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

COMMUNICATION AND THE TECHNOLINGUISTIC SOCIAL ASSEMBLAGE

Introduction
Having elaborated above on two concepts important for this research – power relations and knowledge – here I turn to the third component of this analysis, namely that of communication. In what follows I elaborate upon four relevant social assemblages constituting global society: communication technologies, language, the market, and interpersonal networks and organisations. These assemblages are some of the necessary components that contemporary communication settings present and are important objects of study when approaching the broader notion of the technolinguistic social assemblage.

Communication Technology: Infrastructure and Space
The infrastructure deployed by the contemporary technolinguistic social assemblage mainly consists of communication machines and technologies such as mobile phones, computers, cables, satellites, antennas, televisions, and radios. However, plenty of organisations and institutions pursuing different aims work around these technologies. Here, I present a few examples of organisations that are representative of the sort of institutions participating in the constitution of a part of the technolinguistic social assemblage associated to communication practices. The main organisation in this arena with an active role on the international scale is the International Communication Union (ITU). This organisation depends on the United Nations, and it gathers allies in governments and the private sector to boost communication and information for the world. The absence of the social sector in the form of civil society reveals the entrepreneurial profile of the ITU, which is mainly concerned with three aspects of the international technolinguistic social assemblage. First, the ITU focuses on the administration and management of the radio electric spectrum and the orbit of satellites, so that this resource can be used in an organised way. Secondly, it works with processes of standardisation, so that communication and information can be shared easily between regions. Lastly, the ITU tries to develop communication and information worldwide by providing people with related services and technological provisions. The importance of the ITU in shaping the international technolinguistic social assemblage for communication is indisputable.

There are other organisations at the international level that contribute to the shaping of the technolinguistic social assemblage, but which are non-governmental and non-profit. One of the best examples of this type of organisation is the Association for Progressive Communication (APC).
This organisation focuses on the best social use of new communication technologies worldwide. The APC is an international organisation that was founded in 1990, and is now active in more than twenty-five countries. The main objective of the APC is to support organisations, social movements, and individuals in the use of communication technologies as a means towards more balanced development, social justice, and ecological sustainability.

A similar organisation, which also includes radio transmission, is the World Association of Communitarian Radios Broadcasters (AMARC), one of the most important international organisations dealing with such issues. AMARC began in 1983, and after more than twenty-five years of operating, supporting, and coordinating this collective effort, the results are impressive. Globally it has almost three thousand members and associates in more than one hundred countries, including Mexico. The main objectives of the organisation, and of those radio stations around the world that are linked to it, are geared towards community radio as non-profit organisations, where community ownership, control, and participation are crucial. Community radio focuses on the exercise of the right to communicate and in particular the right to information. Moreover, these radio stations aim to improve social conditions and the cultural life of their audiences.

The space utilised by technologically mediated communication can be found primarily in the form of the radio electric spectrum (RES). The RES is the space where voice, sounds, radio waves, rays, and transmissions travel to be captured by antennas, receptors, or other devices. The frequency used to fulfil these communication aims range from 3 KHz to 300 GHz. The RES is legislated and administered in different ways depending on the legal framework adopted in every nation state. It can be said that in capitalist economies, the exploitation and therefore the economic revenue product of the use of the RES is primarily cashed by private organisations.

**Interpersonal Networks and Organisations**

Other components of the technolinguistic social assemblage are interpersonal networks and organisations (e.g. institutions). According to de Landa (2006), the human conglomerate – the human global assemblage – made up of persons does not form a society. Instead, persons as the human conglomerate constitute a part of complex social assemblages. In assemblage theory, interpersonal networks and institutional organisations may be considered two social assemblages directly related to the activity performed by the collective of persons. For instance, social classes can be viewed as examples of contemporary social assemblages. As de Landa points out,

[W]e may conceptualize social classes as assemblages of interpersonal networks and institutional organizations. Both the networked community and the organization in
which their common interest crystallize must be thought as having differential access to resources, some playing a material some an expressive role, as well as processing a distinctive life-style composed of both material and expressive elements. (de Landa: 2006: 66)

It is not only social classes as social assemblages that deserve attention. The interpersonal networks and organisation of three different social assemblages visible in contemporary global society are comparable to de Landa’s assessment of social classes: those of government (local, national, international, diplomatic); the private sector and commerce; and civil society, which also includes the activity of society at large. These assemblages are in a constant state of change, as they stabilise and destabilise their identity. In the present dissertation research, government, the private sector, and society at large are conceptualised at the national scale as three social assemblages that can be analysed and differentiated accordingly. This operation aims for the identification and observation of the different purposes and teleologies found in constituted social assemblages in Mexico.

