

PART I.

Programme and Abstracts

ATACD Colloquium
Mobility and Borders
23-24 April 2009
University of Bologna
Department of Politics, Institutions, History
Strada Maggiore 45, Bologna

Thursday 23 April

- 12:30 **Registration** (*Aula Boshereccia*)
- 13:00 – 14:00 **Lunch/coffee** (*foyer*)
- 14:00 – 19:30 **Sessions** (*Aula Poeti*)
- 14:00 - 15:00 **Keynote Lecture 1:**
Borders and the violence of translation
Iain Chambers (*Università degli Studi di Napoli, L'Orientale*)
- 15:00 - 16:00 **Keynote Lecture 2:**
Constraints and extremes, limits and boundaries: A mathematical perspective on social systems
Josep Perello (*University of Barcelona*)
- 16:00 - 17:00 **Workshop 1:** Mobility and borders
- 17:00 - 17:30 **Coffee/tea** (*foyer*)
- 17:30 - 19:30 **Roundtable** on border as a method (Participants: Sandro Mezzadra, Iain Chambers, Nirmal Puwar, Sanjay Sharma, Tiziana Terranova, Transimigration project)
- 20:30 Dinner at the *La Spiga* restaurant

Friday 24 April

- 09.30 - 10:00 **Tea/coffee** (*Collotti Pishel*)
- 10:00 – 13:00 **Sessions** (*Collotti Pishel*)
- 10:00 - 11:00 **Keynote Lecture 3:**
Borderscapes of Differential Inclusion. Challenging the epistemic borders of topology
Sandro Mezzadra (*University of Bologna*)
- 11:00 - 12:00 **Keynote Lecture 4:**
Mundane Alignments across Divergent Scales, Ethnographic Perspectives on the Performativity of the Topological
Penny Harvey (*University of Manchester*)
- 12:00 - 13:00 **Workshop 2:** The neutrality of the topological approach?
- 13:00 – 14:00 **Lunch** (*Clorofilla*)
- 13:00 – 14:00 **Conference Work Group meeting with working lunch** (*Collotti Pishel*)
- 14:00 – 16:00 **Steering Committee meeting** (*Collotti Pishel*)

Keynote Lecture 1

Borders and the violence of translation

Iain Chambers (*Universita degli Studi di Napoli, L'Orientale*)

Thinking of topography and the refusal to respect the border, the confine, invariably draws us towards the subversion of the two dimensional map by the three dimensional social and historical matrix. This slant pushes up against, and exceeds, the topological imperative associated with the long, powerful, occidental cartographical tradition of mapping. It also marks the limits of the theoretical gaze and its theatre of power, with respect to the Earth, to the terrain, to a territory, and the transit of bodies and lives that make of space a place.

Here an eco-logical and a post-colonial critique form a series of cross-roads from where it becomes possible to reevaluate both the singular event and its planetary or worldly framing. The abstraction, sustained in the conceptual plane, is here bent and folded into a landscape which, in turn, becomes simultaneously more fluid and precise, specific and mobile, differentiated and dispersive. Here there also emerges the 'double-bind: if 'nature' is socially and culturally produced, it simultaneously also proposes some 'thing' – from the physicality of the terrain to molecular virus – that precedes and exceeds our productive will.

So we are perhaps dealing with a 'measure' that is not merely ours to control and define, hence the challenge of a post-humanism in which the subject is no longer necessarily at the centre of the picture. Whatever the verdict, this, as Deleuze might have put it, proposes a new figure of thought. Here the physical and metaphysical terrain is no longer guaranteed by an '-ism'.

It is in this sort of unstable and unguaranteed context that I would like to insert some comments on the possible dialogue between the topological approach to the dynamics of culture and the challenge (both historical and ontological) posed by modern migration and the bio-political marshalling of borders.

Keynote Lecture 3

Borderscapes of Differential Inclusion. Challenging the epistemic borders of topology

Sandro Mezzadra (*University of Bologna*)

The presentation will be based on a research and book project with Brett Neilson (University of Western Sydney), tentatively entitled “Border as method, or the multiplication of labor”. At stake in the paper will be different instances of proliferation and transformations of borders. These processes will be analyzed with reference to the changing shape of citizenship and labor market. Both the debate on “precarity”, which has been particularly virulent especially in continental Europe in the last decade, and different experiences of mobility will be taken into consideration. Highlighting the tensions, the subjective claims that crisscross both borderscapes and the field of migration, the thesis will be presented that we are confronted nowadays with shifting and multi-scalar geographies of inclusion and exclusion. The concept of “differential inclusion” will be proposed as a provisional analytical tool that allows to come to terms with such shifting geographies. In the last part of the presentation, some of the key concepts of the topological approach – such as order, connectedness, distribution, relationality – will be tested with regards with the transformations of borders, citizenship and labor market outlined in the paper.

Keynote lecture 2

Constraints and extremes, limits and boundaries: A mathematical perspective on social systems

Josep Perello, University of Barcelona

One of the most challenging problems in Mathematics is the study of the escape time of a given random particle from a given space. What is the typical time we should wait for the given random particle to escape from a given region? What sort of randomness can increase or freeze this time horizon? What is the effect of adding more dimensions to our space? The most eloquent measures are the mean exit time, the first-passage time and the survival probability. It is in addition known that the occurrence of the most extreme events is linked to the presence of hidden forces or trends. Complexity and multidisciplinary science have found in these sort of events a significant source of information to describe the dynamics observed in many different systems. From a quite different perspective, the surfaces dividing two different regions or the penetration of a certain liquid or molecules into hostile environments is of considerable interest to physics. A question to be asked is whether these sort of methodologies and abstract models can be translated to the analysis of social systems.

Keynote Lecture 4

Mundane Alignments across Divergent Scales, Ethnographic Perspectives on the Performativity of the Topological

Penny Harvey (*University of Manchester*)

In this paper I explore the creative tensions that emerge when we deploy 'border methods' to think about 'topological approaches' in the social sciences. Claiming 'ethnography' as a 'border method', I begin by analysing Mitchell's account of the production of the modern Egyptian economy (Mitchell 2003). This is a powerful migration story – in which people, insects, technologies, debt, goods and expertise, not to mention hostility, hunger, illness and desire 'swirl' and 'flow' in ways that are not captured by any singular intentionality or plan, but which instead enact a certain networked logic through which specific 'borders' do nevertheless emerge. The topology of the Egyptian economy thus emerges through the movements and translations that Mitchell tracks, and the 'locationless logics' of diverse experts are identified as the significant drivers of this process. The topology is far from neutral. Mitchell's account was highly influential in the ethnographic work that I have subsequently been doing in Peru, in which I am attempting to find a way of re-thinking his account of modern expertise in relation to contemporary road building projects. My concern is to open-up the singularity of the 'expert' that Mitchell's swirling 'networked' account produces and to re-insert the mundane relational dynamics through which specific translations are effected. In this respect my ethnographic perspective is certainly in tune with the shape-shifting differentials that the topological approach also attends to. But it is a perspective that also requires me to 'hold back' from deciding which metaphors to deploy, as I try to take my lead from what I come across in the field, allowing the shape of the description itself to emerge through the research process. My suggestion is that 'border methods' disrupt the topological approach in their attention to the practices and materialities that prevent shape-shifting. 'Border methods' remind us that flows are predicated on the possibilities of getting stuck, just as translation entails a reduction or loss of potential.