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Problematizing geopolitics: survey, statesmanship and strategy

Gearóid Ó Tuathail (Gerard Toal)

'Geopolitics' is a polysemous term that exceeds all attempts to delimit it as a singular presence. It is better approached by critically investigating how the concept is made to carry certain meanings in political discourse. This paper considers three different ways in which geopolitics is used to make meaning in global politics: (i) as survey, (ii) as a philosophy of statesmanship and (iii) as grand strategy. In documenting this performative range of geopolitics, the paper problematizes the conditions of possibility which enable the production of geopolitics as knowledge generally. The key problematic it identifies is a Cartesian perspectivism which operates through assumptions about the faculty of *sight* to produce the *siting* and *citing* of global politics.

key words critical geopolitics survey navigate strategy egopolitics

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Introduction

Geopolitics is not an immanently meaningful term but a historically ambiguous and unstable concept. Originally coined in Swedish by Rudolf Kjellen in an article on the boundaries of Sweden in 1899, the word *geopolitik* was first introduced into German in a review of Kjellen's work in 1903 and subsequently by Kjellen himself in 1905 (Holdar 1992, 319–20). Popularized most famously by Karl Haushofer, who discovered Kjellen's work during World War I, the term established itself in interwar Germany and took on a set of meanings distinct from its use as a category in Kjellen. Kjellen was the first of many commentators to decry the polysemy of the term, complaining that the Germans were misusing the very word he himself coined (Thermaenius 1938, 166). By the 1930s, the word had become a popular one in German political language on international affairs. Inevitably, this popularization of the term was accompanied by a certain amount of confusion as to what *geopolitik* really meant. One commentator suggested in 1938 that the term 'geopolitics' had at least five different meanings and that it was

therefore not surprising that 'a certain amount of obscurity has accompanied its use' (Thermaenius 1938, 165).

The outbreak of World War II and the subsequent allied propaganda war against Nazi Germany facilitated the emergence of an English language word 'geopolitics'. Geopolitics became the name for a new and 'lurid scientific system' that, in the words of *Life* magazine, 'a Briton invented, the Germans used and the Americans need to study' (Thorndike 1942). Once introduced into allied political discourse, geopolitics came to have a paradoxical double life. On the one hand, the term was a taboo word associated with an imperialist Nazi foreign policy. On the other hand, geopolitics was a necessary evil, a hardheaded strategic approach to the study of global politics that the allies could not afford to ignore. 'Let us learn our geopolitics' and 'It's smart to be a geopolitical' were the distilled sentiments pushed by anti-Nazi emigrés in the early forties (Schuman 1942; Strausz-Hupe 1943).

Though stigmatized as a 'pseudoscience' by certain influential intellectuals like Isaiah Bowman,

Richard Hartshorne and Hans Morgenthau, geopolitics became part of Cold War strategic discourse. In the early 1950s Schmidt (1954), in an introduction to a bibliography on geopolitics for the US Airforce, noted that it is used in a wide variety of senses. In some instances, he suggested, the term appears to have no meaning at all. In the 1960s and 1970s, Henry Kissinger propelled geopolitics back into general public discourse and made it a favourite term of journalists keen to be read as serious and worldly (Hepple 1986). In Latin America at this time, the concept became part of the ideology of bureaucratic authoritarian states (Hepple 1992). Within the United States in the early 1980s, geopolitics came to have significance in the Reagan administration's revitalized production of the Cold War, appearing frequently in discussions concerning Central America and the Caribbean (Ó Tuathail 1986; Ronfeldt 1983). Inevitably, these proliferating usages eroded the confidence of some in geopolitics as a meaningful concept. In 1986 one political scientist was moved to write that the difficulty with geopolitics is that 'it is conceptually so broad that it can and does mean all things to all people' (Haglund 1986, 223).

Complaints about the polysemy or meaninglessness of geopolitics are problematic in themselves. In general, such observations assume a naive theory of language where words and concepts have stable, assured identities which refer unproblematically and unambiguously to a fixed set of referents. This assumption, however, has long been questionable. Rather than assuming that we can ever truly define and isolate the essence of geopolitics, this paper seeks to problematize the ways in which geopolitics has been made meaningful in recent political discourse. How is geopolitics put into political discourse? How does it function? What is the problematic marked by its deployment and use? Instead of treating geopolitics as a self-evident presence, this paper seeks to question how geopolitics is presented in our political culture, how it is a gathering point for meaning and knowledge about global politics, a mark of a series of performative practices. This paper is part of a broader project that has come to be known as *critical geopolitics* (Dalby 1991; Dodds 1993; Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992; Ó Tuathail 1994).

To effect this problematization of geopolitics, this paper considers three cases of how geopolitics is deployed in late Cold War US political culture, cases which I have organized as survey, statesmanship

and strategy. Though we could identify more, I have chosen to elaborate on these three usages of geopolitics not because they are objectively distinct but rather because they, first, provide a point of entry into longstanding practices associated with geopolitics and, secondly, provide a point of departure for an exploration of the conditions of possibility of geopolitics as knowledge in general. The production of geopolitics as knowledge, I wish to suggest, is dependent upon the practice of privileging a transcendent, seeing man as the authoritative seer of global political reality. The task of critical geopolitics is to expose the operation and subvert the authority of this Cartesian figure.

