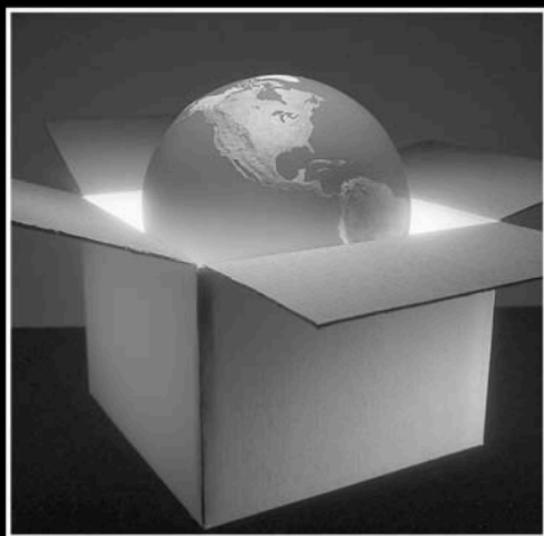


# Political Space

Frontiers of Change  
and Governance in a  
Globalizing World



*Edited by*  
Yale H. Ferguson  
*and*  
R. J. Barry Jones

# POLITICAL SPACE

SUNY series in Global Politics

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James N. Rosenau, editor

P O L I T I C A L   S P A C E

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in a Globalizing World

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EDITED BY

Yale H. Ferguson  
and  
R. J. Barry Jones

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## Political Space and Global Politics

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*Yale H. Ferguson*  
*and*  
*R. J. Barry Jones*

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The concept of *political space*, already familiar to political geographers, has lately received increasing attention from political scientists and other social scientists who are concerned with what has traditionally been called “international relations” (IR) theory.<sup>1</sup> That attention, in part, reflects a sense that we need new ways of thinking about and describing change and the actors, structures, and processes that shape politics and patterns of governance in the contemporary world.

There is a new agenda of concerns that arises from a host of such inter-related developments as the end of the Cold War; the much lower cost and vast expansion of transnational transportation and communication; a related information revolution; the increased internationalization, regionalization, and substantial globalization of the world economy; the recognition of growing threats to the global environment; a resurgence of ethnic identity, religious fundamentalism, and localisms of many kinds; migration and refugee flows; and the proliferation of terrorist and other criminal networks.<sup>2</sup> Distinctions between and among the various academic disciplines are eroding even as are those between the external and internal dimensions of states and societies. The response in the IR field has been heightened interest in international political economy (IPE), the proliferation of critical perspectives upon the nature and role of the state—and now, we submit, concern with changing patterns of political space.

The concept of political space, let alone changing political space, may appear to be unnecessarily abstract or even abstruse. To the contrary, the editors regard it as an especially useful concept for the task of ground-clearing. Thinking about political space forces us to reconsider the degree to which politics and territory continue to be related, possible shifts in that relationship and the sources of change, as well as the extent to which important aspects of global politics and governance transcend territory or are effectively deterritorialized. In this way we can help free ourselves from what John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge felicitously labeled “the territorial trap.”<sup>3</sup>

## Different Maps of Global Politics

Contemporary analysts urgently need to “remap” the world politically. We must consider other borders than those reflected in the map all of us grew up with, with neat sovereign state boxes. Certainly, that map still has considerable utility, but it is seriously misleading in many respects and definitely is not the only map we need to comprehend the political complexities of the present-day world. A useful starting exercise might be to ask ourselves whether if we were to wake one morning and not be able to find the familiar map, how might *we* redraw the political map of the world? The short and obvious answer is that it all depends on what *we* want or need to show. We are reminded of the map in souvenir shops in New York City purporting to be “A New Yorker’s View of the World,” which today is not nearly so focused on just a few traditional tourist destinations for New Yorkers as it used to be. Indeed, most of the nationalities that comprise New York City’s multiethnic population now follow daily events in their former homelands via their own newspapers, television channels, and web sites.

The editors cannot stress too strongly that one map will not serve for all persons and purposes, any more than it has for the contributors to this volume. As Harold and Margaret Sprout pointed out decades ago<sup>4</sup> and constructivists of all persuasions<sup>5</sup> continue to remind us, although the “real world” is definitely “out there” somewhere and misreading its “true” nature sometimes can lead to severe consequences, it is also a fact that all of us are constrained in what we see.<sup>6</sup> We are limited by the “glasses behind our eyes,” not least the various “schools” of theory that presume to tell us what we should find worthy of particular attention and what we can safely ignore. Theory leads us to certain kinds of puzzles, issues, actors, and background forces shaping behavior—and, equally significantly, not to others.

Traditionally, realism and neorealism focused us on a world of sovereign states with differing power capabilities and interests, an international system structure that arises from the distribution of such capabilities, and a systemwide condition of anarchy that makes states competitive and fearful for their security. Let us be clear that we do *not* intend this book to be read as some sort of antirealist manifesto. First, the many problems of realism and neorealism are well-known, including a tendency to generate self-confirming behavior of decision makers who accept their tenets.<sup>7</sup> To review all the old debates would be pointless and boring. Second, there is no denying that there are times in global politics—especially but not exclusively during periods of heightened concern for security—when the realist model seems to be a reasonable description of observable behavior. Decision-makers may be convinced they perceive “objective” national interests, seek to extend the power/influence of their states at the expense of their neighbors, build up their armed forces, and regularly rat-

tle the saber. China's frequently belligerent posture regarding Taiwan and strident reaction early in 2000 to the collision of its military jet with a U.S. reconnaissance plane might be considered examples. Yet such cases nearly always highlight some of the severe limitations of any realist perspective. How do we explain why Peking's approach to Taiwan has sometimes been much more accommodative? Was what some observers considered to be an overreaction to the collision less a reassertion of enduring national security interests than a product of short-term competition among elites at a time of domestic political transition? Similarly, it is tempting to regard the sudden rapprochement among such strange bedfellows as the United States, Russia, Pakistan, India, and China after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center as a classic exercise in realist political opportunism. Although the others no doubt sincerely deplored the brutal attack on the United States, each obviously hoped to exact a "price" from the superpower for supporting the war on terrorism. The war itself was in defense of the security of a state but otherwise was almost wholly outside the scope of traditional realist doctrine—fought with broad international support against the transnational al-Qaeda network and their Taliban protectors, and in a so-called country, Afghanistan, that is a volatile conglomeration of rival ethnicities, warlord bands, and religious factions.

