Mexico and the global problematic: power relations, knowledge and communication in neoliberal Mexico
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Chapter One

THEORY AND SOCIETY

It soon appeared to me that, while the human subject is placed in relations of production and of signification, he is equally placed in power relations, which are very complex. Now, it seems to me that economic history and theory provides a good instrument for relations of production and that linguistics and semiotics offered instruments for studying relations of signification; but for power relations we had no tools of study. (Foucault: The Subject and Power: 1994: 327)

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to lay out the main notions and theoretical tools for approaching the conditions of social and political communication in Mexico from the perspective of power relations and assemblage theory. As Foucault indicates, there are several methodologies in the social sciences that study relations of communication and signification. There are also abundant historical-economic approaches that look at the characteristics of production and infrastructure. It is my belief that in order to grasp the complexity of social and political communication in Mexico it is necessary to enrich the linguistic-semiotic analysis, as well as the historical and economic study of communication, with an analysis of power relations that is supported by assemblage theory.

The appropriate theoretical framework to reach the proposed ethical dimension of the communicative practices in neoliberal Mexico is based on assemblage theory coupled with the notions of power relations and knowledge. I propose this theoretical framework in order to move from what I consider scientific-essentialist standards towards ethical references when carrying out research. In this effort, a proposed theoretical framework grounded in ethical references instead of relations of causality needs to engage in an anti-essentialist perspective and epistemology. One strategy for anti-essentialist tasks is to break the essence of things into parts. Assemblages as well as folds are understood as having insides, outsides, interiors, and exteriors. The combinatorial sum (1) of these four dimensions, and in particular the interior and exterior, enable the projection of appearances into the inter-subjective realm of perception and the sensible. This inter-subjective space-scale can be regarded as the natural playground of the subject (us), where visibilities and statements are abundant.
The Fold and the Assemblage

To describe the abstract *fold* and the material *assemblage*, and the way these notions allow a decomposition of preconceived essences petrifying social objects of study, an example that requires a simple operation comes to mind. If we take a sheet of paper and fold it into an irregular oval (as Fig. 1 shows), an empty shape will form inside. Looking through the void in the shape will make it evident that the inside and the outside of this shape are essentially the same: they are both space. Under this theoretical proposition, what we observe is *inter-subjective space*, namely the natural ‘playground’ of the subject where visibilities and statements are abundant.

If we then take the folded shape and look at it along its curvature, we will notice that the outside of the fold is the exterior limit, the edge, the shape and the form of the sheet of paper (as Fig. 2 shows). The *exterior* is the material and more visible presence of the paper fold. This physical occupation of space manifests its actual existence. The exterior of the paper fold constitutes most of its appearance, an appearance that is the projection of assemblages into the inter-subjective space existing between visible assemblages.
If we tilt the paper fold on an angle from where we can look inside, to the *interior* of the fold, we realise that the interior directly separates the empty inside from the outside (Fig. 3). It plays a structural role in the fold and it is also material in nature, as the exterior. It does not play an evident role in the exterior appearance of the paper fold; it is, however, a component part of it.

![Figure 3 - ‘Interior’](image)

**Appearance**

Deleuze declared some animosity against Immanuel Kant because Kant had confused and merged the *exterior* of assemblages and wholes with that of their *appearance* (2). The implication of having the appearance and the exterior merged is of great importance, and in one way or another affects the complexity, the subject position from which we can approach objects and things in the world. To believe that the *appearance* matches the *exterior* in the same plane implies that the subject reads assemblages and wholes in a totalising fashion that promotes the construction of truth mainly from subjective grounds. It is a totalising view that prevents the existence of independent beings outside of subjective determination of the world, or of what is perceived as real by the sensible and by thought. It is a logic that tends to be essentialist towards objects and things. However, contrary to this, and in line with the heuristic device proposed in this research, *appearance* is considered to be what the subject makes out of the combinatorial sum – the synthesis – of the parts of the assemblage: inside/outside/exterior/interior/appearance. This very idea entails the existence of independent beings and makes implicit the notion that the constitution of the real and the sensible is more complex than the subjective perception of appearances alone.

