

NARCHITECTURE¹

and drug depredation of rural and urban space in Colombia²

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This paper aims to reconstruct the complex depredation of the territory that results from the construction, utilization and destruction of properties in rural and urban zones in Colombia by part of drug dealers; based on the inventory and the characteristics of lands and estates seized by authorities in the last 18 years.

Half of my earnings or my estates (...) will be delivered to my wife. To my son (...) and to those others I might have, all the vehicles I might possess at the time of my death. To my daughters, all goods such as furniture, china, ornaments, electrical appliances, etc, that remain in my house at the time of my death. Will of the drug dealer Pablo Escobar signed October 3, 1980 in Medellín, Colombia⁴

<1. Title> During the last 30 years drug trafficking has penetrated practically all structures of society, intensifying the armed conflict that the country experiences, destabilizing governmental institutions, perverting the exertion of laws and justice, among other multiple and dire consequences. The clandestine economy derived from drugs connects production, commercialization, finances and consumption through an intricate network that transcends national frontiers.

The subterranean character of the economy of drugs complicates the analysis of its effects upon society. Colombia has suffered, since the sixties, the stigma of being the main producer and exporter of cocaine in the world. Beyond any solution to this problem, the social, economical and political effects have been as devastating as difficult to assess.

However, drug dealers have demonstrated their overwhelming power exerted upon physical space, through acts of construction and destruction, with equal intensity and repercussion. The occupation of vast extensions of land, and the construction and acquisition of a great number of properties, evidence the huge amounts of money that derive from these illicit activities.

The word *Cartel* is used when speaking about the Colombian mafias established in regions and cities of Colombia such as Cali or Medellín. The word *Cartel* was first used to express the operational scheme used by different drug dealers that shared common resources such as routes or contacts while maintaining businesses separate⁵. *Cartel* alludes to shared networks associated with territories and their depredation. Regarding space, and in scales that go from the depredation of transnational air and maritime space of the American continent, down to the concealed conception of very small hiding places or caches, the notion *cartel* is useful to untangle the intricate multiple-scalar networks of action and coercion that derive from drug dealing. Construction and destruction, appearance and disappearance, to surrender and to flee, winning or losing, living or dying; are all oscillations of a phenomenon in space and time that exacerbates what is raw and disturbing in human nature and its projection upon its surrounding environment.

In response to the devastating impact of drug trafficking in the country, the government has developed strategies to intervene their clandestine facilities and production centers, capturing the major drug dealers and seizing their assets.

The Narcotics National Direction (DNE), created in 1991⁶, coordinates the government's actions in the control and prevention of illicit drugs. But another of its main tasks is to manage the assets that once belonged to drug dealers. The DNE, as the mafia cartels previously did, administrates huge amounts of money, that result from all the goods seized and sold, and as we shall see later, it has become the legitimated manifestation or visible crystallization of a phenomenon that previously remained hidden. By means of a mega-structure, the DNE assimilates and integrates the structures of the *cartels* that once acted as isolated illegal entities. **<2. Distribution of properties by regions>**

In only two decades, the state has seized 6,968 properties that add all together 789,000 hectares⁷, an extension similar to that of the entire island of Puerto Rico (it is estimated that the entire amount of land bought by drug dealers ascends to 8.000,000 hectares or a 7% of the national territory in the most fertile areas of the country)⁸. Approximately 9,000 of this hectares destined to the cultivation of illicit crops are found in distant regions of the southernmost part of Colombia, and due to safety reasons, the seizures have not yet taken place⁹. But the remaining seized land, that was not used for illicit crops, is scattered throughout the entire country and its study unveils diverse tendencies regarding drug dealer's acquisitive interests, associated either to their fields of action within the illegal business, the areas of influence of their respective cartels or their tastes and actions sprouting out of illegality. **<3. Distribution of illicit plantations in Colombia>**

Regarding material seizures, it is estimated that the DNE has captured about 1500 societies and more than 91 thousand assets, including aircrafts, boats, artwork, chemical containers, buildings and vehicles. From these assets, 18% has been returned to the original owners by judiciary mandate, 11% has forfeiture and can therefore be sold or reused. The remaining 71% is in custody of the DNE awaiting a decision from justice. In the meantime they may be used in loan¹⁰. For this particular paper we will strictly attend to lands and real states following a sequence that goes from greater to smaller scales of occupation.

