

# From La Ville qui tue les femmes to The city of the dead: the web documentary as a tool for investigating the catastrophe in Ciudad Juarez

## *Desde La Ville qui tue les femmes a La ciudad de las muertas: el web documentary como herramienta de indagación de la catastrophe en Ciudad Juarez*

**Julie Amiot-Guillouet**

Paris-Sorbonne University (Paris IV), Paris, France  
julie.amiot-guillouet@paris-sorbonne.com

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### **Abstract**

This article analyses how a new audio-visual format, the webdocumentary, deals with a problem related to drug trafficking in Mexico (disappearances and murders of women in Ciudad Juarez), in order to map the city and its criminality much alike a puzzle that can be freely interlocked. The idea is to provide meaning to a series of events considered from the perspective of catastrophe: tremendous, and lacking of significance. Based on traditional sources, the webdocumentary deals with unpublished material provided by a journalistic fieldwork that also gave birth to a book and a documentary. It is a triple investigation and revelation of a hidden reality whose violence spreads in the whole society. The troubling atmosphere of the webdocumentary appears to be an appropriate tool to report on this phenomenon.

### **Keywords**

Webdocumentary; Ciudad Juárez; Catastrophe; Memory.

### **Resumen**

Este artículo analiza como un género audiovisual nuevo, el webdocumental, trata un tema relacionado con el narcotráfico en México (las desapariciones y los asesinatos de mujeres en Ciudad Juárez), para elaborar una cartografía de la ciudad y de su criminalidad a la manera de un rompecabezas que se puede armar libremente. Se trata de conferir sentido a una serie de acontecimientos considerados desde la perspectiva de la catástrofe: descomunal, carente de sentido. Basado en fuentes tradicionales, el webdocumental baraja un material inédito sacado de un trabajo de campo periodístico que también dio lugar a un libro y un documental. Se trata de una triple indagación y revelación de una realidad encubierta cuya violencia se difunde en la sociedad. La estética inquietante del webdocumental aparece como una herramienta muy apropiada par dar cuenta de este fenómeno.

### **Palabras clave**

Webdocumental; Ciudad Juárez; Catástrofe; Memoria.

## 1. Introduction

In 2005, Alexandre Brachet, from Upien Productions, met journalist Jean-Christophe Rampal who proposed presenting in an audiovisual document the fieldwork done with Marc Fernandez on the “missing women of Juarez” in Mexico, and whose results were published in a book titled *La Ville qui tue les femmes* (Fernandez & Rampal, 2005). Thus, the journalistic investigation by Rampal and Fernandez would have a publication in three formats, in the form of a book, a 54-minute made for TV documentary, and a web documentary *La Cité des mortes*<sup>1</sup>. The association of these works seems particularly appropriate to portray the phenomenon of the “missing women of Juarez”, considered a catastrophe in Mexican society, and therefore significantly difficult to consider and communicate. As stated by Christian Godin in his definition: “this catastrophe seems to be a closed event, but almost never hits all at once. It stumbles about killing and destroying over time” (2009). In the case of the disappeared women, this statement rings true, given that Jean-Christophe Rampal multiplies the focuses to show a series of events apparently difficult to relate and due to this reason uses the notion of catastrophe, to which man always strives to give meaning:

To the multiple calamities, societies try above all to make sense of. The scientific explanation, the use of religion, aesthetic sublimation, the different types of fiction and graphic staging are cultural means for managing catastrophe or anticipating its risk (Walter, 2008).

In this perspective, this work proposes to investigate the way a new (at the time) audiovisual genre, the web documentary, can document a topic Jean-Christophe Rampal seeks to explain related to Mexico’s problem of drug trafficking (the murders and the disappearances of women in Ciudad Juarez), to create a city crime map similar to a puzzle whose pieces you can join in different ways. The goal is to give an idea of the scope of the phenomenon, highlighting its massive and omnipresent

character that also relates it with the idea of a catastrophe, due to its extraordinary size, according to Christian Godin:

The catastrophe can be defined as an event of maximum tragic intensity accompanied or followed by multiple destructions. It represents a massive death threat for human existence. It is monstrous event of absolute risk and accident. It is not just a particularly powerful accident; its magnitude surpasses the category of accidental (2009).

