

*A Review: E. Peeren, H. Stuit, A. Van Weyenberg (eds.), "Peripheral Visions in The Globalizing Present. Space, Mobility, Aesthetics" (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016)*

by Elia Zaru

In 1980 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari published *Mille Plateaux*, in which they theorized the philosophical concept of the "rhizome". With such a notion, the two scholars aimed at breaking any hierarchical ontology. Instead of assuming a situated and territorialized point of view, they argued, the "rhizome" specifically allows the deterritorialization of being, and offers a peripheral vision of the world by excluding the existence of a defined centre. The "rhizome" contrasts what the two authors called an "arborescent" conception of knowledge, characterized by a precise hierarchic form. While in the former every point is necessarily related to each single other, the latter functions exactly by fixing a set of principal points which follow an exclusion principle. The "arborescent" scheme proceeds through dichotomy and hierarchy, and prevents the undesirable connections.

The perspective developed in the same years by the scholars of the "World-Systems theory" is completely different. Theorists such as Immanuel Wallerstein, André "Gunder" Frank, Samir Amin and Giovanni Arrighi were interested in explaining how capitalism functions (and has functioned) on a global level. Far from a "rhizomatic" approach, their analyses were purely "arborescent", as well as their view of the globe: the world has to be divided in core countries, semi-periphery countries and periphery countries. The differences between these two perspectives are clear.

The "core-periphery" model has always been a key issue for the analysis of global contemporaneity, both for its critics and its supporters. The worth of *Peripheral Visions in the Globalizing Present*, edited by Esther Peeren, Hanneke Stuit and Astrid Van Weyenberg specifically lies in the fact that it does not choose a side and excludes the other. Instead, it offers a third point of view, pointing out the necessity of overlapping the perspectives.



*Peripheral Visions* interrogates itself on the periphery from a peripheral point of view, declaring the existence of the periphery as such, but without binding it in a merely binary scheme.

But does it still make sense to speak of centres and peripheries? This is the key question raised by the book, in the very first opening sentence. Then, the thirteen chapters examine the meaning of the periphery and the peripheral, both on a theoretical and empirical level, and how the periphery relates to the centre. The answers to such questions can only be vague, for they lie in the contingency of the relationship between core and periphery which is, indeed, an unstable one. This volume enquires such a changeability in four macro-sections: “Theorizing the Peripheral”, “Peripheral Spaces”, “Peripheral Mobilities” and “Peripheral Aesthetics”.

The first one, “Theorizing the peripheral”, states the ambiguity of the periphery, for it is a space of exploitation and exclusion (disqualification) but at the same time it constitutes its centre. Furthermore, in the peripheral space one can avoid homogenisation, hide oneself from the lights which light up the centre. Mireille Rosello discusses what she called the “grammar of peripheralization” and its rules (*A Grammar of Peripheralization: Neil Blomkamp’s District 9*). Rosello argues that the periphery is a spatially excluded formation (which, in turn, keeps this exclusion mechanism) defined by a normative power capable of establishing fixed identities. Therefore, she asserts, one way to effectively stand up to peripheralization specifically lies in hybridisation, in refusing to be trapped within a settled identity. Sudeep Dasgupta proposes the notion of a “politics of indifference” to displace stable and singular identity (*Fragments in Relation: Trajectories of/for an Unbound Europe*). Such politics takes as a key issue the existence of subjects shunted to the periphery, but asserts their value without measuring their worth through strategies of identification prescribed by normative discourses. Paulina Aroch-Fugellie makes use of Africa to belie Wallerstein’s core-periphery scheme (*The Infra-Periphery and Global Circuits of Symbolic Capital Accumulation*). Africa, she argues, is an “infra-periphery” for it is both exploited (as a “classical” periphery in Wallerstein’s sense) and considered useless, meaningless for the symbolic capital accumulation. Finally, in the last chapter of the first section, through the notion of “untranslatability” Doro Wiese claims the difference

of the periphery (and the peripheral vision) but also the impossibility to easily contain it within the boundaries of the relationship between centre and periphery (*Peripheral Worldscales in Circulation: Towards a Productive Understanding of Untranslatability*). The latter always exceed, as its “untranslatability” proves, and within this excess one could establish a political theory capable of breaking the centre-periphery pattern.