The main difference between an interpersonal network and an institutional organisation is the notion of position. While within the logic of interpersonal networks the means of communication and interaction is given by the familiarity and recognition of persons within the network, in the case of institutional organisations the logic, means of communication, and interaction is given by positions within hierarchies (e.g. General, Chief of Staff, President). In the case of institutional organisations, the subject – a public servant, for example – is recognised as a functional component of the particular organisation, who displays certain expected attributes. In theory, familiarity and recognition do not play a role in identification and interaction with these actors. However, in reality these relations often overlap, and the interaction between what can be considered an interpersonal network and an institutional organisation constitutes a mixture of the two, in particular in nations and governments where the level of professionalism of bureaucracy is low. Here, I will not focus on the prevalence of one interactional logic over the other, because it is recognised that official interactions can have the same influence and impact as an interaction framed primarily under the context of interpersonal informal interaction with a defined purpose (e.g. corruption).

Opaque networks and institutional organisations prevent the recognition of the component parts which make up these assemblages. In these cases, the possibility to read the necessary logical relations taking place in the network or organisation decreases or becomes problematic and difficult. Contrary to this, networks and organisations that are transparent allow for the
identification of the component parts of the assemblage, enabling a proper understanding of its activity and purposes.

**The Market and Anti-Markets**

We may understand the market as an assemblage consisting of a multiplicity of money and exchange products. Within the context of contemporary globalisation, money may be understood as the ‘fuel,’ or the ‘bloodstream’ that fundamentally participates in the process of the distribution and redistribution of things, goods, and commodities in the world. Money is the timeline of the market, representing the possibility of circulation. However, the logic followed in contemporary society when exchanging products maintains the characteristic of a monetised-capitalist society, where accumulation and gains play a fundamental role. The consequences and practicality of monetised societies obviously furthers a myriad of heated debates, without the possibility of arriving at a final resolution. In spite of this, there have been a substantial number of accounts critical of the effects of monetisation in society.

Seen as a historical period, contemporary globalisation and its monetised system accounts for the great accumulation of capitalist wealth concentrated in few hands (Harvey: 2006). This wealth does not reduce social asymmetries, nor does it fulfil aspirations of reaching a state of equal distribution in contemporary global society. Invisible financial entities only hold significance for experts; however, the notion of the market under the scope of assemblage theory is worthy of analysis because it presents the advantage of allowing,

… the replacement of vaguely defined general entities (like ‘the market’ or ‘the state’) with concrete assemblages. What would replace, for example, ‘the market’ in an assemblage approach? Markets should be viewed, first of all, as concrete organizations (that is, concrete market-places or bazaars) and this fact makes them assemblages made out of people and the material and expressive goods people exchange. (de Landa: 2006: 17)

The idea of capitalism as an ideology that orders and organises the modes of money and the conditions for exchanging products is extremely relevant; this idea agglutinates most of the market assemblages and forces in contemporary global societies and territories. There are three levels regarding market assemblages in contemporary globalisation: the global market (e.g. oil, gas, petrodollars, global finance), national markets (e.g. currency), and local markets (personal exchange of material and expressive components and goods). All three levels are made up of different
component parts that make them individual wholes; however, they may interact and eventually form a more complex assemblage (e.g. national economy), given that they are synthesised with or pitted against other self-subsistent assemblages.

These different crystallisations of the market’s identity have different characteristics and affect the lives of persons in different ways and space scales. In the case of financial crises triggered by the global market, the well-being of people is affected by the collapse or slowdown of industrial productivity, the closing of factories, unemployment, etc. When local economic actors corner basic products, or when corruption practices manifest in dealing with the power relations found in the local markets, the everyday life of persons, interpersonal networks, and global societies in general are greatly affected.

