Arte Popular (AAMAP). Photo by Keith Guzik, © 2015.

Beyond the automobile's cultural dimensions, its increasing dominance in Mexico has come at the expense of other uses of public space and modes of transportation. It is, as John Urry writes, "the predominant global form of 'quasi-private' mobility that subordinates other mobilities of walking, cycling, travelling by rail and so on."⁴⁵ As noted earlier, trains powered first by steam and later by electricity and carriages pulled by beasts of burden capably served the transportation needs of Mexico City's population throughout the nineteenth century. But the postrevolutionary government's promotion of the automobile swept these modes of mobility aside. And when the problem of traffic congestion made urban railways desirable again in the late 1960s, they were primarily built underground as subways in accommodation of motorways.⁴⁶ More recently, the supremacy of the automobile has been questioned somewhat in Mexico City, as municipal authorities have embraced the expansion of regional trains, the establishment of bus-only lanes on major arteries, and the creation of a bike-share program to provide city residents with transportation alternatives. But for the time being, these examples can better be read as exceptions that prove the rule of automobility in everyday Mexico.

3.3 GOVERNING THE INSECURITIES OF AUTOMOBILITY

As comprehensive as the concept of automobility is in highlighting the multiple dimensions of modern life affected by the motorcar, it overlooks security and law. The oversight is somewhat curious, as research on the history of the automobile in the United States describes how its introduction led to a spate of traffic accidents,⁴⁷ endangered children playing in the streets,⁴⁸ increased the risks of rape for women,⁴⁹ gave birth to "roving criminals,"⁵⁰ and threatened public safety through intoxicated drivers.⁵¹ In Mexico, likewise, the automobile has consistently served as a source of insecurity. The insecurity of automobility has a dialectical, evolutionary quality, whereby the dangers of car travel in one time period give rise to state interventions designed to address them, which eventually cede ground to new perils. This section traces this progression across three time periods over the last century.

3.3.1 *Responsibilizing Motorists*

Government documents and other literature from when the automobile first appeared in Mexico give insight into the insecurity of automobility.

A 1938 pamphlet titled *Seguridad!* (Security!), published by the Secretariat of Communications and Public Works, describes the different types of accidents involving automobiles on federal highways: 1,273 incidents were reported in 1937, among them 15 fires, 61 crashes against embankments, 125 people run over, 369 collisions with other vehicles, and 508 overturned vehicles, all of which claimed 778 lives.⁵² These are not large numbers. Today, Mexico reports 16,700 road fatalities per year.⁵³ But when one considers that these numbers do not include unreported accidents or accidents occurring on state and municipal roadways, and that Mexico was home to far fewer vehicles at this time—105,470 in 1940⁵⁴—the risk to personal safety captured by these figures is not insignificant. The fatality rate of 778 deaths per 105,470 vehicles in 1937 works out to 737.7 deaths per 100,000 vehicles. The rate today in Mexico is 54.1 deaths per 100,000 vehicles.⁵⁵ It is not difficult to understand, then, why the secretariat in publishing these numbers warned that, without proper attention, automobile travel would be “converted into an epidemic.”⁵⁶

Seguridad! also gives the causes of these accidents. In the 1,273 incidents, there were 39 cases of headlight problems, 58 of inexperience, 69 of carelessness on the part of pedestrians, 68 of drunkenness, 169 of traveling in the wrong lane, 108 of poor vehicle maintenance, 149 of excessive speed in turns, 176 of excessive speed in corners, and 441 of lack of precaution.⁵⁷

What stands out is how a lack of precaution on the part of motorists, whether explicit or implicit in the categories listed, is seen by the government as the main culprit behind the insecurity of automobiles. Guilt accrues to the individual, which suggests that the threat of automobiles to personal safety could be curtailed by having drivers take better care when operating motor vehicles. This is not to say that the government at the time was blind to other possible causes of automotive insecurity. Manufacturers had a role to play by “offering drivers vehicles in perfect conditions . . . with steering responsive to the smallest impulse of the driver, breaks with unquestionable efficacy, powerful headlights, proven road stability, and, in a word, equipped with all the elements to fulfill its function with a minimum of risk.”⁵⁸ Public authorities could also do more to “increase visibility, improve curvatures and gradients in roadways, repairing them constantly and seeing to their conservation, placing signals in dangerous spots to help drivers, and launching preventative measures as well as punitive ones when needed against transgressors.”⁵⁹ Nevertheless, in the end, the secretariat concluded that the

most effective way to fight the insecurity of automobility was to resolve the “problem of educating drivers and pedestrians.”⁶⁰

To educate motorists, governmental agencies and other organizations interested in promoting automobiles released publications on proper motorcar usage. Some of the instructions were elementary. Drivers, for instance, were instructed that “in crossroads, the traffic rules dictate that the car arriving to our right has the right-of-way, and the same goes for street crossings.”⁶¹ “When driving at night, always keep your headlights and rear light illuminated.”⁶² And “one can never trust the sides of the road in partial or total darkness.”⁶³ Other instructions seem quaint today: “Never under any circumstances complete a turn using sidewalks, but rather use the center of the crossing.”⁶⁴ Also, “A lack of precaution is lighting a cigarette in a gas station, since gasoline is not only given via pumps, but also with cans and jars.”⁶⁵

These publications, in addition to instructing motorists on the rules of the road and proper driving technique, also sought to prepare readers for the emotional challenges of driving. The *Manual del “chauffeur”* (Driver’s manual), published in 1943, explained that “it often happens that drivers . . . throw themselves into a crazy race to catch and overtake a car that has committed an ‘offense’ against them. If the driver of the other car becomes aware of what is happening, a true speed contest tends to result, with a total lack of respect for others on the road as well as oneself. One should realize the absurdity of such behavior, meant only to satisfy a stupid vanity.”⁶⁶ “It should never be forgotten,” the manual admonished, “that we do not own the road; other users have as much right as we do.”⁶⁷ Drivers were urged to keep vehicle maintenance in mind too. “Accidents occurring because of excessive speed do not always indicate a lack of skill on the part of drivers,” noted the pamphlet *Seguridad!*, “since many have already demonstrated their ability to drive, [but] many times the unexpected happens, brake failure or a tire that blows or falls off.”⁶⁸ As a result, “before beginning an automobile trip, the driver should ensure that the car is in the right conditions, and to do this, it is appropriate to examine it quickly and verify that all its parts function without problems.”⁶⁹

In addition to information campaigns, government authorities combatted the insecurity of automobility by establishing legal requirements for their operation. Although not the first government entity in Mexico to do so, the City Council of Ciudad Juárez had already published its *Reglamento de vehículos* (Vehicle rulebook) in 1922. The stated purpose of the book was that “all property of this type”—vehicles—“be

registered, inspected, and regulated.” “Vehicles” at this time was an inclusive term. The registry applied not only to automobiles but also horse-drawn carriages and other types of hotel, commercial, and transport cars.⁷⁰

