

The critical reading/writing of geopolitics: Re-reading/writing Wittfogel, Bowman and Lacoste

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In recent years a new poststructuralist-inspired research perspective called 'critical geopolitics' has announced itself within geography (Dalby, 1991; Sidaway, 1994; Dodds and Sidaway, 1994; Ó Tuathail, 1992; 1994a). An approach rather than a theoretical system, 'critical geopolitics' is a project that has three prominent dimensions. 'Critical geopolitics' is a term which requires inverted commas since it seeks to place the very unity, totality and ground we attribute to names/terms/concepts like '(critical) geopolitics' in question (Ó Tuathail, 1994a). In representing 'critical geopolitics' as a project with three distinct dimensions, I am inevitably naming/taming it. The inverted commas, however, are a mark to remind us of the (im)possibility of this very strategy. 'Critical geopolitics' should, in general, be thought of as a heterology in the house of geography (Gasche, 1986: 79–105).

Its first dimension is that it seeks to deconstruct the tradition of geopolitical thought as it has been represented in various intellectual histories within the discipline of geography. 'Critical geopolitics' brings (or at least claims to bring) the 'methods' of poststructuralist historiography to analyse how geopolitics emerged as a mode of analysis in the late nineteenth century and how a tradition came to be created around it. As a form of revisionist historiography, 'critical geopolitics' is part of a general intellectual movement within geography to re-evaluate the history and key intellectuals of the discipline (Smith, 1992; Livingstone, 1993; Dodds, 1994; Ó Tuathail, forthcoming). Unfortunately, however, so far the 'deconstruction' of the geopolitical tradition has been more gestural than substantive, and more rhetorical than strictly deconstructive in a Derridean sense (Gasche, 1986: 121–76).

Secondly, 'critical geopolitics' seeks to engage with the actual practice of statecraft. So far, this has taken the form of documenting and deconstructing how various intellectuals of statecraft spatialize international politics (Ó Tuathail and Agnew, 1992; Dalby, 1993; Ó Tuathail and Luke, 1994; Dodds, 1993). Thirdly, 'critical geopolitics' seeks to displace

our conventional understandings of the geographical in global politics. Rather than work within the confines of the conventional scope of geopolitics, 'critical geopolitics' seeks to place the very meaning and limits of place and politics in question (Dalby, 1992; Ó Tuathail, 1994a).

All three dimensions of this project are inter-related. This article seeks to address the first aspect of 'critical geopolitics' and, in so doing, provoke arguments which have implications for the study of geopolitical practice and the general conceptualization of the geographical in global politics. Specifically, it explores the history of critical attempts to understand and explain 'geopolitics' as a region of knowledge and immanent social phenomenon. So far, few have attempted to scrutinize seriously the nature of the attempts by various intellectuals in the twentieth century to resist, or at least give the appearance of resisting, a practice they identified as 'geopolitics'. There are probably good reasons for this missing 'history of critical readings/writings of geopolitics', a designation we should place in inverted commas since it is precisely this very construction, the possibility of a genre with this name, that is in question in this article. (Though cumbersome, the construction 'read/write' is necessary for our purposes since the very practices of reading and writing are part of the problematic we are investigating. In refusing to separate one activity from the other, I am problematizing both. This works at a number of levels. First, the construction suggests the possibility that all reading is implicitly a writing. Therefore, for example, Wittfogel's reading of the meaning of Haushofer's texts was also a writing of that meaning. Haushofer's texts, in other words, were given meaning by Wittfogel's written commentary on them. Secondly, the construction suggests the alternative possibility that all writing is merely a reading. Haushofer's writing of the state of global politics in 1930s' Germany, for example, was merely his reading of the surface of global affairs. This common understanding, of course, assumes that the surface of global affairs is a legible text. Thirdly, the very indeterminacy of the border between reading and writing suggests the dependence of both on the social infrastructures of signification, or what Derrida calls *arche-writing* (Derrida, 1976).) The first reason is that geopolitics is not an assured and stable category but an exorbitant, polysemantic umbrella term that is frequently evoked but notoriously difficult to define. Secondly, what one defines as 'critical' is open to interpretation. Within the history of geopolitics, some intellectuals could be simultaneously described as critical of geopolitics yet also geopoliticians; figures who defined their intellectual politics in opposition to geopolitics yet nevertheless worked within the conceptual infrastructure of geopolitics. Figures such as Karl Wittfogel, Isaiah Bowman, Robert Strausz-Hupe and many others occupy the ambiguous position of being both against, yet also for, geopolitics.

To pursue the significance and implications of these instabilities and indeterminacies, I propose to reread/write some of the classic texts that have sought to read/write the identity of geopolitics in a critical way. (A further function of the read/write construction is to foreground the point that the investigation of the history of geopolitics is the investigation of the practices of reading, writing and, as will be demonstrated, seeing. In writing about this history of reading, writing and seeing, this very article is itself engaged in a reading, writing and seeing of 'geopolitics'. The motif of this latter reading/writing/seeing and the poetics of 'critical geopolitics' generally is displacement: i.e., a reading that questions the limits of reading, a writing that problematizes the status of writing, and a seeing that seeks to see that which makes sight possible (Ó Tuathail, 1994a).) These classic geopolitical texts offer us a means to think about the exorbitant meaning of geopolitics and also the limits of the critical reading/writing of geopolitics. I have chosen to focus on the critical

theories of geopolitics offered by Karl Wittfogel, Isaiah Bowman (and, to a lesser extent, Richard Hartshorne) and Yves Lacoste because they present inscriptions of geopolitics which are distinctly different yet which reveal certain common difficulties encountered when attempting to think critically about geopolitics. Though their write-ups of geopolitics are quite dissimilar in a wide variety of ways (context, politics, etc.), this article argues that all three are characterized by a similar epistemological infrastructure which holds to the possibility of an objectivist and transparent geopolitical practice. It is this infrastructure that needs to be both documented and problematized by 'critical geopolitics'. Post-structuralism rejects the assumption that there is an epistemologically objective ground from which an analyst can survey global politics comprehensively; it problematizes the Cartesian knowing/seeing subject that is the anchor of the western philosophical tradition. Documenting and problematizing the infrastructural commitments involved in the critical reading/writing of geopolitics enable us to elucidate the precise nature of the challenge 'critical geopolitics' poses to geopolitics.

I Karl Wittfogel: geopolitics as bourgeois ideology

In 1929 Karl Wittfogel was emerging as one of a number of leading intellectuals in the German communist party (KPD). An active playwright in his youth, Wittfogel had been invited to join the newly established Frankfurt Institute for Social Research in 1925, four years after its founding by Felix Weil. At the time Wittfogel was the most politically active communist member of the institute, though he was a member because of his nonpolitical positivist methodology and work (Jay, 1973: 15). His overarching theoretical interest was in Marxism and the question of nature, an interest Wittfogel pursued regionally in publications on China. Later, after fleeing to the USA, Wittfogel would publish *Oriental despotism*, his classic work, in 1957.

