All that is solid (melts into air)

Extractivism and necrolandscape in northeast Mexico[1]

Oswaldo Ruiz
National System of Art Creators, Mexico / oswaldo.r@gmail.com

Ariadna Ramonetti
National System of Researchers, Mexico / ariadna.ramonetti@udem.edu

Translated by Oswaldo Ruiz, Ariadna Ramonetti and George Hutton

Abstract
Through a set of images taken by Oswaldo Ruiz between 2019 and 2020 in the Monterrey metropolitan area, we seek to investigate the production of landscapes of death. These landscapes often accompany the range of extractive economies that are dedicated to the exploitation of the stone materials in Monterrey's mountainsides, in a city which has historically been configured to become the industrial capital of Mexico.
We propose the term *necrolandscape* to critically allude to the geological extractive processes that irreparably damage the natural landscape and its lifeforms, causing a death cycle in which nature and territory are reduced to low-cost goods at the service of the interests of big capital. These interests ensure that the same space from which the stone material was extracted is occupied with public and private infrastructure, as seen in the images below. This leads to a deprived landscape of exclusion.

Keywords
extractivism; necrolandscape; peri-urban communities; landscapes of exclusion; extractive economies; Northeast Mexico; Monterrey (Mexico).

Breathe the mountain: The broken landscape of the Mexican Northeast

Since the early 20th century, the slopes of various mountain ranges that cross the state of Nuevo León have been at the mercy of the extraction of stone materials. These materials are used for the production of cement[2] and ready-mixed concrete, which is exported internationally by large corporations from Monterrey —these businesses have established a geological economy based on the appropriation, commodification and exploitation of environmental common goods that are impossible to regenerate.

From 1905 onwards, various cooperatives and companies were granted authorisation by the government of the state of Nuevo León to obtain stone aggregates of sedimentary origin.[3] This is the term used, in the industry, to refer to limestone rocks and clays which are then exploited in various stages. There is stripping, which involves completely lifting the topsoil, eroding the ground and causing dust emissions; then there is blasting, with explosives at heights of over 230 m, and later the crushing, grinding, screening, calcination and sale of the pulverised mountain, which will eventually be turned into a product for use in housing construction or infrastructure.

Figure 1: Old abandoned stone quarry on the southwest face of the Cerro de las Mitras, to the west of the city, 2019.

Figure 2: San Ángel stone quarry. It is still in operation at the western end of the Cerro de las Mitras. This photograph shows the limestone extraction device, the crushers and chutes to turn them into fine sand, 2020.

Figure 3: Concrete bridge, near sand-selling businesses in the Cerro del Topo Chico area, 2019.

This process is carried out by various types of companies, ranging from small, precarious stonemasonry businesses to large-scale international corporations, which shift from mountain to mountain when the quarries (locally known as "pedreras") are used up, or when local exploitation and operation licenses expire (see Casas, 2020; Hernández, 2018). These companies take advantage of the legal loopholes in the Regulatory Law of Constitutional Article 27 in Mining Matter, which does not apply to "rocks or products of their decomposition that can only be used for the manufacturing of materials for construction or ornamentation, or that are destined directly for those purposes." (Art. 4, III), or when the composition of the mineral deposits is the same as that of the exploited land (see Art. 2), which is the case of the limestone mountains in northeast Mexico.

Despite being prohibited within the Monterrey metropolitan area since 1982, under Decree 187 (which established the relocation of the city's quarries; see HCNL, 2013), the extraction of stone for the manufacture of construction materials has not stopped. Quite the opposite: it has moved towards the edges of the city, in an attempt to slip under the radar. This normalises the presence/absence of a broken landscape that dissolves into the night to the sound of explosives that turn it into powder, before being

scorched at temperatures of 1,450°C to obtain cement. We breathe the mountain.

In southern and central Mexico there has long been *campesino* and/or indigenous resistance against mining, because the social ownership of the land is usually of a communal and agrarian nature. In Monterrey and its metropolitan area, however, the situation has been somewhat different. From 1876 to 1970 there was a gradual impoverishment of the rural working class and thus an accelerated process of metropolisation, whereby the accumulation of capital was incentivised, thanks also to tax conditions that favoured the development of the steel and construction industries (see García, 2007, 39-41). The *campesinos* in this region did not seek agrarian endowments in order to set up some type of communal property, which is what happened in central Mexico with the *ejido* (i.e. common land) and the large number of social organisations that emerged from the distribution of land after the Mexican Revolution. Instead, in the northeast, an urban proletariat and subproletariat were established. In some cases they arose in the working-class neighbourhoods built around large industrial complexes, otherwise they took shape as populous *colonias*[4] that sprang up on the disorderly outskirts of the city. The historical struggles and resistance that Monterrey has experienced are directly associated with the forming of popular urban movements that sought access to basic services and decent housing, rather than demanding the social ownership of land, or defending the environment and non-renewable natural assets, such as the mountains. Only in recent years have isolated complaints emerged, i.e. from citizens concerned about the lack of environmental impact studies, the irregularities in authorisation permits for the extraction of non-metallic minerals, the use of dynamite and the contamination caused by the detonations on the hillsides that surround the city. One complaint received by the Federal Attorney's Office for Environmental Protection (PROFEPA) in June 2018 mentions that: "With the powerful winds in this area, dense dust clouds rise up. This affects vision, and forces nearby people to breathe in the dust from the exploitation of said material, with the resulting physical and health damage. There is also noise pollution and other damage caused by the shaking, which includes disturbing the fauna and the deterioration of the existing flora, due to the effects of this pollution." (PROFEPA, BP / 711-18).

