Poststructuralism and Postmodernism in International Relations 🆓

Aslı Çalkıvik

Updates to sections "Disciplinary Context of the Poststructural/Postmodern Turn" and "Poststructural/Postmodern Approaches in IR"; new section "On Value and Development," references, and links to digital materials.

Updated on 31 March 2020. The previous version of this content can be found **here**.

Summary and Keywords

Poststructural/postmodern international relations (IR) is a mode of critical thinking and analysis that joined disciplinary conversations during the 1980s and, despite the dismissive reception it has initially faced, it is a vibrant and expanding area of research within the field today. Providing a radical critique of politics in modernity, it is less a new paradigm or theory. Instead, it is better described as "a critical attitude" that focuses on the question of representation and explores the ways in which dominant framings of world politics produce and reproduce relations of power: how they legitimate certain forms of action while marginalizing other ways of being, thinking, and acting. To elaborate the insights of poststructuralism/postmodernism, the article starts off by situating the emergence of these critical perspectives within the disciplinary context and visits the debates and controversies it has elicited. This discussion is followed by an elaboration of the major themes and concepts of poststructural/postmodern thought such as subjectivity, language, text, and power. The convergences and divergences between poststructuralism and its precursor—structuralism—is an underlying theme that is noted in this article. The third and fourth sections make central the epistemological and ontological challenges that poststructuralism/postmodernism poses to disciplinary knowledge production on world politics. While the former focuses on how central categories of IR such as state and sovereignty, violence, and war were problematized and reconceptualized, the latter attends to the poststructuralist/postmodern attempts to articulate a different political imaginary and develop an alternative conceptual language to think the international beyond the confines of the paradigm of sovereignty and the modern subject. The article concludes with a brief look at the future directions for poststructural/postmodern investigations.

Keywords: poststructuralism, postmodernism, power relations, structuralism, world politics, critical perspectives

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Introduction

Poststructuralism/postmodernism is a mode of critical thinking and analysis that joined disciplinary conversations during the 1980s—an era commonly referred to as the period of the Third Debate. It is an approach that draws on a wide range of thinkers associated with poststructural/postmodern thought such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-Luc Nancy, Paul Virilio, Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Ranciére, and Judith Butler among others. Less a new paradigm or theory, poststructural/postmodern international relations (IR) is better described as "a critical attitude" (Campbell, 2007) or "an ethos of critique" (Jabri, 2007) that probes the limits imposed by politics in modernity and explores the possibilities that exist beyond it. As a critical discourse on disciplinary knowledge production, it problematizes taken-for-granted assumptions and claims about world politics. It calls for forms of thought that begin from "new and rather uncomfortable or counterintuitive assumptions about 'life, the universe, and everything'" (Edkins, 2007, p. 89).

In philosophy, social, and political theory, poststructural/postmodern thought has a long genealogy whose path has been laid down by prominent critiques of modernity and modern political thought—figures such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Jacques Lacan (Dillon, 2000; Peters, 2001). Additionally, poststructuralism/postmodernism builds upon and challenges the insights of structuralism as found in the works of social theorists such Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss. In contrast, poststructural/postmodern approaches in IR are a relatively new participant in the disciplinary conversations. Despite the dismissive and even hostile reception it has initially faced, poststructural/postmodern IR is a vibrant and expanding area of research within the field today.

Poststructuralism/postmodernism focuses on the question of representation and explores the ways in which dominant framings of world politics produce and reproduce relations of power: how they legitimate certain forms of action while marginalizing other ways of being. Scholars working from this perspective shift the focus away from pre-given subjects of international politics—such as states, individuals, and classes—toward the political problem of the production of modern subjects as sovereign subjects of action and knowledge. More than the question of "what," they share a general concern about the question of "how": How are we, as political subjects, produced to accept certain forms of action and not others, to ask certain questions and not others? How do certain mechanisms of power—political technologies of inclusion/exclusion—become normalized and legitimized? (Gregory, 1989; Newman, 2010). In the words of Donna Gregory (Gregory, 1989), "[p]oststructural practices … investigate how the subject—in the dual senses of the subject-matter and the subject-actor—of international relations is constituted in and through discourses of world politics."

Highlighting the inextricable link between thinking about the world and acting in it, between analysis and action, and theory and practice, poststructural/postmodern IR seeks to elucidate how the interrelation between these two terms is mediated through different

forms of representational practices. Denying the possibility of making value-neutral, objective claims independent of subjectivity, they bring into focus the politics of writing and the ethics of scholarship (Zehfuss, 2013).

Disciplinary Context of the Poststructural/Postmodern Turn

The entry of poststructural/postmodern approaches to the study of world politics is part of a wider critical turn in IR dating back to the late 1980s (Rengger & Thirkell-White, 2007; Zehfuss, 2013). Like other critical approaches—from feminism to Frankfurt-school inspired Critical Theory to Gramscian IR and postcolonialism—the development of poststructural/postmodern IR was prompted by a general dissatisfaction with orthodox theories both politically and analytically. Among the factors that flamed this dissatisfaction were the collective failure of the discipline to foresee the ending of the Cold War; the complexities and uncertainties arising in the aftermath of the dismantling of the Eastern Bloc; and the emergence of new issues and concerns in the wake of globalization, which exposed the limits of traditional militaristic solutions, traditional notions of sovereignty, and order (George, 1994).

At an analytical level, the critique of positivism within the social sciences was another factor influencing the critical turn. The post-positivist agenda uniting newly emerging critical voices denounced the epistemological principles definitive of traditional IR and its claims to value-neutrality and objectivity. In tandem with other forms of critical scholarship that challenge orthodox problematics of knowledge production on global politics, poststructural/postmodern approaches sought to expose the intimate links between hegemonic forms of knowledge production and the reproduction of power relations. They attended to the silences, omissions, and erasures affected by orthodox ways of writing world politics. In this regard, they played a significant role in what is termed "the third debate" within the disciplinary history (Hamati-Ataya, 2013; Lapid, 1989).

