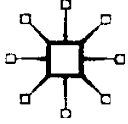# Theories of International Relations

Third edition

Scott Burchill, Andrew Linklater, Richard Devetak, Jack Donnelly, Matthew Paterson, Christian Reus-Smit and Jacqui True

Chapter 7

Postmodernism

RICHARD DEVETAK

Postmodernism remains among the most controversial of theories in the humanities and social sciences. It has regularly been accused of moral and political delinquency. Indeed, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, some commentators went so far as to blame postmodernism. In a time when moral certitude appeared to be necessary, postmodernism was charged with a dangerous tendency towards moral equivocation or even sympathy towards terrorism. If nothing else, these absurd allegations served to prove a central claim of postmodernism, that knowledge claims are intimately connected to politics and power. Moreover, as James Der Derian (2002: 15) has provocatively argued, despite everything that differentiates America's president, George W. Bush, from the terrorist leader behind the attacks, Osama bin Laden, they are united in their moral and epistemological certitude. It is precisely this conviction that their moral and epistemological claims are beyond question that postmodernism challenges.

Before continuing, we should point out that a great deal of disagreement exists as to what exactly 'postmodernism' means. The meaning of postmodernism is in dispute not just between proponents and critics, but also among proponents. Indeed, many theorists associated with postmodernism never use the term, sometimes preferring the term 'post-structuralism', sometimes 'deconstruction', sometimes rejecting any attempt at labelling altogether. In lieu of a clear or agreed definition of postmodernism this chapter adopts a pragmatic and nominalistic approach. Theorists who are referred to, or who regard their own writing, as postmodern, post-structuralist or deconstructive will be considered here as postmodern theorists.

The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first deals with the relationship between power and knowledge in the study of international relations. The second outlines the textual strategies employed by postmodern approaches. The third is concerned with how postmodernism deals with the state. The final part of the chapter outlines postmodernism's attempt to rethink the concept of the political.

Power and knowledge in International Relations

Within orthodox social scientific accounts, knowledge ought to be immune from the influence of power. The study of international relations, or any scholarly study for that matter, is thought to require the suspension of values, interests and power relations in the pursuit of objective knowledge – knowledge uncontaminated by external influences and based on pure reason. Kant's (1970: 115) caution that 'the possession of power inevitably corrupts the free judgement of reason', stands as a classic example of this view. It is this view that Michel Foucault, and postmodernism generally, have begun to problematize.

Rather than treat the production of knowledge as simply a cognitive matter, postmodernism treats it as a normative and political matter (Shapiro 1999: 1). Foucault wanted to see if there was not some common matrix which hooked together the fields of knowledge and power. According to Foucault, there is a general consistency, which cannot be reduced to an identity, between modes of interpretation and operations of power. Power and knowledge are mutually supportive; they directly imply one another (Foucault 1977: 27). The task therefore is to see how operations of power fit with the wider social and political matrices of the modern world. For example, in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault investigates the possibility that the evolution of the penal system is intimately connected to the human sciences. His argument is that a 'single process of "epistemologico-juridical" formation' underlies the history of the prison on the one hand, and the human sciences on the other (1997: 23). In other words, the prison is consistent with modern society and modern modes of apprehending 'man's' world.

This type of analysis has been attempted in International Relations by various thinkers. Richard Ashley has exposed one dimension of the power–knowledge nexus by highlighting what Foucault calls the 'rule of immanence' between knowledge of the state and knowledge of 'man'. Ashley's (1989a) argument, stated simply, is that, '[m]odern statecraft is modern mancraft'. He seeks to demonstrate how the 'paradigm of sovereignty' simultaneously gives rise to a certain epistemological disposition and a certain account of modern political life. On the one hand, knowledge is thought to depend on the sovereignty of 'the heroic figure of reasoning man who knows that the order of the world is not God-given, that man is the origin of all knowledge, that responsibility for supplying meaning to history resides with man himself, and that, through reason, man may achieve total knowledge, total autonomy, and total power' (1989a: 264–5). On the other hand, modern political life finds in sovereignty its constitutive principle. The state is conceived by analogy with sovereign man as a pre-given, bounded entity which enters into relations

with other sovereign presences. Sovereignty acts as the 'master signifier' as Jenny Edkins and Véronique Pin-Fat (1999: 6) put it. Both 'Man' and the state are marked by the presence of sovereignty, which contrasts with international relations which is marked, and violently so, by the absence of sovereignty (or alternatively stated, the presence of multiple sovereignties). In short, both the theory and practice of international relations are conditioned by the constitutive principle of sovereignty.

Genealogy

It is important to grasp the notion of genealogy, as it has become crucial to many postmodern perspectives in International Relations. Genealogy is, put simply, a style of historical thought which exposes and registers the significance of power–knowledge relations. It is perhaps best known through Nietzsche's radical assault on the concept of origins. As Roland Bleiker (2000: 25) explains, genealogies 'focus on the process by which we have constructed origins and given meaning to particular representations of the past, representations that continuously guide our daily lives and set clear limits to political and social options'. It is a form of history which historicizes those things which are thought to be beyond history, including those things or thoughts which have been buried, covered, or excluded from view in the writing and making of history.

In a sense genealogy is concerned with writing counter-histories which expose the processes of exclusion and covering which make possible the teleological idea of history as a unified story unfolding with a clear beginning, middle and end. History, from a genealogical perspective, does not evidence a gradual disclosure of truth and meaning. Rather, it stages 'the endlessly repeated play of dominations' (Foucault 1987: 228). History proceeds as a series of dominations and impositions in knowledge and power, and the task of the genealogist is to unravel history to reveal the multifarious trajectories that have been fostered or closed off in the constitution of subjects, objects, fields of action and domains of knowledge. Moreover, from a genealogical perspective there is not one single, grand history, but many interwoven histories varied in their rhythm, tempo, and power–knowledge effects.

Genealogy affirms a perspectivism which denies the capacity to identify origins and meanings in history objectively. A genealogical approach is anti-essentialist in orientation, affirming the idea that all knowledge is situated in a particular time and place and issues from a particular perspective. The subject of knowledge is situated in, and conditioned by, a political and historical context, and constrained to function with particular concepts and categories of knowledge. Knowledge is never unconditioned. As a consequence of the heterogeneity of possible contexts

and positions, there can be no single, Archimedean perspective which trumps all others. There is no 'truth', only competing perspectives. David Campbell's analysis of the Bosnian War in *National Deconstruction* (1998a) affirms this perspectivism. As he rightly reminds us, 'the same events can be represented in markedly different ways with significantly different effects' (1998a: 33). Indeed, the upshot of his analysis is that the Bosnian War can be known only through perspective.

In the absence of a universal frame of reference or overarching perspective, we are left with a plurality of perspectives. As Nietzsche (1969: III, 12) put it: 'There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective "knowing".' The modern idea, or ideal, of an objective or all-encompassing perspective is displaced in postmodernism by the Nietzschean recognition that there is always more than one perspective and that each perspective embodies a particular set of values. Moreover, these perspectives do not simply offer different views of the same 'real world'. The very *idea* of the 'real world' has been 'abolished' in Nietzsche's thought (1990: 50–1), leaving *only* perspectives, *only* interpretations of interpretations, or in Derrida's (1974: 158) terms, *only* 'textuality'.

