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Eduardo Barrera Herrera

THE POETICS OF MEXICAN ELECTIONS: THE AFFECTIVE TURN IN THE YEAR
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Many neologisms are created to explain changes in Mexican presidential elections. These analyses assume that some element seen as separate and external to the Mexican political system is the cause of a substantial discontinuity. The political spectrum shrinks and shifts to the right with an apparent abundance of political options, concealing the poverty of options.

Key words: elections, politic, neologism

Palabras clave: elecciones, política, neologismo.

Muchos neologismos son creados para explicar los cambios en las elecciones presidenciales mexicanas. Estos análisis suponen que algún elemento visto como separado y externo al sistema político mexicano es la causa de una discontinuidad sustancial. El espectro político se encoge y se desliza a la derecha con una aparente abundancia de opciones políticas, ocultando precisamente su escasez.

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The Poetics of Mexican Elections: The Affective Turn in the Year of the P.I.G.

*Eduardo Barrera Herrera*¹

¹ Profesor de la Universidad de Texas en
El Paso y de la Universidad Autónoma de
Ciudad Juárez dentro del departamento de
Ciencias Sociales.
Correl: eduardo@utep.edu

The Neologization of the Mexican Elections

The Mexican presidential elections of 2006 constitute a turning point in national politics. So were the ones in 2000, 1994 and 1988. Each one of these electoral processes have been characterized by academia, media and politicians themselves as the end of something old and/or the beginning of something new that substantially changes the political landscape of México in terms of the *status quo*, dynamics and a rearrangement of the political spectrum. After the monumental fraud of 1988, Carlos Salinas stated that it was the end of the one-party system. Political scientists began to use other countries as explanatory and normative models: Spain, Chile, and the ubiquitous United States. These analyses operated at low-range levels of abstraction that in most cases lacked explanatory power. The theoretical corpus required by academic conventions, the status of academic fans of a guru, and the distinction given by academic capital in relation to non-scholarly journalists, made them either guide or just sprinkle the analysis with the usual suspects from the classics (Locke, Machiavelli, Hobbes, *et al.*) to the contemporaries (Bauman, Touraine, Sartori, Habermas, Wallerstein, *et al.*) and others in between (Arendt, Gramsci, Bobbio, *et al.*), perpetuating the theoretical colonialism rampant in Mexican academia and to which this text is not exempt. The analyses of the last four presidential elections also broke the monopoly of this object of study from political scientists and historians, to the social sciences *in toto*, particularly the discipline/interdiscipline/field of Communication, perhaps in a lesser degree than in industrialized or postindustrial democracies. This opening made it possible to study politics outside the realist epistemology dominant in Political Science, and analyze these phenomena and their elements from a constructivist perspective as narratives, discourses, representations, social constructions, spectacles, simulations, or imaginaries.

It is in the context described above that after Radunsky used the term “Americanization” for Latin America as a whole in 1996, the optimistic term democratic transition after the 2000 PAN victory gave way to the more modest term “alternation”. These terms that charac-

terized a gradual transformation in turn replaced by more strident terms that suggested a substantial discontinuity in this process with expressions such as Spectacularization (Lozano, 2000), Decomposition (Berlín Villafaña, 2000), Cyberdemocracy (Strikovskiy Vestel, 2000) and Mediocracy (Trejo Delarbre, 2001) of Mexican Politics. Analyses of the recent presidential election that are still being published have already added the terms Polarization (Aziz Nassif, 2006), Infotainment (Trejo Delarbre, 2006), State Mediatization (Esteinou, 2006) and Negamarketing (Valdez Zepeda and Huerta Franco, 2006). These expressions overlap to a large extent and indicate a degradation of formal democracy due to the prominence of irrational elements in the public sphere.

The “Americanization” of Mexican Politics

The original term Americanization (Radunsky, 1996) continues to be used. Francisco Zea of Chanel 11 was still warning of the Americanization of contents and strategies one month before the elections (IPN, 2006). The term has also been used outside the region. Martín Llaguno and Álvarez de Arcaya Ajuria (2003) lamented that the Americanization of the politics of Spain was stronger than in the rest of Europe. By Americanization they meant “the use of mass media as a platform for political critique, the personalization of the options in the candidates, the coverage of campaigns horse-race style or electoral debates”. Dick Pels (200e) uses the term as a synonym to ‘designer’ or ‘audience’ democracy, and summarizes its features as presented by Franklin (1994), Mancini & Swanson (1994), Scammell (1995), Ne-grine (1996) and Fairclough (2000):

The blurring of traditional political distinctions following the demise of the politics of principle, the rise of the floating voter and the experiment-prone political consumer, the drift towards the political middle, the decline of party bureaucracies and overarching ideological programmes, and especially, the mediatization and commercialization of political campaigning (46)

Before the term Americanization was used, the threat of Americanism to Europe was already being advanced in 1934 both by Luigi Pirandello and Antonio Gramsci. The Nobel Prize of Literature condemned the culture of money, while Gramsci (1934) was criticizing Leo Davidov (Trotsky) for his 1923 analysis of “byt’ [mode of living] and into literature”. Gramsci main argument was that “these activities were less disconnected than might appear, since the new methods of work are inseparable from a specific mode of living and of thinking and feeling life. One cannot have success in one field without tangible results in the other”. This essay titled “Americanism and Fordism” is included in his *Prison Notebooks* and was used as the founding text by Michel Aglietta, Alain Lipietz, Robert Boyer, Bob Jessop and other members of the French Regulation School focusing on the latter term of the title of the text. The argument of Americanization was the core element of theories such as cultural imperialism, media dependency and electronic colonialism in the mid-sixties that served as a backbone for the New World Information and Communication Order inside UNESCO, and which led to the withdrawal by the United States and Great Britain in 1984. This proposal dealing with media and culture was part of larger movements dealing with economic and political issues that included the Group of 77 in 1964 and the foundation of the Non-Aligned Movement (which went from 25 to 118 members) in 1961, both of which did not include México as a member.

