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## On body dumps : the rhetorics of corporeal narcoterrorism

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ON BODY DUMPS:  
THE RHETORICS OF CORPOREAL NARCOTERRORISM

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Evan Mitchell Schares  
University of Northern Iowa  
July 2015

## ABSTRACT

Though the exact number is unknown, estimates indicate the trade and movement of narcotics have resulted in over 60,000 murders of Mexican citizens. As a result of the rising narcoviolence, Felipe Calderón, early in his presidential administration, made the “War on Drugs” a top priority. Despite this effort to curb the violence, in 2010 alone, more than 15,200 lifeless bodies have been left across Mexico, most likely by drug cartels. A nascent phrase, *body dumps*, has risen in journalistic reports describing this conscious relocation of the ruined corpse to highly visible traffic areas. This thesis explores the rhetorical constructions of the discourses and labor surrounding *body dump* practices.

Current rhetorical journalistic practices reduce victims to their bodies, then to an indiscriminate aggregate of bodies, and then they liken the bodies to waste needing to be removed from public consciousness. Further, *body dump* practices adulterate and disturb sites of cultural and historical significance. I use the monument to Christopher Columbus, located in Nuevo Laredo, as a case study to examine the ways rhetorical places are used as a soundboard by the state and drug cartels to communicate messages of control.

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This Study by: Evan Mitchell Schares

Entitled: On Body Dumps: The Rhetorics of Corporeal Narcoterrorism

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts

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Ralph Waldo Emerson, a nineteenth-century American essayist and poet, admitted, “I cannot remember the books I’ve read any more than the meals I have eaten; even so, they have made me.” Perhaps the same could be said for the thousands of individuals whose paths have crossed mine. That being said, a few amazing sources of inspiration stick out.

First, much, if not all, is owed to Dr. Catherine Palczewski. You instilled in me a passion for academia and taught me how to articulate, defend, and stand in my beliefs. Perhaps most importantly, you have shown me how to be susceptible to those beliefs changing.

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Closer to home, I need to say if I ever needed a guiding light, it was during the darkness of coming out. Catherine Shafer and Blaire Baldwin, you both entered right on cue. In differing ways, you continue to provide me the courage and support to grow.

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## CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING *BODY DUMPS*

In his novel contemplating the large-scale massacre of the Dresden bombing during the Second World War, Kurt Vonnegut (1991) confessed, “It is so short and jumbled and jangled, Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre” (p. 19). Throughout February 13-15, 1945, allied U.S. and British air forces dropped nearly 4,000 tons of high-explosive bombs on the City of Dresden killing approximately 24,000 German civilians (“Allierte Bombenangriffe,” 2010). I begin with Vonnegut and his sober recognition of the limits of language as I also struggled to detail the staggering casualties and irrefutable destruction of Mexican narcoterrorism. Though the exact number is unknown, it is possible more than 60,000<sup>1</sup> Mexican citizens have had their lives taken as a result of the trade and movement of narcotics, most likely by the hands and guns belonging to members of Mexico’s many drug cartels (Miroff & Booth, 2012). Other sources lack coherence in their varying statistics on the loss of life in Mexico. For example, it has been reported in 2010 alone more than 15,200 bodies have been left across Mexico despite governmental efforts to curb the violence (“Cuatro Decapitados,” 2011). Further, in February 2013, the Mexican Interior Minister announced over 26,000 Mexican citizens remained missing (Schoichet, 2013). Humbly, I constantly consider Vonnegut’s reservations as I attempt to make sense of such devastation and loss of life.

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<sup>1</sup> Official Mexican statistics do not differentiate between drug-related deaths and other homicides.

Early in Felipe Calderón's presidential administration, he made the "War on Drugs" a top priority for Mexico and called for national military intervention when local and municipal law enforcement was unable to control drug trafficking organizations (DTOs; Lee, 2014). Current Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto has tried to "reframe Mexico's image as an investment hotspot while emphasizing a strategy to quell violence against citizens" (Lee, 2014). Despite this effort, *body dumps*, a unique type of terrorist act, remain characteristic of narcoterrorism in Mexico and continue to plague hundreds of cities throughout the region fostering a morbid sense of impunity for warring cartels.

By popular definition, *body dumps* or a *dump job* refer to when "a person is murdered in one location, transported to another location and left" (Miletich, 2003, p. 4). Within the context of narcoterrorism, I add to this definition by including the conscientious relocation of the ruined corpse to highly visible or trafficked areas so as to instill terror within local, national, and international communities. It is common for the victim to be so violently disfigured, mutilated, or fragmented that personal or sexual identification is impossible by merely looking at the body. Unique to *body dumps* is the publicity of the mutilated murdered body. This systematic deployment of the victim's body contrasts with other forms of terrorism which are instead founded on the absence or removal of the body from public consciousness through acts like forced disappearance, bombings, and suicide missions.

The discourse surrounding the act reflects the inhumanity committed against the victims. *Dump* becomes not only a verb to describe the treatment of the victim, but a noun to name the event reported (e.g., Archibold & Cave, 2012; Corcoran, 2011; Day,

2011; “Mexico’s 49 Headless Bodies,” 2012; “Mexico Security,” 2012; Rodriguez & Ramirez, 2012). Archibold and Cave (2012) with the *New York Times* wrote of one incident by saying, “Security experts surmised that the high-profile dumping was a response to mass killing by the [competing] Sinaloa cartel.” In a similar suit, Yahoo and Fox News both wrote of the same atrocity by describing it as a “mass body dumping” (“Mexico’s 49 Headless Bodies,” 2012; Rodriguez & Ramirez, 2012). A *dump*, then, is something created and intentionally placed within public consciousness which ultimately invites study. This rhetorically unique transformation of an inhumane verb into an inhumane noun is examined in Chapter 3 where I explore the problems associated with reducing people to bodies and reducing bodies to garbage which needs to be removed from public consciousness and memory. In this thesis, I adopt the term *body dump* for continuity purposes within narcoterrorism studies. However, I intentionally italicize *body dump* throughout this thesis to highlight and recognize the inhuman implications of the term. By italicizing the phrase, I am attempting to make evident how I am complicit and where I, too, lacked the ability to humanize the victims.

To thoroughly introduce *body dumps*, the rest of this chapter develops in three sections. First, I offer a brief overview of Mexico’s War on Drugs. Second, I explore the rhetorics of narcoterrorism. Finally, I review existing literature on the deployment of bodies for social and political ends.

#### Contextualizing Mexico’s War on Drugs and Narcoterrorism

The alleged first shot of the border’s drug war was in September 1969 under United States President Richard Nixon’s Operation Intercept (Payan, 2006, p. 863).

Operation Intercept and its subsequent policies “result[ed] in the creation and consolidation of a few large drug cartels and the increased effectiveness of their operations” both in Mexico and across the United States and Mexican border (Payan, 2006, p. 863).

Drug-related violence along the United States-Mexico border is a product of numerous factors. First, U.S. demand for drugs increased, in part, because of the counterculture of the 1960s. Second, the United States implemented a series of operations in the Caribbean to prevent cocaine from entering the country from Columbia. Third, Miguel Angel Félix Gallardo, who was a well-known smuggler, was instrumental in the consolidation of several, small, warring cartels leading to efficiency in their smuggling activities (Payan, 2006, p. 865). Even after his incarceration, he still was able to manage daily operations and called for a division of the border into territories and demanded each organization respect the boundaries and “recognize the United States as the real enemy” (Payan, 2006, p. 865).

Even after his death, Gallardo’s wish that the only enemy be the United States was not fulfilled (Payan, 2006, p. 866). As cartels saw the profit in neighboring territories, they were more likely to engage in inter-cartel violence. Additionally, if the leader of one cartel was imprisoned or jailed, intra-cartel violence was likely to erupt as members jockeyed for power and position (Payan, 2006). Combined with Calderon’s outright declaration of war against the cartels, cartels have had to “defend their corridors with increased violence, not only against opportunistic violence from their competitors but also from the government” (Payan, 2006, p. 867).

The horror of *body dumps* throughout Central and South America, particularly Mexico, is now so commonplace it is no longer surprising to the citizens of Northern Mexico when one is reported (Archibold & Cave, 2012). So usual are *dumps* throughout Mexico, Payan stated (2006):

Even border residents have learned to live with the drug war as part of their communities. They hardly pay attention to it anymore. On the border, the drug war is part of the landscape. (p. 369)

Mexican citizens have grown inured and the atrocities of the *dump* have become so commonplace one citizen explained, “One strategy we use for protection, for survival, is to ignore it because there is nothing we can do” (as cited in Archibold & Cave, 2012).

Hundreds of citizens are murdered and, with their bodies ruined, systematically deployed throughout communities as cartels war over power, prestige, and territory. When publically and unceremoniously displayed, *body dumps* are used to taunt law enforcement by celebrating a success over an opponent while simultaneously attempting to terrorize onlookers and opposing cartels. In this sense, narcoterrorists engage in a unique and perverse kind of murder performance to send messages to police and their enemies as well as to the general population, by whom they may be publically denounced.

*Body dumps* are not isolated and unconnected incidents. Rather, they function as a cycle of performance which has manifested itself in a war for power and prestige among warring cartels at the expense of thousands of lives. Thousands of victims have been reduced to their corpses and deployed as visual tropes by DTOs throughout recent years. It has been reported in 2010 alone that more than 15,200 bodies have been left across

Mexico despite governmental efforts to curb the violence (“Cuatro Decapitados,” 2011). For example, on September 21, 2011, motorists stuck in rush hour traffic were suddenly the captive audience of suspected drug dealers and their theatrics as masked gunman blocked Manuel Avila Camancho Boulevard and *dumped* the bodies of 35 people in front of hundreds of horrified on-lookers (Tovrov, 2011). On November 23, 2011, the charred remains of 16 people’s bodies were discovered throughout Sinaloa (Uranga, 2011). The next day, 26 people’s bodies were found stuffed in abandoned cars in Guadalajara, each with multiple bullet wounds to the head, evidence of death by execution (Miroff, 2011). On January 9, 2012, members assumed affiliated with a DTO *dumped* the bodies of 13 men, including three minors, near a gas station in Zitácuaro (Gerardo, 2012).

