

**GENDERED POLITICAL SPACES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS:  
THE CASE OF NGO USE OF INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION  
TECHNOLOGIES (ICTs)**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference is made to the work of others.

## ABSTRACT

The thesis contributes to evolving debates on spatial theorising in the discipline of International Relations (IR). It argues that spatial interpretation in the discipline is both gendered, through its focus on public institutions of politics, and state-centric, through a neo/Realist hegemony of ideas in its discourse. These discursive parameters are argued to impose limitations on the study of transnational phenomena, and the thesis therefore develops a framework for analysis apposite to research into political activity that is not state-centred. This analytical framework is based initially upon the work of Henri Lefebvre, and identifies three categories of analysis: spatial practice, representations of space and space of representation. In this respect the thesis introduces a form of spatial methodology to the discipline. The thesis argues that these categories provide a more flexible model for analysis of complex interactions in the international arena than extant approaches in the discipline can provide, by permitting examination of political activity at the level of agency. The spatial categories are applied to two transnational phenomena of relevance to the discipline: the international political practices of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and their use of information and communications technologies (ICTs). A survey of the use of ICTs by Amnesty International, Christian Aid, Friends of the Earth, the Institute for Journalism in Transition and Oxfam is undertaken. The thesis then analyses the use of ICTs as a political tool by these organizations, using spatial theories as a framework. The application of spatial theories as a methodological approach aims to extend the discursive parameters of the discipline by introducing a less gendered, more flexible analytical model, appropriate to research into complex political practices.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis argues that conventional interpretations of political space in the discipline of International Relations (IR) misrepresent the nature and form of contemporary political practice. The thesis is theory-led and aims to develop new approaches to theorising complex political practices, an area in which the discipline is currently weak. Recent work in IR has challenged the emphasis on territorial integrity which underpins the spatial logic of the discipline (see: Agnew 1999; Murphy 1996; Walker 1993; Youngs 1996b). These scholars have argued that the equation of sovereign territory with political space provides an inadequate foundation for analysis of the multifarious transnational activities which now characterise international politics.

The thesis examines these and related arguments to develop spatial theories relevant to contemporary practice in the international system. These spatial theories are then applied to a study of the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs)<sup>1</sup> by five international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in order to illustrate how a non-territorial spatial logic can provide a foundation for analysis of trans-border political activity. While some literature on the limitations of the spatial logic of the discipline exists (see: Walker 1993; Youngs 1996b), the thesis represents the first attempt to *apply* spatial theories to specific transnational practices and, in doing so, illustrates how they can be used as an alternative mechanism for interpreting political practices.

The thesis is not, therefore, primarily about NGOs or ICTs: both of these play an important part in the thesis but are ultimately of secondary significance. The primary aim of the thesis is to take some complex and rather abstract literatures on spatiality which may be unfamiliar to many IR scholars and to extract key features from these which may be applied to analysis of contemporary political behaviours. The thesis thus builds upon criticisms of the limitations of the spatial discourse of IR. It does this by developing a spatial methodology which can be used to assess political change both contemporaneously and from the level of agency. In developing this methodology, the thesis contributes to the development of gender-aware theorising in IR, by demonstrating

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<sup>1</sup> Other terms in common use, such as 'telematics', 'network technologies' and 'computer-mediated communication' (CMC) may be used in the thesis and, unless otherwise stated, refer to these same characteristics of convergence between computing and telecommunications technologies.

the significant contribution feminist theorists have made to the development of spatial awareness in the discipline. In addition, attempting to develop an agency-level approach may permit analysis of political actions as significant in their own right, an approach which existing state-oriented categories are unable to provide.

The term 'discourse' is used frequently in the thesis and requires clarification. Doty provides a concise definition:

"A discourse may refer to a specific group of texts, but it also refers to the social practices to which those texts are linked. ... The discursive practices that construct a discourse include writing, speaking, and practices often considered to be "behavioural" which are embedded in institutions. Discourses generally work toward closure, creating the effect of an inside that is clearly distinguishable from the outside" (1996: 126).

Youngs suggests that the fundamental aim of the growing body of work on discourse in IR "is to stress a different way of thinking about theory, one which disrupts ideas about separateness from practice and explores how theory and practice are intrinsically and problematically linked" (1996a: 58). As a foundation for analysis of international politics, the discourse of IR displays at least two significant limitations. Firstly, the discourse is gendered, in that 'man' and masculine characteristics are assumed to be representative of political legitimacy (see: Enloe 1989; Yuval-Davis 1997a). Secondly, the discourse of IR situates the state at the heart of its understandings of political activity. Consequently, analysis of political practice, and understandings of concepts such as agency and power, are filtered through a state-centric interpretative framework, a reflection of institutional politics where women are frequently poorly represented. It is the impact these, and other, discursive limitations place on the ability to interpret political activity within IR, and particularly the actions of non-state actors, which is central to the claims of the thesis.

Chapter One addresses the nature of spatial theorising both in IR and in other disciplines. It highlights ways in which discursive constructs impose conceptual boundaries and examines the work of spatial theorists who have challenged the ways academic disciplines legitimise some spaces over others. The chapter explores spatial theorising in general, looking at the historical assumptions on space which have underpinned much academic analysis. The chapter also examines the specific forms of spatial boundaries in IR and, in particular, explores in detail the ways the territorial imagination has 'framed' the ways international political practices can be understood

and interpreted. The chapter also addresses the increasing links between social and political practices, wrought in part by both ICTs and NGOs, and argues that the spatial frameworks which we have used in the past can no longer be applied to interactions in the international arena.

The chapter draws upon the work of feminist theorists to illustrate how the dichotomous logic of much academic endeavour severely curtails opportunities to address complex practices and also marginalizes a wide range of largely non-institutional actors and practices. Feminist theories are valuable in exposing entrenched conceptions of the legitimacy of some political spaces and practices within the discourse of IR. Chapter One, therefore, suggests that feminist theories on discursive boundaries in the analysis of political practices are a useful element in the examination of spatial ontologies. It is suggested feminists and other scholars have contributed to processes of 're-spatialization' of the discipline's discourse in recent years and that IR is no longer so deeply entrenched in a state-centric conceptualisation of politics. It is argued, however, that we have not yet found ways to evade the neo/Realist hegemony of thought which still positions the state as the key actor in international politics and provides a 'top-down' mode of analysis.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, a spatial methodology which may permit analysis from the level of agency is developed using Lefebvre's theories.<sup>3</sup> This methodology is applied to NGO use of ICTs in later chapters of the thesis.<sup>4</sup>

Chapter Two examines the nature of ICTs in order to highlight the characteristics which render them qualitatively different from other forms of communication. The chapter first outlines the widely accepted historiography of the development of ICTs, detailing the reported origins of network technologies.<sup>5</sup> This overview illustrates how these

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to suggest that there is a lack of *awareness* about the activities of non-state actors in the discipline. Many scholars working within the discipline focus on individuals, groups and non-state organizations. The argument is, rather, that the dominant discourse of the discipline views the activities of such actors through a state-centric lens.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that Lefebvre used these theories as a means of re-conceptualising space but did not apply them as a methodological approach. I have drawn upon Lefebvre's theories and applied them as categories of analysis in an attempt to develop more 'spatially-aware' approaches to analysis in IR.

<sup>4</sup> The use of this spatial methodology is designed to overcome disciplinary boundaries which posit some actors and institutions as more *significant* in political practice than others. Its application to NGO use of ICTs is intended to illustrate how it can be used to assess complex political processes. It is not, however, intended to provide empirical evidence on the uses made of these technologies by NGOs.

<sup>5</sup> 'ICTs' is used as a generic term and refers to forms of communication where computers play a key role in the exchange and transfer of information. ICTs have two significant



technologies have evolved through both public and private sectors, and with the influence of state, non-state and economic actors. In this respect, ICTs have always transcended the conceptual state/non-state political boundaries which have underpinned notions of political space in IR. As use of these technologies becomes more widespread, and as the exchange of information across national boundaries more frequent, the need to develop conceptual frameworks which can accommodate these forms of interaction becomes evident.

The chapter therefore also provides a brief analysis of the nature of this form of communication, identifying the specific differences between this and other media. In particular, the chapter considers the ways information is exchanged using ICTs. As ICTs allow a greater degree of control over access to and exchange of information by comparison to other media, this phenomena is suggested to represent an 's/elective' form of communication. It is this 's/elective' feature which is potentially of greatest significance to analysts of ICTs, as the sender-receiver relationship between communicators is more dynamic, and therefore possibly more user-centred, than other communications media permit. Chapter Two goes on to analyse the changing nature of audience construction, arguing that, with the use of this form of technology, audiences potentially have much greater control over which information they wish to access and exchange. Again, this would appear to demonstrate the need for new theoretical approaches which have the flexibility to interpret multi-layered, multi-dimensional interactions.

Chapter Two concludes by looking at the use of ICTs by economic actors to illustrate how these technologies can facilitate interactions which, though having geographical referents, transcend national boundaries, both conceptually and in practice. The use of this example highlights how ICTs play a crucial function in the diffuse and multi-layered activities which characterise global economic interaction. Although the use of ICTs by economic actors does not directly parallel their use in political practice, this example illustrates how the use of these technologies by one group of actors can affect the operations of many others. In this sense, this example illustrates how the state-centric

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characteristics which render their use of relevance to discussion of political space. Firstly, ICTs make use of digital technologies which convert different kinds of data into binary form, allowing it to be transferred between computers. Secondly, networking systems allow links between computers across virtually any geographical area, rendering scale and proximity of reduced consequence.

nature of the discourse of IR limits its ability to interpret activities which are not directed towards states, or related to state interests as prioritised in the discipline.

Chapter Three provides a typology of NGOs. These actors are considered in the thesis for three main reasons. Firstly, their political remit relates specifically to transnational activity. Although these actors may operate within the borders of individual states on specific regional projects, their conceptions of political space are not usually confined to state-centric definitions. Secondly, the ways NGOs operate as social and political intermediaries between states and citizens, as well as political actors in their own right, provides a useful framework for assessing how political practices, at agency as well as institutional levels, may be affected by the use of ICTs. Thirdly, the NGOs who responded to the survey are not specifically or exclusively 'political' actors, but operate upon a premise of socio-political interpretation. None of these organizations seek to influence only 'high' political actors, but aim to change practices across the political spectrum. In this sense, the NGOs considered already view politics in a less hierarchical fashion than the discipline of IR implies. In each of these three areas, spatial theories may provide a more appropriate form of analysis. Linking the existing operations of NGOs with their use of ICTs can illustrate how the fairly rigid spatial mapping of IR is undermined by trans-national political communication.

In order to provide some indications on how ICTs are being used in the political sphere, five international NGOs are surveyed. These organizations, Amnesty International, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Friends of the Earth and the Institute for Journalism in Transition (IJT) all gave information on some of the uses made of new communications technologies, both intra- and extra-organizationally. In addition, material available via their websites has been examined. The analysis is based on a survey conducted by email questionnaire in October 1997, completed by senior staff responsible for communications policy at each of the organizations. Follow-up questions were sent out in April 1998. Copies of both questionnaires are given at Appendices (I) and (II). Literature provided in their online publicity was also used to assess how the organizations promote their interests via ICTs.

Chapter Four describes the responses to the NGO survey, using information gathered in this and previous chapters. This description recognises the constraints on the use of

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ICTs by NGOs, as well as the potential benefits of this form of communication in relation to changing political practices. This section thus examines both the possible advantages of and limitations of the use of ICTs in the political arena. In particular, this chapter focuses on questions of access to communications technologies and, by extension, to political processes. Highlighted within this chapter are forms of marginalization based on gender and on economic disadvantage, as these are particularly pertinent to the ways NGOs make use of communications technologies. A brief examination of the gendered relations of technology is undertaken and the issue of fe/male access to ICTs is considered. The marginalization of some groups and individuals who do not have the economic or educational advantages required to use ICTs is also examined. In addressing the issue of marginalization, it again becomes evident that the dichotomous logic of IR is inadequate for the task of addressing to complex issues relating to use of ICTs, as the various means of access and the multiplicity of issues involved in using network technologies effectively are too complicated to reside within a simple inclusion/exclusion dualism.

Chapter Five draws together the links established between social, economic and political effects of the development and use of ICTs analysed in the previous chapters. These are then applied to concepts of political space in this penultimate chapter. The thesis maintains the position that the separation of social, economic and political factors, as the spatial assumptions of IR dictate, is liable to produce research which underplays the relevance of some actors and practices. Although the disciplinary basis of this research is that of IR, it is argued that greater attention to social variables is necessary for realistic analysis of the impact of ICTs on *political* practices.

For this reason, Chapter Five examines the problems which have faced all disciplines in seeking to analyse a form of communication which materially and metaphorically transcends the majority of conceptual boundaries mapped in academia. This examination illustrates the problems associated with creating artificial divisions between social and political (as well as economic and cultural) spheres. This also places the analysis of NGO use of ICTs in the context of broader debates on both the nature of theorising about ICTs and the problems inherent in inter-disciplinary research into an inherently trans-disciplinary technology.

In order to overcome these difficulties, Chapter Five applies Lefebvre's spatial categories to the responses to the survey. The categories - spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation<sup>6</sup> - provide an opportunity to address political change as it happens and also avoids the institutional framework which many theoretical approaches in IR adopt. Thus these categories allow analysis of changes to the material environment, the nature of political discourse and the opportunities for political action or dissent. They are applied here to show how these changes can be observed.<sup>7</sup> The chapter takes each category in turn and describes how the survey responses can be considered under these headings.

Throughout the thesis, the notion that ICTs transcend divisions between public and private realms, between social and political spheres and between academic disciplines forms an undercurrent. Chapter Six interprets the application of spatial theories undertaken in the previous chapter, in an attempt to identify any illustrative examples of changes to NGO practice which this may have identified. Responses to the survey suggest that NGOs are aiming to use ICTs to expand and intensify some of their current forms of political practice. The need to expand or reformulate the ways in which political space is articulated, both as a physical and a conceptual construct, is therefore shown to be relevant to the use of ICTs in the international arena.

Chapter Six ultimately examines the strengths and weaknesses of the methodological approach used in the thesis. All methodological choices involve some form of compromise and inevitably lead to omission of salient features. It is suggested that one of the main strengths of the application of spatial theories to NGO use of ICTs is the potential to analyse political activity from the 'bottom-up', from the level of agency rather than of structure. That is, the norm in IR, given its discursive limitations, is to interpret the actions of non-state actors through state-centric perceptions of their relevance. Spatial theories provide a mechanism for analysing political activity in context, rather than through the discipline's pre-determined criteria.

One weakness in the use of spatial theories is shown to lie in the categorisation of spatial issues to facilitate analysis. Distinctions made between spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation undermine the values of such theories in

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<sup>6</sup> These concepts are explored in detail in Chapter One.

<sup>7</sup> As noted in Footnote 3, the examples used here are for illustrative purposes only.

illustrating the relationality of these categories. That is, to make a distinction between spatial categories contradicts the concept of space as relational and fluid.

The thesis' Conclusion suggests that the use of spatial theories can make a valuable contribution to the study of international relations. In particular, the potential to analyse political activity from the level of agency through the use of such theories could provide a new dimension to the discipline by broadening available interpretative frameworks. In addition, the opportunity to analyse the use of communications technologies contemporaneously is a valuable feature of the approach used in the thesis. The Conclusion notes, however, that the application of spatial theories to a specific form of activity in the international arena undertaken in the thesis represents a first attempt to introduce this form of analysis to the discipline. As such, whilst the approach taken here has some merits, this form of theorising requires further investigation and further studies would be necessary to provide information for comparative analysis.

Overall, the thesis demonstrates that the use of spatial theories is a fruitful area of research in IR, and suggests that some of the perceived failings of the discipline in analysing the activities of non-state actors may be addressed through their application. The thesis develops a theoretical approach can be applied to some of the key concerns of IR, but which avoids the state-centricity of conventional approaches in the discipline. Application of spatial theories to NGO use of ICTs provides a mechanism for gaining insights into evolving political practices from the level of agency and, as such, represents a new development in analytical approaches in IR.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**SPACE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**Introduction**

An understanding of the multiple constructions of space is crucial to the analysis of political activity. The concept of spatiality may briefly be defined as a metaphoric characterisation of spheres of political action, opportunity structures and agendas, which have the effect of creating boundaries analogous to those of 'real' physical spaces. These spheres are socially-constructed and can impose limits upon, and provide opportunities for, political engagement. That is, the ways that the spaces of politics are *imagined* has a crucial impact on the ways that political activity is understood and interpreted. Effectively, academic disciplines identify the terrain upon which their subject-matter should be plotted, and scholars negotiate this terrain to produce their analyses. The spatial ontologies upon which these terrains are based map out the most significant features of each discipline, emphasising some actors, issues and practices over others.<sup>8</sup>

This chapter analyses how spatial ontologies have been constructed in IR and examines how these affect its approaches to the study of politics. This investigation provides a backdrop to later chapters which substantiate the claim that ICTs affect the spaces perceived as 'political', and are consequently of relevance to the study of international affairs. The chapter also examines how and why the spatial assumptions which inform the vocabulary of IR limit its effectiveness in describing politics between state and non-state actors. The thesis later analyses the use of ICTs by NGO to provide a qualitative case study, to which the spatial theories outlined in this chapter can be applied. The application of these spatial theories illustrates how spatial assumptions permeate the discipline, by showing how this form of communication provides a mechanism for political engagement which does not necessarily take the state as its central focus. The use of spatial theories invokes less embedded spatial perspectives, highlighting the inadequacy of current perceptions of space in IR for interpreting change in international political practices.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The terminology used here deliberately reflects that applied geographical landscapes, as boundaries and borders are concepts central to analysis in IR. The thesis focuses, however, upon the *conceptual* terrain of the discipline and not upon national boundaries.

<sup>9</sup> The concept of 'theory' applied in the thesis can be understood to incorporate both hermeneutic and descriptive dimensions. The development of theoretical approaches intrinsically links the interpretative capabilities of a theory with its relevance to practice. In this respect, therefore, it is possible and necessary for the thesis to presuppose that theories inevitably couple analytical frameworks with the political practices they are used to interpret.

It is important to recognise that particular types of space have traditionally been privileged in social and political theory, and it is necessary to examine and to analyse constraints this may have imposed on meanings and definitions of social and political practices. Hidden or implicit discursive boundaries frame academic endeavour and the boundaries they invoke are particularly significant in the study of world politics; the complexities of global relations evidently operate at myriad levels and it is argued in this chapter that many of the boundaries mapped in IR result in restrictions on both research and interpretation in the discipline.

In seeking to incorporate analysis of spatial discourse into research agendas, it has initially been necessary to 'add space in' or, as Rose exhorts, to persuade academics to "think spatially" (1993: 141). One group of scholars has been 'thinking spatially' for much longer than others and their work is frequently overlooked in spatial analyses. This chapter notes the contribution of this group - feminist scholars - and highlights the contribution they have made to 're-spatializing' some of the core concepts in this and other disciplines. Having examined some of the most significant works on spatial theories, the chapter then extracts key features from the work of Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja by identifying three headings which can supply an alternative approach to political analysis. These headings are applied in later chapters to analysis of NGO use of ICTs and ultimately provide a 'spatial methodology' which allows interpretation of political activity from a standpoint outside of the dominant discourse. The following section, however, examines the nature of space in the discourse of IR, illustrating how spatial assumptions frame the ways in which political boundaries are understood and interpreted in the discipline.

### IR & Spatiality

Perhaps of all the social sciences, IR has the most potent, and the least examined, conceptualisations of space. Walker has argued that modern theories of IR depend upon a discourse "that systematically reifies a historically specific spatial ontology" (1993: 5).<sup>10</sup> The ways in which the discourse of IR affirms the spatial logic of territoriality is

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<sup>10</sup> This theme has been pursued by many scholars in IR, most recently Agnew who argues that "political power is overwhelmingly associated with the quintessential modern state: it is envisioned as pooled up in equivalent units of territorial sovereignty ... that exercise power through their territories and vie with one another to acquire more power beyond their current boundaries" (1999: 499).

examined in this section. It is argued that assumptions of territorial primacy permeate the discourse of IR, and that these form the basis of the discipline's conceptions of political legitimacy. As a consequence, states, as the 'possessors' of territory, are seen as the defining political authority. Despite the many challenges to this perspective both from both within and without the discipline, the state continues to assume the hegemonic site of political power within the discourse of IR.

Research and analysis in IR have consistently, albeit generally implicitly, assumed space to be two-dimensional, pre-supposing fixed and visible sites of politics which can be mapped accordingly. Increasingly, scholars in the social sciences suggest that there is a need to move beyond simplified, two-dimensional interpretations of space. For Rose, spaces should be seen to be "multi-dimensional, shifting and contingent" and that "spaces that would be mutually exclusive if charted on a two-dimensional map - centre and margin, inside and outside - are occupied simultaneously" (1993: 140). Massey makes a similar point when emphasising social constructions of space:

"Such a way of conceptualising the spatial ... inherently implies the existence in the lived world of a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces: cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in relations of paradox or antagonism" (1994: 3).

This type of spatial understanding, the idea that space may be interpreted in different ways, and moreover may have different meanings in different circumstances for different participants, has profound implications for the discourse of IR.

Although the range of scholarly endeavour in IR is wide and diffuse, the hegemony of the state in its discourse informs analysis at all levels of research. The reification of territory as the legitimate centre of politics has its roots in state practice, of course. As Murphy notes:

"the spatial organization of society in west-central Europe after the Peace of Westphalia fostered a world view in which discrete, quasi-independent territorial units were seen as the principle building blocks for social and political life" (1996: 82).

Murphy also points out, however, that the dominant theories of IR which treat the world's states as taken-for-granted analytical units provide an inadequate framework for interpretation of the complexities of contemporary politics (ibid.: 103). In response to the apparent shortcomings of this state-centric discourse (see: Linklater 1998; Alexander B Murphy 1996; Walker 1993), approaches which explore non-state spaces



of politics have gained currency in recent years, and critical reflections on the ways embedded spatial conceptions shape meanings and definitions in the discipline are evolving. Many of these analyses of non-state spaces have been undertaken by feminist theorists, seeking to explore how gender relations are structured both in practice and discursively (see: Enloe 1989, 1993; Pettman 1996; Zalewski & Enloe 1995).<sup>11</sup> Other scholars have challenged the state-centrism of IR by examining how power relations operate at multiple levels, suggesting that states and other actors are involved in mutually causative relations (see: Linklater 1998; Rosenau 1997).

Agnew and Corbridge have claimed that the geographical division of the world into mutually exclusive territorial states has served to define the field of study in IR by providing clear demarcations of space which represent centres of power (1995: 78). Drainville has suggested that the analytical tradition of Realism, which he refers to as the "governing paradigm of international relations", is founded on the refusal of space, in viewing states as "vectors of power moving in an unconstraining and untheorised milieu" (1995: 53). These comments indicate that conceptions of space in IR simultaneously represent a signature in the discipline, shaping the terrain of analysis, and an analytical given, which assumes that diverse political practices can be analysed through a single, largely unacknowledged, spatial formulation.

The common contention of spatial theorists in IR is that there is a conceptual rigidity to the mapping of political spaces in the discipline which is at odds with lived socio-political practices. For example, membership of a non-governmental organization or regional dependence on income generated by a multinational corporation may map the social and political parameters of individual or collective existence more accurately than state-national structures do. Perceptions of space in IR have been informed by a geopolitical tradition which "has drawn our attention to boundaries and spaces carved out by states to enhance their security and command over natural resources" (Tickner 1992: 112). IR is not, as a consequence, devoid of a sense of space as intrinsic to international politics. The 'space-system' applied (generally subconsciously) in IR, however, views state boundaries as defining two different types of politics, one being internal politics, the other international relations. Within this conceptualisation, there is little room for meaningful analysis of the socio-political practices which many NGOs, individuals and social movements engage in.

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<sup>11</sup> The contribution of feminist theorists in this area is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Discursive closure, or fixing limits on appropriate subject matter in academic disciplines, is an aid to coherence but is unhelpful in producing satisfactory analysis of complex material.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, assuming that states have devised, created and maintained the spaces of politics is problematic in two other important respects. Firstly, it situates the territorial state as essentially a fixed variable in political analysis, which suggests that it is a critical component of analysis in all instances. Situating the state as a discursive constant in this respect confers upon it the role of hegemon in defining the roles and significance of other actors. As has already been noted, the concept of space as relational refutes the state's hegemonic status in this respect. Secondly, and as a consequence of the assumption of state primacy, political interactions and activities are understood primarily by how they affect, or appear to affect, state practices. Activities which do not appear to influence states in some way have a fairly low profile in the study of international politics. This reification of the state is increasingly highlighted as an ontological limitation in IR (see: Linklater 1998; Agnew 1999) and the need to expand discursive parameters to allow non-state political practices to be interpreted as influential *in their own right* is apparent.

To challenge the centrality of the state in spatial conceptions is not to deny the significance of territory or location, nor to dispute the importance of state practices in many aspects of global politics. However, it is evident that the ways space is represented in the discourse of IR do not adequately reflect contemporary political practices, either of non-state actors or of states themselves. The argument of many spatial theorists is that the territorial imagination, though often inadvertently applied, is a spatialized imagination which imposes conceptual boundaries.

Territory does matter, of course. Warring factions have always sought to seize territory, or more specifically resources, from opponents, and the mapping of states as geographical entities is important in situating borders, resources, people, and so on. In addition, an important element of political identity relates to national identity (see:

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<sup>12</sup> All academic analysis requires some form of discursive closure. What are called into question here are the particular boundaries which mainstream IR has established as the discursive core for analysis of international politics. The spatial theories applied in the thesis also represent a form of discursive closure but it is argued that these allow a more flexible approach to analysis of complex political interactions.

McDowell & Sharp 1997; Yuval-Davis 1996). Territory remains an important element of interpretation in IR, but its primacy as the central pillar of IR's spatial conceptions is subject to challenge. In particular, its representational abstraction, the state, provides an inadequate context for analysis of other spaces of international affairs, *inter alia*, spaces of migration, of economic growth and decline, of communication, of access to or denial of political choice and so on. Overwhelming attention has been paid to state governments at the expense of other political actors (Murphy 1996: 103) and it is in an attempt to produce a more realistic reflection of contemporary political practices that spatial theorists have challenged the state-centric bias.

There has been a general acknowledgement among scholars in IR in recent years that the range and scope of political activity extends far beyond the real and metaphoric confines of the territorial state. Impressions of space as multi-dimensional which have gained credence in social theory, however, require some translation to the political. Increased communications, in terms of both the growth of telecommunications infrastructures and of individual interactions, the transnationalization or globalization of some aspects of commercial activity, the expansion of the NGO sector and the development of some co-operative international political regimes, among other factors, suggest that it is no longer possible, if it ever were, to maintain an analytical distinction between social and political spheres.

Rosow points out that mainstream IR now accepts that social groups, non-state actors, and subaltern classes may influence and be affected by political processes (1994: 1). He suggests, however, that rather than leading to questioning of the basic assumptions of IR, much analysis which includes new players continues to "undergird traditional Realist intellectual structures" (*ibid.*: 2). These structures require and recreate the international, and are based on "theories that themselves constitute the reality they explain" (*ibid.*: 5). For Walker a series of already existing categories and expectations about the position of the state form the foundations for analysis in IR (1990: 165). This has been the basis of the discourse of IR: its Realist underpinnings mean that the many critiques of its approach are always articulated by reference *to* it. That is, criticisms of

Realism have to explain their relevance by disproving the 'common sense' of its interpretations.<sup>13</sup>

Walker notes that the state system constructed in early modern Europe has dominated both recent experience and collective memory (1995: 308). In this regard, spatial theorists in IR are challenging culturally embedded understandings of political space, as well as disciplinary assumptions. Thus:

"Modern accounts of the political are still framed spatially: here and there, inside and outside, First World and Third World. It is within that framing that modern conceptions of temporality, of progressive history and development, have found their political purchase. Without that framing, it is difficult to make sense of politics at all" (Walker 1993: 314).

This framing of politics reflects the geographical imagination which, Rose argues, assumes that space can always be known and mapped, that it is infinitely knowable and is devoid of impenetrable obscure areas (1993: 70). Hence, even in disciplines which are essentially 'non-geographic', such as politics, sociology and economics, a geographical understanding of space as a given has generally been implicitly assumed. This is particularly evident in IR, where neo/Realist assumptions of a potential science, that is a knowable 'reality', of the international are fostered.<sup>14</sup>

Post-positivist debates and interdisciplinary research have extended the range of IR and challenged this reductionist tendency. Smith identified critical theory, feminism, historical sociology and postmodernism as the central pillars of contemporary challenges to the Realist assumptions which underpin the paradigmatic structure of the discipline (1995). Despite the diverse nature and complexity of these literatures, he suggests that they have in common "a rejection of the simplistic philosophy of science that underlines most positivist scholarship in international theory" (ibid.: 26). The positivist foundations of IR reflected in its spatial ontology, most notably through the promotion of the state as an independent unit operating in a system of comparable entities, objectify the spaces of politics, and emphasise a division from social phenomena. Post-positivist approaches

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<sup>13</sup> The problem of perpetually re-iterating Realist ideas has lessened in recent years as many scholars simply avoid engaging with the Realist vs non-Realist dichotomy (see: Elstain 1995a)

<sup>14</sup> Attempts to make the social sciences more 'scientific' by using empirical methods have been widely criticised, particularly by feminist scholars (see: Harding 1986, 1987). Most disciplines have acknowledged feminist criticisms and have striven to acknowledge the subjectivity inherent in academic analysis; although some work in IR has been undertaken in this area (again largely by feminists - see Zalewski & Enloe 1995), the discipline has lagged behind others in accepting the multi-dimensionality of the political realm.

have frequently, though often implicitly, challenged the spatial ontologies of IR, by viewing the social as intrinsically linked to the political, and by denying the validity of the state as the defining site of political engagement.

Thus a re-spatializing of the discourse of IR has been in progress for several years, although the language of spatial theory has not always been applied. Much contemporary theory in IR has served to erode the concept of the state as central actor, and in particular has challenged the notion of the state as the embodiment of political community (see: Linklater 1998; Rodgers 1999). Given dynamic changes to the nature of international affairs as a field of study, and related adjustments to the ontological assumptions and epistemological approaches of IR, Walker's suggestion that "we should not be surprised if we are forced to revise our understanding of the relationships between universality and particularity, Them and Us, or space and time" (1990: 23) now seems prescient.

Two ways of conceptualising space are necessary for forging discursive links across social and political spheres. Firstly, using the global, regional, provincial, local and so on, in conjunction with awareness of non-elite agendas, as primary frames of reference can provide a more effective analytical approach for interpreting the real impact of activities and the choices made by actors (see: Rosenau 1997). In this sense, location is acknowledged and contextualized, to provide a specific focus frequently absent in state-centric analysis. Secondly, constructions of social and political identity and activity can be understood in respect of situation, rather than through state-centred hierarchies. That is, states do not create exclusive political identities, nor is all political activity by non-state actors directed towards states, or in relation to states. Indeed, many of the actions of non-state actors are undertaken outside of the traditionally-understood hierarchies of political analysis, and their effects are consequently underplayed or under-analysed in IR. In these respects, the blunt instrument of 'state' categories misses genuinely important activities, causes and consequences, which the discipline seeks to explain and understand.

The separation of states in the discourse of IR, both from the domestic realm and from each other, means that the social and the political are not viewed as cognate in any meaningful way. Youngs has suggested that this is problematic as the complexities of mapping the interactions between political, economic and cultural spaces, and the

networks that help to define them, are growing all the time (1996: 2). The complex mapping of contemporary social and political activities has been particularly problematic for IR, which relies heavily on binary categories to convey meaning. Social and political practices, in and of themselves, may provide the spatial frameworks for analysis, rather than any locational or state-spatial context. This is particularly pertinent in relation to analysis of new communications technologies, which, as later chapters explore in detail, are not easily constrained by state boundaries and are implicated in the development of new forms of power relations.

### Space & Social Theory

In recent years, scholars from a range of disciplines have suggested that conceptions of space based on geographical determinants, that is as contained and containable, are analytically limiting. Suggestions that space should be seen as multi-dimensional, variable, contingent and constructed by human behaviour are now fairly commonplace among social science theorists.<sup>15</sup> Spatial arrangements as diverse as the global economy, perceptions of the human body, and the built environments of modern cities are now relatively familiar areas of research. Analysis of such arrangements also often reveals how perceptions of space define epistemological parameters and consequently determine how key concepts such as power, agency and authority are understood.

Relating this literature to IR, it becomes evident that state-centric spatial ontologies limit the potential to analyse metaphoric spaces within the discipline. That is, the positioning of the state as the signifier of political legitimacy constructs ontological boundaries which influence perceptions of both what political activity is, and how it can be analysed. In essence, state-centric ontologies limit the ways in which political participation can be understood, and consequently how concepts such as power, agency and authority can be analysed.

Framing conceptions of *political* space are more general, historically-embedded interpretations of space. Probably the most widespread understanding of space emanates from the dominant Western image of geographic space; that is, the spaces related to and determined by physical characteristics, such as landscape and terrain. This cartographic imagination perceives space to be measurable and finite. Space in this conception is

understood to be complete, pre-existing and potentially quantifiable, essentially mathematical (Lefebvre 1991: 1).

Soja describes how, in the late nineteenth century, the three major realms of socialist, idealist and empiricist thought came to view the placing of phenomena in temporal sequence as more revealing than putting them side by side in spatial configuration (1996: 168). Thus the established interpretative framework for human and social development placed time - associated with dynamic characteristics like evolution, modernisation and change - at the foreground. Space became what Soja describes as an 'extra-social environment', or a stage upon which history takes place (see: *ibid.*).

The norm, therefore, has been to view time as the dominant partner in the time-space relationship. In discursive practices, the standard, generally subconscious, approach, is to define a space (a territory, region, 'the international', and so on) and to observe 'history happen' upon or within it. Soja refers to this privileging of time over space as the "alluring logic of historicism" (1989: 14), where "an already made geography sets the stage, while the wilful making of history dictates the action and the storyline" (*ibid.*).

Thus, for Agnew and Corbridge, "space is regarded as an unchanging 'essence' that constantly produces the same effects" (1995: xi). This taken-for-granted impression of space is increasingly subject to question and the concept of socially-constructed spaces, which are understood to be multifaceted and relational, has been developed. Socially-constructed spaces have multiple meanings and are interpreted differently by different actors. Consequently, it is not sufficient to imagine a particular space as a stage on which history may happen; political activity is neither linear nor constant, and the priorities and concerns of actors vary according to circumstance. Although many scholars are now highlighting the limitations of conventional interpretations of political space for investigating contemporary practices, developing spatial frameworks appropriate to analysis of the nuances of contemporary politics has, to date, proven problematic.

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<sup>15</sup> See: Dear & Flusty (1999), Harvey (1990), Lefebvre (1991), Massey (1994, 1995), Rose (1993), Soja (1989, 1995, 1996), Walker (1990, 1991, 1993) and Watson & Gibson (Eds) (1995).