Mexican historians have construed the political thought and action in the nineteenth century as either an affinity or a reaction against Americanization. Josefina Zoraida Vázquez (1997) states that “in order to neutralize the threat of Americanization, Mexican conservatives favored French intervention” (1). Before any country confronted this threat, there had to be the construction of the concept in the country of origin. There has been a boom of theories of identity in the last twenty years that share a constructionist perspective: narrative identities, performative identities, postmodern —or modern— identities, prosthetic identities, nomadic identities, plastic identities, postcolonial identities,

diasporic identities, liminal identities, flexible identities, etcétera. The two features these theories have in common are (a) a critique of essentialist theories, and (b) the relational character of identities around the notion of the “other”. Lawrence Grossberg (2005) points out that:

The United States, without an empire of colonies, had no “elsewhere” in which to locate those who were different enough to define the difference of the “American” people. It could only find them inside its boundaries: the otherness of blacks and the native populations (and of course the assumed superiority) as defining a kind of internal colonial frontier (202)

This approach of the construction of America is relatively new in the United States considering that Héctor Aguilar Camín published *La invención de México: Notas sobre nacionalismo e identidad nacional* in 1994 and Benedict Anderson have published *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* in 1983, which was in turn part of the literature of imagined geography that started with the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978. Grossberg’s statement about the construction of a national identity in relation to the other owes is inscribed within the framework of Postcolonialism, the other theoretical framework derived from Said. The problem with Grossberg statement is that he’s looking for of an “other” that is necessarily exotic and inferior. The construction of otherness is a relational process that doesn’t necessarily involve a radical opposition. Although the use of “otherness” in contemporary theories of identity is a mélange of Postcolonialism, Lacanian psychoanalysis and Bakhtin’s dialogism, the negative and relational nature of identity of all these theories—along with structuralism itself— derives from the relational nature of the meaning of a sign of Saussurean General Linguistics. Meaning is not inherent in a sign but is derived from its paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations with other signs. Otherness is a matter of degree because difference is a matter of relativity and degree. The white Americans of that first modernity did construct an ethnic identity based on the narrated difference with blacks and Native Americans, but they also built a national identity based on the performed difference

with the British at the Boston Tea Party in 1773, when 150 Boston colonist organized by Samuel Adams dressed as Mohawks destroyed the cargo of three ships. Philip J. Deloria (1998) sees continuity from that event to the ubiquitous postmodern tribes celebrated by Michel Maffesoli:

The practice of playing Indian has clustered around two paradigmatic moments—the Revolution, which rested on the creation of a national identity, and modernity, which has used Indian play to encounter the authentic amidst the anxiety of urban industrial and postindustrial life (7)

A similar process occurred in México with the appropriation of *Guadalupanismo* as well as the indigenous past and on the part of the creoles. The creoles did celebrate the Aztec past by comparing Tenochtitlan to Athens and Netzahualcóyotl to Solon.

Besides the fact that both America and the Americanization of politics, culture or a whole society are social constructions, the claims of the personalization of the options in the candidates, the coverage of campaigns horse-race style and the electoral debates fall under the label of mediocracy.

Greg Palast, BBC and *Guardian* correspondent, reported the Mexican elections as a fraud that used the same tactics as George W. Bush in Florida in 2000 and Ohio in 2004. These two states were the ones who gave the U.S. President the win in the Electoral College. Palast was the journalist who originally exposed the shave-off and intimidation of voters in Florida, as well as the extraordinary amount of null votes because of rigged machines and hanging-chads. Four years later, he claimed that history was repeated in Ohio. In both elections, the exit polls favored the Democrat and were dismissed because they were no longer accurate. Palast came to México after the election and suggested that it was a case of “Florida with salsa”. Palast drew these parallels before he had a chance to compare the TEPJF (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación) with the U.S. Supreme Court. Palast assumes that a Third World country has a mimetic character. It’s the same logic that has to locate the intellectual authorship of Zapatismo

outside the indigenous communities or that of the student revolt of 1968 somewhere in Europe. Using Palast's logic, it could be argued that in order for the PIG [Mexican electoral apparatus of PAN (Partido Acción Nacional) /IFE (Instituto Federal Electoral) /Gordillo) to Floridize México, the GOP had to Mexicanize Florida first.

The Political Culture of Both Sides: The Political Spectrum as a Binary Opposition.

The World is Divided Into Those who Divide People Into two Types, and Those who Don't. Anonymous

Chihuahuan Alberto Aziz Nassif (2006) is one of the first Mexican political scientists to publish an analysis of the recent elections in an international journal. The article austere titled "Elecciones en México" appears in the Fall issue of *Nueva Sociedad*, in which he stresses the polarization of the parties and the electorate. Aziz Nassif is in royal company in the issue (topic and journal-wise) with Alain Touraine and Ernesto Laclau. The French theorist of social movements titles his article "Entre Bachelet y Morales, ¿existe una izquierda en América Latina?" and the Argentinean born theorist of post-Marxism titles his "La deriva populista y la centroizquierda latinoamericana". The other article in the *Nueva Sociedad* issue is "Mucho más que dos izquierdas" written by Franklin Ramírez Gallegos. The journal issue focuses on a problematization of the classical way of looking at the Latin American terms left and right that have been normalized after almost three centuries of use.

The political spectrum of México and the United States has been shrinking and shifting to the right particularly after the demise of the Fordist regime of accumulation. This spectrum can be defined as the verbal or visual depiction of political philosophies along geometric axes. The U.S. media, general public and scholars, tend to define the spectrum in terms of a political opposition that is reduced to a two-party system, although a third party has peeked occasionally: Whig (1844-1852), Constitutional Union and Breckinridge Democratic (1860), Populist (1892), Socialist (1904-1912), Progressive (1912 and

1924), States Right (1948), American Vegetarian (1948-1964), Libertarian (1972-2004), Reform (1996), Green (2000 and 2004). The *realpolitik* spectrum occupies only a fraction of the area of the unidimensional model derived from the seating arrangements of the post-revolutionary French Parliament, where the defenders of the *ancient regime*, aristocracy and the Church would sit on the right, and those who opposed them in support of social change would sit on the left. It also occupies a small chunk of two-dimensional spectra like the Eysenck Model, the Nolan Chart, the Pournelle Chart, and three-dimensional ones such as the Freisian Insitute's Plot. These models vary in the number of axes and layers they combine.