The rulebook’s statement of purpose was an effective summary of the general requirements for operating a vehicle in the city. Vehicle owners first needed to go to the treasury to register their machines, done by making “a written request to the treasury explaining its [the vehicle’s] purpose, presenting their property to the local inspector for inspection and classification, and promising to follow the rules established in this rulebook.” Then, “following authorization by the inspector, the applicant should appear before the municipal treasury to request a tax book, in which payments in accordance with this rulebook will be noted, understanding that it is required to complete these payments within the first eight days of each month.” For vehicles serving the public, such as taxis, the registration requirements were stricter. “Once the application is approved,” the rulebook explained, “the applicant should request the corresponding registration number in order to mark his property thereafter, obtain at his own cost a copy of the respective fee and a copy of this rulebook. In the rulebook noted, there should appear as well a drawing of the applicant’s bust, noting at the bottom his appearance, personal data, residence, names of persons who recommend him or would testify for him before the municipal president, and several pages left blank in the back of the book to note inspections and other particularities that the police find necessary.”⁷¹

The second stated goal of the rulebook was vehicle inspection. Such inspections were presided over “by the city councilman and the vehicle inspector.” Drivers were required to “present at the inspection all of their personal documentation, including the tax book.” And “all public-service vehicles” were required to “pass a monthly inspection.” Drivers also had to be inspected. To qualify to drive a vehicle, individuals were required to “be expert and experienced in the conduct of the machines, as determined by a jury consisting of the inspector, a witness provided by the applicant, and a third party named by the municipal president; be eighteen years old; and have good morals.”⁷² Finally, once inspected and registered, “the automobile should display both in the front and rear, clearly visible and no less than 5 inches in height, the order number corresponding to it in the registry.”⁷³

In addition to registration and inspection, the municipal government of Ciudad Juárez sought to ensure that automobiles followed “the rules

established in this rulebook.” Some traffic rules have been mentioned above—“Never under any circumstances complete a turn using sidewalks, but rather use the center of the crossing” and “When driving at night, always keep your headlights and rear light illuminated.” The traffic code also established speed limits: 7.5 miles per hour (12 kilometers per hour, or kph) within the city, 4.4 miles per hour (7 kph) on side streets, 3.1 miles per hour (5 kph) in front of schools, 1.9 miles per hour (3 kph) around public promenades, and 15.5 miles per hour (25 kph) “away from populated areas in the most adequate and least dangerous stretches.”⁷⁴

In establishing the rules of the road, the city council considered more than personal safety. Public order and morality were also at stake, especially in vehicles used for public transportation, where the class divisions of Mexican society would play out. The Ciudad Juárez rulebook dictated that “when driving drunks or prostitutes, drivers should conceal their vehicles with their covered roofs, driving them directly to their destination.” “Calling out to passengers by whistles or shouts” and “using obscene language” were prohibited, as was anything other than a “moderate use of the horn,” which could “cause a scandal.” With an eye to public health, the city council also prohibited “transporting cadavers or people with contagious sickness, unless by expressed order of the police or other appropriate authority.”⁷⁵

So that motorists completed these steps of registration, inspection, and regulation, the traffic code called for the creation of “a traffic inspector responsible to the municipal treasury who will be charged with ensuring that these rules are followed.” The traffic inspector would keep “in the office and in proper order . . . the following books”:

- a) a general registry of vehicles, listed successively, specifying their class, category, size, conditions, brand, monthly dues, property owner, with exact address, name of the driver and residence, date of registration and withdrawal, specifying the purpose of the vehicle and if payments are current; b) a general registry of drivers, dedicating a single page to each, in which will be included a drawing of the applicant, registration number, current address, place of birth, parents, age, appearance, with a space left blank for necessary annotations; c) a book of inspections, which will consist of whether the city councilman concurred or not or if the municipal authority authorized the inspection.⁷⁶

The power of the fine would enforce these rules. Excessive speed brought a fine of 5–25 pesos, turning without signaling cost 5–10 pesos, and not having a canopy cover elicited a 5-peso fine, with the potential confiscation of the vehicle by the state if not fixed within eight days.

The Ciudad Juárez rulebook provides a unique window into the rationality of state authorities, or “governmentality,”⁷⁷ concerning the regulation of automobiles in the early twentieth century. In Ciudad Juárez, a three-part legal regime controlled automobility, consisting of *registration*, *inspection*, and *regulation*. Each piece of this regime involved a distinct operation of power, even if these operations were intended to work in concert. In *registration*, personal data was recorded for the purposes of tributary obligations, a fundamental state function.⁷⁸ But more than this, registration created a correspondence between car and driver by matching vehicular data to personal data. In *inspection*, tests were administered and judgments made. The aspiring driver’s ability to maneuver a vehicle was tested before a three-person jury. The machine, meanwhile, was examined by the traffic inspector and a city councilman to ensure that it was in proper order. Interestingly, inspections concerned more than the fitness of cars and drivers to operate on public roadways. Public order and morality were also considered, as drivers had to have “good morals” and vehicles needed to possess “a clean and decorous appearance.” These examinations designed to ensure the safety and morality of the public order evoke Michel Foucault’s work on “discipline,” which involves both “an observing hierarchy” and “a normalizing judgment” in its subjectification of those it operates upon.⁷⁹ The resonance with Foucault’s influential work deepens in light of Ciudad Juárez’s *regulation* of motorcars. By providing drivers tax books and registration numbers, the latter of which had to be recorded both in the former and on the vehicle in clearly visible script, the state made the legality of the car-driver coupling visible for surveillance by police officers. Through such measures, the power of the law over the automobile took hold.

If the moral aspects of this legal regime seem intrusive, the law also carved out a unique place for the individual. Drivers of private, personal vehicles, for one, were not subject to the same requirements as drivers of public vehicles (who had to carry the rulebook for annotations by the inspector and police and had to get monthly car inspections). It is interesting to consider that in this time of the nascent bureaucratization of the modern Mexican state, drivers of public vehicles would be the ones responsible for purchasing and preserving the documents for noting police officers’ observations of them. Drivers of both private and public vehicles also had to carry tax books demonstrating compliance with tributary obligations. Similarly, it was the individual driver who marked the assigned registration number on the vehicle.

Jonathan Simon, remarking on the early administration of automobiles in the United States, observed that “laws governing the operation of vehicles,” “civil liability, the general rules of care taking in public life,” and “insurance” served to create the responsible driver.⁸⁰ The disciplinary regime of automotive governmentality described here—creating records of individual drivers in official records, normalizing behavior through the inspection of driving and property, but also entrusting individuals in their own governance—can also be seen to “responsibilize”⁸¹ the modern car driver in Mexico. And the marked decrease in the rate of traffic fatalities over the last seventy-five years reflects the power of this disciplinary project.

This brief account of the earliest mode of governing automobiles returns us to key themes from the first chapter. To control the collective agency of society, in this case automobility, the state targets materiality—it registers its presence, inspects its function, and regulates its movement. And in governing technology, the state itself is co-produced, not only in the form of new government bureaucracies such as a traffic inspector’s office and the police, but also through the collection of taxes to finance the state’s growth.