Perspectives are thus not to be thought of as simply optical devices for apprehending the 'real world', such as a telescope or microscope, but also as the very fabric of that 'real world'. For postmodernism, following Nietzsche, perspectives are integral to the constitution of the 'real world', not just because they are our only access to it, but because they are basic and essential elements of it. The warp and woof of the 'real world' is woven out of perspectives and interpretations, none of which can claim to correspond to reality-in-itself, to be a 'view from nowhere', or to be exhaustive. Perspectives are thus component objects and events that go towards making up the 'real world'. In fact, we should say that there is no object or event outside or prior to perspective or narrative. As Campbell explains, after Hayden White, narrative is central, not just to understanding an event, but in constituting that event. This is what Campbell (1998a: 34) means by the 'narrativizing of reality'. According to such a conception events acquire the status of 'real' not because they occurred but because they are remembered and because they assume a place in a narrative (1998a: 36). Narrative is thus not simply a re-presentation of some prior event, it is the means by which the status of reality is conferred on events. But historical narratives also perform vital political functions in the present; they can be used as resources in contemporary political struggles (1998a: 84, 1999: 31).

The event designated by the name 'September 11' is a case in point. Is it best conceived as an act of terrorism, a criminal act, an act of evil, an act of war, or an act of revenge? Perhaps it is best thought of as an instance of 'Islamo-fascism' or the clash of civilization? Or perhaps

as 'blowback'? Furthermore, which specific acts of commission and omission constitute this event? Did 'September 11' begin at 8.45a.m. when American Airlines flight 11 crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Centre, or at 7.59a.m. when the plane departed from Boston? Did it commence when the perpetrators began planning and training for the attack? Or did it begin even earlier, as a reaction (however unjustified) to US Middle East policy? These questions show that the event of 'September 11' is only constituted in a narrative that integrates it into a sequence of other events and thereby confers significance upon it.

It may be that, as Jenny Edkins (2002: 245–6) says, events like 'September 11' cannot be experienced in any normal sense. Rather, they exceed experience and our normal social and linguistic frameworks. Nevertheless, there will be, as Campbell (2002a: 1) notes, struggles over the meaning of 'September 11'. He, like Edkins, cautions against a hasty attempt to fix the meaning of 'September 11'. In particular he shows that, despite the White House asserting the unprecedented nature of the September 11 attacks, the 'war on terrorism' has returned to past foreign policy practices; in his words, it has morphed into the Cold War (1999: 17). 'This return of the past means that we have different objects of enmity, different allies, but the same structure for relating to the world through foreign policy' (2002a: 18). Cynthia Weber (2002) makes a similar argument, suggesting instead that the Pearl Harbor attacks of 7 December 1941 provide an interpretive framework for the US military response today. 'September 11' is thus read as if it had the same meaning as '7 December'. For postmodernism, the representation of any political event will always be susceptible to competing interpretations.

Genealogy is a reminder of the essential agonism in the historical constitution of identities, unities, disciplines, subjects and objects. From this perspective, 'all history, including the production of order, [is comprehended] in terms of the endless power political clash of multiple wills' (Ashley 1987: 409). Metaphors of war and battle are central to genealogy. In a series of lectures given at the Collège de France in 1975–6 under the title 'Society Must be Defended', Foucault employs genealogy to analyze power relations in the state. He explores a historico-political discourse dating from the end of the civil and religious wars of the sixteenth century, that understood war to be 'a permanent social relationship, the ineradicable basis of all relations and institutions of power' (Foucault 2003: 49). This discourse, found in Sir Edward Coke, John Lilburne and Henri Comte de Boulainvilliers among others, challenged the prevailing assumption of the day that society is at peace. Instead, beneath the calm, peaceful order of law-governed society posited by philosophico-juridical discourses, this discourse perceives 'a sort of primitive and permanent war', according to Foucault (2003: 47).

Foucault (2003: 15) characterizes this discourse through an inversion of Clausewitz's famous proposition: 'politics is the continuation of war by other means'. Foucault means to analyse how war became viewed as an apt way of describing politics. He wants to know when political thought began to imagine, perhaps counter-intuitively, that war serves as a principle for the analysis of power relations within political order. This conflictual understanding of society is equally at odds with Kantian liberalism and Hobbesian realism. If anything, it seems to pre-empt Nietzsche's emphasis on struggle. Political power, instituted and legitimized in the sovereign state, does not bring war to an end; rather, 'In the smallest of its cogs, peace is waging a secret war' (2003: 50). This 'war discourse' posits a binary structure that pervades civil society, wherein one group is pitted against another in continuing struggle.

Foucault (1987: 236) claims as one of genealogy's express purposes the 'systematic dissociation of identity'. There are two dimensions to this purpose. First, it has a purpose at the ontological level: to avoid substituting causes for effects (metalepsis). It does not take identity or agency as given but seeks to account for the forces which underwrite this apparent agency. Identity or agency is an *effect* to be explained, not assumed. This means resisting the temptation to attribute essences to agents, things or events in history, and requires a transformation of the question 'what is?' into 'how is?' For Nietzsche, Foucault and thus post-modernism, it is more important to determine the forces that give shape to an event or a thing than to attempt to identify its hidden, fixed essence. Secondly, it has an ethico-political purpose in problematizing prevailing identity formations which appear normal or natural. It refuses to use history for the purpose of affirming present identities, preferring to use it instead to disturb identities that have become dogmatized, conventionalized or normalized.

A good example of this genealogical method is to be found in Maja Zehfuss's (2003) analysis of 'September 11' and the war on terrorism. She challenges assumptions about unified agency and about the relationship between causes and effects. As she points out, to imply that the events of 'September 11' were an attack on 'the West', as the US and UK governments do, is to ignore the ambiguous character of Western identity. At a minimum, it is to ignore the fact that Western nations are complicit with the technologies and perpetrators, but it also ignores political dissent from those who do not wish the memory of the dead to be used to perpetuate further violence (2003: 524–5). Following Nietzsche, Zehfuss (2003: 522) also questions cause-and-effect thinking; 'cause and effect are … never as easily separated' as they appear to be. For example, governments leading the so-called war on terrorism imply that 'September 11' *caused* the war on terrorism. It is as if 'September 11'

were 'an "uncaused" cause' (Zehfuss 2003: 521), or as if, in Judith Butler's (2004: 6) words, 'There is no relevant prehistory to the events of September 11'. But this ignores a good deal of prior political history which is essential to any adequate understanding.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that genealogy focuses only on what is forgotten. Zehfuss draws our attention to the politics of memory also. She points out that both Osama bin Laden and President George W. Bush want the world to remember the events of September 11. Bin Laden wants the world to remember the humbling of a hyperpower, Bush wants the world to remember the loss of innocent life. Both, Zehfuss's says (2003: 514), 'have an interest in our memory of the events'. Zehfuss's (2003: 525) argument is that a 'certain way of using memory has become politically powerful', especially in the United States, where the White House has exploited the memory of 'September 11' to justify the curtailment of civil liberties at home, and an aggressive military response abroad. Her point is that we need to forget the dominant narratives before we can understand what makes 'September 11' a distinctive event.

It is in view of such genealogical analyses as these that we can understand Foucault's (1977: 31) attempt at 'writing the history of the present'. A history of the present asks: How have we made the present seem like a normal or natural condition? What has been forgotten and what has been remembered in history in order to legitimize the present and present courses of action?

