UNIT 1.

GEOPOLITICS IN MODERN VISION

Revealing this dependence of modern geopolitics on an order of philosophical commitments and conceits is not to absolutize geopolitics as discourse (*contra* Agnew 1998). Geopolitics is state philosophy, a technology of govern-mentality. It was conceived and nurtured in the imperial capitals of the Great Powers, in their learned academies, in the map and war rooms of ambitious expansionist states. A parochial imperialist gaze that represented lands beyond the horizon as spaces of destiny, it helped to colonize the globe with networks of communication, logistics of war, and ethnocentric models of territorial organization (Matellart 1996). The modern geopolitical imagination is a legacy of the imposition of European territorial forms across the globe from the sixteenth century, an order of power over the Earth that sought to discipline its infinite spaces – internal and external, mountain and valley, land and sea – around sovereign presence and immanent logos. Global space was stamped by essential presence (and absence), organized into natura regions and hierarchies, graded for its inherent value and worth, and marked as the destined property of providential authorities.

Yet, this order of geo-power and its epistemological imperialism has not gone without challenge from alternative subjugated forms of organizing space and graphing the geo (Gregory 1994). In recent decades, the modern geopolitical project has appeared more precarious than before as globalization has rearranged the interconnectivity and functional boundaries of the world political map (Luke 1996). Today, the fraying of the modern geopolitical project is becoming more and more evident as the daily practices of 'global life' slip territorial bounds and accelerate beyond the modern map, prompting declarations of the 'end of geopolitics' (Ó Tuathail 1997). It is to the fraying lines and edges of the modern map, to the irruptions of the postmodern within our still nominally modern world politics, that we now turn.

Postmodern geopolitics

A series of distinct yet nevertheless related tendencies have served in recent years to generate considerable speculation about the 'end of the modern' in contemporary world politics. The first is the long relative decline of American hegemony in world politics, an inevitable process that has had many symbolic turning points: the end of the Bretton Woods system of pegged exchange rates, the oil crises of the 1970s, the US withdrawal and *de facto* defeat in Vietnam (Cox 1987). The second is the concurrent and also long-term increasing relative intensity of economic globalization, a phenomenon that is hardly new but that has *appeared* in the last decade to be a profound structural change away from a predominantly statist international political economy towards a deterritorialized global economy (Kofman and Young 1996, Mittelman 1996). Again, many processes and events are read as symbolic of an inevitable and unstoppable 'globalization': the emergence of global financial space, the widespread adoption of flexible specialization production methods, the explosion of transnational investment in the United States, the implementation of the NAFTA, the burgeoning US trade deficits with Japan and now China (Harvey 1996; Greider 1997; Leyshon 1996). The third tendency involves the oft-described 'revolutionary changes' wrought by the establishment, adoption, and ever-increasing diffusion of new information technologies throughout the interstices of societies, economies, and polities: facsimile machines, satellite technologies, personal computers, cable television, and, in recent years, networked computers, wireless communications, and the Internet (Tapscott 1996). In keeping with McLuhan's famous declaration that the 'medium is the message', many theorists have, with considerable justification, argued that these technologies have radically remade the bonds, boundaries and subjectivities of actors, societies, economies, and polities as they have unfolded across global space, itself transformed by the process (Poster 1995; Morley and Robins 1995). All three tendencies in combination with others – increasing ease of transnational transportation and mass travel, the consolidation of transnational media empires, continued transnational migration – have generated a widespread fourth tendency, the disembodying of societies from their nominal territorial roots, the shrinkage and collapse of traditional conceptions of scale, and the emergence of a fluid experience of 'global life' (Appadurai 1996). In a world where traditional centers no longer hold, technologies of time–space compression are colliding modern scales into each other and generating postmodern local/global fusions that many have termed 'glocalization' (Agnew and Corbridge 1995; Robertson 1995).

Does globalization, as Luke (1994) suggests, implode geopolitics? One means of exploring this question is to trace the emergence of new forms of imagining global space in the condition of postmodernity, new modes of representation that Campbell (1996), like many others, identifies with *flows, networks, and webs* (Appadurai 1996; Castells 1989; Shapiro and Alker 1996). Describing the eroding of once discrete national economies by flows of transnational commerce, Robert Reich (1991) identifies 'global webs' as the emergent economic geometry of the contemporary epoch. Corporate nationality is becoming increasingly irrelevant as formerly centralized corporations restructure themselves into web-like organizations with global reach. Power and wealth flows to those groups with the most valuable skills in problem solving, problem identifying and strategic brokering. 'As the world shrinks through efficiencies in telecommunications and transportation, such groups in one nation are able to combine their skills with those of people located in other nations in order to provide the greatest value to customers located almost anywhere'. Contemporary information technologies are fundamental to this new geometry of power. 'The threads of the global web are computers, facsimile machines, satellites, high-resolution monitors, and modems – all of them linking designers, engineers, contractors, licensees, and dealers worldwide'.