To show the “magnitude” of a catastrophe that in the case of Juarez takes the form of the continuous appearance of cadavers and pieces of cadavers, the web documentary relies on traditional sources (press and books) cited that are supported by the methodology of the journalistic inquiry used by the book and the documentary movie. At the same time, it constitutes a way of prolonging the investigative work that is at its origin. Its interactive dimension converts it into a new editorial object, of which I will study both its form and content: it is about a way of revealing a reality, that of drug trafficking underlying the phenomenon of the “missing women”, and the manner in which its presence spreads through Mexican society to cause a disturbing reality that the web documentary aesthetic proves particularly appropriate to recreate.

## 2. The web documentary: a genre to reveal

A web documentary is not a traditional documentary that benefits from online promotion. It is not an audiovisual piece, but a website that can house very heterogeneous formats and materials. The issue at hand is knowing if it is a new genre in creating audiovisual material: if the profoundly hybrid form of the web documentary is undoubtedly original, it still has many factors in common with the traditional audiovisual documentary. The first thing to note is that it does not have a precise definition, due to the high generic plasticity of the

"documentary" category (Moine, 2002). Guy Gauthier, in his synthesis on documentary film, titles his introductory chapter "a poorly-identified film device" (2011). This difficulty to define the documentary translates into a tendency to substitute the notion of "regimen" to that of the genre: the main difference between a documentary and fiction lies in the interpretive pact that they require, given that in the first case revolves around the audience's belief in the veracity of what they are being shown. At the same time, referring to a documentary requires a reflection on the modes of representation, given that, according to the introduction by Stella Bruzzi in her recent essay on the "new documentary", she emphasizes the fact that you can "analyze the documentary like a continuous negotiation between real events and their representation" (Bruzzi, 2000). The documentary regimen implies asking one's self not about what is being shown, but also how it is given shape including via that which is not being shown, that voluntarily remains off camera. To consider the proposals of Diego Zavala-Scherer who relies on the respective theory work of Bill Nichols:

[...] more than focusing directly on registering the catastrophe (which would be closer to the idea of the event), what is interesting is the catastrophe as a limit of the representation, as an element off camera, like the off camera in documentary pieces. The event seen in the social and historic context in which it occurs. This way, more than the real evidence of register what is important here is the catastrophe [...] as the idea or driving image of the representation. Thus we are in the territory of how cultures, filmmakers, societies and nations represent the catastrophe and represent their fears in the face of loss (Zavala-Scherer, 2017).

It involves considering the implications of the desire to want to document certain reality and analyze the type of material selected and the way it is organized in the audiovisual discourse created. All these definition problems also apply to the web documentary that seems to define itself more as a format than as an audiovisual genre with an aesthetic or a specific

content, as shown by the attempts to clarify it on behalf of industry professionals as well as academics. For example, in a masters degree in journalism research project, Isabelle Lassalle follows the multiple factors that configure the notion of a web documentary compared to a documentary: nonlinear story, interactive navigation, structure organized based on different possible and attainable content (Lassalle, 2012). If the question of format (Internet) is fundamental because it allows for interactivity to be the center of the experience of the web documentary, at the same time it justifies the absence of a formal precise definition: each creator is free to use diversified resources, as long as the only criteria making it belong to the field of the web documentary is that of the nonlinearity of the proposed story. This device lies in the association of a hybrid and diverse content with nonlinear narratives that address realities and practices that are also diversified. In her research work, Isabelle Lassalle insists in the importance of the appropriateness between the content and the form of the web documentary, emphasizing that:

In the cases studied, the arborescence of the definition has not been made a priori, but rather a posteriori, at the time when the authors begin to organize the material that they have. Therefore, it is not about an abstract construction but rather a formation closely related to the content (2012).

This description of the method of creating the web documentary applied perfectly to Jean-Christophe Rampal's project. In addition, you may remember that the web documentary belongs to the realm of *trans-media*, which lies in the permeability between different formats: the use of the prefix "trans" suggests the idea that the device of the the web documentary allows for passage from one format to another, which implies that each one of these format proposes its own resources allowing each one of the features of the device to complement the rest.

