

# **NOTAS Y DISCUSIONES**

**Sobre el libro**

**Sandro Mezzadra - Brett Neilson**

**BORDERS AS METHOD,  
OR, THE MULTIPLICATION OF LABOR**

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# **‘BORDER AS METHOD’: AN ARCHIVE ABOUT TUMULTUOUS BORDERSCAPES**

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The long-standing collaboration between Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson finds in *Border as Method, or, the multiplication of labor* (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013) a turning point, whereas it constitutes an encyclopedic anthology of their eclectic approach to the substance of borders and borderscapes in our conflicted contemporariness. Their capability of deconstructing the reification of the borders through multiple theoretical standpoints indeed ranges from ‘migrations’ studies to what they call ‘the operations of capital’ (especially extraction, logistics, and finance), from social movements to the study of the Common.

*Border as Method* was published during the fifth year after the ‘origin’ of the so-called global crisis, and it can be read as an attempt to set up, inspire, and provoke, a new critical-theoretical cartography of our present. The book elaborates a sequence of entry points, original perspectives, and continuous displacements, moving on the planetary scale – feeding on multiple ethnographies, political thoughts, post-colonial theories, and an impressive series of literature and experiences made by the authors. The constant attempt to locate the point of view on the planetary level breaks up the usual idea of the global as a homogeneous Moloch, avoiding at the same time the relativist trap enacted by the image of a fragmentation that would make impossible the attempt to produce general interpretative frameworks.

Since the frontispiece, the book immediately tackles the imaginary of a world of flows where borders are disappearing, representing a counterpart of the consolidated narratives fostered by authors like Kenichi Ohmae (1990) or Manuel Castells (2010). In doing so, it adopts a position ‘within the struggles’, particularly focusing on the migrants’ practices of the border crossing. Therefore, the point is not denying the constitutive ‘mobility’ as a paradigm of our era, but rather to shed light on the grey areas of the global connections, showing how flows and borders, far from describing a dichotomy, indicate a productive contradiction, a mutual articulation. Here, there is a radical overturning of the consolidate approaches in global studies. Pointing to the borders as necessary *dispositifs* for the articulation of the flows indicates a concrete matrix of the ‘movement of the world’, disarticulating the logistical fantasy of a smooth global space. Moreover, Mezzadra and Neilson stress that finance dictates the rhythm of the actual proliferation and heterogenization of borders, which – far from being ‘classical’ lines on a map – are taking a myriad of shapes and are melting in a weird material, kneaded of time, as well as of space. Borders prove to be “complex social institutions”, fields of tension between border enforcement and border crossing, dual entities, the material base of what the authors define as the “real globalization”.

Accordingly, contemporary capital

negotiates the expansion of its frontiers with much more complex assemblages of power and law, which include but also transcend nation-states. Looking at the expansion of capital’s frontiers and considering the proliferation of political and legal boundaries, we are thus confronted with a geographical disruption and a continuous process of rescaling. A deeply heterogeneous global space corresponds to this process, and the border provides a particularly effective angle from which to investigate its making (pp. 5-6).

The only apparent sequel between the border as a method and the adoption of heterogeneity and multiplicity as a lens of inquiry originally situate this book within the stream of critical knowledge that, over the last decades, has reflected upon the philosophical and political image of ‘the multitude’ –but strongly bringing back at the core of the debate the elusive concept of ‘class’. These two terrains have in *Border as Method* multiple overlapping, whereas the knot is not untied between seeing the multitude as a phenomenological image of class composition and the multitude as an ontological dispositive.

The border as an epistemic perspective leads the argumentation against the Agambenian emphasis on 'the exception', as well as towards a sophisticated critic of David Harvey's concept of "special fixes" (1989), Beverly Silver's notion of "technological and financial fixes" (2003), and, more generally, moves into a reassessment of the so-called World system theory: "such concepts as core, semi-periphery, and periphery seem to overemphasize (even from a historical point of view) the stability of the global geographies produced by the expansion of capital's frontiers on a world scale" (p. 74).

*Border as Method* is a huge and complex archive. Here lies its preciousness, as well as its limit. The density of the theoretical profiles sometimes becomes a vortex; the interpretative keys rarely lead to a defined thesis. This is probably due on one hand to a specific choice from the authors, and on the other hand, it is indicative of a thought aiming to honestly assume the complexity characterizing our times. So, moving within complexity, Mezzadra and Neilson are not always able to reduce it in a manageable way through solid analytical and theoretical tools, losing something in terms of 'usability' of the book, but in the meanwhile keeping open multiple and inspiring fields of investigation.

*Border as Method* is a 'hungry' book, voracious but able to hone a sophisticated multi-graduated lens on the encounter/clash between labor and capital at the planetary scale. Imaginative, in search of metaphors, with a rapid pace and unusual juxtapositions of Marxian analytics, cultural studies, postcolonial insights, transforming regimes of accumulation and class composition, racialized, gendered and classed power relations, and even more... Everything merged within a provocative methodology oriented towards "a different means of knowledge production, one that necessarily involves practices of translation, although more in a conceptual than a linguistic sense" (pp. 9-10). Mezzadra and Neilson engage with ethnographic works, alongside writings from fields such as geography, history, and jurisprudence, aiming to provide an empirical foil to test their conceptual propositions. Moreover, they aim to "proceed with the commitment that breadth can produce depth, or better, produce a new kind of conceptual depth, 'new ideas'. Our study is thus deliberately wide-ranging" (p. 10). It is precisely at this stage that they state that "method for us is as much about acting on the world as it is about knowing it" (p. 17).