Within the metropolitan area of Monterrey, twelve stone quarries are still active (see ASEC, 2020 and SGM, 2018). The mountains and urbanisations contained in this visual essay are located in these quarries, mainly at the foot of the Cerro de las Mitras, the Cerro del Topo Chico, the Sierra El Fraile and the Sierra de San Miguel. They all have a declaration as Protected Natural Areas and so they should be subject to ecological conservation, but this is not the case (*Periódico Oficial del Gobierno del Estado de Nuevo León*, 24/11/2000, no. 141, volume CXXVII).

Figure 4: The region's self-built architecture mainly uses materials extracted from the quarries. Colonia Tierra y Libertad, Cerro del Topo Chico, 2019.

Figure 5: Old stone quarry of Cerro de las Mitras. In the background you can see the main building of the Colinas del Valle subdivision. Being so close to the city, the abandoned quarries were sold to build luxury housing that contrasts with what might have been the main office or resting place for the workers of the old stone quarry, 2019.

Necrolandscape, or the Landscape of Death

With regards to the Mexican context, the neologism *necrolandscape* (i.e. "necropaisaje") was coined by Ramonetti (2019) in her PhD thesis *At the Mouth of the Water, on the Shore of the Centre: Territory, Agency and Politics on the North-Eastern Shore of Lake Texcoco*. The term describes the process involved in the extraction of stone materials of volcanic origin, in the surroundings of the Basin of Mexico. These materials were used in the construction of the New International Airport of Mexico City (NIAM), a project since cancelled.

In order to lay the foundations of the airport in such a geologically complex terrain as is Lake Texcoco, the private companies that won the contracts to clean and clear the ground were given the task of removing more than 3 million cubic metres of wet mineral sediment. This had accumulated over hundreds of years, in an area of 1,147 hectares, and was to be replaced by over 23 million cubic metres of tezontle, which, being a very porous

volcanic rock, would, in theory, absorb the water and help to compact the land. This would be aided by the installation of drains for drying the surface water, as well as draining the water accumulated in the muddy bottom of the wetland.[5] This also required almost 11 million cubic metres of basalt, another volcanic rock, to generate weight and help remove the water from the entire area over three years (see, Ramonetti, 2019; 257-258).[6]

With these volcanic stones, the aim was to completely dry out Lake Texcoco,[7] which had been contaminated, partly, by the infiltration of sewage from Mexico City. Meanwhile, the muddy bottom of the lake was being pumped, with no sanitary measures in place, into the cavities left in the mountains, as the volcanic rock at their core was being extracted to dry up the "lake" itself, thus producing a circular landscape of death. Furthermore, various *war machines* (Mbembe, 2012) were deployed to deal with the administration of life and the environment, based on the discretionary limitation of freedoms and rights imposed by some agents who were at the service of capital, over other agents who were not. Their aim was to impose the airport project on the inhabitants of the surrounding towns, through the exertion of structural and political violence, with the presence of *white guards*[8] and taskforces who guarded the entrances to the mountains surrounding the Basin of Mexico (see Ramonetti, 2019).

We therefore propose to recover the term *necrolandscape*, as in the research briefly described above, and adapt it to the context of Nuevo León, in order to critique the predatory manner in which certain extractive processes, of both an economic and geological nature, are established in the northeast of Mexico. We are inspired by the notions of *necropolitics* and *necropower* as enunciated by Achille Mbembe, who refers to those contexts in which sovereign figures are in charge of the administration of life, based on the discretionary limitation of freedoms and rights of some citizens over others (see Mbembe, 2012). However, it should be noted that in the case of the Mexican Northeast, we are alluding to an extraction method that radically deteriorates the natural and urban landscape, but does not necessarily use the logic of the *war machine* for this purpose. This is because we have not yet been able to detect, in our investigations in this field, the presence of *white guards* or armed cartels that protect these quarries, as in the case of the New Airport, nor that they directly extract and loot natural assets, as is currently the case on the Mexican Pacific coast. There, local organised crime brings together multiple different functions for the regulation of death and life, among them, illegally extracting copper and other minerals to exchange them for methamphetamine precursors in China (Conde and Paredes, 2017).

Based on these approximations to the term that have been applied to other regions of central Mexico, where mountain systems have been damaged by the incursion of physical methods for the destruction of common property, to make way for infrastructure works, we reaffirm the term *necrolandscape*. We use it to speak from an extractive and geological place of enunciation, also based on the destruction of human and non-human lifeforms and the disruption of a natural landscape, leading thus to scenarios of exclusion, but to the benefit of big capital and real estate speculation.

Figure 6: Hillside of the Cerro de las Mitras that has been drilled with grooved, right-angled cuts, causing the loss of its native vegetation layer.