To be sure, there are still interstate conflicts in the world, like the India/Pakistan perennial dispute over Kashmir, but in recent years such conflicts have appeared to be dramatically on the decline. Moreover, until the war on terrorism, a host of economic, environmental, and humanitarian issues seemed to be pushing matters military out of the headlines—and they are likely to do so again. Even as the war continued, the World Trade Organization (WTO) held a major successful conference in Qatar, and 160 countries concluded a new pact on global warming (albeit without the U.S.). We clearly need other approaches than realism to explain the remarkable amount of order, cooperation, rulemaking, institution-building, and other forms of political, economic, and social integration in the contemporary world. These sorts of subjects, of course, realists once assigned to those whom they contemptuously labeled "idealists," but such matters are plainly central to any *genuinely* realistic worldview today. Unfortunately, there is still no consensus among IR theorists as to the extent to which order and cooperation are virtually inevitable outcomes of interdependence and produced by a variety of actors or are almost entirely dependent upon the perceptions and "interest" calculations of state decision-makers.<sup>8</sup>

What follows next in this introduction is not so much the editors' prescription as a modest checklist of categories of things we might need or want to show on a political map that would serve as a guide for the early twenty-first century. It is meant to be nothing more than food for thought, and the editors themselves and contributors actually offer a wide range of more

specific and complex conceptions of political space in their respective essays. *In fact, the novelty and diversity of such conceptions—and the appropriateness of novelty and diversity at this stage in the development of theories of global politics—are the main themes of this collection.*

Now to the features on our hypothetical map: *Legal boundaries* clearly persist, but not only those of states (countries). What traditional theorists have often overlooked, or at least underplayed, is that legal boundaries also lie within states, and increasingly overarch and transcend them as well. Within many national governments, a single executive, various executive bureaucracies, legislative bodies, and courts have their separate and to some extent overlapping, legally defined realms of authority. Nonetheless, their actual influence and control varies with particular issues and the political currents of the day. As is the case in the United Kingdom, some political systems enshrine parliamentary sovereignty and may even have no written constitution. Yet the UK does now provide for limited “devolution” for historical regions like Scotland and Wales. Most countries also have political subdivisions with varying degrees of autonomy, like the states in federal regimes, provinces or departments, counties, cities and towns, and so on.

Moreover, in most relatively open and economically developed societies, private property rights, a host of firms and financial institutions, and myriad interest groups that constitute “civil society” all enjoy a degree of autonomy and protection enshrined in law. Companies, banks, and NGOs are increasingly establishing organizational structures, alliances, and networks that cross national boundaries, as are an ever-growing number of international organizations (IOs) and less-formal regimes created by treaties and other agreements. Many IOs, too, have internal administrative and legislative subdivisions as well as a variety of linkages to member-states, other IOs and regimes, and global civil society. Continuing subjects for debate are the degree to which IOs and regimes are separate actors or merely the sum of their member parts, and whether at the end of the day (when and if such ever comes) “final” power and authority resides with states. In practice, however, analysts today might do best perhaps just to raise the questions of how and where effective decisions are customarily made and implemented, only in the relatively infrequent extreme, by means of coercion.

There are also many characteristics of the contemporary world which, while not themselves directly “political” in any conventional sense of the term, nevertheless bear strongly on the pressures on traditional governments, their capacities to act effectively, and on general patterns of advantage and disadvantage. It is thus possible to emphasize various *topographical or ecological characteristics* that seem to have important relevance for global politics, however difficult the task sometimes is to establish the precise nature of that connection—for example, the loci of petroleum deposits and other natural resources, principal

mountain ranges, climate zones, fishing grounds, threatened flora and fauna, major rivers, deserts, and straits.

Another approach is to highlight *economic, social, and technological features*—GNP performance; national public and private debt; the centers of petroleum production and consumption; arms possession and production; the loci of certain “ethnicities”; language groupings; regions or countries of unusual affluence and extreme poverty; class divisions demarcated by income; the concentrations of personal computers, televisions, telephones, internet accounts—and many more.

An additional useful set of features on our map might be actual *transaction flows*. Who is interacting with whom (i.e., “diplomacy” broadly conceived)?—such as summit meetings between heads of state, bureaucratic politics, intergovernmental relations; relations between and among firms, between firms and governments, or between NGOs and IOs. What do we observe about trade, in general and with respect to specific commodities, goods, and services? To what extent is it bilateral or increasingly globalized, concentrated regionally, intercity, or intrafirm? We could ask similar questions about direct investment, loans from development banks, personal mail, telephone calls, hits on World Wide Web sites, and other sorts of interactions. For instance, Susan Strange’s early differentiation of worldwide knowledge structures, production structures, and financial structures—from the more conventional notion of a power structure—illuminated the variable structures and spaces in the area of economics and transactions.<sup>9</sup>

Then there is what we might term the *subjective* dimension of global politics. For example, maps supposedly identifying concentrations of certain ethnic groups can be extremely misleading. Although “ethnicity” may sometimes rest on such factors as a common history or language, there is no escaping the fact that it is largely a social construct like most other identities. The degree to which an individual or a group regards itself as “Scottish,” “Kurdish,” “Hispanic,” “Mayan,” “Slavic,” “Ukrainian,” or another ethnicity, almost always depends on a much broader context and often varies over time. The same might be said for the concept of “nation,” despite the fact that most states define their own nationals and citizens by law. A key question is: With whom or what do individuals and groups actually identify? Religions have their faithful, internal schisms, and heretics. Firms have their local and often far-flung facilities and markets. Scholars have their professions and arcane specializations. Women and gays, their respective and (in the case of lesbians) overlapping constituencies, and so on. Identities are normally not mutually exclusive. However, as a category like “women” strongly suggests, what perhaps matters most is not identity as such, but intensity of identification and loyalty. To what extent are identities shaped by local and global culture? How do identities affect political behavior, and the other way around? Where do true loyalties lie, particularly when identities do seem to conflict and cannot all be equally served?—and why?

Viewed in the ways we have proposed, the global political map becomes at once considerably more complex, but, we continue to insist, far more “realistic” than the map reflected in traditional IR theory. Nonetheless, responsible analysts cannot stop with the statement that the world is, indeed, a complex place politically. The task of theory building is finding better means to “read” the map, make greater sense of its complexities, identify significant patterns, and establish relationships either between the whole and its parts or at least among aspects of the whole. For instance, a concern with specific *issues* brings into focus certain actors, legal boundaries, system characteristics, transaction flows, identities, and loyalties—and, again by implication, not others. If one’s preoccupation is with the issue of protecting whales, for example, the relevant world of political actors and environment influencing their behavior is far different from what it might be, say, if the issue is nuclear nonproliferation. Likewise, deep-sea mining, rather than stabilization of global financial markets, control of AIDS, stopping genocide, ending traffic in women, halting the flow of heroin, combatting bioterrorism, or improving airline safety.