For Grosz, in common with many other theorists, "it has ... become increasingly clear that the organization and management of space ... have very serious political, social and cultural impact" (1995: 54). Thus, for many contemporary scholars in the social sciences, the organization of space is interpreted not only through physical characteristics such as landscape and resources, but on social relations across, through and effectively beyond geographical space. For Luke, the "concrete reality of place, expressed in terms of a socio-cultural context of spatial location, gradually is being displaced by a tangible imaginary of flow" (1995: 100). This does not dispute the significance of place, but does challenge the notion that place alone can provide the spatial parameters for analysis. The location and physical construction of a factory, for example, embody a form of physical space. The factory, however, is a productive unit, which employs and grades people, operates within an economic system, participates in trade, is subject to legislation from domestic and international institutions, and so on. The relations between these various phenomena contribute to the construction of social, economic, cultural and political spaces which have only a limited relationship with the geographical location of the factory - the place where it is situated (see: Massey 1995).

Consequently, the 'flow' mentioned by Luke is characterised by a comprehension of space as created in and through human activity, rather than specifically linked to locale. Space in this conception is not given but constructed, and is not pre-determined but relational and variable. For Massey:

"To say space is relational means both that it should not be conceptualised as some absolute (that is to say, pre-existing) dimension and also that it is actually constructed out of, is a product of, the relations between social phenomena" (ibid.: 1).

These perceptions, which identify space as dynamic and mutable, contradict the geographical imagination which implies space to be both static and finite. In assuming that spatial relations incorporate human activity as well as geographical considerations,<sup>16</sup> space can be understood to be intrinsically connected to social relations, involved in multi-dimensional associations of both cause and effect.

As McDowell and Sharp note, "Physical and social boundaries reinforce each other and spatial relations act to socialise people into the acceptance of [gendered] power relations - they reinforce power, privilege and oppression" (1997: 3). Social relations are not,



therefore, simply the product of interpersonal interaction, but are produced and reproduced across myriad levels of human activity. In light of this, in applying conceptions of the social to images of space it is possible for Massey to argue that:

"(T)he 'spatial' ... can be seen as constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales, from the global reach of finance and telecommunications, through the geography of the tentacles of national political power, to the social relations within the town, the settlement and the workplace" (Massey 1994: 5)

The challenge of these conceptions of space to territorial interpretations obviously has important resonance for IR, as they acknowledge the significance of place but also highlight metaphoric and material boundaries which structure social relations. The implications of this multi-dimensional approach are significant for IR, as the sphere of activity which may now impinge upon the political - social, economic and cultural activity - need to be interpreted within the discipline. At present, the fairly limited landscape of the political plotted in IR restricts its potential to pursue multi-dimensional interpretations of politics effectively. The following sections examine conceptions of space in social theory in more detail, building towards the identification of a 'spatial methodology' which may better reflect the multi-dimensionality of contemporary political practices.

### Developments in Spatial Interpretation

Lefebvre published a wide-ranging critique of spatial assumptions in historical and social theories and introduced new conceptions of the relevance of space for social analysis (1991, 1996). Most academic disciplines have now been subject to some revision of their often hidden spatial assumptions, with many scholars arguing for more inclusive, interdisciplinary approaches to understandings of space.<sup>17</sup> One argument frequently put forward by these scholars is that although spatial metaphors are used frequently in everyday language, their impact on our ways of thinking is rarely acknowledged.

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<sup>16</sup> As noted above, the geographical imagination of IR relates national borders to legitimate political spaces.

<sup>17</sup> In the social sciences, theorists such as Featherstone *et al* (1995), Lash and Urry (1994), Bird *et al* (1993), Smith and Katz (1993) and latterly IR, IPE and political theorists such as Agnew and Corbridge (1995), Alexander B Murphy (1996), Rosow *et al* (1994), Walker (1990, 1991, 1993) and Youngs (1996b) have argued for the inclusion of social interpretations of space in academic discourse.

For Agnew, representations of space in everyday life are so familiar as to be largely unquestioned (1994: 87), and Soja suggests that we need to think differently about the meanings and significance of space and related concepts which comprise the inherent spatiality of human life: place, location, territory, environment, region and so on (1996: 1). Terms such as in/out, national/global and so on, while apparently innocuous, invoke perceptions of inclusion, exclusion and situation which delineate debate and discussion (see: Walker 1993).<sup>18</sup> For Agnew and Corbridge, although these terms are usually implicit rather than overtly contemplated, they are “deeply symbolic of how we define what is right and wrong and whom we identify with and against” (1995: 79). Thus, discursive representations of space “define and limit ... conceptions of social and political discourse” (ibid.) Given the growth in migration and international trade, the use of telecommunications systems and links between the ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ worlds, it is evident that new ways of conceiving of space which permit analysis of these multiple constructions and interpretations, and which avoid the constraints of pre-defined roles, are required.

Despite the general accord among scholars of spatiality about the need to incorporate space into academic discourse and social and political praxis, however, there has been little consensus on how this might best be achieved. Three reasons for the absence of a clear spatial methodology are evident. Firstly, the interdisciplinary nature of spatial theorising transcends and challenges the ontological assumptions of individual fields of study. Indeed Lefebvre suggested that spatiality, along with historicity and sociality, is too important to be confined within the narrow specialisations of academia (cited in Soja 1996: 6). In this respect, spatial theorising challenges the disciplinary distinctions upon which academic exercise is premised. Secondly, the notion of socially-constructed space precludes the possibility of a common scheme of categorisation. The phrases most frequently arising in spatial theory, which posit space as relational, as fluid and as contingent, negate the possibility of a single theoretical approach. Thirdly, with particular reference to concepts of political space, this area of study is relatively new and there are few, if any, theoretical givens. Although work on spatiality in the broader social sciences is now relatively extensive, there has been little *application* of spatial

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<sup>18</sup> Walker has been discussing the spatial constraints of IR since the early 1990s. His work is referred to frequently in the thesis because, although some of his ideas are now over a decade old, many are still relevant to the study of political space in IR. Despite many changes in the international system in the past decade, the discipline of IR has not yet established a clear

theories to political practices to date, although there has been much discussion of the limited understandings of space displayed in IR (see: Alexander B Murphy 1996; Walker 1993; Youngs 1996b).

It is possible, however, to identify spatial theories which can provide a framework for analysis of political activity. The prevalent strands of spatial theory most pertinent to developing new approaches to political analysis are those which provide an interpretative framework for examining links across social and political spheres, an aspect of analysis on which IR is currently weak. It is this dimension of spatial theory, which emphasises the impact of social practices on political activity, which is applied to the use of ICTs by NGOs in later chapters. The following section outlines the contribution of gender theorists to the development of spatial theories, with particular reference to the dualistic discourse of political analysis, illustrating how oppositional categories of interpretation have already been called into question.

### Feminists and Space

An interest in gender relations and related power dynamics has led feminist theorists towards analysis of the ways notions of legitimacy can be imbued within the discourse and practices of politics. In addressing the ways the 'meanings' of politics are conveyed, feminists have identified some of the most powerful but often unquestioned constructions of political discourse. Feminist thinking on political analysis thus has two strong related strands.<sup>19</sup> The first of these suggests that there is a gendered division between the 'public' political arena and 'private' domestic spaces. This division situates politics as an activity related to the public sphere and renders the domestic arena a- or non-political. As a consequence, women can be conceived to be non-political actors unless active in the public arena.<sup>20</sup>

The second key argument, which is related to this public/private division, focuses on the separation of the social realm from the political in analysis of international affairs, an issue which, as noted above, has proven to be a limitation in IR. As a consequence of

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sense of the multi-dimensionality of political practices and it is in critique of this shortcoming that Walker's work is most effective.

<sup>19</sup> Feminist scholarship is a diverse and complex area: Zalewski has argued, for example, that there is not a feminist view, only the interpretations of feminists (1995). Claims regarding 'feminist thinking and 'feminist scholarship' made here identify trends rather than doctrines.

*this* separation, the areas of politics in which many women are engaged are underexplored in political analysis. For example, though few women are represented in the higher echelons of 'official' political institutions, many are involved in forms of activism (human rights, community, environmental and so on) which the public/private division does not recognise. In addition, many of the social and political activities which affect women are not conceived within the dominant discourse of IR to belong within the political realm. For these reasons, feminist scholars have sought to 're-spatialize' analysis of international politics by challenging assumptions about authority, agency and political legitimacy which underpin the discipline of IR.

In general in political theory<sup>21</sup> these issues are addressed from a perspective which views the state as pro-active or complicit in denying or disregarding the rights, responsibilities and needs of women. The state functions, in this vision, as an embodiment of patriarchal values, and consequently as a legitimate target for feminist critique. This is also true, of course, of feminist interpretations of the state in IR. The causal role of gender constructions is, though, frequently obscured by the masculinist terms of reference of the discipline. Feminist political theory can readily identify how and why a particular governmental decision affects the lives of individuals. That is, the material practices of governments have both a tangible presence and material effects. The hegemonic discourse of IR, however, reifies and frequently justifies the state as the primary site of political authority. The state effectively becomes, in this approach, a de-gendered space and a feminist perspective must first determine the relevance of gender to any analysis.

The privileging of the public over the private, presents two dimensions of gendered discourse, as the actions of women are frequently obscured by the emphasis placed on recorded, public activities in social and political theorising. Private spaces were historically contrived within patriarchal constructs as the domain of women for the convenience of a masculinist political structure, and have been manipulated over time according to governmental priorities. It is necessary to appreciate that domestic space is a workplace for women in many, perhaps most, instances, and is also, frequently, one focus of their social and political interests. The circumscription of the private realm, and the characterisation of non-public sites as devoid of political content, is manifestly

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<sup>20</sup> This form of public/private separation is based on the Aristotelean conceptualisation of public sphere politics, a profoundly masculine vision on political space.

<sup>21</sup> A distinction is made here between analysis of domestic and international politics, reflecting the distinction made in IR.

inappropriate. Domestic power relations, questions of economics, divisions of labour and so on, are not contained within the artificial distinction of private and public spaces, and there is an overspill from each and all of these issues which serves to shape and is shaped by these relations across multiple spaces.

The public spaces of politics emphasised in IR are also equated with historicity, in that events within them are visible and recorded, and are thus perceived to be essentially meaningful. Private spaces, by contrast, are devoid of such consequence. The marginalization of the private realm, and particularly the low profile of women on the landscape of political theory, has been well-documented.<sup>22</sup> This marginalization is compounded by the transitory nature of private-space existence; public political activities, which are recorded and re-visited for historical analysis, have a temporal resonance which private spaces lack.

IR is not simply constituted by the transference of discussion from the domestic to the international arena. In the translation of political discourse from the micro to the macro level, the state essentially becomes a self-contained unit, which forms the fundamental and hegemonic unit of analysis in IR:

“Relations between states are conventionally understood as the negation of community presumed to be possible within the sovereign state. Whether characterised as politics without centralised authority, as an international anarchy, or as a more or less mechanical (automatic rather than political) system, international relations is defined both by the presence of sovereign states as primary actors and by the absence of a sovereign power/authority governing the system itself” (Walker 1991: 454).

The entities which comprise the population of IR are states, not people. Conceptions of interdependence and relative power are consequently located in and through state practices, rather than in and through the lives of people, and societal constructions are subsumed within dominant-actor suppositions. These ‘top-down’ interpretations of politics obscure the reflexive relationship between states and individuals, and substantiate the claim of feminist scholars that ‘bottom-up’ forms of analysis are also required. In essence, the framing of international politics as a ‘top-down’ enterprise provides only one, fairly limited, approach to analysis of complex political practices.

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<sup>22</sup> See particularly Brown (1988), Bryson (1992), Butler & Scott (1992), Elshtain (1987, 1991), Peterson & Runyan (1993), Rinehart (1992), and Sunstein (1990).

In IR the state is envisioned to a large extent as removed from governmental processes. Discussion of, for example, foreign policy in IR often functions at a level of abstraction which inadequately reflects the real experiences of either governments or populations, creating a barrier separating individuals from political processes in the discipline. For feminist scholars, the hidden boundaries implicit in the discipline consequently constitute the primary location for critical examination. For example, concepts such as 'power', and notions thereof, have been widely analysed in 'traditional' feminist research. In these conceptions, power is seen to be based on interpersonal relations, specifically on the relations between women and men, and most particularly on the dominance of male over female. Such formulations are not necessarily inapplicable to IR:

"Although power may be experienced in individual terms, it also has a systemic quality about it. The actions of individual men have institutional, ideological and discursive backing" (McDowell & Pringle 1992: 10).

This systemic dimension of power is the area with which IR scholars are most familiar and definitions of power are invariably located at institutional level. Thus power in IR is concerned with military capabilities and/or economic strength and/or diplomatic strategies and/or many other of the political and strategic resources of states. Definitions of power in IR are manifold, varied and often vague. Consensus on a precise definition is probably neither necessary nor desirable, but it is fair to suggest that social relations frequently fall outside of IR's traditional interpretations of power. For feminist theorists, attempts to break the state-centric mould of IR are hindered by this basic issue; feminists see power as related to social relations where mainstream IR views power as an institutional attribute.

In challenging key assumptions of the discipline in this fashion, feminists have sought to extend some non-traditional, de-masculinized ways of interpreting international politics. Feminists therefore focus not only upon women as a category, but also upon gendered constructions of IR theory and practice. As Jensen notes, analysis of the social construction of gender relations compels us to think about the ways in which all social relations are constructed (cited Whitworth 1994/1997: 56). For feminists, this approach offers a greater insight into the nature of contemporary international affairs, where many of the key players, such as NGOs and MNCs, are evidently socio-political, rather than exclusively political, actors.

Feminists have adopted a variety of approaches in their attempts to re-spatialize IR. There has been some work concentrated on case studies, for example, adapting one of the characteristic approaches of social science research in IR to feminist priorities (see, for example: *Alternatives*, Winter 1993; Rodgers 1998a). These have focused on examination of how states and international institutions treat women in particular circumstances, or seek to include women in analyses where they have traditionally been absent or invisible, for example through analysis of gendered patterns of labour or migration. This method illustrates how women are hidden in the conventional discourse of IR, simply by showing what research that *does* include them looks like. There have also been some reinterpretations of conventional histories by feminist scholars, examining masculinist bias in the historiography of IR, particularly in texts seen as classical in IR (see: Elshtain 1987, 1991; Tickner 1992). This work, highlighting the gender bias in IR literature, broadens the base of the discipline and gives scholars wishing to develop research in this area some foundational structure to develop upon.

Despite these moves to create alternative interpretations of international politics, the ontologies of IR reflect and sustain an artificial impression of political practices. Youngs has argued that only rudimentary attention has been paid to questions of spatiality in IR and that there is a “danger of a *gender-neutral sense of spatiality* persisting even in new critical work in this area” (1996b: 2, emphasis in original). Given this danger, it is necessary to analyse gender and space in IR as intrinsically linked, rather than to create or sustain a synthetic division between them. Beyond re-imagining the constituents of politics, therefore, the key contribution of feminist scholars to debates on spatiality has been to highlight and explore the dichotomous logic which underpins all academic disciplines but which has been particularly influential in IR.

It is in this area that the feminist contribution to developing the discourse of IR has been widely overlooked. The feminist critique of public/private divisions and of the dualistic approach which this reflects (see below) is based on a significant body of work which seeks to produce multi-dimensional interpretations of political practice. While many spatial theorists have worked towards a similar goal, even the newest work in this area has underplayed the contribution of feminist scholars.

The “dichotomous dualism” (Massey 1994: 256) which is premised upon either/or interpretations of social and political activity has been subject to widespread criticism by

feminist theorists.<sup>23</sup> The production of oppositional categories, which validate one subject position by negating another, is still characteristic of much scholarship in IR. For example, the discipline's approach to ideology and the choice offered between realist and idealist perspectives illustrates the dichotomous approach which feminists have criticised. For Elshtain, this attitude pits idealists (those who are not realists) v. realists (those who are) (1995a: 265), and allows little room for seeing politics as a more complex picture. The categories of Realist and idealist are discrete and mutually exclusive, with the subject position of one defined by its opposition to the other. The lexicon of IR is riddled with examples of this dualistic approach. It is enshrined in the order/anarchy conceptions of the international system, in structure/agency debates and in notions of inside/outside associated with sovereign statehood (see: Walker 1993). In these respects, although the distinction made between the 'social' and the 'political' has been widely challenged (see: Linklater 1998; Smith *et al* 1997; Walker 1993), it remains a discursive undercurrent in IR.

For Rose, "dominant subject position(s) see difference only in relation to themselves" (1993: 137). Consequently challenges to their authority are rendered incoherent if they seek to apply a non-dualistic approach. Feminist theorists have generally proposed relational and inclusive, rather than oppositional and exclusive, approaches to the study of contemporary politics. In failing to provide a dualistic alternative to the dominant model, however, feminist and gender theory provides no tangible response to the discipline's existing terms, *within* those terms. To some extent, the call for context inherent in feminist theory paradoxically consolidates this multiple reinforcement of dualisms. In not accepting a direct opposition between, for example, good and bad, but always seeking examination of context, this mode of theorising always and inevitably resides outside of the discursive norms.

One of the most prominent areas of feminist analysis of the dualistic approach has been focused on the relationship between time and space, as understood in political analysis. A repeated observation of scholars working in this area is that space has long been subsumed to the significance of time in social theory. For Youngs, this has particularly profound effects in political theory, where much of the justification for specific material and discursive practices has been based on a perceived legitimacy gained over time (see:

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<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Massey (1994, 1995), Bryson (1992), Coole (1988), Elshtain (1995a), Marshall (1994) and Youngs (1996b).



1996b). Where time has been endowed with characteristic dynamism and has thus been associated with progress and development, perceptions of space as a given have rendered it fixed and static by comparison.

This interpretation of the time-space relation has contributed to the gendering of political discourse, as the dynamic realm of public office is associated with the male-dominated sphere of politics. Massey suggests that "this pervasive and influential view of the relationship between space and time sees them as dichotomous and as dichotomous in a particular way. It is a formulation in which time is the privileged signifier in a distinction of the type A/not-A" (1994: 6). The dominance of historicity which prevails in Western conceptions of politics has been subject to repeated challenges from feminist theorists, who argue that such interpretations are based on gendered and exclusionary premises. The temporal, associated with progress and development and the masculine field of public politics, dominates political analysis. The spatial realm is consequently marginalized and analysis of its significance has, until recently, been very limited.

Another point of note is that the creation of conceptual boundaries imbues some issues with legitimacy at the expense of others. Thus Massey notes that "all attempts to institute horizons, to establish boundaries, to secure identity of places, ... can ... be seen as *attempts to stabilise the meanings of particular envelopes of space-time*" (ibid.: 5, emphasis in original). That is, the privileging of time over space constitutes a form of control over the perceived legitimacy of some actors and issues. The way that this has been articulated in IR has been through the establishment of the neo/Realist hegemony, which has established the dominance of the state as the signifier of political validity, thus underplaying the role of non-state actors. Equally significantly, though, this hegemony means that a particular type of history - that based around public, 'official', state-related politics - is privileged. Thus the state is legitimised as the defining site of political practice, and historical analysis of politics in IR is based largely on interpretations or records of state activity.

These dualistic relationships - of space and time, public and private, inclusion and exclusion and so on - depend upon a superior versus inferior ranking (Walker 1993; Youngs 1996b). For feminist theorists the conceptualisation of space as physical and static is a reflection and continuation of masculine subjectivities which depend upon presence and absence to convey meaning. So, though time, space and matter are seen as

inextricably connected in the history and philosophy of Western science (Soja 1989: 79), time is consistently perceived as dominant. Or, as Massey suggests: "Over and over again, time is defined by such things as change, movement, history, dynamism; while space, rather lamely by comparison, is simply the absence of these things" (Massey 1994: 256). Grosz argues that reconceptualization of gender relations entails reconceptualization of representations of space and time because "the ways in which space has been historically conceived have always functioned to contain women or to obliterate them" (1995: 55).

The division of domestic from international politics, and the exclusions this affirms and validates, prefaces consideration of the links which can be made between social and political activity. The formation of political communities has, in IR, tended to be understood as an internal issue, relevant to domestic politics, and therefore largely outside of the discipline's remit. That is, understandings of politics which are not linked to the international agendas of states have been limited in the discipline. For Walker:

"Most prevailing ideologies can - and do - take established ways of speaking about statist forms of political community for granted. By contrast, conventional languages that refer to relations between states are conspicuously barren. This is largely because the character of international relations has been understood as a negation of statist forms of political community, as relations rather than politics, as anarchy rather than community" (1993: 164).

The primacy given to the state as political space provides a metaphoric demarcation in the discourse of IR, and situates concepts of affiliation as an essentially unrelated dimension of political engagement. This renders analysis of multi-faceted relations between states and non-state actors difficult, as terms such as agency and co-operation are constrained by state-centric interpretations.

Given the apparent convergence of many social and political phenomena, which both transcend geographical boundaries and contribute to the construction of new metaphoric spaces (see: Peterson 1996b), it is necessary to explore how IR may address the nature of political, or more correctly socio-political, activities which do not fall either within given spatial parameters, or within its pre-existing definitions of what constitutes the political. Spatial ontologies which view definitions of the political as neither necessarily based on state agendas, nor as defined in and through these, thus form a significant challenge to the authority of existing norms in IR.

Looking at the challenges posed by feminists, it is possible to see a number of discursive limitations which prevail in the discipline of IR, based largely on its patterns of inclusion and exclusion. The first, as noted earlier, is that the state is situated as the definitional space of political authority in the discipline, which renders effective analysis of other sites and spaces problematic. The second is that masculinist constructions of meaning are seen as inherent to definitions of political legitimacy in IR, which positions gender as a subordinate category of analysis. The third is seen in the combination of these two elements; political power, endowed and pursued through 'official' channels, is associated with the public spaces emphasised in the discourse of IR. Consequently, non-state actors and non-official activities are under-represented and underexplored in analysis of international affairs.

The fourth discursive limitation lies in the tendency to emphasise the historical over the spatial in the discipline, which means that the state has come to embody conceptions of political community. As a result, transborder, transnational, regional or globally-defined organizations and communities which may be transient or lack cohesion are analysed within the context of a state-oriented interpretative framework which is ill-suited to the task (see: Rodgers 1999). The evident impact of transnational actors and activities on patterns of political engagement consequently requires an analytical schema better able to accommodate the complexities of contemporary politics. The following section outlines one such approach by adapting the work of Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja and bell hooks<sup>24</sup> to provide a framework for spatial analysis of political activity.

### Spatial Ontologies

Lefebvre has elucidated some key notions about space, arguing that the ways we perceive space are neither accidental nor incidental. Analysing Lefebvre's work, Kofman and Lebas suggest that "the spatialization of society and history are ideological; (it) belongs to the realm of conceived and not lived space" (see: Lefebvre 1996: 48). That is, our conceptions of space both define and situate agents and actions conceived to be of significance, to the exclusion of others.

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<sup>24</sup> bell hooks spells her name without capital letters. Note that word processing packages do not always recognise this and may insist on capitalising the first letter where hooks' name starts a sentence.

Spatial theories offer a multi-dimensional analytical framework which the circumscriptive discourse of IR is unable to provide. Some of hooks' and Soja's insights on spatiality are briefly sketched in this section to illustrate how concepts of the spatial can be adapted to analysis of political practices. These concepts are applied in relation to some of the notions on space produced by Lefebvre, which are then used to provide a basis for analysis of NGO use of ICTs in the following chapters.

A useful starting point for spatial analysis is Lefebvre's suggestion that "Space is nothing but the inscription of time in the world, spaces are the realizations, inscriptions in the simultaneity of the external world of a series of times" (1996: 16). Space can thus be understood as the way(s) the world is organized, and the way(s) in which these forms of organization are understood and interpreted. Using Lefebvre's ideas on inscriptions of time, it is possible to argue that the world *as it has been* is not necessarily the world *as it is now*. In this respect, the historical inscriptions upon which understanding is based are supplemented, reaffirmed, erased and altered over time, adjusting the foundations upon which understanding depends. Consequently, both the assumptions of what knowledge is, and how it can be interpreted, change over time. It is possible to see, therefore, why it is necessary for the discourse of IR to change to reflect the nature of contemporary political practices. Thus the reification of the state *may* have been appropriate in the past<sup>25</sup> but can no longer be justified.

Lefebvre outlined a tripartite conceptualisation of space: spatial practice, representations of space and the spaces of representation, which offer an alternative framework for analysis (see: *ibid.*; Soja 1989, 1996).<sup>26</sup> These three elements of spatial process are closely inter-related: though distinguishable from each other in form, the nature of each critically influences the others. Though Lefebvre's categories do not form an unassailable foundation for spatial analysis, they do provide a loose structure through which some of the more complex characteristics of contemporary politics can be interrogated.

Spatial practice relates to the ways in which societies are organized, both by the material environment, and through the social behaviours of people within them. Soja suggests

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<sup>25</sup> Many scholars, including most spatial theorists, would, of course, dispute this.

<sup>26</sup> Note that the author of this thesis, not Lefebvre, has identified these categories as a framework for analysis. Lefebvre used these headings simply as alternative ways of viewing space but did not apply them as a methodological approach.

that “Spatial practice, as the process of producing the material form of social spatiality, is (thus) presented as both medium and outcome of human activity” (ibid.: 66). That is, spatial practice encompasses the relations between people, their environment, their modes of interaction, and the nature of the work, leisure, social and political opportunities and so on available to them. These are, for Lefebvre, the *perceived* spaces of human existence. As a consequence, spatial practices differ from society to society, and to greater or lesser degree from person to person.

Representations of space relate to conceptualised spaces which, for Lefebvre, constitute control over knowledge, signs and codes. The ways societies represent space are articulated in dominant discourses and theories, through the lexicons of academic disciplines, through accepted codes of social behaviour and so on. Representations of space effectively define our perceptions of ourselves and the world(s) we inhabit. Consequently, for Lefebvre, representations of space are “the dominant space in any society” (cited Soja 1996: 67), and for Soja they constitute “a storehouse of epistemological power” (ibid.) For these reasons, representations of space are obviously an important tool of hegemony, authority and control and refer to the ontologies and epistemologies of academia, and to the structuring codes of social and political praxis. Representations of space define the accepted limits of social and political activity within societies, and are viewed by Lefebvre to be the *conceived* spaces of human existence.

Spaces of representation, on the other hand, equate most closely with concepts of agency and particularly with social practices of resistance, of struggle and of opposition to dominant values. The suggestion here is that spaces of representation are the *lived* spaces of human action, both distinct from the other two spaces and encompassing them (ibid.) In essence, individuals exist within and through spatial practice, and are constrained within representations of space. The social and political choices made in relation to these real and metaphoric demarcations constitute the spaces of representation of each individual. These lived spaces of representation function as “the terrain for a generation of “counterspaces”, spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized position” (ibid.: 68). Although struggles against power and authority are highlighted within interpretations of this aspect of social life, in many senses all social and political action involves negotiating individual spaces of representation.

Soja has used Lefebvre's tripartite structure as the foundation for his more recently developed theoretical approach to analysis of space in contemporary existence. Arguing that "the spatial dimension of our lives has never been of greater practical and political relevance than it is today" (ibid.: 1), Soja has produced a theoretical framework which both illuminates some of the key critiques of traditional spatial ontologies and extends Lefebvre's tripartite approach. In particular, he outlines how spatial theories can be used to challenge the dominance of the dualisms of social and political analysis discussed earlier in this chapter. He labels this approach as 'critical thirding' and proposes a theory where the original binary choice is subjected to a process of *restructuring* that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives (ibid.: 5). This approach challenges the historical bias in social and political analysis but does not attempt to deny the significance of the temporal dimensions of human existence.

Applying the idea of restructuring discursive parameters, Soja introduces the concepts of Firstspace, Secondspace and Thirdspace. Firstspace refers to the concrete materiality of spatial forms, on things which can be empirically mapped and measured. Secondspace relates to conceived ideas about space, to mental and cognitive representations of human spatiality. For Soja, these two spaces roughly coincide with Lefebvre's ideas on spatial practices and representations of space. Perhaps Soja's major contribution to debates on spatiality, though, is to illustrate how these categories reflect the binary logic of traditional discourses. Thus, Firstspace (effectively equivalent to spatial practices) represents the 'real' spaces of human existence and Secondspace the spaces 'imagined' in the dominant discourse.

Thus, with Thirdspace, Soja calls for "the creation of another mode of thinking about space that draws upon the material and mental spaces of the traditional dualism but extends well beyond them in scope, substance and meaning" (ibid.: 11). Thirdspace acknowledges the influence of material circumstance and the structuring influence of dominant codes of representation and practice. It also, however, suggests that there are other ways of operating within and analysing the shapes and structures of societies, which may produce more revealing insights into the nature of contemporary life than dualistic interpretations can offer.

Another scholar, bell hooks, has also made a significant contribution to debates on the nature of spatial politics. The aspect of her work most relevant to the arguments of this thesis lies in her discussions of choosing the margin as a site of resistance (1984, 1991). As a black, female, feminist scholar, hooks argues that it is possible to reside in both the centre and the margin, and to have an insight into and awareness of both. Thus hooks says of herself and others who lived in the community she grew up in: “We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both” (1984: preface). Both hooks and Soja emphasise that this alternative space - Thirdspace or the margin - is a site of radical politics and resistance. It is perhaps this area which has most relevance to the development of spatial theories in IR. If, as later chapters explore, access to ICTs has some impact on the discourse of politics, then it may be assumed that the methods of resistance to dominant political structures may also be affected.

The social and political activities of non-state and non-elite actors are often undertaken without specific reference to the dominant discourse, nor even necessarily to the material situation of individual actors. For example, membership of Amnesty International only rarely reflects the immediate environment of a political activist, and equally rarely do the agendas of the organization correlate with those of state agencies. In this sense, all non-state actors are situated at the margins of international politics as perceived in IR, though any of the activities they engage in reflect upon both their own spaces of politics and upon the dominant structures of political interpretation. In this respect, therefore, many non-state actors are acting from the margins of political theory and practice, but are aware of and informed about activities at the centre. Moreover, communications technologies play an increasingly important role in allowing non-state actors to occupy these spaces simultaneously.

The three literatures considered above are drawn together in the thesis in order to allow the author to develop a clear system for spatial interpretation. Soja’s ideas on the necessity of viewing spatial theorising as a restructuring rather than an outright rejection of traditional modes of analysis underpin the methodological approach of the thesis. Hooks’ claims on marginality are also taken into account, and the notion that the political activities of non-state actors represent a method of engagement inadequately understood by the dominant discourse of IR also inform the ways research into spatiality in the thesis is undertaken. It is the tripartite conceptualisation outlined by Lefebvre

which is used as the basis for interpretation of NGO use of ICTs in the remainder of the thesis, however. The notions of spatial practices, representations of space and of spaces of representation provide an alternative to the dominant discourse in IR by providing analytical criteria which can reflect changes in the political practices of non-state actors more effectively than existing approaches. It should therefore be possible to use this model to assess how each of these dimensions of space is affected by the presence or absence of networked communications technologies.

Moreover, these approaches to spatial interpretation offer an opportunity to produce analysis which does not rely on the dichotomous logic of most political theorising. Consequently, this model of analysis is inherently less prone to gender bias than more traditional approaches to political theory, as the range of actors and activities are viewed in the context not of the dominant discourse, but as players and influences in and of themselves. One aim of this thesis is to apply a theoretical approach which does not have gender bias inbuilt, by avoiding the dichotomous logic of traditional political analysis. The tripartite structure of Lefebvre offers one such approach and is applied forthwith. The value of this model will be assessed in the concluding chapters of the thesis, in light of the findings on NGO use of ICTs outlined in Chapters Four and Five.

### Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the spatial logic of IR and has argued that the hegemony of Realist thinking has had a critical impact on the structuring of space within the discourse of the discipline. This ontological foundation is pervasive in interpretation and analysis of politics in the discipline. Thus, despite the introduction of new actors and issues, these tend to be mapped against a pre-existing template. As a consequence, the spatial limits of politics remain largely intact in the discipline.

The spatial logic which underpins the discourse of IR has a significant impact on what may be perceived as politically legitimate in two significant ways. Firstly, the continuing focus on the public spaces of politics negates alternative interpretations of political constituency. That is, the pre-determined sites of political activity in the discipline provide the definitional frameworks of politics. Thus the priorities associated with states in the discipline are those considered to be related to 'true' politics. Secondly, an assumption that the spaces deemed private are non-political or politically



neutral is made in the discipline. The maintenance of the division between public and private spaces has been shown to be not only gendered but also analytically limiting.

The discursive distinction between the political and the social in IR has been argued to be too simplistic to adequately address the complexities of contemporary political practices, where public and private spaces frequently overlap. A critique of the inherently gendered nature of spatial ontologies in IR identifies the discursive practices which perpetuate principles of inclusion and exclusion. The dichotomous logic which underpins understanding of politics in the discipline has been analysed. This chapter has also suggested, however, that post-positivist schools of thought in the discipline have already had a significant impact on the spatial ontologies of IR, by challenging the centrality of the state as the site of political legitimacy and by promoting social concerns as valid points of reference in analysis of international affairs.

A framework for spatial analysis has been produced, drawing upon the works of Lefebvre, Soja and hooks. This model uses Lefebvre's tripartite conceptualisation of spatiality to provide a framework for analysis of NGO use of ICTs in the following chapters. The three dimensions of this approach, spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation are viewed as aspects of human existence which may be affected by the presence or absence of ICTs. Consequently, they provide a clear structure upon which examination of space in contemporary political practice may be examined.

The following chapter examines how ICTs differ from other modes of communication and suggests that these are a supplementary, not a substitute, form. It is argued that, in this respect ICTs extend the possibilities for political engagement available to individuals and social groups. The chapter outlines how ICTs provide the potential to transcend elite political agendas and engage in political activity which is not necessarily defined within the discourse of IR. The chapter also addresses how communication has generally been analysed within IR and examines how ICTs inherently challenge concepts of public/private distinctions of politics embedded in the discourse of the discipline.

## CHAPTER TWO COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### Introduction

The preceding chapter has outlined the theoretical basis of the thesis, detailing how spatial theories may provide a more effective, less gendered mode of interpretation than existing approaches in IR. Access to network technologies is becoming an increasingly important factor in social and political activity, with the presence or absence of this form of communication relevant to both the ways politics are organized, and to the opportunities for participation in political activity. Later chapters apply spatial theories to these complex practice in an attempt to find a means of assessing the impact of political change *as it occurs*.

This chapter moves away from emphasis on spatial theories towards an examination of some of the *practical* implications of the use of ICTs. This chapter therefore provides an overview of the development of networked communications systems, examining how the technologies evolved, how they function and how the forms of interaction they offer differ from other media. The analysis of ICTs undertaken in this chapter examines what they are, how they differ from previous forms of communication and why their development and growth are of particular relevance to the study of international affairs.