Global and local communities’ responses to these *body dumps* afford the opportunity to examine how corporeal and visceral discourses and performances of terrorism are constructed. In what follows, I explore various definitions of terrorism, highlight terrorism’s rhetorical components and complexities, introduce narcoterrorism as a unique type of terrorism, and finally demonstrate how *body dumps* meet the definition of terrorism. I also preview the organization of my thesis which at a glance is as follows: Chapter 2 addresses my methodological approach to *body dumps*. Chapter 3 explores the inhumane journalistic discourses surrounding *body dumps*. Chapter 4 examines the ways in which place and space are adulterated and disturbed using the monument of Christopher Columbus in Nuevo Laredo as a case study. Finally Chapter 5 offers theoretical perspectives for both body and terrorism studies.

### The Rhetoric of (Narco)Terrorism

Former United Nations officer A. P. Schmid shaped what is the most widely agreed-upon definition of terrorism within Terrorism Studies. According to Schmid, terrorism is an “anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are not the main targets” (Schmid & Jongman, 2005, p. 28). Of importance is the recognition that acts of terror may be repeated to incite anxiety and possibly employed by a variety of actors who intend not only to assassinate but to communicate a larger message to various publics.

Terrorism is not to be confused with criminality, though acts of terror also violate criminal laws. Crime typically wants no witness, as opposed to acts of (narco)terrorism which are fundamentally centered on the visibility of their acts (the *body dump*). Narcoterrorism includes acts deployed by actors involved in the trade and movement of narcotics within Central and South America to systematically instill fear and terror within their communities. It should be noted some actions of DTOs and cartels are simply criminal, such as the trafficking and manufacturing of contraband substances. However other actions clearly extend into terrorism which is the case with *body dumps*.

Terrorism works best when the anxiety it is intended to induce is maximized through visibility either witnessed or mediated. As a result, acts of terrorism are not random acts of injudicious violence but may include communicative acts of attempted coercion. This communicative element of terrorism invites the study of the rhetoric of



terror. Regardless of one's definition of rhetoric, I believe it possible to study the rhetoric of terrorism, mainly because terrorism is addressed to an audience. Terrorism is a communicative action with an intended audience and purpose. As Schmid and Jongman. (2005) noted, "the direct targets of violence are [typically] not the main targets" (p. 28). To approach the rhetoric of terrorism is to recognize the act of terrorism as "not just ends unto [itself]; rather it [is] a part of a larger process of communicating a message generating a response" (Tuman, 2010, p. 31). Communication scholar Dr. Robert Picard (1993) explained his understanding of communication's role within acts of terror:

Although accepting terrorism as an act of communication, I reject the suggestion that such political violence takes place solely as an act of communication. Instead I see terrorism as a purposive strategy of warfare and social change that employs symbolic violence as a vehicle for communication to a variety of audiences as one of its tactics. (pp. 4-5)

I echo Picard's view in that *body dumps* are incredibly inhumane and obviously deplorable, yet have communicative qualities as they seek to generate messages for various audiences. It is the victims' bodies that serve as a "vehicle for communication." I see rhetoric as a tool to explore the ways in which *bodies* are used for communicative purposes which ultimately adulterate or disturb our understanding of the human body.

Currently unexplored by other scholars studying terrorism, *body dumps* certainly meet Schmid's and Tuman's definition of terrorism. First, *body dumps* in Mexico are almost exclusively attributed to DTOs, most notably the rival cartels of *Los Zetas* and *Sinaloa*, as they attempt to secure territory for the criminal trade and movement of narcotics northward. The anxiety-inspiring method is clearly evinced in the body of the victims(s) but also in accompanying *narcomantas*. *Narcomantas* or *narcomensajes* are

handwritten messages to the public, usually replete with grammatical errors, lionizing the gang and their murders, usually threatening the public and attempting to undermine police.

Certainly not the only *dump* with a message, but perhaps one of the most exemplary, is that of Marisol Macías, also known by her online pseudonyms *La nena de Laredo* or Maria Elizabeth Macías Castro. Macías was a crime beat reporter in Nuevo Laredo and on September 24, 2011, her decapitated body showing signs of torture was found at a heavily trafficked intersection. Placed next to her body were a computer keyboard, headphones on her decapitated head, and a message threatening other journalists to reconsider reporting stories related to DTOs (Rafsky, 2011). The *narcomensaje* read, “OK Nuevo Laredo Live and social media, I am the girl from Laredo and I am here for my reports and yours.” According to Committee to Protect Journalists, Mexico ranks seventh-deadliest in the world for reporters (“28 Journalists,” 2015). This example demonstrates how this *dump* transcends an act of assassination as Macías served, and continues to serve, as a visual and written warning for other journalists.

It is clear how *body dumps* and their accompanying *narcomensajes* serve as vehicles to communicate with, and possibly perform for, various audiences. In his thought-provoking book titled *Terror and Performance*, Rustom Bharucha (2014) worked to connect rhetoric, performance, and terrorism:

Terror itself, to spell out a critical point as bluntly as possible, is not a performance. In my understanding, the performative understanding of terror begins only when one *responds* to an act of extreme violence, however, vulnerably and in a state of acute fear, either through spectatorship or an act of witnessing. (p. 27)

At times, I echo Bharucha's understanding of this relationship between critical and performative approaches to terror. However, narcoterrorism as it is occurring in Mexico, particularly with regards to bodily performance within places of significance (such as historical monuments), suggests there are performances of terror occurring which warrant analysis. Within acts of *body dumps*, performances of memory surrounding highly visible cultural monuments still constitute performance, albeit incredibly inhumane and politically unjustified. In Chapter 4, I examine the relationship between memory work, performances of memory, and *body dumps* to understand how *dumps* are being used to rhetorically adulterate or disrupt quotidian operations of public memorials as cartels work to communicate their messages and generate responses.

Most social scientific approaches to terrorism studies tend to focus on what Lee Jarvis (2009) called "problem-solving pursuits" (p. 7). Research has historically addressed problems of "definition, causation, and response" and as a result has self-sealed itself as a "problem-solving enterprise" which is why Terrorism Studies "remains constituted around a restrictively narrow conception of academic responsibility: a conception tied not to critical inquiry, but to problem-solving analysis" (pp. 4-12). In a similar fashion, Sociologist Austin Turk (2004) claimed, "Efforts to understand terrorism have generally been incidental or secondary to efforts to control it" (p. 280). Such limited approaches to terrorism are likely to only continue to limit our understandings of the thing studied.

I maintain the deployment of bodies within narcoterrorism examined from a critical and performance-based approach has much to offer. Though acts of terror are

criminal, immoral and politically unproductive, a critical approach allows for the exploration of motives and methods of individuals engaging in terrorist activities. Thus, a critical approach to *body dumps* has implications for the fields of body, rhetorical, and terrorism studies. I outline my critical methodologies further in Chapter 2.

My two analyses of the linguistic and performative construction of *body dumps* are founded upon rhetorical considerations of (1) the metaphorical nature of language and (2) the rhetorics of place and space. By exploring both discursive and corporeal elements of *body dumps* I work to attend to Arthur Frank (1991) and his understanding of the body as “constituted in the interaction of an equilateral triangle the points of which are *institutions, discourses, and corporeality*” (p. 49).

#### Review of Literature

A thesis focused on the rhetoric of narcoterrorism is desperately needed. Communication and Political Science database results offer little research on the War on Drugs and narcoterrorism. The little rhetorical work that does exist offers only a limited and selective representation of narcoterrorism and focuses on domestic political discourse from the US government. I intend to address the absence of scholarly attention to the study of narcoterrorism with special attention to *body dumps*.

Literature on terrorism tends to focus on Islamic extremists in the Middle East and North Africa [MENA] (e.g., Cloud, 2004; Mersking, 2004; Mishra, 2008; Prentice, Rayson, & Taylor, 2012; Rogan, 2010; Winkler, 2005). Scholars have explored propaganda and communiqués directly produced by Islamic extremists (e.g., Prentice et al., 2012; Rogan, 2010; Winkler, forthcoming) and devoted attention to official U.S.

discourse in response to terrorists and their actions in MENA (e.g., Bartolucci, 2012; Browne & Dickson, 2010; Kellner, 2007; Winkler, 2005; Winkler, forthcoming). The abundance of literature within rhetorical and communication studies is testimony to the symbolic implications and dimensions of terrorism. Yet this research only provides a selective representation of the study of terrorism as it is limited in scope to Islamic extremists in the Middle East and official discourse surrounding the matter.

In the existing literature on terrorism, remarkably little has been written on the rhetoric of narcoterrorism and *body dumps* in Central and South America. Yet, narcoterrorism as enacted by drug cartels and other drug-trafficking organizations clearly meets the generally agreed-upon definition of what constitutes terrorism. Although little has been written on *body dumps* within narcoterrorism, communication scholars have extensively written on the rhetorical deployment of bodies in times of crises (e.g., Brouwer, 1998; Horwitz & Brouwer, 2015; DeLuca, 1999; McGeough, 2013; McGeough & McGeough, 2015). In these instances, rhetors have been forced, or strategically have chosen, to deploy their own bodies as a rhetorical instrument as they agitate to advance their cause. Deploying one's own body as a rhetorical vehicle to further a political cause is not a "flag for attention" but the locus of "site and substance of the argument itself" (DeLuca, 1999, p. 10). The deployment of one's own body as a source of exigence can be incredibly persuasive.

However, the intentional deployment of others' bodies to advance an argument is also a dynamic source of rhetorical power. Many scholars have written on the powerful usage of others' bodies to advance political causes especially as related to white violence

against and lynching of Black bodies (Harold & DeLuca, 2005; Johnson, 2007; Ohl & Potter, 2013). In these instances, one's own body or that of another successfully has been used to motivate and/or enervate audiences.

Two distinct uses of the lynched body emerge. First, the act of lynching and the lynched body itself is obviously used by the lynchers to communicate fear and control. Second, the lynched victim's body may be used by the oppressed to communicate opposition to the violence.

As lynching demonstrates, the calculated deployment and manipulation of others' bodies can be used to demobilize or enervate an audience. Tortured, dismembered, lynched, and murdered bodies are abjected, stripped of their humanity, and deployed not to orient an audience toward social justice but to immobilize and terrorize (Fuoss, 1999; Gonzales-Day, 2006; Harold & DeLuca, 2005; Tolnay & Beck, 1995). U.S. lynching practices speak to such atrocity. The systematic deployment of the ruined corpse is paralleled to the repetitive form of Mexican *body dumps*. Used to enervate those who encounter them on the sidewalk, DTOs work to instill fear and terror into their communities. Lynched black bodies were once "spectacles of white supremacy that helped forge white community. They were also messages of warning and terror for Black communities" (Harold & DeLuca, 2005, p. 267).