To clarify the distinction between exterior and appearance I provide the following example. If we imagine our youthful selves playing with a friend or sibling – pulling, pushing, laughing, and playfully charging against one another – it is not difficult to also imagine how the situation of
playing could intensify to the point where control is less likely. At some point, the one we are playing with suddenly stops and takes a bended position. The bended person starts to move as with uncontrollable laughter, the body still bent, the face contorted and the eyes shut tight. Everything appears as if this person is laughing. But in fact it is not laughter that provokes this bodily reaction; the convulsions come from crying, due to a punch received in the playful pulling and pushing. The realisation is there: the bodily reaction is not what it appeared, not what we thought. Things are not always as they appear.

This is a clear example of why the exterior is not the same thing as appearance, as suggested by Kant. In a critique of the Kantian view, if we do not realise that our playmate is crying instead of laughing, the truth of the subject is imposed on the other. It does not matter whether the actual exterior of the other is expressing pain and tears, as long as we think it is laughter. From this perspective, the subjective truth is that our friend or sibling is laughing, regardless of whether he or she is crying. This rather simple example of the implication of matching the exterior and the appearance allows us to imagine the effects of the intellectual stance which privileges subjective perception and determination in more complex or perilous situations.

Western ontological thought that privileges subjective determinations over the real can be traced back directly to Descartes’ premise “I think, therefore I exist,” and to Locke and Kant. It prevents objects and things from being fully reckoned as independent beings outside the determination of subjects (e.g. solipsism). The negation of the fact that there is a world that exists regardless of our minds’ reading of appearances can lead to catastrophic events and human actions. Slavery and colonialism exemplify the implementation of this incorrect match of appearances and actual exteriors of assemblages and persons, as Deleuze has argued. Dehumanising processes such as slavery during the seventeenth century can be linked to this negation, to not accepting that (human) beings are more than what we think they are, so that we can impose our subjective truth on them. It is certain that today there still exist forms of organised exploitation and enslavement of human beings around the world. Assuming that the ethical failure of the individuals involved in these contemporary practices and those of former times are equal, what makes the case of colonial slavery extraordinary is the fact that this chosen determination of reality, which justified and rationalised exploitation and genocide, was institutionalised and celebrated in academic and intellectual circles for centuries.

Rationality plays an important role in determining the success of this type of subjectivity. The predominance of the subject’s determination over the world and the ‘other’ is the result of a particular rationality and epistemology or logic, both fundamental objects of study for Foucault. A rational epistemology that is confused with phenomenology (3) prevents true communication and
enforces monologues instead of conversations. It also emphasises process of subjective understanding and represses the processes of learning and realisation (like noticing the crying of our playmate). When these practices are institutionalised they can produce what Foucault refers to as diseases of the state; Nazism and Stalinism, for example. I would add to this list colonialism.

It can be said that certain rationalities and particular epistemologies can turn the opinion of one subject into the truth imposed on others. The notion of the assemblage challenges this Kantian problem and proposes to engage in the understanding and learning processes of the world outside our mind. This is a call to open up to the idea of bringing senses, feelings, and thoughts into our research; a challenge to current scientific methods and paradigms that are based on appearances and measurement as the main source and method of acquiring information and knowledge.

The Purity of the Fold and the Heterogeneity of Assemblages

The fold is an abstract idea, a metaphor. However, it can be materialised if we breach its conceptual purity and turn the abstract idea of the fold into the concrete notion of the assemblage. The difference between the fold and the assemblage is the fact that the assemblage is made, composed, and constituted by component parts. It is a heterogeneous entity. This fact enables assemblages to be and therefore to interact and change. After elaborating on the idea of the fold and how it helps to frame an anti-essentialist approach, now the focus is on its material conception, with the idea of the assemblage.

In order to develop the notion of assemblages for the social sciences in an organised fashion, some aspects related to the inside, outside, exterior, interior, and appearance are addressed. First, the part-to-whole relation present in assemblage theory; second, assemblage qualities of interiority and exteriority; third, the explanation of the material and expressive components found in assemblages; and lastly, the processes of identity stabilisation within the territorialisation and deterritorialisation experienced by assemblages. The explanation of these elements of assemblage theory will lead to a proper understanding of the basic propositions posed by de Landa, enabling a theoretical application of an anti-essentialist ontology in the social sciences that may complement more conventional approaches in the field. Assemblage theory centres not only on the multiplicity of objects in the world but on the ways these objects and things interact, mutate, and shift function to bring change and reproduce in permanent and necessary ways the human realm. Whether these assemblages are social, organic, or inorganic, the focus is on the dynamics of permanent interaction among them.
**Organic, Inorganic, and Social Assemblages**