Thus, the mountains of the Mexican Northeast have undergone aggressive open-pit extraction methods, such as drilling with explosives, which leaves vertical gaps in the natural landscape that are irreparable, since this method blasts large right-angled cuts into the slopes until there is nothing left to extract. The pits are then abandoned by the same companies that exploit them, companies which do not have an evident reforestation program that specifically sets out to repair this erosion on the surface of the mountains, even though all of them are a declared Natural Protected Area and supposedly, by law, they should be subject to ecological conservation

(*Periódico Oficial del Gobierno del Estado de Nuevo León*, 24/11/2000, no. 141, volume CXXVII).

Figure 7: Another limestone quarry, located in the Lázaro Cárdenas *colonia*, at the foot of the Cerro del Topo Chico mountain.

These actions have caused irreversible decay, which has affected not only the landscape, understood as a place where the natural elements link human and non-human agents, thanks to these elements' specific functions (see Descola, 2005), but it has also endangered the health of the peri-urban communities who live around these mountains and hollows. Paradoxically, these marginal communities are sustained and employed by the extractive geological economy, which brings about a social landscape (see Gutiérrez-Aristizábal, 2017; 16-27) that entails all the same excluding logics of neoliberal urbanisation, condemning the natural and geographical environment to extinction.

These limestone mountains also serve as filters that decant the water to the subsoil, thus allowing aquifers to be refilled —thus, instead of a prosperous life cycle for humans and nonhumans, the actions described above lead to a death cycle culminating in the construction of public and private infrastructure throughout the city and, sometimes, inside the quarries. Due to the lack of a state programme for decent housing, these large pits began to be filled by makeshift human settlements, or else they were offered up for speculation by the state authorities themselves. The authorities sell on

these previously non-existent plots of land for the construction of luxurious properties, built with the substrate of the same material ultimately extracted to make cement blocks, as these images show.

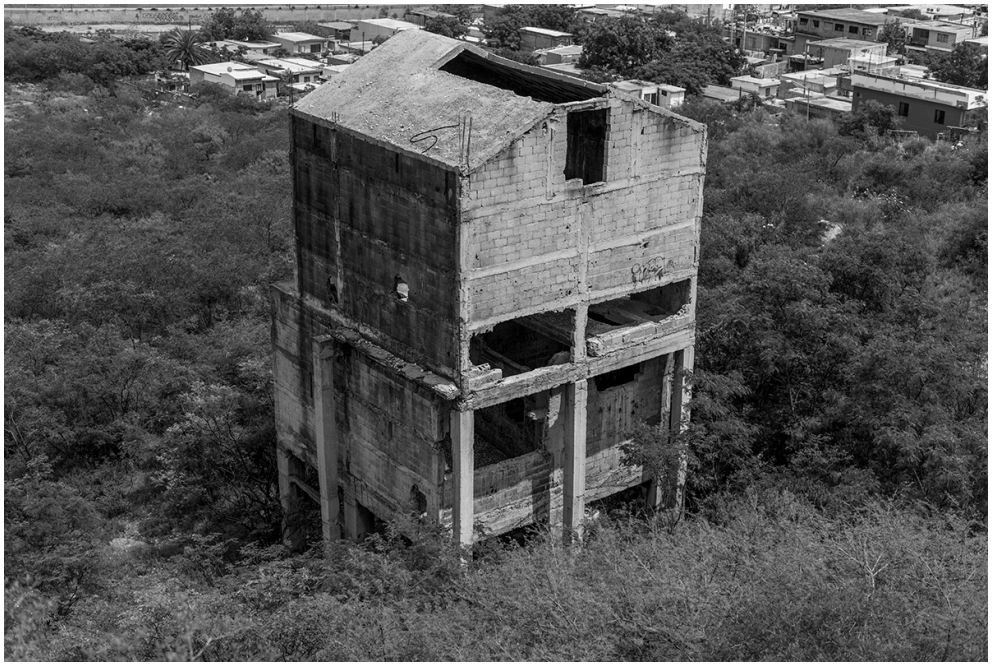

Figure 8: These old quarries still have the functional structures in which the crushers, conveyor belts and hopper were housed.

This operation, which, furthermore, is dressed up in the one-track logic of progress and its relationship with the work and savings culture that has always permeated Monterrey's industrial imaginary, is one that we also consider to be extractive. This is because "[…] the meaning of extraction does not refer only to the technical process […] but also to the social process of private appropriation, by large business corporations, of natural assets that were previously common or private property, whether individual or small, that served the social reproduction of local life or were part of the territorial habitat" (Taddei, Algranti et al., 2012; 28). Cement production, and other industrial developments such as steel or glass, have transformed the city of Monterrey into one of the main industrial nodes in the country, with the respective negative implications for local politics and the environment.

Despite what we have described, Monterrey is popularly known as "the city of mountains". In the local imaginary there is pride and admiration for the mountains, which, apparently, is only symbolic, because it has not been strong enough to spur citizens into challenging these processes of environmental destruction and stop the unregulated extraction of stone materials from their slopes. From our perspective, this is because the local citizens are not engaged in any conscious, organised reflective process about the issue —they seem unaware that limestone extraction is a non-

metallic mining activity that destroys the landscape and impacts both the environment and health of humans and non-humans, just as open-pit metal mining negatively affects the surroundings.