To understand the reasons that brought Jean-Christophe Rampal to choose the web

documentary method, one must remember the way in which his fieldwork in Ciudad Juárez allowed him to reveal a very complex reality, and establish a connection between two apparently non-related problems. Yet he manages to show that they are in fact closely related: one being the murdering of women, and two being drug trafficking. When Jean-Christophe Rampal travels to Ciudad Juárez to investigate the murders of women, the phenomenon has been going on for 10 years and appears regularly on the front page in Mexican and international news media. In 2003, Amnesty International publishes a document titled *Intolerable Killings. 10 Years of Abductions and Murders of Women in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua*<sup>2</sup>, that proposes a balance of this series of events that converted it in Mexico to a national issue, caused by the helplessness and negligence of Mexican authorities that are denounced. The magnitude and the length of time that the killings and abductions took place – that link it with the notion of catastrophe – in the Ciudad Juárez and its surroundings is such that the phenomenon comes to be referred to as a “femicide”, or “the misogynist killing of women by men. This is how it is related to the patriarchal social system in which women seem to be predisposed to being killed, whether for being women, or for not being the right kind of women” (Fernandez & Rampal, 2005: 39). This idea that women are the object of death sentences and systematic executions lies in the number of deaths (370, of which 170 present evidence of sexual violence according to the Amnesty International report), the long period of time in which these murders were perpetrated, the manner in which the bodies are found more or less viciously mutilated in the city’s public spaces, or parts of their bodies, as well as the fact that the victims are chosen from the population’s lowest social classes, which as a consequence receive a very mediocre response from the authorities in resolving cases.

Considering it from the perspective of a catastrophe, the phenomenon of the killings of Juárez work as a symptom of the problems in

Mexican society, a visible and violent translation of problems that stem from four correlated and interrelated factors, given that the catastrophe: “has the appearance of a incomensurability between the effect (enormous, literally), and the cause often times impossible to detect, or in any case unpredictable, here lies the challenge that it represents for thought” (Godin, 2009). In the case of the events of Juárez, the amount and the difficulty of pinpoint its causes are also at the origin of the deployment of a long and difficult fieldwork effort by journalists to try and bring this combination of causes to light.

First, the phenomenon, due to its geographic anchoring in the border city of Ciudad Juárez seems clearly related to the characteristics of the labor market that has developed there during the second half of the 20th century with the mass arrival of assembly factories that attract deprived migrant populations towards the border areas and bring a strong increase in female employment. From this perspective as well, what happens in Ciudad Juárez can be related with catastrophe, from the angle of criticism of the modern capitalist society for example that Jean-Pierre Dupuy proposes upon writing:

When the evil served the good, it became justifiable. When the evil is devoid of sense, it becomes intolerable. The debilitation of the sacrificial justification schemes now refers to the senselessness of the evil that accompanies economic growth (Dupuy, 2002).

Second, the very idea of femicide refers to a misogyny that spreads like a cancer in Mexican culture according to the analysis of Octavio Paz (2015). However, from the perspective of the focuses emerging from ethnology and contemporary feminism, this essentialist vision of male violence against women can be corrected to give it a much more social aspect anchored in the imaginary internalized by both sexes from a culture and a language practice that supposedly translate the position of power – or of submission – that their roles give them. Take for example, in his essay

dedicated to the way that both sexes stand regarding rape, Sharon Marcus suggests, "rape is structured like a language" and is "a closed interaction that takes place from a language and can be understood in terms of conventional masculinity and femininity" (Marcus, 2002). In Mexico, misogynist violence can be related to a conception of the inequality between men and women that is found in many cultures, but that takes place with a special force, given that it occurs in an area in which it is reinforced by a form of exploitation that adds to this gender violence and economic violence that legitimizes it. That's how ethnologist Melissa M. Wright saw it at the end of a field study of female workers employed by the factories of Ciudad Juarez that implement a model in which "the woman becomes a type of industrial waste, which causes her to be eliminated and substituted" (Wright, 2006)<sup>3</sup>.

Third, killings of women in Ciudad Juarez show evidence of the corruption that corrodes the city, the region of Chihuahua and, further yet, the entire country. This translates into the lack of reaction by the authorities, and awakens reasonable suspicions of collusion between police and murderers. The Amnesty International report mentioned emphasizes it:

The authorities' response during the last ten years has been to treat the different crimes like common violence in the private sector, not recognizing the existence of a persistent pattern of violence against women that has deeper roots based in discrimination. The policy of lack of information and access to files has been constant [...]. Irregularities also include test tampering and even alleged use of torture to obtain information or confessions of guilt<sup>4</sup>.