We shall now explore four concrete cases of large scaled land and asset acquisition that give us all together a vision of the multiplicity of depredatory territorial actions that are possible within the mafia phenomena and specially, a synthesized vision of the parallelism that can be unearthed between the mafia's visible and invisible actions.

The first case of direct relations between drug dealers and their territorial properties has to do with one of the mobsters that more land bought and was later

seized: Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, commonly known as 'the Mexican'. He was responsible of accumulating farms in precise regions such as the *Magdalena Medio*¹¹, territory known for its large cattle ranches and for the difficult situations of public order, caused by the hoarding of land in the hands of a few and by violent paramilitary actions. The interest that drug dealers manifest for cattle ranches, instead of agricultural farms is noteworthy. The acquisition of cattle in large numbers and the field work related to it comes close to the behavior of cowboy-like stereotypes as seen in old western or Mexican movies, that the capos tried to emulate. That is, at least, the specific case of Rodríguez Gacha who handled his infrastructure and trusted companions as a patron or farm owner would. The same type of territorial acquisition, that emphasizes human and spatial feudal control, once handled by Rodríguez Gacha is now pursued by paramilitary leaders in the same region of the *Magdalena medio*, where they are responsible for a great number of abuses and massacres. **<4. Las Gaviotas Hacienda that belonged to drug dealers>**

For those who administer illegal businesses from the center of the country, or that exert pressure upon the community, or organize an army of men that keep the illegal business moving, the acquisition of farms or big haciendas is usually a rule. The feudal strategies of oppression and terror upon rural communities ensure drug dealers and paramilitary leaders a double front in both farm-like and illegal businesses. But farm like activity is not the only possible facade for drug trafficking. The second case that we shall see has to do with those who handle coastal infrastructures or are in charge of traffic and illegal transportation by the sea. For them, the colombian coast is a potential territory for depredation. **<5. Hacienda that belonged to drug dealers in the pacific coast>** That is the case of the drug dealer Víctor Patiño Fómeque, who owned many estates in the Pacific Coast, where many of his facade enterprises were found. The capo owned a powerful fishing company apart from other ten smaller companies and a hotel, all in the port area.¹² The acquisition of enterprises, properties and lands in the same seaside context and with the same personnel that worked in parallel for both licit and illicit activities, guaranteed the cartel in charge of importation and exportation an unrestricted domain of maritime activities. **<6. A drugstore of the chain “La Rebaja”, once property of the Rodriguez Orejuela Brothers>**

The third case of territorial depredation in parallel or at the service of illegal actions is even more eloquent than the ones previously mentioned. It is the case of the drugstore chain known as *Drogas la Rebaja (Discount Drugs)*, property of the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers. Even though the assets were seized and later sold, the brand *Drogas la Rebaja* together with its entire corporate image remained intact and is

still one of the biggest drugstore chains in Colombia. With an effective presence in practically all towns and villages of Colombia it stands as an ambiguous reminder of mafia presence in our society. The seized assets associated with *Drogas la Rebaja* represented the nation earnings of about 1 million dollars.¹³ Drug dealers produced the medications, many of them with foreign licenses, and then distributed them at low prices. It is said that the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers were faithful to their past because both had worked as pharmacy delivery boys.¹⁴ **<7. Towns and cities of Colombia where the drugstore chain “La Rebaja”, once property of the Rodríguez Orejuela Brothers, can be found>** But the true reason behind the organization of the drugstore chain had to do with the diversification of activities that could help them launder money. The chemical-pharmaceutical laboratories, specialized in buying, selling, processing, representing, importing and exporting chemical products maintained both the pharmacies and the illegal drug business. Additionally, the control of a network of stores, warehouses and offices, allowed the Rodríguez Orejuela cartel a physical and territorial presence at a national scale that no other cartel of regional character could even consider. **<8. A neighborhood in Medellín entirely financed and built by Pablo Escobar>**

