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Border struggles and the fabrication of the world

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There is a profound ambivalence in Mezzadra and Neilson's *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*. Like many before them, the authors draw attention to the injustices and violence of borders and borderings (e.g. Jones, 2012; Mountz, 2010; Popescu, 2012). However, throughout the book, attention is frequently drawn to the production of subjectivity by those borders, the world(s) produced by them, and the political potential of thinking the subject and world-making together. Borders, then, are a necessary aspect of the social world, but ones that provide key sites of struggle in the very making of that world. Addressing this ambivalence is not a criticism; it is an extraordinary strength of this book, a measure of the ways in which it critically intervenes in and overturns the typical pathos that pervades contemporary discussions of migration and borders.

Given the breadth and depth of the arguments presented by the authors, it is impossible to address the scope of this book in full. Sandro Mezzadra, a

professor of political theory at the University of Bologna, Italy, and Brett Neilson, a professor at the Institute for Culture and Society in the University of Western Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, expound nine chapters, ranging from an overview of the changing function and location of international borders to a discussion of the development of cartography, the international division of labor, the temporal aspects of bordering, political theories of governance, the figure of the citizen-worker, and, finally, the 'new salience' (p. 277) of the struggles to produce the common. The result is a dense but agenda-setting text that is clearly the result of a long collaboration and which provides a novel theoretical framework and ample avenues for further development in a number of fields, including geography and political theory.

Among the many theoretical concepts and empirical discussions that appear in the book, there are three concepts that stand out, which serve as theoretical foci for the book: border as method, differential inclusion, and translation.

The layered meanings embedded in the concept *border as method* make it a useful intervention in debates within border studies. Stressing the ontological presence and force of borders as well as their epistemological effects, the authors engage with

fabrica mundi, or the fabrication of worlds, an expression they borrow from Renaissance philosophers Pico della Mirandola and Giordano Bruno. A pivotal aspect of this discussion, which will be of specific interest to geographers, is the rereading of cartographic reason and the emergence of mapping as a practice. Specifically, the authors discuss the role played by the new practices of mapping in colonial conquest and the appropriation of the commons. In this world-making sense, then, borders act, they are a *method* of producing the world, dividing it, ordering, and appropriating it. Border as method, however, is more than a mere descriptive project; indeed, the concept is less about describing contemporary bordering and more an attempt to open up spaces outside the practices of bordering and mapping 'in which a different imagination and production of the world becomes possible' (p. 36).

Before Mezzadra and Neilson can make this move to ideate a different imagination and production of the world, they attempt to stake out the significance of contemporary bordering practices by illustrating the ways in which the proliferation and heterogeneity of borders work today. Instead of the cartographic project of the mapping, conquest, and occupation of land—an *extensive* project—they identify new frontiers of capital and the multiplication of labor—*intensive* projects occurring after world or global markets are forced to turn inward upon themselves. The authors show how borders proliferate, constantly creating new spaces (frontiers) for capital to turn into markets or commodities and multiply labor. The multiplication of labor works through intensification, diversification, and heterogenization; intensification refers to the tendency of labor to 'colonize the entire life of laboring subjects' (p. 88); diversification, following Marx, refers to the ways in which capital is constantly expanding and creating new kinds of production, which then produce their own set of corresponding needs; and heterogenization refers to the fragmentation of legal and social regimes that organize labor. In these ways, labor is multiplied both numerically, through the opening up of new kinds of production, and in the sense of breaking down what has been the unified figure of the proletariat.

What is at work here is arguably an attempt to put to rest the debates within border studies about whether borders should be studied in their singularity (an ethnographic approach) or in their totality (a world systems or political economic approach). The authors follow Hardt and Negri (2000), among others, in declaring the commensurability of theoretical and ethnographic approaches. We can only understand a global regime or system by exploring the singular and heterogeneous operation of borders. However, this does not mean that we cannot identify a theory of borders: the theory works because it begins with heterogeneity and difference. Indeed, this is another way to describe Hardt and Negri's concept of *Empire*, a system that no longer takes the interior/exterior distinction as paradigmatic but instead externalizes all relations as modulations of difference. Mezzadra and Neilson's concept of frontiers of capital and multiplication of labor can be understood in light of *Empire*'s move to continually externalize markets and labor, a move related to the context of real subsumption (or the 'fullness' of the world in terms of territory and the mode of production). This constant externalization is necessary because as Hardt and Negri claim, there is no longer an outside. This is the intensive project of capital, and border as method is both a new descriptor for this project but also an opening onto the excesses produced by it; in other words, an opening to the production of subjectivity and resistance.

A second conceptual contribution made by Mezzadra and Neilson to understanding the relation of borders and subjectivities is a systematization of the concept of *differential inclusion*, a concept that is an essential mediating passage between the functioning of borders at the scales of state and capital and the subjects produced by and within those borderings: subjects that contest, reshape, rescale, and resist borders. Contrary to a great deal of border studies scholarship, the authors draw attention to the ways international borders, internal borders (such as race and gender), and temporal borders (a concept they draw out in Chapter 5) function not to exclude but to *include* in a hierarchized or differential manner. The authors are careful not to say that borders never exclude, especially in very localized contexts, as when a gated community keeps out a specific person.

Taken as a general tendency, though, borders work to include but not in the general liberal way of 'inclusion'. In fact, inclusion is fundamentally an ambiguous concept: for example, what does it mean to be included in relations of exploitation? Or as they note, how does inclusion serve 'as a means of discipline and control' (p. 159). Rather than simply produce an inside and an outside, borders—taken in their heterogeneity and proliferation—selectively filter, channel, funnel, slow down, speed up, and redirect migratory movements in ways that include them in economic spaces, markets, and most significantly, relations of exploitation.