Yet, targeted groups can resignify the meaning of the body. The 1955 lynching of 14 year-old Emmett Till illustrated the immense rhetorical potential of using another's body to advance a political cause (Harold & DeLuca, 2005). Tortured, dismembered, mutilated, and disposed of inhumanely, Mamie Till Bradley chose to have Emmett Till's

body displayed publically via an open-casket funeral. Mamie Till Bradley hoped to use her son's body as a megaphone to denounce the irrefutable racial discrimination and violence that existed in the southern United States. Till's body was first used as a weapon to instill terror within the black community, but then through this rhetorical resignification, was utilized by his mother to strategically transform the position of a lynched black body within a hegemonic White community.

As Harold and DeLuca (2005) explained, Mamie Till Bradley, the mother of Emmett Till, was able to use her son's lynched body to demand attention to the racial atrocities and undeniable danger faced by Black Americans:

By moving Emmett Till's corpse from a muddy river bottom in the Mississippi Delta to a public exhibition in urban Chicago, Mamie Till Bradley transformed her son from a victim of white racism to an unforgettable symbol that mobilized a generation of activists. (p. 271)

What the body of Mamie Till Bradley was incapable of doing, the body of Emmett Till could: demand the attention of the entire country to eventually advocate for social change. The social construction of bodily meaning is intersectional and multiplicative as evident in the macabre case of Emmett Till.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced contemporary Mexican narcoviolence, the rhetoric of terror as a form of communication, and scholarship done on bodies used to both motivate and enervate publics.

*Body dumps* are worthy of study for a variety of reasons. In 2010 alone more than 15,200 bodies have been left across Mexico despite governmental efforts to curb the violence ("Cuatro Decapitados," 2011). The prevalence of *body dumps* certainly

necessitates attention given the literal thousands of lives at stake. Further, the complex rhetorical creation of *body dumps* ultimately disturbs our understanding of the victims, their bodies, and ways to account for the thousands still missing.



## CHAPTER 2

### APPROACHING BODY DUMPS

This chapter lays out my methodological approach to *body dumps*. It proceeds in four steps. First, I highlight narcoterrorism as a unique type of terrorism that is concerned with local rather than global audiences. Second, I draw attention to Western reporting practices which problematize the study of *body dumps* through visually inaccurate portrayals of what actually occurred. Third, I explain my data selection and text justification. Finally, I examine the limitations of my study.

#### Different Terrorism, Different Types of Communications

Regardless of ideology and intent, acts of terrorism are still “a part of a larger process of communicating a message generating a response” (Tuman, 2010, p. 31). Currently achieving the most media recognition, The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS), which operates out of Iraq and Syria, is unmatched in its online presence as it works to disseminate its ideology on a global scale (Ajbailli, 2014; Knowlton, 2014; Pepitone, 2014; Simon, 2014). Senior Technology Writer for NBC News, Julianne Pepitone (2014) stated:

On a basic level, ISIS uses social media in the same way extremist groups including Nigeria’s Boko Haram and Somalia’s Al-Shabaab do – to control the narrative, boost morale, attract new supporters and demoralize their enemies. But what sets ISIS apart is the volume of media they release on both private and public networks like Twitter and Youtube – and the relentlessly graphic nature of the images.

As described by Pepitone and others reporting on this organization, the sheer quantity of communication released by ISIS clearly attests to the communicative nature of their operations. Aside from the blunt depiction of inhumane atrocities, ISIS also floods media

platforms with undeniable high-quality communiqués. For example, ISIS has launched an easily found online magazine, *The Islamic State Report*, which features modern typography, high-quality images, and impressive image vectoring.<sup>2</sup>

The ISIS communication strategy's resemblance to a full-fledged media campaign results from three pressures: (1) its desire to ensure the West receives its messages, (2) its need to invert geography through the broadcasting of violence as it works to create a fully formed nation state, and (3) it has had to engage in constant membership recruiting efforts.

Yet, not all terrorism is about the global. Mexican narcoterrorism is concerned primarily with the local. Drug cartels and other DTOs do not need high production value missives disseminated from full-fledged media arms. Of importance and interest to DTOs is local place control. It is not uncommon for media reports to mention the constant jockeying for control over small localized streets, *barrios*, or neighborhoods for the purpose of the trade and movement of contraband northward (Archibold & Cave, 2012; Rodriguez, 2012). I believe global audiences are not nearly as important to these DTOs as their local audience. Within the lucrative trade of narcotics and contraband, losing access to one neighborhood or highway assuredly would be detrimental to business.

Yet, some of narcoterrorism's communication reaches Western audiences, notably the U.S. This dissemination is likely due to border proximity and the fact that the San Diego-Tijuana and Juárez-El Paso metropolitan areas are some of the largest binational

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<sup>2</sup> *The Islamic State Report* can be found on Aaron Zelin's website Jihadology.com for academic purposes. The Western-run blog is a "clearinghouse for Sunni jihadi primary source material."

metropolitan areas in the world. As a result, studying how Western media (re)present *body dumps* is important.

### Be Aware of Media Framing

Within communication and critical media studies, much has been written on the influence mass media have on publics' perceptions of terrorism (Alali & Eke, 1991; Ben-Shaul, 2006; Hess & Kalb, 2003; Kavoori & Fraley, 2006; Nacos, 2002; Picard, 1993). As previously stated, terrorism is unique from other forms of criminality and violence as it is intended to relay messages to various audiences. This violent communication is certainly exacerbated when picked up by local and national media, which ultimately benefits the aggressors and terrorists.

As Western news outlets report on *body dumps*, a critical examination of ways in which the story and accompanying photos are framed is necessary to accurately understand the act of terrorism. Undoubtedly, today's news outlets are increasingly interactive and visual. Correspondingly, the visual component of reports on *body dumps* is important. Communication scholar Dr. Robert Picard (1993) acknowledged, "In the majority of incidents, the most important element in communication about terrorist acts is not the acts themselves but the meaning assigned to the acts by media, authorities, and the populace" (p. 4). Therefore, how Western media choose to represent these acts of terrorism has a guiding effect on how these reports are consumed by publics.

In Western reports of *body dumps*, the graphics and photos accompanying the text either (1) are nonexistent (e.g., Agren, 2012; "Mexico's 49," 2012; Miroff, 2012; Partlow, 2014; Rodriguez, 2012) or (2) do not accurately represent the act as terrorism

but instead depict it as criminal (Beaubien, 2011; Castillo, 2011; “Dozens of Bodies,” 2012). As a result, the vast majority of Western reporting practices intentionally deflect the attention of the readers of these articles away from understanding *body dumps* as a unique yet clear form of terrorism.

To illustrate the deflection of terrorist activity while simultaneously selecting merely the criminal, I provide the photo accompanying Beaubien’s (2011) NPR article.



*Figure 1.* “Mexican authorities guard the site where 35 bodies were found beneath an overpass Tuesday in Boca del Rio in Veracruz State,” photo by AFP/Getty Images, used by Beaubien, J. in “Gunmen Dump,” (2011).

Clearly, this photo does not properly illustrate, speak to, or attempt to represent the mass casualties that the article discusses. So indeterminate is the photo, it could be used to visualize nothing more than a stolen car. The position of the camera evokes a sense of distance because a truck and car, and much larger tour bus, only account for a small

portion of the photo. Eight empty lanes of highway pavement create a sense of unease as the space would typically call for constant movement and traffic. It seems the three vehicles, mid frame, are the focus on the photograph. Eventually the crime scene comes into focus in the top left of the frame. Bordered by the top of the frame and the shadow of the overpass it is impossible to make out what this photo is to represent.

A reverse image search of the photo populates a series of more up-close and detailed images for which I would encourage you not to search. These additional images, which never circulated on corporate or mass media but made rounds on various Central American blogs, depict a different story. Not pictured in the above photo, which happened to be the most mediated, are depictions of how strategically placed the victims were, likely to ensure traffic would be stopped. Not pictured is the carefully and repeatedly written “POR” on each part of flesh. Not pictured is the eerily artificial blue canvas juxtaposed against greying flesh and the grey pavement.

U.S. and Western remediated visual depictions, I have found, do not depict the horror occurring on the streets of Mexico. Picard (1993) perfectly explained, “In addition to efforts to restrain coverage they dislike, government authorities regularly make great efforts to characterize the symbolic terrorist acts in ways that support their policies and the existing social order” (p. 113). These remediated depictions are not the same experience as the corporeal and visceral relationship people are experiencing when they encounter these many *dumps*. It is, however, likely mass media such as NPR are in fact critical in their visual depictions of these atrocities. As previously stated, terrorist organization greatly benefit by amplifying their messages.

The way the visual framing of these articles is done may be read in two different ways. First, it could be argued the choice not to show violence done to these people is intentional so as to not help disseminate the DTOs message. However, it could also be argued the choice to highlight only the criminal intentionally deflects from the incredibly repeated, visceral, and horrific loss of life.

This partial reality transmitted through mediation is what Landsberg (2004) described as prosthetic memory. Such memories or experiences, “are those not strictly derived from a person’s lived experience” (p. 25). Rather these experiences are only knowable through mediated accounts. Landsberg (2004) continued:

Prosthetic memories circulate publically, and although they are not organically based, they are nonetheless experienced with a person’s body as a result of engagement with a wide range of cultural technologies. Prosthetic memories thus become part of one’s personal archive of experience, informing one’s subjectivity as well as one’s relationship to the present and future tenses. (pp. 25-26).

So, even if one has not been present at a *body dump*, media images could create the memory one has. I argue, through either no photo at all or through photos which attest only to the criminal rather than the terror and inhumane atrocity that occurred, Western representations of *body dumps* constructs a clouded and distorted understanding of narcoterrorism. Because, if there are no images of bodies or victims, then there is no circulation or memories of the bodies or victims.

Having not personally witnessed a *body dump*, (re)mediated images are my only access. I intentionally did not limit myself to commercial images because, as I have explained, no single image can accurately depict reality. Though multiple images may

come close, it will never mimic the real, visceral, “on the ground” experience of encountering one first-hand.