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These images offer a powerful reflection on the extractive —and geological — character of capitalist accumulation, which here is based on the destruction of life forms and the disruption of social reproduction inside and around these quarries, especially those which are located at the foot of the Topo Chico mountain to the northeast of the city, in *colonias* now known as Tierra y Libertad Sector Heroico, Junio 1 and Lázaro Cárdenas. The first *posesionarios*[9] of the *colonias* depicted here arrived in the 1970s —they were migrants from the rural areas of Nuevo León and the states of San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas and Coahuila, mostly artisans and masons who began to occupy wastelands, some of which were close to the quarries:

> The urban actions of the popular organisations, of the *posesionarios* and unions, were due, on the one hand, to the growth in the migrant demographic of the Monterrey metropolitan area, which reached its peak in the 1960s; and on the other hand to the precarious economic conditions suffered by most of the migrants who come to Monterrey seeking their integration into the urban productive apparatus, and even by the majority of the already settled proletarian families. Given the limited capacity for response that the government had, until 1973, to the popular classes' demands for land and housing, the protesting population organised under the direction of certain leaders to carry out land invasions, thus resulting in the first neighbourhoods of *posesionarios*. (García, 2007; 67).

As we have already mentioned, geographical and social segregation had worsened throughout the state of Nuevo León by the end of the 1970s, due to the impoverishment of the rural areas and the accelerated urban expansion following the industrialisation of Monterrey. In turn, this gave rise to a proletarian and sub-proletarian population with low income levels (barely twice the already-low minimum wage of those years),[10] and they suffered from tremendous social inequality with respect to those sectors of the population that formed part of Monterrey's industrial business community. This situation, along with a large deficit of housing and the scarcity of popular urban land, further exacerbated the illicit taking-over of land in the entire peri-urban region of Monterrey, something known in Latin America as *paracaidismo* (i.e. "parachuting", see García, 2007; 46-47, 63).

It is in this context that the Frente Popular Tierra y Libertad arises (i.e. the "Popular Front of Land and Freedom"), which, by 1973, had brought together over 350,000 people, including tenant associations, public

transport drivers, street vendors, rubbish collectors and *posesionarios* (see García, 2007; 68). Over the years, the Front founded new *colonias*,[11] and —with the help of Marxist-trained activists, who had been involved in the struggles for the autonomy of the universities, at the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (UANL) —they self-managed various forms of Maoist—inspired collective organisation. These forms were based on direct democracy, self-government and autonomous participation, and this became a paradigmatic case, internationally, in terms of the history of urban social movements in Latin America (see Castells, 1981; 18-113 and Sánchez, 2007; 164). Over time, the Front was divided and transformed into various organisations, some of which were co-opted by the political party system during the 1990s in Mexico.

Although the Tierra y Libertad movement was successful at the time in ensuring the right to housing for the large number of families who depended on the informal economy as their only form of subsistence, it later succumbed, in part, to the territorial planning strategies and patronage policies imposed locally by the Nuevo León state government in the early 1980s, through the regularisation program called *Tierra Propia* (see Vellinga, 1988).

