

Reviews

World enough?

David Chandler, *Hollow Hegemony: Rethinking Global Politics, Power and Resistance*, Pluto Press, London, 2009. 272 pp., £60.00 hb., £17.99 pb., 978 0 74532 921 5 hb., 978 0 74532 920 8 pb.

Stuart Elden, *Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2009. 304 pp., £46.50 hb., £15.50 pb., 978 0 81665 483 3 hb., 978 0 81665 484 0 pb.

R.B.J. Walker, *After the Globe, Before the World*, Routledge, London and New York, 2009. 368 pp., £75.00 hb., £22.99 pb., 978 0 41577 902 9 hb., 978 0 41577 903 6 pb.

The field of global politics is much contested, in part because the forces of globalization have thrown open a conceptual disarray about the meaning of 'world' in philosophy, politics and economics. If a system of states often still appears rooted to the founding apparatuses of the Peace of Westphalia, the current complex of state relations, overdetermined to a great extent by transnational capital, seems wildly inconstant and sovereignty hovers more like a ghost in contemporary formulations. Each of the three books under discussion here offers explication of the ambiguities of contemporary global polity while also revealing, symptomatically, conceptual ambivalences in the structure of their own disciplines: political science, international relations and geography respectively. It is understandable that knowledge systems born of nation-state polity might now chase the conceptual horizon of a properly globalized world; what is more interesting, however, is the extent to which reading the world distills a new creative grammar of the globe, at once responsive to the lacuna of conventional disciplines while articulating the shape of new formulations of knowledge production.

For his part, Walker is the most sensitive to the trials of philosophical oscillation in the current conjuncture and the book offers many provocative insights into the logic of inclusion/exclusion that structures the current world system. Walker maintains a notable incredulity about the move from international to world politics, not because the force of the latter is not evident, but because its constitutive principles appear unable, in his account, to understand fully how 'boundaries, borders and limits of a politics' are negotiated between international and world. At first glance, this move is laudable because too many 'global' critiques skip over how the world maintains borders and obfuscate its adherence to older, sedimented genealogies of inside/ outside. Basically, Walker's argument is a warning about brave new 'world' philosophies that eschew the pivot of border rationality, especially when it comes to the thorny issue of sovereignty. This means recourse to tracking the traditions of modern thought on subjectivity, rationality and sovereignty with Hobbes and Kant to the fore, juxtaposed with elements

of Walker's alternative genealogy in Cassirer, Bachelard, Foucault, Deleuze and the history of science. Increasingly, however, the methodology comes down to the original warning so that the perspicuous deconstruction of inclusion/exclusion circles around the repetition of the political as possibility and impossibility. This pattern is set by the 'prelude', which is then seen writ large in the rest of the book. My point is not that an introduction should not lay out the foundations of the project, but that in resisting scaling up from international to global Walker's argument also resists building on its initial distinctions, except to 'run in many different directions' as itself a form of resistance.

For instance, in the space of a few pages the 'prelude' offers the following chorus on possibility/ impossibility: 'this book is constructed ... to frame claims about political possibilities and impossibilities'; the argument 'simultaneously imagines the possibility and impossibility of a move across the borders, boundaries and limits distinguishing itself from some world beyond'; 'we have been encouraged to think about boundaries, borders and limits as if they were indeed just simple lines distinguishing here from there, now from then, normal from exceptional, possible from impossible'; 'They [clichés] speak to the way we have come to imagine the possibilities and impossibilities of liberty and inequality within and under necessity'; 'Whatever else may be said about the possibilities of other ways of thinking about future political possibilities, there can be no other such possibilities without attending to the multiple ways in which the drawing of lines as boundaries, borders and limits has been a more complicated and contested affair'; 'the possibilities and impossibilities of a modern system of sovereign states'; and, finally, 'While I am aware that such claims may seem abstract and remote, I am persuaded that they speak to the principles of authorization and authorization of principles that must be engaged in one way or another by any attempt to reimagine our political possibilities and impossibilities, or to reimagine who we are as political actors able to reimagine our possibilities and impossibilities as political actors.' It often seems in Walker's argument that the hesitation between international and world comes down to an assessment of the border as itself the ground of all things possible, and impossible. It is never clear, however, why the mantra of possibility/impossibility could not apply to 'world' as concept, rather than by dancing on the line that apparently resists its effulgence. Indeed, it has to be said that one can quite easily use the possibility/impossibility gambit to describe absolutely any concept of political theory in its practice. As a more or less constant rhetorical trope in the 'prelude' this is a demonstrable non-starter.

