Taking Hold of the Wheel: Automobility, Social Order, and the Law in Mexico's Public Registry of Vehicles (REPUVE)

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Across the globe, governments are implementing electronic vehicle registration programs capable of locating automobiles instantaneously. In order to understand the impact of such programs on contemporary governance, this article draws upon the extant literature on automobility, law and society and science and technology studies theory, and data collected from Mexico, where the government has been implementing the Public Registry of Vehicles (REPUVE). The central argument of the article rests on three concepts. First, the automobile has recurrently served as a *disruptive technology* in modern society, a technology whose adoption unsettles the social order by drawing users away from their usual modes of social interaction. In response, state authorities over the course of the twentieth century created a collection of legal rules, actors, and institutions designed to take hold of the wheel. By penetrating automobility with law, the state transformed the car into a *legal enactment device*, a technology whose operation pushes people to enact the law and, in so doing, constitutes the sociolegal order. In Mexico, a host of forces have conspired to weaken the state's hold on the wheel. The REPUVE promises to change this by "delegating" policing duties to radio-frequency identification stickers affixed to vehicles and scanners placed on roadways. Rather than enforcing the law through corruptible humans sanctioning irresponsible drivers, the REPUVE opens the possibility of doing so through a "surveillant assemblage" denying roadway access to suspicious vehicles. In the REPUVE then, the automobile passes from a *legal enactment device*, a technology whose operation pushes users to enact the law, to a *legal prescription device*, a technology whose operation requires them to do so. By demonstrating the role of vehicular regulation in the "mutual becoming" of society and technology, this study contributes to the growing research on the intersection of law and technology and provides a glimpse into the changing nature of legal power in the contemporary state.

On June 22, 2009, Mexican President Felipe Calderón inaugurated the Public Registry of Vehicles (*Registro Público Vehicular*

[REPUVE]) by placing the program's first radio-frequency identification (RFID) sticker on the inside windshield of a Chevrolet Suburban at the Puente de Ixtla toll booth outside Mexico City (El Siglo de Torreón 2009). By applying RFID stickers to vehicles, positioning RFID scanners at key transit points, and creating a centralized database containing the identifying information of all vehicles in the country, the REPUVE promises the federal government more control over the circulation of automobiles. As such, the program represents a critical tool in the state's fight against organized crime, allowing it to more quickly respond to car thefts, kidnappings, and drugs and weapons trafficking (Noticias Televisa 2008; Secretaría de Seguridad Pública 2009).

On its surface, the REPUVE might appear to be an audacious effort at governmental control. By allowing for the instantaneous identification and localization of vehicles, and tying such automated surveillance to the fight against organized crime, the registry would seem to capture the new governmentality that responds to insecurity by socially sorting suspicious persons, processes, and things from trusted ones (see Lyon 2007). Conversely, the REPUVE can also be seen to simply tie together devices (RFID tags such as the E-Z Pass) and details (VINs, license plates, driver's licenses) that are already widely employed by governmental authorities across the globe. In this sense, the registry would seem to offer little innovative. To the extent that similar "electronic vehicle registration" programs are being adopted in other countries as well, including Brazil, India, and South Africa (Bacheldor 2008), understanding the REPUVE in Mexico is central to comprehending a more general trend in how governments are regulating the means by which people conduct their daily lives.

The ambiguity in understanding the REPUVE underscores a larger issue at the heart of Mexico's car registry, which is the relation of the law to the automobile in general. Surprisingly, academic research on the topic is sparse. While long an object of interest for social historians, theorists of modernity, and scholars interested in industrialization (see Miller 2001), the car has only recently captured the attention of social scientists. Probably no one has done more to define this growing field of research than John Urry (2004), whose notion of *automobility* describes the system of interrelated institutions, industries, historical processes, cultural practices, and emotions that have arisen around the motor vehicle. In modern and post-industrial society, Urry (2004) contends, the car stands as "1. the quintessential *manufactured object* produced by the leading industrial sectors and the iconic firms within 20th-century capitalism"; "2. the major item of *individual consumption* after housing which provides status to its owner/user through its sign-values"; "3. an extraordinarily powerful *complex* constituted

through technical and social interlinkages with other industries" (car parts, road building, advertising, oil production); "4. the predominant global form of "quasi-private" *mobility* that subordinates other mobilities of walking, cycling, travelling by rail and so on"; "5. the dominant *culture* that sustains major discourses of what constitutes the good life"; and "6. the single most important cause of *environmental resource-use*" (25).

A growing number of studies have helped illuminate these different dimensions of automobility. The best work in the field sketches the distinct cultural practices surrounding the car, especially in transnational contexts, including how it reinforces people's relation to the land in Aboriginal communities in Australia (Young 2001), affords women a sense of abandon and escape from the constraints of the domestic sphere in Norway (Garvey 2001), and provides privacy for drivers to reclaim time and control of their lives outside the restrictions of daily life (Bull 2001). Other works emphasize the role of the automobile in deepening social inequalities, such as enabling white flight away from urban areas in the United States in the seventies (Garvey 2001), reinforcing gender subordination by sexualizing the relation between women and cars (Sanger 1995), extending the colonizing project in Australia (Stotz 2001), and privileging "certain mobilities [vehicular] over others [pedestrian]" (Monahan 2007). In this mode, David Gartman's (2004) research on the different epochs of automobile production reveals how the automobile has throughout its history thwarted self-determinism and individual autonomy in service of elite interests. The automobile has also captured the attention of social theorists, who underscore how the automobile deepens the "technization" or human dependency of humans on machines (Elias 1995, as cited in Dant 2006), allows for a new state of being in the world—motility—which is the ability to be mobile without having to perform movement (Beckmann 2004), and creates the conditions of hyper-mobility, which has become a requirement for true participation in contemporary society and a basis of power for the global elite (Bauman 1998, as cited in Beckmann 2004).

Largely absent in this literature however is law. While it receives some mention relative to responses to vehicular risk, law as a theme is missing. Saying this, one does not find much written about cars within the law and society (L&S) community either. Legal scholars have addressed topics such as the legality of police searches of vehicles, road blocks, and so forth (Blade 1991; Joh 2007; Sklansky 1997) and offered critical examinations of the law "in action" in racial profiling cases (Harris 1997; Kennedy 1997; Russell 1999), sexual assault cases involving vehicles (Sanger 1995), and judges' application of drinking and driving statutes (Ross & Foley 1987). But, apart from a single article written by Jonathan Simon (1997)

on the different forms of governmentality inhering in early legal efforts to govern the automobile from 1919 to 1941, an examination on the interrelation between law, society, and the automobile has not been conducted.

The oversight is curious. As any driver knows, "the law is all over" (Sarat 1990) the car. From having to license one's ability to operate vehicles, register and plate them with the state, and pay excise taxes for owning them to submitting cars to pollution tests and obeying traffic regulations on the road, the automobile represents a primary object that mediates people's relationship with legal authorities. With this in mind, one wonders: what is the relationship between the law[1] and the automobile? Why do states concern themselves so greatly with the government of motor vehicles? How do they govern them? And what does an electronic registration program such as the REPUVE tell us about how this relationship might be changing? This article looks to answer these questions by drawing upon the extant literature on automobiles, theoretical perspectives from L&S, science and technology studies (STS), and surveillance studies, and news and data collected on automobiles in Mexico, where I have been researching the implementation of the REPUVE. As one of a number of countries where electronic vehicle registration has recently been launched (Bacheldor 2008), Mexico serves as a key case study for studying the evolving relationship between the automobile and the law.