Geopolitics as survey: the panopticonism of the strategic gaze

Though the term geopolitics has been in use for less than a century, the general history of geographical discourse has been a deeply political one (Livingstone 1993). Geography is a practice that gained its identity from the Western imperializing project of surveying, mapping and cataloguing the earth. From the fifteenth century onwards, Western expansionism produced a 'world' measured and defined by Western systems of signification. The mathematical systems constructed upon notions of Euclidian space gave rise to systems of calibration which measured the earth in terms of European scales (the French metric system, the British imperial system). The Linnean-inspired science of natural history in the seventeenth century created a table of classification which European explorers projected onto territories they considered 'blank' (Pratt 1992). The scientific surveying of figures like Alexander von Humboldt was made possible by earlier projects of military surveying which enabled territories to be conquered and subdued. The continued maintenance of colonial empires, and their later encroachment into the interiors of Africa in the middle nineteenth century, was dependent upon the persistent generation of surveys and maps of all sorts: navigational, military, topographical, economic, demographic, scientific and political. The maintenance of empire depended on a will to knowledge about places, territories and populations. European science understood its knowledge to be an objective account of the earth, a form of knowledge which described that which was supposedly independent of thought. Maps were considered to

be mirrors of nature, cartographic projections of the reality of territory (Harley 1992; Rorty 1979).

Though the historical circumstances surrounding the production of surveys has changed in the twentieth century, the Western will to survey the territories of the globe has remained. This will is institutionalized in a multiplicity of different *sites* in political and civil society, sites which enable the *sighting* (recognition and rendering visible), *siting* (the delimiting of global political space; e.g. the 'Middle East', 'Eastern Europe', etc.) and *citing* of a world (judging and textualizing of places by means of literatures of Orientalism, developmentalism, Sovietology, etc.) (Luke 1993; Ó Tuathail 1994). It finds expression, for example, in the cybernetic 'watching machines' of late modern states (spy satellites, electronic surveillance regimes, photographic intelligence, etc.) and in Western mass media organizations whose dispersed networks of reported, electronic systems of access and global televisual eyes function as the surveying infrastructure of informational empire (Virilio 1989; De Landa 1991). Built upon enormous electronic and cybernetic streams of data, the panoptic surveying eyes of spy satellites and the global media (from print to the instantaneous global television of CNN) promise the possibility of a world order more transparent than ever before (Vattimo 1992). New cybernetic surveying technologies hold out the possibility of an ever more exact reproduction of reality, of an increasingly total identity of map and territory. Indeed, as has been widely noted, the forms of reality generated by the technologies associated with the new mode of information make the very notion of the referent problematic (Poster 1990). In typically hyperbolic terms, Baudrillard (1983, 2) has suggested that traditional principles of representational survey are giving way to principles of simulation, of representation without reference to an originary 'real'. Territory, he proclaims,

no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map which precedes the territory . . . it is the map that engenders the territory.

Caught in this disappearance of the referent are the institutional sites which produce geopolitical surveys of the territoriality of global politics, seeing sites such as universities, strategic institutes and area study centres. During the Cold War, these institutions produced many surveys under the name geopolitics. To produce a geopolitics ('the

geopolitics of X' where X=oil, energy, resources, information, the Middle East, Central America, Europe, etc.) signified an ability to create a comprehensive strategic survey of global political space, to read the manifest features of that which was held to be 'external reality', and to speculate upon the meaning of the supposedly transparent features of global politics. Following Foucault, we can read this type of geopolitical knowledge production as a form of panopticonism, an institutionalized strategic gaze that examines, normalizes and judges states from a central observation point (Foucault 1979; Luke 1993; Ó Tuathail, forthcoming). The strategic gaze, like that described by Foucault, seeks to render the dynamics of states increasingly visible. It comprises a form of surveillance that is both global and individualizing (or, better yet, in-state-ing), a surveillance that simultaneously sites (i.e. places in a schema of global political space) and cites (i.e. summonses before a court of knowledge and judgement) states. Its central point of observation and judgement is represented as detached and objective but its very functioning is dependent upon the naturalization of hegemonic ways of seeing, siting and citing.

As a means of illustrating this argument, let us consider *Geopolitics of the Caribbean: minstates in the wider world*, a 1984 monograph written by the geographer Thomas Anderson and copublished by Praeger and the Hoover Institution of Stanford University. Anderson's book presents itself as an objective work of geographical scholarship on a region close to the United States. Yet the banality of the work belies its significance as a motivated form of power/knowledge. First, the book was produced at the height of the Reagan administration's ideological and military war in the mid-eighties against liberationist movements in Central America and the Caribbean. Within the context of this imperial reassertionism, the work can be interpreted as a motivated act of surveillance of a spatial zone the US government deemed 'strategic'. Secondly, the work is part of a Hoover Institution series on politics in Latin America. Founded in 1919, the Hoover Institution on War, Peace and Revolution was, in 1984, a 200-strong conservative think-tank with a budget of \$10.4 million and an endowment of \$79 million (Henderson 1984). In Ronald Reagan's own words, the Hoover Institution 'built the knowledge base' of the so-called Reagan Revolution. Key Hoover personnel helped write the policy documents that

became Reaganomics and helped staff the Reagan administration. By 1993 its influence had waned considerably (King 1993). In 1991 the Institution cancelled its *Yearbook on international communist affairs*, its annual survey of the state of communism and 'communist front organizations' worldwide.

The Hoover Institution is appropriately headquartered atop the Hoover tower on the Stanford campus. In a foreword to Anderson's work, Robert Wesson of the Institution views the Caribbean from the Hoover panopticon as a natural hazard region for the United States, a place of stormy political weather generated by centrifugal states. It is a region

beset by swirling currents of revolution. All four of the Marxist-Leninist-inclined states of the Western hemisphere – Cuba, Nicaragua, Grenada, and Suriname – are here, and it is in this area that the influence of the United States is most fiercely challenged by hostile ideologies and guerilla assaults.