### **Patterns of Governance**

Another way of discerning a measure of order in otherwise apparent chaos is to map political space in terms of patterns of *governance*. A familiar approach to that task is to keep sovereign-state boxes but distinguish domestic regime types. We may map the world’s democracies, governments undergoing apparent transitions from authoritarianism, personal dictatorships, military regimes, and others. An unfortunate number of dysfunctional political systems or “failed states” might also have to be identified and charted. Such a map would be helpful to those studying, for example, the often-proposed connection between democracy and peace, or progress of human rights in the sense of political freedoms.

The territorial state has been the primary focus for students of international relations and politics in the past, and certainly many states remain important actors in global politics. It is difficult to generalize because the classification “state” embraces everything from superpower to failed states and ministates. However, if there is any emerging consensus in the current literature, it is that states are not becoming obsolete but that they—like all polities (and there are many types)<sup>10</sup>—are continually evolving and adapting. Contemporary developments may be tending to undermine some traditional state functions (e.g., control of some aspects of the national economy) and to enhance others (e.g., the provision of infrastructure and services that improve competitiveness). In any event, states have never been the only significant political actors in global politics, and it is now increasingly apparent that states must

share the stage with a variety of other polities and even with forms of governance like markets and networks that are somewhat amorphous with regard to their identity and institutions.

Especially today we need to reconsider the relationship between territory and governance. All individuals and collectivities are situated in physical space, and for most nationalist movements the notion of a specific homeland remains strong. Yet much of what is important in global politics and surely the world economy is increasingly incongruent with state boundaries, or put another way, lies within or transcends those boundaries. Not only (as Saskia Sassen reminds us) is the global embedded in the national (and vice versa),<sup>11</sup> but there is also a significant and perhaps growing degree of “deterritorialization.” Cyberspace, for example, gives a new meaning to the more familiar legal concept of “off-shore.” Markets are continually shifting and often volatile, and although particular transactions happen in specific places on any given day, it is the flow of transactions that matters most. Likewise, the subjective dimension we mentioned earlier—for example, identities and cultural norms—is hard to pin down geographically but can be remarkably effective in governing human behavior.

If we conceive of “governance” as those polities and processes that effectively allocate values, that is, collective goods, we open up a wide range of possibilities. To be sure, patterns of governance widely seen as “legitimate”—that is, as proceeding from some legal or moral “authority”—are for that reason all that more secure. However, Ferguson and Mansbach<sup>12</sup> and others insist that governance need not be legitimate to be effective. A contributor to this volume and the editor of the series in which it appears, James N. Rosenau, has put it that “systems of rule can be maintained and their controls successfully and consistently exerted even in the absence of established legal or political authority.” One might well ask how long such informal authorities can persist and under what conditions? In any event, Rosenau’s own premise is that “the world is not so much a system dominated by states and national governments as a cgeries of spheres of authority (SOAs) that are subject to considerable flux and not necessarily coterminous with the division of territorial space.” The foundation of such authority is not legitimacy per se, rather a capacity to “evoke compliance” within their respective domains.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Benjamin J. Cohen writes: “In fact, authority may be manifested through any number of de facto channels of control. . . . By no means is it true, therefore, that we are left with a ‘yawning hole of non-authority’ just because power has shifted away from national governments.” “Governance,” in his view, “may not even call for the presence of explicit actors, whether state-sponsored or private, to take responsibility for rulemaking and enforcement.” “Market forces may be impersonal, but that does not make them any less capable of governance.”<sup>14</sup>

Barry Jones argues to the contrary that, even if recent developments have weakened the capacities of established governments, “private” agents of

governance will not prove capable of effective governance in many of the areas traditionally undertaken by states or statelike public authorities. A “democratic deficit” is only one of the palpable deficiencies of private authorities.<sup>15</sup> Still others might rejoinder, whether private authority is anywhere near an acceptable substitute, state control is weakening and we have to get used to thinking about global governance in additional nonstate terms. Others might stress that many states, as well, have had and continue to have a grave democratic deficit of their own.

As the foregoing suggests, the familiar distinction between “*public*” and “*private*” governance has begun to blur.<sup>16</sup> It has become, for some, less a firm dividing line than a vague and shifting political boundary between those who make the rules and effectively allocate goods in particular domains. Each attempts to justify their capacity to evoke compliance by reference to the collectivities that are putatively being served. State bureaucrats will claim to enhance “the public interest” when they are providing needed services and also when they are merely spending taxpayers’ money for hopelessly inefficient and self-serving programs that should have been terminated long ago. Likewise, Wall Street will sing the praises of the public good supposedly being served by “private” markets that profit numerous small investors, make the superrich even richer, and benefit the poorest of the poor hardly at all.

“*Global governance*” in this perspective becomes not so much a reference to the control exercised by effective authorities on a truly global scale, than a concept that invites investigators of political space in today’s world to map the patterns and consider the source(s) of whatever order and compliance they may observe.<sup>17</sup> Craig N. Murphy, for example, comments: “Certainly it matters that global norms have an impact on and help to construct national interests, just as it matters that some intergovernmental agencies and private institutions are increasingly powerful, but we are not going to be able to explain the nature of global governance without understanding the ways in which powerful states construct and pursue their grand strategies.” “[I]t is in the most powerful state agencies (the Treasuries) and the most powerful clubs of states (the WTO, IMF, and World Bank) that neoliberalism is triumphant.”<sup>18</sup> Of course, this perceptive statement nonetheless brings us back to questions like whether the state as an actor is really identical with one of its ministries, or whether “state” behavior is fundamentally altered by participation in “clubs” or international organizations, or whether both treasury ministries and “clubs” may simply be acting at the behest of private institutions who (rather than states) are the actual source of “neoliberalism.” In any event, it is possible that any search for a *dominant* actor or form of governance in the contemporary world—and perhaps often throughout all of political history,<sup>19</sup> including the Westphalian era<sup>20</sup>—will be nothing more than an exercise in frustration that obscures far more than it clarifies. In each and every period, and certainly the present one, governance has

proceeded not only at various levels of the global system—local, regional, national, and so on—but also as a consequence of ever-widening and complex networks of actors and interconnected systems.<sup>21</sup> As Martin Hewson observes, a “node-and-network space [among distinct yet interconnected power centers] . . . encompasses the world” today and, indeed, did much to displace localism and regionalism from the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries onward.<sup>22</sup> Christer Jönsson, Sven Tägil, and Gunnar Törnqvist similarly explain that a relationship between regions, networks, and cities has long been a feature of Europe and continues in the present-day European Union.<sup>23</sup>