Given the dynamic of state formation through automobile taxation and regulation, it is unsurprising that this regime of automotive governance spread throughout Mexico over the course of the twentieth century. Today, every state in the country possesses a system of automotive administration relying on driver’s licenses, vehicle registrations and inspections, and traffic police. In addition, the tax for registering automobiles in Ciudad Juarez eventually morphed into an excise tax assessed for the mere possession of an automobile. Mexican president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz issued a decree in 1964, the Tax for the Possession or Use of Vehicles, to temporarily collect taxes on automobiles to finance the 1968 Olympic Games. Colloquially referred to as *la tenencia*, from the verb *tener* (to have), the tax became an important source of revenue that the federal government ultimately found difficult to do without. *La tenencia* thus became a permanent tax in Mexico, and states adopted similar levies on vehicle ownership. Long subject to scorn among vehicle owners, *la tenencia* was finally repealed by the federal government in 2012, although twenty-seven of thirty-two states still collect it. *La tenencia*, then, provides a clear example of how controlling automobility can contribute to the creation of the state.

3.3.2 *Reducing Environmental Risk*

By the 1970s, the insecurity of automobility began to manifest itself in other ways in Mexico. As the number of cars and duration of daily commutes increased in cities, greater amounts of harmful gases were released into the air, slowly transforming the country's natural environment. Although it is difficult to envision now, given Mexico City's reputation as among the most polluted places on the planet, there was a time not long ago when national writers with no irony described it as "the region with the cleanest air."^a In the 1940s, visibility in the metropolis extended more than 7 miles. By the 1990s, however, smog, fed largely by automobile exhaust, had reduced it to a little over 1 mile. Not only that, but the paving of roadways impeded rainwater filtration into city aquifers, which aggravated the city's sinking, a structural predicament dating back to the Spanish colonial authority's draining of the lake on which the Mexica had constructed Tenochtitlan. Pavement has also altered the flora and fauna in the city by suffocating the soil and intensifying the sun's rays. In this polluted environment, rates of genetic abnormalities, asthma, conjunctivas, respiratory diseases, digestive problems, and other ailments have increased.⁸²

Automobile pollution is representative of the (post)modern condition. As automobility has advanced in Mexico as the primary mode of mobility—driving national economic policy, turning natural resources into valuable commodities fueling development, changing the physical layout of towns and cities, and establishing itself as a cultural reference point—so too has it poisoned the ecological foundations of society to the point that it threatens society's survival. This is the essence of the "risk society," which labors to manage the "hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself."⁸³

Although federal authorities understood the harmful effects of environmental pollution in the early 1970s, they did not take action to reduce harmful automobile emissions until 1986. A presidential decree passed that year—Measures against Pollution in the ZMCM (Mexico City Metropolitan Zone)—called for the production of unleaded gasoline,

a. The phrase *la región más transparente* was popularized as the title of one of Carlos Fuentes's early novels, which focuses on social life in Mexico City. Before Fuentes, Alfonso Reyes, a Mexican poet active in the first half of the twentieth century, also used the expression to describe the city. Reyes, however, took the phrase from Alexander von Humboldt's description of the city in *Visión de Anahuac* (see Fernández Christlieb, *Modernas ruedas de la destrucción*, 34).

restricted the circulation of buses from neighboring states into Mexico City, and established limits for the emission of contaminants (hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, etc.) in new vehicles.⁸⁴ In 1991, the federal government required installation of catalytic converters on new vehicles sold in the country.⁸⁵

Mexico City, meanwhile, the area most affected by automobile pollution, has generally been in the lead in introducing legislation to combat the environmental risk of automobility. Already in the 1970s, the city was conducting vehicle inspections, referred to as *verificación vehicular*. *La verificación vehicular* was made mandatory in 1988. A year later, the municipal government passed the Hoy No Circula (No Driving Today) program, inspired by A Day without Cars, an international movement to raise awareness about the harmful effects of automobiles by having people voluntarily forgo them for a single day (September 22). Hoy No Circula was designed to reduce the number of vehicles circulating in Mexico City by 20 percent; it prohibited each car from operating one day a week, as designated by the last digit of the automobile's license plate number. Thus, for instance, cars with license plate numbers ending in 5 or 6 were prohibited from driving on Mondays, while those with plates ending in 1 or 2 were restricted from circulating on Thursdays.

In 1997, the government combined the two programs—*la verificación vehicular* and Hoy No Circula—in an effort to renovate the city's aging population of cars. *La verificación vehicular* continued as before. However, cars built within the last four years that passed *la verificación vehicular* were exempt from Hoy No Circula restrictions. These cars earned a double-zero (00) designation, with an accompanying sticker, and were exempt from inspections for two years. Cars built within the last eight years that passed *la verificación vehicular* were also exempt from Hoy No Circula restrictions and received a single-zero (0) sticker. All other vehicles received a two (2) sticker and remained under the Hoy No Circula restrictions. As a result, the original Hoy No Circula goal of limiting 20 percent of the automobile population was reduced to 8 percent.⁸⁶ These measures have generally been viewed as a success, despite early criticism that resources to enforce the new provisions were insufficient.⁸⁷ Car emissions in Mexico City have been reduced, and air quality has improved considerably.⁸⁸ And *la verificación vehicular* has become a model throughout the country, with seventeen states adopting similar measures.

The *verificación vehicular* and Hoy No Circula programs, like the Ciudad Juarez City Council vehicle rulebook, provide insight into the

governmental rationality involved in governing the “risk” of automobility.⁸⁹ The programs demonstrate how the government’s administration of automobility has evolved in concert with its insecurity. To ensure safety on roadways, the first legal regime rested on a triple operation of the registration of the car-driver coupling, inspection of cars and drivers individually, and regulation of moving vehicles. These elements remain in *la verificación vehicular* and Hoy No Circula, but modified to capture and diminish the pollution of automobility.

The purpose of *la verificación vehicular* is the inspection of vehicles. But an important change took place in this program concerning how the government viewed the car. Before, the focus was the operability of a particular vehicle—whether it would function properly on public roadways. Now, the state is concerned with essence of the automobile—what the car emits. And although this emission is largely naked to the human eye, the diagnostic equipment used in *la verificación vehicular* realizes a “modification of scale”⁹⁰ that renders invisible pollutants visible and measurable and thus subject to the law.^b In this way, *la verificación vehicular* extends the gaze of the state, through scientific surveillance technology, from the conduct of the automobile (its operability) to its essence (its gaseous emissions).

The inspection in turn creates a registry of vehicles based on pollution levels. Once captured at the inspection center, the “risk,” or pollution level, of an automobile is recorded in a registry and “translated”⁹¹ from its scientific terms to a numerical scheme—00, 0, or 2—according to the risk it poses. The vehicle is then entered into the registry of cars permitted to travel freely or not, and a sticker is affixed to communicate the car’s risk level to traffic police who, although unable to see vehicle pollution, are nevertheless responsible for enforcing the Hoy No Circula program.

For its part, Hoy No Circula is intended to regulate. But here, too, a change has taken place from prior regulation schemes. Before, authorities were primarily concerned with whether drivers were operating their

b. The intervention of science and technology evokes the work of Bruno Latour, who in describing the power of the laboratory in Louis Pasteur’s battle against the anthrax bacillus that was ravaging cattle in France, noted that in the lab, “It [anthrax] is freed from all competitors and so grows exponentially, but, by growing so much, ends up, thanks to Koch’s later method, in such large colonies that a clear-cut pattern is made visible to the watchful eye of the scientist” (Latour, “Give Me a Lab and I Will Raise the World,” 146). Like Pasteur’s laboratory, diagnostic technology exposes the presence of pollutants to authorities’ eyes.

vehicles in accordance with the established traffic code. Now, given the “risk” of automobility to society, authorities attempt to prevent drivers from operating their vehicles at all, at least on the days dictated by vehicle performance on pollution tests and placement within the registry.