Manuel Castells (1996) pushes this further, suggesting that the dominant functions and processes of the information age are inducing a new *network society*. While networks have long existed, 'the new information technology paradigm provides the material basis for its pervasive expansion throughout the entire social structure.' Networks, he argues, 'constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcome of processes of production, experience, power and culture' (1996). They are making new types of spatial practices possible. Being part of a network, a set of interconnected nodes, is crucial to the exercise of power in the information age. Switches connecting networks are the privileged instruments of power. 'The switchers are the power holders'. Yet the switchers are powerful only by virtue of the network that 'induces a social determination of a higher level' than that of any social interest expressed through or located at any node or point along the network. Echoing earlier arguments (Castells 1988), he declares that 'the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power' (1996). Castells' technologically driven analysis subsumes all the 'new' geo-graphing tropes of postmodernity – flows, webs, connectivity, and networks – within a schema that is ultimately eclectic and *ad hoc*. Bruno Latour's (1993, 1997)

notion of the network is more ontologically radical than Castells' grab-bag conception. Challenging the operation of what he terms the 'Modern Constitution', which legislates an ontology that holds that (1) 'even though we construct Nature, Nature is as if we did not construct it' and (2) 'even though we do not construct Society, Society is as if we did construct it', Latour (1993) claims that we have never strictly been modern, for we do not abide by the terms of the Modern Constitution. A vast middle kingdom of hybrids, of quasiobjects and quasi-subjects, of cyborgs and monsters, is the proliferating product of the socio-technical networks that make up the unacknowledged nonmodern world. So numerous and multiple have these nature–society–object–discourse amalgamations become that they have strained the acts of purification and translation needed to keep the Modern Constitution intact. Our Enlightenment ontologies struggle to make sense of a world where humans and nature are so intimately interdigitated with scientific and technological systems of all kinds.

The subjects, objects, and actors our postmodernity has thrown up are all impure, hybrid, boundary creatures. Our world, he suggests, is a made up of collectives of humans and nonhumans. It is best described as composed of 'actornetworks', which are more than the technical or social networks isolated and described by Castells. Actor-network theory, Latour (1997) writes, 'claims that modern societies cannot be described without recognizing them as having a fibrous, thread-like, wiry, stringy, ropy, capillary character that is never captured by the notions of levels, layers, territories, spheres, categories, structure, systems... Literally there is nothing but networks.' Thinking in terms of networks, according to Latour, problematizes proximity/distance and local/global distinctions, in short geography as we have conventionally known it. The science of geography, of mapping, measuring and triangulating physical space, is useless, according to Latour, for actor-network theory, for it seeks to define universal measures of proximity, distance, and scale based on physical measurements. Proximity, distance, and scale, however, are defined by the connectivity of a network. 'The notion of a network helps us to lift the tyranny of geographers in defining space and offers us a notion which is neither social nor "real" space, but associations'. If geography is reconceptualized as connectivity not space, traditional 'real space' geography is merely one network among multitudes. Using fragments from these and many other theorists – Marx, Mumford, Lukacs, Baudrillard, and Virilio – Luke (1994, 1995, 1996, this volume) outlines a suggestive McLuhan-like three-stage narrative for conceptualizing the shifting relationship between humans and nature, and the transformative

environments and orders of time–space these generate. Luke begins with first nature, an order of time–space where the relationship between humans and nature is largely unmediated by complex technological systems. In this ideal schema, the principle of spatial ordering is organic and corporeal. 'The wetware of the human body measured space, marked distance, metered time, and defined order with infinite variation in the contemporary manifestations of each traditional society' (Luke 1996).

The enveloping environment and lifeworld is the natural biosphere. If first nature has a geopolitics, it is one organized by terrestrial visions and practices Luke's schema is not strictly successionist; older orders of space are certainly succeeded and displaced by newer ones, but the older orders do not necessarily disappear. The social order of primordial communities in organic space prevailed before the invention and implementation of city and state building but also beyond it. Echoing Lukacs and Mumford, Luke describes second nature as the artificial technosphere manufactured and built by modern industrial capitalism from the eighteenth century onwards. Its spatial orderings are engineered, its lifeworld the artificial technosphere created by humans and mechanical machines, its landscapes those of cities and states, its identities those of nations, peoples, and ethnicities. In contrast to the localistic corporeal technologies of first nature, second nature is spatialized by evolving hardware complexes of railways, electrical grids, steamships, hard-surface roads, canals, and telegraph/telephone systems (Matellart 1996). Space is mastered by states and these hardware complexes. This, in sum, is the classic era of modern territorial geopolitics, of competition between distinct, bounded spatial entities for the domination of lands, oceans, and the resources of the Earth. The most provocative aspect of Luke's schema is his elucidation of a distinct realm of third nature, where spatial orderings are generated by cybernetic systems. This is the domain of the informational cybersphere, its electronic landscapes the cyberscapes, infoscapes and mediascapes of postmodern informational capitalism. The forms and structures of second nature begin to buckle and disintegrate under the impact of fast capitalism and its globalizing infostructures. 'Systems of software, as cybernetic codes, televisual images, and informational multimedia, sublate the central importance of hardware... A third nature of telemetricality emerges where informationalization rapidly pluralizes the spatialized operational potentialities of existing cultures and societies' (Luke 1996). Modern geographing becomes postmodern info graphing (Luke, this volume). Groups of people begin to join global webs, while the quickening space of flows erodes traditional divisions between the local, national, and global, creating a