One of the important insights of postmodernism, with its focus on the power–knowledge nexus and its genealogical approach, is that many of the problems and issues studied in International Relations are not just matters of epistemology and ontology, but of *power* and *authority*; they are struggles to impose authoritative interpretations of international relations. As Derrida (2003: 105) himself says in an interview conducted after September 11: 'We must also recognize here the strategies and relations of power. The dominant power is the one that manages to impose and, thus, to legitimate, indeed to legalize ... on a national or world stage, the terminology and thus the interpretation that best suits it in a given situation'. The following section outlines a strategy which is concerned with destabilizing dominant interpretations by showing how every interpretation systematically depends on that for which it cannot account.

Textual strategies of postmodernism

Der Derian (1989: 6) contends that postmodernism is concerned with exposing the 'textual interplay behind power politics'. It might be better

to say it is concerned with exposing the textual interplay *within* power politics, for the effects of textuality do not remain behind politics, but are intrinsic to them. The 'reality' of power politics (like any social reality) is always already constituted through textuality and inscribed modes of representation. It is in this sense that David Campbell (1992) refers to 'writing' security, Gearóid Ó Tuathail (1996) refers to 'writing' global space, and Cynthia Weber (1995) refers to 'writing' the state. Two questions arise: (1) what is meant by textual interplay? and (2) how, by using what methods and strategies, does postmodernism seek to disclose this textual interplay?

Textuality is a common postmodern theme. It stems mainly from Derrida's redefinition of 'text' in *Of Grammatology* (1974). It is important to clarify what Derrida means by 'text'. He is not restricting its meaning to literature and the realm of ideas, as some have mistakenly thought, rather, he is implying that the world is *also* a text–or, better, the 'real' world is constituted like a text, and 'one cannot refer to this "real" except in an interpretive experience' (Derrida 1988: 148). Postmodernism firmly regards interpretation as necessary and fundamental to the constitution of the social world, and it is for this reason that Derrida (1978: 278) quotes Montaigne: 'We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things.' 'Textual interplay' refers to the supplementary and mutually constitutive relationship between different interpretations in the representation and constitution of the world. In order to tease out the textual interplay, postmodernism deploys the strategies of *deconstruction* and *double reading*.

Deconstruction

Deconstruction is a general mode of radically unsettling what are taken to be stable concepts and conceptual oppositions. Its main point is to demonstrate the effects and costs produced by the settled concepts and oppositions, to disclose the parasitical relationship between opposed terms and to attempt a displacement of them. According to Derrida conceptual oppositions are never simply neutral but are inevitably hierarchical. One of the two terms in the opposition is privileged over the other. This privileged term supposedly connotes a presence, propriety, fullness, purity, or identity which the other lacks (for example, sovereignty as opposed to anarchy). Deconstruction attempts to show that such oppositions are untenable, as each term *always already* depends on the other. Indeed, the prized term gains its privilege only by disavowing its dependence on the subordinate term.

From a postmodern perspective, the apparently clear opposition between two terms is neither clear nor oppositional. Derrida often

speaks of this relationship in terms of a structural parasitism and contamination, as each term is structurally related to, and already harbours, the other. Difference *between* the two opposed concepts or terms is always accompanied by a veiled difference *within* each term. Neither term is pure, self-same, complete in itself, or completely closed off from the other, though as much is feigned. This implies that totalities, whether conceptual or social, are never fully present and properly established. Moreover, there is no pure stability, only more or less successful stabilizations as there is a certain amount of 'play', or 'give', in the structure of the opposition.

As a general mode of unsettling, deconstruction is particularly concerned with locating those elements of instability or 'give' which ineradicably threaten any totality. Nevertheless, it must still account for stabilizations (or stability-effects). It is this equal concern with undoing or deconstitution (or at least their ever-present possibility) which marks off deconstruction from other more familiar modes of interpretation. To summarize, deconstruction is concerned with both the constitution and deconstitution of any totality, whether a text, theory, discourse, structure, edifice, assemblage, or institution.

Double reading

Derrida seeks to expose this relationship between stability-effects and destabilizations by passing through two readings in any analysis. As expressed by Derrida (1981: 6), double reading is essentially a duplicitous strategy which is 'simultaneously faithful and violent'. The first reading is a commentary or repetition of the dominant interpretation – that is, a reading which demonstrates how a text, discourse or institution achieves the stability-effect. It faithfully recounts the dominant story by building on the same foundational assumptions, and repeating conventional steps in the argument. The point here is to demonstrate how the text, discourse, or institution appears coherent and consistent with itself. It is concerned, in short, to elaborate how the identity of a text, discourse, or institution is put together or constituted. Rather than yield to the monologic first reading, the second, counter-memorializing reading unsettles it by applying pressure to those points of instability within a text, discourse, or institution. It exposes the internal tensions and how they are (incompletely) covered over or expelled. The text, discourse, or institution is never completely at one with itself, but always carries within it elements of tension and crisis which render the whole thing less than stable.

The task of double reading as a mode of deconstruction is to understand how a discourse or social institution is assembled or put together, but

at the same time to show how it is always already threatened with its undoing. It is important to note that there is no attempt in deconstruction to arrive at a single, conclusive reading. The two mutually inconsistent readings, which are in a performative (rather than logical) contradiction, remain permanently in tension. The point is not to demonstrate the truthfulness or otherwise of a story, but to expose how any story depends on the repression of internal tensions in order to produce a stable effect of homogeneity and continuity.

Ashley's double reading of the *anarchy problematique*

Richard Ashley's double reading of the *anarchy problematique* is one of the earliest and most important deconstructions in the study of international relations. His main target is the conception of anarchy and the theoretical and practical effects. The *anarchy problematique* is the name Ashley gives to the defining moment of most inquiries in International Relations. It is exemplified by Oye's (1985: 1) assertion that: 'Nations dwell in perpetual anarchy, for no central authority imposes limits on the pursuit of sovereign interests.' Most importantly, the *anarchy problematique* deduces from the absence of central, global authority, not just an empty concept of anarchy, but a description of international relations as power politics, characterised by self-interest, *raison d'état*, the routine resort to force, and so on.

The main brunt of Ashley's analysis is to problematize this deduction of power politics from the lack of central rule. Ashley's many analyses of the *anarchy problematique* can be understood in terms of double reading. The first reading assembles the constitutive features, or 'hard core' of the *anarchy problematique*, while the second reading disassembles the constitutive elements of the *anarchy problematique*, showing how it rests on a series of questionable theoretical suppositions or exclusions.

In the first reading, Ashley outlines the *anarchy problematique* in conventional terms. He describes not just the absence of any overarching authority, but the presence of a multiplicity of states in the international system, none of which can lay down the law to the individual states. Further, the states which comprise this system have their own identifiable interests, capabilities, resources and territory. The second reading questions the self-evidence of international relations as an anarchical realm of power politics. The initial target in this double reading is the opposition between sovereignty and anarchy, where sovereignty is valorized as a regulative ideal, and anarchy is regarded as the absence or negation of sovereignty. Anarchy takes on meaning only as the antithesis of sovereignty. Moreover, sovereignty and anarchy are taken to be

mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive. Ashley demonstrates, however, that the *anarchy problematique* works only by making certain assumptions regarding sovereign states. If the dichotomy between sovereignty and anarchy is to be tenable at all, then inside the sovereign state must be found a domestic realm of identity, homogeneity, order and progress guaranteed by legitimate force; and outside must lie an anarchical realm of difference, heterogeneity, disorder and threat, recurrence and repetition. But to represent sovereignty and anarchy in this way (that is, as mutually exclusive and exhaustive), depends on converting differences *within* sovereign states into differences *between* sovereign states (Ashley 1988: 257). Sovereign states must expunge any traces of anarchy that reside within them in order to make good the distinction between sovereignty and anarchy. Internal dissent and what Ashley (1987, 1989b) calls 'transversal struggles' which cast doubt over the idea of a clearly identifiable and demarcated sovereign identity must be repressed or denied to make the *anarchy problematique* meaningful. In particular, the opposition between sovereignty and anarchy rests on the possibility of determining a 'well-bounded sovereign entity possessing its own "internal" hegemonic centre of decision-making capable of reconciling "internal" conflicts and capable, therefore, of projecting a singular presence' (Ashley 1988: 245).