Wesson describes the value of Anderson's work as helping 'increase the understanding' with which these problems can be met by the United States.

Anderson himself represents his work as an 'unconventional approach to geopolitics' because of the comparatively little attention he gives to 'orthodox topics such as military power, national objectives, and national will'. However, this is only because the small size and brief period of independence of the Caribbean 'ministates' make these features less relevant. In Anderson, geopolitics is geographical synthesis. His geopolitics understands itself as comprehensive and geographically holistic:

In geopolitical analysis how a region functions economically and politically as well as its cultural personality are essential to fuller understanding. (1984, 2).

[The] comprehensive understanding of a region provides a superior basis for successful policy formulation. (1984, 9)

The notions of increasing understanding, full understanding, and comprehensiveness appealed to here are worth problematizing. For regional specialists, Anderson's work is far from comprehensive. In a review, Richardson (1984, 482) points out that although Anderson's book suggests regional coverage his focus is only on Jamaica, the Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, and the smaller eastern islands. Furthermore, his work also lacks any West

Indian perspective. In short, Anderson's geography is contestably comprehensive. But we can go further and problematize the very project that leads one to assume one can comprehensively understand a region. The assumption that places can be comprehensively seen and understood is a product of an unreflective gaze that assumes it can render the world fully transparent and knowable. Anderson's very project – to write *the* geopolitics of the Caribbean – is an instance of a strategic gaze that sees but is not seen. What Anderson's work of 'geopolitical scrutiny' (1984, 2) fails to scrutinize is the culture of competence that makes it possible.

Before addressing this (see Conclusion), we need to understand geopolitical scrutiny as performance, as the execution of certain tasks. Using Anderson's chapters as a guide, to practice geopolitics as survey is to:

- (1) provide a descriptive survey of the geographical setting of a region noting the locational relationships, political entities, physical settings and natural resources found within the region (specified and scrutinized because of its perceived value to the hegemon). For Anderson, geography is the production of *geographic intelligence* for hegemonic managers;
- (2) provide an historical overview of the relationships, events and processes which have shaped this region. Part of this exercise involves tracing the historical relationship of the hegemon (the United States) to the region;
- (3) provide a comprehensive survey of 'contemporary geopolitical issues' of interest to the hegemon in the region. Anderson's study addresses marine boundaries, petroleum trade routes, the condition of democracy and 'regional power centres', the first of which is Cuba, a state which has 'consistently sought to export its system throughout the region' (1984, 132);
- (4) provide a clear set of foreign policy options for the hegemon to govern its relationship with the region in the most efficient manner possible. 'Formulation of effective policies benefits from a framework of *realistic perceptions*' (Anderson 1984, 157; emphasis added). Anderson criticizes the 'conceptual blinders' that sometimes lead US policymakers to treat the Caribbean as a cluster of tiny, similar and unimportant places. The region is strategic, he claims, and the United States needs to adopt a more flexible policy towards 'political mavericks' like Cuba, Grenada

and Nicaragua, and be *seen* to be on the side of social progress (1984, 166).

We can identify two basic types of utterances here: denotative and imperative. The first aspires to the production of pure descriptions of the full geographical characteristics of a spatial zone (or issue) which has been deemed significant by the foreign policy community of the hegemon. The second aspires to construct a series of imperative statements to guide foreign policy formulation founded upon the denotative analysis presented. While such a practice takes the identification and description of the 'real' (territory, geography, geopolitical realities, etc.) as its *raison d'être*, the realness of this 'real' is determined by the cultural conventions and, increasingly the technological inscriptive systems, of the hegemon's political culture. To critically problematize geopolitics as survey, therefore, involves the problematization of the rules of competence by which political cultures (and sub-cultures like strategic communities) are empowered to see/write global political space.

Geopolitics as statesmanship: Henry the Navigator

Geopolitics is also the gathering point for a particular understanding of the practical conduct of statecraft. This conceptual understanding of geopolitics as the *savoir faire* of statesmanship is almost exclusively the legacy of Henry Kissinger, the German-born Harvard Professor who became US National Security Advisor and then Secretary of State under Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. Through his many newspaper columns, regular television interviews and extensive connections throughout the US foreign policy community, Kissinger continues to shape the meaning and practice of geopolitics (Isaacson 1992).

In the first volume of his memoirs *White House years* (which address the first Nixon term), Kissinger (1979) makes his involvements in international diplomacy intelligible by constant recourse to the concept 'geopolitics' (which he never explicitly defines) and the qualifier 'geopolitical' (it qualifies 'interests', 'ambitions', 'points of view', 'realities', 'consequences' and 'challenges' amongst others) (Kissinger 1979; Hepple 1986). Kissinger's key expression, for Henrikson (1981, 398), is 'geopolitical insight', an idiom that reveals his reliance on the rhetorics of vision and visibility to describe

geopolitics (Kissinger 1979, 1204). Geopolitics is penetrative perception, the ability to breach with one's sight, to see inside, to strip away 'illusions' and 'surface appearances'. Henrikson (1981, 398) reads 'geopolitical insight' as indicating that political reality for Kissinger must not only be 'viewed objectively' but also 'subjectively penetrated':

Statesmanship requires above all a sense of nuance and proportion, the ability to perceive the essential among a mass of apparent facts, and an intuition as to which of many equally plausible hypotheses about the future is likely to prove true. (Kissinger 1979, 31)

The coding of statecraft as states-man-ship is not insignificant; geopolitical insight was a type of seeing coded in masculinist terms by Kissinger. Yet, ironically, his evocation of 'intuition' (traditionally coded as feminine) subverts his masculinist coding of in-sight.