This chapter outlines the development of ICTs, giving a loose chronological history of the actors involved in their development. This brief history forms a backdrop to analysis of how ICTs differ from other forms of communication, particularly in the ways in which information may be obtained and exchanged through their use. In relation to this discussion, analysis of the nature of audience construction is undertaken, with the suggestion that concepts of audience are also disrupted by the use of ICTs. With the use of this form of technology, there is no fixed or finite, identifiable audience. Although something of a fiction, such a concept has been used in relation to analysis of broadcast media, but there are clear indications that ICTs are a diffusive technology to such a degree that conventional conceptions of audience require radical reworking. It is argued that ICTs are contributing to the development of information infrastructures which are not identifiable as public fora, but which neither reside in exclusively private spaces.

The final section of this chapter builds upon these discussions to examine the growth of the global economic system. This section highlights how influential ICTs have been in altering the nature of economic practices in recent years, and illustrates how this has affected the ways states and other actors approach economic interaction. Thus examination is made of the wide range of actors, activities and the multi-layering of social, economic and political practices which now constitute the global economy, and in which ICTs have played a crucial role. Although not directly comparable to processes of political engagement, the ways in which ICTs have affected economic practices provide a useful illustration of how influential this type of technology can be in challenging traditional interpretations of space in IR.

### Origins of ICTs

This section outlines the widely accepted history of ICTs, with a glossary provided to explain some of the terms employed.<sup>27</sup> Although the Internet exemplifies some of the uses which can be made of ICTs, it does not fully define the ways in which this type of communication can operate, nor identify the potential range of uses.<sup>28</sup> In order to appreciate how ICTs work, however, and in order to situate their use within a context of political agency, it is necessary to draw upon literature which discusses the origins of the Internet. This literature highlights how and why computer-mediated communication was developed, and how its use expanded beyond a limited community of scientists in the United States to encompass an estimated user-group of around one hundred and fifty million users at the end of 1998 (<http://www.c-i-a.com/>).<sup>29</sup>

Technological innovation is not isolated from social factors and the ways in which ICTs first diffused from state agencies into the social realm, and subsequently extended to a global stage, are relevant to their uses and applications today. As Dutton points out,

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<sup>27</sup> A number of accessible texts which provide further information on the technical aspects of the uses and applications of ICTs technologies outside of the remit of the thesis are available (Dutton *et al* 1996; Kahin & Keller (Eds) 1995).

<sup>28</sup> There are many large-scale, intranet systems, such as those used by international stock exchanges in use. Many organizations make use of small-scale systems which facilitate internal communications for employees only. Neither of these forms of intranet system need necessarily be linked to the global network of networks which is now commonly dubbed the Internet. It should be noted that ICTs and the Internet are not synonymous, with ICTs covering a wider range of functions.

<sup>29</sup> Given the way data is routed via servers, it is extremely difficult to estimate how many people are actually using ICTs, or have access to them, at any given point. Current predictions suggest that there will be around three hundred million Internet users by the end of the year 2000 (*ibid.*)

users shape the design and impacts of technological change (1996: 7). As a consequence, ICTs are as much a social as a technological development.<sup>30</sup> The overview below demonstrates that, despite heavy governmental investment in developing convergent communication and information technologies, most notably in the US, state agencies did not have a monopoly on the design and direction network systems have taken.<sup>31</sup> This illustrates clearly how a broad range of actors have been involved in the development and use of ICTs since their origins. In this sense, this form of communication has always transcended public/private distinctions, or imagined political boundaries, with no single group, whether military or political, private or public sector, having a monopoly on its development and use.

According to most accounts, the potential for communication between computers was first realised by the United States Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA, now DARPA) in the 1960s. The aim at this stage was, it is often suggested, to produce a computer system which could resist nuclear attack. No single computer would act as host to vital information; any networked machine could supply and retrieve data, so destruction of one part of the system could not disrupt the function of the remainder. The idea was simple: a network of computers to and through which information could be routed would mean that the removal of any of these would result in the automatic re-routing of data.

From this basic idea, the now-familiar model of networked computers with no single central host evolved. This received wisdom on the motives behind the development of ICTs is not without its detractors. Lipson and Gayton argue that ARPA's work required a national security rationale to justify research spending (1998: 3), thus establishing the official line on the context of the agency's operations. Kitchin argues that the desire

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<sup>30</sup> There is some dispute among scholars regarding precise dates in the development of particular aspects of ICTs. This can be attributed partly to secrecy surrounding the origins of some aspects of ICTs in military and defence research, and partly to the fact that ICTs evolved through a series of actors and institutions, rather than from a single source. This section does not produce a chronology but an overview. The dates given, therefore, are occasionally uncorroborated, though it is hoped that this avoids, rather than indicates, inaccuracy. Similar overviews with slight variations on dates are given in Slevin (2000) and Walch (1999).

<sup>31</sup> The analysis undertaken in here reflects the widely-accepted view that American scientists played a leading role in developing Internet technologies. There is a growing revisionist school which argues that the contributory role of European scientists has been underplayed in most accounts (see: Wyatt, forthcoming). Given the scarcity of published material on this matter at present, however, the overview given largely reflects accounts which view American input as predominant.

to foster interagency collaboration was another key objective for scientists (1998: 29), an idea which implies that researchers were acting with relative autonomy once funding had been granted. Whether by design or default, however, the result was an inherently decentralized communications technology which could be used to establish direct and indirect links between individuals and institutions.

Kitchin dates the first remote connection between computers to 1940 (ibid.: 28), and ICTs subsequently evolved against a background of public and private sector collaboration, with a symbiotic partnership of government research and trade interests in operation. Bell Laboratories, through its parent company AT&T, had a government-enforced monopoly in telecommunications, and during this period effectively operated as the US national laboratory for research in the field (Castells 1996: 59). In 1956, Bell, in return for its monopoly, was required to make details of its technological discoveries available in the public domain. At the same time, a number of universities, such as Harvard, Stanford and Berkeley, and also US national weapons laboratories, were working on government funded programmes which led to significant advances in telecommunications design and development (ibid.) Thus, although one apparent aim of networking was to produce a secure system for information exchange, there was a significant degree of sharing of technological information and research findings among official research agencies involved in its development.

The first computer network, dubbed ARPANET, went on-line in 1969, and was available for the use of research scientists working with or for US defence agencies. At this point the network model still operated as an effectively closed computer community; random access was available to all users, but the community of users was highly restricted. Technological advances in electronics and communications fields made during the preceding decades, however, had broad effects, and were experienced in two significant ways. Firstly, a computer culture which was not linked to commercial or state interests was developing and, secondly, other mainstream actors were keen to make use of ICTs. As a consequence, ICTs developed through a combination of interests, based in both public and private realms, and through the interests of both individuals and government.

The modem which is now used on personal computers for Internet access was invented in 1978 by two Chicago students looking for a way of swapping computer programmes

without having to travel (Castells 1996: 353). These students developed a computer protocol which allowed computers to transfer files directly, without going through any form of centralised host. They also established the spirit of anarchy which later came to characterise the Internet by diffusing this technology without charge to anyone interested in making use of it. Computer networks excluded from ARPANET were now able to make use of similar technology, and were coming close to developing compatibility with the larger, 'legitimate' network.

There were also some parallel and related developments taking place. Bell had developed Unix, an operating system enabling access from computer to computer in 1969, though this technology was under-utilised for almost a decade. In 1979, another group of US students created a modified version of the Unix protocol which allowed computer links over ordinary telephone lines, which at that time were wire cables operating via analogue exchanges. In 1983, research funded by DARPA, this time at Berkeley, led to the development of TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol), the language which computers connected to networks use. TCP/IP provides the common standard for communication between different computer systems (Dutton *et al* 1996: 392), allowing the exchange of data between computers of differing capacities and software.

The form of ICTs originally envisaged by the US government were intended to serve bureaucratic needs such as faster and more direct communication between departments. Those with access to ICTs, however, also used them for social purposes, such as contacting friends and forming discussion groups. The introduction of TCP/IP made their use easier, quicker, and therefore cheaper. Audience potential was also increased, as people outside 'official' systems were able to use the technologies from home, and use of this form of communication began to diffuse.

In 1983, ARPANET was separated into two networks, one retaining that name and being designated for scientific purposes, the other named MILNET and used for military communications. Several other networks were created in the early 1980s, most notably by the US National Science Foundation (NSF). NSFNET and CSNET, both for use by scientists, and BITNET, for non-science scholars, were created by 1983. The increasing numbers of users, and their applications of the available technologies, led to the development of the electronic mail, file transfer and remote login facilities which are

now standard features of network computing. Applying the TCP/IP protocol, all of the new networks linked in with ARPANET, eventually mutating into the system now known as the Internet, which is effectively a vast number of intersecting networks. Despite advances in network technologies, and although there is now a multi-protocol system, TCP/IP protocols are still used for all Internet networks.

Another significant technological advance came in the form of Hypertext Transport Protocol (http), developed in 1992 at the CERN laboratories in Switzerland. This uses the language now current on the World-Wide Web (WWW), known as hypertext. This allows the creation of web-pages by users and provides the links between online documents. One further important feature of ICTs technology is the device known as packet switching. This allows 'packets' of binarised data to be routed by flexible computer-based switches, reaching their destination in the form in which they were sent (ibid.)

ICTs can be operated via analogue or digital telephone lines, or via satellite. Thus, although many modem-fitted computers are linked to telephone lines and are therefore static, wireless technologies are also effective. Consequently, laptop computers can also make use of combined information and communications technologies, and it is not necessary to have access to a telephone point to link into networks. The type of line to which a computer is linked, or whether use is made of wireless (that is, satellite) connections makes a difference only to the speed of information transfer, and does not prevent the use of ICTs (see: Hogan 1997).

This brief overview of the development of ICTs provides background information on how the technologies involved in this new form of communication evolved, and illustrates the conjunction of inter-agency and non-institutional activity in its development. In order to assess the role of ICTs in changing social and political practices, however, it is also necessary to analyse how and why the type of communication ICTs offers differ from other media. ICTs do not, for example, simply provide more advanced versions of letter-writing, broadcasting or data exchange facilities. There are a number of features which are unique to this type of technology, and which are potentially its most important features in terms of social and political change. The following section outlines some of the most salient features of ICTs in relation to communicative interaction. In some senses, ICTs are a mechanism for both

interpersonal and broadcast communications, and the technical capabilities which facilitate these forms of interaction and data transmission are detailed below.

### Features of ICTs

Historically, developments in communications technologies have taken two forms, either to increase the amount of information transmitted or to increase the number of possible recipients. The convergence of computing and telecommunications technologies in ICTs conflates these capabilities, simultaneously permitting the transmission of potentially infinite quantities of information to potentially global audiences.<sup>32</sup> That is, ICTs have a capacity to deliver vast amounts of information to widely dispersed audiences, using complex networks and data-exchange mechanisms unavailable through other media.

Another feature of ICTs relates to the types of communication which they permit. Communications theorists have distinguished three types of interaction in which humans engage: 'face-to-face', 'mediated interaction' and 'mediated quasi-interaction' (Thompson 1994). 'Face-to-face' interaction is premised on the shared presence of participants, where the spoken word and physical signifiers - 'body language' - aid the transmission and reception of information. 'Mediated interaction' is of the type characterised by the use of telephones, letter-writing and so on, where a technical medium is used to convey information to a party not sharing the same spatio-temporal frame of reference. The third form of communication, 'mediated quasi-interaction' is also dependent upon a time-space differential between communicating parties, but refers to the monological flow of information from sender to receiver. This form is exemplified by mass communication media, such as newspapers, radio and television broadcasting. The spatio-temporal framework for this form of communication is largely determined by the sender; programmes are scheduled according to broadcasters' priorities, newspapers are published daily or weekly, and so on.

ICTs differ from all of these modes of communication in three important ways. Firstly, unlike other communications technologies, communication through ICTs can be both mono- and dia-logical in character. Monological through the use, for example, of WWW home pages which do not receive user-responses. Here, users select information

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<sup>32</sup> Many scholars are sceptical about the globalizing tendencies of ICTs, arguing that their spread mirrors the interests of already powerful actors (see, for example Lyon 1997, McChesney 1997b). The potential to reach global audiences is noted here simply because the *technical* barriers to this are now minimal.



about a specific institution, company, product etc., but are unable to respond to it via ICTs.<sup>33</sup> ICTs can be dialogical through, for example, the use of one-to-one email contact. Here individuals may communicate electronically, person-to-person, in much the same way as traditional mail services operate. With email, however, documents and images can be transmitted to the receiver almost instantaneously. In terms of organizational efficiency, this provides a mechanism for acquiring rapid response to campaigns, promotions, sales and so on. This use of ICTs is therefore becoming increasingly common with both commercial and political organizations (see: Walch 1999).

Perhaps the most significant feature of ICTs in respect of political space, though, is their capacity for multi-logicality. This type of communication can be effected both through email and web-pages, and permits interaction between multiple users through 'newsgroups' (see: Glossary), mailing lists and discussion groups. Hence, interactive groups may form around a specific social or political issue and individuals can engage in debate and discussion with a wide range of actors in varying roles and locations.

Changes to the means of communication available to societies have specific effects on the nature and forms of interaction in and across space, and also upon the ways information is translated into knowledge. The unique 'logicality' of ICTs, and the resulting ways in which interest groups can be formed through their use, are therefore crucial to understanding its impact on political practices. It is clear, moreover, that conceptions of borders, both real or metaphoric, are affected by the existence of this type of technology.<sup>34</sup>

The construction of audiences is another important feature of ICTs relevant to this analysis.<sup>35</sup> ICT users can send, receive or participate in the production of information impeded by few physical barriers. Users of ICTs have a significant degree of choice in the use of facilities, and a wide range of options regarding receipt and exchange of

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<sup>33</sup> This type of one-way communication is rare with ICTs, as interactivity is one of their most compelling features. Interactive links have become the norm on the WWW but the possibility for one-way communication *does* exist.

<sup>34</sup> There is no intention to make value judgements about the merits of such change, only an acknowledgement, in common with almost every scholar working in this field, that ICTs are changing spatial relations in some ways.

<sup>35</sup> Note that the term 'audience' is used here to indicate a group which has access to the same information, rather than to suggest the defined and targeted body of recipients which analysis of broadcast media presupposes.

information. Taking email facilities as an example, users engage in one-to-one communication but can also receive information from organizations, social groups and individuals who can send duplicate messages to multiple audiences.<sup>36</sup>

ICTs can also be used as a supplement to, or substitute for, other forms of communication and there are numerous examples of the use of ICTs in bypassing restrictions on media output. Adams (1996) examines the use of Internet technologies by Tiannanmen Square protesters as early as 1988, while the case of Mexican Zapatista rebels has entered cyber-lore (see: Frederick 1997). Hedges (1996) highlights action taken in Serbia in December 1996 in Serbia, when the Yugoslav authorities ordered the closure of state-run radio, B-92, following mass protests in the city of Belgrade. Citizens used ICTs to maintain contact with people outside Serbia, sending details of events to individuals and institutions, particularly broadcasting organizations, in other countries. Increasingly sophisticated use of ICTs was made during the conflict in Kosovo in 1999.<sup>37</sup>

Another feature of ICTs of particular significance is their unique space-time relation. Frissen notes that with the use of information and communication technologies, time and space become less significant as organizational factors (1997: 124) and that time-spatial coherence as a value loses its importance (ibid.: 125). In this respect, it is possible to analyse the spatial and the temporal implications of ICTs independently and in conjunction. The geographical reach of the user of ICTs is potentially global, though disparities exist in the availability of appropriate or compatible technologies, both between some developed and developing countries, and within some technologically advanced states (see: Bailie & Winseck 1997; Lovelock 1996; Mowlana 1997; Winsbury 1994). Once access to ICTs is available, geographical boundaries and political demarcations, such as prohibitions on free speech, may have reduced impact. Certainly these technologies have the capacity both to transcend physical boundaries, and to challenge the effectiveness of legislative constraints on information exchange. In

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<sup>36</sup> The United Nations, for example, makes use of this facility through its Integrated Regional Information Network, transmitting bulletins to interested parties on its emergency and relief operations worldwide ([irinlist@dha.unon.org](mailto:irinlist@dha.unon.org)). Recipients register, free of charge, to receive such transmissions. Many other IGOs, as well as NGOs and governments now produce similar bulletins, allowing users of ICTs relatively easy access to previously restricted or non-existent information networks.

<sup>37</sup> Analysis of the use of ICTs in Bosnia can be found in Walch (1999) and in Kosovo at <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/ics/kosov.htm>

this sense, the scope of political activity facilitated by ICTs, through their potential to transcend both geographical and political boundaries, can contradict the dominant spaces of politics identified in the discourse of IR.

The temporal aspects of ICTs are generally related to the speed at which they operate. Information is transmitted almost instantaneously via ICTs, though the routing of data through a series of servers results in messages taking anything from several seconds to several hours to 'arrive' at its intended destination. ICTs invoke multiple temporal adjustments, acting as a medium for instant interaction, as effectively a storage mechanism for recent transmissions and as an archive for both contemporary and, increasingly, for historical documentation. Thus with ICTs the user has a range of options which influence temporal scales of interaction, differing from both face-to-face interaction where communicators must share the same spatio-temporal referents and from the sender-determined time scales of mass communications.

That the user of ICTs determines when to access or exchange information is another significant attribute of this type of technology, with important consequences for the development of new political practices. There exists an opportunity for non-state actors to participate in political activity, for example by lobbying government agencies, outside of official timescales. Thus many of the constraints on time which mitigate against the participation of non-state actors in politics may be of reduced significance where access to ICTs is available.<sup>38</sup>

ICTs cannot be viewed simply as a technology which compress time and space, comparable to other media forms, such as broadcasting. Given legislative and technical constraints, broadcasts come from a given place, at a specified time. ICTs have no comparable spatio-temporal boundaries and can be sent and received in accordance with the user's desires. The user of ICTs, of course, also has the capacity to be both sender *and* receiver. It is important, therefore, to acknowledge the disembeddedness of computer-mediated communications and to note that their impact on time-space relations can be both subjective and variable.

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<sup>38</sup> This facet of ICTs may also be relevant for some female users, as gender-based restrictions can make participation in elite political practices problematic for many.

To summarise, ICTs constitute a new dimension in communications, and are characterised by a range of unique features. Most significant among these features are the combination of information and communications technologies which they embody and the particular forms of communicative interaction they permit. The relationships between these features give users of ICTs increased scope in choosing and directing information and data, by comparison to other communications media. The range of interactive possibilities, mono-, dia- and multi-logical, are only available through ICTs, as are the ways in which users may access and receive information. Finally, given the ways in which users may access, retrieve and store data, ICTs invoke multiple spatio-temporal relations. There are many other features of ICTs which provide further justification for claims that they have profound implications for the future(s) of social interaction.<sup>39</sup>

All of the factors outlined above indicate that ICTs have the potential to challenge the distinction between public/private spaces in politics, and to contribute to the ongoing reconfigurations of political practices which, as noted in Chapter One, many scholars have already identified. Many theorists have discussed the merits of ICTs and have argued about their potential benefits and drawbacks (see: Stallabrass 1995; Loader (Ed) 1997, 1998). No term has been adopted to date, however, to describe the type of communication which ICTs offer. For this reason, it is suggested here that ICTs provide an 's/elective' form of communication.<sup>40</sup> This term is adopted to reflect the characteristics of ICTs most relevant to the thesis, notably the element of choice on the part of users. ICTs are 'elective' in that, as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, users opt in to most forms of interaction via ICTs. They are 'selective' because users also have a significant degree of control over the type of material they access and networks in which they participate. The relatively high level of control of users of ICTs have over the information communities within which they function, when compared to the use of information from other sources, is significant to its analysis. In these respects, users of ICTs are actively engaged with processes of information exchange, a factor which contributes to the significance of network communications technologies for the discipline of IR.

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<sup>39</sup> This research does not address these aspects of ICT use. The multiple dimensions of ICTs are noted, however, and the increasing overlaps between real and virtual worlds is acknowledged. See: Haraway (1997) and Plant (1997) offer insights on this overlay of different dimensions of human existence on and off line.

<sup>40</sup> This term encapsulates the element of choice inherent in network communications.

Potential audience constructions, enhanced means of data exchange and so on do not in and of themselves provide a mechanism for social or political change. There is no technological determinism inherent in the introduction of a new form of information exchange. Fischer points out that “mechanical properties do not predestine the development and employment of an innovation. Instead struggles and negotiations among interested parties shape that history” (1992: 16). Technologies do not exist outside of social context; commercial interests, regulatory systems, consumer demand and so on all influence the ways in which a particular technology may be adopted or applied (see: Cockburn & Ormrod 1993). The dynamic relationships between user and technology constitute an important element of spatial interpretation: how technologies are used evidently influences the opportunities which they afford. Access to information is thus a key element of political decision-making at all levels, and is a crucial feature of political change. For this reason the following section looks at some of the ways communications technologies have been understood and analysed within the discipline of IR.

### ICTs & International Relations

The means of communication available to elite political actors historically had a determinative effect on interpretations of political legitimacy. The modern state system was founded upon a model designed by political elites with which the populace, henceforth ‘citizens’, were encouraged to identify. The means by which states influenced citizens’ attachment to the unified nation were many and varied, with bureaucratisation, secularisation and the growth of capitalist economics characterising the edifice of the eighteenth and nineteenth century state, and consequently the nature of politics promoted by elites (Palti 1993). Governments encouraged attachment to these political entities through the use of national anthems and flags, systems of documentation and registration such as the recording of births deaths and marriages, and the promotion of histories specifically linked to the territorial state (see: Alter 1994; Colley 1992; Smith 1991; Waever et al 1993). Although Smith argues that states were unaware that they were inventing traditions (1991: 357), what is common to all of these aspects of nation-building is the transmission of the ideal of the territorial state as the focus of political identification.

The ideal of civic nationalism emanated from the state and was conveyed to, and conferred upon, citizens. Thus the public model of political agency was influenced and encouraged by the communication of this ideal through the mechanisms available contemporaneously, such as the printed word in books, pamphlets and newspapers, the spoken word in places such as charity- and Sunday-schools (Colley 1992: 226) and at meetings of friendly societies and trade groups (*ibid.*: 227; Curran & Seaton 1997). All of the historians cited here argue that the means of communication available to elite actors, and the uses they made of them, played a significant role in situating states as the embodiment of political legitimacy.

The means of communication available to states and citizens today have altered fundamentally, as have the range and scale of possible political interactions. Analysis of the nature of ICTs means that the state-centric hegemony upon which much of the discourse of IR is premised appear difficult to justify; as Janelle has noted, the space-adjusting effects of telecommunications technologies result in the formation of communities with less and less spatial cohesion (1991: 66). Thus a range of actors, practices and spaces have been introduced as elements of analysis in IR. Rosenau, for example, suggests that 'the person, the household, the community and the globe' now represent the people and spaces most relevant to analysis of international affairs (1997: 57). At the same time, multilateralism, regionalism, globalising and localising practices and other non-state focused activities have entered the discipline's vocabulary (see: Hettne 1997; Rosenau 1997; Strange 1997), although state-centric assumptions about how the effects of such phenomena can be understood frequently remain (see: Youngs 1996a).

There has, of course, been much debate among scholars about the transformative potential of network technologies. Of particular relevance to the study of international affairs is the way the effects of these technologies are now being felt across national borders, and across previously defined political categories. Rosell has suggested that:

"We are in the midst of a fundamental social and economic transformation whose extent and implications we only partially grasp. ... in jurisdictions around the world, the emergence of a global information society is accelerating the pace of change and overwhelming established methods of organising and governing that were developed for a world of more limited information flows and clearer boundaries" (1996: 675).

The foundations of IR are subject to profound challenges through the introduction of these technologies, as access to trans-state telecommunications services on the part of non-state actors, and increasing governmental involvement with this form of communication, disrupts both spatial ontologies and agent/structure assumptions in the discipline.

The spread of network technologies, seen by many as elemental to processes of globalization has profound implications both for the state in its domestic capacity, and in its external manifestations in international agency. On one hand, in many countries the domestic infrastructure of communications systems is no longer the sole responsibility of elected governments. This means that states have less control over who provides telecommunications systems, and over who uses them. At the same time, global regulation has become the responsibility of a conglomeration of actors, including governments, multilateral inter-governmental organizations and private sector actors.

The political system is therefore affected by the adjustments to traditional domestic relationships which these technologies prompt. Simultaneously, the nature of international regulation is changing. The range of actors involved and their relative power in decision-making processes has changed and continues to do so. In a number of ways, the effectiveness of states as both domestic and international actors is influenced by the ways both they and other actors use network technologies.

As domestic actors, some governments are unable to utilise ICTs to best effect, given the end of their monopoly control over telecommunications provision, resulting for many in the need to buy in services from the private sector. State agencies, moreover, maintain complex bureaucratic structures and divisions which need to be over-ridden before network technologies can be used effectively.

With relation to state control over citizens, the capacity of states to limit or control information flows via ICTs is greatly reduced by comparison to other communication media such as publishing or broadcasting. Censorship of information, or even knowledge of the content of the vast and expanding resources of networked computing systems, is virtually impossible. As a result, enforcement of domestic legislation is problematic where technology and transmissions are not confined within state boundaries, may have contributions from several sources and are routed via a number of

servers which are often situated in different countries. Pornography provides the most obvious example of the problems of control over material available on the Internet. The potential for censorship of pornographic material is severely curtailed by the diffuse nature of ICT networks. Camilleri & Falk point out, moreover, that with digital technology all transmitted information is reduced to a common form, creating additional difficulties for censors:

"This convergence in the form of transmitted information has limited the technical capacity of the state to regulate flows of information across national boundaries reducing, as they do, the traffic across the state's boundaries to a featureless stream of binary bits" (1992: 121).

Control over access to telecommunications facilities is also problematic for states in sustaining a cohesive form of national identity, a concept already threatened by other globalising phenomena. Historians and social theorists have long argued that social, economic and political systems are influenced by major changes to the ways humans interact and ICTs offer profound challenges to the senses of identity and community which individuals perceive. Most developments in communications technologies have some form of evident and measurable effect on the social systems within which they occur. Deibert highlights, for example, the spoken word, the invention of writing, the development of the Greek alphabet and subsequent spread of literacy, and the invention of moveable type technology coupled with the spread of printing as communications developments which have influenced social change (1996). Fuchs and Koch cite international telephony, commercial air travel, satellite communications and international computer networks as important twentieth century technological innovations in this respect (1996: 166).

All of these technological changes affect both interpersonal interactions and the organizational infrastructures which govern important aspects of human existence. Perceptions of the self and the contexts of social and political interaction are heterogeneous for most people in the late twentieth century; they become even more so with the use of ICTs, where subjects are constituted in and through multiple identities. Identification of citizen with state has traditionally depended on a hegemonic discourse of political and/or monarchical authority, which cannot be conveyed through ICTs as concisely or convincingly as other media have allowed.



This suggests that methods of communication are a key facet of citizen-state relations, although this area is often underexplored in IR. Analysis of the relationships between governments and communications media has tended to focus on how states transmit information to citizens, for example through the use of propaganda, manipulation of mass media output and so on (see: Taylor 1995). The content of mass media production is much more open to the influence, intended or otherwise, of governments than the less stringently regulated, s/elective type of communication permitted by ICTs. Governments and other major players have a much greater degree of control over representations of space with mass media than they can have with the s/elective technologies of ICTs.<sup>41</sup>

The 'gate-keeping' function of mass media has been a valuable mechanism of governance, even in democratic societies. The promotion of dominant values and norms, of governments and of societies defined in and through media output, is an intrinsic, though only occasionally acknowledged, function of mass media broadcasting. ICTs lack this gatekeeping function, with traditional sender-receiver models of communication unhelpful in analysing multilogical interaction. Despite the increased interest of commercial actors in using the public spaces of ICTs as extensions of their profit-driven activities, cyberspace retains a free-for-all, permissive appearance by comparison to the more constrained output of mass media (see: Adams 1996). Thus, as McChesney notes, new computer and digital technologies can undermine the ability to control communication in a traditionally hierarchical manner (1996: 98).

How political actors receive and apply information, and how political communities are formed, mediated or created is determined by the ways in which members and individuals (inter)communicate. If communication is understood in its most basic definition, "as something that is shared" (Gold 1991: 3), it is important when analysing the construction of political spaces to place emphasis on the notion of interaction, between all political agents.

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<sup>41</sup> Some states are attempting to control the use of ICTs, albeit generally through the use of low-tech methods such as threats of imprisonment rather than high-tech forms of message interception. Most notably, China is attempting to impose rigid restrictions on Internet use (see: 'China blocks the Internet explosion', The Guardian, 27/1/00, p3).

Examination of the impact of ICTs is now crucial to understanding changing political practices, and how contemporary political communities are maintained and established. Street suggests that at one level:

“technology is the embodiment of certain interests and possibilities, but [at another] it is the bearer of effects: it changes what we can imagine and what we want, it alters our politics” (1997: 35).

For these reasons, it is necessary to examine some of the ways new communications technologies challenge key assumptions made in the social sciences about the nature of information exchange. The following section addresses why assumptions about communication relevant to broadcast media cannot be directly transferred to interpretation of the impact of ICTs. The spatial logic of these two types of communication differs quite profoundly and, though research into the effects of broadcast media can provide valuable insights into the nature of state-citizen communication, analysis of the communications logic of ICTs suggests that some basic assumptions regarding the construction of audiences and the potential to control information flow require revision.

#### ICTs & Audience Construction

In IR, the key issue in this regard centres upon assumptions made about audiences and the sources of information. The notion of ‘audience’ as essentially passive and contained needs to be examined, and the concept of multi-dimensionality developed. Thompson has argued that the development of new forms of communication affects the domain of institutionalized power by altering the relationship between what is public and visible, and what is private and essentially closed to public view. Referring to the development of mass communications technologies, Thompson argues that:

“the publicness (or visibility) of actions or events is no longer linked to the sharing of a common locale, and hence actions and events can acquire a publicness which is independent of their capacity to be seen or heard directly by a plurality of co-present individuals” (1996: 39).

That is, it is not necessary to be in a given location to bear witness to events taking place there, nor does the public which receives information remain constant, as it possible for individuals to be members of different ‘publics’ simultaneously. This has created for Thompson a kind of “mediated publicness ... which differs in fundamental respects from the traditional publicness of co-presence” (ibid.)

Ang has argued that, through the use of audience measurement techniques, broadcasters operate under the implicit and erroneous assumption that an 'audience' can be understood as a finite totality, "made up of subdivisions or segments which can be synchronically or diachronically 'fixed' " (1991: 204). For Ang, a precise construction of audience is a necessary fiction for broadcasters, who seek to define a compact public, the audience, which does not reflect the social practices of viewers and listeners (ibid.)

Attempts to define or measure the mass media audience have been complicated by changes in the social practices which accompany media reception, such as different working practices and timescales of people sharing households, the locating of television sets and radios in public places, the introduction of satellite and cable channels, and so on. ICTs represent a further dislocation of the notion of a definable and measurable audience, by allowing the user to elect and select from multiple sources, opt into particular discussion groups, act as an information provider and so on.

Media coverage in the form of press, radio or television reports makes public details of socially and politically significant events, such as some humanitarian crises, war, foreign policy decisions and inter-governmental conferences. In most cases, however, media coverage is decided in a fairly arbitrary fashion (Hopkinson 1995: 10). That is, the priorities regarding output of print and broadcast media organizations are rarely determined purely by reference to the scale or local impact of an event. As a further limitation, media organizations tend to use pre-determined criteria to manage output. Generalised news values, that is the editorial conventions which follow a fairly uniform pattern across the media as a whole, also have the effect of foreclosing reportage of some events (see: Boyd-Barrett 1998; Allan 1999). News values reflect priorities such as dramatic impact, ease of access to location, cost to the broadcaster or publisher, quality of coverage, and judgements about likely levels of interest among the receiving public (Hopkinson 1995). In this sense, the media again acts as a gatekeeper, in the sense noted earlier in this chapter, channelling and filtering information before it enters the public domain.

Adams distinguishes between content and context in media output, arguing that content is the subject matter of communication, created through the encoding and decoding practices embedded in societies, and that contexts organise the flow of content (Adams 1996: 420). By comparison to network communications through the use of ICTs,

media organizations have almost total control over the content of programming and publication, and the ubiquity of mass media suggests that they also project and influence the contexts within which it is received and interpreted. In this respect, media organizations have a powerful voice in determining the agendas of public communication.

As later chapters will illustrate, users of ICTs appear to gain some degree of control over the content of these agendas, as their influence in public, private and other spaces is experienced. The notion of actors occupying multiple spaces is difficult to reconcile, however, with existing interpretations of audience construction. In particular, understanding of power relations between actors has relied on assumptions of influence over agendas belonging in the public sphere, in this sense relating to the state (Verstraeten 1996: 348). In many respects, though, the development of ICTs is creating crossovers between public and private spaces, and blurring distinctions between audience and participant, and between information provider and recipient.

Identifying two senses of 'public', Thompson argues that both are challenged by the wide range of media organizations and output and the problems inherent in controlling their operations. This has become particularly relevant with the increased availability of transborder transmissions, satellite communications and widespread deregulation of media activities since the 1980s. The first sense of public identified by Thompson is the equation of public with institutionalized political power, contrasting with private, non-state activities. This is the public element of the public-private divide which gender theorists find so problematic, as it relegates non-institutional actors to the discursive realm of the private, as discussed in detail in Chapter One.

It is the second sense of public space identified by Thompson which is of particular relevance to this chapter, however. He argues that another way of interpreting 'public' is to view it as that which is open or available to the general public, signifying visibility or openness (1994: 38), and suggests that for public figures:

"it is no longer possible to circumscribe the management of visibility ... Moreover, the messages transmitted by the media may be received and understood in ways that cannot be directly monitored and controlled by communicators" (ibid.: 40).

With the use of broadcast communications, and increasingly with the use of ICTs, public political activity is intrinsically linked to the private realm, as interpretations are

made by non-public actors in relation to their own subjectivities. Thus, ICTs and their space-adjusting effects imply that both of Thompson's conceptions of public space are contestable. That is, both the concepts of divisions between public and private political spaces, and of audiences as situated within a definable public sphere, are subject to challenge, by both the introduction of new communications technologies, and by broader societal change. The selective nature of ICTs interactions also suggests, moreover, that there is no public sphere as such, but rather a vast range of issues *available in the public domain*. The flow of knowledge and ideas in contemporary societies is more difficult for either states or media organizations to control, given the breadth and scale of mass media communication and the increasing use of ICTs. Moreover, governments have less potential to control the discursive parameters of information exchange, both in relation to technical capabilities and audience construction. In this respect, ICTs challenge conventional conceptions of the public sphere, as meaning is both channelled and interpreted within the public domain and outside of it, as subjects are situated in multi-mediated spaces of social and political engagement.

For this reason, it is necessary to see in ICTs a technology which has some similarities to other media but which also offers some new communicative possibilities. For Pool, advanced electronic facilities differ radically from mass media modes of communication,<sup>42</sup> the key difference lying in the ways in which audiences access information, and in how information is made available. Thus:

"The mass media revolution is being reversed; instead of identical messages being disseminated to millions of people, electronic technology permits the adaptation of electronic messages to the specialized or unique needs of individuals" (Pool 1990: 8).