The general effect of the *anarchy problematique* is to confirm the opposition between sovereignty and anarchy as mutually exclusive and exhaustive. This has two particular effects: (1) to represent a domestic domain of sovereignty as a stable, legitimate foundation of modern political community, and (2) to represent the domain beyond sovereignty as dangerous and anarchical. These effects depend on what Ashley (1988: 256) calls a 'double exclusion'. They are possible only if, on the one hand, a single representation of sovereign identity can be imposed and, on the other hand, if this representation can be made to appear natural and indisputable. The double reading problematizes the *anarchy problematique* by posing two questions: first, what happens to the *anarchy problematique* if it is not so clear that fully present and completed sovereign states are ontologically primary or unitary? And, secondly, what happens to the *anarchy problematique* if the lack of central global rule is not overwritten with assumptions about power politics?

Problematizing sovereign states

States, sovereignty and violence are long-standing themes in the established traditions of International Relations that have gained renewed importance after the September 11 terrorist attacks. They are also central themes

in postmodern approaches to international relations. However, rather than adopt them uncritically from traditional approaches, postmodernism revises them in view of insights gained from genealogy and deconstruction.

Postmodernism seeks to address a crucial issue regarding interpretations and explanations of the sovereign state that state-centric approaches have obscured – namely, its historical constitution and reconstitution as the primary mode of subjectivity in world politics. This returns us to the type of question posed by Foucault's genealogy: how, by virtue of what political practices and representations, is the sovereign state instituted as the normal mode of international subjectivity? Posing the question in this manner directs attention, in Nietzschean fashion, less to what is the essence of the sovereign state than to how the sovereign state is made possible, how it is naturalized and how it is made to appear as if it had an essence.

To the extent that postmodernism seeks to account for the conditions which make possible the phenomenon of the state as something which concretely affects the experience of everyday life, it is phenomenological. Yet this is no ordinary phenomenology. It might best be called a 'quasi-phenomenology' for, as already noted, it is equally concerned with accounting for those conditions which destabilize the phenomenon or defer its complete actualization. In this section, postmodernism's quasi-phenomenology of the state will be explained. This comprises four main elements: (1) a genealogical analysis of the modern state's 'origins' in violence, (2) an account of boundary inscription, (3) a deconstruction of identity as it is defined in security and foreign policy discourses and (4) a revised interpretation of statecraft. The overall result is to rethink the ontological structure of the sovereign state in order to respond properly to the question of how the sovereign state is (re)constituted as the normal mode of subjectivity in international relations.

Violence

Modern political thought has attempted to transcend illegitimate forms of rule (such as tyranny and despotism) where power is unconstrained, unchecked, arbitrary and violent, by founding legitimate, democratic forms of government where authority is subject to law. In modern politics, it is *reason* rather than power or violence which has become the measure of legitimacy. However, as Campbell and Dillon (1993: 161) point out, the relationship between politics and violence in modernity is deeply ambivalent for, on the one hand, violence 'constructs the refuge of the sovereign community' and, on the other hand, it is 'the condition from which the citizens of that community must be protected'. The paradox here is that violence is both poison and cure.

The link between violence and the state is revealed in Bradley Klein's genealogy of the state as strategic subject. Klein's (1994: 139) broad purpose in *Strategic Studies and World Order* is to analyse 'the violent making and remaking of the modern world'. His more particular purpose is to explain the historical emergence of war making states. Rather than assume their existence, as realists and neo-realists tend to do, Klein examines how political units emerge in history which are capable of relying upon force to distinguish a domestic political space from an exterior one. Consistent with other postmoderns, he argues that 'states rely upon violence to constitute themselves as states', and in the process, 'impose differentiations between the internal and external' (1994: 38). Strategic violence is constitutive of states; it does not merely 'patrol the frontiers' of the state, it 'helps constitute them as well' (1994: 3).

The point made by postmodernism regarding violence in modern politics needs to be clearly differentiated from traditional approaches. In general, traditional accounts take violent confrontation to be a normal and regular occurrence in international relations. The condition of anarchy is thought to incline states to war as there is nothing to stop wars from occurring. Violence is not constitutive in such accounts as these, but is 'configurative', or 'positional' (Ruggie 1993: 162–3). The ontological structure of the states is taken to be set up already before violence is undertaken. The violence merely modifies the territorial configuration, or is an instrument for power–political, strategic manoeuvres in the distribution or hierarchy of power. Postmodernism, however, exposes the constitutive role of violence in modern political life. Violence is fundamental to the ontological structuring of states, and is not merely something to which fully formed states resort for power–political reasons. Violence is, according to postmodernism, inaugural as well as augmentative.

This argument about the intimate and paradoxical relationship between violence and political order is taken even further by Jenny Edkins, who places the Nazis, concentration camps, NATO and refugee camps on the same continuum. All, she claims, are determined by a sovereign power that seeks to extend control over life. She argues that even humanitarianism can be placed on the spectrum of violence since it, too, is complicit with the modern state's order of sovereign power and violence, notwithstanding claims to the contrary. Indeed, she says that famine-relief camps are like concentration camps since they are both sites of 'arbitrary decisions between life and death, where aid workers are forced to choose which of the starving they are unable to help' (Edkins 2000: 13). Famine victims appear only as 'bare life' to be 'saved'; stripped of their social and cultural being, they are depoliticized, their political voices ignored (2000: 13–14). In different language, Campbell

(1998b: 506) affirms this view by arguing that prevailing forms of humanitarianism construct people as victims, 'incapable of acting without intervention'. This insufficiently political or humane form of humanitarianism, therefore, 'is deeply implicated in the production of a sovereign political power that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence' (Edkins 2000: 18). Mick Dillon and Julian Reid offer a similar reading of humanitarian responses to 'complex emergencies', but rather than assume an equivalence between humanitarianism and sovereign power, they see a susceptibility of the former to the operations of the latter. Global governance, they say, 'quite literally threatens nongovernmental and humanitarian agencies with recruitment into the very structures and practices of power against which they previously defined themselves' (Dillon and Reid 2000: 121).