This is not just a stylistic quibble (although I think if you removed all instances of circling repetition the book would be half its current length) but a comment about the tizzy 'world' has produced under actually existing globalization. Obviously, there are few clear breaks in modern political theory, just as, in economics, capitalism does not submerge feudalism overnight. The serious question Walker's book poses, consciously or not, is whether this kind of hedging is itself a heuristic, a teachable moment about the kinds of change that produce a disciplinary crisis in knowledge (one can discern

similar discomfort, for instance, in Comparative Literature's hand-wringing over the 'world' in world literature which has mutated considerably from Goethe's initial formulations). As Walker puts it, 'We are, moreover, supposed to know more or less what we are talking about when we deploy such terms' ('international relations' and 'world politics'), but doubt pervades every instance of possibility and impossibility, including the imagination of a world outside international relations, so we are left only with a kind of circling song as a philosophical guide.

The second chapter begins more promisingly with a call to reimagine politics (although not outside inter-national politics), but quickly the polemic lines up obvious empty signifiers for political theory – 'talk shows, the best seller lists, the quick sound-bites, and the executive summaries' – and their associated clichés. Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze have been turned into 'sites of interrogation' and this 'keeps theorists amused and off the streets'. I am not sure of the audience for such statements but in general this section offers a useful discursive sense of modern politics, particularly international politics, which is never 'co-extensive with the world'. Circling hesitancy returns in the third chapter ('possible ways of ... political possibilities', etc.) and resistance is posed as the attempt to move 'in two directions at once'. The 'we' of this chapter is particularly grating – 'We are all modern people' – as if the world cannot bear a little uneven development. This chapter offers a thesis for the book: 'I do not think anyone is able to offer more than very tentative and humble responses to the kinds of questions about political possibilities that might emerge out of various scepticisms about the claims of the modern sovereign state and states system.' In this reviewer's humble opinion, the book is utterly disabled by this tack, and the articulate discussions of Hobbes and Kant in relation to sovereignty are rendered as 'preludes' to yet more hand-wringing. Even when Walker describes a dozen key lines of inquiry into the assumptions that gird the sovereign nation-state to political life the argument is freighted by the subjunctive, weighed down by a polemic 'in two directions at once' that leaves 'the globe before the world' in suspended animation. A blurb calls this 'a profound meditation'; the reader should decide which side of possibility/impossibility such judgment resides.

David Chandler's *Hollow Hegemony* takes up an incredulity towards the global similar to that gestured towards by Walker, but is an altogether different book in terms of both audience and argumentative edge. Rather than hedging, Chandler reads the problem of scaling up from the international to the global as a form of negative capability; that is, the globalization of politics is produced by a 'political disconnection between state elites and societies, and a popular disengagement from mass politics'. Globalism, as such, 'is a lack rather than a presence. It is the lack of clear sites and articulations of power, the lack of clear security threats, the lack of strategic instrumental policy-making and the lack of clear political programs or movements of resistance which drives the conceptualization of international relations in global terms.' To some extent, globalism is an effect of the very polemic Walker's book performs, even if he would agree that globalism is a 'hollow hegemony' in terms of explanatory power.

