



Rata y Narcochingadazo by Pedro Lasch y Colectivo Antrax (Detail from *Latino/a America*, Bogotá.)

University, *Narcochingadazo*, and Hemispheric Non-Cooperation

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This text is part of an artistic and political experiment begun at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Bogotá for the 2009 Encuentro of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics. The experiment consists of the gradual overlapping of the aesthetic frameworks and social networks of two large-scale projects. The first of these projects, called *Latino/a America* and initiated in 2003, is a conceptual series based on the ongoing presentation and distribution of a new map of the American continent, as well as the development of public art forms that are dispersed in everyday social spaces (see: <http://www.latinoaamerica.com/>). While it may be seen as a monument to the epics of migration, its goal is also to reflect critically on the form and function of conventional monuments. The words “Latino/a” and “America” acquire different meanings depending on the context, and reflect on the deep impact of popular shifts in our culture. The

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common tie between all of the different versions is the sharing of a new “Latinidad” that extends globally and is redefining the English-speaking world. The work registers the ways in which we are changing what “America” means and what it means to be “American.”

The second project started only recently in the city of Mérida, Yucatán during the *Bienal Interactiva IV*. Launched in May of 2009 via the Internet and a series of events in Spanish and Yucatec Mayan, this second project is entitled *Bicentenario Narcochingadazo* (see: <http://www.1810-1910-2010.com/blog/>). Developed with Colombian artist and curator Miguel Rojas-Sotelo, as well as a growing number of individuals and organizations, the *Narcochingadazo* project invites participants to create collaborative spaces that critically engage with the various national and international celebrations of independence happening across Latin America in 2010. Under the general call to act “against the oligarchies and their official celebrations” (“contra las oligarquías y sus celebraciones oficiales”) the first stage of the project (May to December 2009) was mostly dedicated to establishing connections with individuals and social groups who want to produce events, actions, and works for the second stage (June to December 2010), a time when we will confront the innumerable official celebrations from our various nodes on the map. All of our interventions will be autonomously organized in each location. Many of them will be tactically disguised as official ones. Some of them will be covert, others public.



1810-1910-2010, Haiti. Photo: Esther Gabara)



1810-1910-2010, Haiti. Photo: Esther Gabara)

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The first stage of the *Narcochingandazo* ended with our participation in the Ghetto Biennale in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti (see: <http://www.ghettobiennale.com/>), where we focused on the importance of the Haitian Revolution, as well as the reasons for its continued exclusion from official hemispheric and world narratives. Local and international artists, activists, and scholars were invited to participate. Between December 14 and 21, 2009, Esther Gabara and I held workshops and activities within the extraordinary artistic community of Grand Rue in Port-Au-Prince. The activities centered on the development of ideas for future actions in Haiti. As a backdrop to these activities, we created on one of the most visible walls of the Grand Rue an active play of significant Haitian dates and numbers, abstract symbols to be overlaid on the ominous numbers of 1810, 1910, and 2010.¹

To begin the experiment to bring these two projects into dialogue, the Bogotá edition of the *Latino/a America* map was painted multiple times to create a horizontal mural on one of the most public sites of the National University, the longest wall facing the entrance from Calle 45.

This is also one of the exterior walls of the Museo de Arte de la Universidad. On one hand, the location and medium were chosen to turn both museum and university outwards, towards the street, without losing the cohesiveness provided by the curatorial framework of the *Encuentro* and its partner institutions in Bogotá. On the other hand, this medium and site created a performative ground where we could collectively find connections between the histories of muralism and graffiti across the continent and also generate a more international dialogue about the vibrant street art and *rayado* culture of the university and the city at large.



Latino/a America - versión mural (Lasch. pintado por Senil en Bogotá)

Originally designed by its modernist architects and urban planners to be constantly dressed in white (hence the nickname *Ciudad Blanca*), the entire campus of the Universidad Nacional registers on its walls an intense daily battle between the various messages and styles of urban graffiti and the overlaid coats of institutional white paint. In November 2000, one week before the Bush vs. Gore elections, I called for a

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collective performance of citizenship that may here help us project the *Latino/a America* mural at the *Ciudad Blanca* onto a key site of U.S. power.

Produced as a set of 500 flyers and posters distributed in very public sites across New York City, the work was called

“Come Paint the White House” and it invited graffiti artists from across the country to meet in Washington D.C. to radically redecorate the walls of the White House with endless layers of colorful tags and

messages(see: <http://www.pedrolasch.com/individual/paintthewhitehouse.html>). “The White House has been too white for too long,” the call and manifesto began.



Latino/a America, Bogotá.



Latino/a America, Bogotá.

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Latino/a America, Bogotá.