#### Data Collection and Text Justification

To collect data, I conducted Google searches of the terms “Mexico + body dump.” Over 1.14 million results were populated. The majority of search results were Western commercial news outlets written in English reporting on particularly large and well publicized *dumps*. Often, Western sources in English were linked to local or national Mexican accounts which also proved useful in corroborating stories. I found socially mediated accounts on blogs and other social websites by searching particular dates of the *dump*, names of victims, or particular locations such as monuments. For my data, I rely on a combination of oral, visual, and written mediated reports of *body dumps* circulated on commercially mediated and socially mediated platforms.

Having never encountered a *body dump*, I rely completely on mediated and remediated accounts to make sense of this violently inhumane phenomenon. However, relying only on commercialized media comes with several reservations. Historically, Mexican crime beat reporters were targeted and killed for reporting in traditional news outlets such as newsprint and broadcast programs (“28 Journalists,” 2015). Consequently, many news sources diluted, distorted, or ended their coverage of narcoviolence and terrorism for fear of retaliation (“Special Rapporteurship,” 2008). For these reasons, I supplement commercially mediated accounts with those socially mediated to explore potentially competing narratives.

In Chapter 3, I purposefully focus on national Western commercialized journalistic reports of *body dumps* as I work to draw attention to inhumane Western journalistic practices. Structural metaphors are evident in nearly all Western reports which liken victims to waste. Victims are reduced to their bodies which in turn are likened to waste or garbage needing to be removed from public consciousness. This analysis contributes to the study of the creation and consumption of terrorism discourse.

In Chapter 4, I rely on what some would call nontraditional sources for my data. Here, I explore how *bodies* are purposefully and repeatedly placed on highly-trafficked monuments as DTOs work to adulterate these rhetorical sites of significance to communicate messages of control over their respective territories. Candid and un-doctored photographs of the scene, more so than censored and diluted written accounts, accurately illustrate how *bodies* are purposefully placed on and around these sites within these communicative actions. However, current Western commercial media practices do not afford such visual resources (for better or for worse). Performing a reverse image search of an indiscriminate photo accompanying Western accounts provides more telling photos which accurately speak to the choices made by DTOs when constructing the *dump*.

#### Limitations and Recommendations for Future Study

I have never experienced first-hand a *body dump* nor do I know anyone who has. My only relationship to them is one of concern for the victims, most of whom remain unidentified. Identification is central to notions of humanity. Rarely do family members of missing individuals even come forward to make attempts to identify the victims.



Further, it is not uncommon for *body dumps* to involve people's limbs and extremities that seemingly do not belong to any torsos present. It is not difficult to imagine victims who were physically partitioned at the discretion of DTOs, kept in reserve until needed then *dumped* throughout communities. Such a horrific treatment of human life necessitates social and humanitarian work for family members and survivors.

## CHAPTER 3

DESCRIBING *BODY DUMPS*

Though the exact number is unknown, current reports claim more than 60,000 deaths are likely to have resulted from drug related violence in Mexico (Miroff & Booth, 2012). Exploring how commercial news media describe and interpret these acts of terrorism is particularly salient as the United States is still engaged in what are known as The War on Drugs and The War on Terrorism. This chapter explores how Western and U.S. discourses and journalistic narratives surrounding narcoterrorism are created and consumed. By charting discourses produced by commercial mass-media, I examine how terrorism discourse influences conceptual frameworks, such as ways in which the human body is understood.

The impetus for this chapter came from a sense of uneasiness I felt researching narcoviolence and terrorism. I soon realized *body dumps* or *dump jobs* were something on which this type of terrorism is centered. This chapter is the result of figuring out why *body dumps* made me feel disturbed and uneasy. Currently, a Google search for “Body Dump + Mexico” populated 4,650,000 results. A *dump* becomes not only the verb which described the treatment of the victim but a noun for the event reported (e.g., Archibold & Cave, 2012; Corcoran, 2011; Day, 2011; “Mexico’s 49 Headless Bodies,” 2012; “Mexico Security,” 2012; Rodriguez & Ramirez, 2012). The millions of commercially and socially mediated texts circulating around such inhumane atrocities warrant attention. This chapter is driven by my concern surrounding a problematic relationship with the victims

and the way they are described within mass-mediated discourses about this particular type of narcoterrorism.

Current Western and U.S. journalistic practices do little to re-humanize those who were murdered at the hands and guns of Mexican DTOs. Sustained by journalists and commercial mass-media, victims discursively are reduced to their bodies and then metaphorically inscribed as waste and pollutants. To substantiate these claims, I situate *body dumps* within theoretical frameworks of metaphor and waste. Next, I conduct textual analyses of media reports immediately following one particular incident where 49 people were murdered and unceremoniously placed publically near the northern Mexico city of Monterrey in May 2012. I work to critically examine how journalistic discourses offer little room for rehumanization of the victims. In what follows, I visit metaphor and waste theory to glean approaches to the inhumane metaphors evident in mass-mediated reports. Then I make explicit the ways in which victims are discursively reduced to their body and their bodies again reduced or likened to garbage or waste.

### Metaphor Theory

Metaphors, from the Grecian *metapherein* meaning to transfer, have been much written about within the field of communication studies. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) warned against discounting the metaphor as merely “poetic imagination or rhetorical flourish” (p. 3). Rather, these authors argued, metaphors do things to and for their users. Metaphors organize our conceptual frameworks and it is our conceptual frameworks which “structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3). Our language is fundamentally metaphorical

in nature and because language is how we primarily make sense of our surroundings, metaphors are unavoidable.

Metaphors are capable of action and are not to be thought of as linguistic fluff. Lakoff and Johnson provided the metaphor “argument is war” to highlight how structural metaphors “structure one concept in terms of another” (p. 14). While arguing, one defends a position, follows strategy, takes the high ground, and potentially beats an opponent. How we conceive of ourselves and the person with whom we are arguing is metaphorically in terms of war. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explained, “many of the things we do in arguing are partially structured by the concepts of war” (p. 4). As such, metaphors structure how we think about things which subsequently dictate our actions.

Metaphors have the power to motivate for civically productive ends but also possess the ability to promote war (e.g., Kuusisto, 2002) or reaffirm understandings of race relations (Osborn, 1967). For example, the ways U.S. citizens conceived of NATO intervention in Yugoslavia were metaphorical in nature. Military aggression was conceived in terms of a heroic tale, game, and business deal (Kuusisto, 2002).

In addition to structural metaphors, Lakoff and Johnson describe orientational and ontological metaphors. Orientational metaphors organize “a whole system of concepts with respect to one another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 14). Ontological metaphors “refer, quantify, categorize, and identify our experiences to be able to reason about them” (pp. 25-26). As a result of the ability to act and do things for its users, metaphors are unique rhetorical devices which greatly affect how we relate to other people, actions, or phenomena.

Metaphors also work to see things in terms of something else, offering a varying perspective. For Kenneth Burke (1967), metaphors are one the four master tropes, all of which, according to him, have “a role in the discovery and description of the truth” (p. 247). Burke (1967) viewed metaphors as a perspective carried from one realm into another and described them as “a device for seeing something in terms of something else” (p. 247). For Burke (1967), metaphors “bring out the thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this” (p. 247). Metaphors, and their varying perspective, afford insight into something’s character because “the reality” of a thing is discovered not from one, but from various perspectives.

For Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), metaphors are best understood as a “fusion” of concepts or a type of “condensed analogy” (p. 399). However, “metaphorical fusion does not involve closer relations between theme and phoros, or the conclusion, than exist in a simple analogy, but its effect is to consecrate the relation between them” or engage in a complete infusion of meaning (p. 401). In this sense, the relationship between the two concepts ought to be properly understood and recognized, lest the metaphor become “dormant” (p. 405) or otherwise fixed. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca further explained:

A danger to which metaphors are subject is erosion. The metaphor is no longer seen as a fusion, as a bringing together of terms taken from different spheres, but as the application of a vocable to that which it normally designated. (p. 405)

When the metaphorical relationship between the two concepts is lost, or perhaps taken for granted, metaphors are subject to becoming dormant which may ultimately provide a unique rhetorical possibility for revelation. Further, dormant metaphors persuade without

us being aware of it because we may not hear them as metaphors. However, the value of the dormant metaphor in argument is so great mainly on account of the great persuasive force it exerts when, with the help of an appropriate technique, it is reactivated. “This strength is due to the fact that it obtains its effects by drawing on a stock of analogical material that gains ready acceptance because it is not merely known, but is integrated by language into the cultural tradition” (p. 405). Thus, the act of resuscitating or bringing to light a dormant metaphor can be a potentially powerful thing, especially if the metaphor has politically unproductive or inhumane implications.

The power of discursive metaphors is not limited to quotidian life. Metaphors also pervade politics and institutional policy decisions. In their edited collection, *Metaphorical World Politics*, Francis Beer and Christ’l De Landtsheer (2004) explored the potential and power of metaphors within politics. Beer and De Landtsheer explored the potentials and pitfalls of metaphor within discourses of power and politics:

The power of metaphor is the power to understand and impose forms of political order. Metaphors reflect, interpret, and construct politics. Metaphors lie at the heart of political analysis, communication, and decision. Understanding the metaphorical construction of politics reveals previously hidden dimensions of political communities and previously hidden meanings of political discourse... Metaphors, however, may also carry stereotypes, deceit, and manipulation, in the various forms in which they are distributed, from traditional storytelling to Web pages. They tranquilize people, and they may promote war, crime, and civil disobedience; they may euphemize torture and state terrorism. Metaphors can be instruments of propaganda. The master of metaphor dominates his or her environment regardless of its scale. (p. 30)

The ability to control and manipulate metaphors is to control and manipulate those who use them. As is the case in current journalistic practices reporting on *body dumps*, metaphors and associational clusters are euphemizing terror tactics of DTOs perhaps so

states do not have to respond. Critical investigations of unproductive and inhumane metaphors is of great importance. Through recognizing and possibly rejecting metaphors it becomes possible to do justice to those who are inhumanely implicated in the metaphor's use.

### People Reduced to Bodies

Current journalistic practices first reduce victims to their bodies before metaphorically likening them to waste. Victims are reduced to their bodies both materially and symbolically. In most Western reports of *body dumps*, reporters rarely refer to victims as victims upfront. Rather, what is reported is the number of *bodies* discovered (e.g., Agren, 2012; Archibold & Cave, 2012; Beaubien, 2011; Castillo, 2011; “Dozens of Bodies,” 2012; “Horror,” 2012; O’Neill, 2012; Rodriguez, 2012; Rodriguez & Ramirez, 2012). The reporters’ choices to refer first to victims as merely bodies directs the way in which one makes sense of the act of terrorism and the relationship the reader has with those who have had their life taken by others. Consumption of terrorism discourse that does little to highlight the lives taken necessitates critical attention.