The *verificación vehicular* and Hoy No Circula programs, then, represent key elements in the regime of risk management that emerged in Mexico during the 1990s to manage the new insecurity of automobility. This regime did not displace the first regime that was based on discipline and making drivers responsible. Rather, it added a layer of legal regulation, as well as the accompanying state agencies required to oversee inspections and monitor vehicles. Interestingly, in contrast to the earlier regime, risk management displays less concern with individual motorists. The moral quality of individual drivers does not concern the state, nor does their ability to operate a vehicle. Rather, it is the materiality of the car that is of interest, both its essence in terms of pollution emissions and its circulation on roadways on prohibited days. And although the invisibility of pollution makes it difficult for law officers to assess the threat of a particular vehicle, the system of numerical stickers applied to inspected cars makes the risk assessment legible for those responsible for monitoring roadways.^c

3.3.3 *Securitizing Legal Uncertainty*

Since the 1990s, the risk-management model of governing automobility has spread to other states in Mexico. Seventeen of thirty-two states today operate a version of *la verificación vehicular*. Over this same time, the deepening of Mexican postmodernity—the coterminous processes of economic liberalization, political democratization, and cultural globalization—has revealed new dimensions of automotive insecurity, which are in fact quite old. As first portrayed in *El automóvil gris*, the car today is a threat to public security. Its monetary value makes it a major target of organized crime syndicates.⁹² Its mobility is central to the commission of crime, be it drug, arms, or human trafficking or evading police or military forces. Its enclosure of space provides the cover necessary for illicit trafficking. And its combustibility can transform it

c. Though the focus of the law has shifted, this new legal regime still affects drivers. Not only must drivers register themselves and their vehicles with the state, but they must also conduct themselves as responsible users of the natural environment, willing to remove their vehicle from roadways or purchase their way into cleaner, less risky vehicles.

into an improvised explosive device for cartels battling one another or the state.⁹³

Crime involving automobiles speaks to fundamental gaps in the prevailing system of governing automobility. The registration, inspection, and regulation of vehicles are failing to ensure the security of motorcars. Central to this failure has been the permeability of the state to corruption. The heroic efforts of honest authorities idolized in *El automóvil gris* have not been sufficient to stem the tide of criminality resulting from automobility, as poor compensation⁹⁴ and rich opportunities for illicit gains have limited the ability of authorities to be honest, never mind heroic.

In response, governmental authorities at different levels have devised policies to try to regain control of the wheel. In Mexico City, municipal leaders in the early aughts prohibited the use of two-door vehicles as taxi cabs, a measure targeted at the iconic *vocho*, whose two-door design made it a favored vehicle for malevolent taxi drivers preying upon passengers.⁹⁵ And at the federal level, the automobile's threat to public security provided the backdrop for President Calderón's launching of the Public Registry of Vehicles.

The legal framework for the REPUVE was actually established on September 1, 2004, when President Vicente Fox—from the same National Action Party (PAN) as Felipe Calderón, and the first opposition candidate to claim the Mexican presidency from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)—signed the REPUVE law. The Public Registry of Vehicles, as described in the law's first article, "is an information tool of the National System of Public Security, whose goal is to provide public and legal security to those acts undertaken with vehicles."⁹⁶ The acts to which the law refers include "the adding or dropping of registrations; obtaining plates; infractions; the loss, robbery, recovery, and destruction of vehicles that are produced, assembled, imported, or circulate in national territory."⁹⁷

But while the legal basis of the REPUVE is recent, its ideological inspiration dates back much further, as evidenced by earlier attempts of the federal government to create a national registry of vehicles. The Federal Registry of Automobiles, established in 1965, was designed mainly to facilitate the collection of taxes and mandate "the registration of vehicles manufactured or assembled in the country, or imported, that were intended for the transportation of people or cargo."⁹⁸ A successor, the Federal Registry of Vehicles, was launched in 1977 to bolster the government's ability to collect taxes on vehicles. The registry primarily

targeted units from abroad, especially from the United States, a segment of the vehicle population not accounted for in state registries.^d The registry was eliminated by President Carlos Salinas in 1990, however, ostensibly due to technical difficulties and an inefficient bureaucratic structure.⁹⁹ Salinas's decision to terminate the program was nevertheless viewed skeptically and blamed for a subsequent increase in car thefts.^e It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the next effort by the federal government to control automobility emphasized security.

The National Registry of Vehicles (RENAVE) was signed into law on June 2, 1998, by President Ernesto Zedillo. The new federal vehicle registry sought to "generate a database belonging to the federal government consisting of vehicles manufactured, assembled, imported, or circulating in national territory in order to prevent contraband and automobile thefts."¹⁰⁰ Combining elements from the previous registries, the information stored in the RENAVE was made available to the public and supplied by producers, dealers, insurance providers, and car owners. Distinctly, however, registration in the program required a fee (375 pesos, or 47 US dollars, for new cars). And reflecting the neoliberal age in which it was born, the registry was operated by a private concession, Talsud.¹⁰¹

Founded to combat insecurity, the RENAVE fell into disrepute when the head of Talsud, Ricardo Miguel Cavallo, was arrested in Cancún

d. The Federal Registry of Vehicles also addressed the economic concerns of both the federal government and national car dealers, who saw imported vehicles as a threat to the industrialization and progress of the nation. The law empowered authorities to "verify the registration and legal standing of vehicles, including being able to confiscate them" (El Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, *Libro Blanco*, 25). Despite its limited focus on imported vehicles, the registry contributed an innovative public component to vehicle registration, as it allowed people to consult and verify the legal status of their vehicles.

e. The Salinas administration fully embraced neoliberal reforms, such as reducing import restrictions as part of NAFTA negotiations and privatizing various state industries. Reducing the size and scope of government regulation fell very much in line with neoliberal ideology. Today, the consequences of terminating the Federal Registry of Vehicles are largely seen as disastrous. With the termination, "the only authority of the state that served in the identification and registration of vehicles produced, assembled, and legally admitted into the country disappeared." And "[the registry's] disappearance brought with it an increase in crime levels with regard to robberies and the alteration and falsification of documents" (Castro Medina, *Criminalística en la identificación de vehículos automotores*, 20). The Mexican Association of Automobile Dealers (AMDA) concurs, noting that the elimination of the registry left "a legal vacuum" with regard to the administration of automobiles, which resulted in a "shameful increase in the theft of autos" (Asociación Mexicana de Distribuidores de Automotores, *Un siglo en movimiento*, 104).

when he was found to be Miguel Angel Cavallo, an Argentine war criminal wanted by Spanish authorities for torture and other crimes committed during Argentina's military dictatorship in the late 1970s.¹⁰² Among the allegations lodged against Cavallo was that he had enriched himself while working for the Argentine military by seizing the assets of his victims, resources that provided him the capital to begin Talsud.¹⁰³ Thus, not only was the head of the program responsible for ensuring the integrity of motor vehicles in Mexico using a false identity, but the head of the program responsible for protecting the property of Mexicans had enriched himself by seizing the property of people he had tortured.