One of the first models to add a second dimension was devised by Hans Eysenck in 1964, who added a vertical axis that went from "tough-mindedness" (authoritarian tendencies) and "tender-mindedness" (democratic tendencies). The political spectrum of the United States goes from center to right, obliterating the whole left. With respect to the vertical axis, the early tension between the agrarian democracy of Thomas Jefferson —influenced by John Locke and Thomas Payne, against the centralism of Alexander Hamilton, disappeared during World War I. The creation of the Committee for Public Information lead by George Creel confirmed the triumph of Hamiltonian technocratic elitism, summarized in the view of the infamous Edward Bernays (1928), called "America's Number 1 Publicist", "Father of Public Relations", "Father of Spin", and similar titles, besides being the bible for Goebbels:

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country...It is not usually realized how necessary these invisible governors are to the orderly functioning of our group life. In theory, every citizen may vote for whom he pleases. Our Constitution does not envisage political parties as part of the mechanism of government, and its framers seem not to have pictured to themselves the existence in our national politics of anything like the modern political machine. But the American voters soon found that without organization and direction their individual votes, cast, perhaps, for dozens of hundreds of candidates, would produce nothing but confusion. Invisible

government, in the shape of rudimentary political parties, arose almost overnight. Ever since then we have agreed, for the sake of simplicity and practicality, that party machines should narrow down the field of choice to two candidates, or at most three or four (37)

Libertarian David Nolan used two different axes: economic freedom and personal freedom. In this chart, the U.S. political spectrum covers a small area in the center from upper left to lower right. The Pournelle chart would only have the corners toward the center representing the whole spectrum of American politics with a field that results from two coordinates: statism and rationalism. With Pournelle, the four extremes would be: Max Stiner and Ayn Rand (rationalist/anti-state), Communism (rationalist/statist), Nazis (irrationalist/statist), and classical Anarchism (irrationalist/anti-state).

This reduction in the anglophone World, is supposed to be a natural development that has been elevated to the status of a “law” named after Maurice Duverger. This process coincides with the emergence of neoconservatism within the Trotskyist faction of Schachtmanism, which included Jeane Kirkpatrick, Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz via the Social Democrats USA in the 1970s. Max Schachtman adopted the Third Camp position in the 1940s, which rejected both Western capitalism and Soviet Socialism. Although David Harvey (2005) pinpoints the turning point to the years 1978-80, with the implementation of neoliberal policies by Deng Xiaoping, Margaret Thatcher, Paul Volcker and Ronald Reagan, Schachtmanites started turning right with their support of the U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. Whereas neoconservatism focuses on an aggressive foreign policy, neoliberalism is its economic platform. This shift in global politics involves a resemantization of political language, where the policies espoused by these two neosims become revolutionary forces and its binary opposition became a four-letter word, the ‘L’ word. Harvey (2005) argues that traditional values and fears like patriotism, the patriarchal order, and xenophobia were mobilized to mask the realities of the economic crises of the 1970s. Grossberg (2005) summarizes the history of the new con-

servatism: “This story started with the reanimation of conservatism in the 1950s and 1960s and goes through the presidential campaign of Barry Goldwater and “the Reagan Revolution” (129). We would actually have to go further back to 1947 with the founding statement of the Mont Pelerin Society (1947), formed around Friedrich von Hayek and which included Milton Friedman and Karl Popper: “The central values of civilization are in danger. ... Fostered by a decline of belief in private property and the competitive market” and the word liberal was used in the European sense of “minimal and dispersed government” (1). This position was echoed in the memo sent by future Supreme Court member Lewis Powell to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in 1971, where he encouraged it to lead an assault upon media and the education system to change and control the way Americans thought “about the corporation, the law, culture, and the individual” (Harvey, 2005: 43).

¿Hidalgo o Iturbide? *Un viejo dilema y su significado en la construcción del nacionalismo mexicano (1821-1867)* by Víctor Orozco reflects this trend towards the construction of binary oppositions in historical analysis. Even problematizing of contrariness by Josefina Zoraida Vázquez (1997) strives on dualism. This approach cannot explain episodes like Juárez ordering the execution of Jaime Chávez López in Chalco in 1869. Chávez López had declared “...I am communist-socialist. I am socialist because I am the enemy of all governments, and I am communist because my brothers wish to work the lands in common”. He advocated in another manifesto: “Abolition of the government, abolition of exploitation! We want land, we want order, we want liberty” (Hart, 1987). This disavowal of anarchism is repeated with the obvious heirs: Zapata—who is collapsed with Madero and the Sonora generals—and the EZLN, which is left outside the analysis. Debord (1968) fustigates the apparent abundance of choice:








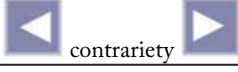
False choice in spectacular abundance, a choice which lies in the juxtaposition of competing and complimentary spectacles and also in the juxtaposition of roles (signified and carried mainly by things) which are at once exclusive and overlapping, develops into a struggle of vaporous qualities meant to stimulate loyalty to quantitative triviality. This resurrects false archaic oppositions...

The reduction and resemantization of political discourse is an operation in four steps:

1. *Dilemma*. The classical figure offers two unacceptable alternatives, called *ceratin* or horns. The naturalization of that Manichean reduction is based in the fact that ‘the binary opposition is a child’s first logical operation’ (Jakobson & Halle 1956: 60). Neoconservatism was actually born of the rejection of the *ceratin* of the Cold War, and gradually embraced the Western pole. A similar rejection of the same *ceratin* was the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1954 by coined by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. In the American arena, the political spectrum is reduced to a binary opposition despite the eventual emergence of third parties. The media tend to frame the debate on the two dominant parties and the enunciation of the media is supposed to be made from an imaginary balanced midpoint between “both sides”. This is derived from an error in the logic, which treats contraries as contradictories. The liberal/conservative opposition is a comparative and gradable one, a hierarchical and hyponomic relation, in the vocabulary of Greimas’ (1987) Semiotic Square. However, it is treated as a categorical contradiction that exhausts all possible positions. Jameson points out that the Greimasian square generates “at least ten conceivable positions out of a rudimentary binary opposition” (Greimas, 1987). Chandler (2000) summarizes the ten positions:

The symbols S1, S2, Not S1 and Not S2 represent positions within the system, which may be occupied by concrete or abstract notions. The double-headed arrows represent bilateral relationships. The upper corners of the Greimasian square represent an opposition between S1 and S2 (e.g. white and black). The lower corners represent positions, which are not accounted for in simple binary oppositions: Not S2 and Not S1 (e.g. non-white and non-black). Not S1 consists of more than simply S2 (e.g. that which is not white is not necessarily black). In the horizontal relationships represent an opposition between each of the left-hand terms (S1 and Not S2) and

its paired right-hand term (Not S1 and S2). The terms at the top (S1, S2) represent 'presences', whilst their companion terms (Not S1 and Not S2) represent 'absences'. The vertical relationships of 'implication' offer us an alternative conceptual synthesis of S1 with Not S2 and of S2 with Not S1 (e.g. of white with not-black or of black with not-white). Greimas refers to the relationships between the four positions as: contrariety or opposition (S1/S2); complementarity or implication (S1/Not S2 and S2/Not S1); and contradiction (S1/Not S1 and S2/Not S2). (119)

ASSERTION	S	NEGATION
S1		S2
		
implication or complementarity	Contradiction	implication or complementarity
		
NOT S2		NOT S1
NON-ASSERTION	NOT S	NON-NEGATION

Jameson adds that the fourth term Not S2 “is always the most critical position and the one that remains open or empty for the longest time” (Greimas, 1987: xvi). This means that those political positions different from the binary opposition are invisible in the media, and into social oblivion, with most individuals being reterritorialized into the *ceratin*.