There is increasing recognition in at least some social science literature that a global system of states is but one type of many important social systems, whose fluid nature and frequent linkages shape the political complexity we observe.<sup>24</sup> Governance emanates sometimes from discrete and identifiable actors, but as often than not, from their complicated relationships on various levels. Liora Salter, for example, describes the “standards regime” for communication and information technologies as “a hybrid regime”: “It is still very local or national, even while it is global in orientation. Even as it becomes more commonplace to speak of global developments, it is also easier to identify the national or local allegiances of those involved. Even though some national organizations have been eclipsed, others have been strengthened, and new ones have emerged that are demonstrably powerful within the standards regime. At any moment in time, and with respect to any particular decision about a standard, it is exceptionally difficult to locate the epicenter of action, the degree to which any standard is national, local, or global in origin.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus far we have been discussing what might be termed the “supply-side” of governance, that is, those existing patterns that we need to muster our analytical skills, information, and consensus-building in order to map. A more prescriptive, or “demand-side,” approach might attempt to highlight those needs and requirements that have yet to be met. What aspects of global politics evince inadequate patterns of governance, in either one of two possible senses: (1) there is as yet too little in the way of order and compliance, or (2) the order and compliance that currently prevails is in some respect or another manifestly unjust? The latter concern is central to what is sometimes referred to as the current “backlash” against globalization. Normative concerns of that sort are considered only in an oblique fashion in this volume, but they are plainly important for both the present and future. It is impossible to deny that our contemporary political space is becoming increasingly globalized (as well as localized) and complex, but who benefits and who does not benefit, in what respects, from prevailing trends, and how can more truly collective goods be provided to an ever-wider constituency?<sup>26</sup> These are fundamental demand-side questions, and addressing them will continue to provide a crucial challenge for analysts and policy makers in a variety of settings.

### Charting Political Space in this Volume

Most of the essays in this volume are substantially revised versions of papers that were first presented at the Third Pan-European International Relations Conference (of the Standing Group on International Relations, European Consortium of Political Research) that met jointly with the International Studies Association in Vienna, Austria, in mid-September 1998. Vienna provided an intriguing venue in terms of its own political space. Austria had been part of one of the world's most polyglot empires, suffered a brief civil war in 1934, was forcefully annexed by Hitler in his campaign for an expanded Third Reich, after World War II was divided into sectors administered by the victorious Allies, became a sovereign state again only in 1955, struggled to reconcile strong regional identities with an Austrian identity (separate as well from German), perceived its security to be threatened by the breakup of Yugoslavia and refugees from the resulting conflicts, joined the European Union after a long national debate, and recently found itself the object of considerable EU and world condemnation because of the rise of Haider's neofascist Freedom Party.

The panel series on "Political Space" at the Vienna meeting brought together an unusually distinguished and diverse group of theorists of global politics, political geography, and international political economy. Those of us who participated had a genuine sense of an "occasion" and even a milestone in the progress of social science theory. The nature of the "milestone" was *not* that anyone thought we were building or reconstructing some bold new paradigm or even theoretical approach on which we all could or *should* agree—quite the contrary! The reader who expects the essays that follow to sing from the same songbook in that sense will thus not only be disappointed but also will have sadly missed one the key points of the exercise. *What we conferees did all agree on was that "political space" is a worthy subject for investigation, that we need to move beyond the constraints of traditional IR theories in attempting to chart that space (or spaces), and that at this stage of new departures a diversity of approaches is to be both expected and encouraged.*

Conversations on the panels over several days were substantive, spirited, and almost always constructive in tone. Everyone made a sincere effort to communicate across disciplines and different theoretical positions. Although the participants might be loosely classified as realists, neorealists, constructivists, and postinternationalists,<sup>27</sup> in fact it is evident that such established theoretical "schools" are themselves rapidly evolving and, happily, few of the essays produced fit neatly into the usual pigeonholes. These essays, we believe, literally do explore the frontier of the field of global politics and all of them deal imaginatively with some aspect of political space. The only other common denominators are an implied continued faith in empirical research and a shared sense of excitement in pioneering and discovery.

The four essays in Part I of this collection offer us historical perspectives on political space and invite us to weigh carefully claims of the uniqueness, fundamental nature, and rapidity of change in contemporary global politics. Kal Holsti quips that change, “like beauty and good skiing condition, is in the eye of the beholder.” Microlevel change is, by definition, not macrochange, but it is often the accumulation of change by such microincrements that make for important major shifts over what Fernand Braudel termed the *longue durée*. Particularly under the confusing conditions of the present, Holsti suggests, we have an urgent need for markers of change, but there is a lack of consensus as to what those markers should be. We may search for certain trends, yet the scales we use to measure those trends are both “quantitatively arbitrary” and “qualitatively constructed.” Similarly, we may highlight certain “great events,” “great achievements,” and “significant social/technical innovations,” without being able to agree whether or not they have inaugurated truly “new eras or epochs.” In Holsti’s view, at the very least, we need to be clear when we refer to change, whether we are asserting that there has been “replacement,” “addition,” “dialectical change,” or a full-fledged “transformation.”

According to Richard Little, the best approach in assessing the degree to which political space today is “undergoing fundamental change” is to develop much greater historical perspective, in his words, for IR theory “to develop closer links with the evolving study of world history.”<sup>28</sup> He insists that two of the leading schools of theory, neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism, have suffered because “they have adopted an ahistorical approach to the conceptualization of political space.” Little considers several other theorists who, by contrast, have made extensive use of world history, and he explains and critiques their findings. Ferguson and Mansbach’s “polities” model he regards as a bit too drastic in treating political space as “seamless web.” He prefers to retain a “dichotomized” distinction between hierarchical and anarchical structures in the global system, but to generate “more empirical detail” by establishing “deeper and more elaborate theoretical foundations.” The work that he and Barry Buzan have now completed<sup>29</sup> proceeds from a neorealist foundation, yet acknowledges the existence of a variety of actors (including “acephalous units”) and relationships throughout history. Little also admires the contribution that constructivists have made that stresses “the importance of ideas in structuring political space.” For example, the anarchical political space of the Greek city-states and that of modern states are profoundly different, not least because the former was conditioned by a Greek normative cultural context.

Ken Dark’s essay similarly maintains that it is important to view patterns of global political and geopolitical change both over the longest possible time span and with sensitivity to the unique characteristics of each era. He makes the case for greater attention to insights and data from such disciplines as archaeology and anthropology as well as world history, noting that contemporary IR

theorists focus almost exclusively on the post-Westphalian era of the sovereign-state system and ignore the fact that most of the 6,000-year geopolitical record is one of nonstate polities. Different types of polities and relationships among them have prevailed in different periods. Dark's principal explanation for these shifts over time, from his perspective of "macrodynamic theory"—an interdisciplinary "synthesis" from the social, biological, and physical sciences—is the effect of changes in communication and information-processing. He writes that "changes in the mode of information-processing and communication [have] not merely enabled . . . polities to operate efficiently, but actually permitted the existence of particular sorts of political form." The current "revolution" in information and communication raises the question of whether we may be witnessing the birth of yet another era in global politics. As he sees it, the modern state is less likely to become "redundant" than to have to "co-exist" with "new political forms." However, "the 'death of distance' inherent in transformed time [means that] geographies of the global system well may constitute a 'death of warning' also." If transnational governance mechanisms do not keep up with the accelerating pace of change, global collapse could become a real possibility.