Finally, the murders of women in Ciudad Juarez show evidence of the presence of drug trafficking which is the final piece of the macabre puzzle put together by Jean-Christophe Rampal in his survey. It is characterized as the part of the iceberg that's underwater given its underground operation that corrodes the society as a whole, and manifests in the case of Ju-

rez not only in the number and the period of time in which the murders continued to occur, but also by the morbid staging of the victims' bodies. What it shows is the generalized and banal spread of violence that allows any type of criminal to hide behind it, in the utmost impunity. The fact that the femicide takes place in an area that is under the control of drug cartels suggests that drug trafficking spreads a violence throughout society in which the exposure of women's bodies often times raped and mutilated is its most manifest expression.

The following is dedicated to showing why the web documentary form seemed appropriate to its authors to reveal this reality, all the while focusing on, as we suggested at the beginning of our reflection, on both the visual content and sound design of the device as the way to organize it that leads to a questioning of the notion of representation.

### **3. Three formats at the service of the expression of the catastrophe**

It is this framework of the complex reality that takes place in the confines of Mexico's social, cultural, political reality as well as their identity that Rampal strives to reveal and describe throughout his survey, using different formats to propose different approaches to the problem and its revelation. It is necessary to briefly summarize them in order to see the features they share, but especially their specificities, before analyzing more in detail the place they hold in the web documentary and the innovative role in the device.

The first publishing of the investigation results was done in book format, taking the form of a traditional long-term journalistic inquiry (seen for example in the systematic citing of the sources as well as their preservation, that guarantees their authenticity, and allows for their later use in the web documentary, like in the case of the pictures and recordings), which allows for bringing light progressively to the

problem of femicides in Juarez, and the role that drug trafficking performs in this context. The back cover mentions the web documentary, which highlights the different formats being complementary of each other. The city's geography is at once recognized as an essential element, with the presence of a map on the first page. At first, the book offers a description of the bodies found and admits the extreme difficulty in finding the killers. At the end, there is a chapter on drug trafficking that appears like the point of arrival of a revelation built on the foundation of fieldwork. Thus, the book begins with the most evident levels of the manifestations of violence: Chapters 1 to 4 are respectively titled "Easy Prey", "License to Dill" (first the effects are described before delving into the cases of violence), "False Guilty Parties and Manipulation" and "Women Hunters" (to show the difficulty in identifying the perpetrators of the crimes). Later it moves on to the most complex clarifications of the context in which the crimes occur: Chapters 5 and 6 are respectively titled "The Border Mafia" and "A Political Issue", and show evidence of the mafia networks related to drug trafficking and the corruption of political parties and police. Later it focuses on the problem from the point of view of the women who suffer from it and/or fight against it: Chapters 7 and 8 are respectively titled "A Women's Fight" and "The City of Dead Women". The last chapter, asked as a question ("Epilogue: Who benefits from these crimes?"), shows the way this climate of generalized violence benefits primarily the fear campaign implemented by the drug traffickers to maintain control of the border area where they transport the drugs. The order of the book provides a dynamic of continuous revealing to show how drug trafficking goes affecting the society as a whole, and leaving signs, manifesting its presence that need interpreting.

The documentary movie is defined by Rampal as a "documentary of reality". The generic characterization of the movie as "documentary" does not seem to relate with its aesthetic dimension (creative documentary), but with the duration of its making, which is revealing

about the magnitude of the work that the investigation represented. The structure of the movie differs greatly from that of the book from which it is adapted due to a number of concessions the authors of the fieldwork had to make in terms of the requirements of TV narrative, which also comes from a difference in tone between the book's authors on one side, and the movie director (who intervenes so that he is coauthor of this version of the investigation) on the other. These differences are manifested in registers of expression of the book and movie. The descriptions in the book are written with a voluntarily descriptive tone that is very effective in awakening the conscience of the reader in light of the harshness of that being told from the first lines of the prologue:

The large redbrick building stands next to the highway in the southern part of the city. It's on the other side of the street that crosses through the industrial sector, the Thomson Televisions assembly plant. Not far from there is the city police station. Several white SUVs, all the same model, line the parking lot. In front of them, a large sign with gold lettering reads: Semefo, Forensic Medical Service. It's the Ciudad Juarez morgue. Here the bodies of women murdered in this city have come and gone and continue coming since 1993. These women have been given the name "the dead women of Juarez" by the city inhabitants. At the entrance, before the employee of a private security company, a family waits to identify a body found a few hours ago at the edge of the desert that dominates the region.