Kissinger's sense of geopolitics must be understood within the context of his reading of nineteenth-century continental European *Realpolitik*, particularly the foreign policy philosophies of Prince Metternich of Austria and Otto Von Bismarck of Prussia (Kissinger 1957). Three aspects of this reading are noteworthy: the understanding of (i) equilibrium, (ii) sentimentalism and (iii) the connectivity of events.

First, geopolitics is a perspective which is premised on the so-called 'historical lesson' that there can be no peace without a balance of power amongst the great powers. A geopolitical foreign policy, therefore, is one that seeks to maintain equilibrium in global politics and thus maintain peace. In recalling his initial meeting with Nixon, Kissinger (1979, 12) notes how he stated that the overriding goal of US diplomacy should be

to free our foreign policy from its violent historical fluctuations between euphoria and panic, from the illusion that decisions depended largely on the idiosyncrasies of decision-makers. Policy had to be related to some basic principles of national interest that transcended any particular Administration and would therefore be maintained as Presidents changed.

Those basic principles, for Kissinger, were the principles of geopolitics, a perspective which is balanced (not fluctuating), realistic (not illusory), rational (not idiosyncratic), transcendental (not historical) and permanent (not transitory). In the closest he gets to an explicit definition, Kissinger

(1979, 914) describes the geopolitical as an approach that pays attention to the requirements of equilibrium'. He laments the fact that the US has no geopolitical tradition and that the geopolitical point of view finds no understanding among those who conduct the public discourse on foreign policy in the US (1979, 914-5). This made it difficult for both Nixon and Kissinger to

found American foreign policy on a *sober perception* of permanent national interest, rather than on fluctuating emotions that in the past had led us to excess of both intervention and abdication. (1979, 914, emphasis added)

Secondly, the imperative to contain fluctuating emotions' (euphoria, panic, etc.) leads Kissinger to describe geopolitics as foreign policy without sentimentalism. Geopolitics is a philosophy of foreign policy founded on the realities of power and not on the vagaries of personality or ideological guilt (which is invariably 'liberal guilt' in Kissinger; e.g. 1979, 192). To act geopolitically is to act in terms of 'hardheaded' power politics calculations and not in terms of idealistic global visions or personal whims. 'Our objective was to purge our foreign policy of all sentimentality' (1979, 191). The Chinese leadership, for example, learnt that 'our approach to foreign policy was unsentimental and geopolitical' (1979, 786). In describing Nixon's trip to China, Kissinger rationalizes Mao's 'preference for dealing with Richard Nixon over the wayward representatives of American liberalism' by quoting Bismarck: 'A sentimental policy knows no reciprocity' (1979, 1089).

Thirdly, geopolitics is a foreign policy analytic by which local events and regional conflicts can be understood in all their global significance. To think geopolitically is to think of a global framework of power within which, Kissinger maintained, regional struggles take on a significance that extends far beyond the immediate geographical location. In explaining his approach as 'strategic and geopolitical', Kissinger (1979, 31) describes it thus:

I attempted to relate events to each other, to create incentives or pressures in one part of the world to influence events in another.

This was formalized by Kissinger into the doctrine of linkage, a doctrine whereby events in one part of the globe were linked to events in other parts in superpower negotiations (1979, 129).

Kissinger's rendering of geopolitics as a philosophy for the conduct of statecraft does not break from the panopticonism of geopolitics as survey. Kissinger writes frequently about Nixon and other leaders producing a *tour d'horizon* of global affairs (e.g. 1979, 93, 384). Kissinger brought to the analysis of international politics the same objectivist pretensions he employed to analyze the Congress of Vienna in his academic work. Once in power Kissinger was able to pass off his own philosophical interpretations of, for example, Soviet foreign policy or the significance of the Vietnam war, as objective descriptions of the state of global politics. These descriptions would then be reproduced and circulated by the US new media with whom Kissinger had a carefully developed relationship (Isacson 1992, 573-586). Declarative statements of fact and imperative statements of policy are not separable in Kissinger's rhetoric but mutually legitimating. Through his skilled use of the Western media, Kissinger was able to exercise a profound influence over the writing of global politics in late Cold War culture.

In order to problematize this writing of global political space, we need to reflect critically on how Kissinger has represented and experienced global diplomacy. First, a recurrent metaphor in *White House years* (1979) is that of the journey. Part one of the book is labelled 'Beginnings' and part two '1969: the start of the journey'. Detailed descriptions of various journeys undertaken by Kissinger and Nixon are presented throughout the book but, more significantly, the substantive conduct of foreign policy is understood as a type of journeying. History is movement and travel through space and time: 'History knows no resting places and no plateaus' (1979, 55). The establishment of a relationship with China, for example, begins with 'small steps' (Chapter VI: First steps towards China). Describing the US-China relationship at the end of Nixon's first year, Kissinger remarks (1979, 194):

We still had a long way to go. But we were at last in the foothills of a mountain range that it would take us another eighteen months to traverse.

Kissinger's most popular journeying metaphor, however, is not mountain climbing but navigation. Drawing upon the classic Platonic metaphor of the ship of state, Kissinger repeatedly understands diplomatic activity as the art of managing the state *qua* ship (states-man-ship) (Foucault 1991, 93-4). Nixon

is the helmsman of the good ship 'United States' and Kissinger is his principal navigator (1979, 59, 1410). Together they, with a small hand-picked crew, navigate the ship of state through dangerous times and stormy seas, all the while striving for balance and equilibrium (against the dangers of wild fluctuations and oscillations). Crises, both domestic and international, are experienced as stormy weather. Domestic protests about Vietnam were a 'tidal wave of media and student criticism' which caused significant damage (1979, 512). Protesting students were 'rudderless' (1510). The President tried to see himself as 'the firm rock in this rushing storm' (514). The India-Pakistan crisis of 1971 was a political cyclone that threatened to sink US efforts with the Soviets and the Chinese. However, the US 'survived the storm with the rudder intact. We could resume our course' (1979, 918). Negotiations are frequently described as 'stormy'. In one of his few references to Watergate in *White House years*, Kissinger (1979, 76) scathingly condemns Nixon's advance men who 'have no ballast when their careers are in jeopardy'. During the Watergate period they

produced the unedifying spectacle of a rush for the lifeboats with each little caesar seeking safety by pushing his blood brothers over the side.