The problem for Chandler is not that globalism fails to attract but that, in its negativity, it attracts too well (although Lacan does not feature in the critique, globalism bears something of the relationship of lack to desire). Its ideology attempts to disable counter-hegemony through abstraction; indeed, political acts as abstraction. In contrast to Hardt and Negri's emphasis on the flight from sovereignty as a creative if paradoxically positive subtraction, Chandler's intervention is to draw attention to a global politics that substitutes abstraction for action and semiosis for social grounds. This is not to say Hardt and Negri represent the consensus on globalism, but for Chandler there are alternative strategies available among those who take globalism on board. As with Walker, globalism signifies a general crisis in political subjectivity but one where its avatars see the nation-state as *the* problem rather than the contributions made by the reification and mystification of the global itself. The latter includes the supposition that territory no longer matters as much since a great deal of human interaction, economically and communicatively, occurs through scales of time/space that defy a territorial ground (this will be important for Elden's book also). On the one hand, we have proponents of globalism who extol the virtues of globalization as a kind of integrative efficiency (this would include global civil society theorists); on the other hand, we have globalists like Hardt and Negri who critique globalization but from a position that emphasizes forms of biopolitical resistance as an irreducible multiplicity without romantic assumptions about unity or group identity. To borrow from the language of Walker's argument once more, what sounds inclusive actually excludes the possibility of a mass action exercising a specific political subjectivity. It also excludes normative foreign policy, which ironically makes both hedge fund managers and Hardt and Negri happy. How did this odd collocation come about?

In part a globalization of power through intense financialization, for instance, was shadowed by a necessarily deterritorialized counter-critique: 'if power was located at the global level then resistance was as well.' Again, Chandler's position is not that global forces do not exist but the jump to this scale elides how the politicization of the global works, how its principles are framed, how its analytic concepts perform the very process that is its object. On one level, Chandler correctly sees a technological determinism at work in which globalization exists because, well, there is a global network; on another level, globalization theory appears underequipped to understand the crude internationalism of hegemonic states, particularly the USA after 9/11. In short, Chandler seeks to separate the ideological confusions of a globalization of politics from the theoretical problem presented by global politics, which is a useful distinction between process and subject before the troublesome concept of 'world'.

Chandler organizes his argument well, with the first few chapters probing the prominent policy discourses that appear to suture a global episteme: security/ development, statebuilding, and a specifically human security discourse. These are obviously cornerstones of internationalism but the point is they have been naively recalibrated to represent a properly global interconnectedness. The chapter on the merging of security and development discourses is particularly noteworthy, although Chandler does have a

tendency to brand every instance of globalizing politics 'hollow' before exegesis might suggest otherwise. The central chapters are devoted to the crux of Chandler's approach: namely, that the global functions as an abstract substitute for liberal norms (of community, of war) and expresses the limit or lack of a global subject for politics, particularly one with agency. Chandler finds in arguments for global civil society a paradigmatic tautology of the globalization of politics, and on the whole the criticism is appreciable (especially in contrast to the work of Falk, for instance). Since Hardt and Negri are also voluble critics of global civil society, Chandler then complicates his approach by challenging their adherence to a 'flight from sovereignty' as a deterritorializing strategy. For those who have wondered about the logic of Hardt and Negri's strategy, Chandler's criticism is pointed: their view endorses a retreat from political engagement and community to communication 'without purpose'. This is not altogether hollowness, however, since part of the political effect of Hardt and Negri's procedures is to short-circuit precisely the regressive power formations Chandler identifies. The question comes down to whether alternatives are meaningfully agential if representational politics is simply ejected?

It is this aspect of hollowness that leads Chandler to a pertinent and often persuasive discussion of sovereignty. It is not that Deleuzeans or Spinozists eschew sovereignty, but that questioning sovereignty does not necessarily distil a politics of its transformation or sublation. Since sovereignty's impress on global war, particularly the war on terror, is also the subject of Elden's book, one should not underestimate its importance to the aforementioned disciplinary crises over the subject of territoriality and the world (the latter, by the way, is not discussed conceptually in any of these three books but one may adduce its pivotal philosophical purchase in recent work by Nancy and Badiou). Liberal constructivist approaches have clearly provided an alibi for sovereign extension within globalization, and when that does not work a brute appeal to superior 'values' is made, as Chandler explicates by reference to a speech by Tony Blair. Rather than take a Gramscian or Foucauldian route by way of response, Chandler interestingly takes up the early work of Marx on the disjunctions between ideas and practice, ideologies and state formation in Germany at that time. The lesson of Marx is that forces structured in dominance (or a will to dominance, like the German bourgeoisie of which he writes) can mask their material interests by appeals to values as an abstraction. This certainly undoes the Blair strategy, but does it explain the hollowness in much global theorization?

