

ATACD Residency Report

-PART I: RESIDENCY MAIN DETAILS

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Host University: Goldsmiths College London, Department of Sociology

Period of Residency: 5th October 2009 – 5th November 2009

-PART II: AIMS OF THE RESIDENCY

Main aims of the residency:

- to conduct research that contributes to the ATACD knowledge base;
- to prepare a paper for the ATACD Conference "Changing Cultures. Cultures of Change" (Barcelona, December 2009);
- to work on the organization of the Graduate Students Day for the Barcelona conference, as a member of the Organizing Committee.

-PART III: RESIDENCY'S RESEARCH PROJECT AND OUTCOMES

The residency at Goldsmiths College London started on 5th October 2009 and ended on 5th November 2009. During this period of time, I tried to combine cultural and postcolonial studies' main concerns with the topological approach to cultural dynamics. I could describe such a tentative as a simultaneous questioning of both the aforementioned areas.

I began my residency research starting from the core questions of my PhD research project, which is an exploration of the cultural movement of Afrofuturism in relation to the spread of black urban futuristic music. Being interested in approaching the area of study of black culture from a post-representative and affective point of view, my attempt is that of working on music as a series of ethical-aesthetical events (Guattari 1992), bringing about political concerns that I see as related to a micro-political analysis of culture.

Within the time spent working on my project, I have found quite difficult to find a methodology that, without forgetting the specific commitments of cultural and postcolonial critique (difference, positions, relations, in-betweenness) could, at the same time, be used to go beyond the questions of 'representation', 'signifying practices', 'identity' and 'belonging' in the analysis of black art.

In this sense, I welcomed the possibility to use the topological approach to cultural dynamics, with its emphasis on the concept of continuity under qualitative transformation, as a way to address the fact that, in the movement of change of cultures, "passage precedes positions" (Massumi 2002, p. 66). Topology offers the possibility to look at cultures and at the momentary, visible products of their 'change' (here musical style) not as results of performed rituals of 'representation' based on the circulation of meanings

amongst different subjects/objects socially and politically produced through ideology. Rather, with topology it is possible to reintroduce immanence and “becoming” into the ecology of the contemporary, taking into account *incorporeal* and “post-hegemonic” (Lash 2007) dimensions (such as ‘affect’) - only ‘laterally’ relying on meanings, signification and ‘typology’ - into the production, spread and mutation of cultures.

I consider this as a necessary turn to engage with, given the fact that traditional analyses of cultural studies and their political agenda - based on positionality - might be at great risk of missing the affective dimension of productive desire at the heart of all the phenomena of the contemporary world. The opening of cultural and post-colonial studies’ concerns to these other dimensions might in fact be a necessary way to cope with the new emerging issues of contemporary world affecting culture, such as the new concerns in culture industry and the questions of immaterial labour and formation. If cultural studies’ main feature is that of always trying to make up new tools to address new problems emerging in the wide and all-encompassing dimension of ‘culture’, then the turn to topology seems to be one of the few useful approaches to really get at the heart of the most urgent issues of these times. However, as I will show later on in this report, some issues must be carefully taken into account.

Given the specificity of my area of research and the attention to art, I spent the first part of my residency trying to apply the topological approach to the analysis of musical events such as black urban futuristic music in London (especially dubstep) and the phenomenon of pirate radio stations. My attempt was to widen the concept of ‘subcultures’ so that it could host post-representative analysis such as Steve Goodman’s concept of the “speed tribes” (Goodman 2005). This was in fact also meant to be the main topic of a section of the paper that I will present, with Michaela Quadraro, during the ATACD Conference in Barcelona (Dec 2009).

Up to this point, I have been describing what I consider to be as a useful but quite uncritical integration of topology into cultural studies. By using ‘uncritical’, I intend to stress the fact that, during the first part of my research, I have been intersecting the two areas of cultural studies and topology in quite a ‘smooth’ manner, without being critical on this same ‘smoothness’ in combining the two approaches.

