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International political economy and the promises of poststructuralism

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Introduction: International Political Economy and the Promises of Poststructuralism

Marieke de Goede

Engagements between International Political Economy (IPE) as a field of thought that thinks critically about ‘the unique problematic of the operation of the modern economy within a fragmented political system’ (Palan 2000: 17), and poststructural politics, have been sporadic and antagonistic. It is possible to say that IPE has been particularly resistant to poststructural intervention. Simply put, if poststructuralism has come to be understood as foregrounding analyses of discourse, identity and culture in the study of global politics, a number of IPE authors have expressed concern that these theoretical moves will (a) distract from the study of real material inequality that critical IPE endeavors to study and to transform; and (b) amount to a political relativism that suspends the ontological ground on which judgments concerning the desired agenda of transformation can be made (see for example, the engagement between Krasner 1996 and Ashley 1996; the engagement between Laffey 2000, 2004 and de Goede 2003; see also Gills 2001; Patomäki and Wight 2000). Barry Gills (2001: 238), for example, while sympathetic to poststructural work on agency and identity, nevertheless expresses concern that such analysis would *displace* political economy’s ‘true subject matter – which is the political economy of the world (historical system) which some call “global capitalism.”’ Moreover, a focus on identity and a poststructural conceptualization of power are sometimes read as disabling IPE’s critique of capital and capitalism, while presenting a worldview of flux and diffused power that is in league with capitalist discourse itself (Laffey 2000; 2004).

This volume offers a sustained engagement between IPE and poststructuralism, that takes seriously the criticisms voiced above, but that moves beyond a polarization of the debate. The resistance of IPE to

poststructural intervention can partly be seen as a disciplinary politics that seeks to regulate IPE's agenda of study and to define its core subject matter. All too often, boundaries set in these debates expel from enquiry those themes so important to this volume: identity, cultural representation, discourse, everyday life, the ambiguity of political dissent. In this manner, the primary subject-matter of political economy is settled in particular ways that work to relegate to secondary importance, in the words of Amin and Palan (2001: 560), the 'powers of behaviour rooted in emotions, cultural and social norms, historical lock-in, serendipity and accident.'

However, IPE and poststructural politics *both* endeavor to challenge 'the idea that the character and the location of the political must be determined by the sovereign state,' and to broaden 'the political imagination and the range of political possibilities for transforming international relations' (Devetak 2001: 204; see also Coward this volume). It is to be expected, then, that they may fruitfully engage. Thinking through IPE's traditional concerns of financial and economic practices, states and firms, power and (class) inequality with the help of poststructural insights on representation, performativity and dissent, may yield rich new conceptualizations of political economy that have the potential to resonate far beyond IPE. For example, a sophisticated theorization of the commercialization of security and of economic practices such as subcontracting, that does not simply invoke a mythical and coherent capitalism, is becoming increasingly important for political analyses of the current war on terror. (e.g. Amoore and de Goede 2005).

Challenging boundaries

In this volume, leading poststructural, IPE and feminist scholars debate the promises of poststructural politics for the study of the global political economy. The authors collected here regard the supposed dangers of poststructuralism as a challenge, which may articulate the political in IPE in rich, new ways. They are guided by a set of questions, including: Does a focus on identity and representation distract from the study of material structures and distributive justice?; Are there facts of economics which remain prior to discourse and representation?; What is the role of culture and representation in political economy?; How does the question of identity become important to the study of global restructuring?; How is resistance rethought through poststructural politics? Through engaging with these questions, the volume challenges the boundaries that some established IPE tries to protect, and explores, amongst other issues, gender performativity (Zalewski), psychoanalytic theory (Gammon and

Palan), financial identity (Aitken), governmentality (Larner), everyday life (Davies) and art as a site of resistance (Amoore).