The central argument of the article revolves around three concepts that I look to introduce. First, the automobile has recurrently served as a *disruptive technology* in modern society, a technological artifact whose large-scale adoption unsettles the social order by peeling users away from their routinized modes of social interaction and into new explorations of social experience. Like the printing press before it (see Eisenstein 1979) and the internet after it (see Ryan 2010), the introduction of the motor car in the United States challenged the prevailing structure of families, religious communities, the physical environment, and so forth (Simon 1997).

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[1] Throughout this work, I use the word law to refer to "the law of the state as recognized by lawyers and state courts and enforced by state agencies," a perspective that Cotterrell (1983) refers to as "juridical monism" (244) and others refer to as "legal centralism" (Griffiths 1986; Merry 1988). This is not to overlook the existence of other systems of rules that regulate affairs in society—"juridical pluralism"—or the appreciable scholarly effort that has been made to understand these forms of regulation more profoundly (for a review, see Walby 2007). Indeed, as the remainder of the article makes clear, the history of the law and automobiles revolves around state attempts to make its set of rules for their operation dominant. This is especially the case with the REPUVE in contemporary Mexico. In this sense, this article adopts a view of "state law as the dominant but not exclusive form of law" and aims to describe the efforts that states undertake to have this be the case (Cotterrell 1983: 246).

As the remainder of the first section of the article describes, authorities of different types took measures—from fathers restricting children's use of vehicles to engineers developing safety belts—to reduce the threats ascribed to the new technology and to weave it into the social order. With regard to law, state authorities over the course of the twentieth century created a collection of rules, legal actors, and institutions designed to take hold of the wheel. Drivers are required to license their ability to drive, operate their machines in the manner specified by traffic rules, protect themselves and others from the risk of automotive accident through the purchase of liability insurance, maintain their vehicles in safe operating condition, and so forth.

By penetrating automobility with such requirements, the state has transformed the car into a *legal enactment device*, a technology whose operation pushes people to enact the law and, in so doing, redefines social order. This is the second key concept of the article, which illustrates the "co-production" (Jasanoff 2006a) or "mutual becoming" (Pickering 2008) of technology and society. Through the intervention of the law, individuals' relation to their automobiles is altered. If people wish to evoke the unique set of emotions and feelings they experience in operating their automobiles, they are first and continuously demanded to conduct themselves as "responsible" (Simon 1997; see also Valverde 2003), law-abiding members of society. While motorists still have the choice to risk operating their vehicles in violation of the law, most in the United States opt to comply, a stance "before the law" (Ewick & Silbey 1998) that demonstrates the constitutive effects of the car as legal enactment device.

The second section of the article highlights the limits of this mode of automotive governance. In Mexico, a host of forces conspire to weaken the state's hold on the wheel. Popular distrust of government, police corruption, smuggling, and geography reduce compliance with the law. And outside the state's grasp, the disruptiveness of the motor car has reappeared, bolstered through its coupling with another disruptive technology circulating through society, illicit drugs. In its adaptability as a medium for criminal trafficking, military assaults, roadblocks, and kidnappings, the automobile is empowering criminal networks in Mexico and co-producing a threat to the legitimacy of the state.

The third section of the article details the efforts of the Mexican government to reorder the car through the REPUVE. By affixing RFID stickers to vehicles and placing scanners on roadways to monitor traffic, the REPUVE would allow a new approach to governing automobility that hinges on the "displacement" (Latour 1992) of human police officers, who have continuously proven corruptible, and the "delegation" (Latour 1992) of policing duties

to a cadre of things. In doing so, the state endeavors to transform individuals' relationship to their vehicles anew. Rather than enforcing the law by sanctioning irresponsible drivers, the REPUVE would do so by denying access to irregular automobiles. Vehicles not in appropriate legal order would simply not be able to operate on roadways connected to the REPUVE's "surveillant assemblage" (Haggerty & Ericson 2000). Through the REPUVE then, the automobile in Mexico passes from a *legal enactment device*, a technological device whose operation *pushes* users to enact the law, to a *legal prescription device*, a technological device whose operation *requires* them to do so. This third concept illustrates how surveillance technologies are providing state authorities with novel opportunities for social control by inserting legal prescriptions more deeply into the objects of people's desires. But rather than simply preserving a sociolegal order challenged by organized crime, the case of the REPUVE suggests that the surveillance technologies and legal measures being adopted in Mexico's War on Crime could coproduce its transformation, as prevailing conceptions of individual choice, private property, and personal identity are altered in favor of security from criminal victimization.

Ordering Cars: Motor Vehicles as Disruptive Technologies and Legal Enactment Devices

With all due respect to baseball, the hot dog, and apple pie, it is difficult to think of an object more emblematic of U.S. society than the automobile.[2] To invoke Urry's (2004) description of automobility, the automobile stands as the "quintessential" manufactured and consumed object in the United States that has given birth to a wide range of ancillary industries, distinct modes of arranging physical space, novel cultural expressions, and dire environmental harms. And as the popularity of baseball, hot dogs, and apple pie has waned in recent years and given way to football, vegetarian fare, and artisanal cupcakes, there is little indication that an alternative form of mobility is set to displace the automobile (but see Urry [2004] for a thoughtful consideration of some possibilities). In brief, the automobile is woven into the fabric of U.S. society like no other object.

But this has not always been the case. The mass adoption of the automobile produced a number of disruptive effects in U.S. society. Jonathan Simon (1997), in his excellent law review on

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[2] An advertising campaign from the Chevrolet Motor Company in the mid-seventies linked baseball, hot dogs, apple pie, and Chevrolets together as distinctly American products. The campaign was revived in the mid-noughties.

governmentality and the motor car during the 1920s and 1930s, notes that "the explosive growth of automobile and truck ownership and use posed a challenge to the governability of American society" (523). Traditional family authority was threatened by the mobility that the motor vehicle provided young people outside the home, while traditional moral authority was threatened by the mobility that it provided families out on Sunday drives away from churches. Businesses were challenged by delivery men taking detours to make personal use and profit off of company vehicles. Class hierarchies were thrown askew as the car became a status symbol and allowed individuals from the lower classes to more easily ascend social hierarchies. And most centrally for state authorities, the precipitous rise in automobile accidents during the 1920s made the automobile a central threat to public safety (Simon 1997).

Even before the 1920s, the increasing number of automobiles was disrupting life in U.S. cities, as vehicles competed with and endangered horses and children playing in the streets and created urban congestion (McShane 1999: 380). In rural areas, farmers resented cars for the damage they caused to land and livestock as well as the moneyed, urban interests they symbolized (Gartman 2004: 171). In the 1930s, the automobile gave birth to "roving criminals" such as John Dillinger and Bonnie and Clyde, who threatened the public welfare and legitimacy of the state (Simon 2007: 48). Around the same time, new dimensions to women's subordination appeared, as cars became "common sites for sexual assaults" (Sanger 1995: 732). More recently, the combination of intoxicated drivers and moving vehicles (Gusfield 1981), as well as that of explosives and moving vehicles (Davis 2007), have revealed new aspects of the unruly nature of automobiles.