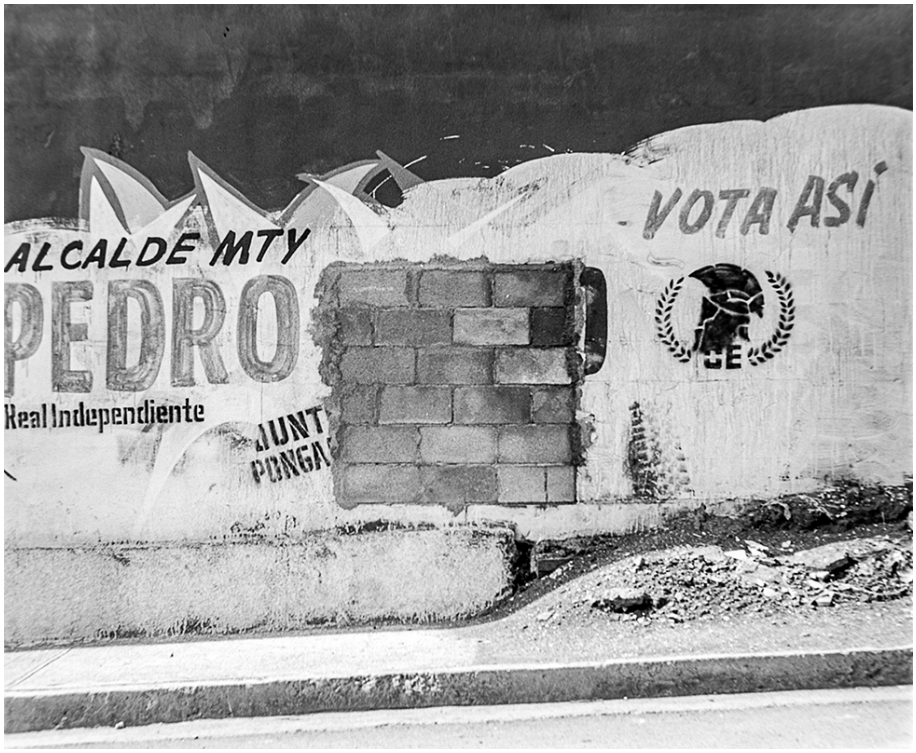


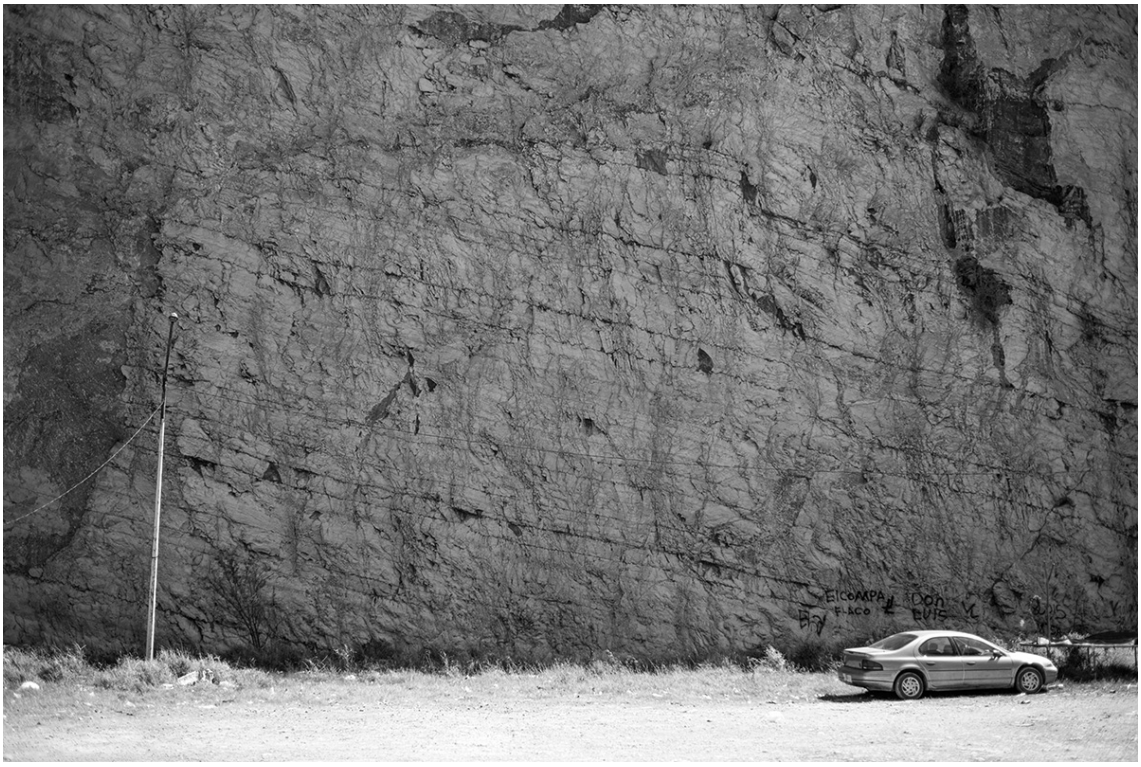
Figure 9.

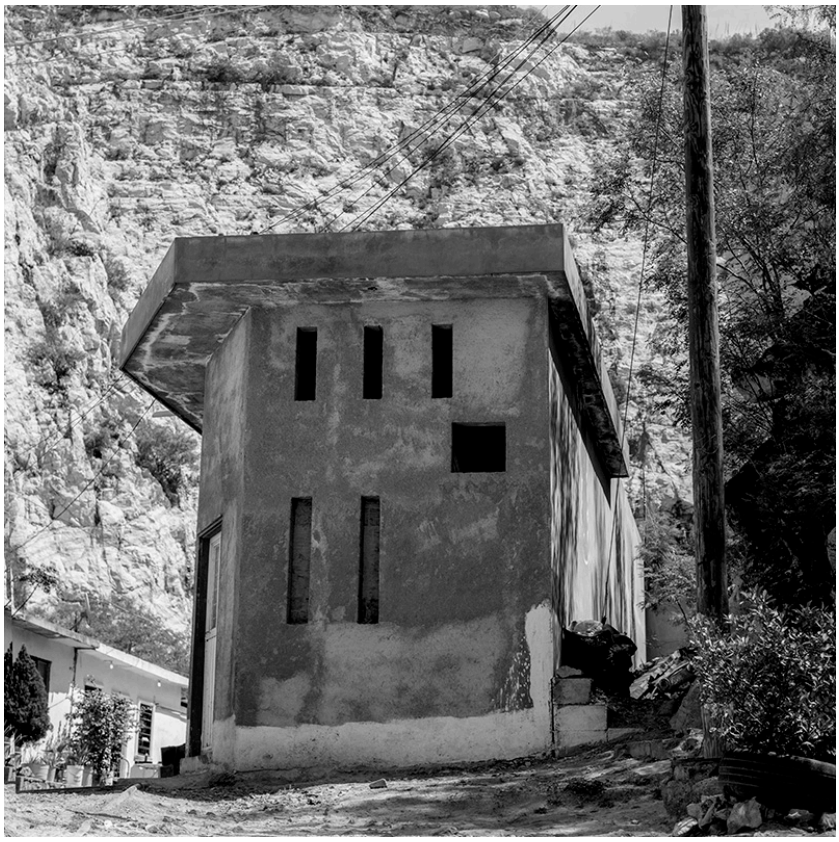
As it stands, several of those artisans, who had come from other Mexican states or the nearby rural municipalities that had founded these *colonias* in the 1970s, still subsist on the slopes of the old quarries. Here, they used to