Given the deep challenges they posed to the orthodox disciplinary agenda, poststructural/postmodern approaches were met with resistance, derision, even hostility. Labeled as "a discourse that prizes epistemological and ontological logomachy above clarity," they were accused for "taking the discipline down an ideologically destructive road" (Jarvis, 2000, pp. x–xii). Paradoxically upheld to the standards of science that they problematized, they were regarded as being less valid forms of knowledge and called upon to prove themselves as worthy of academic recognition by developing a research program and demonstrating themselves as capable of shedding light on important issues in world politics (Keohane, 1988). Treated as a "seduction," they were charged with producing "mostly criticism and not much theory" (Walt, 1991, p. 223). "Dressed in Parisian post-structuralist vocabulary," it is argued that "postmodern theories of knowledge and of reality—their epistemology and their 'ontology', a favorite word—are hidden in foggy formulations" (Østerud, 1996, pp. 385, 387).

Mainstream IR was not alone in its distaste for poststructural/postmodern approaches. As the initial lines of solidarity gave way to serious disagreements and schisms among critical scholars, poststructural/postmodern perspectives were charged with advocating conservativism and irrationalism, promoting relativism and nihilism by constructivists and proponents of Critical Theory (theories that situate themselves within the Marxist heritage, drawing from the works of Antonio Gramsci, the Frankfurt School) (Brown, 1994; Cochran, 1995; Wyn Jones, 2001). In the words of a critic, "the relentless critical tendency" (Price, 2008, pp. 38–40) of these perspectives make it impossible to argue for progressive change and account for the role of ethics in world politics, consequently, rendering them complicit in the reproduction of the system they vehemently criticized. The call for providing "clearer normative positions and commitments" is complemented by assertions by more sympathetic critics that these perspectives need to engage more closely with methodology and causal analysis so as to demonstrate that they can explain events and help make policy (Burke, 2008; also Hansen, 2006).

According to postcolonial IR scholars, the problem with poststructural/postmodern accounts stems less from their inadequacy to live up to the disciplinary protocols about rationality, science, or their divergence from Enlightenment accounts of progress and emancipation. Rather, it is their alleged silence about the colonial roots of modernity and neocolonial forms of rule that render poststructuralism/postmodernism amenable to "replicate the many hierarchies and silences" they criticize and become politically disabling for the marginalized and the oppressed (Chowdhry & Nair, 2002; Krishna, 1993, p. 388; Sajed, 2012).

The choice of terms and labels used to describe and categorize these critical perspectives are indicative of the "highly controversial" (Bleiker, 2008, p. 91) nature of debates surrounding poststructural/postmodern engagements. While some IR textbooks prefer the label "postmodernism," others use the term poststructuralism to describe the same set of approaches (Campbell, 2007; Edkins, 2007; Steans, Pettiford, Diez, & El-Anis, 2005). The different senses in which each of these terms are deployed by scholars who associate themselves with this strand of critical thinking can be a further source of confusion. Opting for the term postmodernism, for instance, Bleiker (2008) differentiates between "the postmodern as both a changing attitude and a fundamentally novel historical condition" (p. 87). Resonating with this stance, Burke (2008, p. 359) distinguishes "'postmodernism' (a set of theories) from 'postmodernity'" (a historical period) and defines "postmodernism" as "a theoretical orientation and set of concerns about global politics." Making a clear distinction between postmodernism and poststructuralism, Steans et al. (2005, p. 130) argue that "postmodernism is centrally concerned with the nature and consequences of modernity and develops a thorough critique of the Enlightenment project" and "poststructuralism is more concerned with the nature, role and function or dysfunction of language." Whereas Campbell (2007, p. 212) formulates "postmodernity" as "the cultural, economic, social, and political formation *within* modernity that results from changes in time-space relations" and suggests that the term poststructuralism—de-

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fined as an "interpretative analytics" that is affected by transformations in modernity—is more apt to depict this strand of critical investigation.

Highlighting the politically charged nature of labeling these approaches as "postmodern" by its critics in the discipline, Campbell (2007) suggests that at the root of the politics of naming lies a deep-rooted uneasiness stemming from the radical critique of modernity offered by these analyses. On this reading, poststructuralism is misunderstood as postmodernism because of an underlying anxiety on the part of its critics that stem from a conception of the critique of modernity as an outright rejection of its principles (Campbell, 2007, p. 211).

Even scholars, who do not share the agenda of this line of critical thinking, also note the disciplinary politics of naming. For instance, Patomäki (1997) highlights the deployment of "postmodernism" as a "rhetorical strategy" to dismiss and delegitimize such strands of thinking and research as a move that has important effects of power. He registers the difference between the two terms and suggests that "many followers of Derrida and Foucault would prefer to refer to their research program as '"post-structuralism' rather than 'postmodernism'" (Patomäki, 1997, p. 326).

Major Themes and Concepts of Poststructural/ Postmodern Thought

While it would hardly do justice to subsume the multiplicity of positions within poststructural/postmodern thought, it is nevertheless possible to point out some common assumptions and themes that characterize their agenda. Foremost among them are the radical questioning of ontological essentialism and epistemological foundationalism in social and political thought and analysis (Torfing, 1999). Rejecting the notion that the nature of things are defined by universal, atemporal qualities, poststructuralism/postmodernism asserts the impossibility of a pre-given, self-determining essence. It contests the possibility of providing universal grounds and absolute justifications for the truth of claims made about knowledge and value. Abandoning the Enlightenment optimism about the possibility of achieving objective knowledge of phenomena through the use of reason, poststructural/postmodern approaches claim that knowledge constructs its own object of study. They foreground language not only as a distinguishing feature of human beings, but also as the constitutive dimension of human relationships. Emphasizing the contingent, undetermined nature of reality, they exhibit a general aversion to metanarratives (total explanations) of social reality. Contra modernist interpretations, they argue that history is not a linear, progressive, uniform process of the unfolding of a single essence (human reason). Instead, they emphasize the contingency, openness of time, and variety of historical trajectories.

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Subject and Subjectivity

Poststructural/postmodern thought has close affinity with structuralism elaborated in the works of thinkers like Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss. One of the common themes that link the former to the latter is the critique of the modern subject as the sovereign subject of reason (autonomous, fully present, and transparent individual) (Sarup, 1993). At issue is what White (1997, p. 503) describes as, the "teflon subject … the assertive, disengaged self who generates distance from its background (tradition and embodiment) and foreground (external nature, other subjects) in the name of an accelerating mastery over them."