Through the *Narcochingadazo* call, a similar invitation was extended to street and graffiti artists from Bogotá and other Colombian towns, except this time the act of painting the white house was not fictional or symbolic. It actually happened on the walls of the Ciudad Blanca during three days of workshops (August 24-26, 2009) and continues to this day. The graffiti interventions were structured by local ideas and practices of resistance against the official narratives of the bicentennials, but they were also painted over the previously executed mural of *Latino/a America*, literally overlapping these two projects in a cohesive visual dialogue. The idea of linking intensely local urban art forms with conceptual and politicized global networks is not random. The goal is in part to help generate throughout 2010 – and beyond – an international university of the street and the field (“una universidad de la calle y el campo”), a university whose ways of making things public is not defined merely by peer-reviewed publications, a university whose art forms are less bound by the invisible class dividers that depoliticize campuses and artists under misleading premises of quality and autonomy.

If artists and academics want to be an integral part of society, they cannot hide under the privilege of exception. Freedom of speech and the general protection from being harmed for one’s ideas and beliefs are as important for a plumber or domestic worker as they are for a professor of art or literature. The *Narcochingadazo* positions itself against the habits and gestures of historical privilege afforded by race and class segregation, privileges that are often the very reflections of the legal and spatial definition of our campuses, privileges that may be maintained by a self-evident oligarchy or a statist revolutionary discourse.

Narcochingadazo also pushes toward the legalization of migration, international work, and the drug trade across the Hemisphere, at the very least attempting to give these social phenomena a more complex cultural voice. This does not mean we identify with the violent power of drug bosses or corrupt politicians above them – those whom Miguel Rojas-Sotelo has identified as the “new capitalists” who brought neoliberalism to places like Colombia in

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the 1980s. We want legalization because, other than the more recent *war against terror*, the policies of *border control* (control of population flows and labor markets) and the *war against drugs* (monopolization of illicit substance and weapons markets) are the two main post-Cold War ideological justifications used by the U.S. and its various allied national elites to oppress Latin American and Latino/a populations.



2x1 (Mefisto)

The *Narcochingadazo* simply states what is already a fact: we are living a great crisis across the Hemisphere and the level of death and misery cannot be suppressed any longer. While certainly harmful to specific individuals, it is of sadly little consequence whether a Cuban artist decides to distribute cocaine at a Colombian university and call it a performance, especially when she has not done the same at the U.S. university where she teaches. Tania Bruguera's ongoing success in the creation of press-friendly social spectacles may be best placed in the U.S., where gestures of civil disobedience by drug users would be the most radical, artistically and politically. Perhaps the artist will agree to bring \$5000 worth of cocaine for public consumption at Harvard for a 2010 *Narcochingadazo* event.

Beyond the recent history of drug wars, there are a great number of reasons why Colombia is the most appropriate place to have begun the overlapping of *Latino/a America* and *Narcochingadazo*. I will here point out only two of them as I conclude this text. On an artistic level, Colombia is the home of talleristas like Antonio Caro, artists without whom we cannot imagine the birth of our kind of art practice. While temporarily obscured by free cocaine handouts, many of these artists were present at the *Encuentro* and we hope they will also join us for the 2010 events. On a more political level, however, the pieces comment upon the troubling provocation to the entire continent posed by President Alvaro Uribe's "welcoming" of U.S. military bases in his country. In the face of this de facto U.S. military occupation, Latin Americans have less to celebrate than official registers would suggest regarding grand accomplishments of independence and sovereignty. Inevitably

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connected to this history, the very name of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics reminds us of the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (formerly known as the School of the Americas), the infamous institution that pretended to close at the end of the Cold War when in fact it was only renamed. 20 years after the cinematic extraction of Noriega from Panamá, the decision to establish U.S. bases in Colombia joins the iconic prison camps in Guantánamo as potent geopolitical markers of the continued high stakes placed in the region.



InDios We Trust (Mefisto)

The images, actions, conversations, and exchanges generated by *Latino/a America* and *Narcochingadazo* defy the oft-expressed notion that the rise of Latin American leftist governments in the last decade is a sign that U.S. foreign policy has shifted its attention to the oil-rich Middle East. These social art projects seek to speak collectively from within the Indigenous and immigrant movements that have reinvented Latino/a and Latin American politics, making them incomprehensible to the traditional political and academic Cold War rhetoric of left and right, as well as the fashionable discourses of international art elites. I end on this point by juxtaposing two fantastic stickers that graffiti artist Mefisto gave to me during our collaboration in Bogotá.

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¹ While all of us there believed Haiti deserved world attention for the many great things Haitians have given the world, beginning with the creation of the first truly free nation on the planet, none of us knew that international media and ten thousand US troops would arrive there only a few weeks later, following the horrific earthquake of January 12th, 2010.

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Confronting this new and unexpected meaning of the date 2010— the tragic death and disappearance of many of our collaborators— and responding in our own ways to the needs of Haitians, as well as our historic debt to Haiti as a nation, has now become an inescapable priority. A new set of projects has grown from the need to celebrate the life and work of the survivors, accompanying them as they rebuild their life from the ruins. Among them is a project called “Writing on the Wall,” a collaboration with surviving Port-Au-Prince based artist Moïse Jerry Rosembert, aka Jerry (who remains in Haiti), as well as anyone who wishes to participate in the project, wherever they may be. More information can be found at: <http://www.pedrolasch.com/blog/writing-on-the-wall/>