Leaving aside the more dramatic personal elements of the story, the RENAVE evidences the growing concern among government leaders with vehicular security at the turn of the last century, a concern at the center of the REPUVE. And the REPUVE, in fundamental ways, attempts to learn the lessons of the RENAVE's failure in order to construct a more successful federal registry of automobiles. First, the REPUVE does not have an enrollment fee, as the RENAVE did. Second, the RENAVE proved that the "operation of the Vehicular Registry under the scheme of a public service concession presented insurmountable complications that made its performance unviable."¹⁰⁴ As a result, the REPUVE functions as a public program, under the authority of the Executive Secretariat of the National System for Public Security (SESNSP).¹⁰⁵ Finally, while the REPUVE preserves the RENAVE's concern with insecurity, it exhibits a particular formulation of security that reveals its governmentality. In the REPUVE, the link between registration and public security is indirect. In a white paper describing the registry, the SESNSP explains, "The fact that the REPUVE is an instrument of the National System for Public Security does not mean that it is targeted to the search, pursuit, localization, or recovery of stolen vehicles in the country." Rather, "the aim of the Public Registry of Vehicles is to provide public and legal security to the acts that are undertaken with vehicles."¹⁰⁶

"Public and legal security," in the eyes of the SESNP, has been compromised by a host of factors. Primary among them has been a "disproportionate growth of the vehicular fleet circulating in the country," around 6 percent, or 610,000 vehicles per year. This growth presents unique challenges to the government, "since at the same time that the automobiles increase, so too do the legal acts or facts involving their participation," including "production, importation, sales, rent, financing, insurance, theft, repair or destruction, among others. . . . As a consequence of the increase in the number of vehicles, the number of

activities in which they were involved grew, exceeding the capacity of the government to offer certainty to citizens regarding the identification and the legal circumstances of every automotive unit.”¹⁰⁷ This, combined with “the intense commercial traffic that exists along the Mexican borders, principally with the United States of America . . . require[s] our country to have, for security’s sake, a registry system capable of detecting the origin and destination of all the vehicles circulating on national terrain.”¹⁰⁸

Of course, a number of automobile registries already exist in Mexico, especially at the state level, that identify vehicles and provide legal status. These are the registries that arose under the first legal regime described earlier in this chapter. However, the SESNSP explains,

such instruments do not satisfy the necessity that the citizenry has that the federal government guarantee the legal certainty [*certeza jurídica*] with respect to the legal situation of vehicles. Because the registries were developed by multiple legislatures, they are not similar in the type of data they contain, nor do they possess the certainty that the physical characteristics of the automobiles correspond to the information about them. In addition, they possess a multitude of aims, as some find themselves targeting fiscal concerns rather than providing certainty. In addition, the data contained in the different registries were not made to be consulted either by federal authorities or the citizenry.¹⁰⁹

Interestingly, then, it is not a lack of regulation or absence of authority that breeds the insecurity that the REPUVE aims to respond to. Rather, it is the multiplicity of regulations, registries, and authorities governing automobility that diminishes the “legal certainty” of vehicles.

The concept of legal certainty occupies a central place in the SESNSP’s white paper. “National security is strengthened,” the document explains, “by providing public and legal certainty to the acts involving automobiles, since in consolidating and publicizing a reliable and effective vehicular registry, anonymity is suppressed and the commission of criminal acts is inhibited.”¹¹⁰ Further, “the REPUVE was imagined as an answer to the government’s pressing need of providing legal certainty to the presence, situation, and existence of all the vehicles moving in Mexican territory. Such certainty strengthens national public security directly, since to the extent that the behavior of the automotive registry is fully known, it will be possible to control and diminish the incidence of crimes committed against a vehicle or with a vehicle.”¹¹¹ Thus, “although the REPUVE is not directly charged to combat car thefts or related offenses, in offering certainty and making transparent

the legal situation of automobiles, it is clear that it inhibits criminal activity and deters the commission of illicit acts.”¹¹²

The SESNSP’s description of legal certainty resonates with key ideas introduced in the last chapter. In noting that as a consequence of “the increase in the number of vehicles, the number of activities in which they were involved grew, exceeding the capacity of the government to offer certainty to citizens regarding the identification and the legal circumstances of every automotive unit,” the SESNSP speaks to how the increasing materiality of mobility in Mexico is reducing the state’s ability to govern. And in explaining that the existing “registries were developed by multiple legislatures” and “are not similar in the type of data they contain,” the SESNSP attests to the problem of redundancy and heterogeneity of state agencies dedicated to the administration of collective agencies such as automobility. The consequence of increasing material agency and redundant state agencies is an “uncertainty” about the things through which collective agency happens.

To ensure the legal certainty of automobiles, the law arms the REPUVE with two types of advanced information technologies: (1) a database integrating the data of every vehicle in the country, and (2) radio-frequency identification (RFID) tags that adhere to vehicles to transmit their identifying data as they circulate. The SESNSP describes the database as “the prime material of the REPUVE.” It is “a multi-dimensional solution of variables and values that stores in an ordered manner and in a grand electronic archive the data on vehicles moving through national territory.”¹¹³ The information in the database includes “vehicle identification number,” “the essential characteristics of the vehicle,” “the name and home address of the property owner,” and “information provided by federal authorities and federal states in accordance with this law,”¹¹⁴ which includes “the inscription/registration number assigned by the SESNSP.”¹¹⁵

Data are provided to the database from three distinct types of entities with reporting obligations to the REPUVE: *autoridades federales* (federal authorities), including agencies such as the Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit, which manages customs in Mexico, and the Secretariat of Communications and Transportation, which is charged with the administration of federal highways; *entidades federativas* (federative entities), the state-level authorities such as departments of motor vehicles and justice departments that manage vehicle registries in their jurisdictions; and *sujetos obligados* (obligated subjects or liable parties), the private-sector businesses dealing with automobiles, such as

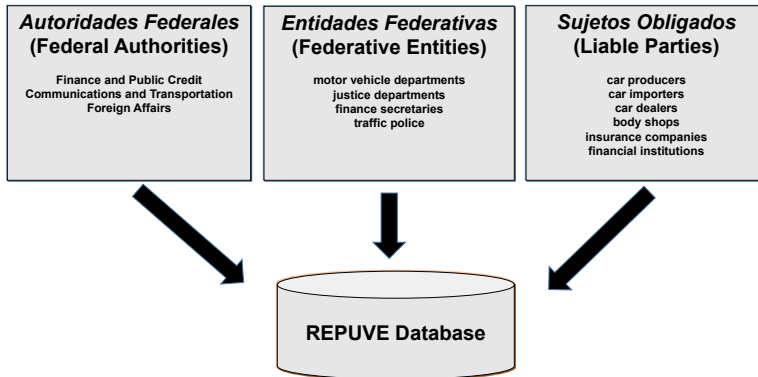


FIGURE 20. Conceptual design of the REPUVE database.

manufacturers, importers, financing agencies, and insurance companies (fig. 20).

The SESNSP, as the authority in charge of the registry, oversees a General Directorate of the Public Registry of Vehicles consisting of four subdirectorates, each responsible for a different area of the program. The State and Federal Operations Implementation Directorate, for instance, is charged with supervising the program's adoption by the *entidades federativas* and *autoridades federales*. The Relations with Obligated Subjects Directorate, meanwhile, ensures compliance with the REPUVE law via the *sujetos obligados*. The Procedures and Citizenry Directorate is responsible for managing the public's contact with the program. And the Oversight and Verification Directorate is responsible for technical aspects of vehicle inspections (fig. 21).