Stories do not begin with claims of murdered people, but rather *bodies* found, which removes the agency of the murderers and *dumpers*. For example, Archibold and Cave (2012) with the *New York Times* began their account with, “Couples were walking hand in hand. Children were frolicking. Just down the road in this northern Mexican town, 49 bodies, headless with their hands and feet severed, had been found, and then cleared away.” Writing of the same massacre, *The Guardian* began its story with, “49 decapitated and mutilated bodies were found on Sunday dumped on a highway

connecting the northern Mexican metropolis of Monterrey to the US border, in the latest suspected outburst in an escalating war among drug gangs” (“Mexican Authorities,” 2012). Additionally, Rodriguez (2012) with the *Independent* began her story with, “49 bodies with their heads, hands and feet hacked off were found dumped on a northern Mexican highway in what appeared to be the latest carnage in the escalating war between Mexico’s two dominant cartels.” Though certainly not the only mass-circulated articles covering this particular *dump*, each of the aforementioned articles accurately exemplifies the reduction of victims to their *bodies* in the lead paragraph of national stories. A theme emerges in the above reports of the act of *finding* the *bodies* which directs agency away from the DTOs and toward law enforcement. Correspondingly, the act of *finding* implies the bodies were, at one time, lost.

*Aljazeera* and *BBC News* were some of the only news sources who mentioned the humane nouns of “people, men, or women” by writing, “the dismembered bodies of at least 50 people stuffed into bags and dumped on a main road...were found...scattered in a pool of blood” (“Headless Bodies,” 2012) and “43 men and six women had been decapitated” (“Mexico Violence,” 2012). Despite these few examples, most reports fail to recognize the victims as human or to name the act as murder, instead foregrounding the act of finding and the thing found as a body, not the remains of a person.

The reduction of victims to their bodies is likely a result of their illegibility or their inability to be clearly articulated as an individual. Often, victims are so horrifically ruined, identification is impossible (Agren, 2012). Intelligibility as an individual or a person is founded upon being identifiable either through naming or identifying



characteristics. Often, the first utterances between two strangers are their names, occupations or perhaps where they grew up. By locating an individual in between these coordinates, people become intelligible. Identification is central to notions of humanity. In these case of *body dumps*, lacking the ability to identify with the victims has resulted in two forms of dehumanization: materially and symbolically.

Often, victims and/or their *bodies* are indistinguishable materially. For example, in reference to the aforementioned 49 victims found, the Nuevo Laredo spokesperson for public safety Jorge Domene lamented, “Identification of the victims will be difficult because their heads and extremities are gone” (as cited in Wilkinson, 2012). The gruesome mutilation of the bodies made it nearly impossible to even identify the sex of the victims. Additionally, multiple sources speculated the victims could have been any mixture of United States-bound migrants, members of the *Los Zetas*’ rival cartel *Sinaloa*, or unconnected Mexican citizens (“Mexican Police,” 2012). As a result, the public’s relationship with the victims becomes troubled as the victims are unintelligible. It is not known whether they were innocent civilians, U.S. tourists, or members of a rival gang.

Additionally, victims are reduced to their bodies symbolically by current discursive practices. The immateriality of the *body dump* transforms multiple *bodies* into a single *body dump* which is often what is reported (Archibold & Cave, 2012; Corcoran, 2011; Day, 2011; “Mexico Security,” 2012; Rodriguez & Ramirez, 2012). For example, in *The San Gabriel Valley Tribune*’s account of one particular *dump*, Day (2011) titled his article “Mexican Cartels Escalate Violence with Mass Body Dump in Veracruz.” Similarly, Corcoran (2011) with *Insight Crime* titled his piece, “Guadalajara Body Dump

Heralds Spread of Massacres in Mexico.” In both these pieces dozens of victims symbolically become a collective mass body through the term *body dump*. It is not until you read further the authors are speaking of 35 and 26 victims respectively.

What invites criticism and reflection is that *bodies*, as they are currently being reported, do not necessarily belong to humans. All animals have bodies with limbs and appendages capable of being severed. Leading and titling stories with such an objectifying word detracts from the intelligibility as human. Likely a result of the problems of identification, victims are reduced to their *body* and, often, a collective *body* through the term *body dump*.

#### Bodies as Waste

After being reduced symbolically and materially to just a body, *bodies* are then metaphorically likened to waste or garbage. Western and U.S. journalists’ leads and titles to their stories do little to rehumanize the victims of narcoterrorism. Few rhetorical options exist as identification is complicated due to the horrific ruining of the human body. As a result, victims are materially and symbolically reduced to other than human, a mere *body*: which in turn is presumed dirty or a potential pollutant.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas’s understanding of the body proves useful as she recognized the potential for it also to be dangerous or dirty. She explained how that which is toxic, dangerous, and dirty is always contextualized and socially constructed. Douglas (1966) stated humans, via their language systems, created a taxonomy of items in their world and when something did not fit or transgressed boundaries, it suddenly and inexplicably became problematic. Those things, then, were defined as a pollutant, or were

considered dirty. Thus, Douglas (1966) defined dirt as “matter out of place” (p. 44). Douglas continued, “this implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order” (p. 44). When expectations from past experiences no longer coincide with reality, danger and contamination are likely to occur. Transgression of boundaries and expectations are ripe with potential to pollute, to contaminate, to injure.

However, that which pollutes, or is considered waste or garbage, may be contested. Sociologist John Scanlan (2005) stated:

The language of garbage – the various terms that point to residues, remainders, and so on – is difficult to pin down. This is for the very good reason that its utterances refer to the excrement of meaning itself. For example, it is when something means nothing *to you* that it becomes “filthy”, “shit”, “rubbish”, “garbage”, and so on. (p. 10)

People in public places are not out of place, but *bodies* and *dumps* are. That is to say, through various systems of classification, one is able to suggest bodies are out of place or without place or value.

By exploring what Burke (1967) called “associational clusters,” I work to examine the ways in which the structural metaphor of bodies as waste is constantly reinforced in current Western and U.S. journalistic practices. Examining associational clusters makes “conscious the interrelationships” of “acts and images and personalities and situations” (p. 20). By examining metaphor’s relationships and associational clusters, one is able to excavate the way discourses and narratives are able to liken unlike things. Through investigating “what goes with what” in these mass-mediated stories, I make explicit inhumane metaphors which do little to re-humanize victims of narcoterrorist activity.

Rather than being reported from the perspective of grieving family members, *body dumps* are reported in ways that cast the victims as other than human, namely a mere body. Further, once reduced to a body, victims are discursively inscribed through structural metaphors as garbage, pollutant, or waste necessitating physical removal from public consciousness.

*Fox News* wrote “bodies, some of them in plastic garbage bags, were most likely brought to the spot and dropped from the back of a dump truck” (“Mexico’s 49 Headless Bodies,” 2012). Similarly, *The Guardian* wrote, “forty-nine decapitated and mutilated bodies were found Sunday dumped on a highway” (“Mexican Authorities, 2012). Interestingly, the articles begin in passive voice, thus removing any agency from the DTOs and murderers. Also, the means of transport, the dump truck, likens the treatment of the victims to waste. Through clusters associated with terms such as plastic garbage bag and dump truck, the victims become linguistically associated with waste and garbage. Structural metaphors of waste are also evident in these reports as well. Here, I believe, is evidence of the ways in which inhumane physical action is supported by limited linguistic capabilities to describe such action. Associational clusters leave little room for imaging the victims as anything other than waste being publically disposed from a dump truck. The victims, literally placed in plastic garbage and dumped from a dump truck, paints an all-too convincing picture of the disposal of garbage.

Reporting on the 49 victims, the *New York Times* began their story with “Mangled corpses turning up on street corners and inside restaurants, hung from bridges, and buried in mass graves, Mexicans seem to have grown inured” (Archibold & Cave, 2012). In this

rhetorically unique cluster, the victims are physically and discursively juxtaposed against their location. Through an incongruous comparison, the victims are likened to waste or something that does not belong. The locations mentioned: street corners, restaurants, and bridges, are all premised on order which emphasizes the foreignness and potential for pollution and danger coming from the *bodies*. Additionally, Archibold and Cave (2012) wrote, "...49 bodies, headless with their hands and feet severed, had been found then cleared away." It is not difficult to image finding garbage or waste in any of the aforementioned areas and immediately clearing it away to restore expectations and order of the space. The metaphor of waste and garbage is paralleled here with a complementary metaphor of sanitation.

Further, newspapers used intersecting metaphors of cleanliness and sanitation to describe how the bodies are handled after they were "*dumped*". In Western culture, what occurs after something is thrown out or dumped is rarely discussed. Take, for instance, discourses surrounding the Christmas holiday. Seldom do Christians share stories of the amount of garbage and waste we accumulate from cooking, shopping, gifting, etc. In this absence of an explanation of post hoc treatment of the victims, the metaphor of waste or toxin is affirmed. To clear a dumped body is to remove it physically from sight as well as from public consciousness. To clear is to acquit, to let off the hook, to liberate, to sanitize, to clean. Dozens of bodies, objects, things, were discarded and then quickly cleared from and sanitized in public consciousness.

Additionally, *dump*, used as a noun (Archibold & Cave, 2012; Corcoran, 2011; Day, 2011; "Mexico's 49 Headless Bodies," 2012; "Mexico Security," 2012; Rodriguez

& Ramirez, 2012), refers to a location, the accumulation of waste and garbage. The

*Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d) defined dump as:

1) A pile or heap of refuse or other matter “dumped” or thrown down. *spec.* A pile of ore, earth, etc., which accumulates during mining operation. 2) The practice of dumping goods. 3) A collection of provisions, ammunition, equipment, etc., deposited in a convenient place for later use; also, the place where such supplies are deposited.

By definition, dumps are devoid of value. A dump, as a location, is the vestige of what was once used but is now considered a pollutant. Dumps conjure up notions of filth, waste, garbage, and severity -- a wasteland of sewage left to rot and decompose outside of the public’s consciousness. Dumps are the accumulation of unvalued things; things that have the potential to pollute or pose a danger to reality. Dumps exist, they must, but should be appropriately located so as not to be seen, smelled, or talked about. In ostensibly civilized Western cultures, once something is thrown out or dumped, it is expected to be invisible and not encountered. Dumps allow for the immediate removal of waste, be it bodily or consumerist, without consequences. Dumps are in the margins and periphery of society. That which is out of sight is also out of mind.