If the three previous cases exhibit parallelism between illegal activities and territorial depredation, the fourth and last large scaled example I will refer to, maintains a relation with the future projection or investment of illegal money, and it's effective inference upon the growth of a certain region or city. Due to the overwhelming amounts of money that are handled, the Colombian cartels had access to properties and terrains that were generally inaccessible to common people or even to municipal governments. In this way they could, in regions such as *Valle del Cauca* or the coast, determine the expansion and territorial transformation of towns and cities. A particular case that exemplifies the power exerted by the mafia on city growth took place in the coast and involved the Eljach couple and the drug dealer Gustavo Hernán Ordóñez. The three of them borrowed money from Pablo Escobar in 1986 for the acquisition of land surrounding Cartagena, so that they could control the future expansion of the city. Because they were unable to pay back the loan, they were eventually murdered.¹⁵

As can be seen from the previous examples, there is a clear relation between the selection and tenure of lands and the specific activities that take place within the drug traffic cartels. The distribution of supposedly licit activities throughout the country and the depredation of territories to exert these activities, are closely related and take place in parallel with clandestine activities. **<9. Emplacement of properties in the region of Valle del Cauca>**

Logistics are also associated with the acquisition of lands and properties. Infrastructures regarding mobility and communications or the control of construction companies and real estate agencies are essential to the well functioning of the cartels. Together with the acquisition of lands for illegal purposes, a series of complex networks such as communications and mobility appear. Together with laboratories dedicated to the production of illegal drugs, drug dealers administered warehouses and an elaborate network of public and private transport vehicles. Logistics supported and ensured the urban and rural mobility of the mafia and their products by physical and human means. What becomes essential at this point is the coming of understanding that the mafia influences over almost all aspects and spectra of society and because cartels are regionalized and fight each other, their respective support groups are configured through very strong physical and human bonds based upon a flexible moral and an inflexible code where complicity rules and betrayal is inadmissible. The mafia owns a great amount of spaces and can therefore exert pressure or influence upon those that inhabit them or pass through them. A specific case that denotes urban behaviour of cartels, has to do with taxi companies in some cities. Controlling taxi companies was important for drug dealers such as the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers, because some taxi drivers in Cali formed support and information networks in exchange for low priced vehicles and maintenance in mafia owned stores and repair shops. **<10. Emplacement of mafia owned commercial properties in Bogota>**

Due to the complexity and dimension of the real estate business associated with the mafia, it wasn't enough to simply buy land or properties. Drug dealers also established and took control of construction companies and real estate agencies in many cities of the country. Real estate agencies administered the properties, and construction companies enabled drug dealers on one hand, to indulge in their eccentricities and desire to flaunt and, on the other hand, to generate opportunities to launder their money. Bad practices associated with construction companies and an apparent economic growth due to the unexpected apparition of illegal money destabilized architecture and its practice for at least ten years. On the other hand, the subsequent control on money that was being laundered through real estate and construction businesses, partially determined a building crisis that took place throughout the 1990's. The understanding of the built environment and it's development throughout the end of the twentieth century in cities such as Cali necessarily requires an understanding of the mafia phenomenon. The relations are not solely economical but, as we shall see later, aesthetic and, above all, ethic.

And so we move on from a territorial scale associated with general means to a second scale that concerns lots, farms and haciendas related to certain objectives. The acquisition of estates of strategic emplacement or scale is as we shall see, useful to presume, invest or conquest. **<11. The “Cañaveralejo” lot in Cali>**

Let us begin by exploring the depredation of territory through conquest in relation with the positioning of the cartels. An exemplary case in the lots chosen by a cartel in order to overcome another cartel, was a seized piece of land in Cali called "Cañaveralejo", that had an extension of 175.000 square meters, and that for over 15 years kept local drug dealers fighting each other to death. The control of this territory valued in 30 million dollars implied the access to an area destined for the growth and expansion of the city. Drug dealers interested in handling licit parallel businesses or moving from the illegal towards the legal saw the construction business as an excellent way out as well as an efficient way to launder money; ¹⁶ but above all, they believed that confronting a threatening enemy cartel also meant taking possession of properties that might be significantly valuable to them. **<12. Emplacement of mafia owned commercial properties in Cali>**