2. *Transposition of the marked term.* The Jakobsonian notion of markedness, popularized by Lacan and Feminism, refers to opposite terms where the unmarked form is typically dominant and appears as ‘neutral’, ‘normal’ and ‘natural’. Kristeva (1991) points out the fragility of markedness, and how the terms can transpose anytime. This occurred during the rise of Thatcherism and Reaganism, when the neoconservative agenda went

from being the marked term to the dominant one, conservatives became revolutionaries and variants of the project of modernity became negative and reactionary. This was achieved by the implementation of the Powells domestically and the Mont Pelerins globally through the naturalization of the values and language of neoconservatism. Naturalization consists in the “*particular ways of organizing the world appear to us as if they were universal and timeless*” (Hall, 1979: 317). *The dominant media operates by naturalizing the axis of contrariety, marking the “liberal” position, and excluding the radical and anarchist positions, to use Mannheim’s taxonomy. The news portrays the stock market as a natural phenomenon that hides the agency of actors, while marking labor and civil rights advocates as “special interests.” As Jameson (Greimas, 1987) points out, the Greimasian Square is temporal or positional, and is a “black box” through which narrative is somehow “converted” into cognition and viceversa*” (14). *The lineage of Ancient Regime/Hamilton/Bernays/Mont Pelerin/Powells/Media Giants had somehow achieved a high degree of control of that “black box”. Negri (1989) would characterize this as part of the overall postmodern turn, “the scientific determination of new subjects which in the Marxian phase of real subsumption (or more simply, in the phase of general circulation and communication) are being formed”* (206).

3. *Newspeak*. The construction of a new simplistic language based on the principles of Newspeak to “provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of IngSoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible” (Orwell, 1949). This includes the formal conversion of contraries into contradictories (*i.e.* ungood becoming the opposite of good), as well regulating “crimethink”, with everyday language becoming a naturalized “duckspeak,” to speak without thinking. The quintessential figure in this neo-Orwellianism is Frank Luntz, a Republican pollster who publishes an annual book for the GOP about the words and phrases to be used in their talking points to frame all debates and discussions.

4. *Repeat, repeat, repeat...* In the words of the leader of the Free World: “See in my line of work you got to keep repeating things over and over and over again for the truth to sink in, to kind of catapult the propaganda”.

Grossberg (2005) divides the U.S. right in four sectors: a) the Christian right, b) neoconservatives, c) political libertarians, and d) business libertarians. Although the last two are the historical backbone of the Republican Party, the first two are the ones that through a new form of cultural populism have been so successful in the last quarter of a century. It would be a grave mistake to see the Mexican right as a replica of their American counterpart. The Mexican right is actually a mirror image, with the founders of the PAN being intellectuals with a strong religious background and the party was soon engrossed with former synarchists. The last two decades saw business libertarians joining and the PAN and eventually gaining control of the party and the presidency with Vicente Fox. Felipe Calderón represents taking back the control of the party from the Neopanistas and giving it back to the orthodoxy. This internal shift was due to the fact of the relatively important overlap by many of the members, but specially because the original religious right was overtaken in key positions by violent militants of secret organizations, primarily *el Yunque*. Some of the most notable members of *el Yunque* inserted in Calderón’s and Fox cabinets, as well as the highest spheres of the PAN are: Manuel Espino (PAN President), Ramón Muñoz (Fox’s Chief of Staff), Guillermo Velasco Arzac (Martha Sahagún’s advisor), Carlos Abascal Carranza (former Secretary of the Interior), Francisco Salazar (former Secretary of Labor), Gustavo Serrano Limón, Luis Felipe Bravo Mena, Francisco Garrido Patrón (Governor of Querétaro), José Luis Luege Tamargo, Salvador Abascal Carranza, José Paoli Bolio, and many others. There are other panistas who are or have been members of similar organizations like MURO, *Legionarios de Cristo* and *Opus Dei* itself.

The Christian right in the United States is primarily an evangelical right. Billy Graham was catapulted to stardom by the conservative news media of William Randolph Hearst and Henry Luce during the

cold war because of his anticommunist preaching. Hearst sent a telegram to the editors of his newspapers that read: “Puff Graham”, while Luce put him in the cover of *TIME* in 1954. Graham started his alliance with Christian Conservatives during the Nixon administration, which developed into the Christian Coalition of America in 1981, which was vital in the Bush-Cheney campaigns of 2000 y 2004. The Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy (CRESP) of Cornell University calls this “sacramental vision”, “Dominionism,” and its goal is to replace the U.S. Constitution. The organizations that are part of this movement are: the Christian Coalition, the Council for National Policy, the Eagle Forum, the Family Research Council, Focus on the Family, the Free Congress Foundation, the Heritage Foundation, the National Religious Broadcasters, the Ohio Restoration Project, and the Traditional Values Coalition.

The shift to the right of the political spectrum is not an actual process, but a normative one on the part of many scholars who are PAN sympathizers. I received electronic messages from different scholars who claimed that the PRD should follow the ASDC political platform. The proposal partially invokes some half-baked version of Touraine or Laclau, in which the left is refounded on the basis of identity politics and new social movements as a substitute for class-based politics, ignoring issues of wealth distribution and labor relations. Identity politics should enrich and not substitute for the analysis of structural inequalities.

