

Topologies of Immunity



Helen Scalway: Starcastles in Powder

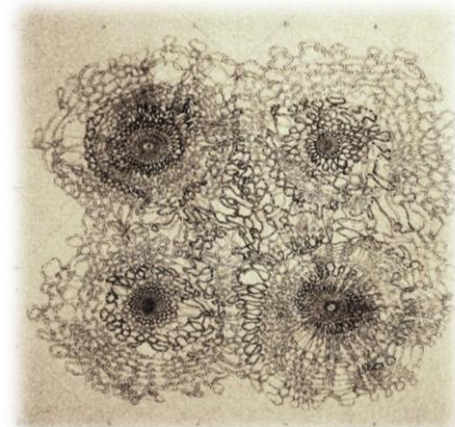
There has long been metaphorical and literal traffic between scientific knowledge production, social/political theories and the picturing of power relations; but nowhere else has this exchange been more pronounced than in the field of immunology (e.g. Haraway, Martin, Cohen, Derrida, Esposito). In this trading zone spatial imaginations abound: in the making of boundaries and borders, the placing of communities, the figuring of bodies and networks of exchange, and the fashioning of spaces for securing or fostering life. Until recently, immunology has relied on a clearly-definable boundary around a unitary 'subject'; thus, concepts of immunity were most immediately mapped onto territorial enclosures and corporeal integrity, as in thinking about strategic defence systems, national security, cold war systems, and legal selfhood.

These metaphors of self/non-self recognition and the obligatory defence systems are now in the process of displacement, both from within and without the biological and medical sciences. Immunitarian logics are changing: identity based models of self/non-self are replaced with the consideration of immunitarian processes as immune systems become multi-species achievements; borderlands became zones of indeterminacies as boundary struggles open-up into a multitude of new topological folds. A new biopolitics emerges as a re-articulated immunopolitics: short-sighted defences mutate into considerations of long-term parasitic and symbiotic exchanges; 'history' and 'geography' are remade through experiments in "living well with formerly abject others" (Lorimer).

In this keynote and workshop, we explore the alternative visions emerging from contemporary scientific endeavours, interrogating their 'self'-understandings and topological inflections – focusing on microbial communities, the biogeography of the human microbiome, the immunological implications of metabolic processes, and the immunitary surpluses of blood stem cell banking – aided by artist intuitions and visualization practices.

Specifically, the workshop will use presentations and discussion based on pre-circulated papers to ask:

- How do geographers, scientists, artists and cultural theorist infect each other today?
- What kinds of spaces populate immunitarian imaginations after the disappearance of the unitarian subject?
- How can we visualize these 'new' immunitarian geographies?



Helen Scalway: Knots and Networks

The day is part of events organised at the University of Exeter around 'Symbiology', which seeks to address questions of form, design, and creativity in the applied biosciences, and to contribute to new ways of thinking about and engaging with the interconnectedness between culture and nature. Workshop organisers Gail Davies, Astrid Schrader and Jamie Lorimer would like to thank the University of Exeter's HASS strategy for funding.

Keynote: Warwick Anderson (University of Sydney) Getting Ahead of One's Self?

12 noon Building:One Bateman Lecture Theatre Chair Steve Hinchliffe (Geography, Exeter)

During the past thirty years, immunological metaphors, motifs, and models have come to shape much social theory and philosophy. It may seem that immunology has served to naturalize claims about self, identity, and sovereignty – perhaps most prominently in Jacques Derrida's later studies. Yet the immunological science that functions as "nature" in these social and philosophical arguments is derived from interwar and Cold-War social theory and philosophy. Immunology can claim a complex, entangled history, derived from multiple cultural geographies of sensitivity and reactivity. Theoretical immunologists and social theorists knowingly have participated in this common culture. Thus the "naturalistic fallacy" in this case might be reframed as an error of categorization: its conditions of possibility would require ceaseless effort to purify and separate out the categories of nature and culture. The problem – inasmuch as there is a problem – therefore is not so much the making of an appeal to nature as assuming privileged access to an independent, sovereign category called "nature." So, then, what is the nature of which we speak? Where is the immunological located?

13.20 Lunch (Building:One Gallery)

Workshop: Topologies of Immunity

Seminar room Byrne House

14.20 Introduction (Gail Davies, Geography, University of Exeter)

14.30 Jamie Lorimer (Geography, University of Oxford) & Richard Grenyer (Biogeography, University of Oxford)
Microbiogeographies and immunity

Nadine Levin (Law, University of Exeter)

Metabolism and the microbiome: thinking through complexity in immunology

Artist Response: Helen Scalway (RHUL) 'The borderlands metaphor: thinking through visualisation'

16.20 tea and coffee

16.40 Nik Brown and Rosalind Williams (Sociology, University of York)
Immunitary surplus: excess and recoil in blood stem cell banking

Astrid Schrader (Sociology, University of Exeter)

Re-thinking immunity with suicidal microbial communities or how death became internal to life

Discussant: Nigel Clark (Geography, University of Lancaster)

18.30 Close, drinks and dinner (dinner is included for speakers and discussants)

The keynote seminar is open to all and no booking is required. Please RSVP to Nick Binney (nb357@exeter.ac.uk) to confirm your place for lunch and the workshop, informing us about any special dietary requirements before 31st of March 2014. Please contact Gail Davies (g.f.davies@exeter.ac.uk) with any other enquiries.