Problematization of this notion of an abstract, unitary subject/author as an originating consciousness and authority for meaning and truth was already underway in structuralist thought. According to Lévi-Strauss, for instance, the "ultimate goal of the human sciences is not to constitute man but to dissolve him" (Sarup, 1993, p. 1). Asserting the illusionary nature of a unified self, poststructural/postmodern approaches radicalize this critique by dissolving the subject altogether and abandoning "any residual notion of subjectivity" (Edkins, 2007, p. 90). The humanist belief that there is a universal essence of "man"—a timeless attribute of all human beings—is replaced with a view of the subject as produced through acts of power, molded by the political techniques and knowledges applied to it. A preconstituted, self-transparent subject (the subject of cogito, a conscious self that possesses a positive essence, which exists prior to or apart from its context) gives way to a de-centered or split subject (Žižek, 1999). Rather than taking the subject as the point of departure, poststructural/postmodern approaches transform the subject itself into a question and attend to the ways in which human beings are produced as particular political subjects through power relations.

Language

Dismantling the Cartesian subject as the authoritative voice of truth is bound up with the reconceptualization of language and the affirmation of its power as constitutive of subjectivity. In this regard, Saussure's disruption of the view of language as an ahistorical, transparent medium for communicating meaning has great influence on poststructural/postmodern thinkers (Sarup, 1993). Saussure conceived language as a system of differences where each term—lacking any essence, positivity—gained its identity through its differential relation to other terms. He argued that meaning is not generated through the relation between a word/name and an object/concept as the referential theory of meaning would suggest: that it is produced through the interrelation between the linguistic terms themselves. Put differently, according to Saussure, there is no necessary relation between a name and the concept that it names. Rather, their association comes about by convention, common usage. It is through the process of naming that an object is constituted as distinct from other objects, enabling speakers to see "it" (Edkins, 2007). By positing the autonomous status of the linguistic structure, Saussure was dismantling "the myth of the

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given," which posits that the reality is given to the subject, that consciousness has direct access to it (Callinicos, 1985, p. 89).

Poststructuralism/Postmodernism embraces structuralist perspective on language as a system of differences. Language is "not as an asset employed by a preexisting subject or as a constraint imposed on the subject, but [as] the medium through which the social identity of the subject is made possible" (George & Campbell, 1990, p. 285). Yet, they reject structuralism's scientific pretensions and its concomitant tendency to reduce heterogeneity and difference to the effects of an invariant structure (Storper, 2001). They repudiate structuralist "claims of totality and universality and the presumption of binary structural oppositions implicitly operate to quell the insistent ambiguity and openness of linguistic and cultural signification" (Butler, 1990, p. 54). Instead, they suggest that social structures cannot be external to, independent of the discursive realm and social context. Privileging ambiguity and openness, poststructuralism/postmodernism brings forth the moment of difference and probe into "the operative and limitless différance of language" (Butler, 1990, p. 54).

Text, Representation

The notion of text is a central concept for poststructural/postmodern investigations into world politics. The text does not merely refer to the written world, literature, but purveys the idea that the world is constituted like a text, in that access to "reality" is always mediated—it can only be apprehended through interpretative practices. Textuality of world politics registers the unbridgeable, inevitable gap between the represented and its representation. Bleiker (2009) elaborates this point through the distinction between mimetic versus aesthetic forms of representation in world politics. Subscribing to a view of representation as mimesis, dominant understandings of theory in International Relations "seek to represent politics as realistically and authentically as possible" (p. 14). Whereas an aesthetic approach "assumes that there is always a gap between a form of representation and what is represented therewith" (p. 19). Following on this, poststructural/postmodern approaches inquire into forms of mediation, historically produced styles of inscription that constitute the "pre-text" of international politics—"various reality-making scripts one inherits or acquires from one's surrounding cultural/linguistic condition" (Shapiro, 1989, p. 11). Treating the world as a complex, multilayered, interconnected text, they examine practices of representation, of mediation in uncommon places such as museums, travelogues, airports, poems, drama, and photography (Campbell, 2002; Debrix & Weber, 2003; Lisle, 2012; Sylvester, 2009).

Deconstruction

Critique of logocentric nature of thought characterizing Western philosophy is a theme that weaves poststructural/postmodern attempts to conceptualize difference. Logocentricism is a way of reasoning that operates through the production of dichotomies such as "meaning/form, soul/body, intuition/expression, literal/metaphorical, nature/culture, intelligible/sensible, positive/negative, transcendental/empirical, serious/nonserious, [where]

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the superior term belongs to the logos and is a higher presence; the inferior term marks a fall" (Culler, 1985, p. 92). According to Jacques Derrida, logocentric thought not only produces binary oppositions, but also sets up a hierarchical relation between the two terms. It "assumes the priority of the first term and conceives the second in relation to it, as a complication, a negation, a manifestation, a disruption of the first" (Culler, 1985, p. 92). Logocentric thinking, with its endless search for an uncontaminated, self-identical state, difference is something to be subsumed and negated.

Logocentricism is intimately linked with phonocentricism—privileging of speech over writing and presupposing the former as having unmediated, immediate access to "an order of meaning—thought, truth, reason, logic, the Word" (Culler, 1985, p. 92). Such a desire for and constant seeking after presence, a definitive answer to the question "what *is*?" entails authorizing a sovereign voice as the source of "truth." It puts in place "a sovereign voice, a voice beyond politics and beyond doubt … from which truth and power are thought to emanate as one" (Ashley & Walker, 1990A, 1990B, p. 368).

According to Derrida, however, logocentricism deconstructs itself in that both the dichotomies and hierarchical structures they authorize are unfounded and therefore carry an inbuilt tendency to dismantle (Edkins, 2007). Although privileged, the first term is parasitic on and is contaminated by the second term. Since "each term is structurally related to, and already harbours the other, totalities, whether conceptual or social, are never fully present and properly established" (Devetak, 2005, p. 169). Deconstruction as a form of thinking seizes these binaries and seeks to expose their inherent instability, untenability.

Power

Like Derrida, Michel Foucault's work has immense influence on poststructural/postmodern approaches in International Relations. His is also a thought of difference and grapples with this task by writing counter-histories, which challenge the basic presuppositions of Enlightenment thought about temporal unfolding—the idea of a unified history with an origin and an end. Referred to as "new historicisim," Focauldian genealogy maps discontinuities and difference that are silenced, "buried, covered, or excluded from view" (Devetak, 2005, p. 163) through dominant interpretations of the past.