This is not to say that all authors collected here are self-identified post-structuralists, nor that they singularly dismiss the reservations that Gills, Laffey and others have voiced towards aspects of poststructural theory. Magnus Ryner, for example, in his contribution, considers it 'dangerous' to emphasize, as post-Marxists Laclau and Mouffe do, the contingency between class and political consciousness, precisely for the reasons of relativism and the problem of political action that may result from such a theoretical position. The collection presented here then, includes a diversity of opinions on, and practices of, poststructural politics and IPE, in order to constitute a real dialogue. It is not the objective of this volume to develop *a* poststructural IPE, but to engage with those authors and those issues generally thought to be poststructuralist, as well as to engage with some of the criticisms discussed above.

The debate in this volume partly draws upon the ways in which post-structuralism has been appropriated within the study of global politics more generally – not because IPE is to be seen as a 'sub-field' of International Relations (IR), but because the problematizations of agency, sovereignty and boundaries developed in poststructural IR are highly relevant to rethinking these issues in IPE. Challenging boundaries is at the heart of the ways in which poststructuralism has been appropriated in IR. As Michael Shapiro (1996: xvi) writes, challenging 'bordered state sovereignties' through literary intervention and a remembrance of the excluded and the violently suppressed in the formation of the modern state system was at the heart of the task of taking seriously poststructural perspectives from the humanities in IR. Concern for the marginalized sites in global politics leads to the politicization of limits and the way they are articulated. For Ashley and Walker (1990: 263), the dissident work of global political theory needs 'to interrogate limits, to explore how they are imposed, to demonstrate their arbitrariness, and to think *other-wise*, that is, in a way that makes possible the testing of limitations and the exploration of excluded possibilities' (emphasis in original).

But it is not just a concern for the *margins* that inspires a politics of the limits. As Etienne Balibar (1999) argues in his reflections 'At the Borders of Europe,' the border is not necessarily the 'outer limit' of a political sphere but is 'dispersed a little everywhere, wherever the movement of information, people and things is happening and is controlled.' Thus, according to Balibar, the border constitutes *the center* of the political sphere: 'In this sense, border areas – zones, countries, and cities – are not marginal to the constitution of a public sphere but rather are at the center.' Similarly, it is through the border of a

discipline that its identity is constituted and its agenda is regulated. A concern for the margins, then, goes to the center of the discipline.

Before moving on to discuss three poststructural themes that are promising to the study of the global political economy, it should be clarified what, in this volume, is meant by the term poststructuralism. Clearly, it is neither possible nor particularly useful to define poststructuralism as if it were a coherent theory or school of thought. Poststructuralism as a philosophical term developed to signify a break with structuralism as a linguistic theory that challenges the direct correspondence between language and the real world, and instead sees meaning as arising within the human system of language and signification. The work of Michel Foucault, for example, can be seen to be indebted to, but to go beyond, structural linguistics in the sense that it accepts a structural understanding 'of both discourse and the speaker as constructed objects,' while rejecting the formal model of rule-governed human behaviour developed by structural linguists, in favour of studying the social and historical contingency of human practice (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: xxiii). Foucault rejects the notion that a deep, hidden truth is to be discovered in human practice through critical theory, and focuses, instead, on a critical analysis of the discursive strategies 'which yield justified truth claims' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: xx).

Neither Foucault, nor other philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, are easily and irrevocably captured under the label 'poststructuralist,' and there are important differences between them. However, and especially in the context of the study of global politics, it is possible to identify poststructuralism as having made a particular set of contributions to the debate, most notably the problematization of sovereignty, boundaries and seemingly secure (state) identities (Devetak 2001). What unites thinkers as diverse as Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard under the label poststructuralism, for George and Campbell (1990: 280), is 'a search for thinking space within the modern categories of unity, identity and homogeneity; the search for a broader and more complex understanding of modern society, which accounts for that which is left out – the "other," the marginalized, the excluded.'