Edkins and Dillon and Reid draw upon an influential and richly textured argument advanced by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998). Following Carl Schmitt, Agamben posits sovereignty as the essence of the political. The sovereign claims the right to decide the exception. This leads, among other things, to the sovereign's right to decide who is in and who is out of a political community. If one of the main concerns of critical theory (as outlined in Chapter 6) is examination of possibilities for more inclusive forms of community, Agamben focuses on exclusion as a condition of possibility of political community. He argues that 'In Western politics, bare life has the peculiar privilege of being that whose exclusion founds the city of men' (Agamben 1998: 7). 'Bare life', most basically, is the simple biological fact of not being dead. But Agamben assigns a further meaning to bare life, a meaning captured in the term *homo sacer* (sacred man), which refers to a life that can be taken but not sacrificed, a holy but damned life. Banished from society, *homo sacer* acts as the 'constitutive outside' to political life. But, in truth, *homo sacer* is neither inside nor outside political community in any straightforward sense. Instead, he occupies a 'zone of indistinction' or 'no-man's land'. Indeed, as Agamben (1998: 74, 80) points out, the Roman concept of *homo sacer* precedes the distinction between sacred and profane, which is why, paradoxically, a so-called '*sacred* man' can be killed. The clearest expression of this was the system of camps established under the Nazis before and during the Second World War. But similar systems were established during the Bosnian War. As David Campbell (2002b: 157) spells out, the Bosnian Serb camps at Omarska and Trnopolje were 'extra-legal spaces' integrated into an 'ethnic-cleansing strategy based on an exclusive and homogeneous' political community.

Judith Butler, in a brilliant essay titled 'Indefinite Detention' (in Butler 2004), applies Agamben's arguments in her reflections on America's

'war on terrorism'. Drawing from Agamben's writing on sovereign power, she notes how states suspend the rule of law by invoking a 'state of emergency'. There can be no more significant act demonstrating the state's sovereignty than withdrawing or suspending the law. Referring to the controversial detainment of terrorism suspects at Guantánamo Bay, Butler says: 'It is not just that constitutional protections are indefinitely suspended, but that the state (in its augmented executive function) arrogates to itself the right to suspend the Constitution or to manipulate the geography of detentions and trials so that constitutional and international rights are effectively suspended' (Butler 2004: 63–4). The detainees are thus reduced to bare life in a no-man's land beyond the law. Butler (2004: 68) observes that 'to be detained indefinitely … is precisely to have no definitive prospect for a reentry into the political fabric of life, even as one's situation is highly, if not fatally, politicized'. By employing Agamben, these postmodern works seek to show how sovereign states, even liberal democratic ones, constitute themselves through exclusion and violence.

Boundaries

To inquire into the state's (re)constitution, as postmodernism does, is partly to inquire into the ways in which global political space is partitioned. The world is not naturally divided into differentiated political spaces, and nor is there a single authority to carve up the world. This necessarily leads to a focus on the 'boundary question', as Dillon and Everard (1992: 282) call it, because any political subject is constituted by the marking of physical, symbolic and ideological boundaries.

Postmodernism is less concerned with *what* sovereignty is, than *how* it is spatially and temporally produced and how it is circulated. How is a certain configuration of space and power instituted? And with what consequences? The obvious implication of these questions is that the prevailing mode of political subjectivity in international relations (the sovereign state) is neither natural nor necessary. There is no necessary reason why global political space has to be divided as it is, and with the same bearing. Of crucial importance in this differentiation of political space is the inscription of *boundaries*. Marking boundaries is not an innocent, pre-political act. It is a political act with profound political implications as it is fundamental to the production and delimitation of political space. As Gearóid Ó Tuathail (1996: 1) affirms, '[g]eography is about power. Although often assumed to be innocent, the geography of the world is not a product of nature but a product of histories of struggle between competing authorities over the power to organize, occupy, and administer space'.

There is no political space in advance of boundary inscription. Boundaries function in the modern world to divide an interior, sovereign space from an exterior, pluralistic, anarchical space. The opposition between sovereignty and anarchy rests on the possibility of clearly dividing a domesticated political space from an undomesticated outside. It is in this sense that boundary inscription is a defining moment of the sovereign state. Indeed, neither sovereignty nor anarchy would be possible without the inscription of a boundary to divide political space. This 'social inscription of global space', to use Ó Tuathail's (1996: 61) phrase, produces the effect of completed, bounded states, usually built around what Campbell (1998a: 11) calls the 'nationalist imaginary'.

However, as Connolly (1994: 19) points out, boundaries are highly ambiguous since they 'form an indispensable protection against violation and violence; but divisions they sustain in doing so also carry cruelty and violence'. At stake here is a series of questions regarding boundaries: how boundaries are constituted, what moral and political status they are accorded, how they operate simultaneously to include and exclude and how they simultaneously produce order and violence. Clearly, these questions are not just concerned with the location of cartographic boundaries, but with how these cartographic boundaries serve to represent, limit, and legitimate a political identity. But how, through which political practices and representations, are boundaries inscribed? And what implications does this hold for the mode of subjectivity produced?

Identity

There is, as Rob Walker (1995a: 35–6) notes, a privileging of spatiality in modern political thought and practice. By differentiating political spaces, boundaries are fundamental to the modern world's preference for the 'entrapment of politics' within discrete state boundaries (Magnusson 1996: 36). Postmodernism asks: how has political identity been imposed by spatial practices and representations of domestication and distancing? And how has the concept of a territorially-defined self been constructed in opposition to a threatening other?

Of utmost importance here are issues of how security is conceived in spatial terms and how threats and dangers are defined and articulated, giving rise to particular conceptions of the state as a secure political subject. Debbie Lisle (2000) has shown how even modern tourism participates in the reproduction of this spatialized conception of security. By continuously reaffirming the distinction between 'safety here and now' and 'danger there and then' tourist practices help sustain the geopolitical security discourse. Her reading suggests that war and tourism, rather than being two distinct and opposed social practices, are actually intimately

connected by virtue of being governed by the same global security discourse.

A detailed account of the relationship between the state, violence and identity is to be found in David Campbell's post-structuralist account of the Bosnian war, in *National Deconstruction* (1998a). His central argument there is that a particular norm of community has governed the intense violence of the war. This norm, which he calls 'ontopology', borrowing from Derrida, refers to the assumption that political community requires the perfect alignment of territory and identity, state and nation (Derrida 1994a: 82; Campbell 1998a: 80). It functions to disseminate and reinforce the supposition that political community must be understood and organized as a single identity perfectly aligned with and possessing its allocated territory. The logic of this norm, suggests Campbell (1998a: 168–9), leads to a desire for a coherent, bounded, monocultural community. These 'ontopological' assumptions form 'the governing codes of subjectivity in international relations' (1998a: 170). What is interesting about Campbell's (1999a: 23) argument is the implication that the outpouring of violence in Bosnia was not simply an aberration or racist distortion of the ontopological norm, but was in fact an exacerbation of this same norm. The violence of 'ethnic cleansing' in pursuit of a pure, homogeneous political identity is simply a continuation, albeit extreme, of the same political project inherent in any modern nation-state. The upshot is that all forms of political community, insofar as they require boundaries, will be given to some degree of violence (Campbell 1998a: 13).