Until this point we may differentiate three types of assemblages: organic assemblages, inorganic assemblages, and social assemblages. The first type of assemblages relates to the biological world of genes and life, the second type refers to geological materials, while the last type refers to those assemblages produced by human knowledge and action. This distinction between these differentiated types of assemblages, however, does not prevent them from being mutually articulated and in permanent interaction due to the process of world formation. Following de Landa, “Strata may be geological, biological or social, but in all cases they represent a way of constraining the spontaneous creativity of matter-energy, of linking it to stable, durable, stratified forms. (rocks, plants or animal bodies, social institutions)” (4). This being a sociological work, attention is directed towards social assemblages over organic (biology and nature) assemblages and inorganic (geology and materials) assemblages. The basic concern in this research is to identify the social assemblages that constitute contemporary globalisation. The relation that these social assemblages have with other organic and inorganic assemblages is considered to be secondary in comparison to the analysis made of the social assemblages that, for example, interpersonal networks and organisations, technology, markets, and language can constitute.

**Part-to-Whole Relations**

An example common to all assemblages and to the concept of part-to-whole relations is a bicycle. A bicycle is an assemblage of different component parts – tires (rubber), seat (leather), chain (iron), pedals (plastic), etc. – that are pieces/parts that work together in a synthetic way in order to form a more complex whole that is called a ‘bicycle.’ The synthesis of its parts allows a bicycle to develop external capacities, different from those of its component parts. The bicycle-vehicle itself – even if composed of different parts with their own identity (e.g. seat, chain, pedals) – also has a full identity as a vehicle assemblage. The bicycle is constituted as an assemblage, and as a machine that effectively exposes its own capacities only when attached to another machine (e.g. a person) that with his or her force makes the two work together, thus becoming a different assemblage. There is an important point to make here: the relations between parts of a whole are different than the relations between assemblages.

A seamless whole is inconceivable except as a synthesis of the very parts, that is, the linkages between its components from logically necessary relations, which make the whole what it is. But in an assemblage the relations may be only contingently obligatory. While logically necessary relations may be investigated by thought alone,
contingently obligatory ones involve a consideration of empirical questions, such as the coevolutionary history of two species. (de Landa: 2006: 11)

Between the parts of a whole, as de Landa points out, the relations are necessary. For assemblages, relations are *contingently obligatory*. A bike without tires is not properly a bike or a vehicle. However, a bike can be ridden by children, students, a robot, and not only by professional cyclists. Social assemblages and their part-to-whole relations follow this same rule: whether a social assemblage is a minimal unit (e.g. individual, citizen, subject, a family of three) or a nation state, the analysis of social assemblages shares a similar logic. It is crucial to properly identify what is a necessary relation (a hand needs to be attached to an arm to fulfil its natural function) or a contingent one (like a hand utilising *any* tool) in order to properly specify the composition of wholes and therefore their potential exterior capacities as social assemblages.

*Exteriority and Interiority Assemblage Relations*

Deleuze provides an example of a possible interaction of two or more assemblages sharing the same space-scale dimension so that they can become intertwined in relations of exteriority:

...The wasp and the orchid provide the example. The orchid seems to form a wasp image, but in fact there is a wasp-becoming of the orchid, an orchid-becoming of the wasp, a double capture since ‘what’ each becomes changes no less than ‘that which’ it becomes. The wasp becomes part of the orchid’s reproductive apparatus at the same time as the orchid becomes the sexual organ of the wasp. One and the same becoming, a single bloc of becoming, or, as Rémy Chavin says, an ‘a-parallel evolution of two beings who have nothing whatsoever to do with one another’.

(Deleuze: 2006: 2)

At this point, a more philosophical distinction is needed to frame assemblage theory for the social sciences and humanities. Several accounts of society are based on understanding objects and concepts as totalities existing within a fixed categorisation – the orchid (a plant) or the wasp (an insect) – often missing the ‘becoming process’ altogether. Therefore it is necessary to distinguish two different qualities in assemblages and entities in order to avoid totalisation or fall into essentialist organic accounts that focus on internal necessary relations composing constituted wholes. Within a philosophical frame, all assemblages and entities can be understood as having interiority and exteriority qualities.
While those favouring the interiority of relations tend to use organisms as their prime example, Deleuze gravitates towards other kinds of biological illustrations, such as the symbiosis of plants and pollinating insects. In this case we have relations of exteriority between self-subsistent components [such as the wasp and the orchid] relations which may become obligatory in the course of evolution. This illustrates another difference between assemblages and totalities. (de Landa: 2006: 11)

Assemblage theory endows the idea of assemblages with a dynamic nature, contrary to other approaches that stimulate totalising conceptions of things composing the environment (e.g. categorisation).