Along this pathway, we could grasp the link between the two pieces of the title of the book. *Border as Method... OR, the Multiplication of Labor*. If chapter one is a sort of long introduction, chapter two engages the spatial dimension of borders working between the history of cartography and the history of capital, focusing on "the making

of the world” (called *fabrica mundi*). The two chapters underlie a critical investigation in chapter three of the political-economic concept of the international division of labor, showing the intertwining between the above-mentioned conceptualizations. In other words, it is possible extracting two conceptual couples intimately connected: borders/the making of the world and frontiers of capital/multiplication of labor. Let’s have a look at the second.

Chapter three juxtaposes a discussion about the multiplication of forms undermining the ‘stability’ of global space (the logistical connections of channels, corridors, scales, zones) as a crucial geographical disruption at the core of global processes, with the concept of a “multiplication of labor”. Therefore, morphological and social dynamics are considered as mutually interacting, in this way challenging the ‘fixed’ image of a rigid division of the world market emanated by Marxian theories of the international division of labor. We are confronted here with a very political point, one that recalls Lenin’s writings on imperialism and his distinction between the economic and territorial division of the world. This variance is mobilized by the authors as a precedent for the distinction between “the expansion of the frontiers of capital and the proliferation of political, legal, and social borders that informs the approach of border as method” (p. 80).

Furthermore, “emphasizing the element of multiplication over the one of division, we want to point first to the disproportion between the intensified social dimension of contemporary labor [...] and the deepening of the social and technical division of labor” (p. 91), Mezzadra and Neilson state, pointing to the active role of capital in producing this new scenario. The ‘rigidity’ produced by the working class was historically smashed by capital via an outsourcing of labor –geographically and to the entire society. This produced an intensification of labor (colonization of the whole life); a diversification (expanding of different kinds of labor, forms of production, systems of needs); a heterogenization (in terms of its social and legal organizational regimes). These considerations also displace the Marxian idea of the ‘free’ wage labor as a capitalist norm, passing through postcolonial and ‘global labor histories’ and on the pivotal role of race, slavery and citizenship in defining the labor market, emphasizing their aim “to understand how emerging global modes of production work by exploiting the continuities and the gaps –the borders– between different labor regimes” (p. 65).

However, needless to say, the stress on differentiation does not carry out towards a disarticulation of the capitalist system (and “the switch between the abstract and the concrete does not necessarily produce the homogenizing effects that give rise to what

Marx saw as a revolutionary working-class subject. This is the origin of the problem of heterogeneity that we discuss from the point of view of global space and time and from the point of view of the composition of global labor” (p. 97)). There is another apparent contradiction here: “the highest degree of isomorphy seems to coexist in contemporary capitalism with the highest degree of heterogeneity” (p. 86), sustain the authors, somehow introducing what is widely discussed in chapter four. Does capital’s ability to be unitary by dividing living labor underpin a possibility of reversal?, Mezzadra and Neilson seem to ask. Again, a strong political question at stake, tackled through an analysis (that resonates with Saskia Sassen’s one originally developed in *The Global City* (1991)) of carers and traders as iconic figures of contemporary labor. How, then, would it be possible to think (again) the unity of ‘the working class’ within its constitutive heterogeneity? Their argument is that the proliferation of borders in the contemporary world makes possible a political organization of labor only in an irreducibly multiple sense: “only by analyzing the heterogeneous constitution of global space and the complex ways it crisscrosses the production and reproduction of labor power as a commodity is it possible to begin the work of translating between subjects and struggles” (p. 95). Along this ambitious and complex political trajectory, one of the lack of the analysis, for us, lies in the downplaying of the strategic role of urban spaces as sites where the re-articulation of citizenship, sovereignty, and space materially occurs. Indeed, in the book, cities are mainly addressed as points of condensation of multiple trajectories. Yet, the relevance of the events, struggle and social reproduction occurring inside the situated spaces of the city, and their role in exerting a transformational power and disarticulating internal borders is downplayed as a result of the nevertheless declared prioritization of border as the strategic analytical thread.

According to these analytical lines, the second part of the book is concerned with inquiring the product of the constitution of border as method, and the turbulence of migration, onto three main trajectories: definition of spatiotemporal geographies; sovereignty; subjectivity. The first trajectory is explored mainly in chapters five and seven, that condensates the reflection about the intersection between borderscapes, governmentality and mobility operations shaped by the just-in-time, to-the point capitalist trajectories depicted in the previous chapters. The fluid, multi-scalar ‘emerging spatiality of globalization’ (p. 210) that the authors configure is indeed the outcome of the “asymmetrical and asynchronous interaction of sovereignty and governmentality in the wide transcontinental spaces” across the globe (p. 214). As such, it is mapped according to points of reference such as the detention camps, bor-

ders, even extra-territorial waters that, far from being the ‘peripheral’ ending of the mapped lands, become the center of post-developmental, fragmented geographies made of corridors, contested lands and points of rupture. From the latter, both autonomous movements and the border logic branch, and pour into the proliferation of internal borders and devices of differential inclusion that shape the everyday experiences of movement and settlement of migrants through an extended (and potential never-ending) spatiotemporal span.

The second trajectory about the constitution of contemporary sovereignty is comprehensively addressed within chapter six, although it flows as a subtext throughout the book. Once again, the situated standpoint of the contested borderscapes becomes a lens for observing how “concepts such as governance, governmentality, and governmental regime, once they are critically understood, allow us to grasp some of the crucial political transformations that are connected to the global processes that crystallize on the border” (p. 176). In developing these reflections, the authors broadly draw upon the Foucauldian theoretical repertoire for describing, on the one hand, the operating of border management through disparate governmental assemblages that present a panoply of dissonant discursive registers, practices and agendas. On the other hand, Mezzadra and Neilson point out that borders and borderscapes epitomize the role of ‘traditional’ forms of sovereignty that, far from being consumed as Negri and Hardt’s formulation of the *Empire* (2000) implied, represent “a necessary supplement for governance, particularly in cases when the latter fails to reproduce the framing of its operations, for instance, through appeals to humanitarianism” (p. 169).

