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The Narco-Machine and the Work of Violence: Notes Toward its Decodification

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When Leonardo da Vinci gives instructions for a battle painting he insists that artists have the courage and the imagination to show war in all its ghastliness.

—Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*

When in the middle of 2010, I received the invitation from the editors of *e-misférica* to be an invited editor for an issue on narco-trafficking and violence, I thought for several days about what direction to take, what framework to employ, and especially how to frame an approach to a phenomenon that has such power to disarticulate, that is so abysmal, and yet at the same time so quotidian. During those days, it became more than evident in Mexico that the violence and the brutal executions had risen to another level (I am referring to the massacres of young people in Ciudad Juárez, Tepic, Tijuana, and Mexico City, and especially to the “narco-fosas,” or mass graves of migrants assassinated by narcos).

As I thought about the issue, a powerful phrase by Michael Löwy that I had read a couple of years earlier kept returning to my thoughts: “the device does not exist there to execute a man,

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but rather, the man is there precisely because of the device, to provide a body upon which it can pen its aesthetic masterpiece, its illustrated and bloody book, full of details and adornments. The officer himself is nothing more than a servant of the machine” (41). This was the key that allowed me to elaborate the idea of the narco-machine as the backbone of this issue of the journal, and, indeed, of the approach that I develop here. Following Löwy, we can say that in terms of the violence linked to narco-trafficking, the machine precedes its servants.



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What I am interested in discussing, then, is what I call the “work of violence,” borrowing from Hannah Arendt’s elaborations on Nazi extermination camps in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1987), in which the author advances an argument that is fundamental to understanding this horror. I also draw from Primo Levi’s chilling observations as an Auschwitz survivor in *The Drowned and The Saved* (2002), in relation to the production of sacrificial bodies which presuppose a fine-tuned and systematic dissolution of the person, a gradual but brutal reduction to an inhuman condition that authorizes the most extreme exercises of submission, torture and control over the body of the other.

The work of violence linked to the narco-machine is similar to the one described by Levi in Nazi camps in two respects, the profundity (and perversity) of which make them difficult to apprehend. Yet there is also an element that differentiates them that is crucial to gauging the narco-machine’s power.

The first similarity is that the dismembered bodies that *el narco* (in the singular,

as it is said in Mexico) leaves strewn about each day across the national geography lose their singularity, much like the prisoners in the extermination camps. It is no longer a case of Maria, Pedro, or Juan, but rather of anonymous bodies that are then layered by an ontological dimension in three senses: they are converted into units of common sense (broken bodies, disarticulated bodies); they are transformed into universals (those executed by narcos, war casualties, collateral damage); they are bodies transformed—by the work of violence—into abstract entities (“*encajuelados*,” “*decapitados*,” “*encojibados*”).¹ The dissolution of the person is the narco-machine’s first victory.

To situate the second similarity, I refer to Adriana Cavarero’s extraordinary book, *Horrorism*, where, in a discussion of the problem of defenselessness, Cavarero states: “the dead, massacred body is only a residue of the torture scene” (60). Similarly, and just as in the extermination camps, the mass graves later discovered, the bodies massacred by narco-violence (in Mexico) operate as “degenerate” *signs* (Eco 1992) of the machine and its work. The bodies are remainders of a previous scene that we no longer have access to, as Cavarero astutely points out. They are specifically *signs* of a prior power that we cannot access through immediate experience. On this level, I find Charles Peirce’s theory on the “instructive” role of the sign particularly useful; I will attempt to develop the concept later in this essay by way of the notion of *expressive violence*, with which I have been working for several years.²

The third correlation, in this case a contrast, lies in the position and location of power. While Nazi power erects facilities to house its work of violence and locates its servants in clearly locatable coordinates, the narco de-localizes itself. Its power appeals precisely to the densest dimension of the machine’s logic: its placeless ubiquity, which enables it to act in a silent but efficacious manner. Its presence is phantasmagoric. The narco-machine is a phantom. Its domination derives from occupying a de-localized space that is impossible to symbolize (in the Freudian sense), appealing to and awaking the deepest fissures between what we consider real and our displaced fears. The impossibility to symbolize performs its work in the imaginary, occluding any possibility of signification. The narco-machine is ubiquitous, elusive, phantasmagoric, and it persists, despite the occasional appearance and momentary subjugation of its servants.