Taking the baseball game as an example, we find that as any other social assemblage, it exhibits qualities of interiority and exteriority. The necessary relations that form the game are partly constituted by the teams, players, and stadiums that make up the baseball leagues. However, this is not a complete account of what the baseball game actually is. Baseball as a social assemblage, and hence in terms of its exteriority quality, can also be seen as the relation between baseball and children, baseball and the fans, or baseball and the market.

In my opinion, social scientific research tends to engage in studying organic totalities: the interiority quality, the parts of wholes, logical relations. This implies that the social sciences should study and try to decode the nature of teams and baseball players and from there try to establish a hypothesis, a generalisation about the game (for example, all baseball teams have nine players), or in de Landa’s thinking, a totalisation of the game (if it has more or less players than nine, then it is not baseball). This analytic focus erodes the possibility of accounting for the process of becoming of the game in relation to its outside environment. For instance, children may play with as many available players as possible, regardless of the official number of nine in professional baseball leagues. In the ontology offered in de Landa’s theory, the option is to focus analytical effort on the exteriority quality of baseball as a whole.

This approach is interested in the actual capabilities, and therefore in the effects or change assemblages, stimulated in other constituted social assemblages sharing the same space-scale dimension: the relation between baseball-children, baseball-fans, baseball-the market, and so on. This is the focus where the analytic and rational thinking of de Landa’s proposed ontology rests. This differentiation in focus (exteriority instead of interiority, contingently obligatory instead of necessary relations) can help the social sciences understand any given phenomena from this ontology – in this context, assemblage theory. Here is where the idea of the whole and its parts
takes its importance. The baseball teams and players are a part of the game, but it is different than the idea of the game as a whole or an assemblage. In this respect, relations of interiority among component parts are necessary, and relations of exteriority are contingently obligatory due to the uncertainty that is naturally embedded in the outside environment of assemblages (the playground of the subject and children). The forms in which these contingently obligatory relations between assemblages take place are means of exchanging material as well as expressive components. De Landa explains,

In addition to the exteriority of relations, the concept of assemblage is defined along two dimensions. One dimension or axis defines the variable roles which an assemblage’s components may play, from a purely material role at one extreme of the axis, to a purely expressive role at the other extreme. These roles are variable and may occur in mixtures, that is, a given component may play a mixture of material and expressive roles by exercising different sets of capacities. (de Landa: 2006: 12, emphasis in original)

**Identity: Exchange of Material and Expressive Components**

The mutating nature of assemblages and the changes in identity they experience after enduring contingently obligatory relations can be better understood in the way de Landa references this type of process: territorialisation and deterritorialisation. Assemblages forming the global process can migrate from one condition to another, playing with different materials and expressive components depending on different processes of territorialisation and deterritorialisation, “processes which stabilize or destabilize the identity of the assemblage” (de Landa: 2006: 18-19). The idea of change and identity in assemblages is significant.

One and the same assemblage can have components working to stabilize its identity as well as components forcing it to change or even transforming it into a different assemblage. In fact, one and the same component may participate in both processes by exercising different sets of capacities. (de Landa: 2006: 12)

For example,

In nature there are also, destratifying processes, which detach a particular structure from its fixed function, and open it up to a new one, like the mouth of a bird which is
detached from a flow of food, a purely digestive function, to become linked to a flow of song, a more expressive function, used to mark a territory and seduce mates. (de Landa, Interview in *Art and the Military*)

All social assemblages are subject to processes of deterritorialisation and destratification, which affect their identity. There is no fixed identity in assemblage theory, hence it avoids social essentialism or totalisations. Assemblages are notions that cannot be unequivocally categorised; in this theory entities are considered assemblages in a perpetual state of becoming, contrary to other sociological approaches that favour fixed categories and identities to work with as variables. De Landa explains,

Today, the main theoretical alternative to organic totalities is what the philosopher Gilles Deleuze calls *assemblages*, wholes characterized by *relations of exteriority*. These relations imply, first of all, that a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different. In other words, the exteriority of relations implies certain autonomy for the terms they relate, or as Deleuze puts it, it implies that ‘a relation may change without the terms changing’. (de Landa: 2006: 10-11, emphasis in original)