Germany in 1929 was a country in a state of tremendous turmoil. Not only did the stockmarket crash of that year contribute to deep depression in the global economy but also far-right extremists were rapidly gaining popular support among the unemployed, the natural constituency of the KPD. Karl Haushofer had founded the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* in 1924 and the romantic myths of those conservatives associated with the journal were finding popular expression as Nazi street slogans. Geopolitics was also attracting the attention of certain leftist intellectuals, most notably the social democrat, Georg Engelbert Graf, and the British socialist, James Francis Horrabin, both of whom suggested that Marxism failed to address the question of nature adequately in the determination of social life.

As was typical of the internecine communist practice at the time, Wittfogel begins his 1929 critique 'Geopolitics, geographical materialism and Marxism' (trans. Wittfogel, 1985) with an attack not on Haushofer nor the political use of geographical myths by the Nazis, but on Graf and Horrabin's suggestion that Marx did not adequately consider the question of nature. Since the third (communist) international in 1928, social democrats, not the Nazis, were considered the main enemy by the KPD and were labelled 'social fascists' (Fischer, 1982; Bullock, 1992: 167). Published in the journal *Under the Banner of Marxism* in three separate issues, the main purpose of Wittfogel's article was to demonstrate that the scattered remarks and concrete investigations of Marx and Engels together constitute a 'coherent whole' which is the basis for a truly comprehensive, dialectical theory of nature and its relationship to the historical development of social

formations. In the course of this necessary act of theoretical homage to the writings of Marx and Engels, Wittfogel offered what can be considered a critical reading/writing of geopolitics.

Geopolitics, Wittfogel (1985: 22) claims at the outset, '...represents an organic ideological complement to bourgeois-democratic practice' in Weimar Germany. By suggesting that at least one-fourth of political life should be understood in terms of its earth-bound nature (the calculation is Haushofer's), geopolitics constitutes a regression to the old geographical materialist methods of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This method, according to Wittfogel, postulated that geographical factors, whatever their character (climate, soil, location, physical terrain, even race), directly influence political life. The essential problem with this method, according to Wittfogel, is that it distorts the true reality that geographical factors do not directly influence but rather mediate the political sphere of life in human societies. In neglecting the necessary set of linkages connecting nature and the political domain, geopolitics ends as 'crude distortion'. It is scientifically 'worthless' (1985: 23).

To substantiate his argument, Wittfogel provides a review of the works of the leading 'epigones' (members of a later generation) of geographical materialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Ferdinand Richthofen, a leading nineteenth-century German sinologist, he finds a '...combination of ineffectual geographical materialism with a completely unfounded eclecticism' which, he states, is repeated by all geopoliticians. In Friedrich Ratzel, Wittfogel finds passages which are absurd, 'plainly misleading', 'inaccurate', 'completely false', 'partial', obscure and mystical (1985: 25-26). Ratzel's mistake is that he has let the economic sphere completely disappear from his analysis of the state's relationship with its 'soil' (a category, Wittfogel finds, is chaotic). The state is 'not an earthworm'. The population that comprise the state-society totality '...do not live directly from the *soil* but from the plants and animals that exist on the soil and are usually only produced and made consumable through *labor*' (1985: 25, emphasis in original). It is this neglect of the crucial link between nature and society that makes Ratzel's writings not a '...system of *interlocking* scientific explanations but a conglomeration of mystifications *externally stuck together*' (1985: 26, emphasis in original).

To Wittfogel, Rudolf Kjellen's empirical analyses of international politics at the beginning of the twentieth century retains the theoretical mysticism of Ratzel. But Kjellen wrote at a time when imperialism, according to Marxist-Leninist theory, had begun to take on a monopolistic-reactionary form. His new science of geopolitics '...not only adapts to the needs of monopolistic-imperialistic capitalism', according to Wittfogel, but 'even anticipates its future needs' (1985: 27). Wittfogel's reading/writing of Karl Haushofer's work continues in this vein. Haushofer's statements are occasionally true but he also falls back on the 'old mystique' of arbitrary determinations. The geopolitics of the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* are ultimately completely uniform. They express the struggle of the bourgeoisie for the preservation of their privileges and the '...necessity of pursuing an imperialist politics for class objectives' (1985: 30).

Following consideration and criticism of the attempt to import the ideas of geopolitics into the labour movement by Graf and Horrabin, Wittfogel turns to consider the eighteenth-century origins of geographical materialism. This, whether in its direct mechanistic French form or its more spiritualist German form, is reduced to an intellectual weapon of the bourgeois revolution. Its discovery of certain laws of nature undermined the persistent feudal-absolutist worldview which was centred on God and notions of the divine. Behind Montesquieu's eighteenth-century materialism, Wittfogel suggests, stood

the bourgeois demand for equality with the aristocracy and nobility. Geopolitics is merely the latest form of this old eighteenth-century geographical materialism. Whereas the pioneers of geographical materialism sought to lay bare the dynamic laws of history with their method, their twentieth-century epigones have become more modest and only claim to be able to explain 25% of the truth.

Wittfogel's arguments against geopolitics as a scientific practice can be reduced to two fundamental claims:

- 1) Geopolitics, as a modern form of a mechanically determinist geographical materialism, is a practice that short-circuits the objective levels of mediation that separate nature in the raw from political life. The short-circuit method, as Wittfogel describes it, '... designates a procedure (typical of the geopoliticians) which omits from the analysis one or more of the most important connecting links and thus leads to "purely arbitrary determinations" which might occasionally be true but for the most part are only half-true or completely false because they are not in fact scientifically developed' (1985: 38). The concept of short-circuiting is a product of Wittfogel's faith in a positivist science of society.
- 2) As a bourgeois social science, geopolitics cannot articulate true general conceptions without, at the same time, articulating all the contradictions of monopolistic-imperialistic capitalism. Geopolitics is produced from the class perspective of the bourgeoisie. It exemplifies '... the law of the diminishing power of perception of bourgeois social science'. The most geopolitics can do is amass material, which the science of Marxism-Leninism must separate and reorganize into a completely new general conception (1985: 31).

Wittfogel's reliance on the metaphors of short-circuiting and diminishing perception reveal much about his epistemological commitments. First, the image of bourgeois science as producing arbitrary determinations normalizes Marxism as an objective science of the totality of human society. 'Only Marx's conception connects social life with its real foundation, with the type of its material production' (1985: 53). Three key implications flow from these discursive claims (all subpoints of this general point). First, they grant supreme power to Marxism to divine the real. Marxism is made into a positivist totalizing science. Its analysis of social life is holistic, objective and correct whereas other perspectives are partial, distorted and arbitrary. It has the power to decide what is true and what is not. Though he was later to break with Stalin, Wittfogel's totalizing scientific Marxism is of a kind with the epistemology that sustained Stalinism.