Postmodernism focuses on the discourses and practices which substitute threat for difference in the constitution of political identity. Simon Dalby, for instance (1993), explains how cold wars result from the application of a geo-political reasoning which defines security in terms of spatial exclusion and the specification of a threatening other. 'Geopolitical discourse constructs worlds in terms of Self and Others, in terms of cartographically specifiable sections of political space, and in terms of military threats' (1993: 29). The geo-political creation of the external other is integral to the constitution of a political identity (self) which is to be made secure. But to constitute a coherent, singular political identity often demands the silencing of internal dissent. There can be internal others that endanger a certain conception of the self, and must be necessarily expelled, disciplined, or contained. Identity, it can be surmised, is an effect forged, on the one hand, by disciplinary practices which attempt to normalize a population, giving it a sense of unity and, on the other, by exclusionary practices which attempt to secure the domestic identity through processes of spatial differentiation, and various diplomatic, military and defence practices. There is a supplementary relationship between containment of domestic and foreign others, which helps

to constitute political identity by expelling 'from the resultant "domestic" space … all that comes to be regarded as alien, foreign and dangerous' (Campbell 1992: Chapters 5,6, 1998a: 13).

If it is plain that identity is defined through difference, and that a self requires an other, it is not so plain that difference or otherness necessarily equates with threat or danger. Nevertheless, as Campbell (1992) points out the sovereign state is predicated on discourses of danger. 'The constant articulation of danger through foreign policy is thus not a threat to a state's identity or existence', says Campbell (1992: 12), 'it is its condition of possibility'. The possibility of identifying the United States as a political subject, for example, rested, during the Cold War, on the ability to impose an interpretation of the Soviet Union as an external threat, and the capacity of the US government to contain internal threats (1992: Chapter 6). Indeed, the pivotal concept of containment takes on a Janus-faced quality as it is simultaneously turned inwards and outwards to deal with threatening others, as Campbell (1992: 175) suggests. The end result of the strategies of containment was to ground identity in a territorial state.

It is important to recognize that political identities do not exist prior to the differentiation of self and other. The main issue is how something which is different becomes conceptualized as a threat or danger to be contained, disciplined, negated, or excluded. There may be an irreducible possibility that difference will slide into opposition, danger, or threat, but there is no necessity. Political identity need not be constituted against, and at the expense of, others, but the prevailing discourses and practices of security and foreign policy tend to reproduce this reasoning. Moreover, this relation to others must be recognized as a morally and politically loaded relation. The effect is to allocate the other to an inferior moral space, and to arrogate the self to a superior one. As Campbell (1992: 85) puts it, 'the social space of inside/outside is both made possible by and helps constitute a moral space of superior/inferior'. By coding the spatial exclusion in moral terms it becomes easier to legitimize certain politico-military practices and interventions which advance national security interests at the same time that they reconstitute political identities. As Shapiro (1988a: 102) puts it, 'to the extent that the Other is regarded as something not occupying the same moral space as the self, conduct toward the Other becomes more exploitive'. This is especially so in an international system where political identity is so frequently defined in terms of territorial exclusion.

Statecraft

The above section has sketched how violence, boundaries and identity function to make possible the sovereign state. This only partly deals with

the main genealogical issue of how the sovereign state is (re)constituted as a normal mode of subjectivity. Two questions remain if the genealogical approach is to be pursued: how is the sovereign state naturalized and disseminated? And how is it made to appear as if it had an essence?

Postmodernism is interested in how prevailing modes of subjectivity neutralize or conceal their arbitrariness by projecting an image of normalcy, naturalness, or necessity. Ashley has explored the very difficult question of how the dominant mode of subjectivity is normalized by utilizing the concept of hegemony. By 'hegemony' Ashley (1989b: 269) means not an 'overarching ideology or cultural matrix', but 'an ensemble of normalized knowledgeable practices, identified with a particular state and domestic society ... that is regarded as a practical paradigm of sovereign political subjectivity and conduct'. 'Hegemony' refers to the projection and circulation of an 'exemplary' model, which functions as a regulative ideal. Of course the distinguishing characteristics of the exemplary model are not fixed but are historically and politically conditioned. The sovereign state, as the currently dominant mode of subjectivity, is by no means natural. As Ashley (1989b: 267) remarks, sovereignty is fused to certain 'historically normalized interpretations of the state, its competencies, and the conditions and limits of its recognition and empowerment'. The fusion of the state to sovereignty is, therefore, conditioned by changing historical and cultural representations and practices which serve to produce a political identity.

A primary function of the exemplary model is to negate alternative conceptions of subjectivity or to devalue them as underdeveloped, inadequate, or incomplete. Anomalies are contrasted with the 'proper', 'normal', or 'exemplary' model. For instance, 'quasi-states' or 'failed states' represent empirical cases of states which deviate from the model by failing to display the recognizable signs of sovereign statehood. In this failure, they help to reinforce the hegemonic mode of subjectivity as the norm, and to reconfirm the sovereignty/anarchy opposition which underwrites it.

In order for the model to have any power at all, though, it must be replicable; it must be seen as a universally effective mode of subjectivity which can be invoked and instituted at any site. The pressures applied on states to conform to normalized modes of subjectivity are complex and various, and emanate both internally and externally. Some pressures are quite explicit, such as military intervention, others less so, such as conditions attached to foreign aid, diplomatic recognition and general processes of socialization. The point is that modes of subjectivity achieve dominance in space and time through the projection and imposition of power.

How has the state been made to appear as if it had an essence? The short answer to this question is that the state is made to appear as if it

had an essence by performative enactment of various domestic and foreign policies, or what might more simply be called 'statecraft', with the emphasis on 'craft'. Traditionally, 'statecraft' refers to the various policies and practices undertaken by states to pursue their objectives in the international arena. The assumption underlying this definition is that the state is already a fully formed, or bounded, entity before it negotiates its way in this arena. The revised notion of statecraft advanced by postmodernism stresses the ongoing political practices which found and maintain the state, having the effect of keeping the state in perpetual motion.

As Richard Ashley (1987: 410) stressed in his path-breaking article, subjects have no existence prior to political practice. Sovereign states emerge on the plane of historical and political practices. This suggests it is better to understand the state as performatively constituted, having no identity apart from the ceaseless enactment of the ensemble of foreign and domestic policies, security and defence strategies, protocols of treaty making and representational practices at the United Nations, among other things. The state's 'being' is thus an effect of performativity. By 'performativity' we must understand the continued iteration of a norm or set of norms, not simply a singular act, which produces the very thing it names. As Weber (1998: 90) explains, 'the identity of the state is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its result'.

It is in this sense that David Campbell (1998a: ix–x), in his account of the war in Bosnia, focuses on what he calls 'metaBosnia', by which he means 'the array of practices through which Bosnia … comes to be'. To help come to terms with the ceaseless production of Bosnia as a state or subject Campbell recommends that we recognize that we are never dealing with a given, *a priori* state of Bosnia, but with metaBosnia–that is, the performative constitution of 'Bosnia' through a range of enframing and differentiating practices. 'Bosnia', like any other state, is always under a process of construction.

To summarize then, the sovereign state, as Weber (1998: 78) says, is the 'ontological effect of practices which are performatively enacted'. As she explains, 'sovereign nation-states are not pre-given subjects but subjects in process' (1998), where the phrase 'subjects in process' should also be understood to mean 'subjects on trial' (as the French *'en procès'* implies). This leads to an interpretation of the state (as subject) as always in the process of being constituted, but never quite achieving that final moment of completion (Edkins and Pin-Fat 1999: 1). The state thus should not be understood as if it were a prior presence, but instead should be seen as the simulated presence produced by the processes of statecraft. It is never fully complete but is in a constant process of

'becoming-state'. Though 'never fully realised, [the state] is in a continual process of concretization' (Doty 1999: 593). The upshot is that, for postmodernism, there is statecraft, but there is no completed state (Devetak 1995a).