The complexity behind the idea of change without the terms changing can be explained with an example. For more than seventy years the Mexican national congress was a one-party majority. In the late 1980s and 1990s the congress became more plural in terms of the composition of political parties forming it. This means that the Mexican congress changed its exterior relations with political parties, and exchanged material and expressive components, thus changing in appearance the identity of the Mexican congress from a one-party congress to a more plural and democratic assemblage. In this process, the identity of political parties also changed due to the exchange with the national congress. It is also possible to question, however, whether the national congress as a whole changed its exterior relations with other social assemblages in Mexican territories aside from the constituted political parties. The exterior relations the congress has with civil society or marginalised groups in society are telling: while party plurality lends a democratic appearance to the national congress, its relations to other social assemblages are considerably anti-democratic. This in principle is not a contradiction. It is a sign of the complex identity performed by the Mexican congress and its simultaneous capabilities. This is a possible example of how to understand the idea of change happening without a change of terms.
The novelty in assemblage theory in relation to more conventional sociological approaches towards society is the dynamic nature of social assemblages analysis. Often, conventional approaches towards society ignore that given social categories are transitory. This dynamic nature in analysis is provided in this work by the idea of destratification. Destratification can be understood as multifunctional while the notion of deterritorialisation equals that of change. These two exterior capabilities of assemblages are understood as multifunction-destratification (knowledge) and change-deterritorialisation (power). Therefore, this theoretical approach conveys in mutability and the multifunctional character found in things or wholes the central concern that the instrumentation of the principles of assemblage theory make possible. I want to attach myself to a social science ontology that focuses principally on the exteriority quality or nature of assemblages, instead of focusing on their interiority qualities and internal logic of necessary relations as found in wholes.

Let me summarize the main features of assemblage theory. First of all, unlike wholes in which parts are linked by relations of interiority (that is, relations which constitute the very identity of the parts) assemblages are made up of parts which are self-subsistent and articulated by relations of exteriority, so that a part may be detached and made a component of another assemblage. (de Landa: 2006: 18)

Following the above descriptions of wholes and assemblages, it can be said that the parts constituting them also define wholes. The analysis made on entities assumed as whole primarily entails processes of understanding (e.g. measurement, categorisation). However, the analysis made on entities assumed as assemblages focuses on the exteriority of relations and entails a process of learning (e.g. realisation, formation of memory). This is the main perceptual difference between wholes and assemblages for social science and humanities research. If we want to understand social objects of study, then we engage in the analysis of the necessary relations that make things what they are. However, if we engage in processes of learning, the viewpoint needs to be different and the focus instead on the analysis of the exterior relations performed by assemblages.

In summary, it can be said that we gain understanding throughout the analysis of wholes, while we learn from the observation of assemblages. Both processes are necessary and complement each other in every realm of social action. Nevertheless, in current scientific paradigms the analytical tools and the position of the observer has been set under a premise which privileges understandings, often radical subjective understandings, while neglecting learning processes about the social world. In this regard, the desire to implement assemblage theory, within a scientific
framework that balances understanding and learning processes, comes out of the shortcomings in the methodology of social science and humanities research to analyse the social realm with greater complexity. The present research aims to provide one form to experiment with a different approach towards the social realm and global processes. It is also an attempt to lay down the basic notions to build the necessary analytical tools to engage in social research based on assemblage theory and power relations.

The How’s and When’s of Social Assemblages

Social assemblages are the product of human knowledge and action. In this section I elaborate on what constitutes knowledge and how action can be described as an analytical tool to be applied within assemblage theory principles in an organised and reasonably sociological way. In what follows I explain the process of assemblage formation as knowledge-stratification and the way in which assemblages are coupled to power diagrams and to human action.

In order to match the relationship between knowledge and power, and partially explain the process of world formation, Deleuze, Guattari, and Foucault built up a philosophical framework, a theoretical ‘dispositif’ that enables a complex, yet not total, way to approach human nature in general, and society and its parts in particular. These authors build on the ideas of assemblages and diagrams to underline a model of human nature. Away from an organicist-evolutionist paradigm, this machinistic framework to power and knowledge enables the relation between social assemblages – knowledge – and power diagrams – forces. However, in order to make possible the relations between power and knowledge, it is important to account for the finitude natural in assemblages. The main characteristic of an assemblage besides its heterogeneous nature is in fact the actual finitude of its components parts; a condition that makes it subject to unique and individuated power diagrams or forces. The finitude and limited nature of assemblages is an action that separates and differentiates them from one another, rendering them as singular and unique, visible and identifiable, and therefore subject to power relations and action.