When the ordered setting of a dump is disrupted, people begin to feel uncomfortable and attempt to remove the dirt or filth from public sight and consciousness. Littering ordinances and legislation serve to exemplify fear of waste. To say these body dumps are “found or discovered and immediately cleared away” (Archibold & Cave, 2012) is indicative of an inhumane conceptualization of the victims’ bodies as garbage or waste. This implies the victims’ bodies were handled as garbage

rather than with care and buried in cemeteries. Unlike disaster victims who are recovered, these *bodies* are cleared away.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an exposition of the inhumane structural metaphors and associational clusters used to describe victims who have lost their lives in the crossfire of narcoterrorism. A critical examination of how we describe these victims and their bodies offers an opportunity to explore how waste discourse is superimposed upon acts of terrorism at the expense of the victims' humanity. Recognizing how institutions of mass-media describe and interpret violent acts such as *body dumps* offers insight into how general populations cope with and understand the aftermath of a terrorist attack. Described as toxins needing to be removed from public consciousness, victims are reduced to their bodies and reduced again to waste.

I call for an examination of current practices in narcojournalism. A critical reflection of the way journalists describe and understand the victims is urgently needed. Also, the agent of violence must no longer be elided. When humans are discursively inscribed as waste, their humanity is lost. Similarly, when drug trafficking organizations are leaving waste rather than murdered humans, consumers of such discourse are less likely to view narcoterrorist actions as terrorism, mainly due to the lack of causalities. If narcoterrorism is not understood as terrorism, the U.S. likely has little motivation to combat it.

## CHAPTER 4

### PLACING *BODY DUMPS*

On October 12, 2010, Nuevo Laredo neighborhood president Ramón Garza Barrios knelt down in front of a smattering of school-aged children and low-ranking public officials to present a floral bouquet as tribute to the recently built monument honoring Christopher Columbus (Martínez, 2010). It was the 518<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorating Columbus's arrival in the Americas, a day known in Mexico as *Día de La Raza* (Day of the Race). In the celebration, Garza Barrios proclaimed, "I feel incredibly proud to belong to a society that builds its strength from the values of justice, gratitude, and appreciation. By unveiling this statue we are demonstrating full compliance with our historical responsibility to those who embody the human courage to change the world" (as cited in Martínez, 2010, translation by author). The monument is a physical and visual reminder of civility and progress.

On February 27, 2011, four men were found decapitated and placed at the Christopher Columbus monument in Nuevo Laredo ("Hallan a Cuatro," 2011). By all accounts, the murders are attributed to Los Zetas. Later that year, on September 24, Marisol Macías Castañeda, the editor-in-chief of *Primera Hora* and online crime reporter, was found decapitated and mutilated with her bleeding corpse on the same monument ("México," 2011). Less than two months later on November 9, another contributor for *Nuevo Laredo en Vivo*, *Rascatripas* was also found decapitated and still hemorrhaging at the monument ("Decapitan a otro Bloguero," 2011). Twenty days later, on November 29, an anonymous caller reported a lifeless body on the steps of the



monument shortly before 5 a.m. (Rubio, 2011). In his article, Rubio stated this was the eighth time murdered victims of drug-related violence had been left at this particular monument. It is likely many more have gone unreported.

This chapter questions how sites of rhetorical significance are contested within Mexican narcoterrorism and violence. The Christopher Columbus monument and dozens of others throughout Mexico have been instrumental in a larger performance of terror involving *body dumps* in strategic places, often ones of high visibility. The monument, due to its centrality and high profile status, serves as a communicative vehicle by the state and drug trafficking organizations [DTOs] as both attempt to communicate messages for control. This chapter builds on Irwin-Zarecka's understandings of memory work – or the collaborative labor required to create and ultimately contest collective memory. As ruined bodies are deployed at sites of memory, other bodies immediately respond by removing the corpses and sanitizing the site. As it is, multiple competing memory works and performances are occurring at this monument.

Larger cultural memories are preserved at the expense of memories of the individuals slain. As custodians of the site, the government must remove the *body dump* and sanitize the monument so as to maintain its messages of power, civility, and economic progress. Not surprisingly, little evidence exists of any state or official response to the repeated crimes linked to the monument. Using the monument in Nuevo Laredo as a case study, I explore how the state's perceived maintenance and control over the monument supersedes any potential for collective remembering of the victims.

This chapter proceeds in three sections. First, I briefly describe the site of the monument itself. Second, I explore Irwin-Zarecka's understanding of memory work to explore how sites of rhetorical significance become contested when used as a soundboard by both the state and DTOs. Third, I visit scholarship on the rhetorics of place and space to make sense of how *bodies* are used to adulterate such a profoundly historical and rhetorical place. Finally, I excavate the ways the monument is adulterated, contested, and disturbed repeatedly by both the state and DTOs.

### The Monument



*Figure 2.* Monumento a Cristóbal Colón, photo by G. Monge in “Inauguran Monumento” (2010).

Completed October 2010, the monument is located at the intersection of Leandro Valle Avenue and Paseo Colón, a highly trafficked intersection both for pedestrians and motor vehicles. Commissioned by the city, the monument cost over 1,300,000 pesos to build and erect (Martínez, 2010). Molded from burnt bronze, the statue of Columbus is 8.8 feet tall. His right arm is raised as if gesturing an inviting welcome or perhaps extending his arm for a handshake. His back is straight as he stands firm and upright looking northward. Neighborhood president Barrios justified the direction of Columbus: “The statue faces north and not south because it’s in this direction where the United States is located” (cited in Monge, 2010, translation by author). Nuevo Laredo, located in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, lies on the banks of the Rio Grande and is part of the Laredo-Nuevo Laredo Metropolitan Area, one of six bi-national metropolitan areas along the US-Mexican border. In this sense, the northward facing statue, as articulated by Barrios, functions as a rhetorical bridge between the two nations.

The statue of Columbus stands on top of a 31.8 foot stone mast surrounded by a raised garden which is elevated three feet off the surrounding sidewalk (Martínez, 2010). Also located within the garden are two large stone spheres likely symbolic of the two worlds Columbus is credited with uniting. Not pictured in Figure 1 are illuminated white stone steps leading from the sidewalk to the base of the monument’s pillar. However, little opportunity exists for publics to gather at the monument as the small area is surrounded by a heavily-used traffic circle.

The monument, as articulated by then-neighborhood president Barrios’s statement, represents cultural and political progress. As erectors and custodians of the

monument, the city of Nuevo Laredo is intentionally conveying messages of power, civility, and economic progress through this monument honoring Christopher Columbus, particularly with its intentional northward facing direction.

The commemoration of Christopher Columbus in Latin America is contested, especially given the enduring, harsh realities of colonial practices in the region. Suzan Shown Harjo, a Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muscogee poet, curator, and policy advocate for American Indian rights stated, “We have no reason to celebrate an invasion that caused the demise of so many of our people and is still causing destruction ” (as cited in Bigelow, 1998, p. 9). Such sentiment is felt throughout the region. For many indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, Columbus is no longer the unquestioned hero who shepherded the hemisphere into the future, but rather one who exploited and colonized and whose effects are still felt today. On the yearly, now-challenged commemoration of Columbus, Summerhill and Williams (2000) said, “Every year, it seems we are asked to ponder the meaning of still another commemoration, as if the idea of public anniversaries has become symptomatic of an underlying wish to recall the past and feel ourselves members of an historical community” (p. 5). The contested nature of the commemoration of Christopher Columbus is beyond the scope of this thesis. Yet the complex rhetorical juxtaposition of a monument honoring Christopher Columbus in Latin America should not go unquestioned. The recent installation of a Columbus monument by the city of Nuevo Laredo is evidence of Mexican state support for Columbus’s commemoration.

### Memory Work

The rhetoricity and historicity of sites of significance require work, work to come into existence and work to remain in public consciousness. Memory work, as described by Irwin-Zarecka (2007) is demanded to “secure a presence for the past” (p. 13). That is to say, memory is not something that objectively exists but comes into existence only through various technologies, works, and efforts. Describing the destroying of monuments commemorating communist heroes, Irwin-Zarecka (2007) reminded us “at times, the work done is not to build but to destroy” (p. 13). Destruction may come in the form of material or symbolic desecration. In this case, memory work serves to both advance, but also potentially adulterate, larger cultural memories.

What types of memory work are or are not performed can shed light onto that which is viewed as culturally important. Irwin-Zarecka (2007) explained such a relationship:

To recognize the concreteness of memory work is also to be usefully reminded of the mundane, yet analytically important qualities. That work takes time, energy, money, and resources are often in short supply and carefully allocated. The very process of production is thus frequently a site for articulating priorities, obligations, goals, and intended audiences. (p. 13)

By exploring how custodians of state property allocate their “time, energy, money and resources,” it is possible to infer what priorities the state wishes to advance.

Types of memory work or memory performances are incredibly varied. Sharing an experience orally, producing a material entity, and maintaining that entity are all works of memory construction and maintenance. “Memory projects” stated Irwin-Zarecka (2007), are “the efforts of many smaller construction jobs combined” (p. 133).

For example, the construction of a particular monument and repeated efforts to maintain its appearance involve multiple different labors and performances to sustain its presence within the communal consciousness.

Sites of historical significance and memory are rhetorical for several reasons. First, there exists an overt differentiation from other places through marks of recognition (Blair, Dickinson, & Ott, 2010, p. 24). That is, places are marked as different through performances and works of memory. This particular way of thinking situates the rhetoricity of place and memory as the product or construction of individuals. Place, as defined by Endres and Senda-Cook (2011) “refers to particular locations that are semi-bounded, a combination of material and symbolic qualities, and embodied” (p. 259). Additionally, space, as defined by Endres and Senda-Cook (2011) is “a more general notion of how society and social justice are regulated (and sometimes disciplined) by spatial thinking” (p. 260). That is, places of historical significance and memory are marked distinct from surrounding space.