The significance of these figurations is that they normalize and naturalize crucial relationships of power. The metaphor of the ship of state ascribes an absolute power to the President and represents any political challenge to that power as hazardous weather not legitimate dissent (thus the preoccupation with 'damage control'; megalomania and paranoia soon developed in the Nixon White House). Congressional antiwar resolutions, for example, are represented as a dam-bursting flood (1979, 1373). It promotes a discourse which links 'America' with the rhythms, crises and patterns of 'nature' – a natural community travelling towards its natural/national destiny (Ross 1987/88, 119). Political events are experienced as natural phenomena (not only as storms but also as seismic geological events. For example, the scheduling of a Nixon visit to China was 'the announcement that shook the world'; (1979, 758.) Foreign policy is represented as a navigational challenge, geopolitics as weather forecasting *qua* horizon watching. It is inevitable that the statesman *qua* helmsman will occasionally experience stormy seas but he should stick to the

charted course. (Interestingly, Kissinger describes Nixon's temper as a storm and notes how he sometimes threw 'restraint to the winds'; e.g. 1979, 927, 969.) Geopolitics is sensible and balanced navigational strategy (it has a calming effect). Yet, at the time of these ideological figurations, Nixon and Kissinger were conducting a wildly violent foreign policy that was murdering thousands in South East Asia. The ostensibly sober navigators were practising megalomaniacs drunk with power (on Nixon and the rhetoric of madness see Sylvan 1992).

The second master metaphor found throughout *White House years* is that which represents diplomacy as gaming, a longstanding Clausewitzian metaphor. Nixon's predisposition for gaming metaphors, particularly poker (which he played prolifically in the navy during World War II), is already well established (Wills 1969). With Kissinger, we find a multiplicity of different gaming metaphors used to describe his experience of diplomacy and international politics. The shootdown of a US EC-121 aircraft by North Korea (14 April 1969) propelled the Nixon administration into its first major crisis (Nixon, the ostensibly sober navigator, was reportedly drunk when this crisis broke: Cumings 1992, 163). Kissinger (1979, 313) remarks that

[n]o new president can really know what kind of 'team' he has until faced with such a crunch. Its essence is the need to make high-risk decisions quickly and under pressure.

Kissinger writes about 'tackling' global problems and 'playing for high stakes'. Like Nixon, Kissinger frequently used card game metaphors to convey how he experienced international affairs. The ability to conduct a *tour d'horizon* was Nixon's 'strong suit' (1979, 1205). In global geopolitics, the US relationship with China presented itself as the 'China card'. Triangular politics holds the potential for playing China and the USSR off each other (1979, 763). Negotiations with Hanoi were orientated towards 'forcing Hanoi's hand' (Chapter XXIII). Negotiations with Thieu were made intelligible as a poker game in which Kissinger should hold back the trump card until the last trick (1979, 1365). Other forms of gambling are also employed to write global politics. The 1971 spring offensive by the North Vietnamese army is described as Hanoi throwing the dice (Chapter XXV). Soviet diplomatic practice was not to 'stake everything on a single throw of the dice' (1979, 118). The 1972 Christmas bombings of

Hanoi were Nixon's 'last roll of the dice' (1979, 1449). Finally, geopolitics is also described as a chess game (e.g. 1979, 524, 709).

We can speculate on the significance of these metaphors for understandings of geopolitics. To survey the geopolitical realities of the globe is to read a playing field or rather a series of different arenas of gaming. Places are emptied of any significant content other than their identity as locations for strategic games (Shapiro 1989, 89). International events are read as moves in a game, in many instances as manoeuvres in a pre-established 'game plan' by one's adversary (e.g. 1979, 679). To think geopolitically, therefore, requires that a 'game plan' is worked out and ready to put in motion (see Brzezinski 1986). Again such figurations depoliticize global affairs and naturalize the violence of the state by rendering it intelligible as a sport or part of an inevitable game. They also serve to inscribe players with secure identities. Tracing their operation also enables us to perceive something of the addictive, even erotic, aspect of geopolitics for statesmen like Nixon and Kissinger. Kissinger (1979, 614) quotes Nixon's response to the Jordanian crisis of September 1970:

there's nothing better than a little confrontation now and then, a little excitement.

Nixon perceived himself as best under pressure. Kissinger (1979, 1471) remarks that

it was sometimes difficult to avoid the impression that he needed crises as a motivating force.

Kissinger's high profile practice of geopolitics during his tenure as US National Security Advisor and Secretary of State came under sustained criticism after 1972 within the United States. This attack, which came most from Cold War ideologues like Henry Jackson, Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Ronald Reagan, was an attack on the Nixon-Kissinger policy of *détente* for its amoral accommodation with Soviet totalitarianism. The Jackson-Vanik amendment to the 1972 trade agreement between the US and USSR, the criticism of SALT II (which was never ratified) and the protests over the 1975 Helsinki agreements in the Republican convention of 1976 were all explicit repudiations of Kissinger's geopolitics (Isaacson 1992, 607–72). Amongst political groups, on both the left and the right (including those who would come to power with Ronald Reagan in 1980), the

term 'geopolitics' became taboo because of its Nixon-Kissinger associations.