The authors describe the inherently biopolitical nature of the vast array of biometric devices, information technologies marshalled to managed borders, as well as of the discursive and material devices through which the rhetoric registers about universal rights and humanitarianism is articulated. The latter aspect is what bridges the discussion about sovereignty with the theme of the configurations of subjectivities emerging in the contemporary borderscapes, as streamlined throughout the second part of the book and more specifically in chapter eight. It is exactly within this analysis that we can locate one of the more generative contributions of the book, which is the notion of differential inclusion. The latter aims at overcoming the prevailing emphasis of critical studies of borders and migration on “the moment and technologies of exclusion as the decisive elements of differentiation and power relations” (p. 159). To this purpose, it traces genealogically and theoretically the constitution of the ‘migrant’ figure from the experience of bordering institutions (such as checkpoints and detention camps) towards the



prolonged (and possibly never fully accomplished) experience of settling. As Mezzadra and Neilson phrase it, the

focus on what we call processes of differential inclusion entails a conviction that the figures who inhabit the world's borderscapes are not marginal subjects that subsist on the edges of society but central protagonists in the drama of composing the space, time and materiality of the social itself (p. 159).

Therefore, differential inclusion captures the uneven temporality of the condition of migration and the enforcement of differential regimes of exclusion, mobility, and exploitation, while debunking two misleading 'myth' in relation to the migrant subjectivity. Firstly, it deconstructs the assumption of the 'migrant' subjectivity as an homogeneous and smooth one, whereas it points out the differential paths of mobility experienced by people within the contemporary regimes of border management that value, accelerate and direct differently movement according to the 'migrants' diverse labor force, understood in the Marxian notion of the overall human characteristics (as the examples of the points-based visa systems such as the Australian one, or the contemporary 'selection' of deserving refugees portray). Secondly and consequently, it overturns the misleading 'myth' of total exclusion which depicts migrants as victims of annihilating coercion who are deprived of any right, agency, and voice. The latter aspect is particularly generative not only for the theoretical reflections it bears but also for the political implications as for the conceiving and thinking of solidarity practices within contemporary social movements.

Indeed, these critique of citizenship in relation to the 'legal' logic and the discursive register of rights is particularly poignant in respect to citizenship as a viable political demand in the light of the contemporary debates about *ius soli and ius sanguinis*, citizenship, 'multiculturalism' and 'assimilation' as outcomes of a 'successful' migratory trajectory. Hence, the authors' discussion fits organically within the debate about the political constitution of the political, citizenship, rights and their insurgent practice threaded by Engin Isin's *Acts of citizenship* (2008), or by Ethienne Balibar (2007) accounts' of the *banlieusards* condition underpinning the revolt in banlieues defined as "border areas and frontlines" (p. 48). Besides, it is actually one analytical part in which the strategic dimension of cityness comes into play in quite compelling terms. For instance, Mezzadra and Neilson point out the role played by the security-oriented policies and anti-terrorism enforcement as a way of territorialising borders inside the urban

spaces, while establishing “multiplied lines of division and partition within and between communities and territories” (p. 153).

Pulling up the diverse theoretical strings elaborated in the book, the last chapter investigates the connection between the border and the common. Being the more overtly political chapter of the book, it investigates and pluralizes the commons as a collective process that pertains the materiality of the “social, juridical and political matters” (p. 278) in relation to the border. Indeed, extending their ‘usual’ meaning, they are configured as a counterpart to the biopolitical primitive accumulation exerted by capitalism on the bodies of the people on the move. Yet, the gap between theory and the material constitutions of the commons as tools and product of territorialized struggles for the Common remains mainly in the background. This is due to the fact that the commons are mainly theoretically partitioned than politically investigated in relation to their potentialities for developing alternative forms of social reproduction and fostering autonomous solidarity, settlement, and mobility, as authors like Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013) would later propose by formulating the radically open notion of ‘mobile commons’.

In conclusion, *Border as method* can be considered as an ambitious archive of references, theories, and original concepts. As such, it represents a generative toolbox from which drawing plenty of analytical frameworks for interpreting current movements and border regimes beyond the distorting lenses of emergency and contingencies that migrant, social movements and even scholars are inevitably confronted within our convoluted contemporariness.

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# BORDERS AND PRODUCTION OF SUBJECTIVITY: FOR A POLICY OF TRANSLATION

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## 1. Global space and border proliferation

The temporal distance that separates us from the publication *Borders as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*, written by Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2013)<sup>1</sup>, allows us to test and carry out an initial verification of some of its main thesis. Since its actual publication, some tendencies of the theoretical and political debate about globalization have increased in response to some events taken as turning points, or even a radical change of paradigm. We can start by looking at some events following the publication of the book so far, in no particular order: the “refugee crisis” of summer 2015, with important repercussions on border policies and with the subsequent containment agreement with Erdogan’s Turkey; the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States; the rise in Europe of extreme right-wing and nationalist movements, widely represented in the East in the so-called Visegrad area, but threateningly growing everywhere; Brexit with its complex separation of the UK from the EU which is still underway. This panorama has partly changed the scenario within which the book was written; but, in my opinion, it makes the impact of the basic argumentation even clearer, and more urgent the deepening of the theoretical and political research lines, that it opens.

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1. The volume has an Italian translation by G. Roggero: Mezzadra e Neilson (2014), *Confini e frontiere. La moltiplicazione del lavoro nel mondo globale*.