Yale Ferguson and Richard Mansbach suggest in the last essay of Part I that "remapping political space" in an adequate fashion should be seen as a two-step process. First, they argue for abandoning most of the current "great debates" in IR theory, nearly all of which they regard as fundamentally misguided, irrelevant, inconsequential, or ready for closure. Those controversies targeted for abandonment include empiricism versus relativism, agent-structure, objective versus constructed worlds, democracy and peace, the novelty and existence of a globalized world, the autonomy of international regimes from their state members, and the demise versus continued viability of the state. The second step advocated by Ferguson/Mansbach is for theorists to focus on the three matters that they define as "the real issues" in the study of global politics. One such issue is the assessment of change in the contemporary world, seen (in Holsti's terms) as an interrelated process of both "addition" and "transformation." In every instance, they insist, it is crucial to specify exactly how the present is "both similar to the past and also different." Another key issue is governance. Ferguson/Mansbach propose that analysts of global politics admit as actors a wide range of "polities" or "authorities" and ask two central questions: "What polities control or significantly influence what issues in the world arena—and why?" The final "real issue" is identities and loyalties. What Strange called "the retreat of the state"<sup>30</sup> is bound to have a powerful long-range influence on identities and loyalties, as she herself recognized. Ferguson/Mansbach remark: "Our conceptions of ourselves and others will be continually changing, or sometimes will be ages old, and the task for us political scientists is to explain what the limited range of choices are, which are likely to prevail—and, again as always, why?"

The three essays in Part II, although otherwise quite different in focus, all strongly emphasize the contingent, ever-fluid nature and significance of political space. Political geographer John Agnew disputes the common notion that “power . . . is fixed in given territorial units.” Rather, he argues that power “changes both its character and spatial significance as different geographical scales (local, regional, national-state, world-regional, international and global) change their relationships to one another as the political practices of the global geopolitical order change.” He describes four different models of “the spatiality of power . . . each of which has dominated in different epochs of geopolitical order.” As he puts it, power thus “has a history” that “can *only* be understood through its changing geography.” Agnew closes by pointing up the normative implications of such an understanding, the historical contingency of the “moral geography of state-based political power.” In other epochs, he observes, “there was widespread acceptance of the idea of a hierarchy of communities with specified purposes and overlapping spatial jurisdictions.” Is the present just such an epoch?

Robert Latham begins his essay with a simple yet important observation that most thought about political life has focused on the state. We therefore tend to “end up with a global realm that is thin, fluid, and lacking an accountable center, and yet in its diffusion is rich with varied forms, political projects, and discourses.” He shares the view of some theorists that it is possible to discern various structures at the global level, but he regards his own work as a somewhat less “top down” and different approach to that task. He identifies three “basic dimensions within which interactions occur across human spaces: namely, international arenas, translocal networks, and transterritorial deployments.” The first is the familiar locus where “states meet to hammer out treaties, conventions, war settlements, alliances, regimes, and where NGOs attempt to influence those activities and define new ones.” Translocal networks involve “the transmission of one form of capital or another (political, symbolic, informational, financial, etc.)” from one local node and place to another. Such networks thus are “specialized pathways of flows of messages, knowledge, and goods . . . along a trajectory that is not open to the view of a public.” Transterritorial deployments (TDs), by contrast, are the actual embedding or “installation in a local context of agents from outside that context,” for example, the headquarters of a UN agency or an office or production facilities of a transnational corporation. Latham devotes the balance of his essay to TDs, especially their “interface with the local,” including translocal networks, and consequent impact on local order, political centers, and the state.

At first glance, Stuart Corbridge’s essay on Hindu nationalism in India might appear to be a rather traditional look at a leading country in the developing world and its great-power aspirations; however, in actuality, his analysis is an extremely radical departure from traditional theory. Here we have the same

territorial space, India, utterly transformed by ideology—what we have termed shifts in the subjective dimension of political space—which, in turn, has broad implications for much of the Southeast Asian region. The BJP Party has “imagined India anew,” reinventing it as Hindustan, “an ancient country whose boundaries are set by fixed geographical features and whose rivers and landscapes are indicative of the mythological unity of India.” Part of the ideological shift involves “gendered rituals of pilgrimage and spatial representation” that “position Mother India (Bharat Mata) as a geographical entity under threat from Islam” and in need of protection by the military might of Lord Rama, “the [now] very masculine incarnation of Vishnu.” The BJP also manipulates “representations of India’s domestic spaces . . . to fashion a new conception of India as a Great Power.” Yet that selfsame Hindu India faces serious challenges from within, from “an ideology of secularism” as well as “a rainbow coalition of popular movements which disavow the dirigiste projects of Nehruvian modernity and militant Hinduism.” The reader cannot help but come away from Corbridge’s provocative treatment with a very fluid view of “India” as a modern “state” or perhaps as a complex polity that almost defies classification.

Three essays in Part III each offer their own assessments of the effects of recent globalizing trends in the world economy on the relative significance of the state and a variety of other actors. Saskia Sassen identifies what she variously describes as “a new cross-border field for public and private actors,” “a new geography of power,” or a “new institutional spatio-temporal order.” States are not so much phasing out as being transformed and repositioned with reconfigured tasks “in a broader field of power.” She sees “the emergence of a mostly, but not exclusively private institutional order whose strategic agents are not the national governments of leading countries but a variety of non-state actors.” Former state capacities and policy agendas are being substantially “denationalized,” and a “new normativity” of free markets has eroded the old Keynesian rules of the game. Not only is economic globalization relocating national public governance functions to transnational private arenas, but also there are profound developments “inside national states—through legislative acts, court rulings, executive orders—of the mechanisms necessary to accommodate the rights of global capital.” Sassen rightly cautions that “moving from territorial organizations such as the modern state to spatial orders is no easy analytic task.” The main reason, as she points out, is that space “is not a mere container or tabula rasa” but “is itself productive of the new dynamics of power and control as well as produced by these.”