have direct access to recently extracted material for producing their decorative objects, some of which were inspired by Neoclassical and Greco-Roman designs, that would eventually adorn houses and other buildings. As the quarries moved to the far west of the city, the small artisan establishments remained in their old places, but with greater difficulty in accessing work material. Here (fig. 10) is a classical-style column with a Corinthian-esque capital, embedded in the concrete block walls of the house of one of the craftsmen. That is, the remnants of the quarries are used to manufacture artifacts that appeal, paradoxically bourgeois taste, bearing in mind the history of the struggles associated with the revolutionary thinking of the left, upon which the Popular Front was founded.

Figure 10.

The hollows and gaps, left behind by the quarries when they were partially relocated outside the city in the 1980s, gave rise to *colonias* within this same group of *posesionarios*, i.e. those linked to the origins of the Frente Popular Tierra y Libertad, such as the Junio 1 *colonia*. This human settlement was founded by territorial leaders within an old stone quarry on the Cerro del Topo Chico. The enormous vertical walls of this space, known colloquially as *El pozo* ("The Pit"), also form physical limits that establish private property —in this case (fig. 11)—, that of a nearby Christian church that uses this hole, left there following extraction processes, as a car park. Similarly, various houses occupy other sites of the quarry's old infrastructure, such as this house (fig. 12), built upon the water drainage channel of a quarry in the *colonia* of *Tierra y Libertad Sector Heróico*.





Figures 11 and 12.

The fragmented urban make-up of these human settlements is laid out also thanks to the pulverised mountain, taking the form of concrete blocks to erect walls, barriers and territorial enclosures. These new spaces function not only as housing, but also as provisional borders, aiding the control and surveillance of organised criminal groups. As such, other landscapes of death are produced, amid states of emergency, as suffered by these *colonias* between 2006 and 2012.

This wall (fig. 13) is located in the Lázaro Cárdenas *colonia*, which divides up the area where, more than three decades ago, a factory that extracts zinc from the subsoil, near an old stone quarry, was installed. The wall divides an area that has been particularly damaged by the violence that drastically impacted all of these *colonias* in Monterrey during the war on drug trafficking (2006-2012),[12] in which armed groups "raised" young men, between 15 and 22 years old, to incorporate them into the cartel's organisational structure. During this time, the hollows and the natural formations of the Monterrey mountains produced another type of *necrolandscape*: that of the biopolitical extermination of bodies by *war machines*.[13]

In this sense, it is worth revisiting the academic Jill H. Casid's use of the term *necrolandscaping* (2018). Following Achille Mbembe and Michel Foucault, Casid uses it to refer to the biopolitical optimisation of life that colonial occupation inflicts upon human and non-human bodies by means of necropower and capitalist accumulation. Without referring to any particular geopolitics, Casid suggests that the term could refer to the death landscape of anonymous graves, the result of forced disappearances in states of emergency. In the case of Mexico, in our view, the term may also serve to refer to the landscape of anonymous graves throughout the entire country, where the bodies of the more than 140,000 people disappeared in Mexico, due to the war against drug trafficking, perhaps lie.

Figures 13 and 14.

This bleak landscape of both marginalisation and extermination, for which the stone quarries in these images serve as a backdrop, changes drastically when they are located in essential places for real estate speculation, i.e. places that have been absorbed by the urban area of Monterrey and its strategic hubs. The result of these operations of extraction, i.e. emptiness, ultimately contradicts itself: often, this emptiness is in fact filled with exclusive apartment buildings and suburban houses, as is the case of the Colinas del Valle development, located in the old abandoned stone quarry of Cerro de las Mitras. The development had barely any services when construction began in the second half of the 2000s, and today it reaches market prices of up to 11 million pesos. The fenced development, guarded 24 hours a day, with CCTV inside and a main building in the centre, completely separated from the other houses and with its own camera system and private security elements, occupies what was the most devastated area of the old quarry, which has another adjacent development, of lower income, called Cumbres del Valle.[14]

In this image (fig. 15) the huge vertical cuts of the mountain are visible, completely eroded by blasting, and the houses and luxury apartments that overlook the quarry are also made of cement and concrete. In this suburban architecture, the pulverised mountain is reconfigured back into solid forged matter, ready for the real estate economy. An economy that, of course, is also geological and extractive.