From Mediocracy to Cyberdemocracy

Most of the claims included under the label Americanization are mass media related. The media landscape reflected this by the appearance of Fox News Network three years after Hallin (1992) declared the passing of ‘high-modernity’ in American journalism as the overt and cynical subsumption of journalists to the philistines. McChesney and Schiller (2002) would disagree that a radical antagonism between the two ever existed and that the assertion by Thomas Jefferson that “if a society could have either media or government but not both, the sane

choice for free people are media” was buried since the very rise of mass media in the United States, with all the federal subsidies through the postal system, governmental advertising and purchases for libraries. They add that the political economic transformation of the mediascape occurred in two stages: (1) global concentration of ownership from the mid-1980s to 2000, and (2) financial stabilization after the collapse of the high-tech stock bubble in 2000. This process included the still ongoing liberalization, deregulation and privatization of telecommunications that started with Reagan and Thatcher, and achieved a climax with the 1996 Telecommunications Reform Act. This process led to the dominance of nine global media giants: AOL-Time Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, Viacom, Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation, TCI, General Electric (owner of NBC), Sony (owner of Columbia and TriStar Pictures and major recording interests), and Seagram (owner of Universal film and music interests). The agenda for this mediascape is now replacing the agenda that the *New York Times* used to set when their headlines were wired to the rest of newspapers the day before. This resemantization in the new mediascape is best exemplified by Frank Luntz, who has the architect of the Bush administration’s fake town-hall meetings and an Orwellian language through documents like “Communicating the Principles of Prevention and Protection in the War on Terror”, “The 14 Words Never to Use”, and ‘The Eleven Steps to Effective Trade Communication’. The process is not at all blatant when it comes to the everyday activities of journalists. In an unpublished introduction to *Animal Farm*, Orwell wrote

The sinister fact about literary censorship in England is that it is largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without any need for any official ban. ... general tacit agreement that 'it wouldn't do' to mention that particular fact... Anyone who challenges the prevailing orthodoxy finds himself silenced with surprising effectiveness. (Chomsky, 1997, NA)

In México, Televisa and TV Azteca were the most cynically partisan when covering and analyzing the election. The coverage in terms

of time might have been equal but the unbalanced selectivity of the imagery, sound bites and the framing of the stories were pro-Calderón and anti-AMLO (Andrés Manuel López Obrador). Political analysis programs like ‘Tercer Grado’ were even more biased than the news programs. Joaquín López-Dóriga, the flagship anchor of Televisa was exposed years ago by Julio Scherer as one of the most expensive “chayoteros” (journalist who accepts bribes). Comedy programs like “El Privilegio de Mandar” were easy on Calderón and Fox, and caustic with AMLO. Televisa’s support was seen as a quid-pro-quo for the “Ley Televisa,” the equivalent of the 1996 US Telecomm Reform Act that allows further concentration of ownership in the broadcast industry, and for blocking the entry of Telemundo as a third network. The radio networks (Televisa, ACIR, Fórmula, etcetera) were also partisan with the exception of —believe it or not— Jacobo Zabludovsky, Ricardo Rocha, Radio Monitor and Carmen Aristegui, who tried to cover “both sides”. The print media ranged from the vitriolic *Crónica* (owned by Salinas de Gortari), the pro-business *Reforma* and *Norte*, the moderately conservative *El Universal* (except for its cartoonists), *Milenio* (which started as pro-AMLO when Federico Arreola had more weight and flipped when Carlos Marín became a pundit for Televisa), the PRIista *Unomásuno*, and *Excélsior*. All these attacked AMLO to different degrees. The ones that supported AMLO were *La Jornada* and the weekly *Proceso*.

The personalization of politics is nothing recent at all and did not even start with modernity. Leo Braudy (1997) points out that the first famous person was Alexander, who founded Alexandropolis when he was fifteen: “he wanted to win the battles of personal honor and family (...) a sculptor once suggested that Alexander commission him to carve Mt. Athos in Northern Greece into his likeness. But Alexander replied that the Caucasus Mountains, the Tanais River, and the Caspian Sea would be monuments enough” (37). The question of Americanism comes up again in Braudy’s discussion of visible fame in the early years of the Republic:

The American mode, although it drew inspiration and techniques of representation

(as well as paper, presses, and other material needs) from France, yet maintained its own uneasy distance from the ideological pressures of past examples of greatness and power. (...) The power of the visible spirit in America, therefore, absorbed a religious sanction instead of competing with it, as was often the case in both France and England. In the American public man, the solitary sanction of the desert saint and the man of destiny presented itself on the democratic stage. To be seen was to be free, to be heroic, to be American (451-453)

However, the quintessential celebrity politician would have to be Pim Fortuyn, even over the likes of Arnold Schwarzenegger, whose political person is shaped after the movie characters he played. Fortuyn was a Dutch millionaire who was running for the lower house of parliament and was gunned two weeks before the elections by an animal-rights activist. Fortuyn was:

A former sociology professor and flamboyant homosexual, had meteorically risen in the polls to single handedly embarrass the self-satisfied politicians of the 'purple' Left-Liberal coalition by his unprecedented style of campy glamour, media flair, and brazen political extremism. (...) Suddenly politics in the Netherlands had turned into an exciting, 'fun' thing (...) consciously capitalized on his personality as a brand, radically blurring the boundaries between private life and public showtime (...) first mediocrat: the first politician who performed almost exclusively in an audiovisual culture, effortlessly coinciding with his televised image. (Pels, 2003: 41-42)

Going against the quasi-consensus of lamenting that electoral politics are moving away from a rational model, Pels argues for “a stylish and style-conscious politics (...bridging) the divide between form and content, detail and essence, presentation and principle, sentiment and reason” (47-48). He warns that this romantic proposal is as Janus-faced as the dialectic of the Enlightenment. Pels approach is shared by most of the contributors of *Media and the Restyling of Politics* that he co-edited with John Corner. As Pels himself acknowledges, the notion of ‘aesthetization of the political’ originated in Walter Benjamin’s review of a conservative anthology edited by Ernst Junger that celebrated the cult of struggle and war. Pels warns that this Janus-faced dialectic of Romanticism was behind the cultural revolutions of Hitler and

Mussolini. Grossberg (2005) points out that the U.S. counterculture in the sixties also “rejected the Enlightenment and any principles of rationality and morality, embracing instead and impossible and self-destructive relativism” (215). The aesthetization falls under what could be called the “affective turn” of the political. Grossberg (2005) defines affect and his concept of mattering map:

Affect describes emotions, moods, desires, volition, attention, caring. It is about the investments we make in the world. People define themselves affectively, by what matters to them, as much as they do ideologically, by the content of their beliefs. Affect is organized by what I call mattering maps, which identify where we belong in the world. (...) they contain different kinds and amounts of investments; investments change and can be relocated; and they can serve different functions. Just as one investment may enable others, so the fact that one-thing matters make it possible or impossible for another to matter. Mattering maps enable people to feel that they own the projects and possibilities and that they have some control over their lives and the world. (...) Contemporary struggles challenge old mattering maps and offer new ones. They attempt to change structures of identification, authority and belonging. (231-232)

The problem, according to Grossberg, is that politics has been reduced to affect. This aesthetization of politics is part of a larger phenomenon that includes the other neologization: the affective turn in politics. Affect has always been part but has never dominated so cynically and blatantly the political landscape as it does today.