This extract shows the importance of the urban topography and introduces factors whose role will be shown during the investigation (the social context, the role of the authorities, etc.). The description, very detailed, works to create a scenario of marginality, in a desolate, dehumanizing theater in which the events to be described take place. The tone of the description is fundamental because it contributes to the awakening of consciences via the transformation of the catastrophic events in a discourse capable of transmitting them:

A catastrophe cannot separate from the discourses that tell it, that interpret it and in this way participate in its construction. These discourses are related with the experience of trauma and tragedy. These are created based on feelings (fear, anguish, desperation, anger, a sense of injustice, etc.) that necessarily accompany any catastrophic rupture in time (Guenard & Simay, 2011).

In the book, an entire series of emotions filter through this initial description that give the reader a very distressing and disturbing image of the place where the story begins, a forensic institution that seems to rise up in the middle a silent desert from which we will learn the role of burying the dead which it carries out.

On the contrary, the movie begins (and ends) in a sequence in which we see a violent altercation between families of victims and the governor of the region of Chihuahua, in which the voiceover says that he came to put on his "show": the viewer finds himself directly submerged in the conflictive reality of Ciudad Juarez, in which the very tense relationships between authorities and the population are a key element. The point of view of the director is seen immediately via the description of the governor's speech (a "show", an act on stage, in which he carries out a social role in front of people who can only show him the authenticity of their pain). This same difference in the treatment of the material of the investigation can be observed for example in the episode of the highly-publicized arrest of a bus driver who is clearly designated in the movie as the "scape goat", which the book manages to express in a more detailed manner.

The web documentary, on one hand, allows for presenting material collected from the initial fieldwork. Such is the case, for example, of the photographs, visual tools used to write the descriptions found in the book. Rampal does not rely on those that were used as descriptions in the book, which confirms the idea of the three formats complementing one another. This project also is the means to an

effort regarding the need to find sources of income for independent journalists: the idea is to arrive at a higher return on investment due to the fact the results of the fieldwork can be presented via multiple channels capable of generating recipes for success (book sales, movie financing and purchase by TV channels and video on demand transactions, etc.).

However, the web documentary itself does not bring in direct income (access is free, there are no ads on the site), but rather its traffic gives visibility to the other formats. Rampal believes that visits to the web documentary that occurred over time (the site remains up today), played an important role in book sales.

#### **4. *La Cité des mortes*: an ethical and aesthetic project in the face of catastrophe**

According to the words of the web documentary producer Alexandre Brachet, one thing it has in common with the traditional documentary is the desire to reveal certain aspects of reality, to awaken consciences, and it is successful thanks to the particular emotion that this device creates:

Is the internet user in general willing to look at and click on content created by/for and with the internet that transmit emotions close to those that cinema or documentaries do? I was once convinced that the Internet could communicate emotions. I am still convinced today. From my point of view as producer, *Lacitedesmortes.net* is the most representative program of this mix of content/emotion. It's important to me that the Internet also has programs that reflect the world we live in. It's important to me that this new form of web documentary give internet users what the documentary gives TV viewers: an informed view of the world, and a questioning of facts that allow us to better understand the problems around us<sup>5</sup>.

This project presentation emphasizes the emotional experience. Given the complexity of the situation in Juarez, there is another interest of the *transmedia* device that is its capacity to create complementary views of said reality, precisely because it, similar to a catastrophe, is largely unrepresentable:

Gunther Anders and Hannah Arendt reflect on this concept: now man is not capable of representing what he does. This is an unprecedented evil, monstrous, that was embodied by Eichmann. What we can do now is much more than what we can represent; between our capability of creation and our capability of representation a large gap has opened, that grows by the day; our capability to create has no limits, while our capability to represent is limited (Godin, 2009).