So, a first approximation to the machine allows us to isolate—for analysis—three levels: the dissolution of the person (transmuted into a dismembered body), the broken body that acts as a sign of a previous scene and power, and its phantasmagoric presence.

Fissures

At this juncture in what is known in Mexico as “the war on narco,”³ any serious attempt to document the precise number of dead that accumulate daily as

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testimony to the horror is impossible. Forty thousand? Fifty thousand? Sixty-two thousand? As a banner in one of the latest marches against violence in Mexico put it: “Is it the number of dead, which one can no longer even count because bodies are strewn on impossible roads, that gives this violence its most important dimension?” Surely numbers are crucial here—those we can muster beyond official figures, those that sometimes come from the mouths of civil servants who are caught off guard, those that somehow make it into the so-called *ejecutómetro* (execution-meter).⁴ But the number that is sought, as a desperate gesture to generate a minimum level of intelligibility, does not capture what is essential—the work performed by the violence of the machine.

The epistemological chill produced by the horror of bodies that accumulate as evidence of an unsuccessful policy—Felipe Calderón’s policy—which failed to establish itself as such, derives from the incapacity of a way of thinking that attempts to think through the *violencias* to situate itself at the interface of what is singular and universal (in the ontological sense) about these bodies, which one by one populate the map of a geography that has collapsed under the weight of terror disseminated (from Cherán to Ciudad Mier; from Culiacán to Ciudad Juárez; from Monterrey to Guadalajara). We count the dead, but the gesture is useless because we are unable to restore the humanity lost and unable to mend the rupture that the machine leaves in its wake. Violence is unidirectional; there is no reciprocal violence in the face of the machine’s phantasmagoric nature.



Mariana Hernández León

Between September and October 2011, after the horrors of the so-called “narco-graves” (Turati 2011) and the shock of the bodies dumped on a street in Veracruz, came the horror of the tortured corpses of two youths that were hung from a bridge in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas (the woman strung up like cattle, the man hung from the arms); two weeks later, the “appearance” of the dismembered body of a journalist with her head mounted on a flower pot accompanied, in a macabre performance, by a keyboard, a mouse, a set of headphones, and speakers. These last two cases carried the explicit warning that this is what happens to those using social

networks and the Internet to spread news or information that compromises the activities of organized crime.

In the face of these *violencias*, language fails, exhausting itself in its attempt to produce an explanation or a reason. The *violencias* in the country produce the collapse of our interpretive frameworks, yet, at the same time, these broken, vulnerable, violated, viciously mutilated bodies are converted into a clear message: keep quiet and submit. Silence and control emanating from total violence advance across the Mexican territory without any contention whatsoever.

The machine specializes in the production of fissures, both those that separate the layers of the same wound (bodies of narco-retailers, assistants, look-outs, associates who are now punished), and those that separate superimposed wounds (bodies of innocent civilians, the “collateral damage” that feeds the voracity of the machine).

In August of 2011, at the Casino Royale in the city of Monterrey, a squadron of hit men set fire to the facilities, killing over 50 people and unleashing endless questions and fears in what was once, before the arrival of the machine, Mexico’s most prosperous city.⁵ It has and continues to be impossible to generate a minimally intelligible framework to make sense of the event—a fissure of the narco-machine.

In October 2011, it was reported that at least 35 bodies “appeared” on a street in Boca del Rio, Veracruz. Stacked and bearing signs of torture, these bodies of Veracruz reactivated the discussion over the efficacy of the narco-machine and the defenselessness of the citizenry. The images are brutal, but in an attempt to resist the vertigo of the lurid, I want to invoke the “geological” layers that the fissure makes visible.