Kissinger, however, gave geopolitics a performativity that exceeded its use as a means of general surveying of the landscape of global politics. Analyzing global politics geopolitically in a Kissingerian fashion enabled:

- (1) the organization and decipherment of the overwhelming complexity of global events and processes. To think geopolitically is to code the everyday life of international affairs with hierarchies of signification (see, for example, Kissinger's (1979, 654) extraordinary reading of the election of Salvador Allende in September 1970 as part of a global challenge to the US). The significant is to be distinguished from the trivial, the essential from the concessionary, the ideological from the strategic, and the local from the global. Everything is affixed with a geopolitical meaning. This system of meaning had its own internal structuring principles. For example, things coded as 'ideological' (e.g. the interests of a certain power or the speech of a particular individual) were of lesser significance than things coded as 'strategic'. Things done in private were of greater significance than things done in public and so on;
- (2) the pursuit of a logical plan of decisive action. Geopolitics not only deciphered complexity but empowered practitioners by providing them with a menu of decisive action. As Kissinger represents it, to think geopolitically is to think in the manner of a detached, rational Cartesian consciousness. *Homo geopoliticus* was a masculine being who cogitated in a hardheaded, realist and balanced manner. He restrained his emotions and contained stormy floods. Fear of feminine-coded conditions – emotionalism, idealism, oscillation, soft- not hard-headedness – threatened the ego security of *homo geopoliticus*.

The performative power of Kissingerian geopolitics is as a mode of decipherment which recovers meaning from the everyday life of international politics. Geopolitics is also a guidebook to action for the foreign policy prince, a navigational system which empowers foreign policy decision-makers to act in particular ways and justify this strategy of action to themselves, their inner advisors and the public at large. To problematize such a type of geopolitics is to question the strategies by which global political space is produced in the everyday

practices of statecraft. It is also to question the male fantasies which engender global political space and secure hardheaded subjectivities from floods and other threatening feminine-coded conditions (Theweleit 1987).

Geopolitics as grand strategy: the geopolitician as geomancer

Despite the ideological reservations of the Republican right-wing, the rhetoric of geopolitics flourished rather than disappeared under the two administrations of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. Part of the reason for this was undoubtedly the return of ex-Kissinger staff to power under Reagan (most notably Alexander Haig). As significant, however, was the resurgence of geopolitics as a way of thinking grand strategy. Although this sense of geopolitics was sometimes confused with Kissinger's geopolitics, it was re-animated by the ideological productions of the second incarnation of the Committee on the Present Danger, a right-wing foreign policy group formed explicitly to critique US foreign policy under Jimmy Carter (Dalby 1990). With the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, the group dissolved and many of its members took up positions of power in the new administration.

One of these members was the British-born strategist, Colin Gray, who served for a time as an advisor on naval issues and arms control to the Reagan administration. Gray is President of the National Institute for Public Policy and continues to produce books and articles analyzing global politics from a position he terms 'geopolitical'. Gray's rendering of geopolitics is distinctive in four different ways. First, geopolitics is about the contemplation of grand strategy and not, as in Kissinger, about the everyday tactical conduct of statecraft. Navigation and game playing required a tactical intelligence that in ancient Greece was known as *metis*, literally 'informed prudence'. *Metis* implied

a complex but very coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behaviour which combine flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills, and experience acquired over the years. It applied to situations which are transient, shifting, disconcerting and ambiguous, situations which do not lend themselves to precise measurement, exact calculation or rigorous logic. (Detienne and Vernant 1978, 3–4, quoted in Stephanson 1989, 198)

Strategy, in contrast, was an intelligence given over to the contemplation of unchanging essences and pre-existent identities. For De Certeau (1984, 36), strategy is

a mastery of places through sight. The division of space makes possible a *panoptic practice* proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus control and 'include' them within its scope of vision. To be able to see (far into the distance) is also to be able to predict, to run ahead of time by reading a space. (emphasis in original)

Whereas Kissinger's geopolitician is a clairvoyant manager of the everyday tactical conduct of statecraft, Gray's geopolitician is a grand strategist, a Delphic seer/prophet who looks into the distance of history and into the essence of things.

Secondly, geopolitics, for Gray, is a tradition of thinking about grand strategy in terms of the most fundamental factor conditioning national security: geography. The key to national security lies in the proper understanding of the strategic meaning of geography:

Geography is the most fundamental of the factors which condition national outlooks on security problems and strategy solutions. Geography, treated properly in political and strategic analysis, is not a rigidly determining factor. But it conditions the outlook of an insular people, just as it conditions the outlook of a continental community. The influence of geography is truly pervasive, notwithstanding the fact that influence must vary in detail as technology changes (Gray 1990, 14).

The distinctiveness of geopolitics as a form of grand strategy lies in its emphasis on geography as a permanent conditioning reality of global politics. Geography does not determine national destiny or strategic culture but establishes limits and provides the necessary conditions for both. A state's national security policy, for Gray (1988, 15), is rooted in its geopolitical soil. The mixture of geography and political culture set the parameters of statecraft and strategy. Ideology has a secondary significance to geography.