Discourse, or "discursive formation," is a central concept to Foucault's genealogical investigations. Discourse is defined as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about—i.e. a way of representing—a particular kind of knowledge about a topic" (Hall, 1992, p. 291). These statements working together construct the topic in a specific way and circumscribe the limits to how it can be thought. Taking Nietzsche's observation that only which has no history can be defined, genealogy aims at "the continuous disruption of the structures of intelligibility that provide both individual and collective identities for persons and peoples" (Shapiro, 1992, p. 2). It seeks to recover the epistemic, historical discontinuities, reversals in central concepts of political life such as sovereignty and war (Bartelson, 1996, 2018).

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Foucault's work has been especially influential in thinking about and analyzing power. His appeal to "cut off the head of the king" in political thought and analysis is a reaction to the well-established paradigms of political power, which take legal or institutional models as their basis for analysis: either problematizing "power" along the axis of law and repression or analyzing power relations vis-à-vis institutional structures of the state (Foucault, 1997). In these accounts of the nature of power relations, power is regarded as a possession that enhances the capacity of those exercising it and impinges on those over whom it is exercised. Furthermore, the implicit assumption underlying such analyses of power is the view that the subjects who are caught in relations of power are autonomous, moral agents (Hindess, 1996). Consequently, questions about the exercise of power become entangled with questions of legitimacy and consent.

Moving away from juridico-political models of power and questions about sovereignty and legitimacy, Foucault (1997) distinguishes relations of power from other types of force relations such as exploitation and domination. Foucault suggests that power is not something that is possessed by preexisting entities such as an individual, a state, or a social class, but designates a social relation, which is characterized less by a confrontation between two adversaries or their mutual engagement than an interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations. Power exists only when exercised within this relation. Furthermore, power is productive in the sense that it does not block, repress, say "no" like the law; it "operates on the field of possibilities" (Foucault, 1997, p. 341). Rather than obstructing, power produces by structuring the possible fields of action. Such a conceptualization of power requires attending to the micro-physics of power (technologies designed to observe, monitor, shape, control the behavior of individuals) operating in a multiplicity of institutional settings. In Foucault's account, relations of power should not be conceived in repressive terms, but something that is positive, productive of subjectivity and social capacities for action. This aspect of power relations provides the basis for differentiating them from other types of force relations, which are characterized by an asymmetrical relation within which the subordinated has little room for maneuver. In the case of such subordination, Foucault argues, what is stake is not power, but violence.

In his analysis, Foucault identifies different practices of power. Sovereign power is the power over death. It concerns "a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself" to suppress it (Foucault, 1990, p. 136). In modernity, sovereign power gets supplanted with other relations of power—disciplinary power and biopower. These relations of power operate by "generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them" (Foucault, 1990, p. 136). Disciplinary practices, which are found in the barracks, prisons, schools, center on the "body as a machine" and aim to optimize its capabilities, increase its usefulness, its productive forces (Foucault, 1995). Unlike disciplinary power, biopower is "directed not at 'man-as-body' but at 'man-as-species'" and is concerned with the health, sanitation, birthrate, longevity, and race characteristic of a group of living human beings constituted as a population (Foucault, 2003, p. 243). While disciplines form the individualizing moment in the exercise of power, biopower is totalizing in that it takes as its object the mass of coexisting beings. The emergence of biopower constitutes a shift

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in the mechanisms of sovereign power. From being a "means of deduction," a power that impedes and destroys, it transforms into something that enables and generates through the administration of bodies, the management and promotion of life.

Poststructural/Postmodern Approaches in IR

Poststructural/postmodern investigations make practices of representation, discourse, and interpretation central to the analyses of world politics. Foregrounding the relations between language, politics, and social structure, they are informed by a "shared acknowledgement of the 'constitutive nature of language' and an antipathy toward 'closed system of knowledge" (George & Campbell, 1990). They challenge disciplinary boundaries by taking to task the discursive limits of the discipline constructed in the language of modern social sciences, which presumes a unity between natural and social sciences and the possibility to distinguish between facts and values (Smith, 1996, p. 16). They draw on the distinction between politics—that sphere of social life that comprises institutionalized processes, activities, subjects assumed to be the premises of political life (elections, political parties, policymaking, international treaties, diplomacy, etc.) and the political—"the frame of reference within which actions, events and other phenomena acquire political status in the first place" (Edkins, 1999, p. 2). With this move, they bring the political back in as they challenge "[e]xclusive epistemological claims or unreflective ontological assumptions about what constitutes a legitimate object of scholarly investigation" (Paipais, 2017, p. 105).

Challenging the established protocols of academic knowledge production on world politics, poststructural/postmodern perspectives reject the view of a subject of knowledge (a universal voice of "truth") unperturbed by the biases that stem from power relations and the influence of historical, political, cultural, social contexts it is situated in (Campbell, 2007). They deny a strict separation between the subject who knows from the object that is known and problematizes the assumption that there can be a universal scientific language that allows the external world to be described in a detached manner (Campbell, 2007). Challenging the distinctions between the subjective and the objective, fact and value, they suggest that our conceptions of facticity are "culturally constructed" and not given in nature (Gregory, 1989, p. x).

One of the key contributions of poststructural/postmodern approaches to world politics is their insight on how "many of the problems and issues studied in International Relations are not matters of epistemology and ontology, but of *power* and *authority*; they are struggles to impose authoritative interpretations of international relations" (Devetak, 2005, p. 167). According to Richard Ashley, the positivist epistemology dominant in the discipline is a particular interpretive method that is expressive of a desire for a "securely bound territory of truth and transparent meaning beyond doubt" (Ashley, 1996, p. 252). For poststructuralism/postmodernism, the inextricable link between knowledge and power renders production of knowledge not simply "a cognitive ... but a normative and political matter" (Devetak, 2005, p. 162). Instead of taking the social world as given and proceed-

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ing with analyses, they "investigate the interrelationship of power and representational practices that elevate one truth over another, that legitimate and subject one identity against another, that make, in short, one discourse matter more than the next" (Der Derian, 2009, p. 194).