Secondly, Wittfogel's Marxism is one that operates outside history and outside society. It is not sensitive to its own historical conditions of production and the limitations generated by this for the formation of sweeping generalizations about the whole of human history. Wittfogel's ideological rival in the communist movement at this time, Georg Lukacs, criticized Wittfogel's Marxism on just these grounds, arguing that Wittfogel lacked '... a real critical and thus a real concrete analysis of phenomena' (Ulmen, 1978: 48). One consequence of this failing is that Wittfogel conceptualizes the relationship between 'Man' and 'Nature' in a deeply gendered way. Taking up William Petty's remarks that labour is the father and the Earth the mother of material life, Wittfogel describes 'the basic relationship' between 'man' and 'his natural environment' as one of father and mother, active movement and passive determination of direction (1985: 55). To conceptualize this as the objective way to approach the person-environment question is, of course,

to normalize and universalize western gendered ways of seeing the Earth.

Thirdly, the type of intellectual practice sanctioned by Wittfogel's arguments is an extremely narrow one which privileges Marx and, to a lesser extent, Engels as the great readers of human history. We can provocatively suggest that the figure of Marx is a being akin to a God in Wittfogel. His texts are the communist movement's bible and the task of intellectuals is to practise an authoritative hermeneutics on these texts. The purpose of this textual exegesis is to get at what Marx really intended, to produce and reinforce an orthodoxy. Ulmen (1978: 92) suggests that Wittfogel not only explains Marx's conception of historical materialism but also goes beyond it. Wittfogel did what Marx intended to do but did not do. The question that must be asked, as Ulmen notes, is: How does one interpret intent? Wittfogel's hermeneutics does not reflect on this question. Once his isolated remarks are gathered together, Marx's intent is taken to reveal itself (1985: 59). The assumption that texts have authoritative univocal meaning and that reading is revelation not interpretation granted authoritarian power to the central committees of communist parties, all of whom were, by the late 1920s, being forced to follow the theological line set by the former seminarian, Joseph Stalin (Bullock, 1992: 13-16, 185, 193, 421). Interpretative authoritarianism underpinned political authoritarianism.

The second good point is that the metaphor of seeing is extremely important to Wittfogel (as it is to geopoliticians and the western tradition more generally: Derrida, 1978). Unlike bourgeois science, orthodox Marxism is a powerful form of seeing which renders things transparent. Bourgeois science produces mystifications. Orthodox Marxism produces clear truths. We can trace the operation of this powerful metaphor throughout Wittfogel's text. The modern epigones of geographical materialism reflect the social contradictions of their time. Their point of view is that of the bourgeois. Wittfogel concedes that one can have 'true partial insight' within 'enlightenment' bourgeois geographical materialism (1985: 38). However, only orthodox Marxism can see the true complete 'picture', the 'inner order of the facts of nature' and their relevance to human society (1985: 53). Orthodox Marxism is a form of seeing which is holistic, penetrative and transcendental.

The equating of sight with truth in Wittfogel enables his analysis to contain the problem language by subsuming it under the problematic of seeing. The fact that Wittfogel's master categories of 'man', 'nature', 'production', 'labour' are socially signified categories with ambiguous, incomplete and unrealizable identities that vary historically is not admitted in Wittfogel's text. Such categories function visually not linguistically for Wittfogel. They are held to be unproblematically seen operating. They are immanently recognizable. Nature is always nature. It is just a matter of seeing it completely and holistically. The social problematics of reading and writing are thus folded into the general language of sight and reflection.

Given the above arguments, we need to re-evaluate the merits and claims of Wittfogel's critical reading/writing of geopolitics. There is much that could be said about the failure of communist intellectual practices at this time, failures that were to prove fatal to the working-class movement as Germany moved from crisis to fascist rule. One of these failures was the neglected study of the popular philosophy of everyday political and intellectual struggle. The striking fact about Wittfogel's theory of geopolitics is that it was a theory of the theoretical status of geopolitics within Marxist thought rather than a theory of how geopolitics works politically. Geopolitics is read/written in a crude economic way, an epiphenomenon that is not of much interest in itself. Leading intellectuals, like Haushofer, are mere epigones of an old geographical materialism that serves bourgeois

interests. Wittfogel's analysis does not actually engage with geopolitics as a social and political phenomenon. The complex questions raised by Haushofer, the founding of a school of German *Geopolitik*, its relationship with the Nazis and the popularization of concepts such as *Lebensraum*, is not addressed by Wittfogel. Geopolitics' complexity is collapsed into categories which actually prevented a political understanding of geopolitics. Reading/writing geopolitics as bourgeois ideology attributed a coherence to geopolitics that it did not have. Haushofer's geopolitics was, if anything, closer to an aristocratic viewpoint than anything else (Heske, 1987). Like other conservatives, Haushofer was actually quite hostile to 'bourgeois' values and the 'bourgeois' Weimar Republic. It was the coming together of a certain aristocratic *Weltanschauung* with the anti-modernist counter-revolutionary zeal of the far right that made German geopolitics significant ideologically. Wittfogel misses this entirely (in 1929 at least). Behind his local theoretical failure was the larger failure of Stalin and the communist movement to appreciate the dangers of fascism until it was too late (Fischer, 1982).

A second observation that can be made about Wittfogel's analysis is that it is not an anti-geopolitics. Wittfogel does not seek to break from the possibility of a geopolitics of human history but to offer a different and better form of geopolitics. Wittfogel shared many of the same epistemological assumptions of German *Geopolitik*. Both believed in the possibility of the objective study of human history. The goal of research was to move beyond mystifications to establish truth in all its clarity. The acts of reading and writing were held to be neutral in this exercise. Both held to the possibility of a transcendental vision of human history, to the possibility of analysing history from a position above or outside it. In the conclusion to his article, Wittfogel quotes Plekhanov (to whom his article owes a great deal: Bassin, 1993: 17) approvingly to the effect that only an investigation which combines both the natural and social conditions of production can disclose 'the innermost secrets of history'. This same will to uncover 'innermost secrets' characterized German *Geopolitik* and it has remained a persistent feature of intellectual practices which have taken the name geopolitics since then (Ó Tuathail, 1994).

The fact that Wittfogel and Haushofer shared certain fundamental epistemological principles accounts for one of the more curious turns in the history of geopolitics, namely, the republication of excerpts of Wittfogel's article in the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* in 1932 (Ulmen, 1978: 540). Haushofer followed Wittfogel's works with great interest (given his own interest in Asia) and consistently gave them enthusiastic reviews in the *Zeitschrift* (Bassin, 1987: 134; 1992: 17–18; 1993: 165). In republishing Wittfogel, Haushofer noted that, although he was a communist, his 'basic position has scientific value' (Ulmen, 1978: 540).