Looking at these types of situations, Joseph Galbraith pointed out the mistake of considering what he calls economic oligopolies as being the same thing as the regular players in the market, where products are exchanged by similar entities. Fernand Braudel (1979) complemented this concern by explaining that economic oligopolies or monopolies deserve to be called anti-markets, since they do not depend on the regular market to engage in their operations; they no longer depend on the market’s self-regulation of consumption and demand. On the contrary, anti-markets (e.g. corporations, state monopolies) have the capacity to plan their activities in advance regardless of market fluctuations. Anti-markets operate more like a small country, and less like a market scale enterprise. Therefore, if we locate both anti-markets and normal market players in the same condition and scale as national and local economies, we will discover an intrinsic asymmetry. In this asymmetrical power relation, oligopolies and monopolies – the monsters of the market, – ultimately concentrate economic power, while simultaneously denying smaller entrepreneurs participation.

Language

Language is a critical component in the formation and development of human communities and knowledge construction in the form of culture. Language is what we say, one constituting part of the process of knowledge stratification. Here, I consider that the language social assemblage is independent of human agency. In this sense, language plays an important role as a social assemblage, mainly seen as the power of voice and speech, the sequence of words and statements, and the power they have by themselves.

In this respect, Foucault explains that while language is a human technique that encompasses meaning and signification (‘interiority’ quality in persons), it also has the ability to produce material effects at a distance (Foucault: 1994). The importance and power found in
language in relation to other social assemblages is represented by de Landa in the following quote.

Given that prior to a conflict a particular social group may have already been classified by government organizations under a religious, ethnic, racial or other category, one of the goals of social movements is to change that classification. But the reason such a change is important for the members of a given movement is not because categories directly shape perception (as social constructivists would have it) but because of the *unequal legal rights and obligations* which are attached by government organizations to a given classification, as well as the practices of exclusion, segregation and hording of opportunities which sort people out into ranked groups. Thus, activists trying to change a given category are not negotiating over meanings, as if changing the semantic content of a word automatically meant a real change in the opportunities and risks faced by a given social group, but over access to resources (income, education, health services) and relief from constraints. In short, struggles over categories are more about their legal and economic significance than their linguistic signification. (de Landa: 2006: 62)

Separating language as an autonomous assemblage allows us to analyse the effects of communication in society from a different perspective. Once language has been detached from human agency it is possible to see the actual capacities of language as a differentiated social assemblage. In this respect, de Landa points out that, “assuming that we have a linguistic theory that meets all the requirements, the main effects of language at the personal scale is the shaping of beliefs” (de Landa, 2006: 51). Language has the power of reduction of reality, to put it one way (1). In contemporary globalisation, the social assemblage based on language has experienced dramatic transformations, especially with the arrival of new communication technologies. Language, *statements*, and the form of reduction and products can travel faster and be stored as information. At this point it becomes evident that the role of language as an assemblage in contemporary globalisation cannot be explained without approaching one of its most important component parts: the media.

The enormous power endowed on the media – the power of shaping beliefs and the distribution of *statements*; the *reduction of open possibilities*, to put it in Luhmann’s (1995) terms – has created the idea that media conglomerates are one of the most significant political, economic, and social powers in contemporary society, and which often challenge governmental, religious, and other powerful organisations or historic social assemblages. Hakim Bey’s formulations on the
notion of the Internet, for instance, and the diverse forms which mass communication take in contemporary society, may help us to relate this to the negative aspects of media influence and its forms of reduction in contemporary society. For Bey, the Internet has “become a perfect mirror of Global Capital: borderless, triumphalist, evanescent, aesthetically bankrupt, monocultural, violent – a force for atomization and isolation, for the disappearance of knowledge, of sexuality, and of all the subtle senses” (Bey: 2003: xi). It must be said, of course, that there are exceptions to this formulation in every case where the ‘media’ is concerned. It is also necessary, however, to keep in mind that media entities with profiles differing from Bey’s assessment are often dispersed and lack the power of the mass media monopolies to shape beliefs, which is the main function of language at the personal scale.

These four complex social assemblages – communication technologies, interpersonal networks and organisations, the market, and language – participate in the actualisation of contemporary society. In what follows I present some characteristics of these complex social assemblages, as they are visible in the case of Mexico. The expectation is to understand and learn about the nature of political and social communication practices in Mexico and their influence in processes associated with the intensification of the global problematic. To meet this end, information about the state of communication technologies in Mexico is provided. The recent history of the government, the private sector, and civil society organisations is organised to clarify the role and power diagrams to which they are attached. Language and the market are also addressed and described to the extent necessary to provide a fair picture of the way in which contemporary Mexican individuals and groups configure their strategies and interact.