Emphasizing the intimate "relationship between social power and questions of what, and how, we study international relations" (Smith, 2004, p. 499), poststructural/postmodern perspectives reject the binary division between theory and practice. Instead, they see "theory *as* practice" (George & Campbell, 1990, p. 287). Abandoning the view of the modern subject of knowledge that transcends its historicity, contextuality, they start from the assumption that "all observations and all theoretical systems … are part of the world they seek to describe and account for, and have an effect in that world" (Edkins, 2007, p. 88).

International Relations theory is regarded as a specific, privileged site that contributes to the production and reproduction of dominant interpretations of the world, hence, as constitutive of particular understandings of global life (in terms of the binary logic of sovereignty and anarchy, inside and outside) at the expense of others. In his seminal work, for instance, R. B. J. Walker (1995, p. 5) argues that theories of IR "are less interesting for the substantive explanations they offer than as expressions of the limits of contemporary political imagination" and to that extent can be read "as expressions of an historically specific understanding of the character and location of political life in general." According to Walker, the concept of sovereignty lies at the heart of this historically specific understanding of organizing political life and, to the extent that IR theories take it as a natural given, they reproduce and reaffirm the limits of modern political imagination.

State and Sovereignty

Ontological inquiries into the constitutive categories of political thought and practice in modernity constitute one of the key themes pursued by poststructural/postmodern theories of international politics. Elaborating the importance of the "turn to ontology," Michael Dillon writes: "For one cannot say anything about anything that *is*, without always already having made assumptions about the *is* as such. Any mode of thought … always already carries an ontology sequestered with it" (Dillon, 1999, p. 97). Consequently, poststructural/postmodern approaches demonstrate a "radical interest in thinking the basic categories of the international system instead of taking them as mechanical givens" (Wæver, 1996, pp. 169–170). In these inquiries into the "core ontological givens" of IR, the modern state and sovereignty take center stage.

Sovereignty from a poststructural/postmodern perspective refers to three different, yet, interrelated phenomena: as presence in the Derridean sense (standing in for notions such as essence, origin, identity, foundation); as autonomy in the liberal political sense (encapsulated in the free individual will); and as state sovereignty, which is understood "in the context of both an essentialist philosophical perspective and a liberal political position that stresses individual autonomy" (Polat, 1998, pp. 453–454). In his deconstructive reading of—what he terms as—the paradigm of sovereignty, Ashley (1989) elaborates on how

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these three phenomena fuse into each other for both historical and epistemological reasons in modernity. Modernity is understood as a regime of power in the Foucauldian sense as "a multifaceted regime of highly mobile knowledgeable practices—interpretive attitudes and practical dispositions ... there to discipline interpretation and conduct" (pp. 260–261). Paradigm of sovereignty refers to "a specific, historically fabricated, widely circulated, and practically effective interpretation of man as sovereign being" (p. 269). Man as a sovereign entity, Ashley argues, has been conceivable on the premise of the metaphysics of presence and logocentric discourse, which posits "an origin, an identical voice ... as the sovereign source of truth and meaning" (p. 261). Conception of sovereignty of the reasoning man acts as the ground for the sovereign state's claim to sovereignty. Situated within the broader discursive and political agenda of modernity, sovereignty becomes the nodal point where reasoning, autonomous Man, who is invested with the capacity and the will to emancipate humankind, fuses with the sovereign political community (the modern state) as the locus of political life. This narrative proscribes a political life amid an anarchical world of Otherness where the discourses of danger work toward domesticating political life by policing the limits, the boundaries of identity, of political possibility and ethical responsibility as it demarcates the self, secure inside, from the other, the dangerous outside (Ashley, 1987; Walker, 1995).

Following Foucault, poststructural/postmodern theorizing challenges the view of the state standing in opposition to society—treating it as something that is externally imposed—and the understanding of state power as something negative, repressive. They deny the state functional unity or priority over other relations of power (Kalyvas, 2002). Refusing to explain state and state power in terms of its inherent, pre-given properties, they see the state as "the contingent outcome of specific practices and the outcome of strategic interplays between diverse social forces within and beyond the state" (Jessop, 2001, p. 156). Put differently, rather than treating the state as an a priori, ontological given, they investigate *how* the sovereign state is produced as a cohesive, purposive actor through the ongoing dynamic processes of statecraft. Timothy Mitchell's (2002) study of the production of the modern state in Egypt provides an excellent example for Foucauldian approaches to the state. Analyzing a myriad of social practices—from disease prevention to methods of measurement, circulation, and exchange—Mitchell shows the way in which the boundaries between state and society—rather than being externally given, objectively determined—are "internally" produced through "modern techniques of power that make the state appear to be a separate entity that somehow stands outside society" (Mitchell, 1991, p. 91). State becomes a "structural effect," a discursive construct with "no coherence, unity and autonomy of its own" (Mitchell, 1991, pp. 85, 94).

Poststructural/postmodern approaches focus on textual strategies of "writing" the state and thereby "simulating sovereignty" (Weber, 1994) through modes of representation (the use of words, signifiers, symbols, and images) which imbue the state with presence, a concrete identity and agency. They explore the ways in which the enactment of various domestic and foreign policies produce particular understandings of the state and constitutes the identity of the self. In his *Writing Security*, for instance, David Campbell (1998) draws on the Derridean account of language and Judith Butler's notion of identity as per-

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formative to examine "the way in which the identity of "(the United States of) America" has been written and rewritten through foreign policies operating in its name" (p. x). Starting from the premise that the state has "no ontological status apart from the various acts that constitute its reality," he examines the way in which "constitution of identity is achieved through the inscription of boundaries that serve to demarcate" an "inside" from an "outside," a "self" from an "other," a "domestic" from a "foreign" (p. 9). Always a work in progress and never a finished product, the state is thus constituted through practices that code and discipline boundaries and produce identity.

While the relation between identity and foreign policy constitutes an important area of investigation, there is no uniform understanding of the representation of difference, of the other, the outside in the constitution of the self, the identity, the inside. For instance, for scholars like Campbell, discourses of danger are central to securing state identity and legitimizing state power. On this reading, modern statecraft comprises political practices that seek to subdue resistance and eliminate all that is foreign/different/dangerous. In contrast, other scholars argue that representations of the other does not necessarily translate into construction of difference as danger and argue that difference between self and other can take different forms (Hansen, 2006; Wæver, 2002). Shifting the focus away from geopolitical forms of othering between the inside and the outside, yet others focus on the temporal forms of othering in the constitution of the self (Diez, 2004).