Strata and the Spatiality of Knowledge and Thought

To elaborate on knowledge and its process of assemblage stratification and actualisation, we need to answer the question of what constitutes knowledge. Knowledge can be thought of as the combination of understanding and learning processes, but it can also be understood as the combination of the acquisition and transmission of knowledge and information (e.g. culture). However, following Foucault and Deleuze, and for the purposes of the heuristic device proposed here, knowledge shall be defined as composed of the visible and the articulable. The visible is made
of visibilities and the articulable of statements. The former may be thought of as the world of appearances; it is the phenomenological world that stimulates the senses, the pre-logic outside whereby nature is uncertain inter-subjective space, which we read by means of specific epistemology and rationality. Statements primarily refer to stratified language, words, sentences, and actions that somehow institutionalise and thus make political certain ideas and practices through grammatical compositions in the social realm.

Knowledge, however, is not pre-logic visibilities and logic statements alone. In order to produce knowledge and enable social assemblages formation out of visibilities and statements, the thinking subject needs to take part in the process. The subject contributes to the formation of knowledge with the thinking process, which is the product of the perceptions of visibilities and the statements of language. The role of the subject, whatever its positionality and its thinking capabilities, is constitutive of knowledge, and therefore it plays a role in assemblages’ formation and change. Without thinking processes, an action that correlates visibilities and statements, knowledge cannot be stratified, and therefore social assemblages cannot be constituted, limited, named, or created in space (e.g. organisations, institutions). The importance then is how we think about what we see (visibilities) and what we say (statements). Assemblages are not ‘actors’ enmeshed in a network of communication (as is commonly advanced in ANT: Actor-Network Theory), but rather entities interacting with an outside environment, “in a meadow” so to speak, where the how’s of social assemblages are determined by knowledge and the when’s are determined by power relations and force diagrams.

**Actions upon Others’ Actions: Power Relations/ Forces/ Diagrams**

The relations between social assemblages, which are the product of what we see, say, and think, and power diagrams may be approached and explained by an exploration of the forms taken by power relations among constituted assemblages. Furthermore, by exploring the characteristics of power relations in contemporary social assemblages, we might also touch upon another interesting notion, namely that of force (5). The way to approach the permanent interplay between forces applied among assemblages is based on the idea of power relations. In the context of social assemblages in particular, we could understand power relations as “an action upon and action on possible or actual future or present actions,” as Foucault advances in his essay The Subject and Power (1994). The importance of studying power relations rests in the fact that, as Foucault reminds us, “[t]o live in society is, in any event, to live in such a way that some can act on the actions of others. A society without power relations can only be an abstraction” (Foucault: 1994: 343).

Power relations are relations of struggle, and not relations of communication or production.
They are relations between subjects that are tied by power diagrams and forces, which each subject or whole struggles to maintain or change depending on its particular expectation, future perspective, or teleology. Hence, power relations can be understood as,

… a set of actions on possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult, it releases or contrives, makes more probable or less; in the extreme, it constrains or forbids absolutely, but it is always a way of acting upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions. (Foucault: 1994: 341)

Actually, “…the relationship of power may be an effect of a prior or permanent consent, but it is not by nature the manifestation of a consensus” (Foucault: 1994: 341).

**The Virtual and the Actual: The Natural Playground of the Subject**

In this section I elaborate on how different social assemblages undergo their process of actualisation. In the previous section the notions of power (action upon action) and knowledge (what we see, say, and think) were explained. At this point, and to follow up on the idea of globalisation in relation to power diagrams and knowledge stratifications or social assemblages, I present the main characteristics of the virtual plane, the plane of immanence, and the actual plane. Two questions may aid this explanation: What is the relevance of the idea of actualisation for the social sciences and humanities in general? How may we instrument the idea of actualisation as a research tool for the social problem, or in this case for the global problematic? In this regard, Deleuze explains the opposition between the virtual plane and the actual plane, their mutual dependency, and the permanent relation that exists between them, the so-called process of actualisation. He understands the actual as something related to the real – the outside of constituted assemblages, the ‘playground’ of the subject. In his early work *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze explains,