Cali is the city with the greatest amount of seized estates in Colombia. Only in 2009, 2700 estates were seized in Cali while in Medellin the amount reaches 300. Nowadays, the estates in Cali are equivalent to half the entire amount of estates nationwide. Pacho Herrera who is a drug dealer from Cali owned 1.400 estates in this city. ¹⁷ Cartels, as can be noticed, are specially regionalized networks and this meant, for each group of cartel members, an extraordinary development of a particular sense of identity based on cultural and social values, attitudes or habits. On the other hand, this strong sense of identity went beyond the cartel itself and permeated the surrounding community. Finally, it was because of this accentuated regionalism that cartels and their members could mark and recognize their enemies. Cartels finally fell by their own weight, through wars that shredded the country apart on its path. Accentuated regionalism explains why a drug dealer such as Pacho Herrera would strictly depredate a focalized territory. The capo would buy enough properties to shield all his actions and his followers, becoming an important and influential individual among his regional community. As a landlord he could freely move throughout the city knowing many estates and businesses belonged to him and the people who cared for them or lived in them were at his service. **<13. The “Napoles Hacienda” property of Pablo Escobar>**

Pablo Escobar, on the other hand wanted to trespass regional boundaries. His actions and properties addressed absolute territorial control beyond the reach of his

own cartel. That is why he urgently pursued the construction of a symbolic haven or bastion. A place that could provide him with recognition and prestige in the eyes of his enemies and that could gain him approval from Colombians in general. It is important to notice, in this sense, that before Pablo Escobar began large scaled terrorist attacks on his enemies, politicians, the police and harmless civilians, his actions had popular support. He symbolically needed some sort of headquarters from where to irradiate all of his power and influence and so he built the equivalent of a Disneyland for the popular Colombian culture. **<14. The “Napoles Hacienda” in its present state, once property of Pablo Escobar>**

The Napoles Hacienda with more than three thousand hectares, had an emblematic impact on the popular imagery and soon became a touristic destination for those who couldn't afford a transnational vacation. In this eccentric hacienda, four hours away from Medellin, Pablo Escobar organized a gigantic zoo with more than 1,900 animals, roads with several security checkpoints, a collection of vehicles, 10,000 fruit trees, 10 artificial lakes, 6 swimming pools, soccer fields, tennis courts, nightclubs, bullrings, an amusement park with large scaled dinosaurs, a theater, a stable, a hospital and a landing strip. **<15. The “Napoles Hacienda” in its present state, once property of Pablo Escobar>**

The iconic character of this hacienda, for a time abandoned, and recently reopened to the public as a touristic spot, exemplifies in a condensed manner a whole set of values associated to *narchitecture*. To begin with, the desired generation of common approval, the emplacement of an unforgettable icon in a previously unimaginable site and finally, the concealment of the illegal and the criminal through the creation of enchantment and excess. **<16. Repercussion of narchitecture aesthetics in residential neighborhoods of Cali>**

The aesthetics of eccentricity in the mafia constructions have a direct relation with the enhancement of popular values and ideals. Besides dimensions and figures, there are many examples of eccentricities in the buildings of the mafia. In the beginning of the mafia phenomenon, new values became evident by means of scale, ostentation and intimidation in real estates, and these new values were partially well received by some segments of society. The physical manifestation of the phenomenon reached collective identification for it was interpreted as an affront to the negligent oligarchy that some despised. Drug dealers offered a visible identity with which some oppressed members of society could identify. This identity was latent in *narchitecture*. The same esthetic values of popular architecture were found here, enhanced or potentiated through more expensive or fancier materials. This was not a cryptic and incomprehensible esthetic that was appreciated by a privileged minority but was rather

an enlarged version of popular living, the densification of the taste of the majority or its most grandiloquent manifestation. Something similar but with much less obscure connotations took place with postmodern architecture as sought by architects and theoreticians such as Robert Venturi. And, in general, such a point of view that enhances and values a less refined approach to aesthetics and a more popular conception and appreciation of taste or beauty has been appearing and disappearing throughout the history of the theory of architecture. Let us think for a moment of the liberal and relative conception of beauty that took place just as renaissance was being gradually replaced by the baroque. In a discreet and low profiled society such as the Colombian society of the eighties, the appearance of *narchitecture* and its overwhelming excess was as shocking and surprising to all, as Venturi's architecture could have been to a young Mies or the Spanish baroque could have been to Brunelleschi. **<17. Repercussion of narchitecture aesthetics in residential neighborhoods of Cali>**