Grossberg was the main importer of Cultural Studies to the United States, however, his latest book quoted above, ranks number 258,157 in amazon.com sales—compared to #1,403 of Noam Chomsky’s *Hegemony or Survival* advertised by Hugo Chávez, Bill O’Reilly’s *Cultural Warrior* at #91 or Barack Obama’s *Audacity of Hope* at #7 and #1 in the *New York Times*— and was issued by a minor publisher. Stephen Colbert uncannily echoed the last line in the premiere of the “Colbert Report” on October 17, 2005. On the premiere show, he opened with the segment ‘The Word’:

- I will speak to you in plain, simple English. And that brings us

to tonight's word: 'truthiness'. Now I'm sure some of the 'word police', the 'wordinistas' over at Webster's are gonna say, 'hey, that's not a word'. Well, anyone who knows me knows I'm no fan of dictionaries or reference books.

- I don't trust books. They're all fact, no heart. And that's exactly what's pulling our country apart today. 'Cause face it, folks; we are a divided nation. Not between Democrats and Republicans, or conservatives and liberals, or tops and bottoms. No, we are divided between those who think with their head, and those who *know* with their *heart*.
- Consider Harriet Miers. If you 'think' about Harriet Miers, of course her nomination's absurd. But the president didn't say he 'thought' about his selection. He said this: (video clip of President Bush:) 'I know her heart'.
- Notice how he said nothing about her brain? He didn't have to. He *feels* the truth about Harriet Miers.
- And what about Iraq? If you *think* about it, maybe there are a few missing pieces to the rationale for war. But doesn't taking Saddam out *feel* like the right thing?

Truthiness is synonymous to the Orwellian Newspeak "bellyfeel: and was selected by the American Dialect Society as the 2005 Word of the Year, by the Merriam-Webster dictionary and the Global Language Monitor in 2006, and by *The New York Times* as one of nine words that captured the zeitgeist of 2005. This parody is a spin-off of the *Daily Show* with Jon Stewart and was critically acclaimed in the print media and networks. *The Colbert Report* was nominated for four Emmys, two Television Critics Association Awards, and two Satellite Awards. Stephen Colbert was named one of the 100 most influential people by *Time*, 2nd sexiest TV News anchor by *Maxim Online*, one of the sexiest man alive by *People* magazine and one of *GQ* Men of the Year in 2006. The *Daily Show* is a satire with high doses of sarcasm and irony and *The Colbert Report* turned it up a notch parodying neoconservative political pundits like Bill O'Reilly, Joe Scarborough, Sean Hannity and Geraldo Rivera. *Daily Show's* Samantha Bee nailed

Frank Luntz after parodying the town-hall meetings organized by the Bush Administration under the guidelines of Luntz. Bee asked Luntz to redefine “Drilling For Oil” (“Responsible Exploration For Energy”), “Logging” (“Healthy Forests”), and “Manipulation” (“Explanation and Education”). When offered the chance to redefine “Orwellian”, Luntz, remained silent. Since then, Luntz has been able to Orwellize Orwell in an NPR interview: “To be ‘Orwellian’ is to speak with absolute clarity, to be succinct, to explain what the event is, to talk about what triggers something happening...and to do so without any pejorative whatsoever”. He also quotes Orwell in the opening of his introduction to his recent book *Words that Work: It’s Not What You Say, It’s What People Hear*, in an attempt to neutralize critiques of newspeak by appropriating the seminal figure. *Daily Show* viewers “have higher campaign knowledge than national news viewers and newspaper readers”. *Daily Show* host Jon Stewart chastised CNN as a guest in *Crossfire*: “You have a responsibility to the public discourse and you fail miserably (...) you’re helping the politicians and the corporations (...) you’re part of their strategies”. Probably the most important contribution of the show, is that “from the start, *The Daily Show* challenges viewers to look for signs of fabrication, and it consistently spoofs the conventions of traditional journalism and the corporate control of media” (Jenkins, 2006: 227).

Colbert has daily guests ranging from politicians, to authors and show business people who play along with his media persona. Amidst the critical acclaim of both shows, some scholars and pundits lamented the extraordinarily high ratings, and that they are the main source of news for many young people. These are not the only ones with a similar profile. Al Franken’s show on *Air America* was shown on Sundance before and after the 2004 election, and Bill Maher has been a nomad and he currently has a round table-based show on HBO. The humor of these two is much more like traditional comedy, with Franken combining analysis and interviews with a touch of irony, along with sketches and impressions, and Maher doing more traditional stand-up comedy around the round tables. The meteoric ascent and collection of accolades of a parody, suggests that the mime-

tic distance that exists in comedy has been erased, and the boundaries between “real” news and “fake” news became irrelevant, in a large part due to the increased blurring by twenty years of infotainment. Also irrelevant is the difference between the “real” Colbert and the Report persona in an age where the self can be shaped and reshaped as part of a project.

In México, Televisa’s *El Privilegio de Mandar* was also a parody that unlike Colbert, made a great effort to stress the mimetic nature of comedy, hence its distance from “reality”. Comedy is “an imitation of characters of a lower type, —not, however, in the full sense of the word bad, the Ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the ugly. (...) the comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not simply imply pain” (Aristotle, 2005: 15). Distortion is a matter of degrees, and the distortion of López Obrador went to caustic extents, portraying him as scheming to deceive the different social actors, while Fox and Calderón were portrayed as well intentioned and the main fault being a lack of malice. The same treatment occurred in Televisa’s satire “Las mangas del chaleco” in López-Dóriga’s fridays edition of *El Noticiero*. Hayden White pointed out how there tended to be a correspondence between genres, and modes of ideological implication, for which he uses Northrop Frye’s and Karl Mannheim’s typologies.