While Wittfogel and Haushofer may have shared certain epistemological principles, their practical politics were far apart. Wittfogel, according to Ulmen (1978: 146), was the only member of the Frankfurt Institute to abandon his scholarly work in 1931 to fight the Nazis. In that year and the next he produced a series of engaged articles on Hitler, Italian fascism, anti-semitism and the 'fascistization of all ideology' by the Nazis. Fascism was still read in economic terms – its mysticism expressed the spiritual bankruptcy of the bourgeoisie – but Wittfogel demonstrates a growing awareness that the 'decline of science' evidenced in fascist ideology was associated with a 'decline of the bourgeois world'. This made it possible for brutality to be a principle of social order (Ulmen, 1978: 151–52).

In 1933 Karl Haushofer marked the Nazi seizure of power with the publication of the pamphlet, *National socialist thought in the world*. Haushofer was put on the radio and his 'World political survey' was broadcast every month by all radio stations throughout

Germany. Wittfogel, by contrast, attempted to escape from Germany, was arrested and moved through a series of different concentration camps. Wittfogel's wife tried to intercede with Haushofer on Wittfogel's behalf only to be told that those who had 'lost the game' now had to suffer the consequences. Nevertheless, Haushofer did put a word in on Wittfogel's behalf with Hess, but to no immediate avail (Ulmen, 1978: 162).

Late in 1933, Karl Wittfogel had the good fortune to be released from his internment as he lay sick with rheumatism brought on by forced labour in the concentration camps. Wittfogel and his wife left Germany a few weeks later. Though his critical theory of geopolitics may have its flaws in the light of contemporary philosophy, we would do well not to forget that Karl Wittfogel fought Nazism in an engaged intellectual, political and personal way.

II Isaiah Bowman: geopolitics as pseudo-science

The political activism of Isaiah Bowman was of a very different sort from that of Karl Wittfogel. Trained in physiography by William Morris Davis at Harvard, Isaiah Bowman's intellectual interests and social position were transformed by USA involvement in the first world war. Because of his position as Director of the American Geographical Society, Woodrow Wilson appointed Bowman the Chief Territorial Specialist of the American delegation to the Versailles peace conference. Through the contacts he made at the conference, Bowman gained access to the élite social circles of the American establishment. Out of the conference grew an effort by UK and American delegation members to create an international research organization, with branches on both sides of the Atlantic, which would promote the ideals of internationalism and Anglo-American co-operation in public life in both states. The effort did not develop in a co-ordinated way, however. The UK did establish its branch of the proposed organization, calling it the Royal Institute of International Affairs, but the American branch floundered. Political circumstances were running strongly against Wilsonian internationalism in the USA, and Congress rejected USA participation in the League of Nations.

One group that found the growing political isolationism of the USA disturbing was the informal dinner club of east-coast lawyers, bankers and academics that Elihu Root, Secretary of State under Theodore Roosevelt, led from 1918: the Council on Foreign Relations. In 1921 Isaiah Bowman and those others associated with the floundering American branch of the Institute of International Affairs merged with Root's dinner club, keeping the name, 'Council on Foreign Relations' (Smith, 1986: 448). The council's explicit aim was to influence USA governmental and élite public opinion towards internationalism. An activist, internationally engaged USA state was not simply an ideological aspiration: it was also very much in the economic self-interest of members of council.

To promote this end, the council founded the journal *Foreign Affairs* in 1922 with Isaiah Bowman actively involved as a member of the editorial advisory board (Smith, 1986: 451). *Foreign Affairs* was designed to foster a new geographic consciousness of the USA and its role in foreign affairs among public-opinion makers and influential governmental officials. In a private letter, Bowman wrote that the journal was '... a plea for a forward United States foreign policy, interested in exploiting the world's natural resources and putting affairs in Washington in the hands of dispassionate experts who, unlike the public at large, know what they are doing' (Bowman, quoted in Smith, 1986: 451).

Not surprisingly, Isaiah Bowman saw himself as one of these 'dispassionate experts'. In 1921 Bowman published *The new world: problems in political geography*, a panoptic survey (there is no chapter on the USA; it is the tower from which the rest of the world is observed) of the empires, states and colonies of the world in the wake of the territorial rearrangements after the first world war. The volume quickly went through four editions. In the preface to the fourth edition, Bowman explicitly states the political value of the work:

To face the problems of the day, the men who compose the government of the United States need more than native common sense and the desire to deal fairly with others. They need, above all, to give scholarly consideration to the geographical and historical materials that go into the making of that web of fact, relationship, and tradition that we call foreign policy. As we have not a trained and permanent foreign-office staff, our administrative principles are still antiquated. Thus even the loftiest intentions are too often defeated. To elevate the standards of government there is required a continuous examination of contemporary problems by citizens outside of the government service. In this way new points of view are set up and independent judgements made available (Bowman, 1928: iii).

The existent common sense of USA foreign policy officials is revealingly described as 'native'. To Bowman, this signified parochialism and isolationism, a sense devoid of worldly knowledge. The scholarly study of political geography can, however, provide career foreign-policy officials with a desirable, modern internationalist consciousness. Interestingly, the governing metaphor is that of elevation. Native common sense may have lofty intentions but too often it remains base and parochial. Geographical education is associated with an elevation of the standards of government and the development of new points of view which are, on the evidence of *The new world*, panoptic: detached, overlooking, all encompassing and surveying. Geography, for Bowman, was about an elevated seeing of the world as a unitary space. USA foreign policy officials needed training in this way of seeing. Bowman was no doubt pleased that the USA Department of State distributed 400 copies of *The new world* to USA consular offices throughout the world. Smith (1986: 441) notes that approximately 18 000 copies of the English-language edition were sold and that as late as the second world war the USA army distributed 2000 copies to its camp libraries.

Although Bowman conceived of *The new world* as serving an important political need, he nevertheless represented it as a scholarly work. In Germany, however, *The new world* was read with some bitterness as a geographical manifesto written by one of the architects of the postwar territorial order. The Anglo-American panoptic it brought to bear on the problems of the new-world order was explicitly challenged by those associated with the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* (founded two years after *Foreign Affairs*). In 1934 a working group of German geographers published a three-volume study, *Macht und Erde* (*Power and the earth*), which was described by one of the contributors (Otto Maull) as the German answer to *The new world*.