In these ways, the automobile represents what can be described as a *disruptive technology*,[3] a technological artifact whose large-scale adoption unsettles the social order by drawing users away from their usual patterns of interaction and into new explorations of social experience. Recognition of the disruptive impact of technology upon society is not groundbreaking. A long record of scholarship has considered the nature of material culture, with technological determinists (Ellul 1964; Mumford 1934) claiming that technology decides social outcomes and social constructivists (Pinch & Bijker 1984) countering that social interests structure

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[3] The term "disruptive technology" originates in Clayton Christensen's (1997) work in business administration on innovations that disrupt existing markets and the companies trading in them. I am using the term in a different sense here to designate the unsettling capacity of new technologies not only to existing markets and associated companies but to society in general.

technological advances. Post-humanist STS research has explicitly sought to overcome such dualistic thinking by demonstrating how society takes definition through humans' engagement with the material world (see Pickering 2005; Strum & Latour 1987). Social formations shift as humans and nonhumans are drawn out of the old roles assigned to them and into new associations with one another (Callon 1986), which results in new actor networks (Latour 1983).

This is the aspect in the story of the automobile that the concept of disruptive technology is intended to highlight. The automobile opened up new avenues for the exploration of "human agency" (Pickering 1995) that pulled individuals out of their usual social routines and roles and into something else that had yet to be defined.[4] The feelings of escape, abandon and the sensation of speed offered by the motor car—akin to what Beckmann (2004) refers to as "motility"—drew teenagers away from their homes and families out of their churches and gave those with ill intentions (whether bank robbers, terrorists, or predatory males) novel opportunities to conduct their business. In the process, established means of mobility, conventional modes of family, community, and social authority, accepted notions of public safety, and prevailing views of appropriate land use were disturbed.

In response to these disruptions, authorities of different stripes developed strategies for ordering the motor vehicle into the fabric of social life. As Norbert Elias (1995) noted, and Dant (2006) reminds us, society has had to "civilize" the automobile and the de-civilizing outcomes of the "technization" process. Parents enforced curfews to reestablish authority over teens newly mobilized by vehicles. Members of the upper classes began to purchase foreign-made cars in the 1970s that were priced beyond the grasp of middle-class drivers in order to reestablish the machine's class status (Gartman 2004). Engineers developed material innovations within and without vehicles—the seatbelt, airbag, road bumps, etc.—to "displace" the moral imperative for drivers to exercise

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[4] To clarify the terminology, not every material artifact is a disruptive technology. The critical piece is the capacity of a certain technological device to draw users out of their normal patterns of social interaction and into new explorations of social experience. As noted in the introduction, the printing press (Eisenstein 1979) would count as such a technology, given the manner in which the printed book invited humans to communicate in new ways that would have profoundly unsettling consequences for religious and political authorities. The internet (Ryan 2010) too would seem to qualify as a disruptive technology, considering how digital space has attracted new forms of interaction that have crippled the music recording industry and impinged upon the ability of university professors to engage with students. Conversely, the mere mechanization of mundane tasks, automatic doors for instance, do not entice humans out of established patterns of behavior and into new explorations of the world, even if they do induce extended theoretical reflection from noted philosophers of science (see Latour 1992).

caution when driving (Latour 1992) or parked (Sanger 1995).[5] And legal authorities devised regulations for drivers to follow in order to ensure public order.

Traffic signs and signals and the rules governing their use were developed by traffic engineers in the 1910s and 1920s to alleviate urban congestion and manage access to city streets (McShane 1999), a system that has become increasingly digitized in recent years through "intelligent transportation systems" (Monahan 2007). The "automobile exception" to the Fourth Amendment prohibition against warrantless searches emerged around the same time (*Carroll v. United States*, 267, U.S. 132 (1925)), providing the police the authority to search vehicles that could flee before the issuance of a warrant[6] (O'Connor 2000). Policing powers were further expanded in the 1930s to prosecute "roving criminals" crossing state lines to evade capture by local police (Simon 2007). Laws prohibiting drinking and driving were passed in the 1970s and 1980s on the heels of a public interest campaign targeting the practice (Gusfield 1981; Lerner 2011). And norms for urban planning and architectural design have been transformed to prevent car bombs from reaching domains of power and authority (Davis 2007). Thus has been created the assortment of criminal, administrative, contract, environmental, and traffic regulations that currently govern the automobile.

In his examination of the automobile, Simon (1997) makes the prescient point that the government's efforts to govern the vehicle involve different ways of operating on the "new governable" subject that it created—the driver. The efforts to tame the automobile accident from 1919 to 1941, for instance, involved three distinct approaches to governance. "Laws governing the operation of vehicles, especially speeding laws," function like criminal law, "aimed at influencing the judgment of the driver through the

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[5] Quoting David Lewis's (1983) "Sex and the Automobile," Sanger (1995) shares that "Henry Ford, according to widespread rumor, sought to discourage sex through car design. The auto king allegedly limited his Model T's seat length to thirty-eight inches so as to inhibit lovemaking in Tin Lizzies" (730).

[6] In *Carroll v. United States* (1925), federal agents pulled over a vehicle driven by George Carroll, whom they suspected of trafficking alcohol. The agents searched the car without a warrant, tearing apart seat cushions to find 68 quarts of liquor, and arrested Carroll for violating the National Prohibition Act. The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the search, thereby creating the "automobile exception." The Court's ruling established that the "automobile exception" requires three elements: "(1) a mobile vehicle . . .; (2) probable cause . . .; and (3) it must be impractical for the officers to secure a warrant to search the vehicle in question" (O'Connor 2000: 397). Over time, as O'Connor (2000) meticulously demonstrates, the Supreme Court reduced these requirements down to a single factor, probable cause. On a related point, the Court in *Arizona v. Gant*, 556 U.S. 332 (2009) restricted the police's power to search vehicles by finding that a vehicle search incident to arrest is unreasonable once the driver is arrested and cannot access the vehicle or when officers are searching for evidence of crimes other than that for which the person was arrested.

disciplines of law enforcement, punishment, and public education." "Civil liability, the general rules of care taking in public life, promised to discipline the same subject." "Insurance," meanwhile, "offered the possibility of providing compensation for victims while maintaining a subtle force for care taking that lacked the vulnerabilities and liabilities of coercive policing" (Simon 1997: 555–56).

Extending this analysis to the collection of laws that currently govern the motor vehicle, it can be said that the law governs drivers in at least three ways. First, it demands people to be *skilled* operators of motor vehicles by requiring them to pass driving tests in order to obtain licenses. Second, it requires licensed drivers to be *dependable* operators of motor vehicles by making them operate their cars according to local traffic rules. Third, it demands drivers to be *responsible* property owners capable of maintaining their machines in proper technical and administrative order by requiring them to register their vehicles, have them inspected, and pay excise taxes on them.

In STS, and actor–network theory (ANT) in particular, the behavioral demands that a certain technological artifact places on the human user are called "prescription" (Akrich 1992; see also Latour 1992, 1999). The automobile "prescribes" a variety of behaviors to its human operator, such as being able to open the door in order to enter the vehicle, activating a key in order to ignite the engine, staying seated in order to drive the vehicle, and so forth. Extending this concept to the legal realm, in ordering motor vehicles in society, state authorities would seem to have instilled a whole set of other behaviors into the automobile that human operators need to fulfill—licensing themselves, registering their machines, obeying traffic laws—in order to drive. In order to escape one's domestic space and abandon one's self (Garvey 2001), take control of one's daily routine (Bull 2001), fashion a group or individual identity through the automobile (Miller 2001), or fulfill unfulfilling modernist dreams of individualism (Gartman 2004), people must first subject themselves to the law.

But this extension of STS/ANT terminology to law and society extends only so far. Whereas the design of the automobile requires the driver, to an (almost) absolute degree, to open the door, activate the key, and seat herself properly in order to put it in motion, the law does not impose such restrictions. Instead, an arrangement of incentives (lower insurance payments for avoiding accidents) and disincentives (fines for traffic violations) are placed before the driver to responsibilize (Valverde 2003, 2011) her behavior. Whether she complies with the rules to license herself, register her vehicle, or not speed is still essentially a decision for her to make, however limited it may be. The automobile will function in any case.