The image is clear and not because of that, vivid. On a road, a street, a roundabout, a “group” of bodies reveal the horror, as much spread out as crowded together, inside a funeral van, like in a traveling extermination camp. The machine’s power authorizes itself to take things to another level, to unload its shocking payload on the road without resorting to any other message. The act of delivery is formally aphasic but, symbolically, total.

Expressive *Violencias*

When I started to study violence (in the singular), it appeared to me that the singular form of the word subsumed into the same analytical space a group of violent forms whose variability, modes of operation, and consequences did not fit into a single or singular expression. I started to use the notion of *violencias* (in the plural), which drove me to elaborate a typology that, while not exhaustive of the entire specter of possible violence, does allow me to advance in my understanding of its multidimensionality. I am not going to elaborate the scheme I proposed in this regard here, but will simply enumerate the four forms of violence I

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have isolated for analytical purposes:

- a) Structural: *violencias* linked to the consequences and effects of systems (economic, political, cultural), which operate on bodies that are considered “surplus,” mainly the poor and socially marginalized.
- b) Historic: violence that affects groups considered “anomalous,” savage, or inferior (women, indigenous people, blacks), and that grounds itself in a kind of longstanding justification.
- c) Disciplining: that which seeks to name the forms of violence exercised to bring others into submission by exemplary punishment (I am thinking of the assassinations of women in Ciudad Juárez or of the selective murder of street children in Brazil).
- d) Diffuse: That violence which is “gaseous,” whose origin is impossible to attribute to anything other than phantasmagoric entities (narcos, terrorism), and which is almost impossible to prevent because it does not follow an intelligible pattern.

These forms of violence tend to present themselves in combined forms, but in my search for a more nuanced understanding, it has been useful to keep the analysis tied to their different logics, origins, and forms of operation.

The narco-machine takes from these four forms of violence and combines them in interchangeable ways, as if it were a Lego set, splicing sociopolitical and cultural pieces to produce differentiated effects. The machine, however, resorts mainly to its disciplinary and diffuse forms. Its brutal calligraphy inscribes itself in the production of control and submission, as it hides behind its inapprehensible nature. As I pointed out above, the bodies disciplined by the work of violence act as *indexes* of its power.

Yet I consider these four elements and their combinations to be insufficient for an adequate approximation to the machine’s violence. Because of this, I propose another distinction, one that detaches itself from the four previous forms: utilitarian violence and expressive violence.⁶

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Tania González Suro

Although they are not antagonistic or mutually exclusive forms, my ongoing research strongly suggests that the narco-machine has been increasing its expressive dimension. By this I mean the exercise of those *violencias* whose sense appears to be centered on the exhibition of total and unquestionable power, using the most brutal and at the same time most sophisticated forms of violence against a body that has already been stripped of its humanity (decapitated bodies, bodies strung from bridges, dismembered bodies strewn on the street). This expressive action tends to displace utilitarian violence, whose aims are readable and can be apprehended by experience (I kill you to rob you, I annihilate you because your presence hinders my plans, etc.) The death of the other is sufficient.

Expressive violence is without a doubt preceded by a complex system of pursuit of “profit,” but this remains concealed, encrypted, hidden as residual elements in the “message” that is delivered by way of the thousands and thousands of mutilated bodies accumulated in the so-called “war on the narco.” In a radical way, and citing Sontag, these messages encrypted in the space of a finite and forever-broken body may be read as *memento mori* (“remember you will die”); you will die three times: when you are tortured (the torture that precedes death is almost always unimaginable), when you die, and when your death is converted into data reported in the media (for example, “five heads were found in front of the Attorney General’s office”). The signifying chain of expressive *violencias* could not be more eloquent. In its passage through these three arenas, total death becomes pure expression—objectives no longer matter here and the pursuit of profit becomes secondary. What is relevant is the exhibition of the

narco-machine as an infinite and inevitable repertoire.