A turning point in my residency, in which I see the real starting point of a more evident contribution to the knowledge base on topology, has been the meeting with Professor Lury, the researchers from Basel and London and my fellow researcher from Naples Alessandra Marino. This meeting took place on 16th October at Goldsmiths College.

Each of us had the chance to present to the others a draft version of our contributions to the Barcelona conference, receiving precious feedback and pieces of advice. During this very useful meeting, it was easily perceivable that, while papers working within the field of sociology and looking at ‘present’ situations (trends, circulations of objects, brands) were much more ‘in accordance’ with the general framework of the

ATACD project, the contributions coming from cultural and postcolonial studies, often based on politics through aesthetics, had to struggle much more in order to be able to fit into said general framework.

Through discussion, what emerged was the fact that there was a difficulty to grasp how analyses such as those proposed in the area of cultural and postcolonial studies were trying to enter topology in a way that went far beyond the plain appropriation and application of the 'vocabulary' of topology (intensity, continuity, transformation, and so on).

The necessity of additional explanation about how our specific projects worked *conceptually* into topology revealed, in a sense, the strength of an already existing 'framework' of reference in the ATACD project.

For the fact that it made much more evident this consideration, I can claim the 16/10 meeting being a 'turning point', in so far as it has made me more critical and attentive to the 'movements' within the Topological Approach To Cultural Dynamics itself.

First of all, I tried to bear in mind the question: Why 'topology' now? The choice of 'topology', in a project sustained by the EU, amongst a series of possible concepts that could have been borrowed from sciences to enter the analysis of cultures, might probably be a marker of a crucial position that we can experience nowadays at the encounter between 'industries' and 'cultures'. The possibility of mapping events, of working on continuity at a point to be able to take into consideration also the immanent variability and randomness of change: all these are crucial elements in present times in which the topological approach proves to be useful.

However, I guess, the usefulness of similar approaches and their being 'for the sake of cultures' cannot be taken for granted. What is necessary is a constant attention to all the possible 'crystallizations' of a similar approach and the political implication of a 'formalization' of an approach and its tendency to become another 'model'.

While I do not think that, at the moment, the ATACD has entered any such phase of crystallization, still I believe (and this I guess was the main concern of the ATACD Colloquium held in Bologna last Spring 2009) that any sign of 'framework' within an interdisciplinary approach should make all partners sensitive to this question: Is topology at risk of becoming, in its institutionalization beyond mathematics and into other cross-disciplinary realms, another 'exploitable' method of prediction - one stronger, for it can also cope with randomness?

If this risk is present (as I believe it is in any possible approach), the most precious contribution to the ATACD project knowledge base can be that of always trying to test ATACD methods on themselves. It might be important to maintain a sense of openness of the concerns and strategies of the approach. The being interdisciplinary of the project is a key-element in this, and I think that the testing and openness should always come from those areas, in each and every 'discipline' involved in the project, that seem to be more 'centrifugal' in relation to the general framework.

For these same reasons, I have decided to dedicate the rest of my residency to a further exploration of that elliptical area, into our culturalist analysis, related to the processes of *politics as art* that seemed to fit less easily into the framework. I have therefore insisted, with my partner for the Barcelona talk, on the question of the *production of subjectivity*, which I see as conceptually related to topology.

I have therefore used here the concept of the fold 'on the Self' drawing from Gilles Deleuze's exploration of what - in his book on Foucault - he calls Foucault's "third dimension": that of *subjectivity production*, derived from Power and Knowledge, but not dependent of them (Deleuze [1986] 1988). In *Negotiations* ([1990] 1995), Deleuze explains that the discovery of such a dimension in Foucault (from *The History of Sexuality* on) is not a return to a 'subject' based on identity, but a "process" in which the Self is a "relation (a relation to oneself) [...] a relation of force to itself [...] a 'fold' of force": "[Foucault] is talking about [...] establishing different ways of existing, depending on how you fold the line of forces, or inventing possibilities of life [...]: existing not as a subject but as a work of art. He's talking about inventing ways of existing, through optional rules, that can both resist power and elude knowledge, even if knowledge tries to penetrate them and power to appropriate them" (Deleuze [1990] 1995, p. 98).