The presence of this series of documents on the internet should play the conscience-awakening role on Internet users who are supposedly not necessarily habitual readers of long, tedious journalistic investigations like *La Ville qui tue les femmes* (the book has 281 pages). Based on this perspective, the web documentary applies a strategy that is both aesthetic and ethical, whose goal is to show "what the world is really like" to an audience that is without a doubt more accustomed to other cultural universes, and in particular that of the video game. Thus, the aesthetic of the site is related with the willingness to reach a large audience via its feelings and emotions, and also its reflection and participation in the creation of the feeling. The importance of the notion of cartography should be highlighted, which of course is related with the topic (the bodies that appear in different parts of the city, the geographic locating of the drug traffickers in the urban space), but also (and especially) the way it leads to understanding: navigation on an internet site, built based on an arborescence that allows the user to go from one space to another, and also move around within each space. The authors' guidance does not completely disappear, since the user can have the impression of having

his very own viewing and navigation experience of the site, the data and the possible tours between them are necessarily limited, and the home page suggests that the visitor begin by reading the introduction that explains the nature of the project before diving into a more independent form of exploration. However, thanks to the interaction of the elements present, the web documentary architecture seems particularly appropriate for the investigative journalism, as is reminded in the introduction of the site's home page: "The origin of this project was the willingness of the authors and of the web professionals to create a new editorial form that would give another dimension to the book". This same page has a link to the introduction that summarizes the main point of the topic (the effect of drug trafficking on crime and in particular the femicides in Juarez), and indicates the different parts of the site: a map (that has active links to items like "map", "video", "photo", and "radio"), references to the book, to the documentary shown on Canal +, and to the blog that should reinforce the interactivity between the site and the visitors.

Five sectors are available for exploration on the site, introduced by the emergence of a photograph of an anonymous woman on a black background, with background music that creates a disturbing feeling: "Radio Juarez: those who dare to speak" lets you hear the recordings made at during the fieldwork, interpreted into French. This guarantee of source authenticity creates a support that the book cannot due to its format while at the same time broadcasting the voices as if from beyond the grave that create the strong emotional dimension of the device. Six audio recordings give testimony about the murders and the implication of the police, with a small sign that mentions the source's name and profession: a lawyer, an investigator, the director of La Casa Amiga that helps female victims of gender violence, a criminologist and a victim's father. The combination gives an impression of cacophony and of fragmentation that the user must overcome, navigating the screen



via the scanning device of the radio that gives him access to different recordings. The way in which documents are structured does not appear making it difficult to recreate a coherent flow, and materializes the challenge to consider all the elements of a complicated case whose driving force (drug trafficking) is not apparent at first. Thus, the "curious" user can feel the extreme complexity of this reality that he can perceive immediately.

The site also offers "an interactive map: to understand the city and its crime", with different layers that allow you to locate the different people involved in the case. The "map of bodies found" is particularly shocking since it appears as colored dots, each one representing a different cadaver, and each color is associated with the *modus operandi* of the murders. When all of the categories are activated at the same time, the completely cover the central urban space, giving an impressive idea of the magnitude of the phenomenon. Another heading presents "identification cards: all the characters of flesh and blood", making up 15 files on the "people related to the cases", whose characteristics make up a diverse group, from the president of Mexico, Vicente Fox to the victim Marilú Andrade, and including associate activists as well as representatives of the authorities. The part "Images of the city of the dead women" offers photographs that allow you to see the main sites in which the case took place: "Ciudad Juarez", "Jail", "cotton fields", "police", "el centrino", "morgue" and "searches in the desert".

Finally, the part "The TV of the disappeared women: never forget" shows "Anapra Neighborhood" that shows scenes of daily life in this low-middle class neighborhood affected by the disappearances; "the buses of globalization", that highlight the importance of this means of transportation that the women use to get to their jobs at the factories, and whose drivers were repeatedly named among the alleged perpetrators of the crimes; "in search of a missing woman", that shows view of the desert that also appears in the documentary,

this desert whose immensity emerges from the enormous battle that the families must fight in search of answers to their burning questions; and finally "remember", where there are photographs of the victims in the prime of their lives who were torn from their families, with images of crosses and for others candles that represent their deaths.