This series of events that has invested us has produced different interpretations that have as a common denominator the idea that the process of globalization has been interrupted. On the contrary, we have explicitly read this phase as the opening of an overall cycle of de-globalization. The construction of a single global space, as we have imagined it in many theoretical constructions that characterized the nineties, would have been interrupted, leaving space primarily for a resurrection of places and a reappearance on the scene of the centrality of the national states, or at least some of them. Reading this text by Mezzadra and Neilson a few years on, now seems to underline the strength of the fundamental theses of the book precisely in responding to the reconstruction of our present in linear terms of deglobalization or “return to national states”<sup>2</sup>. This is not because everything is the same as before and we must not even counter the profound discontinuities that have occurred in recent years in the development of the crisis and its consequences. The point, however, is that the tools, the vocabulary, the background hypotheses put here at work are such that they allow us to read these discontinuities, without having to resort to hypotheses, which would certainly be reassuring like all those basically founded on some “home return”, but unable to grasp the complexity of the lines around which the global space is decomposing and recomposing itself on multiple and diversified levels.

After all, Mezzadra and Neilson clearly explain their distance from the theses on the “end of globalization”, and, what is more, they reject the readings that intend to declassify the process of globalization. The point, however, that reinforces their thesis, and perhaps makes it even more convincing now, is that the reading of globalization is not offered in terms of creating a *smooth* space, which reduces or eliminates faults and areas of fracture. The centrality of the theme of a border is instead taken precisely to offer a reading of globalization that does not declassify it as ideological narration, but at the same time inserts the production of different areas and a composite geography within the same construction of global spaces. Therefore, no smooth spaces but rather a reading of the process of globalization that insists not only on the elimination of borders, but on their *proliferation* and *heterogenization*. Proliferation because the boundaries multiply, reorganizing and radically re-articulating the spaces; heterogeneity because the boundaries take different forms and functions. The authors rightly recall Saskia Sassen, and her idea of an “actual and heuristic disaggregation of the border” (Sassen, 2007, p. 214; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 3), extending her idea of a disarticulation through

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2. For example, among the many possible references on the point, he supports, even if very problematically, the hypothesis of a deglobalization (Esposito, 2017).

the global space of the various “assemblages” that had been unified in the form of the modern state. In the first place, therefore, we are faced with –how literature blossoming around *border studies* has highlighted (Prescott, 1987)– a differentiation between various types of boundaries, even beyond the known distinction between boundary and border: between the geometric line, of invention of modernity, which divides the political state spaces, and the strip of land, mobile and not well-defined, inseparable from the movements of colonial expansion. Secondly, even beyond this boundary-border alternative, and the multiplication of other types of separating lines, walls, controlled crossings, etc., the authors criticize the prevalence of the traditional function of *exclusion* that the border would cover: exclusion, on the other hand, is increasingly graduated and modulated in different forms of control and selection, giving rise to a complex function of excluding inclusion (and of respective including exclusion) (p. 7). The fundamental consequence of this process of proliferation and of the transformation of borders is that their multiplication does not coincide with the strengthening of the political geometries centered on the modern state at all. The multiplication of borders denies any interpretation of globalization as the production of a smooth and continuous space. Globalization multiplies and differentiates spaces, and produces new modes of connection and separation, very different from the traditional borders of states. Precisely for this reason, interpretations that read globalization itself as mere ideology are completely inadequate and off-putting, organizing themselves to celebrate unlikely returns of the nation-state (p. 3).

## 2. The border as a method

In a more general manner, this insistence on boundary heterogeneity/proliferation is used by Mezzadra and Neilson to criticize the prevalence of the geopolitical image of the world –and the method of analysis that binds to that image– that the speeches instead tend to reaffirm the reaffirmation of the centrality of the state. For the same reason, the authors are skeptical about the real critical capacity produced by the *areas studiese* to explain adequately of their proliferation. It is certainly true that in post-state geographies, the organization of space in large continental areas emerges as a process of absolute importance: instead what must be criticized is the unrelated and static image, which is offered in these re-articulation processes when an exclusively geopolitical reading prevails. In fact, this reading ends up, on the one hand, hiding the mutual trans-

formations and the transits that make it possible, but at the same time complicate and continually put the same production of continental or sub-continental areas into crisis; on the other hand, it hides the subjective elements of mobility, autonomy, conflict that occur continuously through and around the borders that rearrange these global spaces.

Assuming the boundary not only as an object but as a method instead aims to overcome the risks deriving from the objectification of global spaces, produced by traditional geopolitical analysis. Assuming the border as a point of observation of transformations and of conflicts, involves overcoming a static –and almost “fetishistic”– reading of the border itself, opening the analysis to the processes through which the boundaries are continually created and transformed. Border means *production*: for the authors, this assumption is so central to play not only a methodological role but rather that of a real, explicit and claimed ontological background. The borders are at the same time *produced*, because it is the whole image of the world that is always a collective production: it is the idea, of which the authors rightly and forcefully recall a Renaissance and humanistic genealogy, of *fabrica mundi* (p. 30). Modernity tends to “freeze”, to transform into a simple epistemological operation of tracking and projection of boundaries on the map, a work of creation and production of the world whose boundaries are an instrument and in which borders are always involved. Reactivating this productive ontology, against an objectified and pacified image of the border, means reopening the production processes behind the tracing/creation of the border.