Violence, War

Poststructuralism/postmodernism problematize the relations between violence and politics, force and law that are found in hegemonic accounts of world politics. While Realist accounts project violence to the anarchical realm outside and figure it as a strategical instrument deployed to advance state interest in an arena constantly prone to violence, Liberal international theory commits itself to the possibility of eliminating violence from political life through the development of liberal institutions and practices globally (Frazer & Hutchings, 2011). In contrast, poststructural/postmodern approaches suggest that being less an antidote to violence as it is generally supposed, modern political reason is itself implicated in the violence it is expected to cure (Campbell & Dillon, 1993). Making central the idea that violence is constitutive of modern subjectivity and modern political freedom is a lethal affair (Dillon, 2013), they examine strategic and security discourses to expose the ways in which the modern state constitutes political life as militarized life (Campbell, 1998; Chaloupka, 1992; Klein, 1994).

Informing these analyses is the idea that politics in modernity derives from an ontology of violence occasioned by a certain understanding of political subjectivity. Campbell and Dillon (1993) suggest that modernity's political subject—sovereign man, sovereign state—is a violent subject by constitution. On the one hand, taking violence as the ultimo ratio of politics, the basic subject of modern political thought is posited as the subject of violence. On the other hand, the subject of modern politics—the autonomous reasoning subject—is a violent political subject whose features, according to modern political thought, bring him into conflict with other men. Given that the political subject of violence is a reasoning

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subject, the complicity of reason in the violence of the political subject cannot be elided. What this diagnosis implies is that modern political reason not only cannot provide adequate tools to understand and address political violence, but that as a rationality of rule it is not immune to it. This paradoxical character of modernity acts as the premise for post-structural/postmodern engagements with two traditional problems in the discipline such as security and war.

An important strand of investigation has been developed by scholars, who draw on Foucault and rearticulate the problem of achieving peace and security not merely as a political project to overcome insecurity, but as a political method to govern life (Burke, 2007; Dillon, 1996; Dillon & Neal, 2008). Rather than being an objective condition to be addressed and remedied through state action in order to safeguard its subjects, security is revealed as a form of political subjection, as a political technology of rule. In her analysis of food crisis and the problem of hunger, Jenny Edkins elaborates the ways in politics in modernity devoted to securing life is tantamount to the technologization and hence de-politicization of politics (Edkins, 2000). Her analysis reveals the ways in which the framing of famine through discourses of modernity de-politicizes hunger and how it should be combated by prioritizing technical solutions through abstract analysis and the formulation of general principles. Such an approach merely reinstates and reproduces the form of politics that has produced the famine in the first place. Mark Duffield's (2007) study on the intersection between contemporary politics of development and security resonates with Edkins's conclusion as it suggests that the modern faith in development and progress becomes part of the problem itself.

Poststructural/postmodern investigations also take up the problem of war and use of force in IR, as they examine contemporary forms of warfare (Der Derian, 1990, 2009; Glezos, 2012). Drawing on Paul Virilio, for instance, James Der Derian (1990) places new technologies of simulation, surveillance, and speed at the center of his analysis and investigates the way in which these new forces and the discursive practices surrounding them transform the nature of international relation and it central practice—war. According to Der Derian, new technological practices give way to novel forms of mediation between states through the discursive power of chronopolitics and technostrategy. Chronopolitics is used to capture the displacement of geography/spatial determination by chronology (overtaking of space by pace) whereas technostrategy refers to the ways in which transformations in technology configure the way wars are fought and the stakes entailed in war-making. The postmodern practices of war, Der Derian argues, transform from being spatial to being temporal and perceptual phenomena.

Rather than focusing on the ways in which technological innovations transform warfare, Julian Reid (2006) draws on Foucault to develop a biopolitical critique of the contemporary War on Terror. According to Reid, the modern liberal project of solving the problem of war entails exercising power over life directly. Liberal regimes root out war internally by pacifying their subjects through disciplinary practices and "making the life of their societies into … logistical life," which he defines as "a life lived under the duress of the command to be efficient" (p. 13). Through biopower, they mobilize populations to wage

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war in the name of life defined as such, as in the case of The War on Terror. The liberal desire for peace, he argues, "is a polemological and ultimately terrorising project which can only proceed on the basis of most resentful violence against life" (p. 124).

On Value and Development

In addition to central themes and concepts of IR such as state, sovereignty, and war, poststructural/postmodern insights and discourse analysis are used in studies on international political economy (IPE) as well. At the center of poststructural/postmodern criticism of mainstream IPE is the latter's presupposition of "a prediscursive economic materiality"—an economy conceived as a realm that is constituted outside of practices of representation, culture, ideas, and identities (De Goede, 2003, p. 80). Challenging such a separation between the "real" and the "ideal," such criticism makes politics of representation, performativity, and dissent central to analyses of socioeconomic relations in modern capitalism. While these studies focus on traditional themes, problematics, objects, and subjects of IPE (such as production, finance, exchange, firms, states, socioeconomic classes), by challenging rationalist IPE (Amin & Palan, 2001) they also extend the analytical field of IPE as they bring into critical purview the intersections between politics of security and economic practices (Amoore, 2013; Amoore & De Goede, 2008; Cooper, 2008; De Goede, 2004). These studies have encouraged the development of cultural political economy as a new field of study.

Scholars working within the framework of poststructural/postmodern approaches to IPE highlight three themes that weave this scholarship together (De Goede, 2006). One of those themes is the politicization of what is otherwise represented as technical knowledge. Undergirding this theme is a concern with the way in which "power operate[s] … within specific contexts to stabilize—with a tendency to normalize and depoliticize—particular discourses and their effects?" (Peterson, 2006). A second theme is the problematization of interest and agency by de-centering the sovereign, rational actor as the subject of IPE (De Goede, 2006). In their analysis of "libidinal political economy," for instance, Gammon and Palan (2006) use Freudian insights to offer a fragmented subject driven by conflictual internal dynamics. Finally, politics of dissent and resistance constitute a third theme in poststructural/postmodern approaches to political economy. They displace a totalizing understanding of capital with a conception that sees the latter as "a performative practice in need of constant articulation and reiteration" (De Goede, 2006). Contesting the discursive coherence of capital and focusing on how it is produced and reproduced in everyday life, they suggest that the constant need for its re-enunciation opens up possibilities for resistance and subversion (Davies, 2006; Gibson-Graham, 2006).