As the organizational structure of the REPUVE indicates, the SESNSP does not simply administer the flow of data into and out of the registry's database; it also ensures compliance with the REPUVE law. Thus, the law empowers the SESNSP to conduct "ordinary and special verification visits to the *sujetos obligados*, who must permit access and provide information that the personnel require for the fulfillment of their work."¹¹⁶ *Sujetos obligados*, further, are subject to fines for any of the following infractions: "enrolling a vehicle in the registry after the deadlines established in these procedures"; "not enrolling a vehicle in the registry"; "not presenting reports referred to in the law"; "making unauthorized use of the proofs of registration, documents, and other means of identification related to the registration of vehicles," "altering, omitting, copying, or permitting illicit registrations or notices, regis-

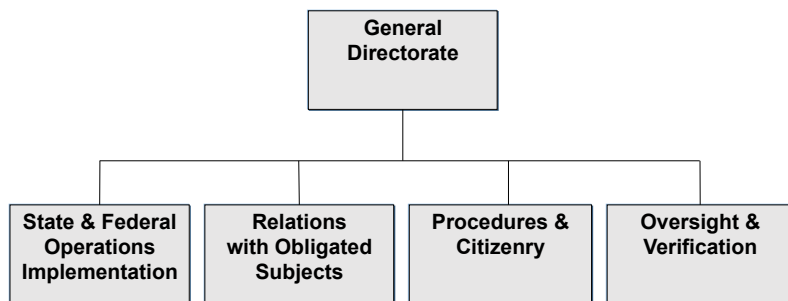


FIGURE 21. Organizational structure of the REPUVE.

tering false data, providing false information or information to unauthorized users or third parties, providing information from the Registry without authorization, or not reporting irregularities as required”; and “making use of the information, documents, or receipts of the Registry for profit, whether directly or via a third party.”¹¹⁷

While the REPUVE law places the SESNSP in charge of administering and enforcing the rules of the registry, the database itself, “in treating a topic of national security,” is stored in the Plataforma México system that operates out of the federal police bunker (see chapter 1). Information entered into the registry by law remains there permanently, even if the car exits the country, is destroyed, or cancels its registration at the local level.¹¹⁸

Access to the database, meanwhile, is broad, which is in line with the government’s conception of “legal certainty.” As the SESNSP notes, “The information in the REPUVE database acquires its true value when it is consulted and utilized.”¹¹⁹ To this end, the REPUVE law dictates that the “*autoridades federales* and *entidades federativas* that provide information from their registries to the [REPUVE] registry will have access to the information contained in it.” In addition, “any citizen or public entity can inform themselves, without charge, of the legal situation of a vehicle in Mexican territory,” although the registry is prohibited from providing personal data, except if one is the owner of the vehicle in question or has been authorized to access such information.¹²⁰ The REPUVE provides access to its database through three separate mechanisms: a call center; email consultations; and a webpage, where individuals can access information about a particular vehicle by entering its plate number, vehicle identification number, or registration number.¹²¹ Once accessed, the registry provides the following information: “make, model, year, vehicle class, type, registration number, plates,

number of doors, country of origin, engine displacement, number of cylinders, number of axles, and legal status of vehicle.”¹²²

These data are detailed but not personal. Thus, a person consulting the REPUVE database can know whether the vehicle she has purchased or is interested in acquiring has been stolen or altered. In other words, the inquiring party would have “legal certainty” that the vehicle is a genuine and lawful object.

The dataset, however, is only the first technical component by which the REPUVE aims to increase the legal certainty of automobility in Mexico. The more exotic element is proof of registration (*constancia de inscripción*), referred to among REPUVE administrators as *el chip*. *Los chips* are actually RFID tags or stickers 4.13 inches wide by 2.76 inches high (fig. 7), adhered to vehicles once they have been entered into the registry. At the center of each sticker lies an integrated circuit or microchip, based on ISO/IEC 18000-6C RFID standards, which can store 800 bits of information and transmit that data via radio frequency. The RFID tags, chosen by the SESNSP after technical consultations with the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), the National Polytechnic Institute, and the Institute of Technology and Higher Education of Monterrey, and produced by the Neology corporation, are passive, which means they transmit data only upon being activated by a RFID reader. In addition to data transmission via RFID, each tag possesses other security elements: a holographic texture in order to prevent its falsification, a miniform number and barcode in its lower portion, microtext containing its batch number and the inscription “Registro Público Vehicular México,” and an imprint of the national coat of arms in invisible ink. In addition, a tag becomes inoperable when detached from the windshield, making its transfer impossible.¹²³ Each chip has a life span of ten years, “during which its physical characteristics remain the same without affecting its functioning. In addition, it is able to withstand different climates and continuous exposure to ultraviolet rays.”¹²⁴

The RFID tags arrive from the Neology corporation attached to a piece of paper, or “miniform,” and vehicle data are inscribed on them through proprietary software.¹²⁵ The only information entered onto a tag is the vehicle’s VIN. “The stickers are not applied by the General Directorship of the Public Registry of Vehicles, but are distributed among the *dependencias federales*, *entidades federativas*, and *sujetos obligados*, who apply them.”¹²⁶ *Sujetos obligados* who produce or import vehicles simply record the VIN onto the chips, which they adhere to vehicles, and then record the link between the VIN, chip number, and originating

miniform number in the database. Laser printers then print out the mini-forms and tags.¹²⁷ In the case of cars already circulating in Mexico, the RFID tags are applied by *autoridades federales* or *entidades federativas*. In such cases, a “physical inspection of the vehicle as well as its documents” must first be conducted. A tag is only printed and applied “when trained inspectors corroborate that the data of the vehicle correspond with that in the documents, and no other illicit modifications have been made” to the vehicle.¹²⁸ Once a tag is printed and applied, “the last phase of the process is to verify the correct functioning of the RFID.” To do this, the vehicle is passed under “a fixed radio-frequency reading portal,” whose radio signal determines whether the data on the RFID sticker can be read.¹²⁹ When the data are verified, the enrollment process is complete.

The laws and documents describing the Public Registry of Vehicles, like the *verificación vehicular* and Hoy No Circula programs and the Ciudad Juárez vehicle rulebook before them, provide insight into the governmental rationality informing the state’s effort to overcome the legal uncertainty of the automobile in contemporary Mexico. The basic logic of registration, inspection, and regulation remains. But the changes to these operations under the REPUVE illuminate how governmental power shifts through the adoption of advanced information and surveillance technologies.