With German geographers seeking to emulate Bowman as Germany came under Nazi dictatorship, it was probably inevitable that, once war broke out and allied propaganda had catapulted German *Geopolitik* to public prominence, the practice of geography by Bowman and the practice of geography by figures like Haushofer would be linked. 'Geopolitics' became a convenient and fashionable word: all forms of work by geographers for the state could be dubbed 'geopolitics'. In public discourse, many began to refer to Bowman as 'our' geopolitician, including anti-Nazi thinkers whom Bowman counted within his own ranks (Smith, 1984: 73). This development greatly irritated Bowman, as did the emergent tendency to refer to him as 'America's Haushofer'. Some analyses even declared that American geopolitics was actually a precursor of German geopolitics (thus making

Haushofer Germany's Bowman!). The erosion of the political legitimacy of Bowman's geographical practice by the term 'geopolitics' demanded a response. This took the form of a polemical broadside, 'Geography versus geopolitics' published in *The Geographical Review*, the journal of the American Geographical Society, in October 1942.

In 'Geography versus Geopolitics', Isaiah Bowman codified a critical reading/writing of geopolitics that was to be the governing understanding of 'geopolitics' within Anglo-American geography until the early 1980s. Bowman's critique of geopolitics was neither novel nor intellectually sophisticated. Its argument was of a kind with the propagandistic type of intellectual practices found in the USA during the war. But the article was, first and foremost, a personal defence. Most of the article is taken up with substantial discussions of the merits of Bowman's past work and his previously published reviews of German geography which are grouped under the heading 'Forewarning Recalled'.

The strategy of Bowman's defence is to equate his own reputation with that of geography, science, moral rights, American democracy and the rights of the individual. German geography blurs to become 'geopolitics', which is then associated with pseudoscience, expansionist imperatives, Nazi dictatorship and worship of the state:

Geopolitics presents a distorted view of the historical, political and geographical relations of the world and its parts ... Its arguments as developed in Germany are only made up to suit the case for German aggression. It contains, therefore, a poisonous self-defeating principle: when international interests conflict or overlap *might* alone shall decide the issue (Bowman, 1942a: 646, original emphasis).

Geopolitics, in Bowman's text, is a signifier without an identifiable referent. It becomes an abstract Other, an outside, a strategy of the enemy. What is ironic is that this reading/writing of geopolitics could, on its own terms, be described as presenting a 'distorted view'. Haushofer's son, at the time of Bowman's article, had been briefly imprisoned by the Nazis because of his association with Hess, who had fled to Scotland in 1942 under suspicious circumstances. Haushofer's writings had been a sustained argument for an alliance with, not a war against, the USSR. In Bowman's text, however, German geography, German theories of government (reduced solely to Treitschke) and Nazi ideology are treated as different instances of the same 'crooked and evil philosophy'.

The persuasive force of Bowman's analysis is dependent upon a wealth of conceits, the most prominent of which are the distinctions between geography and geopolitics, science and pseudoscience. Yet maintaining a clear distinction between these concepts was not possible for Bowman. Bowman's 'Forewarnings Recalled' discussion of German political geography records both his praise and his criticism of certain works. German geography (in this case the work of Alexander Supan) was capable of being both 'excellent' and 'illogical' at the same time. A writing could therefore be both a work of geography and a work of geopolitics at the same time. It could be both scientific and pseudo-scientific by Bowman's own logic.

Bowman defends *The new world* as being a nonideological, scientific work. 'It interposed no ideological preconceived 'system' between a problem and its solution in a practical world in which historical accident, not design only, had played so large a part. It sought to analyse real situations rather than justify any one of several conflicting nationalistic policies' (Bowman, 1942a: 653). Ideology, for Bowman, was a system which justified or rationalized certain foreign policies. Yet Bowman's Wilsonian internationalism was not judged to be an ideology. In other words, Bowman makes the ideological claim that his ideology is not ideological. He used the concept of 'ideology' in an ideological way to normalize his own ideology as objective. When Bowman looked at the world (and it is important to note that this is what he understood himself doing; reading and writing are

untheorized and unproblematic activities) he saw it as it really was. The problem of language, of the social limitations of the categories used to constitute the world (e.g., the categorization of events into 'historical accidents' or 'design') is ignored. The surface of the new world was taken to be immanently legible to a reasonable, dispassionate expert like Bowman.

We can make a similar argument about his strategic use of the term 'geopolitics'. Bowman concludes his piece by stating that geopolitics is '...simple and sure, but, as disclosed in German writings and policy, it is also illusion, mummery, an apology for theft' (Bowman, 1942a: 658). Note the implication (already suggested earlier when Bowman used the phrase 'as developed in Germany') that geopolitics can be 'disclosed' in other ways from that found in Germany. Geopolitics, in other words, is a class, one member of which is *Geopolitik*. Bowman sounds a warning in his article about the migration of geopolitics from Germany to the USA (in a veiled reference to the provocative remapping of the world by George Renner, 1942; see Smith, 1984: 73; De Bres, 1986). But the most prominent example of USA geopolitics at the time was Nicholas Spykman's *America's strategy in world politics* which was published in 1942. In an earlier edition of *The Geographical Review*, Bowman had himself reviewed this work and lavished it with extravagant praise: 'On grounds of merit and public value *America's strategy in world politics* should be read in not less than a million American homes. Every government official responsible for policy should read it once a year for the next twenty years' (Bowman, 1942b: 350). In practice, Bowman was not an opponent of geopolitical thinking. Indeed, his distancing himself from the term 'geopolitics' was part of his own geopolitical practice! By dubbing the enemy's foreign policy as 'geopolitics' he normalized his own geopolitics as 'scientific geography'. Soviet geopolitics adopted a similar strategy after the second world war (Vitkovskiy, 1980; Vigor, 1985).

We can get some indication of the importance Bowman attached to 'Geography versus geopolitics' from the fact that he distributed several hundred copies of the article not only to other academics but also to business and political leaders (Smith, 1984: 73). At the time of the publication of 'Geography versus geopolitics' in October 1942, Bowman had assumed greater governmental responsibilities and was deeply involved in USA planning for the postwar world order, particularly the fate of the British empire. In early 1940 Bowman had declared that the answer to German territorial *Lebensraum* is economic *Lebensraum* for all. In practice, this meant a global *Lebensraum* for USA business and it was this goal that Bowman resolutely worked to achieve throughout the war years (Smith, 1994).

'Geography versus geopolitics' is best understood as a work of wartime propaganda. Bowman made war on Germany in the text. It is significant in the history of the critical reading/writing of geopolitics for three reasons. First, it helped codify the dominant strategy by which postwar Anglo-American geography (and probably geography in a great deal of other countries as well) handled the profound and disturbing questions raised by geopolitics. Geopolitics was a category which demarcated that which geographers did not do. It was the dangerous outside that defined the scientific inside that was geography (Ó Tuathail, 1994a). It was the pseudo-science that not only legitimated but also made the real science of geography necessary. For this strategy to work, geopolitics had to remain a composite abstraction, a practice without definition or specification, a word that simply signified that which was illegitimate.