Place, as a rhetorical device, has potential to be incredibly powerful. Endres and Senda-Cook (2011) expanded the rhetoricity of place by positing, “instead of merely arguing that people make meanings for places through discourse, we argue that places, imbued with meaning and consequences, are rhetorical performances” (p. 260). Places exert power through the discourses and memory performances surrounding them, but it also should be noted the materiality of the place has consequences. Endres and Senda-Cook (2011) stressed the profound rhetorical difference between place-based arguments and place-as-rhetoric: “On the one hand, using place-based arguments, people could

invoke the Castro District – a place with a decidedly queer meaning – as evidence of the city’s celebration of queer identity” (p. 265). To cast Castro in this way highlights only the overarching discourses surrounding the place. However, to recognize the capacity for place to invoke visceral bodily reactions, Endres and Senda-Cook (2011) continued:

On the other hand, in place-as-rhetoric, the material aspects of the place argue for the queerness of the place. Walking through the Castro District, the rainbow flags, pink triangles, gay and lesbian bars, sex positive stores, and billboards tell us something about the meaning of the place, that it is a safe place for queer people to be. Beyond the meaning, the Castro District has material consequences for the people who walk through the neighborhood – they are confronted with an open, affirming, and queer place, which some people find liberating, others find mundane, and others find terrifying. (pp. 265-266)

There exist corporeal implications for bodies in these places. Beyond only recognizing the rhetorical powers evident in discourses surrounding place, Endres and Senda-Cook aptly acknowledged the power places have to incite and implicate bodies viscerally.

Place has a variety of ways of performing and inciting people to perform. The performativity of memory work may come from bodies as they respond to sustain the status quo, or the place itself, but it most likely comes from a combination of the two.

Much has been written on the rhetoricity of place within the publicity of the ruined, lynched body. Communication Studies scholar Fuoss (1999) maintained “extralegal public executions [lynchings in the U.S. South] conform to contemporary construals of cultural performance [as] these events were prepared for and often publicized in advance” (p. 5). Though still extralegal, the organization and advertisement of these murders was possible because of a culture of white impunity. By the 1950s, “lynching was no longer an acceptable public spectacle, though it was still an acceptable community practice” (Harold & Deluca, 2005, p. 269). Performances in this sense, be it

legal or extralegal, are still planned and performed. The distinction between extralegal executions as an acceptable community practice and an acceptable spectacle is trivial in the way the theatre of violence was still framed and performed publically. These performances “were framed within spaces that were temporarily or permanently ‘marked off’” (Fuoss, 1999, p. 6). In this sense, stages came into public being in a multitude of ways. Theatres and their stages were constructed from places such as fairgrounds and cemeteries but also from the physical terrain itself (Fuoss, 1999, p. 6). Liberties were taken in the selection and construction of stages as the perpetrators constituted the legal majority even though their actions were extralegal.

### Analysis

Examples of intentionally disturbing the rhetorics of place and space within narcoterrorism are abundant but perhaps best exemplified by the case of the Christopher Columbus monument in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. However, other places such as night clubs, bridges, highways, and sidewalks have all been reported as location of *body dumps* (Archibold & Cave, 2012).

Using the monument of Christopher Columbus as a case study, I examine the ways in which *body dump* practices, a perverse cycle of repeated atrocities in highly visible locations, work to communicate with state and government officials in Nuevo Laredo. By relying on Irwin-Zarecka’s understandings of memory work, I juxtapose how the Columbus monument is contested by both DTOs and the state.

On February 27, 2011, the corpses of four men were found strategically placed on the illuminated stone stairs of the monument. A poor-quality photo of the scene



accompanied Abisai Rubio's report from *Azteca Tamaulipas*. Taken from a distance, it is impossible for the viewer to completely make sense of the seemingly large, dark mass on the illuminated steps.<sup>3</sup> Quite possibly indicative of how it is to see the scene from afar in person. However, other photos of the scene supplied by *Excelsior* more vividly depict how strategically the victims' bodies were placed on and around the monument ("Hallan a Cuatro," 2011).

Four men were carefully and strategically, yet unceremoniously, placed on the illuminated stone steps leading up to the monument. The victims were face up and shoulder to shoulder save for one who was approximately one foot to the right of the others. The victims' heads were severed and placed somewhat above each of the bodies. Each of the victims were in various stages of undress with their genitalia exposed. DTOs were purposefully attempting to defile the place with disfigured bodies, exposed genitalia, and viscera.

Regrettably, later that year Marisol Macías Castañeda, the editor-in-chief of *Primera Hora* and online crime reporter, was also found decapitated and mutilated at the monument ("México", 2011). Photos of her execution, like so many others, are difficult to witness. Illuminated by the site's existing lighting, much of the monument is stained

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<sup>3</sup> I intentionally do not use photographs of the crime scenes as I do not believe further recirculation of them is just. Describing the circulation of the horrible photos of US lynching practices and the torture photos of Abu Ghraib, Apel (2005) stated "National and international laws against torture and murder are clearly violated, the basic imperatives of humanity and decency dishonored, and the images, like the acts they represent, evoke revulsion at the humiliation and barbarity of it all" (p. 89). Further, Dauphinée (2007) wrote of inhumane images, "the 'ethical' use of the imagery of torture and other atrocities is always in a state of absolute tension: the bodies in the photographs are still exposed to our gaze in ways that render them abject, nameless and humiliated – even when our goal in the use of that imagery is to oppose their condition" (p. 1454). For these reasons, I do not include them in this thesis.

with her blood from her torso, limbs, and extremities placed around the monument. The scene at the monument illustrates the meticulous labor involved to intentionally desecrate the site and her body. Her limbs were severed at the site, evidenced by the wounds still bleeding on the monument by the time crime scene photos were taken (Overnex, 2011). She also was undressed with her genitalia positioned to be exposed and upward. Her head was placed on top of one of the large stone spheres, likely symbolic of the two worlds Columbus is credited with uniting. Placing the victim's head on top of the stone world is likely read as the DTOs communicating they "rule this territory."

The *dumps* at this site evince meticulous thought, despite being incredibly inhumane. Meticulous attention of the rhetoricity of the site can be found in intentionally placing victims in symbolic locations such as on top of the world. Intentionality can also be seen in the example of the four men found on February 27, 2011. Their mutilated bodies were intentionally placed shoulder to shoulder essentially blocking or covering the stairway. While appearing to be completely unceremonious and inhumane, several *body dumps* necessitate labor to properly adulterate and disturb rhetorical sites of significance.

Conversely, though, few resources exist testifying to the government maintenance of the monument. Yet, it is likely correct to assume the state must immediately respond by removing the victims and sanitizing the monument. As custodians of the site, city officials use the monument as a stand-in for conveying messages of control over the DTOs to the general public. As a result, the monument, due to its centrality and high profile status, serves as a communicative vehicle by the state and DTOs as both attempt to communicate messages of control and intimidation, respectfully.

However, there have been cases where the discovery of *body dumps* have mobilized protest groups due to the government's lack of response. For example, *Las Mujeres de Negro* (women in black) formed in November of 2001 in response to the discovery of eight mutilated female corpses at a popular intersection in Ciudad Juárez (Wright, 2005). Though unsuccessful at preventing further narcoviolence and terrorism against women, these *mujeres* do afford an interesting example of how publicized *body dumps* have motivated, rather than enervated, a public. Regrettably, murder and *body dumps* are still common throughout the region.

For example, on February 27, 2011, over two thousand people attended a professional basketball game located in the same neighborhood as the Christopher Columbus monument. As the game ended, and the attendees were dispersed from the stadium, the four decapitated men were discovered at the monument (Reyes Cruz, 2011). Timing the *dump* with a high profile event attended by thousands would assuredly garner the attention of law enforcement, media, and the general population.

In what is described by Endres and Sendra-Cook (2011) as an “ephemeral fissure in the meaning of place” (p. 268), Los Zetas violated expectations of the place as monument and transformed it to a place of terror and celebration of violence. Los Zetas temporarily reconstructed the meaning of the place to publically undermine existing law enforcement and send explicit messages of warning to their immediate, and eventually mediated, audience.

Though this fissure or change in meaning of place is limited temporally, in many cases “residual traces of the fissure in meaning” can remain often in the case of stains left

by blood and other excreta (Endres & Sendra-Cook, 2011; Fuoss, 1999). These residual traces or subsequent performances are much more nuanced. With a brazen disregard for human compassion and civility, four men were murdered, mutilated and *dumped* for thousands to see. The men died showing signs of torture and evidence of death by asphyxiation.

It seemingly took only seconds for the victims to be placed on the monument and in these same seconds, residual trace performances were simultaneously created. As blood and other human excreta poured onto the brightly lit stone monument, so too was a quasi-permanent demarcation to serve as a reminder for what occurred here. It does not matter whether or not you were there on February 27. It is possible to imagine stone stained brown on the brightly illuminated monument. A stain like that can mean only one thing. As it is not uncommon for bodies to be disfigured beyond recognition, families are not reunited with those lost. In this sense, individuals are reduced to their residual traces, blood and other excrement mixed with those who met a similar fate.

Subsequent performances and residual traces also live out in the memory of those who bore witness. An event long past continues to exist only for as long as it is remembered. Los Zetas strategically constructed spaces of terror in front of a captive audience of several hundred and were able to do so in a very short window of time. Blocking traffic, discarding the bodies, and leaving the scene only took a few short moments. Yet, those stuck in traffic turned to voyeurs, witnesses, or terrorized targets, allowing for the continuation of their theatrics of terror. Terror exists only in the minds of those terrorized. To see a pile of bodies inhumanly discarded feet from your car, no

doubt, is paralyzing and will haunt those who bore witness. In this sense, the installation of terror and fear into public memory allows for a continuance of the initial fracture of a place's meaning.

Several factors of space and place come together to create a prime environment for the DTOs of which DTOs took advantage. The confluence of a highly trafficked area, a culturally and historically significant monument which reflects power, civility, and economic progress; and a highly publicized sporting event which assuredly brings in thousands for a momentary audience all afford opportunities for DTOs to construct highly publicized *body dumps*.

There exists no evidence online of memorials being placed at this particular monument honoring those who have either been lost within narcoviolence in general or those who have been *dumped* at the monument. Such an absence is indicative of the culture of silence in which many Mexican citizens live. As a result, the monument of Christopher Columbus, due to its centrality and high profile status, serves as a communicative vehicle by the state and drug trafficking organizations as both attempt to communicate messages of control.