Lest it be thought that that postmodern theories of international relations mark a return to realist state-centrism, some clarification will be needed to explain its concern with the sovereign state. Postmodernism does not seek to explain world politics by focusing on the state alone, nor does it take the state as given. Instead, as Ashley's double reading of the anarchy problematique testifies, it seeks to explain the conditions which make possible such an explanation and the costs consequent on such an approach. What is lost by taking a state-centric perspective? And most importantly, to what aspects of world politics does state-centrism remain blind?

Beyond the paradigm of sovereignty: rethinking the political

One of the central implications of postmodernism is that the paradigm of sovereignty has impoverished our political imagination and restricted our comprehension of the dynamics of world politics. In this section, we review postmodern attempts to develop a new conceptual language to represent world politics beyond the terms of state-centrism in order to rethink the concept of the political.

Campbell (1996: 19) asks the question: 'can we represent world politics in a manner less indebted to the sovereignty problematic?' The challenge is to create a conceptual language that can better convey the novel processes and actors in modern (or postmodern) world politics. Campbell (1996: 20) recommends 'thinking in terms of a *political prosaics* that understands the *transversal* nature' of world politics. To conceptualize world politics in terms of 'political prosaics' is to draw attention to the multitude of flows and interactions produced by globalization that cut across nation-state boundaries. It is to focus on the many political, economic and cultural activities that produce a 'deterritorialization' of modern political life; activities that destabilize the paradigm of sovereignty.

The argument here draws heavily upon the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1977, 1987). They have developed a novel conceptual language which has been deployed by postmodern theorists of international relations to make sense of the operation and impact of various non-state actors, flows and movements on the political institution of state sovereignty. The central terms here are

reterritorialization and deterritorialization (see Patton 2000; Reid 2003). The former is associated with the totalizing logic of the paradigm of sovereignty, or 'State-form' as Deleuze and Guattari say, whose function is defined by processes of capture and boundary-marking. The latter, deterritorialization, is associated with the highly mobile logic of nomadism whose function is defined by its ability to transgress boundaries and avoid capture by the State-form. The one finds expression in the desire for identity, order and unity, the other in the desire for difference, flows and lines of flight.

The 'political prosaics' advocated by Campbell and others utilize this Deleuzian language to shed light on the new political dynamics and demands created by refugees, immigrants, and new social movements as they encounter and outflank the State-form. These 'transversal' groups and movements not only transgress national boundaries, they call into question the territorial organization of modern political life. As Roland Bleiker (2000: 2) notes, they 'question the spatial logic through which these boundaries have come to constitute and frame the conduct of international relations'. In his study of popular dissent in international relations, Bleiker argues that globalization is subjecting social life to changing political dynamics. In an age of mass media and telecommunications, images of local acts of resistance can be flashed across the world in an instant, turning them into events of global significance. Globalization, Bleixer suggests, has transformed the nature of dissent, making possible global and transversal practices of popular dissent (2000: 31). No longer taking place in a purely local context, acts of resistance 'have taken on increasingly transversal dimensions. They ooze into often unrecognised, but nevertheless significant grey zones between domestic and international spheres', blurring the boundaries between inside and outside, local and global (2000: 185). By outflanking sovereign controls and crossing state boundaries, the actions of transversal dissident groups can be read as 'hidden transcripts' that occur 'off-stage', as it were, behind and alongside the 'public transcript' of the sovereign state. The 'hidden transcripts' of transversal movements are therefore deterritorializing in their function, escaping the spatial codes and practices of the dominant actors and making possible a critique of the sovereign state's modes of reterritorialization and exclusion (2000: Chapter 7).

This is also the case with refugees and migrants. They hold a different relationship to space than citizens. Being nomadic rather than sedentary, they are defined by movement across and between political spaces. They problematize and defy the 'territorial imperative' of the sovereign state (Soguk and Whitehall 1999: 682). Indeed, their wandering movement dislocates the ontopological norm which seeks to fix people's identities within the spatial boundaries of the nation-state (1999: 697).

As a consequence they disrupt our state-centric conceptualizations, problematizing received understandings of the character and location of the political.

Similar arguments are advanced by Peter Nyers and Mick Dillon regarding the figure of the refugee. As Nyers (1999) argues, the figure of the refugee, as one who cannot claim to be a member of a 'proper' political community, acts as a 'limit-concept', occupying the ambiguous zone between citizen and human. Dillon (1999) argues that the refugee/stranger remains outside conventional modes of political subjectivity which are tied to the sovereign state. The very existence of the refugee/stranger calls into question the settled, sovereign life of the political community by disclosing the estrangement that is shared by both citizens and refugees. As Soguk and Whitehall (1999: 675) point out, refugees and migrants, by moving across state boundaries and avoiding capture, have the effect of rupturing traditional constitutive narratives of international relations.

Sovereignty and the ethics of exclusion

Postmodernism's ethical critique of state sovereignty needs to be understood in relation to the deconstructive critique of totalization and the deterritorializing effect of transversal struggles. Deconstruction has already been explained as a strategy of interpretation and criticism that targets theoretical concepts and social institutions which attempt totalization or total stability. It is important to note that the postmodern critique of state sovereignty focuses on *sovereignty*.

The sovereign state may well be the dominant mode of subjectivity in international relations today, but it is questionable whether its claim to be the primary and exclusive political subject is justified. The most thoroughgoing account of state sovereignty's ethico-political costs is offered by Rob Walker in *Inside/Outside* (1993). Walker sets out there the context in which state sovereignty has been mobilized as an analytical category with which to understand international relations, and as the primary expression of moral and political community. Walker's critique suggests that state sovereignty is best understood as a constitutive political practice which emerged historically to resolve three ontological contradictions. The relationship between time and space was resolved by containing time within domesticated territorial space. The relationship between universal and particular was resolved through the system of sovereign states which gave expression to the plurality and particularity of states on the one hand, and the universality of one system on the other. This resolution also allowed for the pursuit of universal values to be pursued within particular states. Finally, the relationship between self

and other is also resolved in terms of 'insiders' and 'outsiders', friends and enemies (Walker 1995a: 320–1, 1995b: 28). In deconstructive fashion, Walker's (1993: 23) concern is to 'destabilise [these] seemingly opposed categories by showing how they are at once mutually constitutive and yet always in the process of dissolving into each other'. The overall effect of Walker's inquiry into state sovereignty, consistent with the 'political prosaics' outlined above, is to question whether it is any longer a useful descriptive category and an effective response to the problems that confront humanity in modern political life.

The analysis offered by Walker suggests that it is becoming increasingly difficult to organize modern political life in terms of sovereign states and sovereign boundaries. He argues that there are 'spatiotemporal processes that are radically at odds with the resolution expressed by the principle of state sovereignty' (1993: 155). For both material and normative reasons, Walker refuses to accept state sovereignty as the only, or best, possible means of organizing modern political life. Modern political life need not be caught between mutually exclusive and exhaustive oppositions such as inside and outside. Identity need not be exclusionary, difference need not be interpreted as antithetical to identity (1993: 123), and the trade-off between men and citizens built into the modern state need not always privilege claims of citizens above claims of humanity (Walker 2000: 231–2).

To rethink questions of political identity and community without succumbing to binary oppositions is to contemplate a political life beyond the paradigm of sovereign states. It is to take seriously the possibility that new forms of political identity and community can emerge which are not predicated on absolute exclusion and spatial distinctions between here and there, self and other (Walker 1995a: 307).