In the context of thinking about the global political economy, poststructuralism as a term is chosen to distinguish this volume's concerns from work on 'postmodernism,' which is often understood to signify a new historical era, supposed to be emerging since the 1970s, and marked by 'new experience[s] of space and time' and 'new forms of capital accumulation' (Harvey 2001: 124).¹ Rather than a new (cap-

italist) era, then, poststructuralism here is to be understood as an interpretative analytic that problematizes sovereignty in world politics as well as in research practice itself (Campbell 1998: 213; see also Edkins 1999: xi). This interpretative analytic invites us to reconsider and destabilize not just the conceptual categories that IPE deploys (the state, the firm, the financial system, the economic actor, capitalism), but also the way knowledge is produced and legitimized in this disciplinary practice. This volume foregrounds the work of post-Marxist and poststructuralist philosophers including Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt – whose work enables a critical interrogation of the settled concepts and boundaries of IPE. Below, I discuss three themes that may be thought of as post-structuralist, and that are central to the dialogue in this volume. These themes should certainly not be seen as a coherent poststructural agenda. Rather, they have been articulated to introduce the reader to the promises of poststructuralism for the study of the global political economy. I will discuss, first, an emphasis on the politics of representation; second, a reconceptualization of power and agency; and third, a rethinking of the politics of resistance.

Politics of representation

First, poststructural analysis brings to the fore the importance of discourse and representation for political and economic practice. As Ashley (1996: 245) puts it, one contribution of poststructuralism to the study of world politics is ‘the discovery of the centrality of the problem and paradox of representation to modern political life.’ This involves not just the understanding that all political knowledge is discursively mediated, but also a recognition of the deeply discursive nature of the realms of politics and economics. This does not mean that the linguistic is to be prioritized over the material, but more precisely a ‘moving beyond a simplistic consideration of objects by reconceptualizing materialism so it is understood as interwoven with cultural, social, and political networks’ (Campbell 2005). However, the relation between the material and the discursive is a point of debate in this volume, and not all contributors – including, for example, the Jessop and Sum, and Davies chapters – are comfortable collapsing the distinction between the material and the discursive.

The questions of how certain meanings are fixed at the expense of others, how certain representations dominate alternatives, how the

limits of political discourse are constituted, go to the heart of post-structural politics. As Spike Peterson summarizes this central question in her contribution to this volume: 'how does power operate...within specific contexts to stabilize – with a tendency to normalize and depoliticize – particular discourses and their effects?' Again, a politics of the limits is central to the task. As Judith Butler (2004: xvii) writes in her reflections on the public debate in the wake of 9/11: 'The public sphere is constituted in part by what cannot be said and what cannot be shown. The limits of the sayable, the limits of what can appear, circumscribe the domain in which political speech operates and certain kinds of subjects appear as viable actors.'

It should be clear that the agenda of the study of world politics shifts under the recognition of the politics of representation: from the (objective) study of material capabilities, national interests, and economic power, to the study of, for example, the practices of representation of danger, security and violence (Campbell 1998, Coward 2002; Weldes 1999; Luoma-aho 2004), to a critical assessment of the rationalist myths of political projects (Hansen and Williams 1999), to a rewriting of discourses of the discipline itself (George 1994). These authors have critically reexamined the central concepts of global politics, in order to expose the exclusions and marginalizations that enable their stabilization. Feminist analysis has been of particular importance to the destabilization of the conventional categories of IR and IPE, and broadening its field of study (see for example, Marchand and Runyan 2000; Hooper 2001; Ling 2002; Peterson 2003; Zalewski 2000). And despite what has been said above about IPE's resistance to poststructural intervention, a critical rethinking of IPE's core concepts and agenda in the light of the politics of discourse and representation is quietly underway (see for example, Aitken 2004; Amoores 1998; Deuchars 2004; Jessop and Sum 2001; Shapiro 1993; Rosamond 2002; Williams 1999).

What is perhaps most promising to IPE in this context, is the politicization of technical (economic, financial, political) knowledge that is made possible through rethinking the politics of representation. The move from the study of 'ideology' to the study of 'technologies of truth' in the work of Foucault is crucial here. While recognizing that historical transformations relating to the governance of the delinquent or the insane can have been 'economically advantageous and politically useful' to some, Foucault rejects the close and purposeful correspondence between dominant interests and historical change that is implied by the notion of ideology. Ideology implies an underlying *reality*, and a certain degree of plotting on the part of the dominant