In these residences, as was usual, the 'scorpion' (el alacrán) enjoyed great luxury. One example was what we found in one of his farms, Villa Paola, where water went out of golden faucets. It had a swimming pool, a Jacuzzi, a nightclub, and a well provided collection of pornographic videos in a movie theater with a gigantic screen and a ceiling covered in mirrors. The dining room was made of pure crystal, and in the center of the living room there was a huge copper scorpion that was the symbol of his mafia identity. Rosso José Serrano, Jaque Mate.¹⁸

Narchitecture confronts the official discourse at different levels but it mainly confronts that which is socially admitted as adequate and correct or well seen by the most privileged and educated. It does not share the same values as most of the traditional social elites and this can be seen even in the outer appearance of buildings. Boasting is a variable to take into account together with functional and technical considerations when conceiving or analyzing narchitecture. Boasting implies the opposite of what is elegant if we understand elegance as that which can pass unnoticed. This sort of elegance has been systematically inherited and assimilated in Colombian esthetics since the austere colonial period. But, on the other hand, there is a need for vibration, color, and intensity as sought throughout the most popular cultural expressions; as can be seen in local color, bus and wardrobe decoration, or carnivals. This coexistence of the austere and the baroque characterize the constant ambiguity of the Latin American condition. The drug dealer Santacruz Londoño, for example, believed in architecture as a physical manifestation of vengeance that could sort out what he considered to be unfair treatment. This could be seen, with the construction he

commissioned of a replica of the White House or of the Colombia Club in Cali after he was denied admission.¹⁹

<18. Repercussion of narchitecture aesthetics in residential neighborhoods of Cali>

The immense fortune of this drug dealer (Victor Patiño Fόμεque) became evident when seeing up close his luxurious houses. (...) Among other eccentricities and luxuries, this house had a swimming pool adorned with the statue of a mermaid, golden handlebars and a permanent musical thread that emitted rancheras. Next to the swimming pool the agents found statues of Buda of different sizes that were used for hanging towels, and a marble dolphin from whose mouth came out a stream of water falling in graceful ellipse into the pool. Close to window, there was a Jacuzzi in the shape of a heart with padded edges, the decoration was completed, all in front of a grand window facing the garden, where a statue of the 'India Catalina' stood in the center of a fountain (...) Within the residence we saw more exceptional things. A closed television circuit that allowed the surveillance of all sectors of the house; many meters of books with all covers of the same color, the green of billiard cloths, that contained classic titles; a bar made of crystal and mirror glass; 18 pairs of white new shoes (...) The eccentricities and strange taste of this man reminded me of another unforgettable confiscation: that of the house of the drug dealer Leonidas Vargas in Guaymaral. I remember that he had a "tanning" chamber for the beautiful women that escorted him, and a swimming pool that had the shape of the state of Caquetá, his land of origin. Rosso José Serrano, Jaque Mate²⁰

Drug trafficking produced an exorbitant and fictitious wealth in many cities of Colombia and that we now see only as shapes, carcasses and ruinous consequences. With drug trafficking, a new and unprecedented scale of values emerged that is still partially current. In this scale of values easy money and the consumption of goods determines the way in which individuals react towards the future and face traditional values. Drug dealing has completely destabilized the moral and physical foundations of our society. The physical consequence of this destabilization is clearly visible in the rural and urban landscapes of our country.

<19. Repercussion of narchitecture aesthetics in residential neighborhoods of Cali>

The esthetic codes of drug dealing in Colombia, are part of the national becoming and identity, reason why it is superficial to discard the 'narco' esthetics in the name of good taste. On the other hand, it is an ostentatious, exaggerated, disproportionate and symbolically charged esthetic that seeks status and to legitimate violence. It would be desirable that architecture was not one of its means. Adriana Cobo²¹

In *narchitecture* an ambiguity can be seen. On one hand everything local and regional is exalted, in a rural like manner. On the other hand, international and urban luxury and comfort is sought. Nowadays, however, things have changed. The capos

have complexified their doing and their action and manifestation profile seems lower. They have a lot of money but without the previously seen eccentricities, trying to look like everybody else. For the same reason, recent mafias prefer discreet and more urban-like architectures, scattered throughout the city or in its periphery. The actual transition or assimilation of business-like aesthetics resembles a acculturation process or the dissolution of an apparently solid and tangible criminal process. **<20.**