This device shows the variety and the fragmentation of the materials that the web documentary contains, which implies an effort on the part of the user to link all these apparently loose ends, yet the combination of which manages to transmit a vision that is very much based on material objects (images and sounds) about the complexity of the case. Thus, the issue of representation by way of feelings is fully based on the experience proposed. This work constitutes an effort to humanize this reality against the violent representations produced by the drug trafficker, emphasizing the fact that behind these numbers there are real people and families whose memory can be preserved on the web: Didn't Regis Debray say that "amnesia is amnesty" (2011)? In the case of the femicides of Juarez, the choice of the web documentary option seems justified as an effort to prevent victims from being forgotten, which would be the last act of violence that could happen to them. And at the same time, the material chosen (voices and photographs of victims while alive) eludes voluntarily to the obscene, morbid exhibition of the bodies that the drug trafficker imposes daily and whose objective is to reduce viewers to a scared silence in the face of the "incompressible" that can only be "seen" (Pavón & Albarrán, 2012): thus, the material shown by the web documentary works to make one feel, but whose final objective is to make one think, giving meaning to a catastrophe and putting violence at distance.

## 5. Conclusion

In the blog *La Cité de mortes*, Alexandre Brachet justifies the structure of the site and the

joining of the different documents that are to be shown in the following terms:

The radio, beyond the graphic metaphor it represents, is a search for staging of audio content. With the video, we have strived to make sure that everything seems transparent for the user in order to ensure maximum emotion, above all of the homage. The video is not framed, there is no plug-in, there is no download. For the pictures, the idea of proposing a slideshow with music that is similar to a photo report seemed to us to reinforce the documentary dimension, especially with the idea to present each scene from three different angles. Finally, there is the map. Made with images taken from Google Earth, this map is without a doubt the most promising program for the future. The cartography connected with the interactivity makes for really interesting perspectives<sup>6</sup>.

It is an aesthetic which has been well presented whose objective is to submerge the visitor into a very coherent atmosphere with the progressive revelation of the content: a disturbing environment that constantly reminds you of the aesthetic of certain police crime stories, such as the case itself. The site was the object of an important artistic work in which Jean-Christophe Rampal participated. The visitor is only partially-guided, and navigation seems rather random as the visitor goes uncovering content in each part that he is not exposed to before. This allows for recreating the meanderings of a phenomenon that is difficult to learn beyond what is seen at first glance, which is common in catastrophes: the staging device and the configuration of the web documentary in this sense are a good reflection of what the book provides in its structure and in its progressive construction of one's understanding of the case.

The aesthetic options are clearly addressed by the journalist and producer that consider the media and objectives are confused, given that the goal is to awaken people's consciences. So states Alexandre Brachet:

After having spent 20 minutes on *lacitydesmortes.net*, were you able to get a clear idea? Doubtful. Maybe in this uncertainty is where the nature of the case hides. Maybe the book is an indispensable resource. However... The site's main goal may be to seek a conscientiousness. For us, the value of the program has a lot to do with our willingness to show the public this terrible drama. Plus, when the majority of television programs are heavily guided and formatted, we like the idea the program's use leads to curiosity, to the personal search.

Therefore, the combination of genres and formats, inherent to the form of *La Cité des mortes*, proposes a series of problems from the ethical point of view: to what point can you seek empathy from the user before falling into a certain voyeurism? Is it acceptable to use an aesthetic that is similar to that of a video game in order to document a case like that of the missing women of Juarez? In this case, such problems seem resolved via the selection and design of materials that, as we have seen, make an effort to restore the dignity of victims of violence in Juarez, show them alive in the geography of the city and in one's memory in order to contrast the efforts of the drug traffickers to convert them into passive objects of their violence. In other words, it is to make this truly catastrophic reality something intelligible and not just terrifying.

## Notes

1. Found on March 8th, 2017, desde [http:// www.lacitedesmortes.net/](http://www.lacitedesmortes.net/)
2. Found on March 9th, 2017, de <https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/AMR41/027/2003/es/>
3. My translation.

4. <https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/AMR41/027/2003/es/>

5. Found on March 10th, 2017 on <http://lacitedesmortes.net/blog/index.php?2005/10/04/19-webdocumentaire>. My translation.

6. <http://www.lacitedesmortes.net/>

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About the Author:

**Julie Amiot-Guillouet** is head professor at the Department of Spanish Philology at the Universidad Paris-Sorbonne as of 2007. Member of the CRIMIC Laboratory. Since 2016 she has been a member of the Institut Universitaire de France where she is working on a research project regarding European institutional aid and Latin American cinema. In 2017, she defended a habilitation thesis with an unprecedented work titled *El momento argentino del Fondo Sur (2003-2009), production and reception of an alternative cinema*.

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