Beginning with registration, the REPUVE does not seek to merely create a registry of car-driver couplings, as the first disciplinary regime of automobile governance sought, or a registry of vehicle emissions, as the risk-management model did, or a registry of any particular aspect of automobility. Instead, it endeavors to create a registry of registries, to merge the different records kept by *entidades federativas*, *autoridades federales*, and *sujetos obligados* into a single database that the SESNSP manages and that is stored on Plataforma México.¹³⁰ This “registry of registries” mirrors a central trend noted by surveillance scholars toward the “convergence and integration of different surveillance systems.”^{131,f} However, in pushing for the systematic integration of data from the *entidades federativas* and *autoridades federales*, the federal government demonstrates not only an interest in data merging but also a lack of trust in the administrative capacities of the state agencies entrusted

f. In Kevin Haggerty and Richard Ericson’s “surveillant assemblage,” surveillance today is being “driven by the desire to bring systems together, to combine practices and technologies and integrate them into a larger whole” (Haggerty and Ericson, “Surveillant Assemblage,” 610).

with the management of automobility. In essence, the state agencies that were “co-produced”¹³² with automobility in order to govern it are now seen as obstacles to automobility’s governance. And by creating a mechanism for the systematic review and integration of their data, the REPUVE provides the federal government a way to “police the police” or “govern the governors.”

Turning to inspection, the REPUVE preserves the practice of systematically examining automobiles. But what is examined has changed. The proper conduct of the machine is not what is judged to ensure the safety of the driver and others. The gaseous emissions of the machine are not what are diagnosed to preserve the natural environment. Rather, the body of the vehicle is inspected to certify its identity. To guarantee vehicle identity, the REPUVE inspection requires technicians to locate three instances of corresponding VINs. This use of the vehicle body to verify identity is a key theme in surveillance studies.^g Biometric technologies attest to this trend, for example fingerprint and palmprint scans, facial recognition, iris scans, and gene mapping. Of course, in the case of the REPUVE, the body that interests the state is not human, but machine; and the markings it attempts to document are not those left by nature or biology, but by industrial manufacturers in accordance with international standards for identifying vehicles.

The regulation of automobility is also altered under the REPUVE. Previously, state agencies were created or charged with watching over the conduct of vehicles or their circulation during times of prohibition. Now, RFID tags and readers and license plate recognition technology are deployed to verify both the identity of vehicles (by matching the information stored on RFID tags to license plates and records stored in the REPUVE database) and their location (by noting the place of the RFID and license plate recognition readers). The state here displays an interest in the “presence” of vehicles.¹³³ This concern with tracking movement resonates with the work of surveillance scholars too, who have identified a trend toward “enforced locatability” in the electronic monitoring of “dangerous persons” such as criminal offenders through RFID and GPS technologies that “produce a sense of human proximity without the element of physical presence.”¹³⁴

g. “In a world of identity politics and risk management,” notes David Lyon, “surveillance is turning decisively to the body as a ‘document’ for identification, and as a source of data for prediction” (Lyon, *Surveillance Society*, 72.)

This “enforced locatability” is present in the REPUVE, but its technological composition alters the operation. On the one hand, since RFID tags are affixed directly to vehicles, this regulation is not “participant dependent,”¹³⁵ requiring the active participation of people enrolled in the program. Indeed, once applied, *el chip* automatically communicates its information whenever it passes a corresponding reader, absolving the individual driver of any obligation to check in with authorities and denying her of any knowledge that she has been checked in with authorities. On the other hand, in recording the “presence” of vehicles automatically, the RFID tags and readers, license plate recognition technology, and digital databases of the REPUVE eliminate the need for police officers to regulate automobility. The surveillance technologies of the REPUVE in this sense “displace”¹³⁶ the human agents of the state who have historically been responsible for supervising automobility. Through these mechanisms, the regulation of automobility becomes more automated.

In sum, the structure of power at work in the Public Registry of Vehicles remains the same as in previous regimes of automobile governmentality. The automobile continues to be governed by a process of registration, inspection, and regulation. But the introduction of surveillance technologies alters the operation of the process (fig. 22). And these alterations, in turn, reveal much about the evolution of state power in contemporary Mexico.

3.4 PROHESION: THE WAY TO MAKE THINGS STICK

Various terms have been used to describe the increasing presence and impact of surveillance technologies on contemporary society. Roger Clarke in the late 1980s developed the term “dataveillance” to describe how surveillance had moved from a physical monitoring of individuals to “the systematic use of personal data systems in the investigation or monitoring of the actions or communications of one or more persons.”¹³⁷ Mark Poster, also early in the information-technology revolution, modified Foucault’s concept of the “panopticon”¹³⁸ to fit the digital present, coining “superpanopticon” to describe how “circuits of communication” and the “databases they generate” constitute “a system of surveillance without walls, windows, towers or guards.”¹³⁹ Gary T. Marx, who has studied surveillance for decades, uses the term “new surveillance” to distinguish how monitoring is now done “through the use of technical means to extract or create personal or group data,

HISTORICAL ERA	REGISTRATION	INSPECTION	REGULATION
Governing Road Safety (1910s-present)	Vehicles and Persons	Capability of Drivers & Operability of Vehicles	Compliance with Traffic Rules
Governing Pollution "Risk" (1980s-present)	Vehicles and their Emissions	Essence of Vehicles	Abstinence
Governing Legal Certainty (2010s-present)	Vehicles and their Registries	Materiality of Vehicles & Integrity of Records	Localization

FIGURE 22. Governing automobility in Mexico.

whether from individuals or contexts.”¹⁴⁰ Kevin Haggerty and Richard Ericson modify the Deleuzian concept of “assemblage” to name the “surveillant assemblage,” which “operates by abstracting human bodies from their territorial settings, and separating them into a series of discrete flows [that] . . . are then reassembled in different locations as discrete and virtual ‘data doubles.’”¹⁴¹ David Lyon uses the term “surveillance society” to highlight the ubiquity of surveillance technologies in everyday life and to stress, contrary to dystopian trends in other works on surveillance, that “surveillance—watching over—both enables and constrains, involves care and control.”¹⁴²

The governmental rationality on display in the REPUVE shares many points of connection with these ideas. The registry monitors automobility by processing data rather than watching over their circulation. This monitoring occurs without the policing agents that defined previous modes of surveillance—it is accomplished instead through technical means that record the identity and location of vehicles at a particular time and place and transmit the data to another. And it is designed to provide both care and control, as ordinary Mexicans can access the information in order to have greater confidence in buying and selling vehicles, and the security forces can use the same information to track stolen vehicles. In this sense, the REPUVE embodies “dataveillance,” the “superpanopticon,” “new surveillance,” “surveillant assemblage,” or “the surveillance society.”

At the same time, it is difficult to apply these concepts wholesale to Mexico. For one, the concepts are often cast widely, broadly describing

the applications, significance, and consequences of surveillance technologies on society, including not only how relations between governors and the governed change but also how intimacy, family, and recreation are affected. The REPUVE, however, responds to a particular problem of governance—the uncertainty of automobility—that cannot be assumed to have a significance beyond the state.

Nevertheless, these concepts do speak to a changing relationship between the state and citizens, whereby the former utilizes surveillance technologies to keep the latter under regular monitoring. But in the REPUVE, the particular problem that the state is grappling with does not concern human subjects, but the state and the automobile. There are too many databases consisting of too many assorted formats unable to communicate with one another, and there are too many vehicles involving too many diverse legal acts for the government to keep track of. What concerns the state here is not human subjectivity, but the state agencies and material agency that underlie the exercise of automobility in society.

To respond to these challenges, the REPUVE endeavors not to track individual subjects or even human populations, but to integrate the disparate databases tracking automobility in Mexico and to attach RFID tags to vehicles to establish their “presence.” This is a double operation, involving processes distinct from those usually associated with surveillance. And it thus invites conceptual work that might capture its novelty.