We oppose the virtual and real: although it could not have been more precise before now, this terminology must be corrected. The virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual. Exactly what Proust said of states of resonance must be said of the virtual: Real without being actual, ideal without being abstract; and symbolic without being fictional. (Deleuze: 2001: 208-209)
Despite the fact that the virtual remains with its ultimate characteristic to engulf much of the potency projected into the *actual* plane, this potency has a certain order that promotes in different moments certain *actualisations* instead of others from the *virtual* over the *actual*. This means that there is a timeline; the infinity of the virtual real has a disposition towards the actual world to be revealed, but keeping a limited outlet, a temporary permanence, which enters a process of becoming in the *actual* plane. Therefore, the actual plane is, according to Deleuze,

… the complement or the product, the object of actualization, which has nothing but the virtual as its subject. Actualizations belong to the virtual [forces diagrams]. The actualization of the virtual is singularity whereas the actual itself is individuality constituted [assemblages]. The actual falls from the plane like a fruit, whilst the actualization relates it back to the planes as if to that which turns the object back into a subject. (Deleuze & Parnet: 2006: 113)

In a way, the virtual plane impacts the actual plane inhabited by individuated assemblages, where processes of deterritorialisation and power relations take place. However, if our main interest is to gain some understanding of the actual plane and our conceived outside, Deleuze alerts us that it is the plane of *immanence* where the exchange between the virtual and the actual plane takes place. In these terms, to make some sense of the implication of the virtual plane in our own world of sensibility – the ‘actual’ plane – we might think of the plane of immanence as the point at which the infinity of the virtual gains one degree of certainty and predictability towards the future that manifests in the actual plane or its actualisation.

The plane of immanence contains both actualisations as the relationship of the virtual with other terms, and even the actual as a term with which the virtual is exchanged. In any case, the relationship between the actual and the virtual is not the same as that established between two actuals. Actuals imply already constituted individuals [assemblages], and are ordinarily determined, whereas the relationship of the actual and the virtual forms an acting individuation or a highly specific and remarkable singularisation, which needs to be determined case by case [diagrams and assemblages in a particular relation]. (Deleuze & Parnet: 2006: 115)

It is paramount to include the plane of immanence in the complex relationship between the virtual
and the actual, and their permanent exchange and mutual feedback. It is the plane of immanence where the actualisation of the world is definitely accomplished. The plane of immanence is the point where the potency of the virtual turns itself into a renewed entelechy (Abbagnano: 1994: 408) assumed by the actual plane. It is the field of pure power or power diagrams, to use Deleuze’s expression.

What are the elements or forces from the actual plane that effectively evoke or somehow recall this specific memory of the virtual plane, that ultimately formalises itself in a necessary component of the world? Why do certain events occur instead of others? Why does a specific entelechy take precedence over another? What determines the ‘virtual’ in the ‘actual’ plane? What is the human subject position and power in all this? In theory, there is no hierarchy that leads the passing from the virtual to the immanent that reaches the plane of consistency and permanence, but instead there are ‘promotions’ that allow certain actualisations over others. Four elements or conceptual ideas can be approached to dig into the process and mutual affects of the virtual and the actual having the plane of immanence as a sector for effective exchange. Stratified knowledge (social assemblages) and power diagrams (forces) may be considered constitutive entities in terms of how the actual defines the virtual and the other way round. However, language and technology play a more concrete role in the virtual and actual transactions affecting humanly controlled spaces, structures, and assemblages.

Language and Technology in a Particular Relation or the Technolinguistic Social Assemblage

It may be argued that in contemporary society, language and technology are two fundamentally necessary elements defining the entelechy of the human subject or object of actualisation. Deleuze and Guattari (1997) maintain that language and technology are fundamental characteristics of human existence; that what marks human existence (e.g. the physical world, human geography) is both language and technology placed in a particular relationship. The dichotomy of language-technology may be seen as a core element in two different dimensions. The relation between language and technology in the actual plane is a relevant determinant of the relation between the virtual plane and the actual plane. The proximity of the virtual to the actual is arranged, promoted, or predisposed to a certain extent by the particular relation that exists in any given moment between language and technology (e.g. events of war and peace).