ICTs do not replace mass media, or any other mode of communication, though some technologies may be superseded. As the spoken word, and written text have endured, and have been supplemented by telephones, faxes and so on, it appears probable that ICTs constitute an additional, rather than a replacement, technological development. Thus ICTs add new forms of communications to those already available.

Changes in the way information is transmitted and received obviously have relevance to the way political activity is carried out, indeed to what actually constitutes political activity. In the contemporary system, it is evident that states now have little direct

influence either over the reach and content of communications, or over changes to social structures to which communications media are party. For Held:

"What is new about the modern global system is the stretching of social relations in and through new dimensions of activity - technological, organizational, administrative and legal, among others - and the chronic intensification of patterns of connectedness mediated by such phenomena as modern communications networks and new information technology" (1995: 21).

These new patterns of connectedness affect many of the traditional areas of concern in IR by adjusting the ways in which state agencies and other political players interact.

A specific example of how these patterns of connectedness have affected the political practices of states and other actors is outlined in the following section. This examines the impact of new communications technologies on international economic infrastructures, illustrating how ICTs, in conjunction with other factors, have influenced state praxis in recent years. This example also illustrates, therefore, how state practices have been changing as the use of ICTs among non-state actors has increased.

#### Exemplar: Communications and the Global Economy

As indicated elsewhere in the thesis, analysis of communications in IR has tended to focus on the top-down model of political agency, representing monological state-to-citizen transmission of information. This section examines how digital communications have affected the development of a global economic system, with the aim of satisfying two ends. One of these is to indicate precisely how significant the study of communications is for interpreting the actions of both states and non-state actors, in a discipline which aims to analyse trans-state politics. The other is to reiterate the claims of gender and spatial theorists, who hold that making analytical distinctions between state politics and social phenomena occludes important dimensions of political interaction.

Given their synergetic relations with economic, social and political spheres, communications technologies can act as agents of change in the lives of individuals and groups. The impact of such agency is not always readily quantifiable. Pool argued, for example, that it would have been possible to conclude ten years after the invention of the printing press that the device was of little significance, as change was in large measure

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<sup>42</sup> This difference is not simply technological, as both mass media (particularly broadcasting, but increasingly also publishing) and computer communications use digital technology.

incremental and qualitative (1990: 4). That is, the availability of the printing press permitted only the mass production of texts; the social conditions for mass literacy were not in place contemporaneously. This phenomena was termed a 'cultural lag' by Ogburn (quoted Fischer 1992: 8), defined as "a period of dislocation when changes in social practice have not yet accommodated the new material culture" (ibid.) These social conditions were themselves affected by the wider availability of printed material, reflecting the inter-relationship between invention and social change.

One of the most extraordinary aspects of the use of ICTs has been their rate of growth, with a technology virtually unknown at the start of the 1990s developing at a rate of around one hundred and three percent per annum (<http://www.itu.int>). In this respect, there is no opportunity for scholars to assume a cultural lag, as nonesuch exists. For this reason, the imperative to analyse network technologies contemporaneously exists, as their diffusion has immediate effects and potentially critical ramifications for social and political conduct. A brief examination of the impact of network communications on the mechanisms of contemporary global economics illustrates the degree to which these technologies are changing material practices.

As indicated above, the second aim of this section is to provide some further justification for the claims of feminist theorists and many other IR scholars, who argue that attempts to make a distinction between state politics and social phenomena is problematic, in terms of the limitations such a division places upon research and understanding in the discipline. IPE research generally refutes such a distinction, and shows how analysis of global economic practices highlights the complexity of agent/structure relations which cannot easily be accommodated within public/private conceptualisations of politics. Within mainstream IR, however, the dominant discursive trend is still to assume states to be the dominant and defining actors in international politics. This section does not make direct reference to the links made between public and private spaces in changing economic practices; these become evident as discussion of the range of actors and activities in the contemporary economic system evolves.

Looking at globalising trends in economics and trade, it is possible to argue that the development of fast and efficient transboundary communications systems, which are capable of conveying very large amounts of information at speed, has been the single

most significant feature in the growth of a global economy. Fuchs and Koch suggests that information technology serves a dual function in the processes of globalization:

"On the one hand, the telecommunications sector is being extensively globalised; on the other hand, telecommunications networks are an important precondition for globalization in the world economy" (1996: 165).

Thus the policy-making processes of states are affected, both in relation to the actors with whom they engage, and the ways in which the increasing globalization of telecommunications influences the forms of such engagement.

In terms of managing a national economy, the role of states is affected both by the existence of new players who effectively dissipate the structure of international economics and by the means available to these economic actors to use and transfer information, to shift commodities and capital, and so on, largely unhindered by the impediments of either physical or legislative national boundaries. This applies whether money comes in the form of currency, commodities or, as is increasingly the case, 'international money credit' (see: Thrift 1996). In this instance, money is purely a simulated phenomena, controlled almost exclusively by means of ICTs. This is not to suggest, to borrow Thrift's phrase, "a financial leviathan which it is increasingly impossible to withstand" (ibid.: 214). Rather, as many social scientists and political economists have indicated, changes to communications technologies in recent decades have had a radical impact on the structures of international economics (see: Agnew & Corbridge 1995; Corbridge *et al* 1994; Strange 1996). For Sassen, "electronic space has emerged not simply as a means for communicating, but as a major new theatre for capital accumulation and the operations of global actors" (1999: 49). State practices alter in response to change in the fields of economics, and one of the key areas of change has been in the field of communications.

The growth of global communications has significantly enhanced the role and power of MNCs and has influenced the ways states operate as economic actors. Claval suggests that the lines of international trade have "ceased to be trapped within national territories" (1995: 306). In the developed world, for example, the growth of service and knowledge-based industries has been paralleled by a decline in the manufacturing sector (see: Graham & Marvin 1996), situating information technologies at the heart of national economic interests. In many instances manufacturing facilities have been relocated to newly-industrialised and less developed countries (ibid.: 125), signalling



adjustments to north-south economic relations. Although states are able to exert some influence over economic activity within their borders, particularly through taxation policies and the offer of incentives to MNCs, they have little real power over the flow of credit and debt across state borders. Strange notes that structural change in the world political economy, wrought in significant measure by developments in communications technology, has resulted in an intensification of competition among states:

"(This) competition is forcing states to bargain with foreign firms to locate their operations within the territory of the state, and with national firms not to leave home, at least not entirely" (1994: 107).

Thus the nature of economics is influenced by communications change in three specific ways, each related to spatial practices. First, the sites of economic activity need no longer necessarily be linked to specific locations. An important change in economic activity in recent decades has been the way in which it is now possible to trade via electronic networks, exchanging information, services, and commodities such as derivatives, which have no physical manifestation (see: Cerny 1996; Thrift 1996). State boundaries become, in this context, essentially meaningless. Often there are no real goods to cross borders and few effective legislative tools which states can apply to restrict trans-state commerce.

Second, and related to this shift away from 'located economics', the relationship between state agencies and economic actors is consequentially less circumscribed than previously. As global trading practices and legislation have adapted, partly in response to transnational technologies, states now have less control over which actors may engage in commercial activity within national borders, and over where businesses are located. For example, it is possible for a company to produce goods in several locations and manage other aspects of their business elsewhere, with their choices contingent upon their perceptions of economic expediency (see: Graham and Marvin 1996). Network technologies facilitate both intra- and inter-industrial communication, allowing an efficient flow of goods, services, and information, often with little regard to location. In this respect, the relative power of MNCs is increased vis-à-vis that of states. The actual location of a business is often significant to local and national interests, but few governments have much control over the criteria set by MNCs in choosing commercial sites.

The ways in which their choice of place reflects upon the metaphoric spaces of access and opportunity is crucial for regional communities, however, as it affects social and political processes in profound ways, and at multiple levels. Thus, where an MNC, for example, situates various elements of its operations has an impact socially, culturally, and politically, as well as economically, on a given area. At the same time, government reliance on outside investment means that its relations with economic actors have an impact upon policy-making. Camilleri and Falk used South Africa during the apartheid era as an illustrative example, suggesting that increased exposure to international scrutiny through the integration of global economies and communications systems limited the government's ability to use traditional coercive measures against its citizens (1992: 113). That is, domestic policies which affect citizens are increasingly being made with reference to the needs and interests of external actors.

Thirdly, non-state economic actors appear to make more effective use of the 'disembeddedness' (see: Thrift 1996) which is associated with electronic forms of communication. The communicative power of these actors, and their ability to respond to changing conditions, often outpaces that of the states with which they interact. The adaptive capacity of, for example MNCs and 'money capitalists' (ibid.), means that they are "able to operate on a global scale and with a speed of reaction which many states find difficult to emulate" (ibid.: 220).

The extra degree of flexibility which MNCs enjoy in this respect comes about largely because states are encumbered both by their responsibilities *as states*, and by the burdens placed on their economies in attempting to fulfil these requirements. State agencies are required to service the needs of citizens, whether as individuals or as members of interest groups or collectives. This means that citizens have recourse to health and welfare services and so on, and to the expertise of governments relating to the roles of voters as economic agents, for example as traders or taxpayers. Cerny has argued that "the commodified state is developing into an enterprise association, with key civic, public and constitutional functions either increasingly subordinate to the imperatives of the global market place or even vestigial" (1996: 136). The internal responsibilities of states, however, continue to exist; despite the deregulation, decentralisation, privatisation and liberalisation of many traditional government functions by many contemporary states (see Herman & McChesney 1997), the

involvement of state agencies in the mechanisms of domestic governance of communications technologies remains a question of degree, and not one of detachment.

As a consequence, the territorially-defined state has responsibilities specifically associated with its domestic role. Non-state economic actors have no such limitations, their concerns related primarily, often solely, to their effectiveness in the market-place. This is not to suggest that MNCs and other economic actors are disembedded from wider political processes, but that their range of responsibilities is much narrower than that of states. Strange pointed out, for example, that "while the bargaining assets of the firm are specific to the enterprise, the bargaining assets of the state are specific to the territory it rules over" (1994: 108). Thus in many senses states are increasingly players in a game where their organizational structure, their capacity to adapt to change and their performance criteria are, in terms of efficiency, inferior to those of their economic, and increasingly political, associates.

This does not mean that states are inevitably disempowered; states retain many of the tools of economic management which influence the behaviour of other economic actors. These tools include the forming of trading blocs, some control over interest rates, the ability to offer tax and investment incentives and so on. Additionally, the geographical location of a particular state may be significant to a manufacturer seeking easy access to a particular market. Cerny suggests, however, that the main function of the contemporary state is the promotion of economic activity which makes firms and sectors located within their territory competitive in international markets (1996: 124). In this respect, the value of location in providing employment opportunities or promoting economic well-being has a residual value for states as international actors, but they are also greatly constrained by their obligations in the domestic arena.

This is particularly evident in the field of communications, where the cost of change for states may be considerably higher in real terms than that for non-state actors. It would appear to be much easier for non-state actors to update and integrate communications systems to their advantage, particularly where an organizational infrastructure already exists. State responses to technological change are hindered by inherited policy-making procedures and bureaucracies, financial strictures, inter-departmental competition for funding, the demands of their civic role and the anachronistic distinction between public and private political spheres. Given their role in promoting the economic welfare of the

state, governments often have strong links with domestic and international trading organizations and in this sense are quasi-private economic actors as well as policy-makers.

Many of the metaphoric spaces of economic activity opened by communications technologies, relating to access and opportunity, are restricted for, or closed to, states simply because they *are* states. Fuchs and Koch suggest that the "new decentralized organizational forms of multinational corporations could be designed only on the basis of advanced global communications structures" (1996: 166). Many MNCs have developed their organizational structures in parallel with communications change; the prior existence of the bureaucratic model of the state has impeded its comparable adaptation.

This brief analysis of some of the effects of ICTs on global finance with relation to states is intended to offer an indication of how extensive the reach of this type of communication can be. The role ICTs are playing in restructuring relations between economic players is evident. The introduction of computerised banking and insurance services, share dealing via networked conglomerates and so on open further the spaces of access for individuals to areas of economic activity previously denied by more hierarchical structures.<sup>43</sup>

Analysis of economic relations provides a useful, tangible example which partially parallels the issues of access to political spaces. Such comparisons are limited, in that the structures of global finance are underpinned by the complex relations between profit motives, the relative needs and desires of consumers, legislative restrictions, and so on. These factors in turn are complicated by the specific cultural and historic practices which inform economic relations between actors. It is evident, however, that economic relations have been 're-spatialized' through the widespread use of ICTs. Given the rapid spread of ICTs among other actors in recent years, it is reasonable to surmise, therefore, that socio-political relations are undergoing similar processes.

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<sup>43</sup> This does not suggest that ICTs are responsible for these changes; the political and social climate in which such changes have come about is also crucial in this regard. ICTs have, however, facilitated these changes to such a degree that it is possible to argue that many of the features of global financial networks could not have been established, nor continue to exist, without it.

### Conclusion

Although brief and by no means definitive, the outline of the development of ICTs given in this chapter indicates that these technologies evolved across both public and private sectors, through the efforts of both state and non-state agencies and individuals. ICTs have a number of unique features, which render their use of particular significance to analysis of social and political change. That the volume and speed of information exchange through the use of ICTs is vastly increased, by comparison to any other technology, has been noted, as have forms of interaction which ICTs render possible. ICTs represent a multi-logical form of communication, as well as a mono- and dialogical form. In this respect, ICTs are a unique form of communication, since users play an active role in determining modes of engagement. The traditional tools of propaganda and gatekeeping, whether overt or unconscious, which broadcast media provided are less evident in the use of ICTs. This suggests that processes of political communication are becoming increasingly diffuse, and that any form of state control over either information flow or content is limited.

The notion that ICTs can provide some form of public forum has also been addressed. Although this form of communication theoretically represents an open forum for debate, the nature of interaction it permits suggests the development of a space which is simultaneously public *and* private. In this respect, accepted notions of audience construction are called into question, as traditional sender-receiver conceptions are invalidated.

An analysis of the impact of ICTs on international economic practices has been undertaken, drawing together the discussions on the forms of interaction ICTs permits, some of the effects this technology has had on the role of the state, and questions on public and private spaces of social and political engagement. This analysis forms an illustrative example of the multiple effects of ICTs on the relationship between social, political and economic spheres, and highlights how extensive the impacts of this form of communication can be.

Research into NGO use of ICTs indicates that this technology is being used across the political spectrum, both 'up' and 'down' the range of political actors, with the potential to affect political practices at all levels. The following chapter provides a brief typology of NGOs and examines their role as political actors, outlining their position in

interpretations of contemporary international politics in IR. This overview of the role of NGOs in contemporary politics provides a foundation for analysis of some specific practices, and the application of spatial theories to these, which is undertaken in the concluding chapters.

## CHAPTER THREE NGOs & THE USE OF ICTs

### Introduction

This chapter provides a typology of NGOs in the contemporary global political system to supply a foundation for the spatial analysis of their use of ICTs undertaken in the concluding chapters. The chapter is specifically concerned with the impact of ICTs on the political practices of NGOs and adopts three fundamental premises. Firstly, it is suggested that change is being effected in the political behaviour of NGOs who make use of these technologies; secondly, that these have the potential to transform the nature of political activity, both for these organizations and, as a consequence, for other actors; and thirdly, that it is possible to conclude that these effects are experienced most profoundly but not exclusively at inter- and trans-state levels.

This chapter provides illustrative examples intended to compliment the theoretical foundation of the thesis: that communications technologies are of enormous significance to the conduct and analysis of political activity on the world stage, and appropriate analytical schema are required to incorporate their role in this regard. For this reason, this chapter provides an overview of the role of NGOs in contemporary politics, defining them in terms of agency rather than through the structural assumptions of IR. This chapter concentrates on providing examples of some of the ways in which access to political processes may be affected by NGO use of ICTs. The following section briefly outlines the evolving techno-political climate in which NGO use of these technologies is situated. That is, it looks at the ways ICTs are being introduced into the political arena, and how and why this form of communication appears to be of particular relevance to the work of NGOs.

### NGOs & ICTs

NGO use of ICTs relates, of course, to the broader structural change fostered by the diffusion of telecommunications technologies across real and metaphoric boundaries. Information, as both commodity and resource, has implications for all political actors, with changes in the behaviour of one group influencing the behaviour of others. Thus NGO use of ICTs links to a wider adjustment of power and control relations wrought by the 'information age'. For Castells, for example, all states are, and will become increasingly, informational societies "in the sense that the core processes of knowledge production, economic productivity, political/military power and media communication are already deeply transformed by the informational paradigm, and are connected to

global networks of wealth, power, and symbols working under such a logic” (1996: 21). These networks are diffused across multiple levels and layers of societies, and states are necessarily both contending against and participating in their development.

Many governments are actively promoting the growth of ICTs for use by citizens, under rubrics such as the ‘Global Information Infrastructure’ in the US, and the ‘information superhighway’ in the UK. Many states now make policy details, information on state agencies and contact facilities available to users ‘online’. Moore suggests that “what all these states are trying to achieve in the first instance are cheap and efficient telecommunications infrastructures that will enable individuals and organizations to communicate with one another” (1998: 276). As noted in Chapter Two, however, the roles and responsibilities of states with respect to the security and welfare of citizens pose barriers to the free flow of information which characterises ICTs. For NGOs, however, ICTs may be a political tool inherently apposite to their relationships across the range of actors with whom they communicate.<sup>44</sup>

The intrinsic transcendence of boundaries which ICTs imply suggests to many that it is an inherently globalising media and much of the research on this type of technology identifies this as a primary characteristic. Although ICTs are theoretically ‘global’ technologies, networks are essentially formed by their *use*, rather than by their availability. Thus, ICTs are equally likely to be used to reinforce local connections through, for example, their use by community or environmental groups (see: Pickerill & Rodgers, forthcoming). Analysis of NGO use of ICTs in the international arena does not therefore imply that some form of ‘global society’ or ‘world community’ is likely to develop as the result of the spread of this technology, nor are value judgements made here regarding the merits or otherwise of its use, in terms of the quality of life for individual users.

NGOs differ from other major actors in IR, most critically in their perceptions of political agendas. There are many thousands of NGOs, often engaged in activities which defy the significance of state borders. It is not possible to produce a standard

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<sup>44</sup> In depth examination of state use of ICTs is not possible here. It is noted, however, that NGOs are not the only organizations making use of ICTs and that dynamics of political change through the use of ICTs are by no means limited to the use of digital communications technologies by non-state actors.



model of NGO behaviour. Many NGOs are a partial product of broader social movements, with membership and support based in concern for, for example, human rights, gender and/or racial awareness, animal rights, environmental protection and so on. Moreover, many of these concerns are seen as indivisible, from each other, and from broader political issues. For example, Amnesty International, which campaigns on behalf of political prisoners, views gender as a central issue, arguing that gender often plays a significant role in cases of abuse of human rights. Similarly, Oxfam, whose prime concern is the alleviation of poverty, links this, as a human rights issue, to political processes relating to trade and development. Despite links across organizations and issues, it is impossible to produce a generic model of even those NGOs who work on comparable projects.

NGO activity may be large-scale; some of the organizations considered here perceive themselves to be global actors and have offices worldwide. Many other NGOs, however, are highly localised, focusing their operations on specific regions. Such a local focus, however, does not necessarily limit their activities to within state borders (see: Frederick 1997). The difficulties of classifying NGO activity are now the subject of academic scrutiny, with scholars from a range of disciplines attempting to clarify the position of NGOs within contemporary social and political systems. Vakil has noted that the absence of a framework for classifying NGOs may have seriously impeded an understanding of the sector (1997: 2057). Given the breadth, scale and diversity of the NGO movement, it is prudent therefore to illustrate in general terms their form of political agency, rather than to attempt to generalise about their objectives and their means of achieving them.

For Charlton *et al*, NGOs can be viewed as a conceptually distinct but empirically imprecise organizational category (1995: 19). Their key characteristics are that they are independent of state control, in terms of decision-making processes, and that they are institutions, in that they structure social behaviours around a particular set of goals. For Willetts “NGOs become theoretically important when it is appreciated that they are agents of social change, projected to the level of global politics” (1996: 57). As agents of social change, NGOs cover a diverse range of interests, areas and objectives; there is, therefore, no such thing as a typical NGO and organizational structure arises as social movements grow (*ibid.*) ICTs reflect the diffuse organizational forms of many NGOs. Given the transcendental, issue-based perceptions of politics which NGOs generally

endorse, it is evident that the potential to transcend territory and forge links through and across organizational boundaries, both those internal to NGOs and in the wider political realm, is a facet of ICTs which closely reflects the objectives of international NGOs.

NGO undertakings are characterised by a diffusion of activities across a range of actors, often with a wide-ranging geographical reach. International NGOs invariably have transborder and/or transnational concerns. An NGO may be concerned about a transborder issue and may respond to this by lobbying governments and/or regional authorities and/or people in the regions where a problem originates or where it occurs. For this reason, NGO interaction with governments will often be based upon how much impact a given government can actually have on an issue: NGOs do not necessarily assume a government to be the primary actor when seeking to elicit social or political change. In any given instance an MNC, a regional authority, an IGO, a community group or individual, or a combination thereof, may be better able to effect change than a state agency. Hence, to some degree, politics as defined by NGOs as non-state actors differs from that outlined and applied by governments. The spaces which NGOs perceive to be of political relevance are often dependent upon the territorial assumptions of states, but frequently extend beyond the public parameters outlined in the dominant discourse. Indeed, Smith argues that transnational social movements, in which NGOs play an important role, tend to form around issues for which purely national solutions are inappropriate (1997: 57).<sup>45</sup>

As a consequence of the looser definitions of politics under which NGOs operate, they are generally less closely bound than states to the agendas of high politics. That is, they may act in co-operation with government agencies, international organizations and so on, but are often responsible for introducing new items to standard political agendas, in line with their particular area of interest or operation. International NGOs differ from other trans-state or inter-state actors in that their actions are rarely, if ever, based upon pursuit of power or profit. Some NGOs have established themselves within parliamentary systems, most notably Green parties who have, with varying degrees of success, attempted to influence elite agendas from within government. On the whole, though, NGOs conform to the characteristics identified by Charlton *et al.* These suggest that NGOs are generally distinguished by pursuit of collective action on the basis of

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<sup>45</sup> Della Porta & Diani (1999) offer a useful analysis of the differences and similarities between social movements and what they view as the more formal approach of NGOs.

'voluntaristic mechanisms', based on processes of bargaining, accommodation, discussion and persuasion which are conceptually distinct from the hierarchical operational principles of either states or profit-driven market institutions (1995: 26). The work of some NGOs is widely credited with introducing issues such as human rights, environmental change and gender discrimination to international political agendas. Analysis of regime formation also often acknowledges the normative role NGOs play in the evolution of co-operative practices in international politics.

The operational principles of NGOs are based upon the forging of contacts between and across interested, affected and influential groups and individuals. As in other sectors, ICTs are both elemental to and constitutive of the construction of operational spaces, spaces which for NGOs are by nature socio-political. The technical capabilities of ICTs, that is the communications possibilities they offer, can enhance the existing operational methods of NGOs. The assumption of an anti-hierarchical flexibility in political communication flows underscores the operational principles of international NGOs, and contrasts with the prevailing norm in inter-state behaviour, and to some extent in international organizations such as the UN.

NGOs cannot be categorised as acting either specifically in 'public' or 'private' spheres. As international actors, they may be engaged in research and political activities aimed at altering governmental policy with respect to the environment, to international aid policies and so on. Also as international actors, however, they draw upon the membership and support of private individuals, that is, of members of the general public. The interests of these individuals may have a basis in social rather than overtly political concerns. Membership of Friends of the Earth, for example, could be prompted by a localised issue, such as river pollution in a member's home town area, or a more general interest, such as a concern for the global environment. In neither case can membership be assumed to be intentionally 'political'. In this sense, the metaphoric spaces of access to political structures are extended to individuals through membership of NGOs in that social and political activities overlap within their operations.

The growth in number and type of NGOs in recent decades has had the effect of politicising many issues previously considered to be of social, or private, concern. NGOs can thus provide indirect access to 'official' political structures for otherwise marginalized actors, through their coalescence of the social and political realms. This

coalescence has a critical impact on representations of space, rendering 'the political' an increasingly imprecise category. The manner in which abortion has become a politicised issue of international concern, related to gender, human rights, national and international norms and to development agendas provides a useful example of this blurring of categories.

In some cases NGOs can act as a bridge between individuals and governmental actors. Even in democracies, elite political agendas are based on pre-determined criteria and the spaces of political engagement are mapped accordingly. Through membership of NGOs, individuals move closer to the political arena by engaging by proxy with other political actors. Concerns of individuals or groups may be more easily represented through NGOs than through the direct engagement of individuals with state agencies, as most political structures, representative or otherwise, mitigate against the direct involvement of the public in affairs of the state. The World Bank holds the view that NGOs often act as social and political intermediaries who "can create links both upward and downward in society" (Charlton *et al* 1995: 24). Moreover, as Willetts argues, in lobbying both governments and international governmental organizations, NGOs can be both part of broader social movements, and effective organizations in their own right (1996: 61). All of the NGOs who participated in the research for the thesis emphasised the importance of partnership between themselves, governmental agencies, international governmental organizations and 'ordinary people'. Thus, while remaining outside the realm of official institutions of politics, they, like other NGOs, "seek to establish the interests and rights of those generally excluded from discussion (Devetak & Higgott 1999: 491). The value of effective communications systems in this respect, both in terms of technological provision and access to information, across a range of actors, is apparent.

Although NGOs are now considered to play a significant role in the conduct of international politics, the discourse of IR continues to define them in and through their relationship with states; their primary categorisation in IR is as 'non-governmental' and their roles and functions are often implicitly deemed hierarchically inferior to those of states. The term 'non-governmental organization' was first used in 1950 to refer to "officially recognised organizations with no governmental affiliation that had consultative status within the United Nations" (Vakil 1997: 2068). Despite a huge rise in NGO numbers in recent decades, and the increased politicisation of many, they retain

the negative 'non-governmental' definition, and are described as 'non-state' actors, rather than as actors in their own right. It is now widely acknowledged, however, that non-state political communities have an important impact on state practices, and that NGOs play a key role in the formation of such communities by providing an organizational framework around which political action may be structured or mediated (see: Rodgers 1999).

Hurrell suggests that NGOs in the environmental movement possess four strengths, which make them important players in their own right. The characteristics which Hurrell attributes to environmental NGOs may readily be transferred to NGOs which focus on other concerns. Firstly, NGOs have the ability to develop and disseminate knowledge. Such knowledge will generally be issue-specific, transcending both discursive barriers and national borders. Secondly, NGOs often articulate a powerful set of human values and, thirdly, their actions may harness a growing sense of cosmopolitan moral awareness. These last two are related, in that the actions of NGOs are often based on a concern to develop more equitable social and political systems than exist at present. As the growth of the NGO movement testifies, this type of concern has widespread support. Finally, NGOs respond to the multiple weaknesses of the state system, both at global and local levels (see: Hurrell 1995). As Smith notes, NGOs are able to adopt less pragmatic positions than governments and have less need to satisfy competing domestic interest groups (1995: 306). Some of the many features of late-twentieth century life which serve to undermine the state as primary site of political legitimacy, such as increasingly globalized markets and economies, and the spread of new communications technologies, may often be advantageous to NGOs, given that they are unrestrained by the bureaucratic mechanisms associated with the management of territory.

The characteristics highlighted by Hurrell illustrate the key strengths of NGOs as political actors, and reflect the relevance to such organizations of ICTs. The development and dissemination of information across barriers and borders, the articulation of human values, the harnessing of a growing common awareness and responding to the weaknesses of the state system are all features which ICTs have the potential to consolidate, in terms of both extending audiences and influencing discourse.

New communications technologies appear to be making a considerable difference to the ways in which NGOs can approach their activities. Electronic communications networks are partially responsible for:

“producing forms of social organization - social networks, communications networks, and especially the emergence of multi-organizational networks - that allow people and groups to play an increasingly significant role in international relations as governmental and market hierarchies are eroded by the diffusion of power to smaller groups” (Frederick 1997: 256).

This view is supported by Hurrell, who argues that an increased level of economic globalization provides an infrastructure for increased social communication. Hence the communications networks which have evolved in tandem with economic structures are a mechanism for “facilitating the flow of values, knowledge and ideas and in allowing like-minded groups to organise across national boundaries” (Hurrell 1995: 144).

The criteria for membership of or participation in the activities of socially-based NGOs generally centres purely on the choices made by individuals. This contrasts with ‘membership’ of states, that is citizenship, which for the vast majority of people is based on birthplace and/or hereditary connections. By contrast, NGO membership decisions are made pro-actively, and are apparently based upon informed choice. This suggests that the spaces of representation of individuals, manifested by their available opportunities to participate in political activity, have changed since the NGO movement gained prominence.

For NGOs to exploit these public choices effectively, it is essential to make use of communications media which can be accessed by a wide audience. This applies most particularly to those organizations with a trans-state or global reach. In the UK, for example, ninety percent of charities in one recent survey believe that new technology is important for developing communications in the voluntary sector (Pharoah and Welch 1997). The Charities Aid Foundation (CAF), which conducted the survey, links some two hundred UK-based NGOs, many with international operations, to the Internet via its CharityNet pages. Globally, the Association of Progressive Communications (APC), which specialises in the communication needs of NGOs, had connections in one hundred and thirty three countries in 1997 (Frederick 1997: 258), a figure which is likely to increase further given APC’s rate of growth since its inception in 1984. All of the organizations which participated in research for this thesis link to one or both of these networks, as well as to others.

The focus on NGOs in IR "appears to be ... concerned with the bureaucratic politics of pressure groups working within the established system to influence policy, at both the governmental and the global level" (Willetts 1996: 59). Recent research suggests, however, that the influence of NGOs is not experienced only at the level of policy-making (see: Bailie & Winseck (Eds) 1997; Keck & Sikkink 1998). Their impact is felt in three other important ways. Firstly, NGOs tend to be inherently de-centralising, working across multiple spaces, both geographical and metaphoric. As noted, NGOs will, in pursuit of their objectives, lobby and/or work with any actor who may influence changes, with questions of geography and status relevant only to a specific goal. Secondly, NGOs may often be structurally less prone to gender imbalance than are state agencies. Though women are barely represented at the 'top' of politics, they are widely active as members of local, national and international NGOs (Peterson & Runyan 1993: 149).<sup>46</sup> Thirdly, although often operating in co-operation with governments, NGOs' basis in value-led politics, rather than in conventional agendas, extends the scale and scope of politics, thus providing alternative spatial constructions of politics.

The alternative conceptualisations of politics which many NGOs operate within has led many scholars to situate their activity under the rubric of 'global civil society'. Those promoting the concept of global civil society suggest that non-governmental actors, and in particular NGOs, are developing forms of interaction which create social and political links across societies, often with little recourse to formal institutions of governance. Indeed, Stavenhagen suggests that civil society challenges existing paradigms of governance and relates to objectives which entail alternative forms of economic development, political control and social organization (1997: 34).

The concept of global civil society promotes individuals, NGOs and less formal collectives as political agents and has had a demonstrable impact on the ways politics are now being understood in IR. For Lipschutz, one of the first scholars to develop the concept, global civil society is characterised by the "emergence of a parallel arrangement of political interaction ... focused on the self-conscious construction of networks of knowledge and action, by decentred, local actors (1992: 390). This parallel

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<sup>46</sup> As social organizations, NGOs are not gender-neutral. However, many NGOs, including four of those surveyed, place gender-awareness high on their agendas, arguing that women's human rights must be taken into account at both grassroots and policy-making levels.

arrangement challenges, albeit often implicitly, the concept of the state as central to political practice, and acknowledges the significance of non-territorial forms of political association more fully than the dominant discourse of IR does.

Proponents (for example Cox 1997, 1999; Rosenau 1997) and detractors (such as Baker 1999; Mahon 1996)<sup>47</sup> alike acknowledge a transnationalization of political activity in recent years, with a related shift in the significance of NGOs as actors and of communications technologies as a driving mechanism. In this respect, the concept of a global civil society is of enormous relevance to analysis of changing political spaces and, in particular, of NGOs and their use of communications technologies. Cox has argued that civil society has become a crucial battleground for recovering citizen control of public life (1999: 27) and in this respect its relevance to analysis of the links across social and political spheres is evident.

As key players in connecting governments, institutions and individuals to the political process both NGOs and ICTs represent challenges to state-centric norms of political analysis. In this sense, in common with feminist theorists, those analysing global civil society have been 're-visioning' politics as a more diffuse, decentralized enterprise. For Devetak and Higgott, NGOs represent an important alternative voice aspiring to the development of a 'justice-based' dialogue beyond the level of the sovereign state (1999: 485) and, as a consequence, they push the conceptual boundaries of political analysis beyond state-related definitions of the political.

As Walker has argued, however, the concept of civil society provides another spatial container (1995: 312) which can be viewed as comparable to state-centric norms in its discursive closure. The concept of global civil society, while taking analysis in IR an important step away from state-centrism, effectively posits another, potentially equally limiting, version of politics, in terms of the interpretative possibilities it permits. Thus for Walker:

"For all the sophistications of the literature on social movements ... , it still seems bound by conceptions of political possibility that preclude debates about

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<sup>47</sup> There is little doubt that some form of global civil society now exists, in that a diffusion of political interests across state boundaries among non-state actors is evident. Mahon, however, is highly critical of the concept and suggests it to be part of a broader neo-liberal project which legitimates a shift in power from states to the world market (1996: 299). Baker, too, sees the conflation of civil society with market ideals and suggests that the theory of global civil society has effectively been demobilized by this orientation (1999: 24).



what it would mean to put established conceptions of political community and identity into question” (ibid.)

The application of spatial theories is premised on the assumption that it is unnecessary and unhelpful to frame politics within a single discursive field. Although it has been argued that politics can now be seen as a triangular configuration of state, market and civil society (Devetak & Higgott 1999: 490), this still positions political analysis under a fairly rigid set of assumptions regarding how such analysis can take place. One of the significant strengths of the application of spatial theories is the potential this provides to assess change without subsuming that change under a conceptual banner which positions political practices within a pre-existing framework.

Looking back to Levevre and the concept of representations of space, we can see that the rubric of global civil society codifies relations between actors in the same manner as state-centrism does. For this reason, although the concept of global civil society has relevance to analysis of political practices, and in particular on the blurring of state/non-state boundaries, much greater emphasis is placed in the following chapters on the practices of NGOs which contribute to this than upon a meta-level interpretation of how the political landscape is constructed today.<sup>48</sup> It is possible to argue, however, that the at least partial existence of a global civil society is contributing to the development of a global public sphere,<sup>49</sup> where interactions between states and non-state actors find expression (Devetak & Higgott 1999: 491). This global public sphere is potentially the area where the use of ICTs by NGOs could have its greatest impact.