In what was, sadly, to be Susan Strange’s last essay, she reflects on the status of the field of international political economy that she helped to found and also draws some additional theoretical conclusions from her famous book on *Casino Capitalism* as well as her final volume on *Mad Money*. In characteristically caustic style, she decries the “myopia” of international relations theorists

preoccupied with issues of military security and the “equal myopia” of Western political theorists concerned only with values of political liberalism. What they are missing, “astonishingly,” is “the role of finance, and financial policy, in deciding the ‘who benefits?’ question at the heart of international political economy.” The primary changes in the modern era, she maintains, are two, the role of technology in “shifting power over trade and production from governments to firms” and “the involvement of organized crime in the international financial system.” One result is that the traditional specific goals of regulation have blurred to such an extent that the supposedly regulated are essentially writing their own rules. Strange repeats her long-held view that states themselves are largely to blame for their own decline, in that their decision and nondecisions have led to the contemporary ascent of private power. “Bad theories” of declining U.S. hegemony and the benefits of capital mobility—against which she believes students must be warned!—have also mislead policy makers. Her essay (and career) closed with a clarion call to economists and other social scientists to exercise their “social responsibility” in setting the record straight, building better theory, and both fashioning and advocating more effective policies.

Ronen Palan also highlights the degree to which states have themselves been responsible for creating the legal space—in his example, the concept of “offshore”—for globalization to blossom and expand. Although he acknowledges that cyberspace linkages have been a prominent feature of globalization, he takes strong issue with any notion that global finance, for instance, has been a “space-less” phenomenon. Indeed, he points to Sassen’s work on global cities<sup>31</sup> as illustrating the territorial embeddedness of the global financial system. Asserting that “space is not simply there” but is “in fact a social construction,” Palan urges us to think about the “proper spaces of globalization” and how they came about. In his view, “the growing integration of the market within the context of a state system . . . created a series of problems [and] attempted solutions.” States came up with legal constructs like tax havens and “offshore” as a means of withholding some or all of their regulations in certain enclaves while preserving the general principle of state sovereignty. Much of global economic activity now takes place (literally) in or through such enclaves. “Offshore is the quintessential global market,” writes Palan, “and yet contrary to globalists, it is a juridical space that operates within the context of a particularistic political system.”

The primary concern of the final four essays that constitute Part IV are shifting patterns of governance. R. J. Barry Jones’s lead essay offers an important caution that we need “a disciplined approach to the notion of political space” as well as to whatever changes in such space and difficulties we might foresee as a consequence. “Governance,” he stresses, is *the* issue,” and we must be careful not to confuse the “supply side” thereof with the “demand side.” As he expresses it, “ubiquitous information technologies or mass long-distance

transportation do not necessarily lead to the emergence of new patterns of political association or public governance," nor "does the emergence of new needs and problems within the human condition guarantee the emergence of appropriate structures of public governance." He "highlights the importance of the distinction between public governance and private governance and, in consequence, between formal and informal governance." To be sure, "history reveals a complex and changeable pattern of political structures" and contemporary states are a highly varied lot, but, when all is said and done, the state remains "one of the most potent forces, for good and ill, within the modern world system." Yet today's states face formidable challenges from forces of internationalization and globalization, nested polities, and private governance. Under such circumstances, how will the various collective goods and minority needs states have traditionally supplied and met continue to be served? "Global governance," as Jones sees it, is not an effective substitute; rather, it is "poised delicately between a potentially expanding realm of private governance and a dense, but often fragile, structure of inter-governmental public governance." "Popular democratic representation is largely (possibly necessarily) absent from the former; tenuous, and rarely more than indirect, in the case of the latter." In sum, complexity itself is less to be feared than the prospect that "states will further weaken, or even dissolve as effective central agencies, without the prior, or simultaneous, emergence of alternative agencies of public governance to deal with a wide range of human requirements, at societal as well as global levels."

Mark Boyer's essay considers together the separate notions of clubs, socially constructed identities, and international institutions, with the goal of establishing "how the divergent theoretical approaches complement one another in their challenges to realist approaches to understanding the prospects for international cooperation." He observes that "the greater the overlap among the clubs in the policy space, the greater the likelihood that there will be cooperation among the clubs in search of common goals and policy outcomes"; and, by extension, "for issues that lie outside the shaded overlapping policy space, it is likely that as cooperation emerges on issues within the area of overlap, club members will tend to make decisions on other policy issues that are also in concert with overlap issues." A variety of factors could intervene to make the relationship between overlapping clubs and cooperation somewhat more tenuous, but the connection is still likely to remain significant. In the contemporary system, Boyer identifies a core set of perceived interests among various clubs in military stability, liberal trading policies, and international financial stability. Whether that degree of consensus will persist long into the twenty-first century is, of course, uncertain.

James Rosenau in his essay probes the role of transnational nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in "the emergent global system," which subject he regards as "both central and controversial," as a bridge to wider issues of understanding "the underlying nature of world affairs." He begins, in fact, by

reflecting on the meaning and significance of key concepts, including one that we met earlier in Holsti's essay, "change"—the others are "complexity," "structural erosion," "state capabilities," and the "NGO" concept itself. Rosenau sees the world as "a globalized space—a space that is not disaggregated in terms of specific geographic territories so much as it consists of a wide range of fast-moving, boundary-spanning actors whose activities cascade erratically across amorphous ethnoscaples, mediascaples, ideoscaples, technoscaples, and finanscaples." The second half of the essays addresses the nature of "authority" in such a world. For Rosenau, the essence of authority is its capacity to elicit "varying kinds and degrees of compliance." That formulation accommodates both states and many other authority structures, and it allows for "change in response to the feedback loops and complex adaptation of collectivities in diverse situations." The essay closes with an examination of five types or sources of authority on which NGOs can draw to gain compliance and thereby enhance their role in global politics.

In the last essay of the volume, Rey Koslowski and Antje Wiener observe that the "modern democratic context" has changed dramatically in the second half of the twentieth century, owing to "border crossing by a variety of non-state actors" and "international interdependence expressed by institutional arrangements." The "democratic deficit" potentially inherent in a world in which states are less predominant has, of course, been the subject of considerable discussion in IR literature. Koslowski and Weiner explore some of the conditions traditionally presumed to be associated with democratic practices and suggest, optimistically, that there may at least be hope for a substantial measure of democracy to evolve beyond the state or transnationally. The second section of their essay traces the way the European Union has tried to deal with the issue of democracy as part of its decades-old process of integration. Subsequent sections examine "new forms of democratic practices" in several additional important "sites" in global politics, including international nongovernmental organizations, trans-governmental relations between regions and localities within two or more states, and transnational corporations. Our volume thus closes with a glimpse of the possibility that at least some future nonstate patterns of governance within global political space may become participatory, regularized, and even routinized. With all of the uncertainty, turbulence, and complexity of the contemporary world, that comes as a rather comforting thought.