Here it needs to be stressed that the relation between language and technology, and the technolinguistic social assemblages formed from these relations, are always underscored – or relatively pre-determined – by the more abstract forces and limits set by knowledge (what we see, say, and think) and power (actions upon other actions) in a broad sense. We may, however,
understand language and technology as part of the plane of immanence in terms of the capacity of these particular permanent relations to help define the outlet of the actualisation processes of the virtual over the actual plane. The relation established by language and technology participates in the arrangement of the virtual to the actual plane. Therefore, language and technology underscored by knowledge and power relations are crucial in the process of assemblage formation.

Together, power, knowledge, language, and technology lend forms and stimulate the exchange proper of the virtual (potency) and the actual (material) planes. These four elements may be considered fundamental in consolidating the different instances of the process of actualisation of the virtual, and the process of immanence in relation to human existence. It is upon the actual plane where language, technology, knowledge, and power overlap and interact, shaping human existence and predisposing the order that the virtual plane of potency maintains in relation to the generation of the entelechy of the world, and the real for human existence in its actual plane.

It can be argued that language and technology are of a material nature and hence society produces, consciously or not, the distinctions between language and technology depending on subject positions. This statement carries deep implications if we consider that it is not language and technology as entities or social assemblages that determine the plane of immanence, and hence partially determine the transit from the virtual to the actual plane. Instead, it is the way in which society, the human subject, differentiates language and technology, and creates technolinguistic social assemblages in a specific way and with specific purposes, which promotes certain actualisations or particular technolinguistic relations over others. In fact, understanding language and technology as material elements and individuated assemblages evidences the relevance for society in the way it interacts, thinks, and creates distinctions between language and technology. It is not language and technology that define the exchange proper to the plane of immanence and its outcome over the actual plane, but instead it is the differentiation and the use made by social assemblages, human subjects that can determine and enact the final influence or forms of evocation from the actual plane over the virtual one.

This plane of potential exchange – the immanent – where the subject thinks and differentiates language and technology in a particular relation, can be explored to study contemporary globalisation by looking at the way in which governments, the private sector, and society at large make this differentiation and relational process between language and technology. Different rationalities, intentions, perspectives, and practices might bring different forms of relations and differentiations of language and technology, forming diverse technolinguistic social assemblages interesting for analysis. The aim then is to learn about the formation of the infinite particular, possible relations between language and technology under the bases of particular
perspectives set by constituted social assemblages. Nevertheless, knowledge and power are the elements that set the conditions on language and technology for the formation of these infinite particular relations, and the specific marks produced on human existence or ‘our actual’ plane.

Finally, the particular relation between language and technology – the technolinguistic social assemblage – may be pinpointed as one possible source of the global problematic and its actualisation. The subject and its thinking power, as an individual or as an interpersonal network, however, are what precede the formation of particular relationships between language, technology, and other assemblages. Ultimately, subjects are responsible for the technolinguistic social assemblages produced.

**Synthetic Power: Money and Language**

Here, a note on the theoretical dimension of synthetic power and assemblages. Assemblage theory and a more pluralistic understanding of the social realm will address the characteristic attraction to leaders and leadership as a process of synthetic power. The differences between leadership and synthetic power are mainly theoretical. Synthetic power is, to use Spinoza’s terminology, a process that *composes relations* (6), instead of decomposing relations between assemblages. Synthetic power processes are not constrained to the figure of an individual or group of individuals because it can be the case that other types of entities or forces induce these processes, which compose relations in order to achieve certain aims.

One example are natural catastrophic events like an earthquake or tsunami, where the material objective conditions in certain moments enable specific synthetic figures, human or otherwise, as engines to compose relations in a synthetic fashion, thus creating actions proper to synthesised forces. Nevertheless, synthetic power entails plenty of social capabilities, and this also means that the synthetic power effort of society at large and civil society are quite limited if compared to the synthetic power of government assemblages and private sector assemblages, which use the control of money and the manipulation of language and meaning as the main elements for synthesis, or in turn to achieve synthesis (e.g. the use of propaganda, corruption).

The premise here is that the main synthetic forces at the personal scale in contemporary global territories are money and language. Money and language need not be confused with the common notions of capital and discourse. These two forces, money and language assemblages, predispose particular relations between language and technology; as previously mentioned, these form technolinguistic social assemblages that actually *mark* human existence. Money and language are forces that shape the limit, edge, and form of assemblages, and in one way or another determine among many other relations that of the communication setting in Mexico.