Mode of Employment	Mode of Argumentation	Mode of Ideological Implication
Tragic	Mechanicist	Radical
Satyrical	Contextualist	Liberal
Romantic	Formist	Anarchist
Comic	Organicist	Conservative

Comedy tends to be conservative because society is assumed to be a big happy family, with no class struggle or structural conflicts related to gender, ethnicity or other dimensions. In the words of Aristotle: “...Comedy, where those who, in the piece, are the deadliest enemies (...) quit the stage as friends at the close, and no one slays or is slain” (1453a). *El Privilegio de Mandar* is a comedy with a tragic ending. The

closing episode right after the election the *Cantinflas* character played by Carlos Espejel fustigates López Obrador for not providing the classical comedic ending and breaking the unity and harmony of the “Colonia”, which was used as an analogy to the country throughout the series. On the other hand, Colbert’s parody plays with “satire is militant irony: its moral norms are relatively clear, and it assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured” (Frye, 1957: 223).

Colbert is also lampooning what is called Negamarketing by Valdez Zepeda and Huerta Franco (2006). This is associated with the polarization of politics and has been used much more effectively by the right with their “law and order” campaigns in the United States, Europe, and now in México. This is part of what Adorno called the authoritarian personality. The fear mongering that characterized the relaunch of Calderón’s campaign was euphemistically called “campaign of contrasts”. The “danger” theme was the central theme hammered by the PAN, the media and the Internet. The second phase was designed by Spanish Antonio Solá—who was recommended by José María Aznar—and US advisors Dick Morris and Rob Allyn that are direct political descendents of the late Lee Atwater, the so-called “Darth Vader of the Republican party”, who was the Sith master of Karl Rove.

Pundits like George Stephanopoulos see California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger as the crest of the coming new wave of centrism, and Grossberg (2005) points out that is the common sense of popular politics. However, neoconservatives find the middle of the road repugnant and strive on polarization, with “the substitution of a politics of the frontier for the possibilities of compromise or consensus (Grossberg, 2005: 229).

Cyberdemocracy (Strikovsky, 2000) suggests that the Internet with the political websites, the blogosphere, and the viral dispersion of e-mails, videos and PowerPoint presentations, is replacing traditional media. It is not a question of replacement, substitution or competition, but remediation, that is, the refashioning of old media on the part of the new. In the 2004 and 2006 presidential campaigns in the United States and México respectively, were breakthroughs in this area. The

Howard Dean campaign during the primaries was the most innovative with “smart mob”-style tactics, using meetup.com to launch rallies quickly, as well as what became common in the Bush and Kerry campaigns, and the Mexican elections: youtube.com, PowerPoint, blogs, photoshop doctoring, “viral” distribution, etcetera (Jenkins, 2006). Around election day in México, senderodelpeje.com became the most visited website in Latin America. A research team from Universidad Iberoamericana led by Gabriela Warkentin monitored the Internet traffic and analyzed the content of viral videos for an intergovernmental agency.

Henry Jenkins (2006), the archetypical scholar-fan and one of the handful of media theorists that have been hailed as the “new Marshall McLuhan” claims that political institutions are “reinventing themselves for an era of media convergence and collective intelligence” (208). He argues that the new media have eroded the unquestioned authority of old media. Blogging, for example, is supposed “to create a more intimate, real-time relationship with supporters. They deployed “smart mob”-style tactics” (210). Jenkins explicates the dialectics between the old and new media in the era of convergence:

New ideas and alternative perspectives are more likely to emerge in the digital environment, but the mainstream media will be monitoring those channels looking for content to co-opt and circulate. Grassroots media channels depend on the shared frame of reference created by the traditional intermediaries; much of the most successful “viral” content of the Web critiques or spoofs mainstream media. Broadcasting provides the common culture, and the Web offers more localized channels for responding to that culture. (211)

The difference between the two media were obvious in the way senderodelpeje.com fustigated the official media outlets of López Obrador for their solemnity and their failure to react quickly against PAN negative campaign. However, the political cyberspace is far from being a Habermasian public sphere, since the different parties have different access to organizational, financial, and technical resources to produce, distribute, hack, block and legitimate websites and messages. The political cyberspace can end up being an “echo chamber” to

“get the mindset I want when I want it,” an option unavailable in the mainstream media (Jenkins, 2006).

José Carlos Lozano (2000) used the expression Spectacularization of Mexican Elections right after the PAN victory in 2000. He repeats basically the same arguments listed under Americanization: personalization, message simplification over meaningful dialogue, mediocracy, dramatization and normalization. However two features the centrality of the spectacle as a social relation and worldview of society and the issue of the fragmentation. Guy Debord's (1967) opens his 221 bits about the *Society of Spectacle* with these seven ones:

1. In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.
2. The images detached from every aspect of life fuse in a common stream in which the unity of this life can no longer be reestablished. Reality considered partially unfolds, in its own general unity, as a pseudo-world apart, an object of mere contemplation. The specialization of images of the world is completed in the world of the autonomous image, where the liar has lied to himself. The spectacle in general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living.
3. The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as instrument of unification. As a part of society it is specifically the sector which concentrates all gazing and all consciousness. Due to the very fact that this sector is separate, it is the common ground of the deceived gaze and of false consciousness, and the unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of generalized separation.
4. The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.
5. The spectacle cannot be understood as an abuse of the world of vision, as a product of the techniques of mass dissemination of

images. It is, rather, a *Weltanschauung* which has become actual, materially translated. It is a world vision that has become objectified.

6. The spectacle grasped in its totality is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society. In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choice already made in production and its corollary consumption. The spectacle's form and content are identically the total justification of the existing system's conditions and goals. The spectacle is also the permanent presence of this justification, since it occupies the main part of the time lived outside of modern production.
7. Separation is itself part of the unity of the world, of the global social praxis split up into reality and image. The social practice, which the autonomous spectacle confronts, is also the real totality that contains the spectacle. But the split within this totality mutilates it to the point of making the spectacle appear as its goal. The language of the spectacle consists of signs of the ruling production, which at the same time are the ultimate goal of this production.