In searching for the words to describe the operations of power in the REPUVE, the image of “sticking” keeps coming to mind. It is an image inspired by the RFID tags used in the program. With these tags, the state adheres itself through its technological delegates to the material substance of automobility. And in doing this, the state aims to make automobility more adherent to the law. Thus, adhesion is a dominant theme. The image of sticking also applies to integrating the databases of the *entidades federativas*, *autoridades federales* and *sujetos obligados*. That is, the state is interested in having its different agencies become more consistent and unified, or cohesive. Cohesion, then, is another theme. Adhesion and cohesion. The root in both words is the same, *haerere*, a Latin verb that means “to stick.”¹⁴³ And it provides a simple way to imagine the double operation of power present in the REPUVE. To control automobility, the state attempts to make the state agencies and private actors governing automobility more cohesive with one another and to make the materiality of automobility more adhesive to the infrastructure of the state.

These reflections suggest that collective agency in society more generally possesses a *hesion*, or viscosity, that can be made either more or less amenable to governance independent of individual subjectivity. The amenability of automobility to governance, for instance, can be manipulated through the automobile itself—by maintaining records of a vehicle (manufacture, sale, registration) that create its history, by placing markings on it such as vehicle identification numbers or license plates that identify it to authorities, by attaching an external surveillance technology such as an RFID tag that allows it to be tracked by authorities, or by designing it with certain features such as black boxes that allow it to be tracked in time and place. Or it can be influenced through the material environment through which it circulates—by installing obstacles such as toll booths, by altering the surfaces of roadways with rumble strips, or by modifying the number of traffic lanes. Or it can be affected through the organization of state agencies that police it—by changing the arrangement of authority both within departments (chains of command) and between them (organizational structure), by revising the composition of departments through staffing choices, by keeping records on vehicles, and so forth. The REPUVE, then, can be understood as an effort to increase the hesion of automobility in Mexico by using surveillance technologies to alter the composition of automobiles (by attaching RFID stickers on them), their physical environment (by installing RFID scanners on roadways), and their policing (by integrating registries).

Speaking of the state's adoption of surveillance technologies in terms of hesion rather than surveillance enables us to imagine governance outside the purely human drama of governors and the governed. As a quality inherent to collective agency, hesion directs our attention to the other elements besides humans that enable activity in society. This is not to say that people are not involved. Politicians pass the legislation that establishes the rules governing collective agency, and citizens or individuals are responsible for ensuring compliance with the law. But the concept pushes us to imagine dynamics of social control outside human subjects and inside the material artifacts and state infrastructures through which collective agency happens.

Introducing *hesion* to describe the Mexican government's novel program to govern the uncertainty of automobility in Mexico is not to suggest that the phenomenon is new. State authorities since the founding of Mexico have sought to make agency more tractable by manipulating its conditions. In the case of mobility, this was done during colonial times by erecting *presidios*, or forts, near roadways to secure

commercial transports from Chichimeca and bandit raids. In the case of communications, the material culture of the indigenous peoples of Mexico was destroyed and schools were established so that the symbolic basis of Spanish culture would take root in the conquered region. In the case of identification, differences in the physical appearance of peoples inhabiting colonial Mexico were transferred into *pinturas de casta* that instructed viewers on the racial hierarchies being imposed on society.

So the state's practice of manipulating the hesion of collective agencies in Mexico is not new. But at the same time, the REPUVE, as well as the other efforts of the Mexican government to enroll surveillance technologies to fight crime, does reveal a certain postmodern condition, or post-postmodern condition, which makes *prohesion*, which I define as governmental efforts to increase the *hesion* of collective agencies, especially significant. First, the materiality of collective agency today is increasing and/or changing. In the context of economic liberalization and global production, the number of cars, mobile phones, computers, and so forth in Mexico today is increasing. As a result, the vibrancy of mobility and communications is enhanced and becomes more difficult to govern.

Second, the existing infrastructure of the state has become less capable of governing agency. The pace of change in mobility, communications, and identification has left behind the state organizations that were "co-produced" over the course of modernity to govern collective agencies. The neoliberal policies of the Mexican government were intended to diminish the state's oversight of automobility. The Salinas administration terminated the Federal Registry of Vehicles in 1990, and the Zedillo administration entrusted the RENAVE to a private firm. And corruption remains a pervasive problem for the state in Mexico, which reduces its capacity to enforce the law.

Third, the alternatives available to the Mexican state to address the insecurities of collective agency are limited by the course of history. If, before, the state could control the number of automobiles in Mexico through restrictions on production, importation, and pricing and the use of telephone communications through the monopolization of telephone services, its embrace of neoliberal political economy emphasizing free trade, smaller government, and international standards of democratic governance restricts its ability to manage society as it had done in the past.

Fourth, surveillance technologies provide state authorities with novel tools that allow it to reimagine the art of governing in a way unparalleled

perhaps since the dawn of statistics.¹⁴⁴ If, prior, the ordering and control of society was accomplished through shaping human subjectivity through disciplinary techniques¹⁴⁵ or manipulating populations through control tactics,¹⁴⁶ computer systems, RFID, GPS, and biometric technologies now allow states to govern collective agencies without having to engage unreliable human subjects or depend solely on corruptible human agents. The materiality of collective life can be directly engaged instead. Thus, while *hesion* is not new, the challenges of governance that have accrued over Mexico's recent past and the technological tools laid before state authorities today make *prohesion* a more fitting form of governmentality than discipline.

It is not surprising, then, that when the Mexican government has had to grapple with the challenges of mobile telephony and identification in its War on Crime, it has developed programs—the National Registry of Mobile Telephone Users (RENAUT) and the Citizen Identity Card (CEDI)—that also feature prohesive strategies. As verbal communication has migrated from telephone wires to radio waves, the state has struggled to get a handle on communications, especially in cases involving kidnappings. In response, the RENAUT creates a governmental database of cell phone lines and their subscribers and requires cell service providers to create their own databases storing subscribers' names, addresses, fingerprints, and photographs and to provide geolocalization of individual calls,¹⁴⁷ all of which exhibits a push for the *cohesion* of records and data-processing procedures involving mobile telephony. The RENAUT also mandates cell users to register their phones with the registry by sending a text message with their name and date of birth, or Unique Population Registry Code (CURP),¹⁴⁸ a move akin to *adhering* state RFID stickers on automobiles. Thus, an activated phone, like a passing car, can be identified and localized immediately. The CEDI provides a single form of identification to replace the innumerable forms (birth certificate, driver's license, voting card, advanced electronic signature for tax payments, military service card, etc.) that Mexicans otherwise contend with, a *cohesive* idea. And the CEDI bases personal identification on biometrics such as photographs and iris scans that are embedded into a government-issued card,¹⁴⁹ which evokes having the body *adhered* to the state's governmental infrastructure.

In the REPUVE, RENAUT, and CEDI, then, one witnesses the emergence of a distinct mode of governmentality for the control of collective agency. Whether the brave generals, inspectors, and police officers depicted in *El automóvil gris* ever approximated their historical

counterparts and inspired their successors, the emergence of *prohesion* speaks to their place in history. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, insecurity would not be overcome by having men of the law bring bandits before firing squads, but by deputizing advanced information and surveillance technologies to make the things of mobility, communication, and identification stick.