The power of expressive *violencias* lies in this infinity and inevitability, the bodies are at the service of the machine as are its servants, as Löwy correctly points out.

To Serve the Machine: Language

When I wrote the first notes for this essay, I considered that a pertinent title could be “*Narcoñol: Language as a Device of the Narco-machine.*” The complexity and multiple dimensions of the phenomenon led me to consider that *Narcoñol*, as I would call the speech that is derived from narcos, is more of an appendix of the narco-machine rather than its epicenter.



Mariana Hernández León

I reached this formulation working through the writing—again—of Primo Levi. In reading and studying his books on extermination camps and his experience as a survivor in depth, it occurred to me that the speech of the concentration camp was key (of the *lager*, as he calls it). Speech configured (and arranged) the experience of violence. The figure of “the Muslim,” for example, alludes to those men who had already submitted themselves, “puppets, squalid,” who had already given in to their tragic destiny and were on the way to their own human dissolution (Levi 2002). The “Muslim”—guard, witness, survivor, and accomplice even in his own tragedy—is the most terrible product of the work of violence and the appearance of an intermediate language that, stammering and using available categories, tries to name abjection, indignity, and pain. (The figure of a “Muslim” in a Nazi concentration camp, as the focus of the reflective space of abjection, is a topic that I will not explore here, but it surely merits in-depth analysis.)

I am especially interested in Levi’s suggestion that that language, “his language,” does not offer the necessary words to name “the destruction of man” (39).

According to this hypothesis, I think the emergence of a “*Narcoñol*” that is ever more robust and sophisticated is self-explanatory. When violence advances as *lingua franca* (Segato

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2004) it requires finding words, terms, modes, and metaphors to speak of itself (with the collaboration of the media). Narcoñol is, then, an exercise that claims to produce a certain intelligibility about the logistics, modes, strategies, values, figures, and, especially, impacts of the narco-machine.

This is not the place to attempt to analyze a genealogy of the speech linked to the narcos. Nevertheless, it is possible to isolate some semantic fields that allow us to calibrate its impact on language, assuming that this is key to the production of the social. To continue, I will use the symbol popularized by Twitter and the so-called “hashtag” that is prefixed by the #, which serve, in collective conversation, both to reflect on the impact of a topic as well as to guide and focus our discussion.

The semantic fields I want to discuss are the following three:

#brokenbodies

With this “tag” I allude to the forms in which Mexican Spanish (but I am also thinking of Colombian parlance) has named the corpses of those assassinated or killed in the violent spirals of the narco-machine.

Ejecutados (or the “executed,” a generic name for all the dead by and because of the narco-machine); *ahorcados* (or the “strangled,” a mode of execution, alludes to a specific but ambiguous end), *colgados* (or the “hanged,” a mode of execution, most common in the North); *decapitados* (or the “decapitated,” a modality, phantasmagoric name for incomplete bodies); *encajuelados* ((corpse)cordkcorpse that “appear” in the trunks of abandoned cars); *deslenguados* (bodies stripped of their ability to speak); *encojibados* (bodies that are “delivered”—paradoxically—in blankets that should serve as protection);⁷ *entambados* (bodies that “appear” or do not appear because they have been dissolved in acid); *embolsados* (bodies that are “delivered” in black trash bags); *las hieleras* (heads that are “delivered” in coolers).

And so the inventory of words that today serve to name the complex and chilling exercise of the narco-machine over bodies could continue.

#practicesandculture

No doubt one of the oldest and most important “contributions” of the machine in its tense dialogue with society is the use of the prefix “narco” to name a broad and disperse group of cultural practices and products.