Secondly, the consequences of this reading/writing of geopolitics was that postwar geography never confronted the questions raised by the use of geographical knowledge

during the war. The role played by the intellectual discipline of geography during the war was considerable on all sides of the conflict. The role of popular geographical identities and slogans was even more significant and deserved serious research. Popular terms like 'Lebensraum', 'Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere' and 'Atlantic community' naturalized highly contentious geographical processes and communities (Henrikson, 1975; Dower, 1986). In order to wage war, geographical images of one's own place and that of the enemy had to be starkly drawn. In Germany, Nazi newsreels pioneered the use of cinematic cartography (bleeding maps, threatening arrows, etc.) to foster the requisite public consciousness about the war. In the USA, such techniques were copied to convince geographically innocent soldiers to die for places they might never have heard of. The world which the Film Production Division of the USA army projected in its 'Why we fight' series was a Manichean one of slavery and freedom, gangsters and good guys (O'Tuathail, 1994a). The ability to control the production of geographical identities and knowledge during the second world war was crucial to the conduct of the war.

None of these eminently geographical issues was ever confronted and problematized by a newly sensitized political geography. Under the guidance of Richard Hartshorne, political geography in the postwar period retreated from anything that appeared political and controversial. Hartshorne was in a unique position to lead research into the politics of geographical knowledge. In the autumn of 1938 Hartshorne had gone to Vienna and found himself in post-*Anschluss* Austria. Hartshorne lived in a Jewish apartment block and his correspondence records the arrest of some Jewish neighbours. Nevertheless, he remained remarkably naive to the emergent political situation, noting how '...it is wonderful to live in a country in which discipline is so splendidly developed' (Hartshorne letter quoted in Kirby, 1994). Back in the USA in 1942 after the publication of his *The nature of geography* in 1939, Hartshorne headed a projects committee in the Research and Analysis Branch of the Office of Strategic Services. Hartshorne's response to the war was to deepen the commitment he had expressed in *The nature of geography* to objectivism. He functioned, in the words of Kirby (1994), as '...the scientific hit man for the Projects Committee'.

As Kirby (1994) perceptively notes, American geography after 1945 was '...already strongly committed to a bureaucratic and instrumentalist path, employing objective and scientific methodologies'. Hartshorne ascended to a position of significant influence within the discipline. In 1950 he surveyed the field of political geography and found much that he considered to be explosive and dangerous:

We may have produced no atom bombs in political geography, but the field nonetheless strewn with dynamite – it is no place for sophomores to play with matches. Fortunately, we appear to have escaped the danger of repeating, in American terms, the crime of those of our colleagues in Germany who were responsible for the dangerous doctrines of geopolitics. But we will be exposed to similar dangers until the foundations of our knowledge in this field are on a much firmer basis than appears now to be the case (Hartshorne, 1950: 104).

The field was 'unorganized' and the least scientific of the branches of geography. Its practitioners were often poorly trained and sometimes published '...misinformation or irresponsible recommendations purporting to represent more than the personal views of the author' (1950: 103–104). In certain cases political geography was criminal. Given this situation, Hartshorne set out to provide the field with certain organizing principles which would '...establish knowledge on such firm foundations that argument disappears, and acceptance becomes relatively enduring'. Political geography was to be given a firm foundation and solid structure of knowledge which would enable it to '...arrive at applications of sound value in the solution of actual problems' (1950: 104).

The vision of transforming a minefield into something solid, firm and consensual was a reflection of reconstructionist times (not to mention a gendered understanding of science). It was a vision in keeping with the turn USA political culture had taken in the postwar period. The politics of the new deal, a politics based on explicit class appeals, ended with the declaration of war and the exhortation to national unity that accompanied it. Postwar politics came to be organized around what Wolfe (1981) terms 'the politics of growth', an apolitical form of politics which promised a harmonious, prosperous future for all social classes. Geography within the USA developed a similar politics of growth: growth and scientific progress could be achieved by rejecting explicitly the overtly political and by an active containment of the disturbing questions raised by the war. Hartshorne's attempt to develop a functional approach in political geography in 1950 was an attempt to create a political geography without politics, a diligent, scientific, civic-minded knowledge that was uncontroversial and consensual (see Smith, 1989, on the same impulse in *The nature of geography*). Integral to this project was the forced marginalization of geopolitics, the errant practice that was now best avoided and forgotten.

Outside the discipline of geography, the reaction to geopolitics was quite different. While some theorists followed the 'pseudo-science' line and condemned the word (e.g., Morgenthau, 1949: 116–20) while working within the problematic it marked, others readily embraced both the word and the practices associated with it (Schmidt, 1954). Some within political science attempted to objectivize geopolitics by translating it into 'geopolitical hypotheses' which were then put through a ritual of being 'tested' (Sprout and Sprout, 1960; 1961). A few lonely figures in political geography continued to address global issues but in a careful and circumspect way which carefully avoided the accusation of 'geopolitics' (Jones, 1956; Cohen, 1973). Though none of this intellectual work was outside politics and ideology, all claimed the mantle of science and objectivity.

III Yves Lacoste: geopolitics as a form of geographical reasoning

Though a widely disseminated and culturally hegemonic set of geographical identities concerning 'the east' (communist, totalitarian, enslaved), 'the west' (free, democratic and individualistic) and the 'third world' (the zone of conflict between capitalism and communism) was fundamental to the functioning of the cold war, the social production of such geographical scripts was never investigated by the discipline of geography (Slater, 1993). It was not until contradictions began to develop in the postwar politics of growth ideology, with the civil rights movement and the Vietnam war in the 1960s, that questions began to be raised anew about geography and its relationship to a social order that was violently suppressing domestic minority rights while spending billions of dollars conducting a brutal war against an undeveloped nation thousands of miles from the USA.

The social and political upheavals brought on by the civil-rights movement, the Vietnam war and new cultural movements led to the development of a self-consciously 'radical geography' in the late 1960s in the USA. The journal *Antipode* was founded as a journal of radical geography at Clark University in 1969. It provided a forum which challenged the objectivist, value-free, political neutrality pretensions of geography as a science, an epistemological ideology that had taken a quantitative and technocratic turn in the late 1960s. Despite the significance of the Vietnam war to the political conscientization of a new generation of geographers, the new radical geography of the 1970s had disappointingly little to say about geopolitics in a substantive, empirical way. A naive rediscovery and

enthusiasm for the dogma of old Marxist theoretical debates on capitalism and imperialism precluded actual empirical investigations of the Vietnam war (Abdel-Malek, 1977). The Vietnam war was read by one radical geographer as a consequence of '... late capitalism's dependence on imperialistic domination and exploitation for its continued functioning and the inevitable reaction (in the form of liberation struggles) against this domination in the Third World' (Peet, 1977: 7). In most instances, analysis did not get beyond this description.