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Cali> This dissolution of the process makes it more difficult to apprehend in urban contexts. In distant locations and in the country's periphery, however, drugs, criminality and violence are living phenomena. Paramilitary and guerrilla leaders reproduce many of the territorial preyful patterns of drug dealers and the numbered cartels of the past have atomized becoming smaller and more difficult to trace. But easy money becomes visible one way or another. If this money can't be seen through the appearance of new ostentatious buildings, it becomes apparent through the great quantity of unwanted and vacant new constructions. Investment in the cities can be seen through the amount of unexpected new constructions, businesses and societies. But within popular neighborhoods, the aesthetic phenomenon of *narchitecture* is still alive. What we now see is the coexistence of popular eccentric *narchitecture* and more expensive neutral *narchitecture* that in its silent manner is alarmingly concealing a phenomenon that has never ceased to exist. Not because symptoms disappear at a skin level, does it mean that the disease has disappeared. It lays hidden , secretly kept in the abundant caches of our society. **<21. One of Pablo Escobar's caches as shown by his brother**

to a tourist>

The last resource of the drug dealer is the cache. This hideout that precedes the capture is of the most radical discomfort and therefore greatly contrasts with a life of excess and abundance. But every drug dealer thinks and conceives his own cache and may well foresee its usage even from the beginning if his illegal trajectory. In symbolic and scalar terms, the cache is the last hiding place for a surrounded drug dealer that has to abandon his lands, his hacienda or apartment to hunker down in a tiny space with a tank of oxygen, persecuted for his crimes. Absolutely all capos that commissioned mansions or haciendas contemplated for themselves these very small caches. And it is through the contemplation of this dark, air tight hideouts that we may take a glimpse at the dark side of narchitecture. **<22. A Drug dealer's cache>** They were, generally speaking, very small spaces adjacent to bathrooms, staircases or walking closets, that were hidden behind apparently unmovable furniture; accessible through small doors resembling walls or tile patterns. These caches were not exactly

bunkers but much rather resembled coffins in which a human being could barely enter, alone and with an oxygen tank. **<23. A Drug dealer's cache>** Only the capos knew about the location of the caches and once inside trusted their associates or relatives on insisting they had already left. Authorities, however, performed exhaustive site investigations and would often drill walls and furniture searching for caches. Those who built them were found murdered. Rosso José Serrano describes the cache of Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela as follows: “the entrance was 40 centimeters high, behind the sink, and it could be opened introducing a pin in a tiny slit. The pin made contact and the block immediately moved”. Rosso José Serrano.²² **<24. Looted property of the drug dealer Juan Carlos Ramírez>**

Once captured, many drug dealers faced prison or extradition. Others died and their properties were seized by the DNE. Buildings and properties suffered looting and stigmatization. They still, however, stand out in many cities and towns, as bad taste gifts that nobody is willing to openly exhibit or use. They are, literally, ruins of a historically regretful period. **<25. An abandoned house built by the mafia in the coast>**

Of the innumerable assets mentioned above, many are abandoned or threatening ruin, and the constant postponement of their sale makes it even more difficult to bid them. In fact, the sale processes of these luxurious items fall because of a lack of bidders.²³ The stigma of the past remains within these objects and estates, and people do not want to remember or do not want to coexist with a reality that is still alive. Not even current drug dealers are interested on these estates for they are specially interested on maintaining a very low profile. **<26. Buildings in Medellín built by Pablo Escobar**

The ruins of drug trafficking in cities like Medellín are nowadays touristic attractions for the curious. In this tours the Monaco building is visited, a luxury apartment block located in an elegant neighborhood. This building was the official residence of Pablo Escobar and his family until 1988, when a bomb damaged it and a war between the cartels of Medellín and Cali began. Nowadays, the building is administered by the National Police. The Dallas building, property of Pablo Escobar, also suffered a bomb explosion. In both abandoned buildings, capsules from the panoramic elevators remain hanging. **<27. “The Cathedral”: prison that Pablo Escobar had built for himself>**

One can find, a short distance from the buildings mentioned, a five star hotel that Pablo Escobar ordered to build as a prison fitted for him when he decided to give himself up to justice in order to avoid an attack by his enemies. The prison known as