Perhaps the oldest use dates back to *narcocorridos* (written like that, without a

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hyphen), as a noun used to name a musical genre that narrates the vicissitudes of the machine. But along with it come words that are already established as part of common speech in Mexico: *narcoarquitectura* (“narco architecture,” a term alluding to a style that is recognized as the machine’s own way of making itself present in space); *narcoEstado* (“narco State,” which alludes to diverse forms in which the machine has the capacity to penetrate the State); or *narco cultura* (narco culture) as a word already used in the popular domain to name (without naming) the effects of the machine on everyday life.

Although it is difficult to document with precision, one speaks of “*Culiacán Tardío*” (Late Culiacán) and “*Miami Temprano*” (Early Miami) to allude to certain architectural configurations. Clothes, accessories, diamond-studded guns made of gold, lockets, scapulars, saints, cars, and other accessories make up what is recognized as *narco cultura*.

#thewar/thejargon

One of the most complex fields of “Narcoñol” is undoubtedly the war and its derivations. The war on the narco, declared by the current president of Mexico, Felipe Calderón, has generated a “language” that is as lurid as it is popular. The central expression in this level of speech is “collateral damage.” Following the terminology of conventional wars, it alludes to the “unintended” impacts on the defenseless body, on the innocent or beneficial victim. But this Narcoñol is full of tropes: intelligence work, suspects, “it was said,” “it is known,” “he/she was linked to.”

The combinations and their possibilities, on this level, are infinite, so I will limit myself to point out that the Narcoñol of #thewar grows in strength and scope drawing upon two key elements: the figure of the total enemy (in which so-called “collateral damage” has no importance), and the collapse of our interpretive systems, which end up producing the demented dichotomy of the “good dead” and the “bad dead.” When there are no words to describe or name useless, surplus, brutal death, jargon is a pertinent instrument to both official powers and to the narco-machine. As long as the bodies do not transcend the category of “collateral damage,” it is possible to set up a language that obstructs its emergence as evidence of the limits of barbarism. “Collateral damage” is the sign, in this case official, of the broken body.

Counter-machine

In a loose sense of the dialectic, we can be certain that a counter-machine opposes the power of any machine.⁸ According to the approaches I have outlined here, a possibility would be to locate a counter-machine in the State and, or, its institutions. Unfortunately, corruption, impunity, the sum of failed strategies, and the current government’s policy focused on the militarization of the territory, preclude any expectation that the counter-machine will come from the institutions of the State.

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So the idea here is that the counter-machine, because of the phantasmagoric and radically disciplinary power of the machine, cannot come from any place other than society, from citizens in their multiple roles (activists, artists, journalists, *cronistas*, teachers, parents, students, critics).



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By counter-machine (in the context of the work of the violence of narco-trafficking), I mean the group of fragile, intermittent, expressive, and fragmented devices society deploys to resist, make visible, or subtract power from the narco-machine. As Deleuze (1999) points out, “it is simple to search for correspondences between types of societies and types of machines, not because machines are determinant, but because they express the social formations that originated and use them.” I propose that as a “responding” device, the counter-machine draws from the knowledge of the different social formations (in Colombia, confronting the power of the “magicians,” as the drug lords were called; or in Mexico facing the undoubted power of the crime bosses, for example) and, on the other hand, it searches for forms or alternatives in space-time that open the narco-machine in order to explore the horizons of possible answers.

Paraphrasing Raymond Williams (1982), we could say that there are “residual” counter-machines that operate with the knowledge at hand (marches, the creation of associations and non-governmental organizations, press strategies, sit-ins, and occupations) and “emergent” counter-machines, which operate in a different space/time and that employ the mobilization of performative information and expression, as well as viralization, to mine the ground upon which the machine resides (mainly by way of the Internet, websites, blogs, or intrusive performances in public space, among others). Of course, the devices of the counter-machine take on mixed and combined forms.