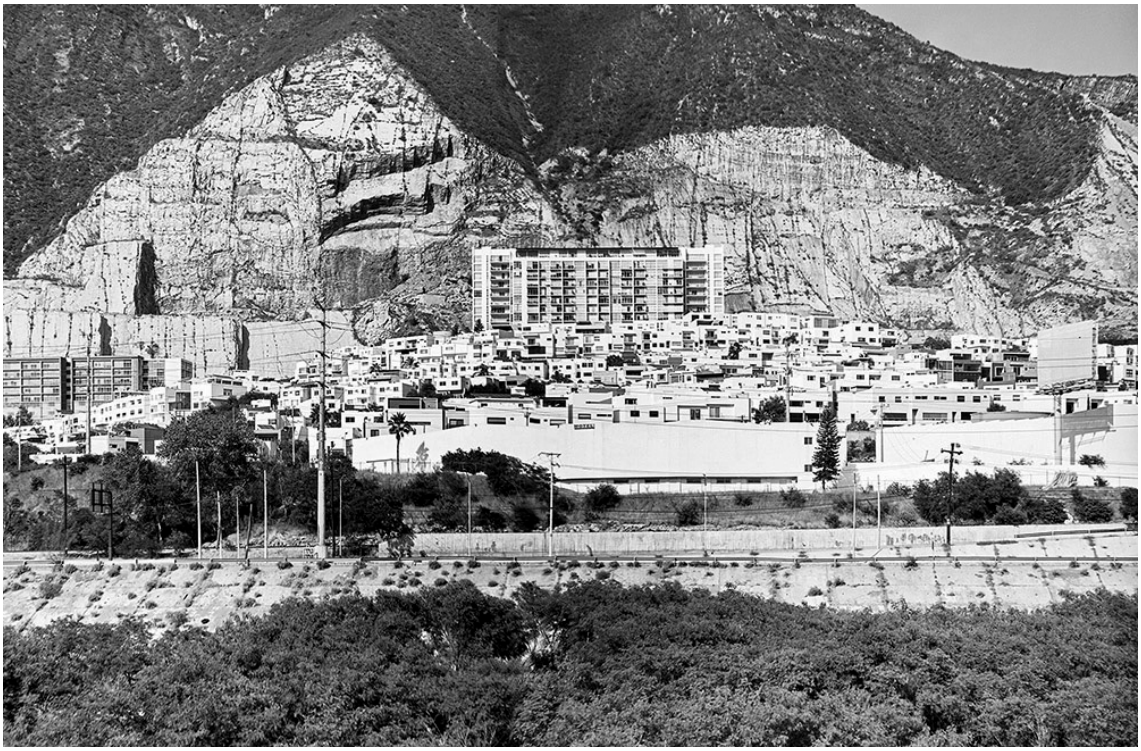


Figure 15.

Marx and Engels reflected on the idea of evanescence when they wrote "all that is solid melts into air".[15] In this visual essay, the idea has been used literally, to explicitly depict the death cycle in which mountains are reduced to dust, to then come back to life as a low-cost commodity. This configures a social landscape of deficiencies and erosions, where the human factor, historically pushed out to the edges of the post-industrial city, must live on between the precariousness and desolation that end up merging with the holes left in the mountains by the quarries once their useful life has come to an end, in radical contrast with the luxurious developments that we have briefly described above.

In all of these visual metaphors there is an extractive place of enunciation, based also on the destruction of life forms and the disruption of social reproduction. We would like to address this via the notion of *abyssal thinking*, defined by Boaventura de Sousa Santos in his text *Descolonizar el saber* (2009) as a system of visible and invisible distinctions, a line —sometimes imaginary or metaphorical, and sometimes physical— that is produced by dichotomous Western thought. Such an approach tends to divide the experiences and knowledge of social reality into two: a hegemonic reality that is "inside" the line because it is useful, intelligible, regulated and appeals to reason, and another that is the complete opposite. This division is so radical that anything "outside" the line tends to be socially produced as non-existent: this is where to find what has been forgotten, what is perceived as violent or dangerous, the subaltern and the

marginal —anything not regulated by scientific knowledge, and what thus must be made invisible.

As these images show, there are deep lines, inscribed by abyssal thinking, all over the landscape of Nuevo León. They are forged in a system of the hierarchical distinction of postcolonial space, where the invisible lines form the argument of the visible ones. These lines divide reality into two universes, of inclusion and exclusion, and over time they have led to the circular production of a landscape of death upon a ruined modernity, upon a dream of failed progress that has reduced nature to emptiness, thanks to the radical changes in the environment's relief and orography carried out to establish a necrolandscape at the service of big capital. A necrolandscape in which cities like Monterrey have been formed as a collective dimension of capitalist accumulation: a combination of territorial empowerment and command over the surrounding nature, moulded in the image and likeness of the aspirations of those who inhabit them thanks —in part— to the mountain's own substance. Its sacred side, present in the common imaginary of much ancestral knowledge, turns to dust, to become the mixture with which those same cities are built. The city's permanence itself is due to real estate speculation, the lack of decent housing programmes and territorial planning —in turn, this produces human displacements and ruins, configuring thus a deteriorated, broken and precarious landscape.

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Notes

[1] Project benefited by the *System of support for creation and cultural projects* (FONCA).