fraction to effect a distortion of reality by the subjected. Foucault, in contrast, leaves us with the realization that there is no reality (perceivable) outside of techniques of truth, and that techniques of truth are thus both less ideological and more political than assumed. 'I do not believe that what has taken place can be said to be ideological,' writes Foucault (1982: 102), 'It is both much more and much less than ideology. It is the production of effective instruments for the formation, and accumulation of knowledge – methods of observation, techniques of registration, procedures for investigation and research, apparatuses of control.' It is no longer to be assumed that *underneath* discursive representation a deeper truth is to be discovered, or that *underneath* ideology the real motivating forces of actors can be detected. As Shapiro (1996: xvii) puts it, 'discourse is always...a form of impoverishment, even as it affords value and access. All intelligible oral and textual articulations involve a temporary fix on a meaning at the expense of other possible structures of intelligibility.'

Understanding techniques of truth production as profoundly political is of crucial importance to the study of the IPE, for it opens up technical and depoliticized economic practice to political scrutiny. A burgeoning literature – not all of it taking its cue from Foucault – is critically examining economic truth techniques including credit rating (Sinclair 2005), accounting and auditing (Porter 1999; Power 1997), financial modelling and statistics (de Goede 2005; MacKenzie 2003b), debt restructuring standards (Soederberg 2003); and pensions calculations (Langley 2004). This involves getting *inside* the particular construction of numbers and statistics by developing an understanding of their normative assumptions, as well as a wider reading of the historical and institutional sedimentations that makes contestable numbers truth in the here and now. More broadly, 'cultural economy' is emerging as a field of study that takes seriously the discursivity and cultural contingency of current economic practice (see du Gay and Pryke 2002; Amin and Thrift 2003, also Shapiro this volume). As Don Slater (2002: 59) puts it, 'economic and cultural categories are logically and practically interdependent...In practice, social actors cannot actually define a market or a competitor, let alone act in relation to them, except through extensive forms of cultural knowledge.'

This understanding of discourse and cultural knowledge, rather than distracting from the study of material reality, enables it to be seen as profoundly political. In fact, it is in thinking about the political that IPE has a valuable contribution to make to the wider literature on cultural economy. For example, for Glyn Daly (2004: 5) it is precisely the

discursivity of economy that makes possible a radical political economy: 'a *political* economy is one that...presupposes the essential discursivity of the economy. The reason for this is clear. The idea of an extra-discursive...is something that is wholly incompatible with that of the political' (emphasis in original, see also Daly this volume). There is then political potential – if not a political agenda – in the effort to show how economic truth techniques are particular and contestable representations of reality, rather than immutable facts. In this volume, Zalewski explores the politics of representation and (economic) survival, and concludes that 'survival and representation occur *in and through one another*' (emphasis in original).

At the same time, the move from the study of ideology to the study of truth techniques, makes visible a sharp difference between post-structuralism and constructivist work, that forms an important theme in this volume (as well as an important theme in current IR debates, see for example, Campbell 2001, Doty 2000; Zehfuss 2002). First, a constructivist reading is more likely to 'posit a limit to the limit-attitude' by carving out an extra-discursive domain (Campbell 1998: 224). For example, in this volume, Magnus Ryner argues for maintaining an extra-discursive realm that limits 'the extent to which discursive practices can construct commodities and their relations.'² While it should by now be clear that poststructuralists do *not* take the politics of representation to mean that anything-at-will can be constructed to be true, neither do they envision an extra-discursive realm through which such limits are imposed. They are more likely to understand the particular forms that socially constructed truth takes through cultural and institutional practice and historical sedimentation (see for example, Cameron and Palan 2004; Latour 1999). In this volume, Michael Shapiro argues, through rereading the work of Adam Smith, that 'the way value is deployed in the dynamics of political economy cannot be derived from...the way an object's materiality satisfies a need or want,' but that economic value emerges through complex cultural codes and historically contingent practices of valuation.

