

Report

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The residency at the Centre for Humanities, Universities of Utrecht, Netherlands, started on the 17th of October 2008 and was completed on the 2nd of November 2008.

The research project proposed to the University of Utrecht aimed to use the residency to explore a topological approach to the cultural dynamics of geopolitical globalization, with a specific focus on the relation between the Iraq war and communication networks such as the Internet. The project focuses on the intersection of Iraq and the US as two topological spaces where the territories of the two nations exceed geographical boundaries to literally fold into each other by means of the movement of people (US soldiers and civilians in Iraq) but also through the movement of information (Iraqi and US blogs, TV programmes, news, documentaries and films, books etc) affecting the entire planet.

Topology implies a conception of space as an intensive continuum characterized by a capacity of distinct regions to fold into each other through processes of self-organization which potentially give rise to emergent configurations (De Landa 2005). The question at stake here is whether such conception of space can better allow to conceptualize and study phenomena of cultural globalization involving the use of distributed digital networks – even dramatic ones such as wars. In a way, then, the project extends and expands on the influential thesis by globalization theorist Arjun Appadurai to understand globalization as a process involving the conjunction/disjunction of flows giving rise to what he called a series of –scapes (including infoscapes and mediascapes). (Appadurai 1996); and on Celia Lury and Scott Lash's approach to the globalization of the culture industry (Lury and Lash 2007)

The residency at the Centre for Humanities at the University of Utrecht allowed me to both focus for two weeks on the study of theoretical work on topology which is particularly suitable to the task at hand; and to discuss and exchange perspectives on the value of topological approaches to cultural dynamics with scholars at the centre. In particular I participated to most of the seminars and public lectures organized by the Centre, where I was able to articulate publicly the notion of a possible topological interpretation of the relation between Islamic and Western culture. Such notions were

debated at talks held at the centre by Dr. Markha Valenta (University of Amsterdam): “On The Sexiness of Religion in Politics; Americanism and Islamism as Kissing Kin” (21 October 2008); and by professor Costas Douzinas (Birbeck College, University of London: ‘On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights: The End of Human Rights?’ (30 October 2008). During the residency I was also able to establish contact and have a useful exchange with prof. John Protevi, a visiting scholar at Utrecht from the State University of Louisiana and co-author with Mark Bonta of *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: a guide and glossary* (Protevi and Bonta 2004), a book which represents a valuable contribution for a philosophical approach to a topologically-inflected geography.

The residency also allowed me to participate to and benefit from the lively new media culture of the Netherlands, where I attended a number of events on topics such as bioart (with its fascinating folding of the mechanical and the biological); and especially a one-day event on visual digital media (‘Moving Movie Industry’, Sandberg Institute, Amsterdam 31st October 2008).

The theoretical work carried out during the residency involved a close reading of a book by French architect Bernard Cache, *Earth Moves* (Cache 1995) with particular attention being paid to his rewriting of Spinoza’s ethics of a single substance presenting as attributes of body and mind as a single topological surface. Cache’s work appears suggestive in the ways in which it potentially allows for an extension of topological approaches to cultural dynamics into the sphere of subjectivity. The consultation of university libraries of Amsterdam and Utrecht was also very useful.

Unfortunately, due to the busy schedule of the Centre for Humanities, it was impossible to organize the seminar as promised. With the benefit of hindsight it appears that for such short residencies, utmost care should be employed well in advance of the residency to organize shared work or public seminars. Nevertheless, considering the short time frame, the residency appeared overall as a success, allowing for research and fruitful connections and exchanges between the two partners involved (one of the outcome will be prof. Braidotti’s stated intention to apply for a residency in Naples).

Bibliography

Appadurai, Arjun (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press

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Lury, Celia and Scott Lashh (2007) *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things*. Polity Press.

Protevi, John and Mark Bonta (2004) *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: a guide and glossary*. University of Minnesota Press