Patterns of NGO behaviour are reflected by the spatial forms of network communications. These are essentially decentralizing “in the sense that they democratise information flow, break down hierarchies of power, and make communication from the top and bottom just as easy as from horizon to horizon” (Frederick 1997: 256). Although complex, there are identifiable patterns of construction and use of ICTs which provide tangible communications infrastructures for political activity. The form of these infrastructures contrasts with the geographical structures upon which IR has traditionally based its ontologies, in that they are socially constructed and intrinsically

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<sup>48</sup> This is not to suggest that the global civil society literature is not valuable: it’s contribution to the ‘re-visioning’ of IR has been significant. Producing an alternative model to the state-centric norm does not, however, fit the key aim of the thesis, which is to apply spatial theories directly to political practice and attempt to assess change from the ‘bottom-up’.

mutable (see: Libicki 1995, 1996). Indeed, ICTs are characterised by their inter-linking, web-like structures, which are completely at variance with the impression of autonomous political units in the hegemonic discourse of IR. Although NGOs are not immune to dispute and dissent, co-operation is something of a byword in the NGO approach to politics: as a consequence, “Organizationally, networking is seen ... as the NGO’s trump card “ (Charlton *et al* 1995: 27). In this sense, the use of ICTs appears to compliment their *modus operandi*.

This mutability and multi-dimensionality of ICTs does not preclude analysis of their forms and effects. There are many aspects of the use of ICTs which are subject to design and which conform to regulated organizational patterns, particularly on the part of information providers. For example, contact with an NGO may frequently be random on the part of an individual using ICTs. ‘Surfing the Net’, that is casual exploration of the Internet, is a common pastime among many users of ICTs; chance encounters with the sites of NGOs are likely. An NGO as information provider, however, structures information by designing the content of pages, supplying details of activities, research, projects, and so on, associated with the organization’s work. NGOs, as the source of information, use web-sites as a one-to-many form of communication, whilst at the same time providing direct links back to the organization, allowing users a form of one-to-one contact. In this respect, NGOs use ICTs as a tool with which to extend their audience and promote their causes. Any contact with these organizations through the use of ICTs, therefore, is structured at least in part by the decisions on communications infrastructures made by the original information provider.

As this section illustrates, network technologies appear to provide a digital continuum of the existing mode of operation of NGOs. The following section looks in greater detail at the NGOs who participated in this research, outlining a brief history of each organization, and detailing their primary objectives, as outlined in their publicity literature. This information provides a historical context for the research into their use of ICTs which is detailed in the following chapters.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Note the observation made in Chapter Two which suggested that the evolving public sphere includes private-space interactions too.

<sup>50</sup> The use of ICTs by these organizations was analysed to provide evidence to support the claims on the applicability of spatial theories to complex political practices.

### NGO Sample

Five international NGOs, Amnesty International, Oxfam, Friends of the Earth, Christian Aid and the Institute for Journalism in Transition (IJT), provided information on their use of ICTs. All are well-established international NGOs involved in charitable work in countries across the globe. Although all originally established in the West, each has an international reach and has offices in several countries. Organizations which originated in the West were chosen for this research because, historically, there have been few, if any, examples of advanced communications technologies diffusing from the economically developing to the developed world, and the necessity of identifying whether this form of communication is reaching less developed regions was evident. As the thesis examines ICTs as a mechanism with the potential to restructure political spaces, it was necessary, therefore, to look at organizations which have available economic and technological resources to promote the provision of information to dispersed and frequently marginalized audiences.

All of the NGOs surveyed are independent, in that their main source of income is from membership subscription and private donations and/or sponsorship. Each of the NGOs sampled is engaged in issue-based politics. That is, their primary motivation relates to social concerns, such as human rights and environmental protection, rather than to the activities of national governments *per se*. That said, many of their activities bring them into contact with governments and with inter-governmental organizations, as well as with members of the public and with social and community groups. In this sense they are firmly embedded in transnational political processes. Brief details of the history and self-defined remit of each of the NGOs who participated in the research are outlined below, providing background information on their activities. All references, quotes and information used are taken from the websites of the NGOs or from their printed publicity material.

#### *I: Amnesty International ( <http://www.amnesty.org> )*

Amnesty International is a human rights organization, established in May 1961. The organization now has over one million members, subscribers and donors in over one hundred and sixty countries and territories, several thousand local groups, plus many more thousands of groups supporting the organization's work but not formally registered with its International Secretariat. Amnesty also has nationally organized sections in fifty four countries, and its 'nerve centre', the International Secretariat, is

based in London, staffed by almost four hundred people from over fifty countries. The organization also has a network of health professionals, comprising around ten thousand people, who support the work of the organization. The movement is dependent upon membership subscriptions and donations from members of the public. Promotional literature for the organization stresses that no money is sought or received from governments.

Amnesty argues that “(T)he protection of human rights is an international responsibility, transcending the boundaries of nations and ideologies. This is the fundamental belief upon which the work of Amnesty International ... is based”. The organization operates under a statute, with its main aims outlined as the release of all prisoners of conscience, fair and prompt trials for all political prisoners, and an end to torture and executions. Amnesty International has also produced a protocol on the protection of women’s human rights, arguing that, while women may suffer the full range of human rights violations known to the modern world, they also face other forms of abuse and discrimination perpetrated solely or primarily because of their biological sex.

Reliable information is crucial to the work of the organization: “Amnesty International attaches great importance to impartial and accurate reporting of facts. Its Research Department collects and analyses information from a wide variety of sources. These include hundreds of newspapers and journals, government bulletins, transcripts of radio broadcasts and reports from lawyers and humanitarian organizations” (ibid.) Amnesty International places strong emphasis upon its independence and ideological impartiality, making its own assessment of the facts of each case on the basis of the organization’s own research. In order to achieve its objectives, contact between the organization and prisoners, their families, governmental and prison authorities, international organizations and other relevant parties is necessary. At the same time, it is crucial that the facts upon which action is based are reliable and effectively transmitted and exchanged.

## II: *Friends of the Earth* (<http://www.foe.co.uk/> )

Established in 1971, Friends of the Earth (FoE) campaigns for the environment and places particular emphasis on influencing policy-making, at national, regional and international levels. FoE was the first environmental pressure group to start campaigns against whaling, for the protection of endangered species and tropical rainforests, and against acid rain, ozone depletion and climate change. All of these issues have since

become the subject of international negotiations and intergovernmental agreements, and the role of environmental NGOs in forcing such items onto domestic and international political agendas is widely acknowledged.

FoE represents the largest international network of environmental groups in the world, with offices in fifty four countries. The organization raises around eighty percent of its funding from donations from supporters, with the remainder coming from fundraising events, sponsorship, grants and trading. It operates a diffused system of membership and support, with each country determining its own organizational structure. Within each country, there are also local FoE groups in existence: in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, for example, these number some two hundred and fifty. Figures for local membership in other countries are not available. FoE local groups often work with other local people and organizations to improve the environment "in their own backyard". International offices co-ordinate transnational campaigns, though local and national offices and members are also involved in campaigning on international issues.

FoE campaigns against environmentally destructive plans and policies, and for a sustainable environment. Emphasis is placed on the network structure of the organization, with regular meetings and training sessions designed to provide "relevant and useful information and serve to share skills and experiences through the network". As noted above, there is a good deal of interaction between local and international elements of the organization.

Among the 'Five good reasons to support Friends of the Earth' cited on FoE's January 1998 website were the following: FoE persuades politicians and industry to take action, using argument, lobbying and use of the law where necessary; FoE's pioneering research is widely used by governments, commerce, the media and other environmental organizations; FoE publishes a broad range of information to help everyone find out about and take action on environmental problems; FoE are politically independent; FoE are uniquely placed to mobilize public opinion and campaign successfully - locally, nationally and internationally.

FoE operate on the belief that pressure for change "is most effective when people have access to the facts and can arm themselves with all the arguments". To this end, the organization lays heavy emphasis on research, publishing, public information and media

work and related social issues. In their mission statement FoE outline three key approaches to reducing environmental degradation. Firstly, FoE seeks to change political policies and business practices in favour of environmental protection, conservation and the sustainable use of natural resource. Secondly, FoE seeks to empower individuals and communities to lead sustainable lives, inspiring them to take peaceful action to protect the environment and conserve natural resources. Thirdly, FoE aims to stimulate public debate about the need and means to encourage environmentally sustainable development. All of these points highlight the significance for FoE of information provision and exchange, effective communication across the socio-political spectrum and independence from state-political structures.

*III: Christian Aid ( [http://www.oneworld.org/christian\\_aid](http://www.oneworld.org/christian_aid) )*

Christian Aid is the relief and development agency of forty British and Irish churches. It was established in 1945 to provide aid to refugees in Europe following World War II, undergoing several incarnations before eventually adopting its current name in 1964. From its origins as an organization providing aid and relief for victims of war in Europe, Christian Aid's focus shifted towards tackling the perceived injustices of colonialism in the 1950s. Through continued fundraising Christian Aid established regional development projects in Africa and set up the World Development Movement in 1969 to address poverty in the Third World. The organization's operations have increased steadily since then, and now encompass development projects in dozens of countries, emergency relief operations and lobbying of governments and international organizations aimed at tackling the root causes of poverty. Christian Aid resumed relief work in Europe in 1992 following the outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia.

Christian Aid now has offices in nine countries, but works in over seventy. Christian Aid's funding comes largely from voluntary donations from the public, though approximately one third of its income in 1995-6 came from UK government grants. Though associated with the Christian church, Christian Aid works with secular organizations and with individuals and groups of different faiths. None of its overseas offices are permanent, in line with the organization's policy of linking directly with the poor by funding local organizations who can respond best to local needs. Christian Aid provides practical support to poor communities and also seeks to challenge the economic and political conditions which keep people poor.

Christian Aid's policies on gender operate at two levels. As well as including gender-aware practices in its regional development and relief projects, the organization also campaigns on women's human rights on international and intergovernmental platforms. In recent years Christian Aid has been running a campaign against the structural adjustment policies (SAPs) operated by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Governments in developing countries are increasingly reliant on loans and aid packages from these institutions, but such assistance is conditional upon the introduction of free market policies which include cuts in public spending, privatisation, removal of price controls and increased exports. Christian Aid argue that SAPs "often hit the poor hardest, bringing job losses, cuts in health and education services and higher prices." Christian Aid also argue that women are particularly burdened by the introduction of SAPs and that their health, education and employment rights and prospects are all undermined by these policies.

Christian Aid lobbies international organizations for the reform of SAPs, and places particular emphasis on their damaging effects on the lives of women. The organization's lobbying is designed to achieve three key objectives: that women should be involved in all stages of the policy-making process, that policy measures should take account of the power relations which occur within households and wider society, and that the public spending cuts required under SAPs should not discriminate against women.

Christian Aid's objectives are based in "upholding the dignity and worth of every person, not only by providing practical support to poor communities but also by challenging the economic and political conditions which keep people poor." The organization's biggest campaigns in recent years have involved lobbying to reduce the burden of Third World debt, challenging unfair terms of trade and improving British government aid spending. Some ten percent of Christian Aid's budget is spent on education programmes and campaigning in the UK, Ireland and the European Union.

*IV: Oxfam ( <http://www.oneworld.oxfam.org> )*

*( <http://www.oxfam.org> )*

Originally known as the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, Oxfam was founded in 1942 to provide aid to soldiers and civilians in Nazi-occupied Greece, suffering due to the blockade imposed by the Allies. The Committee continued to raise funds after the end of the war and extended their remit to include "the relief of suffering arising as a

result of wars or other causes in any part of the world". Oxfam grew steadily through the ensuing decades and now has offices in around seventy countries and sister organizations in the United States, Canada, Quebec, Australia, Belgium, Hong Kong, Netherlands and Spain. 'Oxfam International', which links Oxfam in the UK to these sister organizations, was formed in 1996, with the aim of strengthening Oxfam's potential to influence decision-making on the part of governments and inter-governmental organizations, and to support Third World people in lobbying their own governments.

Oxfam places strong emphasis on using the weight of public concern to lobby governments and political and economic decision-making bodies such as the UN and the World Bank. To raise the profile of poverty, fair trading and its emergency relief operations, Oxfam runs programmes of developmental education, aimed at informing people about the causes of, and possible solutions to, these problems. The organization operates through a wide network of volunteers and paid staff, and generally supports small projects run by local people "whose knowledge and contacts ensure that money and effort are used as efficiently as possible".

In its development operations, Oxfam applies principles of sustainable development, arguing that small scale local projects are the most effective means of helping people to become self-sufficient. Publicity material for the organization states that "(T)he common thread in Oxfam's work is supporting poor people in their efforts to gain more control over their lives and to achieve peaceful change".

Oxfam's policies on gender are intrinsic to its operations and are based on the claim that women suffer deprivation and discrimination from cradle to grave. It is a key objective of Oxfam's, therefore, to ensure that the interests and needs of women are specifically considered during the development and implementation of projects. For Oxfam:

"(I)t is vital that women are fully consulted and involved in any relief or development; too often in the past they have been neglected, or even further disadvantaged, by proposals and plans drawn up by men".

Oxfam's focus is on gender, rather than on women, and the organization argues that it is important to ensure that the changing of women's status is the responsibility of both sexes. Oxfam is "trying to ensure the full integration of gender into all its lobbying work". To this end, a Gender Development Unit was established in 1985 with the aims



of promoting gender training for its staff and partners, providing financial support to women's groups and networks working for change, appointing gender experts and consultants for field research and project evaluation, and advocating gender-focused policies for international organizations.

In 1995-6, Oxfam in the UK had an income of almost ninety million pounds sterling. Over half of this income came from private donations, from trading and from gifts in kind. Of the remainder, the British government's Overseas Development Agency acted as the largest single donor, granting over thirteen million pounds, and other funds were provided by the European Union and the United Nations. During 1995-6, Oxfam spent over six million pounds on education, information and awareness campaigns.

*V: Institute for Journalism in Transition (IJT)*

( <http://www.ijt.org> )

( <http://www.ijt.cz> )

IJT was established in 1998, but was formed by the merger of two other institutions, the Prague-based *Transitions* magazine, and the London-based Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR). IJT maintains offices in both cities, as well as field and correspondent offices, and receives funding from a variety of sources. These include a funding package from the Open Media Research Institute (OMRI) of the Open Society Institute (OSI), support from international organizations such as the European Union, the US-based National Endowment For Democracy and the UK National Lotteries Charities Board, and subscription fees for the magazine.

IJT describes itself as a not-for-profit media development organization which works to strengthen independent media and other democratic voices in societies undergoing major political transition in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. IJT works with local journalists and international media organizations with the aims of developing professional journalism and encouraging critical public debate in these countries. It seeks to achieve these objectives by following an integrated range of programming and publishing activities. This approach has two related dimensions. Firstly, *Transitions* magazine, published monthly in both print and electronic format, reports and debates events and issues relevant to post-communist societies, using contributions from both within its regions of interest and from the West. Secondly, IJT operates journalism

training, media development and research projects in its main focus regions, which include the Balkans, Caucasus, Central Asia and Russia.

IJT's role is based upon the perceived need to establish a critical and independent press in regions which have no history of free speech. IJT identifies a paradox in this respect: "Just as the need - and opportunity - for good journalism have increased, the stories have become more difficult: more complex, more local if no less important, in some cases (i.e. corruption) even more dangerous. Yet just when international reporting could play such a helpful complementary role in collaboration with local journalists, Western interest in the region has sharply declined". In an attempt to redress the balance, IJT aims to use its experience in co-operating with diverse networks of regional media to create an international platform for information and debate on political, economic and social developments in the areas covered, using contributions from both indigenous local journalists and western analysts.

IJT's publicity material suggests that partnerships are key to its operations. Consequently its principles include full integration between its operations in East and West, close co-operation between regional media and NGOs on field programmes and collaboration between regional and international journalists, including journalist exchanges, media monitoring and research, and other editorial projects. IJT sees electronic publications and the use of email as serving an important role in disseminating reports from *Transitions* and IJT's other publications both internationally and within the regions. IJT is also developing an online access system to output from newspapers published in each of the Eastern European and former Soviet Union countries.

### Method

A questionnaire was sent by email to each of the participating NGOs and was completed by a senior member the communications team or the staff member responsible for co-ordinating Internet output. By prior agreement with all of the NGOs, this was followed up by a second questionnaire which requested additional information. Copies of both are given at Appendices (1) and (2). The questionnaires looked at the use of ICTs within the individual organizations. Questions covered the use of email and the Internet by each NGO, and also asked for brief detail on the size of the organization and membership numbers, policies on webpage production, language use, online archives and duplication of information in different formats. A follow-up interview was conducted by email in

each case, to allow clarification on some points, and to gather greater detail on some issues which were common to all responses. In this respect, a combination of formal survey and informal electronic interviews was used to gather information. The questionnaires were completed towards the end of 1997, with the follow-up interviews taking place in early 1998.

### Research findings

#### Use of email

The research findings show that the organizations surveyed all use email, both internally among staff members and externally, to communicate with individuals and with other organizations. Members of the general public are, therefore, able to contact all of the organizations by email. More detail on external email contact is given later in this section.

Friends of the Earth, Christian Aid and IJT have email links between all of their offices, with the latter organization making 'extensive' use of the facility. Oxfam has links between ninety-five percent of its offices. Amnesty International has email facilities in ninety to ninety-five percent, with some offices in Africa still unconnected due to technical difficulties. Amnesty International indicated that bringing these offices online has been deemed a high priority within the organization.<sup>51</sup>

Each of the NGOs was asked whether contact was ever made with any of the following groups/organizations by email: existing members; the general public; British government agencies (such as the Department of the Environment); international organizations (such as the United Nations); other human rights or environmental organizations; media organizations. Christian Aid and IJT are not membership organizations, so the first question is not applicable to them; however, both organizations use email to contact all of the groups/organizations listed. Amnesty International uses email to contact all except the general public and British government agencies. Oxfam uses email to contact all but British government agencies and the media. Friends of the Earth makes use of email to contact all of the above. All of the organizations surveyed place email contact addresses on their websites.

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<sup>51</sup> Note that telecommunications links to Africa have historically been restricted by the pre-existing colonially-based infrastructure, and by the high cost of laying cables around and across the continent. Developments in wireless and satellite technologies are now producing significant reductions in the cost of connecting remote regions.

The three organizations with membership systems indicated that they use email to send information to members, although only Amnesty International asks for email addresses on membership application forms. The use of 'mailshots', that is, the sending of unsolicited information by post, is a common practice among NGOs (see: Pharoah & Welch 1997). None of the organizations surveyed, however, does 'mailshots' via email. Friends of the Earth indicated, though, that, having developed a prototype system for automated information delivery to local groups, a similar system may be developed for contacting the general public.

### Use of the Internet

All of the organizations surveyed use the Internet and all have pages on the World Wide Web. All of the websites were established in 1994, with the exception of IJT's which came online in 1998 following the launch of the newly-merged organization. Web pages can thus be considered to be an accepted part of the information infrastructure of these organizations. The Web pages of all of the organizations are accessed frequently, although all of the respondents indicated that the figures given for number of 'hits' (that is, how often the sites are accessed) are, at best, rough estimates. Information on web-site access is not available from Christian Aid or from IJT. Amnesty International suggested around 0.5 million people have accessed their web-site since it was established. Oxfam suggest that over ten million hits have been made on their sites, while Friends of the Earth estimate around one hundred and forty thousand hits in the six months prior to the survey. It is possible to join all of the organizations surveyed via their web-sites or, in the case of Christian Aid and IJT, to join their mailing list.

New information is added to the Web sites on a regular basis. Oxfam and IJT update their pages at least once a month, whilst Christian Aid adds news releases and job vacancies at least twice a week on average. Amnesty International said in their response that regularly updated information was essential to the organization's operations, and that Web pages are therefore updated at least once a week. Friends of the Earth also update their Web pages on a weekly basis.

Each of the organizations surveyed has a different staffing policy for the production of Web pages. Oxfam employs copy-writing staff based in the UK to produce material for its Web pages. Christian Aid uses texts which are also published in other formats.

These are then converted to 'html', and sent to OneWorld Online (based in Oxford, England) to be added to the Web site. Only minor changes are ever made to the texts; an example given was changing 'Birmingham' on a UK press release to 'Birmingham, England' for the Web site. Amnesty International does not employ staff specifically to write copy for Web pages, nor does Friends of the Earth. IJT commissions articles from freelance writers. Some IJT staff also write for their web pages, but their 'real' jobs are in wider editorial features.

Each of the organizations surveyed, except IJT, employs a co-ordinator who makes decisions on the content of web pages. The web pages published by IJT are reprints of magazine hard copy and decisions on content of the web pages are made by the assistant magazine editor. In each of the other organizations, material sent by regional and/or international offices is filtered through the office of the co-ordinator before electronic publication. The organizations surveyed each have a slightly different approach to producing material for publication in various formats. Oxfam publishes some material online which is not available elsewhere. However, most of the information on the Web pages is available through other means, such as press releases, pamphlets, books and so on, but is not always presented in the same way. All of the material Christian Aid publishes online is available in other formats. All material currently available online from Amnesty International is also available in other formats. However, plans are being developed to produce material which will only be available online, or which will be published on the Web before it is available in hard copy. Most of the material which Friends of the Earth publishes is available in other formats, except for information on large database applications, which only appear online.

Asked whether information online was published in languages other than English, the organizations again had differing responses. Oxfam (UK) publishes material on its Web pages in English and Welsh. Oxfam International, however, has offices in various countries which publish some material in their national tongue. Christian Aid only publishes material online in English. Amnesty International has a complex system, with each of the national offices publishing material in their own languages. Their international offices publish material in English, French and Spanish. The English material is posted online from London, the French and Spanish from the Amnesty International Translation Units in Paris and Madrid respectively. Friends of the Earth publishes some material in other languages from its offices worldwide, though its central

offices in England only publish information in English. IJT have published special editions of their magazine in Serbo-Croat, but at present only publish online in English.

Comprehensive online archives are kept by all of the organizations. Oxfam publishes, among other things, reports on national and international campaigns, research material, policy documents and details on its Fair Trade campaign, and information on the socio-political motives behind the project. Oxfam also publishes its trading catalogue on its website, with a facility for online purchases provided. Christian Aid publishes similar material electronically, with details of campaigns, press releases, reports and briefing documents accessible on its website. Other pages detail the history, philosophy and aims of the organization. Amnesty International keeps a large online archive of material published in the previous year. This covers press releases, campaign documents, reports about countries and themes of campaigns. It also contains the entire Annual Report of Amnesty International separated into country-specific items. Friends of the Earth also publishes press releases, details of past and present local and international campaigns and policy documents. In addition, it also publishes a wide range of information documents on issues such as climate change, energy use and production, transport policies, sustainable development and business and the environment. IJT keeps back issues of its magazine in its online archive and is developing an archive for back issues of articles published in the local and regional press in Eastern European and former Soviet Union states.

All of the organizations surveyed provide links to organizations with similar concerns. Both Oxfam and Christian Aid are linked to OneWorld Online, a BT-sponsored, multilingual facility which provides network services to over one hundred and fifty NGOs. This encompasses a wide range of organizations worldwide, varying from large international NGOs, to regional and national groups, covering many social, political, environmental and human rights concerns. Amnesty International provides links to a large number of other sites. As well as, among others, organizations dealing with human rights, civil liberties, anti-war campaigns, women's and gender-awareness sites, Amnesty International's sites also supplies links to governmental sites, the United Nations, the European Parliament and the European Court of Human Rights. Friends of the Earth also provides links to like-minded organizations, as well as supplying links to businesses, local government, youth groups and colleges providing environmental courses. IJT provide links to almost one thousand websites in Eastern Europe and the

former Soviet Union. The organization also provides links to over seventy international organizations, including the United Nations, Amnesty International, the European Union, the Human Rights Web and the World Bank.

The NGOs surveyed were asked whether written policies on the use of network communications were held. Despite the widespread use of email and Internet facilities among the organizations, such written policies appear minimal. Information on policy documents was not available from Christian Aid. Among the other organizations surveyed, only Friends of the Earth had written network communications policies, and then only for its UK offices.

Organizations surveyed were asked whether they provided network facilities for their 'client groups', that is, groups or organizations to whom they provide aid or assistance, in the form of funds, staff, equipment and so on. Christian Aid provides network facilities to three charitable organizations, BICT (British and Irish Churches Trust), GOOD (Gender Orientation on Development) and UKFG (United Kingdom Food Group). Amnesty International does not at present provide such facilities to client groups but when surveyed was developing plans to do so. Oxfam funds community groups around the world, with funding used for network access and facilities where applicable. For example, Oxfam has helped an umbrella group of NGOs in the Caribbean to upgrade computers, connect with email and provide training in the use of network technologies for members. Oxfam also provide computer and fax facilities to a group in the Negev desert which was established to help revive the traditional weaving skills of Bedouin women and market the resulting products. Oxfam has also provided email to client groups for the purpose of lobbying the World Bank, and suggests that information technology is of increasing importance to developing countries, and the organization is therefore establishing policies accordingly. FoE provides links to over one hundred and fifty environmental organizations, including policy-making agencies, scientific institutions and social groups. FoE also links to the OneWorld system. IJT differs from the other organizations surveyed in that it is a media organization aiming to provide information on post-communist countries both to those living within them and to interested parties in other areas. Although IJT runs regional training programmes it does not work with client groups as such.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the nature of political agency of NGOs, and related some of the key characteristics of NGO activity to the features of ICTs. There is no specific model of NGO activity, and they cannot be viewed as a homogenous group. There are, however, a number of characteristics which distinguish their form of political agency from others. Most notably, NGOs tend to be inherently decentralizing and place a high priority on transmitting information on their activities and concerns to both official institutions, such as governments and IGOs, and to individuals and collectives. It has been suggested that ICTs may provide a valuable tool for achieving this objective, not least as their key features appear to compliment the existing operational patterns of NGOs. ICTs represent, for relatively well-off NGOs, a cost-effective communications mechanism, providing both a means of interpersonal exchange between staff and a publicity and information output facility. Moreover, the key strengths of NGOs as political actors identified by Hurrell may be articulated through the use of ICTs.

This chapter has also provided brief background information on each of the NGOs surveyed. This offers an account of their establishment and development and of the foci of their current activities. Although essentially given to provide a backdrop to the analysis of the use of ICTs by NGOs, these histories also provide some insight into the prominent role effective communications play in the operations of the organizations surveyed. Details of the responses to the survey have been given, although no analysis of the significance of these findings has been undertaken at this point.

Taking a broad overview of both the publicity literature and survey data provided by the surveyed NGOs, it is evident that each of these organizations places an important premium on the value of information as a political tool, and on the use of network technologies to spread their particular concerns to the widest possible audience. A qualitative analysis of the findings of the survey is given in Chapter Four. Some of the possible implications of increased provision of information, with respect to understanding of political spaces, are then discussed in Chapter Five, along with an application of the spatial theories outlined in Chapter One.



## CHAPTER FOUR NGOS, ICTs & POLITICAL PRACTICES

### Introduction

Using the indicators given by the survey, it is possible to analyse how NGOs are making use of ICTs and the implications this may have for their involvement in and influence upon political processes. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, the spatial practices of the political lives of individuals, that is their lived environment and the mechanisms available to them for political engagement, operate and adjust in dynamic relation with the actions of other political players. Consequently, changes to the political practices of NGOs, such as the introduction of ICTs, may have an impact on the political opportunities available to other actors. NGO use of ICTs as a political tool is not without its shortcomings; there can certainly be no claims that ICTs provide a panacea for the imbalances in or injustices of the global political system. However, the use of ICTs appears to consolidate some of the existing features of NGOs which have contributed to their growing potency as political actors in recent decades.<sup>52</sup>

This chapter aims to highlight the issues most likely to be affected by the introduction of this form of communication into the political arena. The chapter thus identifies some of the actors potentially likely to be affected by access to ICTs via NGOs, and looks at some of the ways the increased flow of information may be influencing political spaces. As well as a general overview of pertinent issues, this chapter identifies issues around the gendered relations of technology and how this may affect access to ICTs. In addition, issues relating to other forms of marginalization are highlighted. The aim of this chapter is not, however, to fully explore the implications of NGO use of ICTs in relation to the discourse of IR. Analysis of the ways spatial theories can help us to make sense of the use of ICTs in political practice is undertaken in detail in Chapter Five.

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<sup>52</sup> As noted in the Introduction to the thesis, the key aim of this research is to apply spatial theories to complex political practices in an attempt to develop more flexible approaches to theorising in IR. Any claims made about changing NGO practices which are made in this and the following chapter should therefore to be understood to be observation rather than induction.

### NGO Use of ICTs

The four communicative strengths of NGOs outlined by Hurrell (see Chapter Three) appear to be largely substantiated by the responses to the survey. Firstly, the ability to develop and disseminate knowledge, a feature which all see as being crucial to their work, is a facet of NGO operations which ICTs are ideally suited to. Hurrell's terminology is rather awkward in this context: the NGOs surveyed use *their* knowledge to provide information, which in turn can be contextualized in new forms of understanding. Despite the conflation of knowledge with information,<sup>53</sup> it is evident that ICTs can provide a mechanism for NGOs to increase the volume and range of their informational activities.

Unlike participation in state politics, any form of mass involvement in political activity through NGOs is dependent on their ability to raise interest and awareness in their particular areas of concern.<sup>54</sup> ICTs have the capacity to transmit information on a greater scale and to more geographically dispersed audiences than any other communications technology. That is, it is possible for NGOs using ICTs to make larger volumes of material available across a wider area. ICTs compare favourably with other media in this respect. Broadcast media, whether used for programming or advertising, is extremely costly, gives no priority to NGO concerns and is subject to the gatekeeping practices noted in Chapter Two. Print media, whilst more cost-effective than broadcasting, can reach only limited and usually fairly specific audiences, both in geographical and intellectual terms.<sup>55</sup>

At the most basic level of information provision, all of the NGOs surveyed have web sites on the Internet, where details on their projects, research and campaigns can be accessed. Although all of the organizations currently provide the same data in other forms, some have plans to produce material specifically for online distribution in the near future. This conforms with what appears to be a general trend in Internet use; as information providers become more experienced in the use of online technologies, their material moves from direct replication of existing formats and adapts to the technology

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<sup>53</sup> Terms frequently used to describe contemporary techno-social relations, such as 'the knowledge society,' tend to reflect this conflation.

<sup>54</sup> Of course, many NGOs have very little interest in mass involvement in politics. One aim of all of the organizations which participated in research for the thesis, however, is to promote their activities widely, in order to use public support as a means of political leverage.

<sup>55</sup> This applies to advertising in newspapers and magazines, as well as in specialist publications.

available. In providing details of their interests, activities and campaigns online, the NGOs surveyed dramatically increase their potential audience and profile.<sup>56</sup>

Two of the other strengths of NGOs identified by Hurrell, the articulation of a powerful set of human values and their potential to harness a growing sense of cosmopolitan moral awareness, are also relevant to their use of ICTs. How NGOs articulate values and harness awareness is in large measure contingent on their ability to reach and receive responses from audiences, and to engage in discussion and debate on their strategies and campaigns. The interactive technologies offered by ICTs can provide individuals with opportunities for some form of direct engagement in the activities of NGOs, in a number of different ways.

The survey responses indicate that NGOs facilitate four main forms of communication for users of ICTs. Firstly, it is possible to email all of the NGOs directly, providing information and feedback from user to organization. Secondly, users can access information, in downloadable form from websites, and have the potential to transfer any documentation from the NGOs onward to other parties. Thirdly, facilities to form online discussion groups are available either directly from the websites of all of the organizations surveyed, or from links to them. Finally, it is possible for users to contact international policy-making organizations such as the UN, the World Bank and the EU, and local and regional institutions, such as governments and regional authorities through links provided on NGO websites.<sup>57</sup>

This multi-dimensional approach is not necessarily representative of structural change in the nature of political interaction as the engagement of actors with NGOs and other organizations, as individuals or collectively, is possible through other media. The multi-logical potential of ICTs does, however, indicate that two issues relating to spatial change are highlighted by NGO use of this form of communication. Firstly, the public/private, state-centric logic of political interaction understood is open to challenge:

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<sup>56</sup> Note that, as the survey does not analyse 'audience' figures, it is not possible to *prove* that their information is reaching a wider audience. Indeed the organizations themselves operate under the assumption that this is the case but have no concrete evidence of this yet.

<sup>57</sup> Hurrell's terminology is again slightly problematic; human values and moral awareness are highly subjective expressions. All of the NGOs surveyed, however, use similar terms within their own campaign literature, and their use of ICTs does appear to adapt this technology as a mechanism for articulating their ideas in new forms and for providing links between dispersed groups, individuals and agencies.

the potential changes in the range and scope of extant NGO practices through the use of ICTs suggests that patterns of political engagement could become yet more complex. Secondly, and relatedly, if new, more intricate and multi-layered forms of political interaction *are* emerging, the 'top-down' interpretations of politics implied by the ontologies of IR may prove too rigid to adequately analyse such practices.

Hurrell's final argument is that NGOs respond to the multiple weaknesses of the state system, both at global and local levels, and their use of ICTs is also relevant to this claim. Although much discussion of network technologies assumes 'the global' as the normative space of political engagement, there is evidence from the survey to suggest that local and regional spaces of political engagement can be bolstered by the use of ICTs. Research, campaigns and educational and advocacy programmes conducted by international NGOs can operate at multiple levels, with all of the NGOs surveyed involved in both region-specific operations and large-scale socio-political campaigns.

ICTs are not simply a mechanism for promoting a globalized form of politics, although they can be used to publicise issues to a potentially global audience. One of its significant characteristics for NGOs is that they can also be used to forge or consolidate links between local communities, or across diasporas. It is possible that NGO use of ICTs will help to draw marginalized groups who do not conform to normative interpretations of racial, cultural and social national identity into political processes where many have previously sought support outside of the institutional structures of politics. The use of ICTs by NGOs may strengthen the ability of these organizations to provide a conjunctive point for some disenfranchised individuals and collectives, by providing focal points for information-exchange and debate on 'low' political issues.

Evidence from all of the NGOs surveyed identifies numerous sites of political engagement where the consolidation of *local* communities is an important application. Thus, although all of the organizations use ICTs to contact international institutions and provide mechanisms for service-users to do the same, they also aim to use network technologies as a means of creating and reinforcing regional ties among social and political activists. At the same time, the provision of ICTs to local groups can help to overcome some of the imbalances of differential access to political processes, by supplying these technologies to non-elite, frequently economically under-privileged actors.

Illustrating the complexities of contemporary political practices, the NGO movement has been credited with providing mechanisms for 'internationalizing' many aspects of political processes, most notably those previously interpreted as operating at a social-political nexus and consequently falling outside of high political practices. NGOs have assumed much of the responsibility for publicising and responding to many of the trans-state, international and global concerns which governments are rarely able to prioritise. The use of ICTs may provide a mechanism for improving the efficiency of NGOs in forging, maintaining and extending contacts in and across communities, a prerequisite for strengthening the base of non-state political practices.