Second element: considering the border as production also implies the assumption of the full methodological relevance of *subjectivity* in the study of the production of global spaces and their relationships. On the one hand, there is no boundary that does not profoundly affect the construction of subjectivities: the border as a production is also, to put it in Foucault’s terms, a *dispositif* of the production of subjectivity. On the other hand, the movements and transformations of subjectivities, the conflicts they give rise to, actively produce the boundary and continually modify it. There is no global geography that is structured if not starting from the struggles, from the mobility, from the push of the subjects that cross it. The lesson from Italian operaism is evident and declared here, or more precisely its method is, and we are talking about Italian workerism: capital appears to the working class as “subject” only in the political confrontation; a clash in which at the same time the transformation of the working class, sociologically understood, into the political subject of the proletariat (Tronti, 2006). First the struggles, then the development, the operaism said. First the struggles, then the border and its spatializations, affirms the “boundary as a method”. However, with a necessary and



evident gap, with respect to the tradition of the first operaism: while, despite the complexity of the class composition and its continuous transformations, the first operaism maintained the idea of the centrality of a subject that is ultimately homogeneous, here everything the movement of subjectivities is always marked by unsurpassable heterogeneity. A heterogeneity that corresponds to the heterogenization of the boundaries and spatial dimensions produced by global processes (pp. 84-85).

### 3. The multiplication of work

The productive ontology involved in the assumption of the *fabrica mundi* requires the reconstruction of the new global spaces not to be disengaged, as well as their profound dissymmetry with respect to classical geographies, by close comparison with the laboratories of production in a specific sense, that is with the transformations of the capital and labor. The boundary as a method, precisely because it brings together the idea of productivity of spaces with that of the production of subjectivity, becomes the key to a survey inspired by the decisive option for a *geographical materialism*. In a double sense: both because the production of space is itself an essential element of the new production systems, and because the processes of production of spaces are materially implanted in the transformation of the labor-power. As the boundary is at the same time a *dispositif* for the production of subjectivity, and produced by the struggles and the mobility of subjectivities, so the relationship between the articulation of spaces and the workforce continuously crosses the spatial element with the processes of constitution and transformation of the work and subjectivity of the class. The metaphor of flows, which dominates – and also for good reasons – the debate on global capitalism, is thus not rejected, but at least outlined and relativized: space is inserted into the materiality of the management/control of flows, characterizing itself as one of the determining actors in the construction of new scales and new hierarchies that at the same time allow capitalist valorization and are continually formulated and recreated by the valorization itself (pp. 209-211). While not constituting a smooth space, nor a management of flows without faults arrests or blocks, as the hydraulic metaphors are likely to make sense, the boundary geography, within which the processes of contemporary capitalist valorization are built, does not coincide with the geography of political boundaries State actors. Neither do Mezzadra and Neilson insist the boundary geography can be rearticulated according to homogeneous areas, but rather cross the classical distinctions, develop-

ment and underdevelopment, metropolis and province, industrial areas and agricultural areas, opening them all and diversifying *within them*, to reconnect them according to codes that do not use the traditional rigid categories.

The image of the construction of the world market offered by Karl Marx, even if it is not enough to explain the ways in which today's global plan is articulated, the proliferation of spatial differences and heterogeneity of the subjective figures of labor is summoned by the authors because it allows us to read the actual coexistence of these plans very well. At the same time, we have on the one hand an effective constitution of the global dimension (interpretations of which in terms of deglobalization and return of the national state cannot be grasped), which produces a plan of abstraction capable of connecting special areas and unique processes of reterritorialization and/or re-spatialization; on the other hand, a production of "concrete" differences, a series of heterogeneous operations constituting the processes of valorization, different ways and spaces in which the "abstraction" touches the ground and allows the extraction of value (pp. 67-69). This reading allows the authors to develop an important and very useful critique of positions that, on the contrary, tend to lead to rigidly new categories and to net polarizations this complex and dynamic relationship between the abstraction of the value and the heterogeneity of the singular devices of value extraction and of subjectivities. Speaking of multiplication of labor, in other words, serves to take a critical distance from the theories focused on the "new international division of labor", as well as from the repetition of interpretations in terms of traditional imperialism or uneven development. These readings all end up moving within a binary logic based on a rigid opposition between an inside and an outside, between a high-tech center and productivity and a periphery with a very high rate of exploitation and a low-cost work tank. Just as in the classical theories of imperialism, a close homology between political spaces and productive spaces, between state borders and lines of capitalist valorization. But it is precisely the maintenance of this homology that seems impossible today: frontiers of capital and national borders, but also devices for capturing the value and multiplication of the work figures, chains of valorization and movements of real work, can no longer be grasped within homologies or logic of mutual mirroring (pp. 82-84).

It is clear, even in Marx, the power of abstraction, the soul of the construction of the global market, was reflected in the political construction of a subject made homogeneous by the abstractive and homogenizing force of capital. The logic of global capital certainly preserves Marxian tension between abstraction and progressive socialization of living labor. But, as Mezzadra and Neilson underline, incorporating here the main

results of the analyzes in terms of cognitive and post-Fordist transformation of contemporary capitalism<sup>3</sup>, the productive socialization that occurs along the global cognitive networks works as an assemblage and connection of differences; therefore, maintains the heterogeneity of the subjects as a constitutive element of the productive labor force, even in the powerful process of socialization that cognitive production allows (pp. 137-138). Contemporary capital works by producing differences and at the same time it values an extremely socialized labor force, which lives along the networks of cognitive production, and which concretizes the perspective that Deleuze and Guattari (1980) drew, in the abstract, in the machinic assemblages and in the stratifications of a *Mille plateaux*. And precisely from the lexicon of Deleuze and Guattari, Mezzadra and Neilson draw the concept of “axiomatic of capital”: the “axiomatic” produces abstraction through the connection of differences without homogenizing synthesis, but rather proceeding by disjunctive synthesis, for assemblages that do not eliminate the constitutive heterogeneity (pp. 81-86). The border as a method, and its play of proliferations, differences, and connections, thus gives us a whole political passage that does not have the classical form it assumed in the Marxist tradition. The abstraction of capital continues to occur on a global level, but there is no automatic transition between the construction of the global market today, and the production of a transnational proletariat. The “Unite!” of the *Communist Manifesto* must necessarily be *translated* into the constitutive heterogeneity of living labor.