### Conclusion

This chapter builds on, yet diverts from Endres and Senda-Cook's understanding of the rhetoricity of location. Endres and Senda-Cook (2011) explained, "Instead of merely arguing that people make meanings for places through discourse, we argue that places, imbued with meaning and consequences, are rhetorical performances" (p. 260). Endres and Senda-Cook (2011) stressed the profound rhetorical difference between

placed-based argument and place-as-rhetoric (p. 265). Yet, within the context of *body dumps*, the intentional placement of *bodies* at monuments is evident of placed-based argument. The lingering memories of atrocities found at these monuments is evidence of place-as-rhetoric. *Body dump* practices complicate this understanding of the performance of place. Intentional, rhetorical and strategic in nature, *body dumps* often rend and significantly disturb the meaning of places, namely because DTOs, the victims, and those who witness the *dump* are all involved in the creation of the place's meaning.

In this chapter, I have excavated the ways in which DTOs work to adulterate and disturb place and space. As previously mentioned, central to *body dumps* is the intentional display of the ruined *body* to instill terror and fear into audiences. Using the monument of Christopher Columbus as a case study, I explore how Mexican narcoterrorism contests public and open areas. The monument, due to its centrality and high profile status, serves as a communicative vehicle by the state and DTOs as both attempt to communicate messages of control and intimidation, respectfully.

## CHAPTER 5

THEORIZING *BODY DUMPS*

This thesis explores the rhetoric and labor surrounding *body dumps* and offers ways of making sense of the inhumane atrocities and acts of terrorism in modern Mexico. Regardless of ideology and intent, acts of terrorism are still “a part of a larger process of communicating a message and generating a response” (Tuman, 2010, p. 31). Terrorism works best when the anxiety it is intended to induce is maximized through visibility, either witnessed or mediated. As a result, acts of terrorism are not random acts of injudicious violence but may include communicative acts of attempted coercion.

A communication lens invites the study of the rhetoric of terror. I would now like to refer back to terrorism scholar Jarvis (2009) who maintained many social-scientific approaches to terrorism focus on “problem-solving pursuits” (p. 7). A critical and rhetorical approach to terrorism affords more possibilities. Though acts of terror are usually criminal, immoral, and politically unproductive, a critical approach allows for the exploration of motives and methods of individuals engaging in narcoterrorism which seem to be communicating messages of control and power over highly localized areas. By exploring the rhetorical constructions of the discursive and the corporeal *body dump*, this thesis offers theoretical insight to the fields of body and terrorism studies.

This chapter proceeds in the following two parts. First, I explore the theoretical insight gained from exploring the ways bodies are adulterated, thus rendering them *antibodies* or perhaps *any bodies*. Then, I explore the way DTOs and their use of *body dumps* must be viewed as what they truly are: an act of terrorist rhetoric.

*Body Dumps and Body Studies*

The body is a site of contest. Even how the body is defined and understood is challenged. Bodies, as understood by Frank (1991) are “constituted in the interaction of an equilateral triangle, the points of which are institutions, discourses, and corporeality” (p. 49). Frank’s approach to bodies appreciates and recognizes a variety of intersecting and often competing factors that ultimately make a body (il)legible. In a somewhat similar fashion, Palczewski, Ice, and Fritch (2012) wrote of bodies, “not of some biological entity, but of a social and individual creation, performance, and inscription. Gender, sex, race, class, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, ability, age, and a host of other identity ingredients enter the discussion” (p. 66).

However, *body dumps* complicate the way the victims (and their bodies) are understood. Often, victims are so ruined, sexual or racial identification is impossible which likely eliminates many, if not all, of the “identity ingredients” that make a body legible. Also, discourses surrounding *body dumps* cloud the relationship between the victims of narcoterrorism and readers of many mass-mediated accounts of the violence.

The phrase *body dump*, explored in Chapter 3, is used extensively by journalists throughout U.S. and Western accounts of Mexican narcoterrorism (e.g., Archibold & Cave, 2012; Corcoran, 2011; Day, 2011; “Mexico’s 49 Headless Bodies,” 2012; “Mexico Security,” 2012; Rodriguez & Ramirez, 2012). The qualifying moniker *body* within the phrase *body dump* recognizes the role of the body but it is not a body fully recognized as human. Frank (1991) and Palczewski, Ice, and Fritch (2012) all recognized multiple factors at work that ultimately constellate a body. However, when “identity ingredients”



are removed, and the material body becomes so mutilated and ruined, traditional rhetorical construction of the body becomes virtually impossible. As a result, people are reduced to their body and, through journalistic practices, discursively reduced to an indistinguishable aggregate of bodies. This mass of bodies is then likened, through metaphor and associational clusters, to waste and garbage removing all agency and the humanness of the individual.

Bodies as they are described, used, and abused within narcoterrorism come into consciousness not from “identity ingredients” but from their absence. In this sense, a body becomes either an *antibody* or *anybody*. An antibody, in the medical sense, is an agent used for negating an effect, typically an infection or poison. The emphasis on negation for preventative measures is similar to the act of negation or stripping of identifying characteristics which often prevents identification of the victims. *Antibodies*, as described by Western corporate media, do two things. First, they disturb the identification process of the victims beyond recognition to the point humane ways of describing them become nearly impossible. And second, as a result, they also disguise, negate, and strip the reality of terrorism as it is occurring since victims are not being discovered but merely *bodies*.

Or perhaps *bodies*, in other instances function as *anybody*. *Anybody*, a noun referring to some unspecified person or people, also highlights an undifferentiated or nonindividualized understanding of another’s identity. As opposed to *antibodies*, an *anybody* may function to increase terror. By highlighting the literal possibility that the

victims found could be anybody, the sense of fear is heightened in those who bear real, unmediated witness since it could very well be themselves next targeted.

For example, in reference to the aforementioned 49 victims found, the Nuevo Laredo spokesperson for public safety Jorge Domene lamented, “Identification of the victims will be difficult because their heads and extremities are gone” (as cited in Wilkinson, 2012). Multiple sources speculated the victims could have been any mixture of United States-bound migrants, members of the Los Zetas’s rival cartel *Sinaloa*, or unconnected Mexican citizens (“Mexican Police,” 2012). In this sense, the *bodies* spoke of could be *anybody*. Or perhaps, the lack of “identity ingredients” constellates an *antibody*, a body rendered unintelligible and used to negate identification.

#### *Body Dumps and Terrorism Studies*

This thesis contributes to the separate, but not unrelated, fields of rhetorical and terrorism studies. Mass-mediated responses to *body dumps* and the labor involved to design and dispose of them provide rich, although disturbing, texts with intersections of rhetoric, violence, and the body. This thesis also contributes to theoretical understandings of the nascent field of Terrorism Studies.

Former United Nations officer A. P. Schmid shaped what is the most widely agreed-upon definition of terrorism within Terrorism Studies. According to Schmid, terrorism is an “anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are not the main targets” (Schmid & Jongman, 2005, p. 28). Of importance is the recognition that

acts of terror may be repeated to incite anxiety and possibly employed by a variety of actors who intend not only to assassinate but to communicate a larger message to various publics.

Narcoterrorism as enacted by drug cartels and other drug-trafficking organizations clearly meets the generally agreed-upon definition of what constitutes terrorism. Within narcoterrorism, the deployment of bodies as visual tropes is instrumental as warring cartels jockey for power, terrain, and influence. Terrorism works best when the anxiety it is intended to induce is maximized through visibility, either witnessed or mediated. As a result, *body dumps* are to be thought of and understood as acts of terrorism and not random acts of injudicious criminal violence.

Chapter 4 explores how *body dumps*, as created and used by Mexican DTOS, should be understood as acts of terrorism and rhetoric. I explored how sites of historical and rhetorical significance are contested by DTOs and subsequently the state. Using the monument to Christopher Columbus in Nuevo Laredo as a case study, I explored the way DTOs work to inspire anxiety through repeated violent actions for criminal reasons at this one location. Further, in many cases of *body dumps* at this monument, the direct targets of violence were not only the main targets but served as a vehicle to relay the messages of intimidation and control to larger audiences.

### Conclusion

I believe it important to reflect on the ways current U.S. consumption of narcotics indisputably drives Central and South American drug enterprises. Currently, Mexico is the hub of “one of the world’s most sophisticated drug networks” namely because of its

proximity to the U.S., “the world’s largest consumer economy” (Lee, 2014). Further, commercial and economic inequalities stemming from the implementation of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have unquestionably left Mexico in precarious economic standing. Additionally, officials estimate the trade and movement of narcotics northward “makes up three to four percent of Mexico’s \$1.2 trillion annual GDP – totaling as much as \$30 billion – and employs at least half a million people” (Lee, 2014). An honest reflection of U.S. drug incarceration and rehabilitation practices is desperately needed in conversations surrounding the U.S. War on Drugs.

Remember Vonnegut’s (1991) own doubts of writing on large-scale massacres in the opening page of this thesis. “It is so short and jumbled and jangled, Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre” (p. 19). Here, I depart from the formidable novelist. Humanistic and rhetorical approaches of study have as much to offer as policy conversations and social-scientific methods of inquiry. Good rhetorical criticism ought to “take a position..., clarify more than it obscures..., and be attentive to the way the texts studied participate in larger systems of power” (Palczewski, 2003, pp. 388-389). Throughout this thesis I have worked to show how critical approaches to inhumane media accounts and bodily practices at sites of historical significance cloud much more than clarify the harsh reality of narcoterrorism.

Rhetorical criticism has the ability to elucidate discourses and practices which may be taken for granted. By taking a clear and unwavering position, this thesis works to raise consciousness of the inhumane atrocities and the way they are being responded to in Mexico. However, writing on such events presents a risk of sensationalizing the murder,

violence, and terrorism that is occurring. Throughout this thesis, I worked to attend to such risks. I intentionally italicized *body dumps* to highlight the limits of the linguistic phrase. I also choose not to include photographs of the victims due to the inhumane ethical implications of furthering subjecting the victims to our gaze. I considered Dauphinée's (2007) explanation of similar images from Abu Ghraib, "the bodies in photographs are still exposed to our gaze in ways that render them abject, nameless, and humiliated – even when our goal in the use of that imagery is to oppose their condition" (p. 1454). Additionally, I referred to those murdered with as humane vocabulary as possible and when it was not possible, I italicized the phrase *body dump*, which I adopted from journalistic practices solely for continuity purposes within the study of narcoterrorism. This thesis, in its capacity, has attempted to make explicit the ways in which thousands of people throughout Mexico have not been done justice.

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