[2] "Cement is a fine powder, obtained from the calcination at 1,450°C of a mix of limestone, clay, and iron ore. The product of the calcination process is clinker —the main ingredient of cement— that is finely ground with gypsum and other chemical additives to produce cement." (CEMEX, 2020)
[3] "Aggregates are composed of geological materials such as stone, sand, and gravel and are used in virtually all forms of construction. They can be used in their natural state or can be crushed into smaller pieces." (CEMEX, 2020)

[4] In Mexico, a *colonia* (literally "colony") is a demarcated urban zone, albeit with no legal autonomy or representation. The word does not have the same (middle-) class connotations as *neighbourhood*, nor the administrative scope of other terms such as *borough* or *district*. As such, due to the lack of a relevant alternative, as well as the weight of the word in the context of Latin American history, it shall remain in Spanish throughout. [Translator's Note]

[5] Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes (SCT) / Grupo Aeroportuario de la Ciudad de México (GACM), no date, circa 2014-15. Retrieved 16th August 2020: Manifestation of Environmental Impact, Regional Modality. pp. II-25.

[6] *Retos y soluciones del NAIM*, *SCT y GACM*, 2018, pp.71-73. Retrieved 12th August 2020: http://www.amivtac.org/xseminarioingenieriavial/assets/retosnaicm.pdf

[7] Although the Basin of Mexico began to be drained from 1521, the water basin known as the Lago de Texcoco, which had degraded into a wetland over 400 years by various technical methods such as piping, forming pits and rechannelings, still contained large amounts of water both in the subsoil (the Texcoco aquifer) and in various bodies of water that were still on the surface when the airport works formally began in January 2015. The first such task was the cleaning of the land, stripping and removal of the muddy bottom that contained salty water contaminated with silt from the drains and rivers of Mexico City that flowed there (see Ramonetti, 2019; Levi Lattes, 1988).

[8] The "white guards" (i.e. *guardias blancas*) are armed, quasi-paramilitary groups who are seemingly paid to stop land (including, for example, entrances to mines and infrastructure works) from being taken over by *posesionarios* (see note 8) or similar. They are said to have links with the centre-right PRI party, and the police. For Paul Farmer (2003, pp. 106-8), they are essentially "paid hit squads" who operate "with complete impunity". [Translator's Note]

[9] In the Mexican context, a *posesionario* is somebody who makes use of or takes over available land (either public or privately owned) as if it were theirs. It may also refer to somebody granted limited use of an *ejido* (i.e. communal land). In English, a broad equivalent might be "squatter", but this term has a narrower scope of meaning and a different set of connotations. Thus, *posesionario* shall remain in Spanish throughout. [Translator's Note]

[10] The minimum wage in Mexico is one of the lowest among all of the countries in the OECD. Furthermore, since the late 1970s, it has suffered historical losses: "The accumulative loss in purchasing power over the last 30 years, as measured by the Canasta Alimenticia Recomendable (CAR [i.e. the Mexican "inflation basket", for comparing prices]), is 80.08%. And in the analyses carried out over several years, it has been detected that three decades ago the minimum wage was enough to buy food and a bit more, but its purchasing power has not improved since then." *La pérdida acumulada del poder adquisitivo en los últimos 30 años es de 80 por ciento: expertos de la UNAM*. Retrieved 27th October 2020: https://www.dgcs.unam.mx/boletin/bdboletin/2018_016.html

[11] The researcher Menno Vellinga recounts a critical moment in the formation of the movement as an organised front in relation to the quarries: "The police attacked the *Tierra y Libertad* neighborhood after the *posesionarios* hijacked a truck belonging to a nearby quarry, in order to be compensated for damages caused by the dynamite explosions that took place there." (Vellinga, 1988; 119).

[12] "In 2010, the state of Nuevo León went from being one of the safest states to one of the three most dangerous in the country: extortion, robbery and attacks on businesses proliferated, there was also an increase in kidnappings, dispossession in rural areas, human trafficking, violent atmosphere and the number of victims. The gradual effect has been a crisis of governability, institutional ineptitude and corruption, a decrease in investments, changes in social routines, investments in security, closure of businesses, and exile." (González Rodríguez, 2014; pp. 44-45)

[13] 15/08/2009 "A cave for drug traffickers is found in Nuevo León: The Attorney General's Office in Nuevo León located a cave that was allegedly used by organised crime groups to dispose of the bodies of their victims […] The narco-cave, known as Tiro de Mina, is located in the Cerro de las Mitras at the height of the San Pedro 400 *colonia*, in the metropolitan municipality of Santa Catarina. However, to access the site, a 4x4 vehicle or walking is required, because you have to cross about 400 metres of dirt on the top of the mountain.". See https://www.proceso.com.mx/117828/hallan-narcocueva-en-nuevo-leon (accessed 26th October 2020).

[14] Information obtained from a field visit and the *Dictamen de valores unitarios de suelo de los nuevos fraccionamientos y colonias*, R. City Hall of Monterrey, Municipal Government, 2006-2009.

[15] The complete phrase in the Manifesto reads as follows: "All that is solid melts into air; all that is sacred is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind" (see *Section I. Bourgeois and Proletarians*). Marshall Berman (1981) analyses it extensively, in a text of the same title, to reflect on how to hold onto something real even when everything vanishes in late modernity, given the inherent contradictions of global capitalism.