#### 4. Images of politics: articulation against translation

The border as a method gives us a continuous extension of the spaces invested by capitalism, together with a complex map of intensification and set of transformation of the methods of exploitation of labor. At the same time, this plan is constantly crossed by multiple and heterogeneous figures, whose struggles and mobility contribute to continuously change the same economic geographies and codes of value extraction. The challenge of political thought, but also of the political practices of those who resist the logic of exploitation and those who struggle around and across borders, is how to think the logic of the political subjectivation emerging from these productive transformations. The production of political subjectivity is now all immersed in the spaces and

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3. See for a wider debate Hardt and Negri (1994, 2000); Moulier Boutang (2007); Vercellone (Eds.) (2006); Marazzi (1999); Fumagalli & Mezzadra (Eds.) (2007).

production chains of the global market: in a production of value that is simultaneously production of subjectivity, no abstract transcendence of political subjectivity is imaginable with respect to the spaces and times of the production of value. Politics can only be –we could synthesize– a politics *of* production, never politics abstractly intended as a restoration of the Political *on* production. In other words: the border as a method does not give room for resurrections of the autonomy of the Political. Moreover, the traditional pivot of the autonomy of “modern” Politics is lacking, which is the centrality of the national state: which, if observed by the proliferation of borders, certainly does not disappear or is liquidated, but in any case sees its functions completely transformed and it constitutes only one of the points (of passage, of selection or of conflict) of the control of the workforce.

The political hypotheses of articulation of differences, which in recent years have been presented as a hypothesis of reconstruction of the political subject, or directly of political reconstruction of a “people”, are effectively criticized by Mezzadra and Neilson, from the point of view of the assumption of the border as a method. Options like the populist *à la Laclau* start from a radical assumption of the end of homogeneity and of the homology between social space and political space, and take radically the heterogeneity as a starting point (Laclau, 2005). But then they convert that heterogeneity into a construction of the universal which provides for the incorporation of an absolute difference, which differs from any other difference, re-establishes a binary logic of inclusion/exclusion and with it a perfect logic of equivalence. A *transcendental* moment is thus restored, which, from a more strictly political point of view, always forces the projection of a shadow of national statehood and its geography on these projects of reconstruction of the people through a hegemonic articulation, making every principle fail from the beginning serious attempt to confront the complex global plan on which financial accumulation is based. Moreover, this logic forces to treat differences to “articulate” always as political demands to be satisfied, always grasped in a regime of constitutive lack, and incapable of producing new political forms. The struggles, for the populist hypothesis, are always particular, and overcome their horizon of particularity only through the transcendental articulation, which capture them in a model of equivalence (pp. 285-288). It is obvious the unrealism of these reductive operations in a neoliberalism that does not act within the simplified border logic of national states, and that has ample capacity to anticipate and transform social demands, to treat them in a much more dynamic way than these projects of hegemonic articulation they manage to put in the field. Against this idea of hegemonic articulation, the hypothesis that

the volume traces is that of a political connection of the subjectivities that play instead of the *translation* card, to be understood not only in the strictly linguistic sense but to fall within the ontological productive background of the *fabrica mundi*. To translate means to experiment a *lingua franca* that connects the singularities in a production of the common, without reproducing the model of abstract universality, which is rebuilt through the exclusion of an absolute difference, just as it returns to make the model of the hegemonic articulation.

By designing this model of translation of political subjectivities, Mezzadra and Neilson evidently proceed by experimentation and approximation: translation, in their sense, does not and cannot be a normative model for designing an ideal scheme of political organization. However, this is a way of thinking for concatenations and assemblages, rather than equivalence and absolute difference, which has the merit of not reducing political subjectivities to abstract *demands to satisfy* political subjectivities, but to always grasp them as “subjects in transit” and in transformation (p. 289). The authors try to maintain the reference to the production of subjectivity, which has as in the whole book: both in the sense –subjective genitive– to reiterate that subjectivities are always characterized by autonomy and mobility, both in that –objective genitive– for the which subjectivities are always also the product of devices that try to govern and capture that mobility, to make capitalist valorization possible.

Production of subjectivity, in these two senses, is precisely the labor power, in its Marxian meaning of *potentiality*: a potentiality that runs through the whole field of *governance* animated by different and conflicting regulatory regimes<sup>4</sup>. Investigated, however, from the point of view of the production of subjectivity and the labor power, *governance* changes sign, and this is perhaps the theoretical contribution that constitutes the fundamental core of the book: it no longer describes a linear passage from the traditional modes of government, and in particular from state sovereignty, to horizontal and reticular governance techniques, but it opens on a politically crucial tension, within the proliferation and the differentiation of borders, between mobility and capture; or, better, “a line of conflict drawn from the alternative of the capture of life’s potentiality and its appropriation as a common basis for a multiplicity of exit and escape strategies” (p. 204).

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4. The authors here open a productive comparison with theories of the postsystemic law (Fischer-Lescano & Teubner, 2006). It would lead to very interesting results comparing the theory of legal globalization as conflictive normative pluralism and difficult to contain in an orderly key, crossed by the permanence of a concept of sovereignty, completely transformed to modern tradition (Catania, 2008).