Secondly, and related, a constructivist reading is more likely to understand the social construction of truth to be purposefully in the interest of particular social actors. This may result in the (implicit) suggestion that 'social discourses are controlled and promoted...by socio-economic classes, gender groups, racial groups, powerful faiths and so on' (Cameron and Palan 2004: 48). But this reading fails to problematize the agent (and interest) behind the construction of discourse, and moreover fails to recognize the complexity of discursive

constellations that ‘are not easily manipulated’ (Ricoeur, quoted in Cameron and Palan 2004: 48). Quoting Butler, Campbell (1998: 224) understands the construction of truth (in foreign policy) less as an “‘act,” singular and deliberate...than as a nexus of power and discourse that repeats and mines the discursive gestures of power.’ In this volume, Aitken offers a similar understanding of the financial economy, not as an exploitative system designed by particular interest, but as a performative practice, the reiteration of which in the space of everyday life makes capital possible.

Power and agency

Problematizing interest and agency, then, forms a second theme to be highlighted here. According to Campbell (1996: 18), a critical questioning of the ‘sovereignty problematic’ in international politics involves challenging the concomitant ‘economistic conception of power, whereby power is regarded as a commodity to be wielded by agents.’ Instead of assuming a prior political agent that (individually or collectively) wields power (and discourse!) to serve its particular interests, it becomes imperative to enquire into the discursive constitution of agency and interest themselves. It becomes imperative, in Butler’s (2004: 16) words, to ‘rethink the relations between conditions and acts. Our acts are not self-generated, but conditioned.’ In this volume, Gammon and Palan offer libinal political economy as a way of decentring the rational subject of political economy and replacing it with a Freudian subject who ‘does not enjoy complete sovereignty, but is fragmented by an internal conflictual dynamic as it seeks to stabilize its object relations.’ Although different from libinal political economy in many ways, Butler’s work also draws upon a Freudian subject, and offers an understanding of human agency as not a singular starting point of political acts, but as always simultaneously enabled and constrained by (gender) discourses. By being called a name (‘It’s a boy!’), according to Butler (1997: 2), ‘one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call’ (see also Zalewski this volume). However, the rituals that exist before us and bring us into being, do not fully determine our possibilities: ‘being acted upon is not fully continuous with acting, and in this way the forces that act upon us are not finally responsible for what we do.’ Butler (2004: 16) concludes, ‘We are at once acted upon and acting, and our “responsibility” lies in the conjunction between the two.’

One of the ways in which Butler's rethinking of agency speaks to the study of the global political economy and the concerns of this volume is by challenging the representation of capital as a coherent logic driven by class interests. There is no singular and purposeful political act or actor behind capitalist logic, but a circulating operation of power that constitutes agents and their interests. For Foucault, the panopticon did not imply a singular and all-seeing eye at the center of penal surveillance. Instead, Foucault (1979: 176–7) understands the 'disciplinary power' of the panopticon as

organised as a multiple, automatic and anonymous power; for although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network 'holds' the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: *supervisors, perpetually supervised*. The power in the hierarchized surveillance of the disciplines is not possessed as a thing, or transferred as a property....And, although it is true that its pyramidal organisation gives it a 'head,' it is the apparatus as a whole that produces 'power' and distributes individuals in this permanent and continuous field (emphasis added).

The command center of the panopticon, put simply, is not manned by the all-seeing capitalist with a firm grip on the process, but by a supervisor – or these days, more likely an auditor – who is in turn supervised and who understands his agency, interests and responsibility in particular and historically contingent ways. Put differently, economic agents do not act purposefully and deliberately in the service of particular class interests, but emerge within a domain of explicit and implicit norms, which regulate the limits of the sayable for legitimate participation in economic practice.

In fact, theories of performativity, as developed by Butler and others in order to problematize the purposeful agent behind the political act, are becoming quite influential within the study of finance and economics from geographical and sociological perspectives, although the precise meaning and significance of performativity is under debate (see Callon 1998; Clark, Thrift and Tickell 2004; de Goede 2005a: 5–13; MacKenzie 2003a; Thrift 2002). In discourse theory, a performative is that which enacts or brings about what it names – the quintessential example being the priest whose words 'hereby I thee wed' enact the marriage (Butler 1993: 13; Austin 1962: 4–7). Understanding finance