In a related field, poststructural/postmodern approaches have also challenged predominant conceptions of the idea of development and the ontological, epistemological assumptions informing theories of modernization and capitalist development (Crush, 1995). Influenced by poststructural/postmodern understandings of the power/knowledge nexus, critique of the Cartesian subject, and the problematization of metanarratives, they conceptualize "development as a discourse … as a modernist regime of knowledge and disciplinary

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power" (Crush, 1995, p. xiii). They offer a "post-development" agenda that attends to imagining "a new domain which … leaves behind the imaginary of development, and transcends development's dependence on Western modernity and historicity" (Escobar, 1992, p. 21). More recently, scholars have explored the entanglement of the question of climate change with the desire for capitalist development in Third World countries and global inequities (Chakrabarty, 2018).

Thinking at the Limits

Poststructuralist/postmodern approaches attempt to articulate a different political imaginary and develop an alternative conceptual language to think the International beyond the confines of the paradigm of sovereignty, the modern subject and a politics devoted to securing that subject—a politics that is premised on a desire for identity, order, unity. Through these alternative conceptions, they challenge both state-centric, communitarian visions, and cosmopolitan arguments (Lawler, 2008).

Community, Resistance, Democracy

Suggesting that contemporary "spatiotemporal processes that are radically at odds with the resolution expressed by the principle of state sovereignty" (Walker, 1995, p. 155) some scholars highlight the need to rethink the questions of democracy and political community beyond the paradigm of sovereignty. In the context of "centrifugal forces" of globalization, for Connolly (1991), the territorial state's "tight grip over public definitions of democratic accountability, danger, and security" renders it "a potential carrier of virulent nationalism" (p. 463). Drawing on Nietzsche and moving beyond foundational conceptions of ethico-political life, he calls for the cultivation of a different political ethos. Ethos refers to the "relational dispositions of people," to the customs, priorities, habits, and norms that animate political institutions, organizations, and practices (Connolly, 2005, p. 135). Connolly argues for a different "democratic imaginary" that takes as its premise an "ethos of pluralization" that exceeds the territorial boundaries of the state.

Rearticulating the contemporary political impasse less as a problem stemming from territorial definitions of liberal democracy and more as a problem ensuing from the globalization of liberal regimes, other scholars raise the question of "how we might rethink and pursue a politics of life" (Reid, 2006, p. 63) beyond liberal biopolitics. Affirming that "there is *more to life* than … ongoing survival," Evans and Reid (2014) note that changing the given order of things means the death of what exists so as to make way to what is to come. As they explain, "we cannot even conceive of different worlds if we cannot come to terms with the death and extinction of this one" (p. 170). Reid (2014) elaborates such a politics by contextualizing it in relation to two interrelated issues (climate change and migration) high on the global political agenda, perceived as major threats to political stability and security. The study exposes the way in which fears of climate-induced migration are encouraging and contributing to the implementation of methods of population control, including sterilization of the illiterate poor. Ultimately, what informs these regimes of

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security to govern migration is the "fear of rupture that portends in the new," the fear that the migrant signals the end of the existing constitution of society (Reid, 2014, p. 204). Instead, Reid (p. 205) elaborates a different political imaginary that draws on "a celebration of the beauty that emerges through the monstrous mixing of life across the climatic boundaries" and offers a way to imagine the emergence of new life forms, of new ways of being, of worlds that would otherwise be blocked by securitizing, de-politicizing, catastrophic imaginaries.

Politics of Ethics

An important strand of inquiry pursued by poststructuralist/postmodern approaches concerns the question ethics in world politics and how the ethical may be conceptualized beyond a moral singularity. Working with nonfoundationalist, immanent framework—without "resort[ing] to external authorities or transcendental values" (Der Derian, 2009, p. 193), they register the way in which the ethical is always already bound up with the political. In the words of Zehfuss (2009, p. 98), "[i]t is impossible to understand ethics—what we should do what is right—as separate from questions of politics, not least the question of how we come to believe that particular responses to these questions are more valid than others." The traditional understanding of ethics (the notion that ethics concerns generating abstract moral codes or universal rules of conduct to mediate relations among autonomous, preconstituted moral agents) is replaced with the investigation of political ethos—forms of life, subjectivity, and identity—called forth by particular conceptions of the political. "The ethics of post-structuralism," Der Derian (2009, p. 194) notes, "is located in and through the construction of subjectivity." They reconceptualize ethics, politics, and the international by unsettling the notion of a secure self—the sovereign reasoning subject—and formulate ethics in terms of an inescapable relation between self and the Other. Recovery of the ethical is intimately and inescapably bound up with the recovery of the political. Politics does not concern applying predefined rules, a question of arithmetic, of techno-politics. The political, it is argued, is not a question of the "singular what" but a question of "a plural 'how'" (Dillon, 1996, p. 65). Put differently, the political is conceptualized as a way of being in the world where the life/being human is cast as a verb—a way of being, as a "person as such" (Edkins, 2011) rather than a noun—an entity that can be enumerated, categorized.

At the center of poststructuralism/postmodernism's critique of the dominant conception of ethics is the modern subject (the individual in the domestic realm, the state in the international realm), which the latter take as the ethical agent. The limit of the modern rational subject—sovereign entities of politics—mark the boundaries of identity from difference, inside from the outside, order from anarchy. When the subject of ethics is understood as a complete, fully constituted self, coexistence is conceptualized and articulated through "a logic of composition" (Odysseos, 2007). This logic reduces coexistence to the copresence of previously self-sufficient, nonrelational, autonomous entities (sovereign states, individuals, substate groups). "The decisive effect of the logic of composition is thus the restriction of relationality to mere co-presence of pre-constituted entities" (p. xxvii). Positing subjects as simultaneously being present and not coexisting, the logic of

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copresence incorporates coexistence as "an after-thought," as "extrinsic to the subject," effacing the constitutive role of Otherness. Effacement of heteronomy—the role of the Other in the formation of the self—puts in place a particular ethos of relating to the other: an ethos of survival through which the other is encountered in narratives of a pre-socially dangerous Hobbesian world. Within this schema, responsibility gets cast as something pertaining merely to the survival of the self.