Connolly delivers a postmodern critique which brings the question of democracy to bear directly on sovereignty. His argument is that the notion of state sovereignty is incompatible with democracy, especially in a globalized late modernity. The point of his critique is to challenge the sovereign state's 'monopoly over the allegiances, identifications and energies of its members' (Connolly 1991: 479). The multiple modes of belonging and interdependence, and the multiplication of global risks that exist in late modernity, complicate the neat simplicity of binary divisions between inside and outside. His point is that obligations and duties constantly overrun the boundaries of sovereign states. Sovereignty, Connolly says, 'poses too stringent a limitation to identifications and loyalties extending beyond it', and so it is necessary to promote an ethos of democracy which exceeds territorialization by cutting across the state at all levels (1991: 480). He calls this a 'disaggregation of democracy', or what might better be called a 'deterritorialization of democracy'.

'What is needed politically', he says, 'is a series of cross-national, nonstatist movements organized across state lines, mobilized around specific issues of global significance, pressing states from inside and outside simultaneously to reconfigure established convictions, priorities, and policies' (Connolly 1995: 23).

A similar argument is advanced by Campbell. According to Campbell (1998a: 208), the norm of ontopology produces a 'moral cartography' that territorializes democracy and responsibility, confining it to the limits of the sovereign state. But Campbell, like Connolly, is interested in fostering an ethos of democratic pluralization that would promote tolerance and multiculturalism within and across state boundaries. By promoting an active affirmation of alterity it would resist the sovereign state's logics of territorialization and capture.

Postmodern ethics

Postmodernism asks, what might ethics come to mean outside a paradigm of sovereign subjectivity? There are two strands of ethics which develop out of postmodernism's reflections on international relations. One strand challenges the ontological description on which traditional ethical arguments are grounded. It advances a notion of ethics which is not predicated on a rigid, fixed boundary between inside and outside. The other strand focuses on the relation between ontological grounds and ethical arguments. It questions whether ontology must precede ethics.

The first strand is put forward most fully by Ashley and Walker (1990) and Connolly (1995). Fundamental to their writing is a critique of the faith invested in boundaries. Again, the main target of postmodernism here is the sovereign state's defence of rigid boundaries. Territorial boundaries, which are thought to mark the limits of political identity or community, are taken by postmodernism to be historically contingent and highly ambiguous products (Ashley and Walker 1990). As such, they hold no transcendental status. As a challenge to the ethical delimitations imposed by state sovereignty, postmodern ethics, or the 'diplomatic ethos', as Ashley and Walker call it, is not confined by any spatial or territorial limits. It seeks to 'enable the rigorous practice of this ethics in the widest possible compass' (1990: 395). No demarcatory boundaries should obstruct the universalization of this ethic which flows across boundaries (both imagined and territorial):

> Where such an ethics is rigorously practised, no voice can effectively claim to stand heroically upon some exclusionary ground, offering this ground as a source of a necessary truth that human beings must violently project in the name of a citizenry, people, nation, class, gender, race,

golden age, or historical cause of any sort. Where this ethics is rigorously practised, no totalitarian order could ever be. (1990: 395)

In breaking with the ethics of sovereign exclusion, postmodernism offers an understanding of ethics which is detached from territorial limitations. The diplomatic ethos is a 'deterritorialized' ethics which unfolds by transgressing sovereign limits. This transgressive ethics complements the deterritorialized notion of democracy advanced by Connolly. Underlying both ideas is a critique of state sovereignty as a basis for conducting, organizing and limiting political life.

The other ethical strand is advanced by Campbell. He follows Derrida and Levinas by questioning traditional approaches which deduce ethics from ontology, specifically an ontology or metaphysics of presence (Campbell 1998a: 171–92; and see Levinas 1969: Section 1A). It does not begin with an empirical account of the world as a necessary prelude to ethical consideration. Rather, it gives primacy to ethics as, in a sense, 'first philosophy'. The key thinker in this ethical approach is Emmanuel Levinas who has been more influenced by Jewish theology than Greek philosophy. Indeed, the differences between these two styles of thought are constantly worked through in Levinas' thought as a difference between a philosophy of alterity and a philosophy of identity or totality.

Levinas overturns the hierarchy between ontology and ethics, giving primacy to ethics as the starting point. Ethics seems to function as a condition which makes possible the world of beings. Levinas offers a redescription of ontology such that it is inextricably tied up with, and indebted to, ethics, and is free of totalizing impulses. His thought is antagonistic to all forms of ontological and political imperialism or totalitarianism (Levinas 1969: 44; Campbell 1998a: 192). In Levinas' schema, subjectivity is constituted through, and as, an ethical relation. The effect of the Levinasian approach is to recast notions of subjectivity and responsibility in light of an ethics of otherness or alterity. 'Ethics redefines subjectivity as … heteronomous responsibility' (Levinas, quoted in Campbell 1994: 463, 1998a: 176).

This gives rise to a notion of ethics which diverges from the Kantian principle of generalizability and symmetry that we find in critical theory. Rather than begin with the Self and then generalize the imperative universally to a community of equals, Levinas begins with the Other. The Other places certain demands on the Self, hence there is an asymmetrical relationship between Self and Other. The end result is to advance a 'different figuration of politics, one in which its purpose is the struggle *for* – or *on behalf of* – alterity, and not a struggle to efface, erase, or eradicate alterity' (Campbell 1994: 477, 1998a: 191). But as Michael Shapiro (1998b: 698–9) has shown, this ethos may not be so different

from a Kantian ethic of hospitality that encourages universal tolerance of difference as a means of diminishing global violence.

The consequence of taking postmodernism's critique of totality and sovereignty seriously is that central political concepts such as community, identity, ethics and democracy are rethought to avoid being persistently reterritorialized by the sovereign state. Indeed, de-linking these concepts from territory and sovereignty underlies the practical task of a postmodern politics or ethics. As Anthony Burke (2004: 353) explains in a forceful critique of Just War theory after September 11, postmodernism's conception of an 'ethical peace' would refuse 'to channel its ethical obligations solely through the state, or rely on it to protect us violently'. It should be noted, however, that postmodernism, as a critique of totalization, opposes concepts of identity and community only to the extent that they are tied dogmatically to notions of territoriality, boundedness and exclusion. The thrust of postmodernism has always been to challenge both epistemological and political claims to totality and sovereignty and thereby open up questions about the location and character of the political.

Conclusion

Postmodernism makes several contributions to the study of international relations. First, through its genealogical method it seeks to expose the intimate connection between claims to knowledge and claims to political power and authority. Secondly, through the textual strategy of deconstruction it seeks to problematize all claims to epistemological and political totalization. This holds especially significant implications for the sovereign state. Most notably, it means that the sovereign state, as the primary mode of subjectivity in international relations, must be examined closely to expose its practices of capture and exclusion. Moreover, a more comprehensive account of contemporary world politics must also include an analysis of those transversal actors and movements that operate outside and across state boundaries. Thirdly, postmodernism seeks to rethink the concept of the political without invoking assumptions of sovereignty and reterritorialization. By challenging the idea that the character and location of the political must be determined by the sovereign state, postmodernism seeks to broaden the political imagination and the range of political possibilities for transforming international relations. These contributions seems more important than ever after the events of September 11.