The concept of differential inclusion thus allows Mezzadra and Neilson to do two things: first, it moves 'the figures who inhabit the world's borderscapes' (p. 159) from a position of marginality to the very center of the production of worldliness; second, it once again stresses the concept of border as method, in that borders serve as the connective tissue of a system of accumulation, capture, and exploitation that is masked if borders are thought primarily through walls or exclusion. These moves together make up what I take to be the core of *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*: a complete re-figuration of migration, at once more concrete than Hardt and Negri's multitude and largely autonomous from economic push/pull factors. Thus, migrants and border struggles constitute the central actors in 'the drama of composing the space, time, and materiality of the social itself' (p. 159).

Like much of the work that follows from the Italian autonomist or *operaist* tradition, Mezzadra and Neilson are very much concerned with the composition of living labor, discussed frequently in the book in terms of the various figures of migrant or precarious labor. They identify migration, labor, and border struggles 'as forms of social conflict that challenge capitalist ways of being' (p. 59), and in fact view them as conflicts that open up new spaces of struggle and identity, as forces that initiate their own *fabbrica mundi*. At stake for the authors is the problematic of the unity of labor; as they note, 'gone are the days . . . when it was possible to represent the experience of migrant labor as revolving around a single iconic figure' (p. 103). They highlight this problematic by pointing to two drastically different

figures of precarious labor: female care workers and financial traders. They are skeptical, then, of attempts to figure class composition through precarity or the precariat. Here, the concept of multiplication of labor points less to a form of capture than to the heterogenization of experience, posing a significant challenge to the long-standing project of uniting labor. Referring once again to Hardt and Negri, they seek to problematize the 'unity of the multitude' (p. 253).

Finally, the concern for migrant subjectivity culminates in a concept that Mezzadra and Neilson term *translation*, a project that provides a kind of unity in difference aimed at rekindling anticapitalist politics. Translation is not the mere act of taking one language and turning it into another; translation is nothing less than a social praxis that is forged from the ground up within political struggles. In this context, they employ a diverse array of references, including speaking patois, pirates, and worker cooperatives. Patois, as a kind of improvised language, is figured here as a language of resistance, a specific response arising in the Middle Passage of slaves from Africa to the Americas. Against a strategy in which slave owners and transporters tried to reduce the possibility of resistance by placing people of different language groups onto slave ships, the slaves developed modes of communication anyway (p. 275). Pirates also found ways to communicate across the linguistic differences of the 'motley crew'. These practices arise from living together and working together and highlight what translation might mean if politics is re-figured away from institution-building and toward common-building. If the former is a project in totalization, the latter is a project of articulating difference and a means of producing the common. Worker cooperatives, such as Mondragon in Spain or Zanon in Argentina, are another form of common-building, even if, as Mezzadra and Neilson note, 'it is unrealistic to view them as key organizations for overcoming capitalism' (p. 300), notably through the ways they are linked to market economies. Importantly, the authors do not dismiss such efforts, since they are 'the only grounds on which the common can be generated' (p. 300). Thus, the authors seek to articulate the concept of translation with the concept of the

common, for a politics of the common 'must extend beyond any rhetorical invocation of a world without borders' at the same time that it must 'renounce any attempt to turn the border into a justice-giving institution' (p. 281). Such a politics cannot be simply local; it must work across all scales, while avoiding the sometimes totalizing impulse of distinguishing 'genuinely' political projects from those that supposedly fail to meet those criteria.

In sum, Mezzadra and Neilson offer a work of great scope and ambition, the stakes of which are nothing less than the 'making of the world' (p. 310). This book decisively reframes debates in border studies and migration studies. For geography, the authors provide ample material for discussion and perhaps even grounds to transform some of the disciplinary articulations that define contemporary geopolitics. More importantly, this

is a book informed by contemporary struggles and will serve as a crucial text for activist scholars as border struggles continue to dominate the political landscape.

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Geography is not enough

Reviewed by: Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson,

We would like to start by thanking Ugo Rossi who took the initiative to organize this forum in *Dialogues in Human Geography*. We must add that we are very pleased that geographers are among the first to discuss *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*. We are not geographers, and our work on borders is not primarily conceived of as an intervention in the field of border studies. Linn Axelsson is right when she notes that many standard references in this field are absent in the 35 pages of our bibliography (although the essay by Newman and Paasi she mentions is duly listed in it). Nevertheless, the engagement with critical geographers has become more and more important for us in recent years and has helped us to make our work on borders more concrete and 'case-sensitive'. Moreover, we are convinced that the current 'spatial turmoil' underlying capitalist globalization requires a detailed account of the production of a global space that can no longer be conceptualized in terms of a 'smooth' space of flows. To identify the disruptions and

specific antagonisms at stake in these patterns of turbulence and variegation, there is need of new methods and conceptual frameworks. For us, this means taking difference and multiplicity as the irreducible starting point for any analysis. It is not a matter of setting sharp definitional parameters within which 'analytical clarity' can unfold but of grappling with ambiguities and instabilities that fundamentally unsettle the 'making of the world' today.

We are happy that Nathan Clough recognizes that we 'take geography seriously'. However, we do not believe that geography holds a disciplinary monopoly on the political study of space. In reality, *Border as Method* does something more than bringing a temporal perspective to the spatial analysis of borders, although this is crucial to the book's interest in 'seeing like a migrant'. By emphasizing the subjective stakes of what we call 'border struggles' we hope to provide a new frame for the analysis of capitalist globalization. Central to this is the distinction between political borders and 'frontiers of capital', which allows us to describe how the current proliferation of borders opens spaces that capital colonizes through primitive accumulation and other means of extraction. For us, the production of space