A similar distinction has been noted in STS by John Law (2004), who explains that science and technological artifacts can be used in ways outside of their "inscription" or construction, which represent different approaches to "enacting" reality. In the case of the car, the law does not "prescribe" users to license, register, and obey road rules. However, the arrangement of incentives and disincentives propels them to "enact" the law in order to minimize the risk of encountering legal problems while driving. In this way, the law transforms the automobile into a *legal enactment device*, a technological artifact whose operation encourages individuals to fashion themselves as legal subjects and enact the legal order.

Studies suggest that this intertwining of vehicular regulations and people's "attachments" to the "objects of their passion" (Gomart & Hennion 1999) has proven effective in producing responsible, law-abiding drivers. That is, when given the choice to enact the law or not before getting behind the wheel, drivers in the United States overwhelmingly choose to stand "before the law" (Ewick & Silbey 1998) and comply. In a recent study of registration rates for vehicles in California, Younglove et al. (2004) find that the rate of unregistered vehicles among a sample of 98,000 vehicles was 3.38%, a number considerably below the California DMV's own estimate of 6–7%. An earlier study, also in the state of California, estimated the percentage of unlicensed drivers on the road at 3.3%, while that of drivers operating with a suspended or revoked license was 8.8% (Peck 1997). With regard to compliance with state laws to carry automobile insurance, numbers vary considerably from state to state, with 96% compliance in Massachusetts and Maine to 28% in Mississippi[7] (Copeland 2011).

And as the law is enacted, the social order is defined, revealing what some STS theorists have described as the "coproduction" (Jasanoff 2006a, b) or "mutual becoming" (Pickering 2008) of technology and society. The various taxes paid on cars in the United States generate some $91.5 billion in state government revenues, $60 billion of which stems from "use taxes and fees including fuel taxes, registration fees, and driver licensing fees" (Hill, Menk, & Cregger 2012). These receipts are central to the construction of the physical environment (roadways, bridges, tunnels) required for automobility as well as the growth and sustenance of the various state agencies charged with maintaining the roadways, licensing drivers, registering vehicles, policing traffic, and so forth. New social norms regarding appropriate conduct have emerged. As a

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[7] Unsurprisingly, compliance depends on law enforcement. The high rate of compliance with insurance requirements in Massachusetts reflects the fact that proof of insurance is a requirement for registering a vehicle there. In states with lower rates of compliance, no such mechanism exists (Copeland 2011).

result of the stricter enforcement of drunk driving rules since the 1980s, young drivers today are more likely to view drunk driving as irresponsible than their counterparts 30 years ago (Atchley, Hadlock, & Lane 2012). And public safety has increased. When California passed bills in 1994 allowing for the impoundment of vehicles operated by drivers without valid licenses, researchers found that drivers who had their vehicles seized had some 20% fewer traffic convictions in the future and 30% fewer crashes than a control group that did not (DeYoung 1997). Also, as Simon (1997) explains, from the 1930s to today, the number of deaths attributed to automobile accidents has remained remarkably stable at some 30,000 to 40,000 deaths per year, which indicates a substantial decline in the death rate.

To summarize, the appearance of the automobile in U.S. society in the early twentieth century proved fundamentally unsettling to the social order. The automobile lured individuals out of their usual social routines and, in the process, disturbed established means of mobility and modes of family, community, and social authority. But by intersecting people's attachments to their vehicles with law, the state has been able to transform the automobile from a disruptive technology that posed a fundamental risk to public safety and the social order to a legal enactment device that engenders legal compliance from drivers and, as a result, redefines the social order.

The Limits of Order: Automobility and the Law in Mexico

The laws that govern the motor vehicle possess a global dimension. The electronic traffic signal with a red light signifying stop placed atop a green light signifying proceed is an international standard that has withstood the efforts of Irish Americans in Cleveland to place nationalistic green above British-associated red and the attempts of Chinese Communists to reverse the color scheme to have red associated with forward movement (McShane 1999). Drivers in Mexico, meanwhile, are faced with many of the same legal obligations as drivers in the United States. To operate a vehicle, drivers require a *licencia de conducir* (driver's license). To operate one's own vehicle, drivers also require a *tarjeta de circulación* (traffic card), equivalent to a vehicle registration in the United States, as well as *placas* (license plates). A tax—*la tenencia*—has historically been levied by both state and federal authorities to owners of vehicles, although the federal tax was eliminated as of January 1, 2012 and seven states have followed suit (Milenio 2012a). Additionally, various states possess air pollution laws that require car owners to have their vehicles undergo a pollution inspection (*verificación vehicular*) and place limits on the movement

of vehicles not meeting emission standards. Automobile insurance (*seguro automotriz*), however, is not obligatory in Mexico.

While the system of laws governing the automobile may be international, its enactment on the part of drivers varies. In Mexico, for instance, some 25% of vehicles in the state of Coahuila operate without license plates (Milenio 2012b). In an interview with Oscar Jiménez, a public official responsible for implementing the Public Registry of Vehicles (REPUVE) in a northern Mexican state, I was told that only 40–45% of Mexicans pay the *tenencia* excise tax on vehicles (personal interview, May 25, 2011), a number on par with press reports that put the number at 45–60% (Barrientos 2012). Meanwhile, a recent law requiring drivers in Mexico City to obtain a new *licencia de conducir* containing a RFID chip saw only 70% of city drivers complying (Milenio 2012c).

The relatively low level of compliance reflected in these numbers (as compared to the United States) is a function of different forces. Legal consciousness (Ewick & Silbey 1998; Marshall & Barclay 2003; Merry 1995), for one, has a different history in Mexico than in the United States. Mexico experienced a long period of colonial rule under the Spanish crown (1519–1810), with periods of autocratic rule and foreign occupation thereafter, where compliance with the law held unclear benefits (Sadler 2000: 162–63). Mexicans have also historically participated in institutions and forms of civic participation outside the state. The Catholic Church provides a stronger symbol of national unity—*la Virgen de Guadalupe*—than the national flag, and the Church today, despite high-profile cases of child sexual abuse, garners much higher levels of confidence from people than do the president, senators, deputies, and political parties (Campos & Penna 2010).

In addition to legal consciousness, the actions of legal authorities also affect compliance with the law (Tyler 1990). In Mexico, the pervasive corruption of the police makes the law's hold on vehicles variable and negotiable. The settlement of a traffic violation negotiated on the spot between a traffic cop and driver benefits the individual officer and his networks of professional relations[8] (Nelson Reames 2007: 129) rather than the formal legal system. Together with stories of police complicity with organized crime, such practices leave Mexicans with little confidence in cooperating with legal authorities. In recent national surveys, some 30% of those surveyed believed it is "very dangerous" "to help the police in your

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[8] Local police officers often rely on bribes in order to survive, since police wages do not cover basic living expenses and police are often required to purchase their own bullets (Shirk & Ríos Cázares 2007: 19). Research on the police also indicates that corruption in Mexico is organized hierarchically, meaning that line officers are expected to send a certain percentage of their bribes, estimated to be one-third, up their chain of command (Rowland 2007).

city," a number that rises to 48% among respondents with a university education (Consulta Mitofsky 2012).