The second section, “Peripheral spaces”, focuses on how this scheme is affected by alternative activities and knowledges carried out in the periphery. As in the case of the Sahara Desert investigated by Luca Raineri, these activities and knowledges lead to a redefinition of what is “central” and what is “peripheral” on a global level, or they determine the slipping of the core-periphery pattern within the very periphery (*The Center of All Concerns at the Periphery of the World: The Sahara Desert from a Nomadic Perspective*). By doing so, these practices once again show that the definition of what is core and what is periphery ultimately depends on the point of view, as demonstrated by Durgesh Solanki (*Cast(e)ing Life: The Experience of Living in Peripheral Caste*). Similarly, Ena Jansen examines the context of apartheid in South Africa and considers the backyard of white people houses as a peripheral space, even if often unrecognized (*The South African Backyard as a Very Local Peripheral Space*). The backyard was the border between black servants (employee) and white masters (employer); it constituted a space of exclusion, but also a meeting place (perhaps the only one) where employer and employee met in caring but also denigrating ways. In the backyard took place a double peripheralization, or a re-peripheralization, for it occurred a peripheralization within the centre.

The third part of the book, entitled “Peripheral Mobilities”, deals with the motion from the periphery to the centre. Magdalena Slusarczyk and Paula Pustutka’s inquiry exhibits the necessity to complicate the core-periphery pattern (*Mobile Peripheries? Contesting and Negotiating Peripheries in the Global Era of Mobility*). Moving from the latter to the former does not necessarily mean to arrive at the centre, but, instead, it could mean to move from a periphery to another one. And, after all, as stressed by Astrid Van Weyenberg in “*Repairing Europe*”: *A Critical Reading of Storytelling in European Cultural Projects*, centralization and peripheralization are nothing but narrative architectures formu-

lated by a specific point of view which is constantly moving, as in Geli Mademli's chapter on the peripheralization of Greece in the European crisis context (*The Rise of the Peripheral Subject: Questions of Cultural Hybridity in the Greek "Crisis"*).

Finally, the last section, "Peripheral Aesthetics", discusses three examples of artistic forms capable of recounting peripheralized histories, subjects and spaces as well as to work against the grammar of peripheralization. Paula Blair focuses on cinema (*Remains to be Un/Seen: Envisioning the Disappeared in Willie Doherty's Ancient Ground and Patricio Guzmán's Nostalgia for the Light*), Ksenia Robbe on post-Soviet narratives (*Shaping "Common Places": Post-Soviet Narratives beyond Anti-Utopia in Ksenia Buksha's The Freedom Factory and Igor Saveljev's Tereshkova is Flying to Mars*), Matthieu Foucher on the French queer magazine "La Revue Monstre" and Michael James O'Brien's photo series *Interiors* (*The Heterotopic Closet: Spectral Presences and Otherworlds in La Revue Monstre and Michael James O'Brien's Interiors*).

All these chapters share the purpose to observe "the periphery" without a peripheralization perspective. This means to contrast both the exploitation and the redemption of the periphery, to refuse the idea that the only way in which one can struggle the subaltern role of the periphery consists in turning it into a centre. This book, as stated by Peeren, Stuit and Van Weyenberg, is "not about the emancipation of the periphery into the centre [...] but about looking for ways to regard the periphery as able to negotiate its inevitable relation with the centre on a variety of terms that belie its construction as statically 'other'".

We can stress three key-words to synthetically describe *Peripheral Visions*: *a*) difference, for the aim of the periphery is not to become the centre, but to relieve itself from the peripheralization and universalism (whose purpose is to centralize and integrate the periphery, annihilating the differences); *b*) renegotiation, for the identities of centre and periphery are anything but settled and enclosed, their relationship has to be constantly discussed; *c*) perspective, for the point of view is essential in the analysis of the relationship between centre and periphery.

Does it still make sense to speak of centres and peripheries? The thirteen chapters answer that yes, it still makes sense, as long as one speaks about centres and peripheries. In this sense, *Peripheral Visions* mixes Deleuze and Guattari's "rhizome" with Waller-

stein's "arborescent" pattern: the centres do exist, as well as the peripheries, but what matters is that each centre is also a periphery, and each point of this global net relates to the others as centre *and* periphery.

However, *Peripheral Visions* (and, more broadly, this kind of analysis) seems to run a risk, that is to ignore the facility with which some certain points are capable of centralizing themselves and to impose their perspective. It could be true that each point can be both centre or periphery, and that its definition always depends on the perspective chosen. But it is as much true that potentiality not always transforms into power, and that there exist perspectives and points of view easier than others to pick. Thus, to summarize, even if the peripheries are surely capable of negotiating their relations with the centres, one should take into consideration the gap of forces implicated in these negotiations. Instead of looking at the two extremities of the relationship between centres and peripheries, perhaps we should turn our attention to what happens in the middle, within this gap, for this is where the centralization and peripheralization mechanisms occur, and so where they could be contrasted.