Responses to the survey suggest that, contrary to some of the popular lore on the 'disembodiment' of cyberspatial technologies, location remains an salient feature of social and political existence. Where individuals live and the regimes they are subject to, whether social, political, religious, cultural and so on, affect material conditions. If ICTs can extend potential audience for NGOs their use may draw a wider community into local issues, as well as mapping localised politics against global social concerns. Thus, for example, women in the Negev desert are viewed by Oxfam both as a localised and specific community and as situated within wider debates about women's human rights and access to political processes. The focus of the survey was not upon the consolidation of local communities, and the evidence provided is therefore relatively scant. There were some indications from each organization surveyed, though, that the focal sites of political engagement through their use of ICTs reflect both regional specificity and global referents. In this sense, use of ICTs may reaffirm the customary approach of NGOs in viewing political practice as relating to multiple actors and fora.

Albeit in a relatively limited capacity, individuals and groups have the opportunity to situate themselves as political actors across the political spectrum, transcending pre-defined political spaces in the process. As Kitchin notes, it is well-documented that on-line communities are forming, centred on common interests and affinity rather than coincidence of location (1998: 11).<sup>58</sup> NGO use of ICTs can provide individuals and groups with an avenue for developing or intensifying communities of interest by providing an organizational framework through which contact can be made or mediated. Research into smaller collectives suggests that the potential to develop and consolidate

political communities through the use of ICTs also applies without the pre-defined organizational structure which the large NGOs surveyed for the thesis provide (see: Pickerill & Rodgers, forthcoming).

This again disrupts oppositional categorizations of politics by ignoring concepts of high/low political division and state-centric interpretations of agendas. As discussed in Chapter Three, NGO operations are inherently decentralized and decentralizing. Thus the focus of their activities is often based on circumstance, and centres upon concentrated effort in a particular location and/or with a particular group of influential parties or individuals. The forms of influence applied by these parties does not conform to traditional notions of power in IR, combining cultural, social and economic criteria with the agendas of high politics.

Amnesty International has been one of the most energetic proponents of this form of contingent politics, with its webpages suggesting that the use of information from a wide range of sources, including government bulletins, international media, and human rights organizations and activists, is necessary to achieve its objectives. One of Amnesty International's initiatives, the Urgent Action Network, illustrates how ICTs can be used to mobilize support by activists. The Network uses email and fax, as well as courier, express and airmail services, to marshal support among volunteers in eighty-five countries, with the aim of initiating mass appeals on behalf of prisoners of conscience considered to be in immediate danger.

The international NGOs surveyed perceive themselves to be resolutely *non-state* actors. Although each of the NGOs surveyed occasionally co-operates with both national governments and international governmental organizations, their objectives centre upon broader conceptions of civil society than state-based interpretations can muster. NGO use of ICTs appears to intensify contemporary challenges to state-centric political discourse by providing an information-exchange mechanism and an interactive medium which refute the validity of pre-defined political hierarchies. IJT, for example, bases its operations on the assumption that the development of a free and open press across the former Soviet Union and countries of Central and Eastern Europe will help to promote both the structures and cultures of democracy. As with all of the other NGOs surveyed, a progressive socio-political philosophy underpins their routine activities, and their use

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<sup>58</sup> See also Slevin (2000).

of ICTs is seen by the organization as another tool available to promote their particular interpretations of more equitable societies.

Responses to the survey also suggest that NGOs may be able to consolidate their role as bridging organizations through their use of ICTs, by providing information unavailable from other sources. While many intergovernmental organizations, states and MNCs now issue bulletins on their activities on their web pages, only NGOs take social change as their chief incentive for providing information. ICTs can be a useful mechanism for this, as, when operating effectively, they constitute a fast, efficient, cost-effective means of transmitting information. As well as linking to CharityNet and APC, the network systems discussed in Chapter Three, the NGOs surveyed provide links to a vast and diverse array of organizations and institutions specific to their areas of interest. All of the NGOs surveyed also make use of OneWorld, another 'umbrella' site, which links around one hundred and fifty charities, both those working on specific regional interests and those working on particular social and political issues, such as women's rights and anti-war campaigns. All of these organizations provide links in turn to others. The provision of these links may reflect the claim of some commentators that NGOs operate a primarily co-operative mode of political engagement by comparison to other political actors such as governments and MNCs. More significantly, though, such links can supply a breadth of detail which no single organization, whether, state, inter- or non-governmental, could provide alone. An additional strength of ICTs in this respect is the provision of comprehensive online archives, which four out of five of the NGOs surveyed hold. These detail in varying degrees past campaigns, research findings, policy initiatives and so on and may increase their value to researchers and academics as well as to activists.

The NGOs surveyed also provide hyperlinks through their websites to many of the public institutions whose actions affect their operations, such as government agencies and inter-governmental organizations, providing non-institutional actors with connections to wider networks of political activity. By using ICTs to provide links to official agencies, NGOs may again transcend traditional conceptualisations of public/private political space by providing a mechanism for some form of public access to otherwise relatively inaccessible institutions. Institutions linked to the websites of the NGOs surveyed include political organs such as the European Court of Human Rights,

NATO, the UN and the European Union and, on specific campaigns, to government departments and the offices of individual ministers.

Having examined only NGO practices, however, the survey does not produce evidence to indicate that states or IGOs are adapting their decision-making processes to accommodate the opinions of online activists. Some of the NGOs surveyed now use intense Internet lobbying as an element of their campaigning, by providing direct hyperlinks to decision-making agencies. It can only be assumed that the NGOs surveyed find this an effective mechanism, as at present there is no firm evidence to suggest that the actions of agencies and politicians take account of this new dimension of political activity.<sup>59</sup>

Operating across the political spectrum means that NGOs effect contacts with a wide range of actors across myriad levels. ICTs, and email in particular, have become a valuable mechanism for making contact with an increasing number of these actors. All of the NGOs surveyed now use this form of technology as an intrinsic feature of their administrative procedures, and use it to communicate across political hierarchies. It is possible that the less formal approach of email communication may have an effect on the conceptual hierarchies between actors. Kitchin suggests that cyberspace provides a unique space of communication, blending together written and oral styles to produce a new linguistic register and create new rules of language (1998: 13). This is particularly evident in the use of email, a facility which all of the surveyed NGOs use to contact 'official' political organs, as well as individuals and other non-state actors. This suggests that some of the cultural boundaries, such as linguistic formality and idiomatic conventions which have marginalized some groups, may be disrupted by more casual use of language exercised through email in particular. As well as bypassing some traditional institutional barriers, the lack of formality usually associated with the use of email, and the disregard for status which this implies, suggests that some of the conventional, elite-defined distinctions between political actors are being challenged.

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<sup>59</sup> In his study of the use of ICTs in the Netherlands, Paul Frissen has identified a growing correspondence between electronic and policy networks, leading to a horizontalization of relations (1997: 115). Any evidence on this issue in respect of NGO influence over policy-making is at present largely anecdotal and warrants further investigation.



### NGOs, ICTs and Gender Issues

On gender issues, NGO use of ICTs reveals a dual tension relating to questions around structure and agency. All but one of the NGOs surveyed believe that addressing gender inequalities in their areas of concern, both material and metaphoric, is necessary to achieving social change. NGOs are confronted by structural inequalities in gender-technology relations: bias is not uniform, and women are subject to discrimination and exclusionary practices in all societies to varying degrees. How discrimination is made manifest does not conform to standardized codes of practice, and is based on combinations of legislative, cultural, economic and political control. Underpinning attempts to redress gender balances through the use of ICTs, however, are issues about how men and women relate differently to technologies and technological artefacts. The gendered relations of technology, that is, how women have frequently been socialized to believe that the realm of the technical is a masculine world, consequently underscore questions of political agency in the context of the thesis.

The gendered relations of computing thus warrant further brief examination, in order to situate questions of access to political processes in the 'real' lives of individuals as actors. As Damarin notes: "The computer is, after all, *a machine* and thus a part of the male domain often prohibited to women" (1993: 364). Though changing education and employment policies in some societies have had some impact on fe/male relations to technologies, girls and young women often learn, frequently simply experientially, that technology belongs in the male domain (see: Kirkup & Smith Keller (eds) 1992; Turkle 1984, 1996). Though women come into more frequent contact with electronic and computerised artefacts than ever before, it is unusual for them to have any real influence over their design, development or application (see: Grint & Gill (eds) 1995).

Moreover, and crucial to understanding the ways individuals relate to technologies, is Lie's argument that: "The concept of technology not only applies to technical objects but, ..., includes the knowledge surrounding them" (1995: 392). In this sense, girls and women are frequently socialized to believe not only that they have no 'natural' aptitude for using computers, but that the type of knowledge required to do so is unattainable. Feminist research on technology, as in all other subjects, is multi-faceted, but "tends towards approaches which examine how long-standing, institutionalized and structural patterns of male power, ... , express and shape technology" (Ormrod 1995: 33). These approaches recognize that influencing social change, both in the real and virtual worlds,

depends upon the participation of women in the shaping of rules, norms and values regarding the use of technologies.

Nye points out that “technologies are not deterministically fated for use by one or another sex. ... Technologies are not inherently gendered. Rather, pre-existing cultural values and gender relations are re-expressed in the use of new machines” (1997: 1081). Challenging gender bias depends in part on the mechanisms available to individuals to restructure power relations, and the beliefs and codes of practice which underpin them. This suggests that NGO use of ICTs needs to be paralleled by increased use of these technologies by women if entrenched gender relations are to be altered.

Gendered relations are, of course, nuanced and constantly shifting, and the use of ICTs is affected by broader social change. There are several indicators which suggest that women’s access to information and communications technologies, and by extension to political processes, is increasing. Changing education and employment practices in some areas have already been mentioned. These introduce girls to the technological realm at an earlier age, and moderate the masculine purchase on this area. In addition, Turkle argues that the age of technophobia will end with the new generation of children, who see computing technologies as a standard component of everyday existence, in their toys, in televisions, sound systems and domestic appliances and, increasingly, in personal computers in the home (see: Turkle 1996). Turkle applies the concept of extant technophobia to both male and female, suggesting fear of the technical to be based as much on an exclusion of the masses from the scientific realm as upon gender difference. Although representing a notably Westernized point of view, Turkle’s comment highlights two important issues; that the relationships between individuals and technologies are historically contingent, and that new technologies and the ways they are used operate in mutually causative relation.

Only by introducing more women to ICTs does it appear possible to profoundly influence the gendered knowledge-base upon which understandings of technology, or what could be described as ‘lived ontologies’, are formed. In spite of NGO advocacy on gender equality, there exists in this area a tendency to use ICTs as an informational medium, rather than as catalyst for change. This links with Pharoah and Welchman’s criticism that the potential for interactivity of network technologies has so far been

misunderstood by all parties, with the tendency to view the Internet in particular as a passive medium, rather than as a multi-way exchange mechanism (1997: 8).

Of the NGOs surveyed, this is only true in respect of their approach to gender online. Across a wide range of other socio-political concerns interactive communication between individuals, activist groups and large and small institutions is encouraged and facilitated. There is little evidence online, however, of the NGOs surveyed prioritising debate on gender issues among the various political actors with whom they interact. All, bar one, of those surveyed lack policy initiatives which promote the use of network technologies by women. Consequently, although four out of the five actively promote women's human rights, and all perceive ICTs to be a valuable mechanism for social change, only Oxfam has made any link between advocacy and action in this respect.

There is little evidence from the survey that the NGOs involved have grasped the transformative significance of this technology in respect of the restructuring of gender relations. There are, for example, well-documented precedents of women adapting communications technologies to the specific conditions of their existence which none of the NGOs surveyed have yet related to their use of ICTs. The telephone, for example, was envisaged as a tool of business and its social use "was not only weakly promoted, but even disapproved of" (Frissen 1995: 80). Patterns of use from its early introduction, though, show that women were applying it to their social circumstances almost immediately, using it to contact friends and family rather than for the businesses messages it was intended to carry (see: *ibid.*; Fischer 1992). Castells argues that Fischer's study shows the high social elasticity of any given technology, with users adapting technologies to both enhance their existing networks of communication and to reinforce their deep-rooted social habits (1996: 363). Although findings in both of these areas suggest that women have often extended their domestic roles and responsibilities in their application of these communications technologies, there are nonetheless indications that their social contacts are also enhanced (Frissen 1995). Women are evidently adept at appropriating communications technologies to meet their own needs. Historical evidence therefore suggests that, despite the barrier of the masculine-technical connection, the use of ICTs for social, and political, purposes could provide some mechanism for contesting gendered norms.

The paradox here is that if gender relations are to become more equitable through the use of ICTs, there exists an explicit need to promote women's use of this form of technology. As Katz points out "(T)here is almost certainly no going back on information-networking technologies, but we can make individual decisions about how we will use the technologies available to us. Individual decisions will be aggregated into social decisions" (1997: 11). The potential to influence the development of political practices through the use of ICTs depends to a significant degree not only upon the forms of communication they permit, but also upon the ability of marginalized actors to access this form of technology. On the whole, the use of ICTs by the NGOs surveyed does not at present appear to offer significant opportunities to those actors, particularly women and the economically disadvantaged, who currently have little influence over the evolving political discourse.

#### NGOs, ICTs & Marginalized Groups

Questions of economic dis/advantage are central to much of the critical literature on the emancipatory potential of network technologies. Kitchin argues, for example, that:

"Looking beyond ... egalitarian hyperbole, ... , it is clear that cyberspace usage is fragmented along traditional spatial and social divisions and is not universally accessible" (1998: 111).

Many other scholars offer similar arguments, with common themes identifying the biggest user-group as a largely male, economically advantaged and educated elite. Although the spread of ICTs has been rapid and continues apace, much of the contemporary theorising about its use argues that it will be of limited significance as an agent of social change, given that its dominant user group reflects existing social hierarchies. As Franklin points out, the vast majority of the world's population have no direct contact with this type of technology (1998b: 17), and McChesney notes that illiteracy rates continue to map out boundaries between various regions of the world, and between men and women (1997a: 231). For these reasons, among others, cyberspace is frequently identified as an elite and exclusionary space, with its super-structure determined by Western political and economic actors, and its infrastructures, that is its communications networks, dominated by privileged individuals.

Even in the US, where relatively widespread use of ICTs has the longest history, over fifty percent of Internet hosts are concentrated in just five states (Kitchin 1998: 133). This evidence is significant for both analysts and practitioners, as it indicates how

existing inequalities could be exacerbated by patterns of distribution of ICTs, and that social division could be aggravated by its presence or absence. There is insufficient evidence at present to refute essentialist claims on economic privilege. Nguyen & Alexander's argument is noteworthy in this context, however, as they suggest that cyberspace as a field of study "has no recognizable boundaries or parameters within which social scientists (could) use traditional approaches to formulate criteria for analysis" (1996: 99). Ways of analysing the transformative effects of ICTs are in the process of development and this highlights the difficulties of adopting a deterministic position which assumes that existing relations provide an appropriate foundation for analysis of the impact of this form of communication.

There are problems related to assumptions that dominant actors and dominant discourses will prevail. This is particularly pertinent to analysis of NGO use of ICTs, given that the impact of such organizations on socio-political practices had had a profound impact prior to the advent of ICTs. Although states remain the major decision-makers in intergovernmental agreements, and corporate interests frequently dictate the economic terms of negotiations, NGOs are widely acknowledged, as noted in Chapter Four, to have broadened the discursive parameters of politics, and to have posed a challenge to traditional agent/structure assumptions about the nature of international politics. Their use of ICTs therefore exists within an already-altered political system which the discourse of IR has yet to fully acknowledge.

There is no evidence from the survey to suggest that NGO use of ICTs is disrupting the dominance of economic actors over the superstructure of cyberspace, nor of any desire on their part to do so. The aims of the organizations surveyed centre upon distributing and diffusing information to as wide an audience as possible, and in this respect the widespread availability and increasing standardization of these forms of communication appear advantageous to them. Moreover, the development of a global regulatory framework for ICTs has also served to remove some of the technical and legislative barriers to telecommunications services which previously existed, making access to network technologies and services in many cases more easy and less expensive than would have been the case without some standardization of both service and legislative mechanisms.

All of the organizations surveyed use ICTs to provide information to individuals, via email and websites, and some of them also supply network communication facilities to community groups and local organizations, or have plans to do so. In this sense, the economic barriers to access commonly identified by scholars are not relevant to this analysis, as the NGOs surveyed are, in some cases, providing users with direct access to software, hardware and connection to services. Moreover, many countries have recently introduced online facilities in public buildings, such as public libraries and community centres, a phenomenon which is largely unaccounted for in polarised debates on elitism and egalitarianism. Thus, in degrees which have yet to be quantified, some organizations, both state and non-state, have assumed an element of responsibility for the cost of provision of ICTs to marginalized groups and individuals.

ICTs are, indeed, an expensive form of communication, even by developed-world standards. The prerequisites for use of ICTs, such as access to computers, software, telephone connections and so on, are all costly, and in some areas inadequate local and national infrastructures create additional expense. Some of the problems relating to the hardwiring of telecommunications services can be overcome by relatively recent developments in wireless and satellite technologies (*The Economist*, 18/5/96). These, however, only make access more easy; at present wireless technologies do not generally make using ICTs any less expensive.

These technological developments suggest that access to ICTs in less developed areas can be less problematic than, say, access to telephone services have been in the past. There is still a marked disparity between developed countries and LDCs and despite rapid growth in telecommunications access in some countries, the latter trail well behind (<http://www.c-i-a.com>). There is no clear income-access equation, though. As the ITU point out, Central and Eastern European countries have high access levels relative to average income, while Japan's access levels are ten times lower than Finland's (<http://www.itu.int>). This suggests that NGOs need to provide ICT services in specific locations, as well as to specific groups if any meaningful change to degrees of political participation is to be achieved.

Pharoah and Welchman found that cost is a key factor in influencing the choice of communications methods and that there is a very wide gap between the expenditure of small and large charities in this area (1997: 26). The findings of the survey conducted

for the thesis do suggest that a limited number of economically disadvantaged groups may be able to gain access to network communications via international NGOs. These, however, are groups which have been specifically targeted, and for whom specific funds have been allocated. It should be noted, therefore, that further investigation into the effects ICTs are having on the NGO sector is warranted, particularly in relation to the question of economies of scale on the provision and use of network technologies.

There is also an issue of intellectual accessibility which rests partly on the acquisition of necessary computing skills and partly on the ability to use the lingua franca of network communications, English, effectively. On computing skills, it is important not to conflate educational levels with technical ability, though there is a tendency among scholars to assume that the use of ICTs again reflects existing patterns of achievement, that is, that only the well-educated can acquire the necessary skills to use this form of communication. Kitchin argues that the use of the Internet is largely restricted to use by academics, students and business people (1998: 112), people generally well-equipped to use this form of communication effectively. The increasing use of this form of technology by NGOs, INGOs, governments and non-academic individuals, and also the transfer of information-based services to LDCs by a growing number of MNCs (see: Castells 1996, Chapter Six), raises the possibility that the equation of national statistics on educational achievement may provide a distorted foundation upon which to base assumptions about expertise in the use of ICTs.<sup>60</sup>

The NGO survey suggests that their use of ICTs has the potential to increase access to official political organs for non-state political actors, and allows interchange of information between them.<sup>61</sup> Thus the 'informational elite' developing through the use of ICTs, who are gaining increasing access to political processes which are themselves changing with the use of this form of technology, may differ from previous characterisations of political elitism. On the one hand, the demographic make-up of the informational elite differs from that of traditional political structures and comprises a diverse interest base by comparison to high political practice. On the other hand, some basic requirements, education, time and/or money, remain important factors in political

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<sup>60</sup> This is another area which warrants further investigation as there have been, to my knowledge, no comparative studies of educational levels of ICT users in developed countries and LDCs.

participation and these issues can only be addressed in a fairly superficial way by the organizations surveyed.

The problems created by the use of English as the dominant language of ICTs, both on intranet and Internet systems, is acknowledged by some of the NGOs surveyed, notably Amnesty International and Friends of the Earth, who publish in several different languages online. For the most part, however, the early US domination of Internet use has created an English-language hegemony online. The US has lost position as the largest per capita user of the Internet, however (<http://www.c-i-a.com>),<sup>62</sup> and there is the possibility that the use of other languages will become more common as translation software becomes more sophisticated. ICT technology certainly has the capacity to accommodate a multilingual system, but there is no significant evidence from the NGOs surveyed that they have prioritised this issue.

Finally, one of the few really clear indicators from the survey is that ICTs are being used to increase the operational efficiency of each of the organizations. The offices of all of the NGOs are now online, and internal communications by email is a matter of routine. The multilogical forms of communication ICTs permit are also a valuable feature of this form of technology, allowing the NGOs in some instances faster and more direct contact with related organizations and with official political institutions. As all of the organizations surveyed work in regions where communications infrastructures have traditionally been, at best, inadequate, the introduction of ICTs represents an expedient technological advance.

### Conclusion

This chapter indicates that the NGOs analysed do not observe the primary spatial boundary of the state as central to political processes. They operate 'politically' at multiple levels and across a broad range of actors. Their use of ICTs appears to conform to this interpretation of political space. Despite this, there are also indications that the use of ICTs as a political tool is not having, in this case at least, a *radical* transformative effect on the field of politics more generally. That is, NGO use of ICTs

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<sup>61</sup> Slevin (2000) points out, however, that just because it is possible to email the UK prime minister or the US president, this does not mean that s/he will actually see the email, let alone respond to it.

<sup>62</sup> Finland, the home of the Nokia communications company, now has the highest per capita access to both ICTs and mobile telephones.



allows some change or expansion in the role of these organizations but there may be as many disadvantages as benefits in the use of these technologies.

NGO use of ICTs may provide an important facility for some marginalized groups, by providing direct access for some actors and making information on projects and campaigns widely available.<sup>63</sup> ICTs can allow the NGOs surveyed to access or become more easily available to some marginalized groups and individuals who are largely excluded from 'public' political structures. In addition, all of the organizations surveyed are attempting to use ICTs in both local and global contexts. That is, although all of the NGOs surveyed use this form of communication to reach potentially global audiences, there is also a strong sense from their responses that they are also attempting to use it on behalf of local communities. In this respect, ICTs can reflect the existing operational practices of the NGOs surveyed, where socio-political activity is conducted across multiple spaces. In addition, the opportunities for increased efficiency, both within organizations and in their communications with outside agencies and individuals, is another key feature of their use of ICTs, as it suggests that the potential to operate more effectively as political actors is provided by this form of communication.<sup>64</sup>

NGO use of ICTs is not entirely without its drawbacks and there are a number of issues which indicate that more careful consideration of the use and impact of this form of communication is required. This is most evident in relation to gender concerns. Although most of the organizations surveyed place gender issues high on their agendas, only one has specifically highlighted women's use of ICTs as a priority. There is a clear need for women as a group to be specifically targeted as users to prevent their further marginalization from political processes.

Other key difficulties in NGO of ICTs centre upon the skills of users, rather than specifically upon the organizations in themselves. However, if the NGOs surveyed are to use ICTs as a tool in the promotion of more equitable societies, these issues also require consideration. English as the lingua franca of Internet and email communication needs to be addressed, as significant numbers of people may be excluded by the use of a single

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<sup>63</sup> ICTs have the potential to facilitate communication across a wide range of political actors, a feature which all of the NGOs surveyed are attempting to capitalise upon. This challenges accepted conceptions of political space in IR and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

dominant tongue. There is little evidence from the survey that the NGOs who participated are actively engaged in providing appropriate skills to marginalized groups and individuals.

Chapter Five draws upon the research issues outlined in all of the preceding chapters, structuring the questions raised by NGO use of ICTs around the spatial theories outlined in Chapter One. Thus, Chapter Five examines how spatial theories can be applied to the complex issues of access to political process raised in the thesis, and illustrates how some of the central concerns of the thesis, such as concepts of real and metaphoric boundaries and political legitimacy, can be addressed using this approach.

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<sup>64</sup> This potential, in relation to some of the other issues highlighted in this chapter, will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**NGOs, ICTs & THE APPLICATION OF SPATIAL THEORIES**

**Introduction**

This chapter draws together some of the issues previously outlined in the thesis, and identifies issues which analysis of NGO use of ICTs raises. These issues are manifest at three related levels: disciplinary divisions relating to research into cyberspatial technologies, theoretical approaches to the study of political space, and questions of access to political processes through the use of ICTs. The last of these issues is discussed in detail in Chapter Six. This chapter, however, is divided into two sections which look at academic analysis of cyberspace and the application of spatial theories respectively. The aims of this chapter are twofold. Firstly, by addressing the difficulties facing scholars in developing appropriate modes of analysis for ICT use, the chapter highlights the necessity for more flexible theoretical approaches. Secondly, the application of spatial theories to NGO use of ICTs provides an example of how flexible approaches to analysis of ICTs may be developed.

Under the heading 'Ontologies of ICTs', some of the key observations on the impact and effects of the use of ICTs articulated by scholars across a range of disciplines are outlined. These observations will situate analysis of NGO use of this form of communication within the context of broader debates on the nature of socio-technical change. Fundamental questions about the most appropriate means of analysing these forms of communication remain unanswered. ICTs constitute and construct phenomena which do not lend themselves easily to interpretation through any extant analytical criteria in the social sciences. For this reason, some of the difficulties facing scholars attempting to analyse ICTs are highlighted and the absence at present of a satisfactory theoretical framework for this area of study noted.

Following these discussions, the chapter re-examines the spatial theories outlined earlier in the thesis. The section headed 'Spatial Theories Applied to NGO Use of ICTs' therefore illustrates how the concepts of spatiality detailed in Chapter One can be adopted as a loose analytical schema which provides an interpretative framework for analysing the complex effects of NGO use of ICTs. This is not a definitive model; the application of spatial theories does, however, highlight how conceptualisations of space as dynamic and relational provide a fluid methodological foundation apposite to analysis of complex political practices. Unlike more rigid conceptualisations of politics, spatial

theories provide a model for analysing multi-dimensional and rapidly-changing phenomena, and their application to NGO use of ICTs provides an illustrative example of their effectiveness.

In terms of methodological development, spatial theories such as those applied in the thesis provide a foundation for examining political practice from the level of agency, rather than of structure as the hegemonic discourse of IR dictates. This presents the potential for an epistemological transposition in IR, by identifying a framework for 'bottom-up' analysis of political activity. Earlier chapters examined how the state serves as the point of reference for political practice in the discourse of IR and consequently acts, implicitly or explicitly, as the definitional focus for all other political actors. Despite acknowledgement of a broader range of actors and practices as influential in international affairs, analysis of individual agency has been restricted by the discipline's discursive focus on state-related organizational structures. The potential to use spatial theories to analyse change in international politics at the level of individual agency is discussed in more detail in this chapter.

### Ontologies of ICTs

As the preceding chapters have demonstrated, the impact of ICTs on the structures of contemporary human existence, and on individuals as social, political, economic and cultural actors is being broadly, though neither universally nor uniformly, experienced. Issues relating to the use of this form of communication extend across academic disciplines, forging links across diverse and previously apparently unrelated fields of study. In addition, ICTs have the potential to transcend both discursive and material barriers which have served to delineate actors, institutions and social practices.

In these respects, study of ICTs is necessarily transdisciplinary, as the intellectual divisions of labour which define the boundaries of academic disciplines are disrupted by the evolving computer-mediated, relational spaces generally tagged 'cyberspace'. This relationality contradicts the conventional segregation of academic disciplines and challenges some of the intellectual boundaries applied in academia. For Gregory:

"It is always possible to provide reasons (historical reasons) for the boundaries being drawn this way rather than that. Once these boundaries are established, however, they usually become institutionalized. All the apparatus of the academy is mobilized to mark and, on occasion, to police them. But these divisions do not correspond to any natural breaks in the intellectual landscape; social life does not respect them and ideas flow across them" (1994: 11).

Within IR, the historical reasons for its intellectual boundaries are evident. The concept of the sovereign state as the autonomous embodiment of political legitimacy is enshrined in international convention and is embedded in cultural experience. States have historically been, and remain, potent political actors, and the boundaries which distinguish one territorial entity from another retain important practical implications and symbolic resonance for states and citizens alike. However, the alignment of state borders with conceptual boundaries of politics, as is the norm in IR, has been challenged from within and without the discipline, and patterns of political engagement which are not state-centred are recognised by scholars as significant to the organization of political space (see: Agnew 1994, 1999; Alexander B Murphy 1996; Peterson 1996b).

The intellectual divisions which distinguish IR from other disciplines, already undermined by intra-disciplinary critiques, and by some of the palpable effects of trans-national and globalising activities, are further contravened by the use of ICTs as a tool of social and political engagement. Franklin suggests, therefore, that, for the researcher:

“communications issues are, in their most prosaic sense, about the practical problems of sustaining a multidisciplinary approach in the face of the hegemonic demarcation lines of any respective paradigm(s)” (1998b: 5).

Franklin’s point exposes a basic paradox in the discursive foundations of the discipline. On the one hand, IR is intrinsically interdisciplinary, in that it draws upon a range of contributory academic fields to satisfy its wide-reaching remit. On the other hand, however, the critical signifier of IR, its equation of state territory with political legitimacy in the international arena, renders a multidisciplinary approach problematic. This is particularly evident in relation to analysis of transcendent, non-state-centred political practices of the kind analysed in this thesis.

ICTs thus link with a host of factors which are not necessarily designed to directly threaten the authority of states, but which have a crucial impact on the defining principles of political legitimacy underpinning the discipline of IR: sovereignty and autonomy (see: Walker 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993). Most pertinently for the thesis, the conjunction of ICTs and the growth of the NGO movement represents a dimension of political interaction which state-centric ontologies do not recognise. Consequently, if state sovereignty and autonomy *are* being affected by the trans-state political activity facilitated by the use of ICTs, current mainstream theories in the discipline provide no effective mechanism for analysis of such change. In this instance, the dynamic

relationships between non-state actors and transcendent technologies suggest a multi-layering of socio-political practices which is alien to the differentiated epistemological approaches of the discipline.

Hirst and Thompson note that “new communication and information technologies have loosened the state’s exclusive control of its territory, reducing its capacities for cultural control and homogenization” (1995: 409). ICTs thus refute the inside/outside distinction central to IR, by transcending state boundaries *and* disrupting internal systems of governance. In this respect, the ontologies of IR which situate the state as the definitional basis of political interaction, or the “nodal point” of the discourse of IR (Doty 1996: 125), are undermined as both the international and domestic functions of states may be altered by the use of ICTs by states and by other actors. The potential impact of ICTs on the state and other actors cannot, therefore, be understood within the static state-spatial categories which remain hegemonic in IR (see: Guzzini 1998).

In analysing the impact of this form of communication, it is problematic to assume the state to be either autonomous within the international system or to be the principle influence over decision-making within the confines of its territory. In particular, the need for international and global forms of legislation and the influence of a few major economic players over the spread of communications technologies (see: Luke 1999; Sassen 1999) suggests that even powerful states have only limited autonomy regarding the distribution and use of these technologies within their borders. Featherstone and Lash make this clear when they note that national governments still largely operate in a pre-digital era and do not have the capacity to regulate MNCs and the flows of capital across global markets (1999: 6).

The discipline of IR is not alone in struggling to reconceptualise its ontological premises in light of techno-social change; Poster suggested as early as 1990 that the rapid introduction of new communicational modes constituted a pressing field for theoretical development and empirical investigation (1990: 8). In this respect, the study of ICTs suggests that a fundamental re-imaging of the nature of enquiry in the social sciences is required, most specifically of the tendency towards division rather than linkage. Indeed,

much of the recent analysis of ICTs and its real and imagined ramifications draws upon post-modern, post-structuralist and constructivist approaches to theorising.<sup>65</sup>

Kitchin argues, for example, that the relationships between technology and society can no longer be framed within strict economic and political terms or in strict social and cultural terms but must encompass both (1998: 71). Thus one of the most obvious impacts of ICTs is to render even the broadest categories of analysis - economic, social, cultural and so on - to be viewed as inter-related, creating conceptual dilemmas for traditionally independent disciplines. On the other hand, however, even where inter- or multi-disciplinary work is undertaken, the necessity of maintaining distinct disciplinary boundaries remains, not least in relation to teaching and funding concerns.

Attempts to introduce concepts of multi-dimensional social and political relations have been examined by theorists in all of the social sciences. Lyon argues, for example, that it is problematic to assume rational, autonomous social agents when analysing the impact of new communications technologies, and notes the frustration experienced in attempting to apply conventional theories to understanding of the social relations of cyberspace (1997: 32). He suggests that:

“The forms of social interaction observable within CMC, especially on the Internet, appear to push social theory beyond the simple dichotomy of direct and indirect relationships ... but also beyond the scope of modern notions of self and society” (ibid.)

These notions are particularly complex in IR, as the discipline has situated concepts of rationality and autonomy at state level, and has little real sense of self and society beyond the system of states. Thus the *self*, as rational, autonomous individual, has always been an *other* in IR, as individuals other than state leaders have effectively been located outside of interpretations of political legitimacy in the discipline. This dichotomy suggests that some of the foundational premises of IR also require radical reworking if emerging concepts of multi-dimensional political actors, operating within dis- and un-located spaces, are to be interpreted effectively. The use of ICTs by NGOs, for example, suggests that a range of actors, not necessarily ‘new’ but currently inadequately accounted for in IR, are engaged in activities which are not imbued with political legitimacy within the discipline, but which could clearly have an impact on both other non-state, and state, actors.

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<sup>65</sup> See Graham and Marvin (1996), Kitchin (1998), Nyugen and Alexander (1996) and

The challenge to intellectual boundaries posed by ICTs is not therefore unique to IR. Most academic disciplines have experienced some difficulty in incorporating the study of this form of communication within existing discursive parameters, as concepts of boundaries, both within academic disciplines and in social, economic and cultural existence, are disrupted. The use of ICTs disrupts some of the fundamental constructs of social theory by reconfiguring agent/structure relations, most specifically by disputing the role of structure as the key determinant in defining agency. While institutional and discursive constraints continue to limit the choices available to actors, the availability of ICTs may provide one form of expression which operates outside of, but in relation to, the structural boundaries understood in IR.

Franklin highlights a key concern relating to analysis of the impact of ICTs in a discipline dedicated to investigating the international:

“there is an unarticulated conflict between traditional epistemological/ontological frameworks, of IR/IPE in particular, employed to critique Informatics and the experience of working and living in societies increasingly premised on this form of High-Tech infrastructure” (1998b: 1).

In this sense, IR lacks analytical tools for interpreting the myriad effects and influences of this form of communication, either at the levels of theory or practice. The dichotomous logic underpinning the discipline, particularly in respect of definitions of political legitimacy, implies divisions between elements of political practice which may now be linked by the use of ICTs, as well as by broader social and political changes. Linkages across social and political spaces, which are exemplified by the growth of the NGO movement and appear to be reflected in the growth of communications infrastructures, have important implications for the ontological and epistemological foundations of IR.