Regional political economy affects the power of the law over vehicles as well. The importation of automobiles from the United States provides one challenge. Because imported vehicles fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government and customs officers, state-level officials find it difficult to have these vehicles register with state agencies. As Oscar Jiménez, the state official implementing the REPUVE explained, "we are certain that here in the state there are a half-million vehicles that are legally registered and that there is an equal number of so-called *chocolates*, which are from abroad. For years there have been efforts to construct a registry of all the foreign vehicles. But we come up against a legal limitation, which is that . . . we cannot conduct a census of vehicles by itself, we would have to conduct a census of car owners" (personal interview, May 25, 2011). And unless car owners were willing to declare their unregistered vehicles in such a census, the vehicles would remain unaccounted for.

Geography also limits the ability of state officials to order vehicles. As Mr. Jiménez added, "we have a town here, which is some 20 minutes from the neighboring state. It is a community dedicated to planting vegetables and produce, all of which is sold in the neighboring state. Many of these producers are also distributors and have tax addresses in that state because it is a regional distribution center for fruits and vegetables. So, they have two addresses. Depending on what is cheaper for them, they will either go [register their vehicles with] their tax address or personal address. This is the problem we are having." Geography too restricts traffic police from detecting vehicles whose papers are not in order. Where I conducted my field research, I was told that the traffic police chiefly operate in the state capital, leaving the rural areas of the state to their own devices and thus allowing nonordered vehicles to operate freely.

Given these forces, the sociolegal order governing vehicles in Mexico possesses various gaps, and from these gaps reemerges the disruptive nature of automobility. If not a direct result of legal noncompliance, the number of road fatalities per 100,000 registered vehicles in the United States is roughly 17, while in Mexico the number is 68 (World Health Organization 2009). But road fatalities are just one type of insecurity accompanying the motor vehicle in Mexico today. It has also played a central role in the rising rates of crime and violence experienced across the country. Its value as a manufactured object makes it a frequent target of thieves (Román 2012). Its mobility is critical for drug cartels launching attacks against other cartels as well as the police and military. This mobility is also key for the abduction of persons. The car's

propensity for immobility and congestion is exploited by cartels to create roadblocks to impede the arrival of police and military forces when shoot-outs with rival criminal bands are planned (Estrada 2010). Its enclosure of space provides the cover necessary for illicit trafficking and hiding dead bodies for authorities to uncover. And its combustibility has been used on at least one occasion to produce car bombs to punish state authorities seen to favor one cartel over another (de la Luz 2010).

The insecurity emanating from vehicles in Mexico today is not the same as that against which the law has usually been mobilized. The traffic accidents noted by Simon (1997) owed in many ways to the chaotic outcomes stemming from people's pairing with machines. The feelings of release and escape that drivers experienced in operating cars, especially if accompanied by alcohol, produced reckless conduct that threatened public safety. In Mexico, insecurity stems not only from the daring behavior produced by individuals' union with automobiles, but from the schemes hatched by drug cartels and other bands of organized criminals in the execution of their craft.

The source of power behind organized crime in Mexico is illicit drugs, which represent an interesting object of their own. Like the automobile, psychoactive drugs such as opium, cocaine, methamphetamine, and the like represent *disruptive technologies* that draw users away from preestablished patterns of social interaction.[9] However, state authorities across the globe have taken a different approach to governing drugs from that taken to govern motor vehicles. While governments *regulate* automobiles, creating distinct sets of rules for their production, sale, and usage, they *prohibit* those drugs they deem to be either physically or morally harmful to individuals, making illegal their production, sale, and use.

This approach has prevented the establishment of a centralized, formal legal order around drugs similar to that of automobiles. But this is not to say that no legal order exists around drugs. By attempting to cast this disruptive technology outside the social order through prohibition rather than integrating it through

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[9] The importation of Indian opium to China led to high levels of addiction there, a phenomenon that became more troubling to state authorities when rich youth and government officials became ensnared in opium's allure. But the true disruptive aspect of the drug was the weakening of the Pekin government relative to the Portuguese and British traders profiting from the trade, leading to its eventual criminalization in 1729. The development of more refined methods for extracting morphine from opium during the mid-19th century, combined with the invention of the hypodermic needles and the use of morphine injections to treat wounded soldiers in the U.S. Civil War, the Austro-Prussian War, and the Franco-Prussian War, produced heightened rates of morphine addiction in the West. Initially imagined as a treatment for morphine addiction, cocaine eventually entered the social mainstream of the United States and Europe as well (Davenport-Hines 2002).

regulation, state authorities have laid the groundwork for novel "legal orders" to emerge instead of "a centralized and codified legal system" (Merry 1988). In Mexico, opium trafficking traces its origins to the 1910s, when political and military leaders in the north began selling permits to traffickers to transport the drug to the United States, which had recently criminalized narcotics. As a result, drug traffickers have historically been seen as doing the dirty work of the dominant political class in Mexico (Astorga 2000: 62–63). The legal order governing illicit drugs was transformed in 1997, when Amado Carrillo Fuentes, the leader of the Juárez cartel, died following plastic surgery, leaving different cartels to battle for control of the Juárez *plaza* (territory and supply route). In 2007, the competition between cartels intensified as Esmail "*El Chapo* (Shorty)" Guzman, leader of the Sinaloa cartel, was allegedly unable to reach agreement with a rival cartel on access to the city (de la Luz González & Mejía 2010). More recently, the legal order(s) around drugs have been further transformed by the federal government's War on Crime, an effort to disrupt the operations of the drug cartels that has resulted in several high-level arrests and left over 50,000 people dead (see Guzik 2013).

As noted above, the automobile is central to organized crime in Mexico. In the shadows left by drivers not registering and plating vehicles and the state not enforcing regulations, organized crime has been able to assemble a powerful and profitable criminal formation that can profit from stolen vehicles, transport illicit substances and kidnapped persons without detection, and establish roadblocks to thwart police and military forces. In essence, and evidencing once again the "coproduction" and "mutual becoming" of material artifacts and social orders, organized criminals have coupled illicit drugs and unregulated automobility together, empowering themselves in the process to challenge the authority and legitimacy of the centralized, formal legal system.

In Juárez, the city that has been most affected by the massive amounts of violence accompanying drug trafficking and the federal government's campaign against it, the link between unordered vehicles and insecurity has been identified explicitly by the group *Todos Somos Juárez* (We Are All Juárez), a federal, state, and municipal cooperative effort to combat insecurity in the city. On its website, "*Mesa de Seguridad*" (Security Roundtable), the group asks drivers "Do You Want Security?," before affirming that "There is something you can do!" The first point of action, the website explains, is to "1) Put plates on your car and strengthen your city: 9 out of 10 serious crimes are committed in autos without plates; cars that do not have plates invite delinquency and make it harder to capture kidnappers, extortionists, and car thieves" (Mesa de Seguridad 2012).

Reinventing the Wheel: Surveillance Technologies and Legal Prescription Devices

The strategy of the *Todos Somos Juárez* group to combat the insecurity of automobility follows a traditional approach. The car owner continues to be imagined as the primary agent for anchoring the automobile to the legal order. By appealing to *juarenses'* (residents of Ciudad Juarez) desire to live free of the insecurity and crime that has plagued the city in recent years, and invoking fears of criminal victimization, the plan seeks to fashion car owners into "responsible" (Simon 1997; Valverde 2003) property owners who will enact the law by registering their vehicles with the government.

However, the *Todos Somos Juárez* is a local effort concentrated in a single city. At the national level, the federal government has sought to break the link between insecurity and automobility not by responsibilizing the human operators of automobiles, but by gaining a hold on the vehicles themselves through surveillance technologies. This is the REPUVE (Public Registry of Vehicles), mentioned at the start of the article.