The conceptual key is sovereignty, which is the subject of Chandler's final chapter. Briefly, if the appeal to the global reflects an absencing of political responsibility, then the claims of sovereignty are submerged even when they may dictate the decisions in play. In other words, globality is not the battleground of the political but is the hollow metonym of sovereignty as the true site of political contestation and purposeful acts. I like this formulation not because it endorses sovereignty as a norm but because it continues to question its insinuation in otherwise value-laden discourses of the global with a concomitant persistence of territoriality in its suasion. One of the problems of

globalism is its abject declarative force, as if terminological insistence means the revolution has already happened (and nobody really wants to miss one of those). In contrast to Walker's hobbling hesitation, Chandler offers the heuristic of the hollow that, even when it overstates the case, is a call for reflexive theoretical clarification in the study of international relations.

Elden's contribution takes a different tack from the other two even as it remains similarly sceptical of the claims of global politics. The novelty of the text is not necessarily its spirited defence of conceptions of territoriality but the test case it brings to bear on the polemic: an analysis of the spatiality of sovereignty through the recent histories of terror and terrorism. Right from the start Elden signals the advantage of this approach because it requires simultaneously a mapping of terrorist events, geographically and historically, against a logic that is putatively deterritorialized vis-à-vis sovereignty and the state. In effect, it answers naive globalists in familiar terms they are then called on to take into account (thus when Rumsfeld bemoans a lack of metrics to see whether the war on terror is being won, Elden's text immediately establishes the coordinates between terror and territory with maps, and etymologies, to underline the point). This is a refreshing take on territory because it shows via concrete examples how concepts of territoriality and sovereignty are woven through the most prominent scene of contemporary global politics: the war on terror itself.

Having established the pivotal role of territory in globality, Elden then examines what this might mean to the forms of Islamism seen to feed specific terrorist movements, most obviously al-Qaeda (keeping in mind the network was to some extent produced by effects of long-standing Western foreign policies in West and Central Asia). By re-reading the history of the group's development, including the statements of its leaders and ideologists, Elden is able to track the force of territorial and sovereign rights in its otherwise stateless, virtual or networked manifestations. The point is not an either/or stratagem, but the pursuit of an explanatory framework adequate to territory's actual meaning for al-Qaeda. To foreground this condition simultaneously reveals the territorial commitments of a global politics in response; not a muddle, nor a lack, therefore, but a material synergy of territorial aims between nation and the world.

The chapter on weak states attempts to deepen the polemic by considering the relationship between weak/failing states and the development or harbouring of terrorist groups. I think the challenge of weak states goes beyond contesting international law or facilitating havens for non-state actors. As I have argued, failed states in particular dispute conventional narratives of decolonization not because state polity has been lost, but because it may not have been found or founded. True, this may indicate a failure of state structure, but even in the most extreme example, Somalia, local and entrenched modes of social organization and trade have attempted to maintain communities even among the ravages of civil strife and foreign intervention, however this is measured. Thus, international frameworks of polity not only fear lawlessness and terrorist ferment, but modes of polity with their own conditions of right

and responsibility. From this perspective the failed state is also a logic of state failure inaugurated by the Peace of Westphalia (a response to the Holy Roman Empire as failed state).

For many, Elden's chapter on Iraq will prove the most provocative, and one cannot help but admire his ability to sift through vast amounts of secondary material produced on the subject. Others, however, may find themselves submerged by such documentation, particularly when it is drawn from a seemingly endless procession of UN resolutions on the Iraq invasion. Nevertheless, beyond the symptomatic paradox, Iraq was invaded, its sovereignty suspended and its territorial integrity breached in defence of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Elden uses his critique to sharpen the overall thesis of the book regarding the global order's continuing pivot on sovereignty (even when contingent) as demonstrably spatial. The last chapter and 'coda' broaden the lessons of the Iraq example both to return to terrorism as a problem from and within sovereignty and to accentuate Elden's notable position that the deterritorializations of globalization are not divorced from equally discernible processes of reterritorialization. In the end, this does not provide us with a working definition of contemporary regimes of globality but it does at the very least reveal Elden's consummate ability to take global politics as itself a dynamic interrogation of his geographic zeal. While I agree with all three writers that globalization is overblown, this does not preclude the possibility that certain disciplinary analytic models are effete. To that extent, the philosophical disposition of world must also be actively contested.

Peter Hitchcock