as a performative practice suggests that processes of knowledge and interpretation do not exist in addition to, or are of secondary importance to, 'real' material financial structures, but are precisely the way in which 'finance' *materializes*. For Michel Callon, for example, financial discourse is performative because it constitutes the reality it merely purports to describe. Economic measuring tools 'do not merely record a reality independent of themselves; they contribute powerfully to shaping, simply by measuring it, the reality that they measure,' according to Callon (1998: 23). In this volume, Martin Coward draws on Hardt and Negri's notion of Empire and understands 'the various thresholds of imperial power' to be 'performatively reasserted': 'The normalization of certain notions of life, community, and safety is never fully secured, but must rather be performatively re-iterated.'

Is it 'dangerous' to problematize the class agent behind economic discourse? This is certainly one of the strands of debate in this volume. Jessop and Sum wish to supplement Foucault's theorization of power with a coherent theory of capitalism. For Matt Davies, moreover, the Foucauldian theorization of power as a network results in an inability to theorize resistance, as it seems to extinguish agency. In contrast however, for Wendy Lerner, it is liberating to see power as not emanating from one clear center, but operating as a practice of governmentality that constitutes agency and identity. Precisely through this theoretical move, the gaps and insecurities of neo-liberal governance become visible, and multiple sites of resistance may be thought possible.

Politics of resistance

This brings us to the third theme that needs to be drawn out for the purposes of this introduction. It is the rethinking of the politics of dissent and resistance that currently forms perhaps the most controversial, but perhaps also the most promising, poststructural intervention in the study of the global political economy. The rethinking of dissent through poststructural lens is sometimes seen as very problematic for left-wing politics, most recently for example, by Richard Wolin (2004), who argues that emphasizing the cultural and historical contingency of 'truth' deprives left-wing politics of sorely needed normative ground (for a counter-argument see the contributions to Butler, Guillory and Thomas 2000; also Rorty 2004). In feminist thought, for example, as Zalewski points out in this volume, the decentering of the subject 'woman' has 'seemingly threatened the capacity to answer – or ask – simple questions about important material issues such as why women

are poorer than men with all the attendant suffering/violences that this incurs over lifetimes.' In addition, the understanding of capitalism as a performative practice 'increasingly resembles capitalism's description of itself' (Thrift 2005: 4; cf. Laffey 2000). These theoretical positions seem to raise insurmountable problems for the politics of resistance. If it is rendered problematic to speak in the name of a coherent political subject (for example, woman, the working class), how is emancipatory action possible? If critical theoretical discourse is dangerously close to capitalism's self-representation, how can it engage in effective resistance?

To the heart of these concerns of dissent and resistance goes a new realization of the ambiguities of the contemporary political economy and practices of dissent. For Thrift (2005: 4), it is clear that 'we have reached a point in which...capitalists and anti-capitalists...are not easily separated linguistically and, in some cases, even practically.' In her contribution to this volume, Louise Amoore points to the manifold contradictions in the global political economy within which we all find ourselves, and asks, 'how do we understand the Amnesty International Visa cardholder who stands opposed to the human rights abuses that characterize much of contemporary world politics, but whose debt is bundled up and sold in the global financial markets?' (see also Amoore and Langley 2004). For Amoore it is precisely these contradictions, however, that have the ability to become 'points of politicization,' as they contain 'the potential for a recognition of the intimate connections between "our" world and "theirs."' For Amoore, the realization of the ambiguous divide between the rulers and the ruled finds dissent in unexpected places. If capitalism lacks a singular center of power, it also lacks a singular center of resistance. In Foucault's (1998: 95–96) words, that inspired the title of Amoore's chapter, 'there is no single locus of great Refusal,' but instead a 'plurality of resistances...[M]ore often one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remoulding them.'