The idea for a national registry of vehicles was not born from the War on Crime launched by President Calderón in 2006. The law providing for the REPUVE was passed in 2004 by Calderón's predecessor, Vicente Fox. That law, in turn, replaced an earlier effort to implement a vehicle registry, the National Vehicle Registry (RENAVE). Launched in 1998, the RENAVE had inscription costs (375 pesos, or $47, for new cars), which made it unpopular. The program later fell into disgrace when its head, Ricardo Miguel Cavallo was arrested in Cancún, after it was learned that he was actually Miguel Angel Cavallo, an Argentine war criminal wanted by Spanish authorities for torture and other crimes committed during Argentina's military dictatorship in the late 1970s (Lutz & Naomi Roht-Arriaza 2002). These precedents notwithstanding, it has been the Calderón Administration's implementation of the car registry that has lent it a distinctive character.

The REPUVE involves three basic technologies: (1) a centralized federal database containing the details of all cars circulating in the country, including vehicle identification number, registration information, physical description, and the name and address of the owner; (2) 18,000 C-type RFID tags containing an individual vehicle's identification and registration information; and (3) RFID readers and license plate recognition cameras to read vehicles' tags at toll booths and other transit points (Noticias Televisa 2008; Secretaría de Seguridad Pública 2009). Individuals, as well as public and private organizations, are required by law to comply with and contribute to the registry. For instance, private sector

entities such as car manufacturers and importers, insurance agents, and car dealers are obliged to enter the details of the vehicles that they handle into the database. Public sector entities such as state-level motor vehicle departments and federal-level customs officials must do the same. These same actors are also required to apply the RFID tags to vehicles, whether at the point of manufacture or importation in the case of new vehicles or at the point of registration in the case of pre-owned vehicles.

Taken together, the technologies operant in the registry would create a "surveillant assemblage" (Haggerty & Ericson 2000) that would perceive vehicles in novel ways. The actual database fulfills "the desire to bring systems together" (Haggerty & Ericson 2000: 610) by integrating multiple state-level vehicle databases—those recording the payment of excise taxes and registration fees that are typically maintained by Finance Secretaries, those tracking traffic offenses that are normally maintained by Transit Police, and those tracking stolen vehicles that are usually maintained by State Prosecutor's Offices—into a single record. As a result, federal and state authorities now have a common record that can be used to help identify vehicles reported as stolen or simply out of compliance with regulations. By making this registry available to laypersons through a web interface, the government offers car buyers the opportunity to verify the origin of vehicles before purchase, creating "tokens of trust" (Lyon 2001: 16) that give buyers added security in their transactions. The application of RFID tags to vehicles and the installation of scanners at transit points, meanwhile, enables the "surveillance of mobility" (see Nellis 2009) by providing authorities a method for identifying and disabling vehicles reported as stolen or out of compliance with regulations.

These surveillance technologies would transform the governance of automobility in Mexico. In his work on sociotechnical relations, Latour (1992) highlights how humans can often not be relied upon to undertake simple actions that are in their own interest, such as fastening safety belts when traveling by car or closing doors to conserve energy when entering or exiting a building. Engineers, in turn, work to "delegate" these tasks to objects, or "nonhuman actants" as Latour prefers to call them, who can perform them more reliably. A sound beeps in vehicles when occupants have not fastened their safety belts and spring hinges help ensure that doors close when humans pass through doorways. In this way, for Latour and other STS theorists, society is characterized by the increasing "displacement" of human actants for nonhuman ones.

Currently in Mexico, the ability of the state to ensure drivers' compliance with vehicular and traffic regulations is only as strong as police officers and bureaucrats are honest. With the REPUVE

however, human traffic cops who rent-seek by overlooking traffic or regulatory infractions would be "displaced" by teams of RFID stickers and scanners with no such pecuniary interests. As a result, the subjective, discretionary nature of law enforcement changes, promising to enhance the state's control over vehicles.

This point was alluded to in my interview with Mr. Jiménez, the official responsible for implementing the REPUVE in his state. He remembered a time, "a few administrations ago," when the state operated a program also seeking to put the vehicle roll in order. "The program was called Secure Transit. It was primarily a public safety program, but it also contained provisions allowing Finances to verify payments due. So, two Transit officials would go out, one person from Finances, and another person from the State Comptroller, who would serve as an observer to prevent acts of ill-gains, abuse of authority, and so forth. This program allowed transit authorities to monitor pollution emissions, tinted windows, seat belts, and so on . . . The program helped elevate levels of compliance. But if every vehicle had a chip, we could initiate another program of this nature. With the scanner and chips, we could collect information on payments, and this would help the operation of such a program a lot."

In Jiménez's comments, it is noteworthy that the older program required four persons to operate, one with the explicit function of monitoring the other officials. With the chips and scanners, another program could be launched, but without the need for so many human actors. Wondering how officers' indiscretions would fit into a new program, I asked Jiménez, "what would happen with bribes?" "Well," he replied, "we would be putting an end to that." Thus, by "delegating" to technological devices police work traditionally belonging to human transit officers, the state imagines itself more able to close the gaps in the enforcement of vehicular regulations and to bring the car into the legal order.

The displacement of corrupt human traffic cops by RFID chips and scanners would in turn transform drivers' relationship to both the law and their vehicles. Currently, the state enforces vehicular regulations by punishing those drivers who have failed in their responsibilities to license themselves, register their vehicles, and so forth. Under the REPUVE however, the state would be able to enforce vehicular regulations by denying roadway access to those vehicles with irregularities. Whereas drivers once had the choice to comply with state regulations, however constricted by the potential penalties awaiting lawbreakers, the REPUVE's hold on vehicles would make drivers' passage through tollgates contingent upon their prior compliance with the law. In this sense, the REPUVE transforms the automobile from a *legal enactment device*, a technological device whose operation encourages users to enact the legal

order, to a *legal prescription device*, a technological device whose operation requires them to do so.

Legal prescription devices embody a unique approach to governance. In response to a disruptive technology that can draw users away from the formal sociolegal order, the state utilizes the material agency of surveillance technologies (RFID chips, scanners, databases, etc.) to reconfigure the gravitational pull or force of attraction of these things. As users convene with the "objects of their passion" (Gomart & Hennion 1999: 128), the state's ability to disable these objects forces users, whatever their "relation to the law" (Ewick & Silbey 1998), to first carry out the legal requirements that have been attached to them. In this way, people's attachments to disruptive technologies would actually serve to bolster the state.

The REPUVE's transformation of the automobile into a legal prescription device is not without precedent. Within automobility, wheel clamps, which immobilize vehicles parked illegally, thus requiring drivers to pay for parking offenses prior to being able to operate their vehicles, have been in operation in the United States for decades. Of greater sophistication is the ignition interlock, the breathalyzer device that connects to a vehicle's starter or onboard computer to prevent people who have been drinking alcohol from driving.[10] Of still greater sophistication is the autonomous vehicle or self-driving car of the (near) future (Vanderbilt 2012), whose use of radar, laser, GPS, and other technologies would presumably ensure automobile travel in full compliance with the law.

Beyond the realm of automobility, automated public toilets (APTs) in the United States are infused with a politics "that imposes a morality in practice" (Braverman 2010a: 1). The enclosed space of the APT can only be accessed by those wielding coins, a design meant to exclude undesirable populations such as the homeless, and the 12 minutes of access afforded by paying the APT's fee are intended to prevent individuals from using the space for activities, such drug consumption or prostitution, other than that for which it was designed. Returning to Mexico, in addition to the REPUVE, the Calderón Administration launched another program in its War on Crime—the National Registry of Mobile Telephone Users—that required cellular telephone users to register their devices with the government, under threat of cessation of service, in order to combat kidnappings.