Thirdly, Gray grounds his understanding of geopolitics explicitly in a canon of prophetic thought which has Halford Mackinder and Nicholas Spykman as its leading seers (Kissinger's 'wise men' were not detached observers but long-serving, conservative, nineteenth-century practitioners:

Metternich and Bismarck). The great genius of Mackinder and Spykman is not only that they identified geography as the most fundamental factor in international politics but that they also discerned the operation of a set of 'enduring oppositions' (founded upon permanent geographical realities) which have defined the struggle for power throughout the ages. These oppositions are those between landpower and seapower, heartland and rimland, centre and periphery, individualism and authoritarian/totalitarian values, East and West (Gray 1988, 39, 212). Although characterizing his writings as 'steeped in history' (1990, 13), Gray's analysis is distinguished by its remarkable indifference to historical context and particularity. The dynamics of the Greek city states, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the British and the Soviet Empires can all be reduced to the play of these oppositions.

Fourthly, Gray reads the Cold War in terms of a system of understanding provided by the above principles and opposition. The Soviet Union is a threat to the United States not because it is a Marxist superstate but because it is the only plausible bidder for hegemonic control of the assets of Eurasia (1988, 70). The Cold War is not about ideology or a struggle between two competing ways of life but a dramatic struggle between two essential spaces: 'insular USA' and 'Heartland USSR'. The role occupied by the United States is that of an insular seapower with an individualistic democratic culture in alliance with the rimland states of Western Europe and Japan. The Soviet Union's position in the plot is as the great Heartland superpower. It is a backward yet formidable territorial empire with an innate desire for expansionism, both territorial and hegemonic. Geography makes it a natural enemy of Western Europe and the United States.

It is the still-landlocked continental superstate that has been bequeathed by its distinctive history a political culture and a strategic style which – when married to a permissive balance of power – is profoundly threatening to the security of the 'Marginal Crescent' of peripheral Eurasia and, ultimately, even to the insular continental-scale democracy that is the United States (1988, 195)

The rape sub-text in Gray's narrative – desire and permissiveness threaten a vulnerable 'marginal crescent' – is found throughout his works. Read symptomatically, it is a fantasy fetish which enables

him to suspend any responsibility towards the real. In a 1988 statement which is a testimony to the force of fantasy/denial in his geopolitics (during a time of historic upheaval in the USSR), Gray proclaimed (1988, 1–2)

For as far into the future as can be claimed contemporarily relevant, the Soviet Union is going to remain *the* source of danger – narrowly to American national security, more broadly (and quite literally) to the exercise of the values of Western civilization. (Emphasis in original).

Gray's geopolitics in the 1980s were distinguishable from those of Kissinger in conventional political discourse by their relative emphasis on accommodation with the Soviet Union. Whereas Kissinger supposedly sought stability amongst the superpowers (this is questionable considering, for example, his commitment to the Vietnam war or the subversion of Chilean democracy), Gray's writings throughout the eighties placed their emphasis on achieving victory over Heartland USSR, thus making him appealing to right-wing ideologues disaffected with Kissinger's geopolitics. Both Kissinger and Gray's geopolitics, nevertheless, have many features in common. Methodologically, both usages appeal to a deeper level of interpretation than that which seeks only to recover the immediate meaning of the everyday events in global politics. Both are sceptical of the accounts offered of statecraft by most participants and journalists. They seek to uncover the hidden structures of meaning that exist below such accounts, the deep truths hidden by everyday practices that escape most observers. Both, in sum, set themselves up as men who are privileged seers of 'the reality' of global politics.

As a type of prophetic seeing, Gray's geopolitics can be described as divination or geomancy. The conceit of his analyses is its pretensions to reveal the timeless hidden secrets of human history by speculating on lines in the earth. Gray sets himself up, with a certain degree of hubris, as a British teacher of the Americans; as a seer who has unlocked the secret success of Great Britain in its imperial heyday. 'The key to British security', he declares, 'lay in proper understanding of the strategic meaning of geography.' Enter Halford Mackinder, another British teacher (to whom we all should have listened). Mackinder's ideas are ones that 'have stood the test of time'. He

provided an intellectual framework for understanding the recurrent patterns in international power

relationships that was well founded in history and geography and that the events of the twentieth century have substantiated in most essentials (Gray 1988, 5).

The Lacanian reading of prediction is relevant here:

[a] contingent real triggers the endless work of interpretation that desperately tries to connect the symbolic network of the prediction [in this case, Mackinder's ideas] with the event of . . . [human history]. Suddenly, 'all things mean something' and if the meaning is not clear, this is only because some of it remains hidden, waiting to be deciphered (Žižek 1991, 31)

Mackinder supposed prophetic divination is given semiurgic force by being displayed as a global map (a crude Mercator projection as geomancy map) with huge swaths of territory stamped with different identities: 'Heartland', 'Marginal Lands', 'Islands or Outer Continents'. Spykman's modification to this Mackinderian map is then displayed, cartographic displays of timeless earth truths.

Gray's recharging of Mackinder and Spykman's system of opposition and geopolitical identities empowers a transcendental seeing subject to:

- (1) divine which things are permanent (e.g. the laws of international political behaviour) or continuous over time (e.g. geopolitical realities), and which things are cyclical or given to oscillations (e.g. national security policies);
- (2) fit the messy places of global politics into the collection of geopolitical identities (Heartland, Rimland, etc). 'Without the benefit of an appropriate geopolitical framework', Gray (1988, 67) suggests, 'neither US policymakers nor the general public can be well equipped conceptually to make sense of arguments about US interests in particular cases';
- (3) produce an analysis which is 'impartial' (1988, 93), sophisticated and decisive in sorting out what foreign policy the nation should adopt.

In sum, geopolitics, for Gray, is a geomantic practice that enables us to identify the permanent patterns of global politics, label territories with the appropriate geopolitical identities, and construct policies on the basis of revealed earth patterns and identities. To problematize this type of geopolitics is to question the rituals by which it cites its own power, sights the strategist as prophetic seer and sites places as geopolitical blocs which are caught in the inevitable play of transcendental opposition.