Paradoxically, then, a representation of agency as both constrained and produced in the social field of power may open up multiple possibilities for change. In this volume, Aitken offers an understanding of capital not as a monolithic and united force, but as 'something de-centered and something made, and potentially re-made, in the diverse and sometimes incoherent space of everyday life.' This understanding – of capital as a performative practice in need of constant

articulation and reiteration – makes it vulnerable at the moment of enunciation: ‘If...a structure is dependent upon its enunciation for its continuation,’ writes Butler (1997: 19), ‘then *it is at the site of enunciation that the question of its continuity is to be posed*’ (emphasis added). In other words, despite the rigorous training and education economic agents are initiated by, their performances do not flawlessly reproduce previous formulations, but may reformulate, rearticulate, transform, and even fundamentally question orthodoxies. While Stephen Gill (1995: 2), for example, reads the theory of the panopticon as reducing the individual to a ‘manipulable and relatively inert commodity,’ for Butler discursive power is not always so felicitous. In its daily life, the gaps, disjunctures, contradictions and political openings of global capitalism may be rendered visible (cf. Gibson-Graham 1996). In this volume, Larner emphasizes the contingencies and ‘messy actualities’ of neoliberalism and reveals at work a ‘complex and hybrid political imaginary,’ instead of a coherent policy program or ideology.

In this context of capital as made and remade in mundane spaces, everyday life comes to be seen as an important site of power and resistance. In this volume, Jessop and Sum discuss how exploiting the ‘affordances of mundane products and routine circumstances’ in everyday life is able to subvert their disciplinary logic. At the same time however, Matt Davies warns that we should not interpret any nonelite gesture automatically as an act of resistance, but instead we should come to a *critique* of how capitalist practice transforms everyday life in order to theorize resistance and the everyday. Both chapters contribute to the increasingly important theorizing of everyday practice as an important site of power and resistance in the global political economy (see also, for example, Campbell 1996; Langley 2002; Sinclair 1999).

Moreover, the effects of resistance are themselves ambiguous and can never be securely known to produce the ‘mimetic reflection of an a priori political principle’ (Bhabha 1994: 25). For Homi Bhabha (1994: 28, 25), political resistance is to be understood as a *negotiation* rather than a negation, in order to recognize the unpredictable ‘hybrid moment of political change,’ in which emerges ‘a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other*’ (emphasis in original; cf. Derrida 1981: 42–43). The outcome of the contingent process of negotiation that is political resistance cannot be known before one engages. As Daly (2004: 4) puts it, ‘the effects of the political cannot be known in advance.’

Bhabha’s intervention makes dissent unpredictable and ambiguous but also arguably more *political*. The insecurity of political positioning

envisions a constant self-reflection and reexamination of one's politics. Political positioning becomes mobile, unfinished, tactical, and dependent upon context – instead of something to be decided before the battle starts. To give an example relevant to Dutch politics at the time of writing, political positioning may entail resisting the breakdown of the social welfare state – but that positioning needs to remain mobile and self-critical when it becomes clear that anti-migrant sentiment is central to much of the current protest against the breakdown of the welfare state. Simultaneously, social movements need to engage in a politics of strategic alliance and selective collaboration (Appadurai 2002; Shaw 2003). As Butler (2004: 48) writes: 'various routes lead us into politics, various stories bring us onto the street, various kind of reasoning and belief.' In this volume, Bice Maiguashca draws on Gramscian and poststructural theory to come to an understanding of the multifaceted strategies and tactics of social movements.

For Bhabha (1994: 20), culture forms a privileged site of dissent: 'Forms of popular rebellion and mobilization are often most subversive and transgressive when they are created through oppositional *cultural practices*' (emphasis in original). While it is clear that culture historically has played an important role in sustaining and reproducing dominant practices or repressive politics (Jenkins 2003), an increasing strand of literature relevant to IPE examines cultural practice as a site of dissent (see Amoore 2005, part 4; also Bleiker 2000; Campbell 2003; Shapiro 2002). For Amoore (2005: 358), 'playful resistance and celebratory festivals become a potential means to temporarily interrupt the pressures of everyday life and to suggest alternative ways of life' (see also Amoore this volume). In my own work, I have argued that comedy and carnival are particularly important in economic and financial criticism, because the authority and legitimacy of financial practices is underpinned by their rationality and differentiation from emotion (de Goede 2005b; also de Goede 2005a). Finally, for Edkins (1999: 142, 140), the task of repoliticization involves rendering visible the 'contingent, provisional nature' of the symbolic order, which may be helped by 'disrupting [the] claim to seriousness.'