## Notes

1. See, for example, Christer Jönsson, Sven Tägil, and Gunnar Törnqvist, *Organizing European Space* (London: Sage, 2000); and Stephen Rosow, et al., eds., *The Global Economy as Political Space* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994).

2. On recent trends, see especially: Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, "Global Politics at the Turn of the Millennium: Changing Bases of 'Us' and 'Them,'" *International Studies Review*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Summer 1999), 76–107; Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, "History's Revenge and Future Shock: The Remapping of Global Politics," in Martin Hewson and Timothy J. Sinclair, eds., *Approaches to Global Governance Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 197–238; Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, rev. ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 2000); Robert Gilpin, *The Challenge of Global Capitalism: The World Economy in the Twenty-first Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Oxford: Polity, 2000); R. J. Barry Jones, *The World Turned Upside Down? Globalization and the Future of the State* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000); Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 2001); Richard Langhorne, *The Coming of Globalization: Its Evolution and Contemporary Consequences* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Virtual State: Wealth and Power in the Coming Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Jan Aarte Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Palgrave, 2000); and Herman M. Schwartz, *States Versus Markets: The Emergence of a Global Economy*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

3. John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge, *Mastering Space: Hegemony, Territory and International Political Economy* (New York: Routledge, 1995), chap. 4.

4. Harold and Margaret Sprout, *The Ecological Perspective on Human Affairs with Special Reference to International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

5. See, for example, Friedrich V. Kratochwil, *Norms and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Vendulka Kubáľková, Nicholas Onuf, and Paul Kowert, eds., *International Relations in a Constructed World* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998); and Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

6. Extreme relativist among postmodernists would insist that the "real world" is entirely an illusion, precisely because it can never be truly known, but we part company with them on that score and side with the constructivists.

7. See, for example, John A. Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

8. Compare, for example, the famous liberal institutionalist manifesto of Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) with the constructivists cited in footnote #3. See also constructivists John Gerard Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity: Essays on International Institutionalism* (London: Routledge, 1998); and Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). Wendt's state-centric position is closer to Keohane's than the other constructivists, although Finnemore and Ruggie also stress the role of powerful states in shaping norms and institutions to their lik-

ing. An earlier influence on all who write about these subjects was Hedley Bull's *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). Nevertheless, Bull was somewhat more venturesome in speculating about the possible emergence of a "new medievalism."

9. Susan Strange, *States and Markets* (London: Pinter, 1988).

10. On this subject see Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, *Politics: Identities, Loyalty, and Change* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996).

11. Saskia Sassen, "Embedding the Global in the National: Implications for the Role of the State," in David A. Smith, et al., eds., *States and Sovereignty in the Global Economy* (London: Routledge, 1999), 158–171.

12. Ferguson and Mansbach, *Politics*, 35.

13. James N. Rosenau, *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Exploring Governance in a Turbulent World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39, 147.

14. Benjamin J. Cohen, *The Geography of Money* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 145.

15. See R. J. Barry Jones, *The World Turned Upside Down: Globalization and the Future of the State* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000), especially chaps. 8, 9, and 11.

16. See especially A. Claire Cutler, Virginia Haufler, and Tony Porter, eds., *Private Authority and International Affairs* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

17. See, for example: Hewson and Sinclair, *Approaches to Global Governance Theory*; Robert W. Cox and Timothy J. Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Joseph S. Nye and John D. Donahue, eds., *Governance in a Globalizing World* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000); and Oran F. Young, *Governance in World Affairs* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

18. Craig N. Murphy, "Global Governance: Poorly Done and Poorly Understood," *International Affairs*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (October 2000), 797.

19. See Ferguson and Mansbach, *Politics*.

20. See Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

21. On the more recent era, see, for example, Mark W. Zacher and Brent A. Sutton, *Governing Global Networks: International Regimes for Transportation and Communications* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Mark W. Zacher, *The United Nations and Global Governance* (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1999).

22. Martin Hewson, "Did Global Governance Create Informational Globalism?" in Hewson and Sinclair, *Approaches to Global Governance Theory*, 109.

23. Jönsson, et al., Organizing European Space.
24. cf. Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, trans. by John Bednarz, Jr. with Dirk Baecker (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995); and Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).
25. Liora Salter, "The Standards Regime for Communication and Information technologies," in Cutler, Haufler, Porter, eds. *Private Authority and International Affairs*, 117.
26. See, for example, Murphy, "Global Governance," Robert O'Brien, et al, *Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Margaret E. Kock and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Jackie Smith, et al., eds. *Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics: Solidarity Beyond the State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); James H. Mittelman, *The Globalization Syndrome; Transformation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and Andrew Heron, et al., eds., *An Unruly World?: Globalization, Governance, and Geography* (London: Routledge, 1998).
27. We lacked liberal institutionalists and "critical" theorists, and there was only one postmodernist (Cynthia Weber), whose paper, unfortunately, was unavailable for this volume.
28. On the need to study history to understand change, see also especially Robert A. Denemark et al., *World System History: The Social Science of Long-Term Change* (London: Routledge, 2000).
29. Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000).
30. Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
31. Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

PART I

The Problem of Change  
in Historical Perspective

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## The Problem of Change in International Relations Theory

K. J. Holsti

Because we have an inadequate basis for comparison, we are tempted to exaggerate either continuity with the past that we know badly, or the radical originality of the present, depending on whether we are more struck by the features we deem permanent, or with those we do not believe existed before. And yet a more rigorous examination of the past might reveal that what we sense as new really is not, and that some of the “traditional” features are far more complex than we think.<sup>1</sup> (Since) no shared vocabulary exists in the literature to depict change and continuity, . . . we are not very good as a discipline at studying the possibility of fundamental discontinuity in the international system.<sup>2</sup>

These observations about the nature of inquiry in international relations point directly to a fundamental, if often hidden, dimension of all international theory. It is the problem of change. Ruggie is right: we do not have even the beginning of a consensus on what constitutes change or transformation in international relations.

The great debates among theorists of international relations have been implicit arguments about the nature of change, its possibilities, and its consequences.<sup>3</sup> Along with other dimensions that distinguish the various schools and strains of international theory, mutability has been a major area of disagreement.<sup>4</sup> Realists commonly believe that anarchy creates a realm that predisposes states to behave in certain ways irrespective of national attributes and policymakers’ wishes. Thucydides, Meinecke, von Gentz, Gilpin, and Waltz share a view of recurrence in international politics, and are skeptical about the possibilities of transcending the consequences of anarchy through international institutions, learning, or sociological and technological changes at the unit or transnational levels. Whatever their differences, change in international relations is limited to narrow parameters such as alterations in the balance of power, the poles of power, or the cast of great power characters.