I have therefore proposed such a topological adventure of the black body-mind through art, and related it strongly to concepts of Time and Space. Focusing on the concept of time anomalies, control as modulation, preemptive power and "dread" in the 2006 album *Memories of the Future* by Kode9/Space, I have been seeking to present a topological concept of noopolitics and a rielaboration of the concept of 'the slave' in relation to the force of Time (see Lazzarato 2006, on "machinic enslavement").

The effort has been to carry out the possibility of a "postcolonial affective topology" as the *folding of time and space*. Deviating from dominant signification and traversing the notion of "discourse" the 'postcolonial condition' I have introduced encounters topology for it is *the condition of folding*. It marks a shift in focus from semiotics and signs to a more encompassing idea of material ecologies, in which techniques and technology work immanently on matter through 'closeness' and 'contagion'.

This turn is also a political turn: from "resistance" and "subversion" ("signifying" art), to the idea that change has to do with conditions of visibility and perception related to this process of folding; from 'forms' to 'taking-form'. Here, the work of black art on the thresholds of perception, on matter and sensation, on the affective aspects of body-minds' relations is what Elizabeth Grosz refers to as "the becoming art of politics" (Grosz 2005, p. 2).

I see the usefulness of pushing further the analysis of processual modalities of subjectivity production also as an attempt to maintain alive the openness of each and every project, keeping in mind the possibility of working within certain frameworks but always trying to avoid the reflection and sedimentation of methods on themselves. I see this kind of analysis presented above as an attempt, within the specificity of my research approach, to contribute as much as possible to the process of keeping the ATACD's approach open to the creation of tools for transformation that work *for* culture and *for* an ethical project of politics.

I would like to quote, as a way to conclude, some recent considerations by Brian Massumi: “I see affective intensity and an aesthetics of varying life potential as the elements of an ecology of practices of the symbiotic kind. [...] [A]n anti-capitalist politics begins by affirming the variability and potential for forms of life unleashed by capitalism itself. It continues the differentiation of forms of life already under way, but by other means, governed by other constellations of termini and embodying other values” (Massumi 2009).

-PART III: EXTRA NOTES

As the above notes show, the experience of the residency seems to be a strong and effective way to really bring about critical issues into the ATACD project. The opportunity to have real discussion and exchange amongst members of the project coming from different backgrounds and different research institutions during roundtables has proved to be a strong way to critically look at one’s methodologies and concerns and make these consideration feedback into the general frame of the ATACD project itself and into the specific areas of research. For this reason, I would like to underline the successfulness of the bursary scheme as a way to maintain very high the level of critical thought in such a wide project as the Topological Approach to Cultural Dynamics. I would also like to highlight the point that I consider crucial in this sense the fact that the residency bursaries at Goldsmiths were given to researchers coming from different areas *during the same period of time*, which allowed for all of us to be present in London at the same time.

Also, the possibility to have access to Goldsmiths College Library and other libraries in London has proved to be crucial for the research itself. I have conducted intense bibliographical research (see below), benefiting from the chance to be able to go through key-texts not easily available in Italy.

The period of residency at Goldsmiths College London has also been very useful to prepare the Graduate Students Day event for the Barcelona Conference. Thanks to the bursary scheme, it was possible to open the Organizing Committee, of which I have been part since May 2009, to more members from Goldsmiths College. Together we could more easily arrange the details to prepare a series of workshops and talks to be run during the event, including: the “Keyword Workshop”, the “Core Notions from Point Set Topology Workshop” (run by Professor Xin Wei Sha from the Topological Media Lab at Concordia University), and a session with plenary speakers (Professors Braidotti and Arenas).

-PART IV: BIBLIOGRAPHY (of materials used to write the Barcelona paper on black art + topology)

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