If the dissenting task of poststructural criticism is to repoliticize that which appears as apolitical in modern life (and contemporary economics and finance do so *par excellence*), then art and culture can be important sites of disturbing, challenging, disrupting, making strange – in effect *repoliticizing* – these practices. This certainly does not mean, in Roland Bleiker's (2003: 417) words, that 'we should turn our eyes away from the key challenges of world politics, from war to inequality and

hunger, to devote ourselves to reading poetry and gazing at art.' But it does mean encouraging multiple sites of dissent, and drawing 'upon the innovative nature of the aesthetic to rethink deeply entrenched and often narrowly conceived approaches to understanding and solving world political problems' (Bleiker 2003: 417). It moreover means facing up to the realization that the seriousness and coherence of global capitalism is constituted, in part, through the very discourses that seek to challenge it (Gibson-Graham 1996; see also Lerner this volume).

And despite the debates cutting across these chapters – economy as discursive or material, power as network or resource, capitalism as coherent or vulnerable and diffuse, it is important to remind ourselves, as Amoore does at the very end of this volume with the words of Butler (2004: 48), that 'We could disagree on the status and character of modernity and yet find ourselves joined' in a politics of dissent.

Volume structure

The three themes set out here – the politics of representation, the problem of agency and the politics of resistance – run as a red thread through the present volume. The volume is divided into three parts, each with its own introduction in which a detailed description of the chapters can be found. First, the section titled 'poststructural interventions' offers a number of ways of thinking through the promise of poststructuralism in the study of the global political economy. If poststructuralism sees its work as an interpretative analysis with political effects – rather than the accumulation of objective knowledge – poststructural political interventions are already being made in both the theory and the practice of IPE, from a cultural reading of the work of Adam Smith in order to destabilize his conceptual apparatus that has been so influential on modern economics (Shapiro), to thinking about financial performativity (Aitken), to seeing power at work in Empire (Coward).

Section II engages explicitly with one of the most explosive issues in the debate on IPE and poststructural politics – the question of discourse and materiality. As will be clear from this introduction, this question is at the heart of some theoretical resistance to poststructuralism. This section does not pretend to resolve this thorny question once and for all – if anything, it becomes clear that one's position in the debate rests upon an act of faith more than a realization of the 'truth' – but offers a diversity of points of view that students of IPE may identify with.

Section III thinks through the question of ambiguity, dissent and social movements. As discussed in this introduction, some poststructural theoretical positions seem to problematize emancipatory politics, but also promise rich new ways of thinking about dissent. The readings in this section grapple with the politics of dissent in different ways, from emphasizing the politics of everyday life, to rethinking the politics of social movements, to exploring culture as a site of dissent.

Notes

- 1 However, in contrast to Harvey, Devetak (2001: 181) uses the term postmodernism to denote all (IR) authors who 'regard their own writing as either postmodern, poststructuralist or deconstructive.' An alternative term used in some IR literature is postpositivism (see Lapid 1989). Palan (2000) uses the term postrationalism in the context of IPE, to denote a break with traditional economic assumptions of rational economic actors.
- 2 Ryner sees his point about the extra-discursive supported by my exploration of discourses of scientific finance that led to the rise and fall of the hedge fund LTCM (de Goede 2005a, Chapter 5). The reason the fund failed, Ryner seems to imply, is that it came up against an extra-discursive realm of 'reality' that limited the constructive power of the discourses of scientific finance. However, it should be clear that I do not subscribe to this interpretation. My discussion of the LTCM case, while critical of discourses of scientific finance, does not base this criticism on the assumption that these discourses somehow *distort* reality, and can be exposed to be 'false' with reference to an underlying truth (as an ideology-critique might do). Instead, I read these discourses in the sense of truth-techniques as theorized by Foucault and discussed above, that have particular effects of power, and that are historically and socially contingent, but not necessarily *false* or unrealistic. For a discussion of the differences between ideology-critique and poststructuralism, see George and Campbell 1990.

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