One notable exception was the work of the French communist geographer, Yves Lacoste. As a member of an International Commission of Inquiry into War Crimes, Lacoste visited North Vietnam in 1972 and undertook an empirical investigation of the systematic USA bombing of the dikes on the Red River in North Vietnam, a bombing that appeared designed to destroy the irrigation system of the Red River Delta and so flood the homes and crops of the ten million people who lived in the delta region (Lacoste, 1977). Lacoste's research on the Red River dike-bombing strategy of the USA war machine in Vietnam was a brilliant example of a countergeopolitics, a writing from below on the environmental consequences of USA geopolitical practice in Vietnam.

Unlike so many other forms of radical geography, Lacoste's work is characterized by a sustained consideration of the meaning of geography and geopolitics. What distinguishes Lacoste's work from traditional political geography is, first, its appreciation of geography as a language and form of knowledge. Geography in Lacoste's work is never naively taken to be immanently meaningful or obvious. Rather, geography is a social discourse, 'a mode of representing the word' (1977: 244). It includes not only academic works but mass-media-generated 'geographical clichés and images' (Lacoste, 1976; 1977; 1984). Geography is taught not only in classrooms but also in films, newspapers and advertisements. The range of what is taken to be geographical varies, however, and is dependent on what the existent social order wants to demarcate as 'geographical'.

Geography, for Lacoste, is, secondly, a strategic form of knowledge. In the words of his landmark 1976 study, *La géographie, ça sert, d'abord, à faire la guerre*, geography, is, first and foremost, a military form of knowledge. Before being made, in the late nineteenth century, into a discipline to be taught in schools, geography was a form of knowledge taught to kings, princes, diplomats and military leaders:

Geography is first and foremost a strategic knowledge which is closely linked to a set of political and military practices; these practices demand that extremely different, at first sight heterogeneous pieces of information should be brought together. You cannot understand the grounds for existence nor the importance of such information if you confine yourself to the validity of knowledge for knowledge's sake. These strategic practices make geography necessary, primarily for those who control the machinery of the state. Is this really a science? It does not really matter; the question is not fundamental in so far as one is aware that geography, being the structuring of knowledge relating to space, is a strategic knowledge, a power (Lacoste, 1976: 7; trans. Buleon, 1992: 27).

In designating geography as a strategic form of knowledge, Lacoste sought to undermine the scientific image of geography as a discipline with its own discrete place in the academic division of labour and the enlightenment project of the university. Rather, geography is a form of knowledge which traverses other strategic forms of knowledge. Lacoste terms Clausewitz's *On war* a genuine work of 'active geography' (Lacoste, 1976). Military science and geography are inseparable. Yet while Lacoste emphasizes the close connections of geography to the military and the practice of warfare, he does not designate geography solely as a military form of knowledge. Geography is also a practical form of knowledge concerning administration and government. Echoing Foucault, Lacoste argued that it is a knowledge born out of the practical management problems of government,

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problems addressing the administration, surveillance and control of populations, territories and colonies. In March 1976 Lacoste and a number of other French geographers established a radical journal *Hérodote*, subtitled 'strategies, geographies, ideologies' and edited by Lacoste, to explore these themes.

Lacoste understands specific types of geographical knowledge within this strategic conception. The map, Lacoste points out, should once again be understood as an instrument of power. It is a way of representing space which facilitates its domination and control. To map is formally to '...define space along the lines set within a peculiar epistemological experience; it actually transposes a little-known piece of concrete reality into an abstraction which serves the practical interests of the State machine' (1977, 244-45). The survey is another type of geographical knowledge linked to state power. Geographers, Lacoste argues, have historically been 'information agents'. Through the centuries they have paid attention to phenomena that are of potential use to military and governmental leaders:

Topography, for example, was described in terms of strategic and tactical interest; the distribution of population was described in terms of the administrative and political organization of space. The central notion of region, so perennially used in the discipline, derives from the Latin word *regere* (to rule). Etymologically speaking, then, a region is by definition a military region (1977: 245).

Lacoste understands geopolitics as a type of geographical reasoning. In orthodox use, this is a type of reasoning that appeals to geographical 'evidence' and 'imperatives' to justify the particular foreign policy of a state. Geopolitics is associated with the imperialistic foreign-policy practice of a dictatorial ruler (such as Napoleon or Hitler) which attempts to impose a geopolitical plan that presents itself as if it corresponded to the 'nature of things' (Lacoste, 1984: 214). Geopolitics is also associated with the tradition of political argument represented by Mahan and Mackinder. The theses of Mahan and Mackinder, Lacoste argues, '...rest more on historical evocations than on rigorous strategic thinking, based as they are on grandiose geographical metaphors of the Land and the Sea' (1984: 214). Such theses lack scientific value but have a significant 'lyrical value' which enables them to misrepresent the conflict between the USSR and the USA as a metaphysical conflict between Land and Sea.

Lacoste's stress on science and rigour point to a critical theory of geopolitics that relies on a retained notion of objectivity. Orthodox geopolitics is objectionable to Lacoste not only because it is associated with imperialism but also because it is a type of geographic reasoning which is hazy, erroneous, distorted and simplifying. Though international relations cannot be studied in a perfectly objective way, Lacoste nevertheless believes it possible to '...reduce the influence of certain ideological assumptions that lead us to think in Manichean terms. Above all, we must avoid thinking that problems are simple when they are very complicated' (1984: 215).

Despite his well founded suspicion of scientific geography, Lacoste nevertheless champions a form of 'true geographic reasoning' (1984: 216) which he sometimes describes as 'objective' and 'scientific'. At different points in his work, Lacoste expresses his understanding of what is involved in this commitment. First, there is the possibility of a pure seeing of international affairs. Lacoste holds strongly to the possibility of seeing things as they really are (1984: 215). The argument against Manicheism in international relations, he suggests, is a moral one but '...it also arises from a desire to be more effective, and to see the situation more clearly. For us, the geographer is perhaps, amongst the many observers of the world today, one of the best equipped to do so' (1987a: 3).

Retained within Lacoste's work is the dream of the geographer as a removed and privileged seer (not a reader or writer).

Secondly, there is the task of unmasking the fraudulent. Geopolitics in the mass media is frequently associated with 'banal statements and outdated slogans'. It is vital that geographers respond to the growing interest in geopolitics '... in a more satisfactory and rigorous manner and that we unmask all fraudulent geopolitical stances' (1987a: 3). Initially at least, Lacoste envisioned the critique of geopolitics taking the form of a revelation of ideological simplicity in the face of complex reality.

Thirdly, there is the necessity to document exhaustively the complex spatial relationships that are to be found in international relations. Geographers must think of space as something that is '... textured, extremely varied and very complex' (1984: 225). Only the exhaustive designation of the spatial configurations that shape international relations and a '... sensitive analysis of the articulation between them will make geographical reasoning worthwhile and enable geographers to arm themselves better against the influence of ideological assumptions' (1987a: 6).