“The Cathedral” had 360 degree views, protected air space, a football field, a doll house for his daughter and an electric fence. After its abandonment, the ruins were looted in search of a hidden treasure, and bathrooms, pipes and tiles became part of modest homes in the surrounding neighborhood; another demonstration of how *narchitecture* refuses disappearance but rather spreads. **<28. A five star hotel in Barranquilla built by the mafia>**

Regarding goods, the amount of seized objects is such that it has demanded the construction of new infrastructure just to administer it. That is the case, for example, of the seizures of chemicals that drug dealers used in the production processes. Because the mafia didn't have a warehousing infrastructure, the DNE established it. Nowadays the public entity has warehouses in various cities and is selling, according to law, the substances with a great success, mainly because of low prices due to importation tax exemption.²⁴ In this way the raw material needed for production and that was not organized, reached an organization in a post seizure period.

The end that many of these assets reach seems contradictory. Some vehicles are bid, those that are deteriorated are sold as scrap, but the majority is given by law to government employees for their use. Nowadays more than 300 mayors use these cars in loan and this amount is expected to grow until all mayors in the country are provided with.²⁵

The maintenance and control of properties is more complicated. In order to maintain these luxurious estates and the payroll of employees in charge, the DNE delivers the goods to provisional custodians, endorsed by the entity, or are offered in rent through public tender or bids. That is the case of about 25 hotels and motels rented by large hotel chains.²⁶

From 1990 to 2006 and because of all the processes mentioned above, the DNE presented utilities of 1 million dollars and between 2007 and 2008 the entity received 80 times more the profit than in all the previous 16 years.²⁷ **<29.**

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But not all the seized assets appear in the inventories. There are missing goods and in recent years corruption and mishandling has unchained a series of investigations that has the DNE at the edge of closing. Adulterations in the real value of the assets have been found as well as irregularities such as the fact that many drug dealers still enjoyed their properties although they already been seized.²⁸ It seems as though the stigma of that which is not visible has also changed hands. Corrupt practices seem to accompany the estates themselves and their handling. The DNE

therefore seems to operate like a legitimate cartel that organizes and structures everything that once resisted structuring and legitimization. It is thanks to the operational network of the DNE, the extensive lists of assets, among others, that the fragmented and lucrative machinery that kept crime moving can be understood.

After the scandals behind the DNE, the government has presented new approaches to the final use of assets seized. The government has a bill pending in congress that seeks to restore land to population displaced by violence. It is also expected that earnings estimated in 100 million dollars can be destined to the improvement of the penitentiary system, the health system and drug prevention plans. On the other hand, and to fight corruption, every bid and tender of assets has to be done in public. **<30. One of Pablo Escobar's terrorist attacks, Bogota, 1989>**

Finally, it is important to mention that not all depredation process of space by part of drug traffic is based on construction and purchase. Destruction is an integral part of this process that is still very much alive. Nowadays the mafia is not over but has rather transformed. New criminal organizations have emerged and the guerrillas and paramilitary groups maintain the control of drugs generating waves of violence and massacres that shatter the whole of our nation. The boom of narchitecture seems over leaving behind and ahead an incessant violence and destruction. **<30. The end>**

¹ The term, although probably used elsewhere, has been coined for this particular paper in order to associate the mafia phenomenon in Colombia with architecture as physical manifestation

² Special thanks to Luis Guillermo Rodríguez for his support and assistance in the development of this investigation.

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- ⁴ Will of the drug dealer Pablo Escobar signed October 3, 1980 in Medellín, Colombia. Source: EFE Agency. News divulged in Bogotá, Colombia, Nov. 27, 2003 by RCN Television.
- ⁵ For further information on the cartels:
http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerra_contra_el_narcotr%C3%A1fico_en_Colombia
- ⁶ News article entitled: *Gobierno inició intervención a la Dirección Nacional de Estupefacientes*. AP, Colprensa and El Colombiano newspaper, Published November 2nd, 2010.
- ⁷ News article entitled: 'Mafia' infiltrada en Estupefacientes se apoderaba de bienes incautados a narcotraficantes. El Tiempo Newspaper Justice Section, Publication date: November 4, 2009.
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- ⁹ Colombian drugs observatory. Report on actions and results, 2003. DNE, 2004. Source: www.dne.gov.co/?idcategoria=835&download=Y
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