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[10] As of 2011, alcohol interlocks are used in 48 different states in the United States. Four states mandate their use when an individual has been convicted of driving with a blood alcohol content (BAC) of 0.08 grams per deciliter (g/dL) or more; 11 states require them for convictions involving a BAC of 0.15 g/dL or higher; and seven states mandate them for a second driving under the influence conviction (Ashton 2011).

Legal prescription devices can be seen to evidence a more general shift in contemporary governance noted by governmentality and surveillance studies scholars. The oversight of human subjects by human agents—"old surveillance"—gives way to data tracking of nonhuman devices (computers, cell phones, etc.) by nonhuman agents—"new surveillance" (Marx 2005). Empowered through this technical capacity, the focus of authorities evolves from the time and resource consuming work of disciplining difference in pursuit of normalized order to the automated "sorting" (Lyon 2001, 2007) of safe/healthy/legal and dangerous/harmful/illegal persons, processes, and things in pursuit of "security"[11] (Foucault 2008).

In attempting to order disruptive technologies by prioritizing access control rather than the subjectivity of users, legal prescription devices would alter the individual's grip upon the world in subtle, but fundamental, ways. For instance, if drivers never had complete free choice over whether to license themselves or register and plate their vehicles, these choices are all but eliminated when the RFID devices and readers require people to maintain their vehicles in order. And while drivers never possessed their vehicles completely (the plate that identifies the car belongs to the state and laws commonly proscribe tinted windows and other modifications to vehicles), the state's placement of the RFID stickers on vehicles colonizes a new portion of the automobile—the windshield—which further limits ownership over the vehicle. The stickers are present and registered with the state at the point of sale, they cannot be legally removed, and they must be replaced should the windshield require replacement. Even individual identity is affected as new driver's licenses (such as the ones being distributed in Mexico City) include biometric information that "anchor" identity to one's biology (see Amoore & de Goede 2005: 16), thereby lessening the ability of individuals to define themselves. At the same time, these intrusive technologies would also strengthen individuals' hold upon the wheel by assuring that vehicles are not stolen (and thus subject to repossession) and that other persons on the roadway are licensed motorists (and thus less likely to cause accidents). In sum, the REPUVE and other programs like it would seem to portend the emergence of a distinct approach to governance in which the touchstones of liberal society (individual choice, private property, and

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[11] Such sorting occurs at national borders, where identity cards and scanners work to sort between safe/legitimate and dangerous/illegitimate persons (Amoore & de Goede 2005; Braverman 2010b); on city streets, where CCTV operators look to identify "undesirables" and intelligent transportation systems (ITS) implement "throughput rationality" to prioritize certain mobilities (motor vehicles) over others (pedestrians) (Monahan 2007; Smith 2007); in correctional facilities, where good risks for rehabilitation are separated from bad risks (Feeley & Simon 1992); and other spaces of institutional control.

self-definition) are decentered in order to better manage the risks (theft, accidents) seen to inhere in disruptive things.

But if the REPUVE promises to reorder automobility in Mexico, that promise is at present far from being met. The REPUVE database has been operational for a number of years, and it is accessed by police and civilians alike in order to verify the status of vehicles on the road or wanted for purchase. However, the application of the RFID tags has progressed slowly. Interestingly, manufacturers and importers are complying with the law, but many states are not. While a handful of states have already installed tags on their fleets of public vehicles, only a few have extended the provision of stickers to private cars as well (Ponce 2010). And that process has proceeded slowly. In Zacatecas, where the program has been in operation since July 2010, only 10% of the state's 430,000 private vehicles were registered as of September 2012 (Amador 2012).

The sticking points thus far stem from sociopolitical conditions similar to those described in James Scott's seminal work on modern statecraft. Three factors, Scott (1998) contends, determine whether states are able to carry out their aspiration for an "administrative ordering of nature and society": "high-modernist ideology" concerning the possibility and desirability of "scientific and technical progress;" "an authoritarian state . . . willing and able to use the full weight of its coercive power" to bring its designs into being; and a "prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans" (4–5). In Mexico, these three conditions are notably absent. With respect to high-modernist ideology, the complicated history of the RENAVE program—that prior effort at a national car registry administered by the Argentine war criminal—and various other state projects tarnished by corruption and official misconduct reduce the general population's faith in national car or cellular telephone registries. As a result, when given the opportunity to register their vehicles in states such as Zacatecas, they have been slow to do so. Meanwhile, the power of the federal state to unilaterally implement the program is limited by the federalist political structure set out in the Mexican Constitution. While private actors are obliged to abide the REPUVE law under threat of financial penalty, the United States of Mexico are not. As a result, many states attempt to bargain their participation in the program, suspending its implementation until the federal government provides additional money and resources (García 2010). Finally, elements of civil society have been actively resisting the program. Initially, in October 2009, the Mexican Association of the Automobile Industry pushed for an expansion of the program, envisioning it as a platform for the payment of taxes on vehicles, the acquisition of plates, and the acquisition and transfer of titles, all of which would in

theory restrict the unregulated importation of cars from the United States and boost domestic car sales (Aviña 2009). Nine months later, with time to assess the program, the president of the National Association of New and Used Car and Truck Sellers expressed concern that the registry was experiencing a 1-month delay in processing stolen car reports, limiting the ability of users to verify the status of car purchases and leaving victims in doubt about authorities' response (Miranda 2010). More recently, the director of the Office of Insured Risks, an organization charged with locating stolen vehicles for the automobile sector, noted that car thefts had increased by 17% in 2010 (Torres 2010) while recovery rates for stolen vehicles remained low—37% or 29 077 of 78,876 vehicles in 2010—all of which revealed the need for amending the program (Torres 2011).

These points portend neither the success nor failure of the federal government's attempt to reorder automobility in Mexico. Rather, they cast in sharper focus the variety forces at work. Returning to the concepts of "coproduction" (Jasanoff 2006a) and "mutual becoming" (Pickering 2008), the paths by which a particular social order is constituted are neither direct nor dictated by the logic of governors. "Identifying a logic of governance and documenting its dissemination," Valverde (2011) argues in a recent article on land use planning in the United States, "does not mean that one has documented the decline, much less the death, of alternative perspectives and habits" (308). Thus, whether and in which manner the automobile comes to be reordered in Mexico remains an open question. But what seems beyond debate is that the answer to that question will hold with it the shape of the social order itself.

Conclusion

The automobile has garnered increasing interest among social scientists over the past 15 years. The present article has sought to contribute to this growing field of inquiry by reflecting on the relationship between the law and the motor car, an underappreciated aspect of this foremost object of modern society. Focusing on the United States and Mexico, and drawing on sociolegal, STS, and surveillance research, this work offers three concepts—disruptive technologies, legal enactment devices, and legal prescription devices—that provide insight into the socially constitutive interactions between the automobile and the regulatory regimes governing it.

The widespread adoption of the automobile in the United States revealed its character as a *disruptive technology*, an object that

unsettles the social order by pulling users away from their usual patterns of interaction and into new explorations of social experience. The sensation of effortless speed and movement, the feeling of control over time and space, the opportunity to construct unique group and individual identities, and so forth offered by the motor car drew people out of their normal family, religious, work, and moral commitments. To counter these effects, authorities of different stripes undertook efforts, from engineers manufacturing safety devices to parents imposing curfews, to weave the technology into the social order. In the realm of the law, state authorities placed a series of regulations upon automobile use—the licensing of drivers, the registration and plating of vehicles, the payment of excise taxes, the completion of pollution tests—that command people to be skillful, reliable, and responsible drivers. Through such measures, the state transformed the motor vehicle into a *legal enactment device*, a technological artifact whose operation pushes users to comply with the law. Evidencing the "coproduction" (Jasanoff 2006a) of law, technology, and social order, the legal requirements imposed upon automobility have been accompanied by high rates of compliance and decreasing rates of motor vehicle deaths in the United States.