Because of space limitations, I will focus on two examples:

a) The web portal Nuestra Aparente Rendición (Our Apparent Rendition, NAR), which was founded in October 2010 by the writer Lolita Bosch. It is an emerging device, articulating

different social mechanisms of response. In this sense, it is a device of the devices. Its contribution to the visibilization and open discussion about narco-trafficking in (mainly) Mexico undoubtedly lies in its capacity to move across different circuits and registers: from social-historic and political essays, to crónicas of events in small towns; from words to images; from fixed images to moving images; from denunciation to demands for justice; from the mobilizations in Mexico to its replicas in the rest of the world. The multiple registers of NAR fundamentally call for making the work of violence visible by way of the restitution and replacement of that which the machine erases in a perverse way: the dissolution of the individual body. As Sontag says, invoking Virginia Woolf's discussion of a photograph of "what might be a man's body, or a women's; it is so mutilated that it might, on the other hand, be the body of a pig" (4); Sontag adds: "her point is that the scale of war's murderousness destroys what identifies people as individuals, even as human beings" (57).

The work of NAR emerges as a form of response and active mobilization against the machine and the fatal consequences of the so-called "war on the narco." It activates critical thinking, places its "readers, viewers, visitors, and collaborators" in a position of reflexivity, making it possible for the commonplace naturalization of the violencias to clash with substantive questioning.

b) The second is the crónica, which functions as a device of the counter-machine on two levels, as narrative tool of investigative journalism and as photojournalism. In an article I wrote in 2000 about the emergence of the crónica as a form of epochal narrative, I argued that "the crónica, in the feminine, points to an orderly account of events; and in the masculine, lo crónico, as in a long, chronic illness, is established today as a narrative form that enables the telling of that which does not allow itself to be captured within the antiseptic frameworks of a genre. Or could it be that the event establishes its own rules, its own ways of allowing itself to be told?"

Narrating death, violence, and "horrorism," in the words of Cavarero, requires the elaboration of what I then called "writing in the trenches" (*escritura a la intemperie*) I am thinking here of the work of three journalists/cronistas, whose sustained field work and writing over time has shed light on gray zones which are normally invisible in conventional media. Cristian Alarcón who, working from Argentina, has been able to construct ties and complicities between journalists and academics who work on violence. His work as a cronista ultimately investigates the arena where context, victim, and perpetrator destabilize—to say the least—the tendency to conceptualize the servant of the machine in terms of total monstrosity. Alarcón makes it possible for us to explore streets, houses, conversations—the modes and forms through which the machine advances in daily life in the construction of a particular subjectivity, one that is functional to its objectives (Alarcón 2003, 2011)

In a notable way, the work of the journalist Marcela Turati (2011), whose capacity to bring out the voice of victims without reducing them to their defenselessness, brings into stark relief the total desolation and destruction that the machine leaves in its wake. Her work gives visibility not

only to the serialized production of broken bodies, but also to the citizens at the epicenter of the horror that are still capable of narrating their experience, and thus of living.

And then there is the work of Diego Osorno (2009), whose central preoccupation has been to lend intelligibility to the intricacies of power in the spaces where the machine mobilizes. Osorno has known, more than anyone, how to ask pertinent questions, going from the structural to the subjective story; to move through the minefield in which every phrase, figure, or occurrence articulate a vital interrogation: the complex, dark, fatal web spun by the machine as it becomes a total power.

There is much to be said of the counter-machine. I consider it an issue that concerns all of us and which demands our best analytical efforts. Here, I share only develop a few examples of the ways in which “people” have succeeded in creating devices that confront the almost total power of the machine, proposing spaces, languages, modes of interpretation that help to calibrate our precarious instruments to decipher a power that relies on the work of violence and the systematic production of horror.

I have yet to mention the work of photojournalists such as Fernando Brito (a key contributor to this issue) whose power lies in his capacity to resist two temptations when dealing with the machine’s violence: an aesthetization of the horror that ends up erasing its structural roots, and, on the other hand, the avoidance of prurience in the exhibition of the broken bodies. Brito situates himself in the very place of a witness who mourns, and is at the same time caring enough to “be there,” as Geertz (1988) would say, showing us the calligraphy of the machine in a temporal sequence that reveals the systematic work of its war apparatus.