Conclusion: the problematic marked by 'geopolitics'

It should be clear from the three late Cold War usages of geopolitics examined in this paper that the term geopolitics does not have a singular, all-encompassing meaning or identity. This is not to imply that geopolitics as survey, statesmanship and strategy are ontologically distinct. The practice of statecraft or grand strategy are both activities that require surveying just as the practice of surveying could itself be viewed as a form of statecraft and strategic thinking. None of these usages are mutually exclusive. Rather, they mark out a problematic that needs to be confronted and analyzed by critical geopolitics. I wish to conclude by offering three brief speculations on this problematic.

First, it is frequently assumed that geopolitics represents a problematic that can be described as 'advice to the prince'. Geopolitics involves using geography as an aid to statecraft. From the evidence of the usages discussed in this paper, however, this formula inadequately described the performative range of geopolitics. The very concept of advice to the prince, exemplified by Mackinder (1942, 150) in his famous image of an airy cherub whispering in the ear of the statesman, is an archaic medieval one, anachronistic not only in the age of huge foreign policy bureaucracies and postmodern information flows but also in a culture where traditional Cartesian assumptions about the unity of the human subject are being overturned (Grosz 1990, 1–5). Geopolitics is better understood not as advisors and princes but as discourses and subjectivities. A more appropriate framework for understanding geopolitics as a type of knowledge is perhaps Foucault's (1991) concept of 'governmentality', the ensemble of rationalities concerned with the governing of territories and populations that emerged in the eighteenth century. Perhaps geopolitics marks a particular expression of governmentality in the twentieth century, a governmentality concerned with the task of hegemonic management. Hegemonic managerialism produces its own rationalities and informational projects. Among them are those we have examined: (i) the survey and surveillance of objects (regions, minerals, issues like energy) deemed 'strategic'; (ii) writings on the art of conducting statecraft in turbulent times (which includes the art of self-government, how a statesman should conduct himself); and (iii) the divination of the (meta)physics of earth and space as causal forces in

international affairs that enables hegemonic managers to see into the future and thereby organize their priorities. Such projects are not specific to geopolitics; rather geopolitics is one gathering point for their expression and operation.

Secondly, one feature that all three usages of geopolitics examined here have in common is an appeal to the metaphors of seeing and sight. Anderson claims to see things comprehensively and realistically. Geopolitics is geographical scrutiny. Kissinger holds 'insight' to be a vital geopolitical faculty and understands statecraft in terms of subject-positions (the navigator, the cool poker player) which value the skills of watching, recognizing and overseeing. The very practice of strategy is one whereby the eye transforms foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured. Panopticonism is a condition of possibility of grand strategy. All three cases could be said to represent instances of a dominant Cartesian perspectivism, a hegemonic visual/scopic regime that separates subject and object, rendering the former transcendental and the latter inert (Foster 1988, x; Rorty 1979). However, this is perhaps to attribute a unity to Cartesian perspectivism that it does not have (see Jay 1988; Crary 1990) and to ignore the peculiarities of the scopic regimes appealed to by the different usages of geopolitics (Kissinger's notion of insight, for example, appeals to both the mimetic and the subjective). Certainly this question needs further research. What we can say is that the strategy of sight in geopolitical discourses works as a strategy for the citing of certain forms of authority (e.g. disembodied seeing man) and a strategy for the siting of places as real and fantasy space (Zizek 1991, 8–20).

Thirdly, though it may be problematic to speak of Cartesian perspectivism making different geopolitical strategies of sight/site/citing possible, it is nevertheless worth problematizing how the geopolitical gaze(s) is/are gendered. That the disembodied, distancing and de-eroticizing cold eye of Cartesian perspectivism is masculinist is well established, though hardly uncontroversial (Foster 1988; Haraway 1991; Pile and Rose 1992). That we can begin to understand geopolitical sightings as cases of pornographic voyeurism – an obscene will to see everything – is an intriguing possibility (Doel 1993). To designate the looking found in geopolitical practices as voyeuristic not only subverts the objectivist perception pretensions of such practices but places them within the domain of subjective(izing) pleasure

and desire (Deutsche 1991, 10; Zizek 1991). Geopolitical visions are mediated by fantasy, desire and denial; envisioning becomes the means by which *homo geopoliticus* ostensibly secures his subjectivity as a tough, anti-sentimental, hardheaded realist. Geopolitics operates as ego-politics. (Interestingly, some elements of the US press suggested that the geopolitics of Nixon-Kissinger is a misspelling of ego-politics; Graham 1970.) Investigating ego-formation in geopoliticians through acts of recognition, specularization (construction of mirror-images) and voyeurism is also something that needs further investigation. Ego-formation, as Freud and Lacan have suggested, is a projectionism, a graphing of psychic/imaginary maps of meaning (Grosz 1990, 31–49). If we read geopolitics as ego-politics in a Lacanian sense, then we are dealing with the orders of the imaginary and the symbolic not the real. In other words, we are dealing with the systematic refusal of the real (Grosz 1990; Zizek 1991). A critical geopolitics ought to engage with feminist psycho-analytical discourses much more so than it has done for there is much to be learnt about how geopolitics and gender work together.

The above points are offered as *speculations*. As this very word indicates, any discourse of critical geopolitics is itself caught in a rhetoric of visibility that needs to be exposed and known. So also is it caught within gendered epistemologies and perhaps its own unconscious economies of desire and denial. It is only through a relentless problematization of our concepts, subjectivities and writing strategies that we can begin to explore the obscurity of the deceptively simple term *geopolitics*.

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