Finally, Lacoste advocates a return to the work of the turn-of-the-century French anarchist geographer, Elisee Reclus, for renewed inspiration. Reclus's work is an example of how to disengage geographical knowledge from its links with the state apparatus without, at the same time, eliminating the political. Reclus developed geography's effectiveness by enlarging the 'geographical', by emphasizing the ambiguity of 'progress' and by turning knowledge against the ruling classes. In doing so, Lacoste argues, Reclus '... advanced geographical reasoning as a method of objective and scientific analysis of a broad spectrum of reality' (1987a: 8; 1987b).

Lacoste's commitment to a Reclusian-inspired enlargement of the 'geographical' led him to make the case for a geopolitics beyond that associated with imperialism, an alternative anti-imperialist geopolitics that justifies independence, autonomy and liberation (Lacoste, 1982). This geopolitics is not a geopolitics of and for the state but a geopolitics of and for social movements. Later in the 1980s Lacoste added further dimensions to his 'other geopolitics'. In 1986 Lacoste and 36 other authors published a mammoth three-volume study on the evolution of the *région* in France. The study of the *région* was an example of 'inner geopolitics' which was separate from yet also complemented the study of 'outer geopolitics' (Buleon, 1992: 36). In 1988, in what is perhaps the clearest statement of Lacoste's commitment to the panoptic dream associated with geopolitics, Lacoste outlines a distinction between a partisan and an aloof geopolitics. The latter form of geopolitics, the form Lacoste champions, is a geopolitics which 'looks down' on international issues. It is less directly committed, a detached form of geopolitics that observes conflicts and tries to understand the reasons for events (Lacoste, 1988: 8; Buleon, 1992: 34).

There are many dimensions of Lacoste's work on geopolitics that I have not examined, particularly his empirical analyses of Islam, Euromissiles and the sea (1987b; 1987c; 1987d; 1987e; 1988). Nevertheless, we have considered enough to gain a sense of the value yet also the difficulties associated with his reading/writing of geopolitics. The first of the difficulties is that Lacoste has an objectivist understanding of reality. 'Reality' is taken to be a complex but nevertheless graspable and capturable entity independent of signification. With care and exhaustive documentation the geographer can see the world as it really is, can narrate the truth of things and can effectively represent the way things objectively are.

Secondly, despite the significant advance of recognizing geography as, first, a social

discourse and, secondly, as a discourse tied to systems of power, Lacoste's work arguably ends up falling back into the very ideological infrastructure he wished to challenge. Geography, for Lacoste, clearly can attain an objectivity and scientificness. It can approach the dream of geopolitics, that of panoptic survey and divination (1984: 227; Ó Tuathail, 1994b). In not challenging the possibility of objectively knowing and panoptically seeing the world, Lacoste leaves the epistemological infrastructure of geopolitics intact. Assertions of rigour, exhaustiveness, complexity and science do not guarantee a rupture from the infrastructure underpinning geopolitics.

IV Conclusion: reflection, reading and writing

The critical interrogation of geopolitics inevitably leads to the critical interrogation of that which makes the production of geographical knowledge as a whole possible. In seeking to problematize the conditions of possibility of geopolitics/geography, 'critical geopolitics' needs to problematize not simply the social construction of space and place but also the very rhetorical infrastructure of the western philosophical tradition (which is our whole conceptual discourse not simply the discourse of the 'discipline of philosophy'). Two such rhetorical infrastructures which are essential to the possibility of geopolitics and geography are, first, what Derrida (1978: 27) calls 'photology', the domination of western philosophy as metaphysics by the metaphor of darkness and light and, secondly, the related metaphors of 'Cartesian perspectivism' which separates subject and object, rendering the former transcendental and the latter inert (Foster, 1988; Jay, 1988). Both metaphors are part of the problematic of philosophical reflection which is, as Gasche (1986: 13) notes, a name for philosophy's eternal aspiration towards self-foundation. As he explains it, reflection became the outstanding principle of philosophical thinking with Descartes. Descartes '...establishes the apodictic certainty of self as a result of the clarity and distinctness with which it perceives itself' (1986: 13). Self-reflection, with Descartes, became at once the medium, method and foundation by which philosophy grounds itself. Modern metaphysics is a metaphysics of subjectivity with reflexivity as the very medium of its unfolding. Self-reflexivity, the Cartesian *cogito me cogitare*, '...remains an *a priori* structural precondition of what we understand by knowledge itself' (Gasche, 1986: 15). Reading and writing are conceptualized as orders of reflection, with reading *qua* speech closer to the pure presence of self-reflective thought than writing which is secondary, a derivative of speech (Derrida, 1976).

The aim of Derridean deconstructionism is to put this self-reflexive Cartesian subject – a subject that still survives in many forms in western conceptual discourse – into question. Deconstructionism does not wish to refute or reject the discourse of reflection but to question its unthought, the limits of its possibility. Deconstructionism never fully escapes the language of light and sight, enlightenment and revelation. Our very forms of knowledge and expression are so constituted by these metaphors that invariably we end up reproducing them even when we question them. The most effective strategy is to subvert this rhetoric so it questions its own functioning. As Gasche (1986: 6) remarks:

Derrida's philosophy, rather than being a philosophy of reflection, is engaged in the systematic exploration of that dull surface (the tain of the mirror) without which no reflection and no specular and speculative activity would be possible, but which at the same time has no place and no part in reflection's scintillating play.

In other words, deconstructionism seeks to use the very rhetoric of reflection against it to explore its limits. It seeks to render visible that which makes visibility, legibility and

transparency possible. Its goal is to reverse and displace the hierarchies of conceptual oppositions that are the infrastructure of Cartesian perspectivism, our own culture of knowledge (Haraway, 1991).

The implications of deconstructionism for 'critical geopolitics' are considerable. Just as Derrida reverses and displaces the conceptual infrastructure of western philosophy by valorizing an arche-writing (the pure play of difference), so we need to reverse and displace the conceptual infrastructure of geopolitics. One means of doing this is to subvert the centrality of sight by emphasizing how sight in the geopolitical tradition (just as elsewhere) is a socially sanctioned form of *siting* places (mapping them into pre-established conceptual landscapes) and also a socially authorized form of *citing* places (emplacing them within authoritative sets of discourses such as 'Orientalism' or 'development studies') (Ó Tuathail, 1994a). Sight, in other words, is infested with sites and cites, with that which it as apodictic presence denies. Another strategy is to displace the concept of 'geopolitics' itself by opening it up to its own heterogeneity not homogeneity, indeterminacy not decidability, polyvocality not unity (Ó Tuathail, 1994a). *There is no concept 'geopolitics' which signifies in and of itself.* To study geopolitics critically is to study the movement of *différance*, the play of forms without a determined and invariable substance, the spacing and temporizing of traces (Derrida, 1982). To study geopolitics critically is to study (arche)writing.

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