Still to be mentioned are the performances that from of artistic or activist entry points index a counter-power that is capable of resisting the vertigo of total violence. I am thinking principally of the work of Violeta Luna, which the readers of *e-misférica* can see and calibrate in this issue.

In their fragility, intermittence and expressivity, the devices of the counter-machine, whether residual or emergent, are there as spaces, narratives, images and practices whose objective is to show the power of the machine and undermine its operational capacity.

Escapes

For Deleuze, the task of critical thinking is to detect and reinforce the lines of flight (those spaces that escape the power of the narco-machine, in this case), which can lead to new space-times. In the face of a machine that has blocked the singularity of the human and that has worked (successfully and in collaboration with the media) to produce, in the same frequency, a normalized tone in which the bodies of the defenseless are left abandoned to sinister mathematics or the accumulation of statistical data, what is counter-machinic lies is the

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ability to locate and enhance the lines of flight that present themselves, or that “can be constructed, from where the unexpected can break through, the event, the ‘revolutionary becoming’ that can produce a transformation,” as Deleuze would say.

If the work of violence of the narco-machine consists—at its core—in the dissolution of the human, the line of flight lie in our intellectual, critical, artistic, journalistic, and civic capacity to raise, make visible, and emphasize the ontological crime, that which erases uniqueness in the search for its encoded profit.

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Notes

¹ Translator’s note: these terms refer to bodies found in car trunks (*encajuelados*), decapitated bodies (*decapitados*), and bodies found wrapped in blankets (*encojibados*).

² In Peirce’s linguistic theory, he makes the distinction between sign, icon and symbol. Regarding sign, he says: “A sign, or *sema*, *representamen* whose representative character consists of the fact that it is a second individual. If the secondary-ness [*that is, the referent*] is an existential correlation, the sign is genuine. If the secondary-ness is a reference [such as the case with, “the narco” as an abstract entity], the sign is degenerated. [And what is most important:] Some signs are more or less detailed instructions of what the viewer can do to achieve an experientially direct connection, another connection, to the object being signified.” Brackets are mine. See Eco (1992).

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³ The war against the narco, declared by President Calderón at the beginning of his term in 2006, basically consisted in taking the army to the streets; that is, in militarizing the methods of combating narco-trafficking, and to increase the budget for security. I suggest interested readers see articles by the specialist Eduardo Buscaglia for a profound understanding of this.

⁴ The “ejecutómetro” is a daily count of the deaths in the country; it is commonly used by journalists (the newspaper *Reforma* has a section with that title) and it has become part of popular speech. It reads like a weather report: “Today we awoke to 72 dead.”

⁵ The news of the intentionally set fire of the Casino Royale in Monterre

y (<http://www.milenio.com/cdb/doc/noticias2011/b969338e9136051cf54e4a5225248d48>) made me think of the emergence of a verb I detected at the beginning of 2009 in an interview with a girl that had been tied to the Tijuana Cartel. She said to me, “My brother learned to

⁶ See Reguillo (2005), this elaboration owes much to the exceptional work of the anthropologist Rita Segato (2004) and by talking with her and reading her work, I could arrive at this proposal.

⁷ In 2006, the artist Teresa Margolles, exhibited her polemic work, “Encojibados” in different museographic spaces, using real, bloody blankets used by narcos to wrap bodies.

⁸ I owe this idea to Marcial Godoy, who brought it up during one of the many editorial meetings for the publication of this issue. He made me see the central importance of expressions of citizen resistance—as disarticulated as they may appear—to confront the narco-machine’s power. I attempt to elaborate here an intermediary concept, from his suggestions, convinced that it is necessary to continue the analysis.

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