Responses from the NGOs surveyed appear to imply that definitions of political activity prevalent in the dominant discourses of IR are inconsistent with some contemporary political practices. By situating the state as agent and the international system as structure, the impact of other actors, and the validity of alternative interpretative mechanisms, are frequently underplayed in the discipline. Analysis of NGO use of ICTs highlights the discipline’s analytical inflexibility in respect of changing relations between actors, and towards evolutionary change in political practices. Neither NGOs, as non-



state actors frequently engaged in political activity which does not take the state as a central focus, nor the use of ICTs, as a transcendent means of communication, are adequately acknowledged or effectively accommodated within existing interpretative frameworks in IR.

Communications media, moreover, cannot simply be 'added in' to the discipline; Thompson points out that deployment of communications media does not consist simply of the establishment of new networks for the transmission of information between individuals where the basis of social relations remain intact (1994: 34). He suggests that "on the contrary, the deployment of communications media establishes new forms of interaction and new kinds of social relations between individuals" (ibid.) The social relations engendered by network communications, coupled with the growth of transnational, issue-based political activism, imply heterogeneous links and non-linear connections between actors, compromising historically conceived notions of autonomy and rationality, whether related to states or to citizens.<sup>66</sup>

Rationality and autonomy are, of course, key elements of modernist conceptions of societal development, premised on notions of advance and progress. For Melucci, "the historicist notion of change as global, homogenous, and end-directed has ceased to apply to analysis of complex societies" (1996: 209). ICTs are a fundamental component of complex societies, and cannot be considered in isolation from the wider effects of social change, in which they in turn indisputably plays a major role. Consequently, analysis of the use of ICTs by NGOs needs to be considered within the context of broader social effects, wrought in part by the introduction of these technologies. As Loader points out:

"cyberspace can only be understood in relation to the techno-social restructuring which is occurring in the real world: ICTs are both driving that restructuring and responding to it; they are not creating an imagined realm separate from it" (1997a: 7).

In this respect, the interlayering of social and political spheres, as well as the apparently inescapable role of new technologies in processes of change, places developments in theoretical approaches at the forefront of academic imperatives.

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<sup>66</sup> These conceptualisations have already been dissected by feminist theorists, who have argued that notions of autonomy and rationality are culturally determined and exhibit masculine bias (see: Sylvester 1994; Tickner 1992). Feminist theorists have thus played an important role in developing concepts of non-linear political agency, and have generated key critical insights into some of the givens in IR.

The ways ICTs are used by NGOs do not merely imply new forms of information exchange, but suggest new forms of social interaction which cannot be interpreted effectively within a state-centric discourse. The application of spatial theories reflects Loader's conception of techno-social change, in that analysis of the ramifications of the use of ICTs does not centre upon the concept of a separate political sphere, but upon interpreting the ways these technologies are applied *to existing and evolving practices*. That is, NGO use of ICTs, in common with that of other political actors, is embedded in existing practices, as well as implicit in the creation of new ones.<sup>67</sup>

Research into the ways information is acquired and acted upon, and into how the agendas of political actors are formed and influenced requires acknowledgement of a broader picture of techno-social, as well as political, change. The ways NGOs produce and exchange information and the extent of their reach across the political spectrum are affected by the communications media they and the actors they engage with have access to. Street highlights the inextricable link between technology and social change in contemporary societies:

“technology is the embodiment of certain interests and possibilities, but ... it is also the bearer of effects: it changes what we can imagine and what we want, it alters our politics” (1997: 35).

He notes, moreover, that the relationships between actors and technologies are in constant flux, with political processes shaping technology, which in turn shapes politics (ibid.). The impact of technological change on political practices, therefore, relates not only to ‘new’ behaviours, but also to adjustments in actions and assumptions across the political spectrum, and through the whole of the political sphere.

Despite the complex relations underlying this area of investigation, it is possible to identify some of the most salient features of contemporary socio-political activity relevant to interpretation of the use of ICTs by the NGOs surveyed. In relation to one of the central propositions of the thesis, that ICTs may provide new opportunities for access to political processes, the most pertinent concerns are essentially twofold. Firstly, economic determinants, encompassing financial constraints on individuals through to the influence of various actors over decision-making processes on service provision, are significant. Secondly, the socio-political contexts within which the NGOs surveyed

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<sup>67</sup> Barker has noted that periods of transformation, require more heuristic, open-system conceptual approaches (1994: 39). The use of spatial theories undoubtedly provides one such

operate, at micro and macro levels, may have important implications for individual access to this form of technology.

In respect of economic factors, there are a number of salient issues which warrant brief examination. Firstly, the diminished role of the state as chief regulator of telecommunications reduces the control of elected or imposed state representatives over decision-making processes on pricing and access (see: Herman & McChesney 1997). Telecommunications systems, services and artefacts are increasingly regulated within the international and/or global arena and, as a consequence, major economic actors have a large degree of influence over policy direction and there is little real potential for states, or any other actors, to control either the infrastructures of ICTs or the content of transmissions effectively.

The prominence of economic actors in the policy-making field, as well as in the distribution and provision of goods and services, has led many commentators to conclude that the interests of the most dominant telecommunications and media companies are both served by, and constitute a driving force for, the use of ICTs. Graham and Marvin suggest that ICTs are “fully inscribed into the political, economic and social relations of capitalism” (1996: 94). They stress, too,

“the key role of telematics in reshaping the time and space limits that confine capitalist economic development, *but in ways that directly favour those economic and political interests who already dominate society*” (ibid.: 100, emphasis in original).<sup>68</sup>

For some analysts, therefore, there are three likely outcomes of the spread of network technologies: that current patterns of underdevelopment in some regions will persist, that networks will serve to reinforce existing inequalities, and that business imperatives will continue to be privileged over those relating to public access (see: Franklin 1998b; Haywood 1998; May 1998). None of these eventualities are guaranteed, and the interweaving of social factors, technological change and global commercial interests precludes the identification of a single analytical baseline. The emphasis placed by some analysts on the commercialisation of the Internet in particular implies that the relatively unrestricted flows of information which users currently experience are potentially threatened by the imposition of ‘real’ constraints, that is legislative or commercial

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approach.

restrictions, on virtual exchanges (see: Haywood 1998; Holderness 1998). The WTO Agreement on Telecommunications and the spread of 'e-commerce' are the most obvious foundations for such fears.

The fundamental role of ICTs in facilitating the operational efficiency of the market is irrefutable, and their centrality to the mechanisms of global trading systems increasingly apparent. Thus, despite the transcendent nature of network technologies and the multi-dimensional implications of the use of ICTs, capitalist economics are playing an important role in the current development of ICTs, as goods, as services and as an infrastructure of commercial endeavour. Much analysis of the impact of ICTs focuses exclusively on the role of either the market or the state, however, with the complex, multi-dimensional social relations constituted through its use unrecognised or underplayed.

As a consequence, claims about the use of ICTs as a tool for social and political participation remain situated to some degree within the dualistic debates of state versus market control. Although both states and markets are crucial variables within debates on access and provision, their dominance in discussions of the impact of ICTs reflects the power relations of public/private, elite-oriented interpretations of political participation. Franklin notes, however, that new communications technologies "reveal new sites and expressions of power/gender relations" (1998b: 7), and these are frequently underexplored in state/market debates. ICTs do not exist within the exclusive province of either states or markets; they have social, political and cultural applications and implications, and cannot therefore be analysed from a deterministic perspective. State versus market dualism in political discourse perpetuates occlusive ontologies, by legitimising some actors and practices, notably those deemed major players, and minimising the significance of others. In this sense, the state/market dualism continues the 'top-down' tradition of analysis which the application of spatial theories is designed to overcome.

The following section applies some of the spatial theories discussed in Chapter One to analyse how ICTs are influencing NGO practices, and the challenges this poses to ways

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<sup>68</sup> The role of major economic actors in the policy-making field is important. The degree of resistance to this dominant-actor model, both in research and practice, should be noted, however. See, for example, Smith and Kollock (1999), Slevin (2000) and Walch (1999).

legitimacy and authority in the political arena are conceptualised in IR. Spatial theories are applied to the information given in the responses to the NGO survey, providing insights into some of the ways this form of communication is being used in the political arena. In particular, spatial theories are used to examine NGO use of ICTs as political activity which is defined through the concept of agency, rather than through the state-dominated assumptions prevalent in IR.

#### Spatial Theories Applied to NGO Use of ICTs

Statistics on Internet use and the data on growth rates for ICT use offer some indication of how rapidly network communications are spreading, both quantitatively and geographically (see: <http://www.itu.org>). Although the vast majority of research in this field concurs with the notion that ICTs are affecting the lives of people worldwide, whether or not they actually come into direct contact with this form of communication (see: McChesney 1997a), there is strong evidence to suggest that the impact of technologies depends to a significant degree on *how* they are applied.<sup>69</sup>

Thus the apparently inexorable growth and relentless technological advancement of telecommunications systems in recent years cannot sufficiently describe the impact of ICTs across multiple dimensions of human existence. That is, the impact of this form of communication cannot be assessed statistically. For academic analysts, the multi-dimensionality of ICTs is the most problematic aspect of this techno-social phenomenon; as discussed earlier in this chapter, the indivisibility of ICTs from their effects on social practices sits awkwardly with norms of inclusion and exclusion in academic discourse.

The spatial theories adapted from the work of Lefebvre, outlined in Chapter One, provide a relatively fluid analytical schema, by permitting the impact of change on individual actors or organizations to be analysed. This contrasts with the top-down categorisations of political activity which dominate the discourse of IR, and provides a mechanism for analysing the implications of this form of communication for non-state actors, viewed as political agents in their own right. The spatial categories applied here are by no means conclusive and do not provide a system of spatial classification. They are designed, rather, to promote the concept of space as a valid analytical construct within the discipline of IR.

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<sup>69</sup> See: Adam and Green (1998), Cockburn & Ormrod (1993), Grint & Gill (1995), Fischer (1992) and Frissen (1995).

The spatial categories outlined in Chapter One, and re-examined in this chapter in relation to NGO use of ICTs, are both discrete and related. The three key headings applied below - spatial practice, representations of space and spaces of representation - highlight areas of analysis relevant to the complex issues of access to political processes, and for interpretation of the actions of non-state actors by reference to non-state, as well as to state, practices. Issues raised in Chapter One form the conceptual undercurrent to the application of spatial theories undertaken in this section. Hence the notions that political practices cannot be mapped effectively against purely geographical interpretations of space, and that emphasis on the public spaces of politics in IR is analytically limiting, form a backdrop to the analysis which now follows.

### *Spatial Practice*

As stated in Chapter One, spatial practice relates to the ways in which societies are organized, both by material environment and through the social behaviours of people within them. In interpreting NGO use of ICTs, therefore, two issues are most evidently germane: whether ICTs appear to be changing the material environments of NGOs and the people they interact with, and whether any such change has an impact on the political behaviours of either group. These interwoven issues are addressed together in this section.

The fundamental concern in respect of spatial practices relates to the availability or otherwise of network technologies, for the organizations themselves and for the individuals and groups they work with. Chapter Four indicated that all of the organizations surveyed have access to ICTs and use them for both internal and external communication. Internally, ICTs provide a mechanism for improving the efficiency of the organizations, facilitating more rapid and effective intra-agency communication. Using ICTs to link all of their offices has been a high priority for the organizations surveyed, with the aim of improving internal communications.

Externally, ICTs allow the NGOs to publicise their concerns relatively inexpensively via email and the Internet. The potential to promote the interests, concerns and campaigns of the organizations across a wide geographical reach is thus available. Consequently the NGOs surveyed see in ICTs a potential to influence political norms and values by introducing specialist information to a potentially global audience. Although the impact

of such information provision is impossible to assess at present, the NGOs surveyed are creating a pool resource of research and archive material which is more widely available than at any previous point in their history. Whilst the availability of such information is not in itself sufficient to fuel political change, the social conditions within which it exists indicate that such provision has the potential to have a significant impact on states and other actors. Most notable among these social conditions are the increased status of major NGOs on the international stage in recent years and the rapid spread of ICTs as a tool of social and political engagement across a broad range of actors.<sup>70</sup>

As the use of ICTs increases, methods of communication between NGOs and other political actors are adjusting to make use of this technology. That is, the spatial practices of all political actors are adjusted by the introduction of this form of communication as, for example, the use of email between state agencies, international institutions and NGOs becomes increasingly common. The increasing use of websites by these organizations and institutions also alters their spatial practices.

For the individuals and groups the NGOs seek to reach, however, there remains the basic issue of availability or otherwise of appropriate technologies. Lack of access to ICTs does not preclude political participation, of course. Availability of ICTs, and the skills to use them effectively, however, may have a domino effect in relation to informational resources available, and to the range of other easily-accessible actors. If political activity is premised on access to relevant information, ICTs appear to be becoming the *sine qua non* of contemporary activism. This applies both to formalised activism, relating to engagement with 'official' political institutions, and to the activities of informal collectives, such as eco-activists (Pickerill and Rodgers, forthcoming). In addition, the phenomenon of 'downloaders,' well-informed individuals who use specialist information from the Internet to lobby doctors, politicians, local authorities and so on, suggests the potential for the development of an information underclass.

This begs the question of the negative effects increased use of ICTs may have on those who do not have access to this form of communication. This cannot be answered entirely satisfactorily by a response which suggests that the 'information rich' will dominate the 'information poor'. Although this position has been widely argued (see:

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<sup>70</sup> The effects of geographical concentrations of both NGO activity and of ICT networks warrant further investigation.

Holderness 1998; Stallabrass 1995), such an approach situates economic determinants at the crux of analysis. Although these determinants do play a significant role in the availability of ICTs to individual actors, the reductionist logic of the economic determinist position pays inadequate regard to the broad social, cultural and political dimensions of the use of ICTs.

It is evident from much recent research that, despite rapid growth, people in developing countries, and in less developed regions within advanced industrial societies, have far fewer opportunities to use ICTs than their wealthier counterparts (see: Hamelink 1997; Loader (Ed) 1997b, 1998; Lyon 1998). In terms of the spatial practices of NGOs, however, these disparities in access serve to highlight the significance of this form of communication to the work of the organizations surveyed. Pruett suggests that NGOs have a critical role to play in providing access to ICTs in less developed regions:

“Sufficient demand for the Internet exists even in the poorest countries to make it a viable, indeed a highly profitable venture. If the market is ensuring rapid Internet growth, ... NGOs may need to focus on ensuring access and benefits for the less advantaged” (1998).

Indeed, the lack of basic telecommunications provision in some areas could emphasise the role of NGOs as political actors. This appears to be true insofar as these organizations can increase their profile, both locally and in the wider political arena, through the use of this form of communication. Besette notes the disjuncture between provision of information at global level and its value for local actors:

“Facilitating access to information is important, in the global sense as part of the communication process, but we also need to facilitate the production and circulation of information at the local level. ... This means using technology not only to validate local knowledge, but even more importantly, to place users in an active role” (1997: 22).

Even relatively wealthy NGOs such as those surveyed have limited resources, and the wisdom of prioritising information technology provision is contested by both theorists and practitioners (see: Pharoah and Welchman 1997). Besette notes, though, that one important role of ICTs is in facilitating feedback and enhancing participation in decision-making (1997: 23), a function which may justify greater investment in ICTs.

Each of the organizations surveyed suggest in their publicity literature that empowerment of local people, whether in respect of human rights, environmental protection, democratisation and so on, is a key facet of their operations. Provision of



ICTs to local groups could provide one avenue for participation in decision-making at grassroots level but, although some of the NGOs surveyed recognize the importance of such provision, it is the spatial practices of the NGOs themselves, rather than of the individuals and local groups with whom they interact, which is undergoing most profound change. Thus the material environment of staff among the NGOs surveyed is changing, as in-house access to ICTs increases. As responses to the survey show, this allows the organizations to create links across space with other political actors.

There is some evidence from the survey, albeit fairly limited, that some of the NGOs involved are targetting specific groups and providing them with access to ICTs, thus altering the spatial practices of other non-state actors. The degree of provision is, however, minimal at present. Oxfam has been active in providing telecommunications and computing hardware to groups to who would not otherwise have access to this form of communication. On the whole, however, the NGOs surveyed are relying on extending information provision to an already elite audience, that is to individuals and social groups already equipped with the facilities to make use of ICTs.

As discussed in detail in earlier chapters, the relational nature of space, conceived through links between actors, and across micro, meso and macro sites of engagement, suggests that changes to the practices of NGOs can influence the operations of other political actors. This applies both to the political practices in which they engage and to their interpretations of what actually constitutes the political realm. In this sense, changes to the spatial practices of NGOs, in respect of the actors they engage with and the effectiveness of the tasks they undertake, can act in conjunction with broader socio-cultural factors to influence perceptions of political activity. That the NGOs surveyed are using ICTs to increase their operational efficiency suggests that their use of this form of communication can have an impact on representations of political space, that is on the ways politics are defined and understood. This potential is discussed below.

### *Representations of Space*

Representations of space, as noted in Chapter One, relate to conceptualised spaces which, for Lefebvre, constitute control over knowledge, signs and codes. Thus the ways societies represent space are articulated in dominant discourses and theories, through the lexicons of academic disciplines, through accepted codes of social behaviour and so on. As previous chapters have shown, understandings of political practice in IR have

traditionally been dominated by state-spatial characterisations of politics. Online publicity from all of the organizations surveyed, however, stresses individual empowerment, local and regional communities and what could be termed 'partnership politics' between individuals, NGOs, businesses and governments.

The erosion of state control over media output and telecommunications infrastructures in recent years has now been exacerbated by the introduction of the selective technologies of ICTs. Consequently, the opportunities for states to structure the codes of political engagement, and by turn to influence academic interpretations of the constituents of politics, are undermined by the use of ICTs by a wide range of actors. Thus the oft-repeated claim of neo/Realist scholars to represent the world 'as it is' become open to question. For the NGOs surveyed, all of whom are non-state, *transnational* actors, the promotion of normative political perspectives across state borders<sup>71</sup> can be facilitated by the availability of ICTs.

Discussion already undertaken in the thesis indicates that state boundaries cannot provide appropriate demarcation lines for interpretation of the impact of ICTs. Brown rightly suggests that "to attempt to make sense of NGOs without considering the way the states-system defines their context is to overstate the degree of discontinuity in the system" (1997: 8). However, the use of ICTs by the organizations surveyed suggests that micro and macro level change in political behaviours may be occurring which cannot be analysed purely by reference to state-based definitions of political practice. For many of the actors with whom NGOs engage, the context of political engagement is defined by the normative position of the organizations concerned, rather than through state referents of the validity of non-state practices. Spatial theories which situate analysis at the level of agency therefore provide a mechanism for analysing change which relates more specifically to the metaphoric boundaries affecting political engagement which face individuals and non-state organizations than to state-spatial borders.

The value systems which the NGOs surveyed claim to represent are articulated through a discourse which is based on normative rather than territorial interpretations of politics. Thus, although the state system has a structuring effect on the role of NGOs in the

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<sup>71</sup> This key feature of much NGO practice is discussed in detail in Keck & Seckink (1998) and in Smith *et al* (1997).

international arena, the various factors which contribute to a diminution of state authority over representations of space suggest that perceptions of political space are being disrupted. ICTs are one of these factors, and NGO use of this form of communication another; these are transnational actors using largely geographically unconstrained technologies in a system regulated largely in respect of global, rather than national, econo-political spaces.

In addition, the use of the Internet to promote campaigns radically increases the potential audience for publicity material. One of the most important effects of this is to extend the reach of the organizations, providing the opportunity to deliver more information on their activities to wider audiences. In this respect, despite the uneven distribution of ICTs across social groups, the potential to influence the actions of key publics is enhanced. Hirst and Thompson note the role of key publics in influencing state and international policy-making, and suggest that:

“Such influence is the more likely if the populations of several major states are informed or roused on an issue by the world ‘civil society’ of trans-national NGOs” (1995: 431).

Providing information which may influence the opinions of key publics is a function of ICTs which the NGOs surveyed are in a strong position to capitalise upon, and evidence from their online publications suggests that this is an area where these organizations have developed clear strategies.

The use of ICTs among the NGOs surveyed challenges some of the entrenched conceptualisations of boundaries in IR by disputing state-centric or institutionally-dominated interpretations of the political. The provision of information on local, regional, national and international issues, and the links made between actors and across issues has been a key strength of NGOs in establishing a distinctive and influential voice on the international stage. NGO agendas which posit individuals, local and regional collectives and other actors marginalized within traditional interpretations of international politics as significant players essentially disrupt dualistic impressions of politics. High/low, public/private, exclusionary political ontologies, already undermined by the proliferation of non-state actors staking claims on the realm of the political, can be further undercut by the use of ICTs. This form of communication blurs the boundaries of political activity and interpretation, by responding to neither geographical demarcations regarding the sites of politics, nor discursive demarcations on its content.

In this respect, the structural basis of IR, which is premised on the concept of states as discrete units, albeit ones which have increasingly complex relations with other actors, is weakened.

ICTs also affect representations of space by emphasising challenges posed to the state as the embodiment of political community. This is evident both in the limited ability of states to control the use and development of this form of communication and through the potential non-state actors have to use ICTs to engage in forms of political activism conceptualised as issue- rather than state-based. The ability of any single group of actors, such as states or MNCs, to hegemonically influence the content or flow of information via ICTs is compromised by the nature of the technology. Opportunities to dominate definitions of political practice are consequently limited. Communication between political actors, constituted for the NGOs surveyed of far more diverse groups than state-centred interpretations recognise, extends discursive parameters by forcing new issues onto high political agendas.<sup>72</sup>

The use of ICTs to publicise campaigns, moreover, provides a mechanism for promoting non-state political agendas into the social arena. The inadequacy of the spatial norms of IR for addressing this socio-political compression has already been noted. The diminishing control of states over these crossover socio-political agendas is highlighted by the use of ICTs by the NGOs surveyed, with each shifting information up, down and through the spectrum of political actors. In this sense, the use of ICTs may consolidate some of the operational features upon which NGOs have capitalised in recent decades, most notably their ability to link practical aspects of political activism to the promotion of universal social concerns.

The work of the NGOs surveyed, in common with that of many similar organizations, can thus be viewed as ideologically driven and as having practical implications, with their use of ICTs responding to both of these aspects of their operations. Culturally- and locationally-specific responses to the agendas of these organizations do exist and these are most evident in the practical activities undertaken in different areas and with different cultural groups. The normative agendas of these organizations form the basis

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<sup>72</sup> The ways NGO activity have extended the discursive boundaries of politics have been widely discussed. The most obvious impact has been in the field of environmental politics but other areas, such as gender, development and animal rights causes, have all benefited from NGO consciousness- raising.

of their activities, however, and the use of ICTs appears to be becoming an important tool for promoting international norms.

This is particularly relevant to the issue of access to political processes because, as Haywood points out:

“Free-market capitalism has no system for identifying common human needs ... and provides no way of fostering common forms of community provision [of information]” (1998: 22).

Neither are states or IGOs able to offer a public platform for information exchange at present, although experiments in teledemocracy would suggest that the use of ICTs could become a familiar feature of state-citizen relations. Although there are overlaps among the multi-layered information distribution and exchange systems of all actors in the international arena, at present only NGOs of the kind surveyed aim to provide a platform specifically for debate on and response to socio-political concerns. This is made manifest most clearly in the vast range of connections to other organizations and actors which all of those surveyed provide. The evolution of an *international* public sphere is being consciously developed by these actors, suggesting that the dominant codification of politics as geographically located and state-defined are being challenged by NGO use of ICTs.

The use of ICTs by the NGOs surveyed depends to a important degree on a capacity to communicate freely and openly, unfettered on the whole by external constraints on the distribution and exchange of information, whether from political or commercial sources. Indeed, one of the most valuable attributes of ICTs for non-state political actors is their potential to circumvent restrictions on open exchange of ideas and information. To date, states and other actors have generally been unable or unwilling to impose constraints on the information flows which ICTs facilitate,<sup>73</sup> and Moore suggests that, although actors have followed different policy directions, most are consistent in their desire to see an ‘information society’ develop (1998: 152). At present, therefore, there is no evidence to indicate that this emerging international public sphere will be hindered by restrictive legislation on information exchange. In relation to the development of this new form of public sphere, ICTs are not the *basis* of an NGO challenge to high political discourse

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<sup>73</sup> As noted in Chapter Two, China and some other authoritarian states have made attempts to staunch the flow of information within and across their borders. The convergence of television and computing technologies may, however, render such resistance to market-forces unsustainable.

but may provide a tool for building on some of the gains non-state organizations have made in expanding the agendas set by high political actors and in drawing social concerns into the political arena.

Chapter One suggested that all non-state actors are marginal to the discourse of IR, as the hegemony of state-spatial conceptions continues to dominate analysis in the discipline. ICTs can be seen, however, to express many of the changes already witnessed in international political practice; they transcend borders, can foster non-state political communities and facilitate non-state political activism, and can be used as a tool of activism at multiple levels. In these respects, the use of ICTs by the NGOs surveyed may represent a significant development in the role of such organizations as agents of social change. In addition, the marginalization of NGOs and other non-state actors in IR has been reduced in recent years as the impact of social movements has filtered through to state agendas.

Representations of space, in both political practice and theory, therefore, are reflecting the shift towards collective endeavour and the increasingly important role of communications technologies in political practices. The decreasing marginality of non-state actors is not necessarily experienced at the expense of states as political players; the analytical approaches of most of the spatial theorists referred to throughout the thesis, which reject binarised conceptualisations of politics, acknowledge that politics is a multi-faceted realm and that states remain important players, both in defining some of the rules of engagement and regulating some aspects of citizen behaviour.

For many theorists critical of the discursive hegemony of the state in IR, the major point of dissent has not been the presence of states as key players in international affairs but the relative absence and influence of other significant actors. Representations of political space in IR, influenced among other things by the two transnational trends of increased NGO prominence and the spread of ICTs are slowly beginning to reflect the inter-relationships between states and other actors.

### *Spaces of Representation*

As noted on Chapter One, spaces of representation equate most closely with concepts of agency and particularly with the possibilities for political action available to individuals. These possibilities are framed by the real and metaphoric demarcations of

spatial practices and representations of space. That is, the perceived and conceived spaces of human existence, as defined by Lefebvre, have important implications for political actors in terms of the choices available to engage in political activity.

NGO use of ICTs which affects the spatial categories considered above therefore has implications for access to political processes by individuals and social groups. The potential for political participation has, in many respects, traditionally been equated almost exclusively with the notion of representations of space. Thus, historically, the notion of political participation has focused upon the structural level, defining political practices through the auspices of the state. This is, of course, the model of politics which both domestic political theories and the discipline of IR have applied as the standard for interpretation of the role of the individual in political practice. In the domestic arena, individuals are represented *by* the state, and on the international stage, are subsumed *to* the state.

Increasingly, however, the choices available to many actors are structured not only by the political system within which they reside but also, along with other factors such as economic resources, by the presence or absence of technological artefacts and information provision (see: Adams 1996; Frederick 1997; Walch 1999). The spatial practices of individuals are consequently as influential over the opportunities for political participation as the state-political system within which they reside. Access to ICTs is part of the complex of factors, including literacy and computing skills, which now influence to the choices available to individuals as political actors.

The spaces of representation of some actors may be altered by the use of ICTs by the NGOs surveyed, as individuals and social groups who have access to ICTs undoubtedly have an increased range of options relevant to participation in political activity. Thus the opportunities for political activism and dissent may be increased. Firstly, the documentation placed online by the NGOs surveyed, and the hyperlinks provided, vastly increase the potential to access key actors and organizations, by comparison to other forms of communication. The impact of such access has not yet been assessed by scholars. By comparison to the mono-logical communication of broadcast media and the

slow pace of traditional postal communications, it is evident that ICTs provide a qualitatively different service.<sup>74</sup>

Secondly, the multilogical potential of ICTs, the speed of information exchange and supply of specialist information on the work of the organizations surveyed may all serve to enhance the potential of individuals and social groups to 'act politically', both in specific places on specific issues, and in response to broader ideological concerns. Such political action parallels conventional campaigning methods, such as producing and distributing publicity material, mobilising activists, lobbying government agencies and other decision-making bodies and so on. The apparent advantages of ICTs in this respect are their speed and the potential for theoretically infinite reproduction of data. That is, things that NGOs *already* do can, with the use of ICTs, be done with greater intensity and efficiency.

Responses to the survey suggest that the NGOs studied are tending to use ICTs to enhance their existing operational techniques. Rather than directly increasing access by providing communications facilities to marginalized groups, the organizations surveyed use ICTs to distribute, receive and exchange information and to forge links up and down the political spectrum and between political actors. They do not appear, however, to 'create' new actors or, except on a very limited scale, empower marginalized groups directly.

The NGOs surveyed cannot therefore be credited with creating new political communities through their use of ICTs. The infrastructures which the NGOs provide, though, can facilitate interaction between individuals and political organizations. Attempting to provide individuals with access to political networks is a key feature of NGO use of ICTs. With claims to universal ideals but limited resources, hyperlinks to other political actors may permit individuals to act on behalf of NGOs with little cost to the organizations themselves. It is the interface between these two aspects of NGO activity which spatial theories highlight most effectively; the linkages between spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation can be used to connect ideological intent with material effects.

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<sup>74</sup> No claims are made here about the benefits of electronic access to political institutions; as noted, changes in the practices of high political actors in this regard have not yet been assessed. The point here is that the dynamics of communication between political actors appears to be changing with NGO use of ICTs.



The provision of information is a necessary element of the development of non-state political collectives and ICTs can provide a mechanism for increasing the potential of NGOs to reach geographically, if not necessarily socio-economically, diverse audiences. In this respect, the limitations which geographical barriers place upon political participation may be of reduced significance. Other barriers, such as technical problems in gaining access to ICTs, may exist, but the constraints of territory appear to be diminished.

The use of ICTs by the NGOs surveyed, and by others like them, may also contribute to a form of political activity which is premised on non-linear agency. This reflects a general trend in patterns of political practice, particularly on the part of non-state actors, with a range of factors underpinning activism. Where, until fairly recently, the political impact of individuals was experienced through representative authorities, the forms of activism which ICTs permit can reduce the relevance of public/private boundaries and makes exclusion from political processes more difficult to for 'official' institutions to effect.

The aim of NGO use of ICTs is not to create virtual communities; as Kitchin notes, the people who inhabit virtual worlds live in real worlds too (1998: 166). While potentially providing new platforms for intellectual exchange, NGOs are aiming chiefly to use this form of communication to effect or promote material change. Consequently, much of the documentation placed online by the organizations surveyed details their campaigns and objectives, and is generally reflective of material produced in other formats, but now made available to wider, more dispersed audiences.

Access to information is a prerequisite of political campaigning. Much of the material placed online by the NGOs surveyed is designed to encourage response from users, utilising the interactive potential of ICTs to elicit specific practical effects, such as raising funds or encouraging supporters to lobby governments. All of the NGOs involved in this research have, since the survey was conducted, introduced online campaigning tools, which create links to named actors to allow direct lobbying of governments, international institutions and commercial organizations. All have also introduced facilities for direct membership subscriptions and/or donations via ICTs.

The power of NGOs to bring pressure to bear on both governments and international institutions, as well as their capacity to influence public opinion, is now widely acknowledged (see: Vakil 1997). Their use of ICTs signals the potential to further increase their profile on the political stage. Although the organizations surveyed are, by and large, failing to provide communications facilities to marginalized groups, the influence of informed elites on decision-making processes is significant, with the potential to access appropriate information increased by NGO use of ICTs.

One significant issue relating to the vast increase in the amount of information available through ICTs is the absence of a gatekeeping mechanism in this form of communication. As noted in Chapter Two, the gatekeeping function of mass media serves to filter information for audiences, effectively deconstructing complex issues and reconstituting them in more digestible forms for transmission. The absence of a gatekeeping mechanism on the intersecting networks of ICTs, where access to output is user-led, has both advantages and drawbacks. On one hand, users can access information which has not been pre-digested for mass consumption, and which often reflects specialist opinion on complex issues. In addition, ICTs can only indirectly be used to promote hegemonic societal norms and values, as governments and other dominant actors lack any real system for encoding multilogical interactions. On the other hand, however, the diffuse nature of ICT communications, and of the Internet in particular, effectively renders all information of equivalent merit, and no effective filtering system exists for distinguishing between online documents.

All of the NGOs surveyed have established reputations as credible and effective political actors, a factor which could be of advantage to them online. The high profile of most of the organizations could be a valuable attribute as users seek out familiar names among the proliferation of sites online. In addition, ICTs are not subject to the same constraints on information exchange as mass media, and all of the organizations surveyed are recognised as potent actors in their specialist fields. Other media do not provide the opportunities for the organizations surveyed to provide the detailed information on their activities which ICTs permit. ICTs could consequently be an important tool both for individuals as a source of information and for the NGOs as a means of distribution.

Although NGO use of ICTs would appear on the whole to be having a significant influence on the ways politics can be understood, the gendered implications of their use

suggest that practices which are detrimental to women continue to shape the development of the political arena. These gendered implications affect both the representations of space and the opportunities available to women as political actors, that is, their spaces of representation. For reasons of coherence, these implications are analysed under this single heading.

While NGO activity and the use of ICTs, both separately and in conjunction, are having a discernible influence on the ways politics are conducted and understood, there is some evidence that the NGOs surveyed could, probably inadvertently, promote a new variation of gendered politics by failing to specifically target female users. The socio-political conceptualisation of politics central to the activities of the NGOs surveyed provides more opportunities for political engagement for women, by a general eschewal of some of the gendered channels of official agency, acknowledgement of gender as a variable in decision-making processes, and the relative lack of disruption to other aspects of social existence which participation in NGO politics at a basic level requires. Consequently, the NGOs surveyed tend to promote less gendered conceptualisations of what actually constitutes political activity. That is, the representations of space which the NGOs surveyed promote assume gender to be a variable in political discourse and refute the gender-neutral assumptions which political theorists and practitioners frequently apply.

Their use of ICTs, however, is by and large perpetuating exclusionary politics by failing to redress the male dominance of networks. As Pruett notes:

“Access to information means access to power and most societies continue to exclude women from both. ... The freedom to have access to spaces other than the bedroom and the kitchen, and to fully and safely be able to act in other public spaces is key to women’s full participation” (1998).

NGO use of ICTs may provide more information to a wider audience, but without some form of mechanism of directly producing material by and for women, this will not necessarily reach women as a category, consequently marginalizing an already under-represented group. That women’s use of ICTs is restricted by gendered socio-political structures is evident, with dominant codes of social behaviour in many societies sanctioning explicit and implicit forms of discrimination against female populations at multiple levels (see: Enloe 1989; Pettman 1996). The NGOs surveyed are, in general, challenging gendered socio-political codes, but are having only limited impact, in their use and provision of ICTs, on gendered practices.