Many castigate Realists for not acknowledging that some things in international life have fundamentally changed and that, therefore, the conceptual apparatus that may have been useful for understanding and even explaining diplomatic/military life in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe will not help us a great deal today.<sup>5</sup> Proponents of the view that the quality of international life today is fundamentally different are equally criticized for failing to acknowledge continuities.<sup>6</sup> Absent some agreement on what we mean by change, how we identify it, and for what purposes, these debates are likely to continue and to come to no resolution.

Liberals and constructivists emphasize the variability of state interests, the capacity of policy makers to learn, and the prospects for progress away from standard scenarios of realists such as security dilemmas and stag hunts.<sup>7</sup> Even some postmodernists join a variety of positivist-oriented critics in claiming that the main conceptual categories of the realist tradition—for example sovereignty and anarchy—are no longer consistent with the observed facts of international life. R. B. J. Walker, for example, charges that mainstream versions of IR theory “remain caught within the discursive horizons that express spatiotemporal configurations of another era.”<sup>8</sup> Susan Strange argues that “social scientists, in politics and economics especially, cling to obsolete concepts and inappropriate theories. These theories belong to a more stable and orderly world than the one we live in.”<sup>9</sup> The result is “one-eyed social science.”<sup>10</sup> It is thus incumbent on us to accomplish an intellectual “jailbreak,”<sup>11</sup> to move beyond ritual invocations of concepts that once had theoretical and descriptive uses, but that are no longer able to capture those things that are truly new and novel in the world.

But there is more than just change in the theoretical air. Increasingly, scholars of International Relations are claiming fundamental *transformations*. We live in an era not of marginal alterations and adaptations, of growth and decline, but in an era of discontinuity with the past. Rosenau speaks of post-international politics<sup>12</sup> and of a contemporary “epochal transformation.”<sup>13</sup> Yoshikazu Sakamoto characterizes the contemporary scene as a *new era* involving fundamental transformations.<sup>14</sup> Rey Koslowski and Friederich Kratochwil suggest that the end of the Cold War constituted a “transformation” of the international system—not a change within the system but a change *of* system.<sup>15</sup>

Postmodernists and many critical theorists read our intellectual predicament somewhat differently. Rosenau and Strange, they might suggest, do not go far enough because they remain wedded to positivism and to the idea that the trained observer can through a variety of rigorous procedures encapsulate the amazing complexity of the world into totalizing theoretical projects such as Rosenau’s “two worlds of world politics.”<sup>16</sup> The world, they claim, cannot be rendered intelligible through “grand” theoretical projects that attempt to distill complexity, paradox, and change into neat theoretical packages and categories.

Rather, we now have to acknowledge that everything is in flux, paradox prevails, and we can only know what we ourselves experience.<sup>17</sup> Generalization is a Western logocentric practice that invariably contains a political program. To know, literally, is to act, and since the record of action on the diplomatic front in the twentieth century is not one to be proud of, it is probably better not to know in the sense of generalization. Postmodernists basically claim that change has rendered the pursuit of knowledge as we have known it since Aristotelian times not only a fool's game, but also ethically dangerous. The human mind is incapable of understanding the complexity of the world, and since change is ubiquitous, any attempt to characterize it in general terms is bound to fail.

Analysis of change, then, has become almost a constant in the academic field of international theory. A whole new vocabulary of clichés or analogies has invaded debate. “Globalization,” the “global village,” “new mediaevalism,” “post-Westphalia,” “the borderless world,” and the like, suggest that we have entered, or are entering, a new era or epoch in which contemporary ideas, practices, institutions, and problems of international politics are fundamentally different from their predecessors. But popular monikers, while evocative of things that are different, do not substitute for rigorous analysis. Lacking in all of this claim of novelty is a consensus not only on *what* has changed but also on *how we can distinguish* minor change from fundamental change, trends from transformations, and growth or decline from new forms. The intellectual problems are both conceptual and empirical. This essay addresses two questions: (1) What do we mean by change? and (2) What, exactly, has changed in the fundamental institutions of international politics? This implies a subquestion, namely, what has *not* fundamentally changed?

### Markers of Change

Change, like beauty and good skiing conditions, is in the eye of the beholder. From a microperspective, the international events recorded in today's headlines constitute change because they are not identical to yesterday's news. The media, to perhaps a greater extent than ever before, run on a twenty-four-hour cycle that militates against notions of continuity, that emphasizes novelty, and that encourages pessimistic framing of issues for analysis.<sup>18</sup> To a historian of civilizations, on the other hand, today's events do not even appear on the intellectual radar screen. Nothing in daily events suggests any sort of fundamental alteration of the persisting dynamics and patterns of power, achievement, authority, status, and the nature of social institutions. Somewhere between these micro- (media) and macro- (philosophical) extremes, observers may note certain types of markers where, typically, things appear to be done differently than they were previously.

### *Trends*

Trends record one kind of change. Population grows, the membership in the United Nations increases, communications networks and the messages they carry proliferate and speed up (space and time are compressed), the volume of international trade grows at a much faster rate than total economic production, and the numbers of people traveling abroad increases annually. Moving in the other direction, the incidence of terrorist acts and airline hijacking declined before September 11, 2001, as continue to do the number of nuclear warheads and the incidence of interstate wars. What are we to make of such trends? That they are noticeable or that they occur over a relatively short period of time does not necessarily make them theoretically significant. Change must have significant consequences. Otherwise the claim of change is no more than one observer's arbitrary judgment that things in a quantitative sense are not the same as they used to be. We have many notable trends over the past half-century, but their implications are by no means obvious. Population, international trade, number of sovereign states, number of intergovernmental organizations (IGOS) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOS), investment flows, citizen competence, and the like may increase. But individually or collectively, what is their import? This is the Hegelian and Marxist problem: At what point does quantitative change lead to qualitative consequences?<sup>19</sup>

Traditional markers are also subjective and selective. How do we interpret the dramatic growth of World Wide Web use against the less well-known fact that one-half of the world's three billion souls have never made a telephone call? If you choose the first trend you will infer very different characteristics of the world than if you choose the second. Thus, inferring systemwide transformations from increases or decreases of selective quantitative trends is a tricky business indeed. Few of the advocates of the "new" international politics (or new paradigm, or whatever) have made a convincing case that all the quantitative changes since 1945 or 1989—to pick arbitrary dates—somehow constitute a revolution, a new era, or a transformation in the world.

### *Great Events*

Others favor "great events" as the main markers of change. Change is not an accumulation of many little acts, seen as trends. What matters are not quantities of standard practices, but great variations from the typical. Significant change, many argue, tends to be dramatic and compressed. The practices, ideas, and institutions of international politics assume reasonably fixed patterns over the long haul, until a major historical event—usually cataclysmic—changes them. Lord Bolinbroke defined epochs in terms of chains of events (indicating regular patterns) being so broken "as to have little or no real or visible con-