The production of subjectivity, the potential that is the heart of the labor power, with its characteristics of plasticity and mobility, produces the transformation of the ancient “sovereign” and unitary government into a multiplicity of regulatory, autonomous and often conflicting regimes; at the same time, it inserts a continuous necessary recourse to a supplement of power, to a presupposition in its own way still “sovereign” (even if far removed from the characteristics of unity and transcendence of classical modern sovereignty), which exceeds the framework of simple neoliberal rationality and of its multiple governance and/or governmental operations. The authors speak of the *sovereign machine of governmentality* (p. 175) to indicate these “sovereign effects” (p. 203), through which global capital intervenes to reassign those devices of value extraction that the production of subjectivity equally continually challenges. In this field, which cannot be depicted neither as a space for neoliberal *governance*<sup>5</sup> and rationality, nor on the contrary as a permanent exception *à la Agamben* (Agamben, 2005), struggles across borders continually redefine subjectivity, criticising the traditional political subject, neither communitarian/organicist, or “transcendentally” rebuilt. At the same time, “transcendentally”, but at the same time they experience the production of a *common* that assembles and connects the differences: inside and against the machine of capitalist exploitation that is both governmental and sovereign of capitalist exploitation and inside and against the logic of domination of class, race and gender that constitute the modalities of operations of capital, certainly heterogeneous but not in any way less ferocious.

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# INTEGRATION, LOGISTICAL COMPLEXITY, TIME, AND SOME HINTS ON THE POLITICAL PRESENT

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In the pages that follow I will address the topic of this special issue, ‘inclusions’, moving from some insights that I draw from *Border as Method* as well as my work on the politics of logistics. In its basic terms inclusion refers to the act of making a part of a structure or a group and, from the Latin word *includere*, to confine. In geology, this is expressed in clear terms as inclusion means a body of distinct composition embedded in rocks or other materials. This concept has been widely associated with the history and trajectories of the nation-state and modern citizenship. The concept of differential inclusion adopted by Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) in *Border as Method* grasps in this sense the “varying degrees of subordination, rule, discrimination, and segmentation” (p. 159) that correspond to the fickle spheres of contemporary politics. As they argue, financialization of capital and the coordination of production across global assembly chains has not only unbalanced the relationship between labor, time, borders and production, but also fostered the formation of heterogeneous political spaces. Drawing from anthropologist Anna Tsing’s works on ‘supply chain capitalism’ they review different “emerging spatialities of globalization” paying attention to “the logistical operations that make its production possible” and “the bordering processes that channel practices of mobility and attempt to discipline working lives” (p. 210). The changes in the relationship between labor, time, borders, and the production of value that characterize contemporary capitalism, they write, “become particularly visible in the workings of transnational labor systems that establish new kind of spatial connection and temporal control” (p. 136).

With *Border as Method* and their further interventions, Mezzadra and Neilson form part of a series of scholars that see logistics as a force that transforms time, space, and territory recasting jurisdiction beyond the realm of transportation and distribution. This scholarship has illustrated how infrastructural spaces are sites where forms of polity are created at a pace that overcomes the dimension of the state and the regulatory capacity of governance (Cowen, 2014; Easterling, 2014). These processes are ignited by a logistical power that challenges both theories of centralized sovereignty and theories of dispersed governmentality and, as I discuss more in length elsewhere, has the capacity “to articulate the apparent contradiction between the strategic dimension of command and a dynamic of mobile and flexible power, open to changes and based on equivalences among differences and abstraction through parameters” (Grappi, 2016, p. 70; Neilson, 2012). The kind of dynamics associated with logistics shows the deconstruction of discrete entities and a situation where practices of confinement corresponds to the direct participation in interconnected networks of production, communication, and transaction. While citizenship and nationality play a role in the definition of the conditions of this participation, however, if we turn our gaze in the direction of “the emergence of a political world beyond the nation-state” the very concept of inclusion takes different shapes (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 166).

A useful exercise in this regard is to think together inclusion and integration, two concepts that often overlap and lose a clear meaning in public discourses and in the practices of governances. While inclusion implies to make something or someone part of something else, integration refers to the act of combining or mixing different parts so that they work together. Inclusion and integration are thus intertwined but different logics, and they help to shed light on different processes. The operational dimension of integration, with its accent over processes of clustering and interlinking rather than the participation in a pre-existent entity, is more apt to grasp the nature of the social interlinks produced by global forms of power such as logistics, where what is generalized is the entanglement of different realms while the promise of inclusion vanishes.

One way to briefly illustrate this point is by considering how logistics fosters integration through the formation of geographically concentrated ‘logistics clusters’ (Sheffi, 2012). The formation of these new areas that host transport services, warehouses, ITC networks, and intermodal facilities is often associated with activities that need to be performed locally and cannot be offshored, such as delivery and distribution. However, these conglomerates where factories, services and infrastructure merge are the result of

the very process of dissemination of production brought about by the logistics revolution. Even the specialist literature is indeed very clear in maintaining that globalization and better communications led to increased ‘geographical clustering’ of economic activities and increased the relative unevenness among different areas (Nordås, Pinali, Geloso & Grosso, 2006, p. 6). Forgetting to consider the global dimension of capital and the world market, these ‘post developmental geographies’ have been often improperly described as deindustrialization (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 205).

These spatial fixes of contemporary capitalism are embodied by multiple and heterogeneous temporalities, while, drawing from Marx’s insights on the formation of the world market, it is acknowledged the aim of logistics to ‘annihilate space by time’ in what David Harvey (1989) has dubbed ‘time-space compression’. This perspective stresses peculiar dimensions of logistics, which are the speeding up of the pace of production and the uneven synchronization of the diversity of conditions encountered across the globe. Logistics reduce time complexity into measurable elements, abstracted from social and political dimensions, that can be processed by algorithms and represented into performance charts to develop and implement chronological dimensions of schedule, organization, and evaluation (Dawson, 2014, p. 302). In asking what kind of political quality we can identify in these tempos of logistics, my interest is to enquire on the kind of social relations they embody beyond the realm of transportation and the dimension of management.