scalar dynamic of 'neo-world orders' composed of rearranged glocal space (Luke 1995). New networked social actors, quasi-subject cyborgs, and quasi-object 'humachines' within megamachinic collectives populate third nature and give it its functional ontologies, though not, *contra* Haraway, yet its politics, dominated still by mythic liberal categories, identities, and narratives (Haraway 1991; Luke 1996, 1997). All of these schematic theorizations have their problems. Reich has justly been criticized for exaggerating the erosion of national economies, the irrelevancy of corporate nationality, and globalization (Hirst and Thompson 1996). Castells can be justly critiqued for his technological determinism, hasty eclecticism, and overly extended reductionist claims. Latour's schema threatens to dissolve all our inherited ontological notions into networks, inflating the concept, dehistoricizing it, and as a consequence generating only modest insight. Luke's schema can be accused of being too sweeping, abstract and intellectually isomorphic, an academic exercise with questionable relevance to the 'real' not 'hyper-real' dilemmas and dramas of world politics today (for counter-evidence see Luke 1991, 1993). Yet, such schematic theorizations can be useful in clarifying immanent tendencies in contemporary affairs. Combining Agnew's arguments with the suggestive claims of Luke and others, I have constructed a table distinguishing a purified modern from an immanent postmodern geopolitics. The table is organized around five key questions central to the problematic of geopolitics *as practiced by dominant states in world politics*, with two sets of distinctions devoted to each. The questions are as follows:

    1. How is global space imagined and represented?

    2. How is global space divided into essential blocs or zones of identity and difference?

    3. How is global power conceptualized?

    4. How are global threats spatialized and strategies of response conceptualized?

    5. How are the major actors shaping geopolitics identified and conceptualized?

    While such an exercise has its limits, grappling with these five questions reveals some general trends and tendencies about the conditions of possibility of geopolitics at the end of the twentieth century that are worthy of critical attention. What the tabular distinctions highlight and elucidate are tendencies already finding expression in the practices of the US strategic complex of institutions, intellectuals, and actor-networks. The first question points to the growing significance of telemetrical visualizations in contemporary world politics. It was no accident that the Bosnian War peace talks in 1995

were held at the Wright–Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, the place where the term 'bionics' was first coined and the site of some of the most advanced geographical information systems (GIS) and visualization technologies in the world (Gray 1997). There the negotiating parties could visit the 'Nintendo' room, where they could see up-to-date three-dimensional maps of the disputed territories and settle precisely on lines of separation and demarcation. The technology, according to Secretary of State Warren Christopher, enabled the parties to 'fly' over the area and 'actually see what they were talking about' (quoted in Gray 1997). But what the parties were 'actually seeing' was, of course, a simulation, a model of the real that became in Dayton more real than the real terrain itself. The displacement in Dayton of maps by GIS, of modern cartographic representations of global space by postmodern telemetrical simulations, is symptomatic of a much broader technocultural transformation in how world politics is imagined and visually represented in the late twentieth century. With globally positioned 24-hour news machines in perpetual operation, the drama of world politics has been turned into an information spectacle, a spectacle that takes its form from its virtual life in flow mations. Perpetually projected and screened as televisual images and easily recognizable scripts – chaos in the streets, democracy in action, *coup d'état* in motion – world politics has long ceased to be the theatrical drama it was to geopoliticians in the first half of the twentieth century. It is now a hyper-reality of television spectacles and military simulations, a universe of information that encompasses and overwhelms all. CNN's spinning globe is a globe in informational spin. Residual yet redundant, the tropes of political realism can no longer cope with the dizzying world scene. Visions are eclipsed by vertigo (Ó Tuathail 1996). The speed, quantity, and intensity of information problematizes the very possibility of foreign policy as deliberative reflection and decision making (Luke and Ó Tuathail, forthcoming). The second question foregrounds the disintegration of the Euclidian world of discrete nation-states imagined by so many political realists. Maintaining a distinct border between the inside and the outside, the domestic and the international was and still is always a matter of political performance (Walker 1993; Campbell 1992; Weber 1995), but it is today a performance that is becoming more complex and involved amidst the deterritorializing scalescrambling consequences of globalization. In our postmodern condition of deterritorialization, Appadurai (1996) has argued, 'configurations of people, place, and heritage lose all semblance of isomorphism.' Contemporary cultural forms are 'fundamentally fractal, that is, as possessing no Euclidian boundaries, structures, or regularities'. The questions we need to