This approach to the governance of automobility has proven less effective in Mexico however, where legal consciousness, official corruption, and liberal trade policy have decreased the state's hold on the wheel. In the process, new dimensions of the car's disruptive nature have emerged, fed by drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime. Cars count as a primary source of income for thieves, a mode of shipping for drug traffickers, a means of abduction for kidnappers, and an element of force for paramilitary forces. In short, the automobile has proven central in the coproduction of a criminal order in Mexico that threatens the legitimacy of the state. For this reason, taking control of the wheel has become a primary objective for the federal government in its War on Crime.

To reorder this disruptive technology, the federal government has drawn on the power and potential of surveillance technologies. By affixing RFID tags to vehicles, placing RFID readers at key transit points, and integrating all vehicle records into a single database, the Public Registry of Vehicles (REPUVE) launched by the Calderón Administration promises to regulate automobility in the country. Altering the former model of governing through the "responsibilization" (Valverde 2003) of drivers, the REPUVE reveals a novel approach to governing through the access control of things. Cars not in appropriate legal order can be prohibited from operating on roadways. Through this mechanism, the government promises to transform the motor car from a legal enactment device to a *legal prescription device*, a technological artifact whose operation

requires users to first carry out the law. While legal prescription devices foreshadow an emergent sociolegal order that pursues security through the social sorting of suspicious persons, processes, and things, the implementation of the registry has been complicated by a variety of factors, including the federalist political system of Mexico, the population's lack of faith in technical solutions promoted by the state, and the resistance of a vibrant civil society. This, in turn, underscores the contingent nature of social order as a coproduction of law, technology, and culture.

These ideas do not exhaust the investigation of automobility and the law. By taking the historical disruptiveness of motor vehicles as its point of departure, this work is biased in the types of vehicle regulations it considers (those governing drivers' relationship to vehicles). This limits the relevance of the research in certain ways. If the article had begun from another aspect of automobility—the car as a valued object of international trade, for instance—other types of laws would have come into focus (import tariffs, for example) with goals other than ordering unruly vehicles. Thus, the ideas presented here, rather than being comprehensive in describing the relationship between the law, automobility, and technology, are meant as a starting point for moving this area of research forward.

And in this regard, these ideas are meaningful for different fields of inquiry. For automobility studies, this work adds another dimension for understanding the relationship between the motor car and the social order. Within this literature, the automobile is generally understood to have played a predominant role in structuring contemporary society. The physical organization of society in suburbs, the immense reliance on oil as an energy source, the notion of mobility as private, and so forth all owe to a greater or lesser degree to the automobile (Urry 2004). While this is undoubtedly true, it also overlooks how the car has been ordered into the wider social framework by political and legal authorities. By weaving the law though vehicles, authorities turns humans' attachments to their automobiles into a relationship by which the state itself emerges. New state bureaucracies are formed to manage automobility. Tax revenues are generated that finance these bodies. And drivers are made to comply with the law. Thus, while drivers are encouraged by advertisements to imagine themselves as independent and even rebellious souls circulating through society with whatever rapidity afforded by the vehicles they can afford, automobility pushes the driver to become a law-abiding subject standing before a growing legal regulatory formation. What's more, the legal ordering of automobility produces new forms of social control—the driver's license as a dominant form of individual identification—allowing state authorities to more easily track individuals. In this

way, this study demonstrates the richness that considerations of the legal life of automobiles can offer.

This work also contributes to sociolegal studies in different ways. For instance, researchers interested in governmentality have developed a body of research that describes the methods by which authorities are able to construct social order in line with the principles of liberal governance by working on the subjectivity of individuals and having them govern themselves (see Rose, O'Malley, & Valverde 2006). The concept of the legal enactment device contributes to this tradition and offers a way to extend it by examining the role of material artifacts. It illustrates how authorities, through legal provisions, are able to alter the relationship between people and their "attachments" (Gomart & Hennion 1999) to technology. When people engage the "objects of their passions," they are often also enacting the law, fashioning themselves as legal subjects and strengthening the legal order in the process. A similar dynamic can be found in Mariana Valverde's (2003) work on licensing and pubs, in which the threat of losing one's license disciplines the tavern owner to manage his property more responsibly. With these examples in mind, one wonders with what other technologies can a similar approach to governance be found and whether users of such technologies might actually display greater levels of legal acquiescence than nonusers.

At the same time, this article highlights the limits of what STS scholars might describe as "human-centric" approaches to analyzing social order and authority. Despite the power that techniques for fashioning human subjectivities should bestow upon authorities, the episodes in the history of automobility shared here speak to the propensity of things to overwhelm the intentions of people in positions of power. The allure of the automobile and the unique social experiences it offered people proved capable of disrupting the authority of the church, parents, and police in the United States. In Mexico today, it is likewise proving capable of disrupting the legitimacy of a modern, democratically elected state. The concept of disruptive technology might thus invite further research on the interrelation between technology and legal power. While the present work has speculated on which technologies might qualify as disruptive (the printing press, internet, and psychoactive drugs, for instance) and not (automated doors), additional research could help better understand the disruptive nature of technologies. For instance, what is it about a technology that makes it disruptive? Is it a technology's capacity to alter the basic senses and capacities of human experience—mobility and the motor vehicle, perception and psychoactive drugs, and communication and the printing press—that draw users away from normalized modes of social interaction? Or is something else at work?

Similarly, the notion of legal prescription contributes to recent efforts to integrate L&S and STS research (see Jasanoff 1997; Latour 2004; Silbey 2008; Silbey & Ewick 2003) by offering a way to understand how surveillance technologies are reshaping governance in contemporary society. Surveillance technologies provide authorities the potential to short-circuit human subjectivity in the regulation of disruptive technologies. Material artifacts not in legal order can simply be disabled. This article has noted a few examples of legal prescription devices (the automobile, the APT, the cellular telephone). But it would be interesting to examine whether and in which ways other everyday technologies have legal compliance written into their operation. It would also be worth considering how such transformations affect legal consciousness. Do people perceive such requirements as unwanted infringements on personal choice and ownership, as welcome measures of added security, or as something else? And are these opinions accompanied by particular stances with relation to the law and legal authorities? Finally, each of the attempts to create legal prescription technologies mentioned in this work—the REPUVE, the APT, and Mexico's cell phone registry—have struggled to get off the ground. With that in mind, what determines the success or failure of legal prescription devices? And which types of sociolegal orders do they co-produce?

These thoughts are intended to accentuate some possible points of connection that a study of the automobile and law can hold for scholars of different backgrounds. But in the end, it is worthwhile remembering the more immediate interests at stake. A new presidential administration (that of Enrique Peña Nieto) has recently come to power in Mexico, from a rival political party (the Institutional Revolutionary Party), and program officials in the REPVUE program are anxious to learn whether the new administration shares its predecessor's interest in and approach to governing automobility. Ordinary people too, weary of both the immense costs of the Calderón Administration's War on Crime and the continuing insecurity of everyday life, are anxious to see whether the Peña Nieto Administration will prove capable of providing order to society. For these reasons, the question of how authorities take hold of the wheel is one that can not only hold the interest of sociolegal scholars, but one that could very well hold the welfare of an entire society.

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