Logistical integration fosters the conception, derived from quantum mechanics theories of change, that time must be considered as “part of performative being” among entangled and mutually constituted parts. Otherwise, said the degree of integration of processes inside interlinked networks that defines logistical complexity changes the quality of time and its parameters. Suffice to consider the pervasiveness of the just in time principle. From a strategy to reduce at minimum inventories, just in time has become an “overall organizational phenomenon” that spills over the shop floor imposing targets and discipline and redefines social relations around strategic “infrastructure practices” (Sakakibara, 1997, p. 1246).

Just in time implies coordination, and the greater a process logistical complexity, the more phases and operations are involved and thus the greater the number of relations and the amount of information which are needed to make it successful (Funk, 1995, p. 67). Time thus becomes a critical junction between the “interconnectedness and unpredictability of the system” and contingency, as the latter implies the need to adapt to the environment (Thomé, Soucasaux & do Carmo, 2014, p. 680). The more a

system is complex the more is enmeshed in a diversity of factors. But while technical literature renounces the role and presence of social relations, a critical and extended vision of complexity and contingency must recognize that they reflect the different political conditions that logistical processes encounter and help to reshape along their operations. This has direct political implications if we consider how the relevance of borders and administrative practices is tremendously increased by the level of complexity and integration of transnational regimes of production, communication and labor; and how they can produce dead times not as much because they affect the speed of the process, an element always under the spotlight, but because their political dimension may result in “continued lack of predictability” (Nordås, Pinali, Geloso & Grosso, 2006, p. 16).

If hard infrastructure and machines can be considered parameters of technical speed, the growing recognition of the role of ‘soft infrastructure’ of multilateral governance in the formation of logistical corridors reveals the difference between time compression and the quality of time that is built in predictability and reliability. Hard infrastructure remains just dead capital without the soft infrastructures that allow them to work. These dimensions made the core of a global reconfiguration that I describe as the politics of corridors (Grappi, 2018). The focus on compression is indeed a matter of speed and connection and highlights the shortening of time among different spaces. But what if this is just one side of the coin and implies other features of time that remain behind the veil? Transience and mobility of flows are in fact a social effect both of logistical complexity and just in time processes, and of the fixity of infrastructure spaces where logistics is anchored. Besides being a measure that makes logistical integration possible, the logistical time contains a dose of perennial transit: transitory solutions are offered for problems that are perceived in technical terms as contingent, transitory and temporary. But behind this façade of transience logistics is rooted in trajectories of planning and multi decennial projects for building infrastructures, extract natural resources and organize industrial conversion at a large scale.

This reveals the paradoxical dimension of logistical time as both transient and lasting, and its internal tension between continuous change and the search for stability. While contingency is the technical nightmare of logistics, logistical power creates contingencies translating any different time in something that can be processed in its own terms: it relegates to the short term any situation perceived as disturbing and forces other times to present themselves as temporary questions. The managerial principle of just in time is thus translated into a political just in time where any

question is considered a limited one, an obstacle to overcome, a problem to solve. When the pervasiveness of logistics has invaded the realm of production and takes the form of a global political discourse this produces deep political consequences as it fosters the de-politicization of constitutional elements of our present, ruling out the possibility of radical transformation (Grappi, 2016, 2018). Nothing as the principle of supply chain resilience, which considers anything from a natural event, an armed conflict or a strike as interruptions that need to be confronted through re-routing and contingency plans, encapsulates better this principle.

The relation of logistics with contingency is thus binary: while in the name of continuous improvement glitches, differences and even conflicts are not just obstacles, but parameters to feed algorithmic calculations and data extraction to produce value, these are treated by logistics as transient as they reveal its incapacity to form a stable order. We can, therefore, infer why logistics simultaneously weakens and reinforces the state, as it overcomes its capacity of control but needs a supplement of violence and continuity to execute its plans. We can track this interlink between logistics and the state in the global consensus that sees together policymakers and investors around the renovated consideration given to infrastructure and the access to global networks of production that goes together with the apparent return of authoritarian forms of government.

The relevance of these questions is further manifested by the Chinese ‘Belt and Road Initiative’, often referred to as the New Silk Road. While the strategy responds to specific Chinese goals, in fact, it also marks a shift in international relations where integration and the priorities of logistical complexity are for the first time explicitly posed as the basis for a geopolitical strategy (Neilson, Rossiter & Samaddar, 2018). The success of the Belt and Road Initiative in reshaping global dynamics shows the paradox of a logistical time that roots its mobile connectivity on stable and predictable plans. As a recent column in the Italian edition of *China Newsweek* explains, indeed, “notwithstanding there is who criticize the Chinese political system, democratic countries cannot establish plans of thirty or even fifty years” as the Belt and Road (Lanbo, 2017, p. 4). We know that this is only partially true and efforts are made everywhere to direct new forms of planning in different time tracks from the unpredictability of politics.

In this intervention, I discussed how logistics changes the coordinates of space and time of contemporary politics. Fostering practices of geographical clustering that corresponds to the direct participation in transnational networks of production and transaction logistical power generalizes the operational dimension of integration, while the

promise of inclusion vanishes. Contingencies and the complexity of global regimes of production, communication, and labor, as well as the emergence of 'soft infrastructure' such as transnational corridors, mutates the relevance of borders, administrative practices and states with direct implications for a critique of contemporary capitalism and forms of power.

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