Rather than taking boundaries that mark the limit of sovereign community and identity as given, poststructuralist scholars focus on the limit—the "inter," in-between, relationality— and examine how it operates as marker of difference. The limit is rearticulated as a site that exposes what is effaced by modern subjectivity: a sense of selfhood that is always already relational, a self that is constituted by Otherness. Erasing the conceptual distinction between self and Other brings into view the radical interdependence of being (Campbell & Dillon, 1993; Zehfuss, 2007). The premise for such a move is the conception of ontological difference as the defining feature of being human. It is a difference that renders human existence, not just a multiplicity of human subjects (subjects such as the nation, class, race, religion, etc.), but a plurality "[i]nstalled within the being of every human being" (Dillon, 1999, p. 114). Such accounts displace the question of difference and the limit from the realm of inter—that is, difference between sovereign subjects (individuals or states)—to an account of difference that is intra—that is, pertaining to the self as such. The Other, which inhabits the self, it is argued, can never be folded into the self and thereby prevents the human from ever being at home with itself. In short, the question of the limit is reconfigured from being a question merely about the limit, the boundary between self and other, and their interrelation into the very operation of the relationality itself. What is at stake, poststructural/postmodern interrogations suggest, is not merely the difference between identities and their indebtedness to each other in their constitution, but an unassimilable Otherness—a difference that prevents any identity from ever becoming fully stabilized. Being "inevitably implicated and indeed exposed" (Zehfuss, 2009, p. 104) renders the form of responding to the other as an inevitable consequence of being-with and therefore constitutes existence as responsibility. Building on these premises, scholars seek to develop a poststructural/postmodern political ethics that is premised on the notion of de-territorialization of responsibility, asserting not only the obligation to respond to conflicts, to suffering to the other, but, more importantly, the urgent need to reflect upon what it means to respond (Campbell, 1994; Dauphinée, 2007; Jabri, 1998). They develop a notion of the "ethic of the encounter" that "evokes radical hospitality and a welcoming of the other despite the risks to the security of the self and the self's identity" (Lawler, 2008).

Critical Aesthetics

Rather than taking for granted the relationship between the represented and its representation as in most IR scholarship, poststructural/postmodern approaches assert the unbridgeable gap between the two and locate the political in that very gap (Bleiker, 2008). Shifting the focus away from mimetic to aesthetic forms of representation, they make images, narratives, sounds, literature, visual art, cinema, performative arts central to their

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investigations (Bleiker, 2008; Edkins & Kear, 2013; Opondo & Shapiro, 2011; Shapiro, 2009, 2010). Inquiries in this regard range from forms of visualization at work in contemporary security practices" (Amoore, 2009) to the "musical modulations" of political thought (Whitehall, 2006).

Poststructural/postmodern concern with representation in world politics is very much entangled with questions of scholarly responsibility: How does one relate to those one writes about and makes present? What kind of knowledge one produces about those one represents? (Zehfuss, 2013). For instance, rather than treating war as a matter of allegedly value-neutral analyses, poststructural/postmodern writings make the question of how one narrates war central to their investigations. They grapple with the relation between writing on war, responsibility, accountability (Jabri, 2007; Steele, 2013) and experiment with different forms of writing war—such as storytelling—and push the boundaries of what a scholarly engagement with war and security—beyond a pretense to scientific objectivity—might mean (Dauphinée, 2007; Hozic, 2015).

The critical impulse in these investigations into aesthetics is succinctly captured by Michael Shapiro (2013) who elaborates on the meaning of critical thinking. Following Jacques Ranciére's conception of "critical artistic practices," these interventions seek to disrupt the established relations between the sayable and the visible. Through "juxtapositions that unbind what are ordinarily presumed to belong together" critical aesthetics seeks not only "to challenge institutionalized ways of reproducing and understanding phenomena," but also "to create the conditions of possibility for imagining alternative worlds" (p. xv).

Future Directions

Almost two and a half decades after "dissident voices" made their first collective intervention into disciplinary debates with the special issue of the *International Studies Quarterly*, poststructural/postmodern investigations entertain a degree of reception today than what could have possibly been foreseen at the time. New and cutting edge research are being published in prominent journals of the field such as *International Political Sociology*, *Society and Space*, *Security Dialogue*, and *Review of International Studies* while the number of panels at major conferences, the number of graduate students versed in the poststructural/postmodern perspectives increase by the day. Proving the falsity of alleged irrelevance of poststructural/postmodern IR to empirical analyses and policy questions, there is a constantly growing literature that examine a wide range of topics and issues pertaining to world politics both at conceptual and empirical levels: ranging from questions of time and temporality to the meaning and effects of bordering practices, from contemporary global security technologies to humanitarian interventions and international finance (De-Goede, 2005; Lobo-Guerrero, 2011; Lundborg, 2012; Steele, 2013; Vaughan-Williams, 2009).

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Opening new avenues of research for poststructural/postmodern IR, the new materialism debates within critical social theory and political philosophy has sparked new and fruitful conversations, which carry important implications for future directions. Rather than treating matter as passive, raw, inert, brute stuff, new materialism asserts the philosophical and political need to take seriously the "vitality of non-human bodies" (Bennett, 2010). De-centering the human, attending to the agency of non-human objects, focusing on human/non-human interactions has important implications about issues that are immediate policy concern—such as the global ecological crisis, uncertainties, and anxieties affected by the Anthropocene, globally circulating viruses, and health epidemics. The impact of these conversations reach beyond policy issues however, as they raise questions that carry the potential to recast an anthropocentric discipline such as IR. What would an IR beyond the human look like? How would it a post-human perspective recast the structure–agency problem? How would it alter our conceptions of security or war? What would it mean to speak of cosmopolitanism, democracy, and resistance? These and other questions are increasingly being taken up by poststructural/postmodern scholars (Connolly, 2013; Cudworth & Hobden, 2011, 2015; Mitchell, 2014) In addition to opening up new avenues of research by reframing central questions of world politics, new materialism debates also carry important implications for poststructural/postmodern IR to the extent that it paves the way to develop more robust understanding of discourse and text by dismantling the language and matter binary altogether (Lundborg & Vaughan-Williams, 2015).

Link to Digital Materials

The Disorder of Things.

Gloknos: Center for Global Knowledge Studies.

Histories of Violence Project.

Theory Talks.

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Aslı Çalkıvik

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Istanbul Technical University

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