Debord's not only is making a significant theoretical contribution, but also an important epistemological one. He's looking at the spectacle as a social relation and as constitutive of society. Most analysts approach the different phenomena: Americanization, mediocracy, etcetera, as something that is happening to society, as something exogenous that is acting in a cause and effect relationship to change politics. When discussing political marketing, John Street (2003) argues that "Political marketing does not emerge simply from the 'realities' of modern politics, but rather it is a discourse that shapes or constitutes those realities" (91). Street,

quotes Falasca Zamponi in response to the reduction of politics to marketing:

Where Schumpeter's answer to the question 'what is a politician?' is someone who trades in votes (...) Falasca Zamponi's answer is that a politician is an 'artist' and that the people are their 'work of art'. (...) political reality is produced through narrative (...) these narratives are not simply expressions of a pre-existing world; they constitute that world: they produce power while representing it'. (93)

In this quote, Street is bringing up three theoretical and epistemological issues:

- 1) The aesthetization of politics. Pels (2003) mentioned this in his discussion of political style. It should be pointed out that the anesthetization of politics does not occur only in politics and its mediation but in the academic analysis of the phenomena. Many of the neologisms used in the literature reviewed here and this text itself are part of this anesthetization that falls under a broader affective turn. Terry Eagleton (2003) challenges the preoccupation of postmodern cultural studies with the body and consumption at the expense of production and geopolitical issues.
- 2) The linguistic turn in the social sciences. This preoccupation with discourse and narrative is not a is making inroads in Latin America but is not as prevalent as it is in the United States and Europe since the 1970s and 1980s, consolidating first in ethnography and historiography. This approach is part of a constructivist approach, which is somewhere between the status of an emerging paradigm and normal science. However, this is not something radically new. Nietzsche wrote in 1873:

What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are

illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.

We could go even further back to William de Occam and the medieval nominalists, and even to Protagoras and the sophists. While liberals and radicals may struggle to pick the theoretical origins of the linguistic turn, conservatives embraced it practically and politically from Edward Bernays to Frank Luntz.

- 3) The inseparability of the different areas of everyday life. Gramsci already pointed that out in his discussion of Americanism and Fordism. Raymond Williams (1974), the central founder of British Cultural Studies, also pointed out the imbrication and impossible separation of base and superstructure. This is one of the main points of Debord, how the totality of life is presented in a fragmented spectacle:

The spectacle originates in the loss of the unity of the world, and the gigantic expansion of the modern spectacle expresses the totality of this loss: the abstraction of all specific labor and the general abstraction of the entirety of production are perfectly rendered in the spectacle, whose mode of being concrete is precisely abstraction. In the spectacle, one part of the world represents itself to the world and is superior to it. The spectacle is nothing more than the common language of this separation. What binds the spectators together is no more than an irreversible relation at the very center, which maintains their isolation. The spectacle reunites the separate, but reunites it as separate.

That is, spectacle, the irrational, the affective, the aesthetic, mediation, etc., are not things that happen to politics, but constitutive of and constituted by politics. Raymond Williams (1974) criticized both the media effects approach and technological determinism: “the study of television’s effects has then to be seen as an ideology: a way of interpreting a general change through a displaced and abstracted cause” (122). Williams denounces this operation as displacing the primary causes and limiting it to the study of “the symptoms of the operation of an otherwise

unexamined agency” (129). It was because of the neglect of the primary cause or unexamined agency and the separation of effects “at a tertiary level, as between competing and alternative factors” (128) that the Federal Tribunal was able to declare that it was impossible to measure the effects of the campaigns by Fox, Sabritas, Televisa, the CCE and other organizations that articulated against López Obrador. Calderón followers reunited the separate only to make a straw figure that could be easily dismissed. The campaign also saw a blurring of boundaries between followers, journalists, and scholars, who produced or distributed virally videos, PowerPoint presentations, messages and antidotes to the above. A viral message received from a scholar-PAN follower creates one of those straw figures in a message titled: Members of the Compló. . .

1. Vicente Fox.
2. The Right.
3. Business.
4. The nine board members of IFE.
5. The 913 thousand citizens that acted as voting station officers.
6. The 800 district council members.
7. The 970 thousand party representatives.
8. The 24 thousand national observers.
9. The 693 international observers.
10. Mass Media.
11. Foreign Presidents who congratulated the President Elect.
12. The computers.
13. The other political parties.
14. 27 million 34 thousand 972 voters, who decided not to support Mr. López.

Messages like this assume the separation as natural and their reunion possible only under the logic of a pre-Foucauldian view of centralized power. Even mainstream political science theories have concepts like articulation that preclude theological notions of power. The strawman argument also neglects the non-monolithic nature of many of the items, as was the case of some business organizations (Cana-

cintra, the *Asociación Latinoamericana de Micros, Pequeños y Medianos Empresarios*, and the *Confederación Nacional de la Micro y Pequeña Empresa*), national observers (*Acción Ciudadana* and *Comité Conciudadano*), and international observers (Global Exchange and the Woodrow Wilson Center). Messages like this and a post-election campaign by shadow PANistas emphasized the “citizens that acted as voting station officers”. The narrative by the mass media was that it was impossible to doubt the honesty and *bona fide* of plain citizens. Compare this narrative to the one the same media broadcasts before tax day, when common citizens are guilty until proven innocent.

All the literature that uses a neologism to explain what’s happening to Mexican elections—including this text—are also spectacular:

The critical concept of spectacle can undoubtedly also be vulgarized into a commonplace hollow formula of sociologic-political rhetoric to explain and abstractly denounce everything, and thus serve as a defense of the spectacular system. It is obvious that no idea can lead beyond the existing spectacle, but only beyond the existing ideas about the spectacle. (Debord, 1967)

The concept of the spectacle is the foundation of Baudrillard’s (1988) notions of simulation, simulacra, and the hyperreal. Disneyland is a third-order simulation that “conceals the fact that it is the “real” country, all of “real” America, which is Disneyland (just as prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, which is carceral)”. The same way, the issue of the PAN and CCE spots featuring Hugo Chávez is not whether they were distorting Chávez or the parallels with López Obrador, but they “rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real” (Baudrillard, 1988) by presenting Mexican democracy as “real” compared to the “false” Venezuelan democracy. Furthermore, they rejuvenate the sanctity of the concept of democracy itself. As Badiou (1998) enucleates: “It is somehow prohibited not to be a democrat. Accordingly, it furthers that the human kind longs for democracy, and all subjectivity suspected of not being democratic is deemed pathological”.

Conclusions

There will be several analyses in the next few months that will repeat some of the neologisms listed here or will create new ones. The epistemological position will be the same: some element seen as separate and external to the Mexican political system will be singled out as the cause of a substantial change. The political spectrum will continue to shrink and shift to the right but there will be an apparent abundance of political options, with the parties and individuals operating in that small chunk of the spectrum will mix and match political positions in different areas, with the modularity of Tweedle-dee and Tweedle-dum politics concealing the poverty of options. At the same time, the neoliberal policies will be even more “naturalized” and lead to further income inequalities that might strengthen the options situated outside the “legitimate” spectrum.

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