Spaces of representation are affected by the information made available to any or all political actors. On the one hand, therefore, NGOs are promoting less gendered conceptualisations of politics at the discursive level which influences the ways power, authority and political legitimacy are conceived. On the other hand, however, the NGOs surveyed are not prioritising women as political agents.<sup>75</sup> Some NGOs, INGOs, international organizations, states and commercial organizations, individually and in loose coalitions, are promoting women's use of ICTs as a necessary feature of degendered political futures (see: Adam and Green 1998). However, the organizations surveyed, although influential trans-national actors, appear to have taken a back seat on this issue, promoting but not necessarily practising less gendered forms of political engagement in relation to distribution of information and communications technologies.

The most obvious barrier to targetting women as a marginalized group lies in the complex question of appropriate use of limited resources. Pruett notes the centrality of prioritising need to the debate on providing access to ICTs:

“How important is Internet access in an area without safe water or even an affordable telephone service? While some health workers praise the satellite system that has brought them email connections and cheap access to health information, others complain that Internet connections will not pay for aspirins or syringes” (1998).

Diverting limited resources for the provision of technologies with at present unknown, and potentially unknowable, benefits is a risky strategy. All of the NGOs surveyed suggest in their publicity literature that they are committed to extending the use of network technologies. Ogburn's 'cultural lag', noted in Chapter Two, may be partially responsible for the slow filtration of ICTs to client-groups via NGOs; although the social practices of NGOs *as organizations* are changing, the present effects and future implications of the use of ICTs are widely contested. Consequently, the organizations surveyed are apparently responding to the tangible benefits of the use of ICTs, notably to their role in consolidating and extending existing communications networks, rather than attempting to use this technology to *actively* restructure social relations through direct influence over spatial practices.

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<sup>75</sup> This claim applies the the promotion of ICT use, as some of the NGOs surveyed have quite clear policies on empowerment of women relating to issues like local trade and economic systems.

## Conclusion

This chapter has begun to draw together issues relating to the key argument of the thesis, by addressing how spatial theories can be applied to analysis of NGO use of ICTs. Analysis has taken place at two discrete but related levels, both designed to draw conclusions on the nature of spatial theorising and its relevance for analysis of contemporary political issues.

This chapter has examined the challenge ICTs pose to academic discourse through their relevance to a growing range of social, economic and cultural interactions. Given their multi-dimensional impact, ICTs have been shown to challenge many of the ontological givens not just of IR but of most, if not all, academic disciplines. The boundaries upon which divisions between academic disciplines are premised are challenged by the use of ICTs, as interactions through this form of communication do not directly replicate patterns of social interaction in the 'real world'. Consequently, interpretation of the uses and impacts of ICTs require a development of academic analysis to reflect the complex relations which are characteristic of this form of communication.

In response to the current absence of an appropriate methodology, this chapter has examined how spatial theories can be applied as an interpretative framework for analysis within the discipline of IR. This form of theorising is seen to provide a loose analytical schema which permits analysis of political activity at the level of agency. Thus the three categories of analysis adopted - spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation - focus upon how the NGOs surveyed, and by extension individuals, as political actors are affected by their use of ICTs. The spatial theories applied therefore position non-state actors as significant categories of analysis in their own right, contrary to the state-centric norm of IR.

Having outlined how spatial theories can be applied, the chapter also examined how access to political processes for individuals may be influenced by the use of ICTs by the NGOs surveyed. As discussed in detail in Chapter One, the potential to use spatial theories to analyse activity in the international arena has been discussed by a number of theorists in recent years.

The ultimate concern of the thesis must lie in analysis of the efficacy of the theoretical framework used. The utility of this form of spatial methodology for research into NGO

use of ICTs in particular, and in analysis of political practice in general, is therefore assessed in the following chapter. Any interpretative model has both strengths and weaknesses, and defining criteria for analysis, however flexible, inevitably leads to occlusions. For this reason, the validity of the method of analysis based on the spatial theories outlined in Chapter One and applied in this chapter is examined below.

## CHAPTER SIX SPATIAL THEORIES & POLITICAL CHANGE

### Introduction

This chapter has two, related aims. Firstly, a brief interpretation of the application of spatial theories undertaken in Chapter Five is made, outlining how NGO use of ICTs may be influencing political practices. The chapter therefore focuses initially on whether there is any evidence from the survey that new forms of political engagement are emerging through NGO use of ICTs. Following this discussion, the chapter examines the effectiveness of the spatial theories which have been applied here. One of the primary concerns when identifying any new approach to theorising must be to assess the benefits and drawbacks thereof. The spatial theories applied in this chapter to NGO use of ICTs are therefore evaluated.

In order to examine the indications of new forms of political engagement which MAY emerge from the survey conducted for the thesis, it is necessary to re-iterate the assumptions about agency upon which the research has been based. Although research for the thesis has extended across disciplinary boundaries, the central focus of critique lies in the ontologies of IR. In particular, the discipline's assumptions of state-centred political processes have been the subject of scrutiny. In this respect, the actors which the thesis has sought to examine, namely NGOs and individuals, are marginalized in the discourse of mainstream IR, as the attributes of these actors are framed within the dominant discourse by reference to their relations with states, rather than in direct relation to their own interpretations of political practice.

The thesis has challenged these assumptions and has argued that both NGOs and individuals engage in forms of activity which, although they are not legitimised by the discourse of IR, can have a perceptible impact on the international political system. To this extent, the forms of political engagement which the thesis outlines relate more specifically to the impact of the use of ICTs on the NGOs surveyed, and on the individuals with whom they interact, than to their influence upon state practices. The focus of the following analysis is therefore upon the potential impact of ICT use upon the organizations surveyed. Any changes to NGO activity, however, are likely to have an impact on other political actors.

### ICTs, NGOs and Political Change

As noted in Chapter Four, the NGOs surveyed for the thesis are relatively wealthy, organizations with fairly extensive resources for developing the provision of ICTs. Analysis of their use of ICTs requires acknowledgement of two trends, neither of which can be easily located within pre-existing assumptions in IR about the international political system or the nature of non-state political activity.

Firstly, NGO activity which does not take the state as a defining site of political engagement, a phenomenon discussed in detail in Chapter Four, is difficult to situate within the context of the discourse of the international adopted in IR. There is, moreover, no clear consensus among scholars in IR on the structure of the contemporary international system; contradictory perspectives on globalization, neoliberal institutionalism, North-South relations and so on, suggest that system-level analysis can produce only a partial impression of political change.<sup>76</sup> Although some aspects of NGO activity can be qualitatively assessed, and their influence on policy-making processes loosely determined, many other dimensions of their operations, including their impact on access to political processes for individuals and for non-state collectives through the use of ICTs, cannot be analysed with any real effectiveness from system-level.

Secondly, ICTs as a medium are inherently non-state, in that they are not confined within geographical state borders and much of their content and flow is controlled by customary law, rather than through formal legal frameworks (Kitchin 1998: 103). The social conditions and technological advances which have fuelled the spread of ICTs, such as the introduction of relatively inexpensive modems, standardised protocols, widespread use of computers in the home and workplace, and so on, also render state borders of diminished consequence, in terms of control over output and infrastructures.

Thus IR has, at present, no clear or definitive reading of the nature of the international system. In many respects, the absence of an all-encompassing framework represents an epistemological advance, in that inter- and intra-disciplinary debates on the nature of trans-state politics are influencing theoretical approaches in the discipline. This does suggest, however, that modes of theorising which are located at system level have been fundamentally undermined.

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<sup>76</sup> This is not to suggest that there *should* be a consensus among IR scholars. The point is, rather, that there are a now number of interpretations of the field of politics which dominate the discourse of IR but that these generally adopt system-level interpretations.



In addition, the uses and impacts of ICTs cannot be analysed as multi-dimensional or relational phenomena because interpretations of the *international* are dominated by a focus on trans-state politics and the role of trans-national institutions. Access to ICTs is *located*, in that users are real and not virtual. The pre-configured spatial units of IR cannot, however, adequately reflect the multi-dimensionality of this form of location, such as the social and economic contexts of use. In these respects, therefore, use of spatial theories which permit analysis of international affairs from the level of the individual as a generalised construct can provide a more effective mechanism for analysing complex phenomena than the top-down interpretative methods prevalent in IR offer.

To this extent, the thesis illustrates four changes to the nature of political practice in the international system which appear to be being effected through NGO use of ICTs. Firstly, the spatial determinants of political community appear to be altering as NGOs extend their reach across territorial boundaries. As NGO use of ICTs provides an organizational framework for individuals to do likewise, political interactions are characterised by multi-dimensional links when this form of communication is taken into account. In this sense, the hierarchical distinctions made between actors in the discourse of IR underplay the impact of non-state actors in the field of political interactions. This is not to suggest that non-state actors are either more or less important than states. The suggestion is, rather, that the responses to the survey suggest that NGO use of ICTs facilitates links between a wide range of actors into the political arena and that the impact of these links needs to be explored.

Secondly, the NGOs surveyed pose a challenge to concepts of boundaries in the political arena, chiefly through their espousal of normative agendas. Where interpretations of political activity in the discipline of IR have assumed the primacy of territory, and have consequently elevated states to the role of principal actor, the influence of NGOs in the international arena, and upon the policies of states, is now widely acknowledged (see: Charlton *et al* 1995). Thus the use of ICTs by the NGOs surveyed can pose a challenge to the significance of territory as a repository of political meaning by facilitating the exchange of normative agendas across and beyond territorial confines. As a result, NGO use of ICTs may extend the concept of political identification beyond the state,

continuing trends apparent in recent decades through the spread of issue-based politics in which these organizations have played a key role.

Thirdly, the use of ICTs provides the organizations surveyed with a medium through which they can provide and develop an informational resource. For individuals, this may provide an opportunity to access information less readily available from other sources. Probably more significantly in terms of changing political practices, however, this provision may limit the opportunities for any category of actor to hegemonically influence the discourse of political legitimacy through this evolving form of communication. This appears most evident in the forms of online activism which the organizations surveyed are developing, as hierarchies of actors may be undermined by direct access.

Fourthly, the use of ICTs by the NGOs surveyed suggests that a public sphere which operates outside of the confines of states, in both spatial and discursive terms, could be developing. The platform for public debate which ICTs appear to be developing situates states as one of many categories of actor, rather than as the principal and definitional focus of political legitimacy. Although some scholars have argued that the commercialisation of the Internet in particular is detrimental to its potential as a public network (see: Herman and McChesney 1997: 135), the capacity for information provision and exchange which ICTs provides indicates that the potential for any group of actors to dictate the development of this form of communication is limited.

Responses to the survey suggest that access to political processes for individuals may be influenced by NGO use of ICTs. In some aspects, this influence can be experienced as an extension of existing opportunities. Thus, for example, while the ability to access information on NGO campaigns is not new, the amount of specialist data available through ICTs is. Other aspects of NGO use of ICTs apparently offer new dimensions of political engagement, however. Online activism, for example, and the ability to communicate easily and instantaneously with others who share similar concerns are features which no other form of communication offers. The role of the NGOs surveyed in these evolving political practices is to provide the structures which can facilitate these forms of political interaction.

As noted previously, problems relating to inequality of access and opportunity still exist. The NGOs surveyed have only limited influence over the use of ICTs for economically marginalized actors and are unable to provide communications hardware to individuals or social groups on a significant scale. In one sense, therefore, the NGOs surveyed are dependent upon an informational elite to engage with and act upon the political activities they publicise. On the other hand, of course, the NGOs themselves are part of this evolving informational elite, but are operating according to normative agendas which require distributing their ideals widely. In this respect, the use of ICTs by the NGOs surveyed highlights how significant their role as bridging organizations, discussed in Chapter Four, is likely to become. That is, the NGOs surveyed, and others like them, have a crucial role to play in ensuring that the 'information poor' are connected to political processes. Evidence from the surveys indicates that the organizations are aware of the value of this form of communication in promoting their particular conceptions of sound political practice, although strategies for developing provision outside of organizational structures remain scant at present.

As these points indicate, there is ample evidence from the survey that NGOs are attempting to use ICTs to extend their activities in the international arena. The survey's findings have been assessed through the application of the spatial theories, the intention being to develop a flexible theoretical approach which can provide insights into complex political practices. In particular, the spatial theories used have been intended to directly interpret the actions of the NGOs surveyed, contrary to the structure-level norms of IR. The next section of this chapter assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the use of these theories, and draws some conclusions on developing research of this kind.

### Validity of Spatial Theories

All methodological decisions have ramifications for research findings. Arguing that the discourse of IR restricts the potential to analyse political change on the lives of non-state actors, the thesis has applied spatial theories which aim to provide an alternative approach to the analysis of international affairs. As the first such attempt to adopt spatial theories as a methodological foundation for a specific research project, the thesis highlights a number of issues pertinent to the development of research of this kind. This section will first outline the disadvantages of approaching research in this manner which have been identified during the course of this analysis. It will then identify the value of this form of theorising for the discipline of IR.

The application of spatial theories to a specific project, as in the case of this thesis, encounters the problems inherent in categorisation of any complex research issue. Categorisation inevitably incurs occlusions and the separation of categories is particularly problematic in relation to the complex issues relating to the use of communications technologies by political actors. The spatial categories applied in the thesis offer a framework for exploring changing political practices but may not allow the opportunity to illustrate the inter-relation of actors and activities effectively.

In some respects, the epistemological limitations of academic analysis of ICTs are highlighted by the thesis. Attempts to transcend the norms of academic discourse by seeking to avoid oppositional categories and adopt a fluid and relational approach ironically fall victim to the very norms they challenge. That is, existing norms of academic analysis require a linear logic of coherence to which neither ICTs nor spatial theories conform. Categories of analysis are inevitably and unavoidably *not* inter-relational, and ICTs and spatial theories *are*. Thus to separate spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation under separate headings automatically serves to disrupt the sense of the interplay between these aspects both of spatial theorising and the use of ICTs.

Despite the limitations identified above, however, there are some clear strengths to the use of spatial theories in analysis of political practice. Analysis of the application of spatial theories identifies seven ways in which they may contribute to the development of new forms of political analysis which can be related to contemporary practices.<sup>77</sup> Firstly, and most significantly, the use of spatial theories permits analysis of the role of the individual or other non-state actors as political entity. That is, it is possible to assess continuity and change in the material environment, the dominant discourse and in opportunities for dissent by applying spatial theories. This constitutes a critical development in the nature of theorising in the discipline of IR as discursive constraints have previously served to preclude effective analysis of the impact of individuals on political processes.

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<sup>77</sup> The listing of seven different issues is not necessarily the most elegant approach to identification of key concerns. Given the multi-layering of spatial analysis and it provides the most coherent framework possible.

Although the key distinguishing characteristic of IR as an academic field of study has been its focus on patterns of engagement in the international arena (see: Guzzini 1998), analysis of the use of ICTs by the NGOs surveyed suggests that states may be having a diminishing influence over the terms and forms of political practice. Whilst the influence of NGOs and individuals through the use of ICTs does not necessarily signal a change to the overall nature of the international system, it does seem to highlight trends in transnational political activity which the study of international politics must take into account.

Secondly, and related to the potential to analyse the impact and actions of individuals, spatial theories overcome some of the gendered limitations of mainstream theorising in IR. As noted in Chapter One, the oppositional categories which characterise the dominant approaches to analysis in the discipline are frequently based upon assumptions of inclusion and exclusion which validate one subject position and negate another. The use of spatial theories permits interpretation which acknowledges rather than seeks to diminish relationality.

Thirdly, spatial theories can provide an important tool for measuring political change contemporaneously, contrary to the norm in IR. Spatial theories thus provide a potential to analyse *current* conditions rather than to examine change retrospectively. Thus, the spatial theories used in the thesis have allowed analysis of how NGOs are using ICTs *now*, rather than to attempt to predict how this form of communication *will* affect NGOs as political actors. This is particularly significant for IR as its self-defined remit necessitates expertise in international interactions. The pace of technological change in recent years requires analytical tools which can be applied to contemporary conditions and practices if effective interpretation of international affairs is to be achieved within the discipline.

Fourthly, the spatial theories used in the thesis allow analysis of the interface between the two dominant aspects of NGO activity in the international arena: ideological intent and material influence. The linkages between spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation illustrate the connections and discontinuities between the organizations' objectives and their actions. This is achieved by highlighting how changes to material environment may affect the discourse of politics and, in turn, how such changes may provide new opportunities for political activism.

Fifthly, the types of spatial theories used in the thesis can be applied to any actor or group of actors in the political arena. The main benefit of this aspect of spatial theorising is that actors need not be analysed by reference to others, but through direct examination of their own actions and activities. A recurring theme throughout the thesis has been the problem of analysing the activities of non-state actors within the discourse of IR, as an implicit hierarchy situates states as the definitional focus of international politics. Although the activities of actors such as the NGOs surveyed may have an impact on states and state practices, this is not always their primary or sole aim. Spatial theories provide an analytical framework which does not necessarily situate the state as the focus of non-state activity.

Sixthly, spatial theories of the kind applied in the thesis provide a mechanism for transcending the territorial norms which have proven restrictive in developing the discipline of IR. As discussions in Chapter One noted, although the territorial state remains a valid and significant agent in international politics, the complex, multi-dimensional interactions which now characterise global politics are difficult to analyse within a state-centric discourse. Consequently, the need to develop analytical tools which provide a mechanism for acknowledging and interpreting a broad range of actors and practices is evident. Spatial theories provide one such tool.

Finally, spatial theories of the kind applied here are not dependent upon or restricted by a specific disciplinary framework. Although the research for this thesis has focused upon a critique of some of the limitations of IR as a field of study, it is possible to apply spatial theories across disciplinary boundaries, as analysis operates at the level of agency rather than of structure. Consequently, the framework for analysis is not determined by disciplinary givens but through interpretation of action. This renders spatial theories particularly significant for analysis of the impact of ICTs which, as detailed earlier in this chapter, transcend many of the disciplinary divisions which prevail in academic analysis.

Despite their current limitations, therefore, spatial theories can be seen to offer an important analytical tool of relevance to contemporary IR. Many of the ontological and epistemological concerns which have been raised in the discipline in recent years are at least partially addressed by the application of this approach to analysis of international affairs.

## Conclusion

This thesis represents the first work in IR to link specific spatial theories to specific practices in international politics. Although other scholars have produced important critiques of the ways politics are spatialized in IR,<sup>78</sup> none have yet developed specific conceptual categories which may be applied to specific political practices. Some important benefits to this mode of theorising have been identified, not least the potential for agency-level analysis. As the first piece of research of this kind, however, the thesis has been subject to some of the pitfalls associated with the development of new forms of analysis. Much more work is required to develop spatial theories which are readily applicable to analysis of political practices in the international and other arenas.

Given the emphasis the thesis has placed on challenging the discursive norms of IR, the over-riding concern of this research has been to explore the relevance of spatial theorising to the discipline. Following analysis of the survey findings in the previous chapter, therefore, this chapter has examined the relevance of the spatial theories used for analysis of international political affairs.

Two specific difficulties in using spatial theories as categories of analysis became evident during the course of research for the thesis. The first of these was the problem of using an essentially paradigmatic theoretical structure. This approach, much criticised within IR, essentially applied a positivist methodology to a post-positivist proposition. That is, perhaps paradoxically, *categories* of analysis were adopted to interpret *relational* phenomena. Although the headings proved effective in identifying a range of issues relating to NGO use of ICTs, problems in situating practices within particular categories were noted.

The second difficulty relating to the use of spatial categories was found to be the problem of demonstrating relationality between actors and practices. This was attributable in part to the norms of academic research which demand a linear logic to which spatial theories do not conform. In addition, both ICTs and the activities of NGOs, as previous chapters have shown, defy the logic of categorial analysis which many academic disciplines, including IR, depend upon.

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<sup>78</sup> Refer to Chapter One for details.

Despite these difficulties, a wide range of benefits from the use of this form of theorising were observed. The most important of these is the opportunity this approach offers to research and analyse the role of the individual in political practice. In the discipline of IR, the hegemonic discourse situates the individual as a marginal actor in international politics. Consequently the impact of individuals and other non-state political actors on political processes has been underexplored within the discipline, as no suitable theoretical framework has been available. Spatial theories have been identified in the thesis as providing an analytical schema which permits research into political change at the level of agency.

Other benefits relating to the use of spatial theories include the potential to challenge the gendered mode of theorising which characterises the oppositional categories of traditional academic discourse. This is particularly pertinent to issues raised by feminist theorists which were outlined in Chapter One. As noted there, gender-aware scholarship need not be based upon an explicit normative intent but must be able to identify gendered assumptions. Spatial theories provide the capacity to do this, both through their challenge to discursive norms, and also through the potential to analyse the actions of individuals in the international arena. In this respect, the gendered norms of both academia and of political structures are secondary to the actors analysed.

Although they can be applied to most situations in the international arena, by providing a potential to assess political change contemporaneously, spatial theories are particularly apposite to analysis of new communications technologies. The discipline of IR has struggled in recent years to incorporate rapid technological development into its epistemologies; the spatial method used in the thesis represents an attempt to develop theoretical approaches which respond to such changes.

Spatial theories highlight the links between objectives of actors and their actions. In the case of NGOs and their use of ICTs, the use of spatial theories has shown that, although all of the organizations involved in the survey demonstrate a desire to broaden access to provision of this form of communication, only limited resources are made available to achieve this end. As the spatial theories outlined permit related analysis of both discourse and practice, both of these dimensions of agency can be researched simultaneously.



The spatial theories used in the thesis were focused exclusively around the issue of NGO use of ICTs. At this juncture, however, the possibility that they can be adapted to analysis of any actor in the international arena is viable. This area of theorising is underdeveloped, both in IR and in other disciplines, and the need for further work on the application of spatial theories to specific practices is evident. The limited evidence from the research undertaken for the thesis, however, suggests that this approach has the potential for much broader application.

## CONCLUSION

This conclusion briefly summarises the core concerns of the thesis and identifies related areas which warrant further investigation. Analysis in the thesis has centred on three key issues: spatial theories, the impact of ICTs on political processes, and their use by NGOs as actors in the international arena. Of these areas, the development of spatial theories has been the key concern of the thesis, as the central aim of this research has been to provide an analytical tool which transcends the limitations of the public/private, state-centric interpretations of space which dominate the discourse of IR.

Theses on the impact of ICTs on social change are constantly evolving, as both the capacities of these technologies and the range of actors making use of them increases. Thus, the roles, functions and relevance of new communications technologies in international politics are now widely acknowledged but little clear evidence on their impact has been produced. The thesis has, therefore, addressed what could be termed the 'moving target' of ICTs in the international arena by seeking to develop spatial theories to provide a more flexible analytical tool than the extant discourse of the discipline permits.

Given the complexities of the analytical approach taken, the thesis has been organised into six discrete but related chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion. Each of the main chapters focuses on one significant issue and each relates loosely to the others but more specifically to the broader issues of spatial analysis and the limitations of the extant discourse of IR. Although some of the chapters focus on apparently diverse issues, there is a linear logic to their organization. In relation to the discourse of IR, To establish the context for the application of spatial theories to complex political practices, Chapter One addressed spatial theories, Chapter Two ICTs and Chapter Three NGOs. Building upon the issues raised, Chapters Four, Five and Six addressed how NGOs are making use of ICTs and how spatial theories can be applied to help us interpret this use. More detail on the individual chapters and their overall relevance to the discipline of IR is given below.

Chapter One highlighted the relevance of feminist theories to the concerns of the thesis. Feminist scholars, in IR and in other disciplines, have been at the forefront of developing theoretical approaches which explore the role of discourse in positioning actors and practices. In particular, feminist theorists have provoked intense debate on the relevance

of public/private categorisations of political space, arguing that the dualism of this form of discursive construction imposes constraints on analysis, by perpetuating a dualistic, 'either/or' interpretative model of political practice. In this respect, the work of feminist scholars on the limitations of public/private interpretations of politics in IR was used to provide a foundation for the development of spatial theories which followed.<sup>79</sup>

Building upon analysis of feminist interpretations of spatial theorising, a critique of the nature of spatiality in the discourse in IR was also developed in Chapter One. In recent years, an increasing number of scholars in the discipline have suggested that it is hindered in its analyses of complex political interactions by its state-centric ontologies. It has been widely argued that, despite a growing challenge to the neo/Realist hegemony of ideas, the state remains the definitional space of analysis in the discipline. As a consequence, all other actors are interpreted and understood in terms of their relationship with, or impact upon, states. The thesis has suggested that political interactions in the international arena are far more complex than this limited discursive construction can accommodate.

Spatial categories initially outlined by Henri Lefebvre were therefore identified as providing a more flexible approach to analysis of political activities of actors other than the state. These categories - spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation - were argued to provide an effective framework for analysis of change in international affairs in two important respects. Firstly, they provide a mechanism for analysis of agency-level interpretation of political activity, an area in which the 'top down' categorization of politics in IR display significant limitations. Secondly, they provide a means of assessing change in both discourse *and* practice, areas which tend to be considered discrete categories in the discipline.

Chapter Two was designed to illustrate the issues which link spatial theories in IR with the use of ICTs. Where Chapter One illustrated how public/private divides and attempts to 'contain' international activity have proven limiting in IR, Chapter Two highlighted how ICTs transcend such distinctions and thus call for new forms of investigation.

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<sup>79</sup>A secondary aim of this research has been to show that gendered discursive structures impose limitations on the nature of analysis in IR. Thus, rather than focusing on women as a category, the thesis has explored the boundaries imposed by the gendered discourse of the discipline.

Examination of the origins of ICTs reveals how the links and divisions between public and private sectors, and state and non-state actors, in their development highlight the imprecise nature of the dualistic categories in IR. The features of ICTs, that is the modes of communication they permit, and the ways in which audiences are constructed through their use, suggest that their introduction to the political arena can add new levels of complexity to existing political relations. In particular, a need to move beyond assumptions of an identifiable audience was noted. The nature of communication through the use of these technologies, and in particular the 's/elective' processes which they permit, were therefore explored in detail, in order to develop some new mechanisms for understanding the nature of network communications.

In addressing the use of ICTs by a number of international NGOs, the thesis has addressed two transnational issues. The inherent transboundary nature of these two phenomena frequently proves problematic to analysis in IR, as standard categories of analysis in the discipline, and, in particular, dominant concepts of the real and metaphoric boundaries to political activity, tend to reflect state-centric assumptions. As a case study of the validity of spatial theories, therefore, analysis of NGO use of ICTs provided a useful example of transboundary activities which relate to the concerns of IR, but which fall outside of standard ontologies. The generation of mechanisms for analysis of such phenomena is crucial to the development of the discipline, and Chapters Four, Five and Six attempted to directly apply spatial theories to the responses to the survey conducted into NGO use of ICTs.

Chapter Three provided a typology of NGOs as political actors, and then gave a descriptive overview of each of the organizations surveyed. Although the organizations differ in size and objectives, all are transnational actors, making use of ICTs to mobilize support and publicize their activities. The chapter outlined the responses to the survey, describing the use of both email and the Internet by each of the organizations. The aim of this chapter was to identify the nature of agency of NGOs in the international arena, and to indicate how, according to their survey responses and publicity literature, they are making use of new communications technologies. The chapter illustrated both how NGOs differ from other actors in the international arena, and described of their use of ICTs, drawn from their responses to the survey.

Chapter Four then sought to contextualise the responses to the survey by linking them with literature on the role of NGOs as political actors, and with some of the issues highlighted in the NGO typology. Thus ways in which NGO use of ICTs may be affecting both their own work and other political actors was considered. In particular, the problems facing NGOs in relation to providing access to ICTs for marginalized groups was highlighted.

Chapter Five examined the ontologies of ICTs which restrict effective analysis of their use. This is a problem which is experienced in most, if not all, academic disciplines, as their heterogeneous effects transcend economic, cultural, social *and* political boundaries while potentially creating new ones. Attempts to view cyberspace as an interdisciplinary field are hindered by the categorisation of subject matter which exists in all disciplines. In this respect, IR is not alone in struggling to develop new mechanisms for analysis of cyberspace and its multiple effects. Analysis of ICTs is particularly significant in IR, however, as the boundaries which the discipline has set to mark legitimate political spaces have very little meaning in relation to network communications. In addition, the development of international regulatory frameworks and the growing power of economic actors in this area further demonstrates the need to develop new modes of analysis which can adequately respond to the multi-level changes which are taking place.

Following discussing of these issues, Chapter Five went on to apply Lefebvre's spatial categories, identified in Chapter One, to the use of ICTs by the NGOs surveyed. The aim of this application was not to draw general conclusions about the changing nature of political practice. It was, rather, to demonstrate how NGO practices may be changing through their use of ICTs and to suggest ways in which this may affect other political actors.

Although Chapter Six highlighted some limitations to the spatial theories applied in the thesis, they were shown to offer valuable insights into the impact of ICTs on political practice. The thesis has shown that, at present, NGO behaviour is not fundamentally altered by the introduction of ICTs, but that their existing methods of operation may be extended and intensified. A key aim of all of the organizations surveyed is to influence political discourse and to induce material change for the individuals and social groups with whom they interact. In these respects, ICTs undoubtedly provide a useful tool for

lobbying and consciousness-raising, and have been shown to be being used to good effect in this respect by the organizations surveyed.

NGO provision of information accessible via public sites on the Internet may also have a domino effect for individuals as political actors. There is, however, a prevailing elitism in access to this form of communication, most notably economic, but also in terms of language and literacy. Although growth rates for access to ICTs in developing countries are high, there is an evident need to assess both the role of NGOs in increasing provision, and also to explore the ways other political actors are addressing this issue. In this regard, the thesis has highlighted two important areas where further research is warranted. Firstly, the use of ICTs by other political actors, such as states and international organizations, requires examination, as this would provide material for comparative analysis. Secondly, the nature of this study has rendered measurement of the ways information provision is contextualized as *knowledge* impossible. That is, although the thesis has examined how information is supplied, it has not analysed the cultural context in which this information is received and understood. Area and case studies on NGO projects using Internet resources could provide some valuable data in this respect.

The spatial theories applied to analysis of NGO use of ICTs have been shown to have value to as an analytical tool for IR. Most significantly, they move away from the state-centric discourse of the discipline and provide an approach which recognises that politics are socially-embedded and do not operate as a discrete category. As noted earlier, these theories also provide an opportunity to examine political practice at the level of individual agency, in contrast to conventional modes of analysis in IR. This is a crucial feature of this mode of theorising, as it indicates that the ways space is organized, discursively and materially, have an important influence over the ways political participation is understood.

The increase in the range and scope of NGO activity in recent decades suggests that impressions of politics which do not centre on states are now commonplace. There is, therefore, a need to reiterate that states remain important players, as they retain a significant degree of power, resources and legitimacy in the international arena. Non-state politics co-exist with state politics, however, and can have crucial relevance for many marginalized groups, and for individuals and collectives in circumstances not

prioritised on state agendas. In this respect, the impact of social and political change, such as the introduction of new technologies, can be assessed through the use of spatial theories. People existing at the margins of a state-centric discourse, including many women and the groups with whom the NGOs surveyed work, are frequently overlooked by structure-level analysis, and spatial theories can provide an opportunity to explore their activities, and the impact of the actions of other actors upon them.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the thesis has been to highlight an under-explored aspect of social theorising, as very little work on spatial *methodologies* has been undertaken by scholars in the social sciences to date. Thus, although there has been much discussion of the nature of space, and the power relations embedded in its organization and categorisation, there has been little research into the development of methodological approaches which permit closer examination of the constraints spatial categories impose. The thesis has attempted, therefore, to develop a form of theorising which extends the parameters of the discipline to incorporate complex interactions and a range of actors more readily. The spatial categories applied in the thesis could, even at this early stage of development, be used to address any form of political practice. In particular, they would be a valuable tool for shedding light on the activities of non-state actors as political participants in their own right. The spatial theories used are slightly over-simplified, and tend to compartmentalise actors and their behaviours. An important strength of these theories, however, is their value in analysing complex phenomena and, though their application in the thesis does present a mechanism for analysing political practices at the level of individual agency, the need to identify spatial methodologies which can illustrate intersecting relations effectively is evident.

As a first attempt in the discipline of IR to *apply* spatial theories to specific practices in the international arena, the thesis has achieved its objectives, in producing an analytical tool which can be applied to complex phenomena in IR. In developing spatial theories, the thesis has also highlighted the limitations of the extant discourse and identified ways in which spatial theories can be adapted to provide agency-level analysis. The thesis has, therefore, attempted to move the discourse of IR beyond spatial theorising, and towards some form assessment of the real effects of the organization of space. In this respect, the thesis provides a foundation for further research into the most appropriate ways to apply spatial theories to the concerns of IR.

## GLOSSARY

**browser**

Browsers allow exploration of documents on the WWW, by 'searching' webpages for text, images etc., by connecting to web servers and transferring information from remote sites to host computers.

**computer-mediated communication (CMC)**

Form of communication where computers play a key role in the exchange and transfer of information. CMC uses digital technologies which condense different kinds of information into the same binary form, allowing it to be transferred between computers. Networking systems allow links between computers across virtually any geographical area.

**digital technology**

High-speed mechanism for information exchange. Digital technology converts information into binary units. Data, images and sound can thus be condensed, transferred and reconstituted between computers.

**download**

Documents from webpages can be transferred to and stored by host computers by downloading.

**electronic mail (email)**

Function which allows messages to be sent and received electronically via personalised addresses. Can be used person-to-person or for group communication.

**file transfer protocol (FTP)**

Mechanism for exchanging information which allows computers connected to the Internet to explore, retrieve and transfer files.

**hardware**

Material resources of computing, such as computer, modem, hard-drive etc.

**hits**

Connections made with a web site. The number of hits made can be measured by creators of web pages to establish how frequently a particular site is accessed.

**hypertext markup language (html)**

Coding system used to create the hypertext documents used on the WWW. Hypertext links between documents allow users to 'jump' between pages. Can be used to create links within documents or to documents from other sources.

**hypertext transfer protocol (http)**

Mechanism for exchanging information used by browsers to receive documents from servers.

**Internet**

Vast number of computers connecting to interlinking networks. Consists of thousands of interconnecting sites, but functions as a single network, making use of compatible protocols which allow ease of access for users.



**Internet Service Provider (ISP)**

Usually a commercial organization which provides links to Internet for service users.

**modem**

Computer attachment which allows access to networks and transfer of files between computers. Usually links to telephone lines, but some kinds can also be used for satellite connections.

**packet-switching**

Allows 'packets' of binarised data to be routed by flexible computer-based switches, reaching their destination in the form in which they were sent

**server**

Computer or computer programme which manages and delivers information for client computers.

**software**

Programmes used to operate computer systems.

**Transmission or Transport Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP)**

Exchange mechanisms controlling communication on the Internet. Essentially the adopted technical standards for transferring information from one digital source to another.

**World Wide Web (WWW)**

Hypertext-based Internet service used for browsing resources on the Internet. Effectively the collection of all online hypertext documents which use html formatting.

Appendix (1)

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**QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE USE OF NETWORK COMMUNICATIONS**

The aim of this research is to establish how NGOs use network communications to increase their profile as political actors.

Please answer all questions if possible, providing general answers if specific data is unavailable. A small space is left under each section for any additional information you feel is relevant.

**ORGANIZATION:**                      NAME OF ORGANIZATION

Background information

- 1)        When was name of organization established ?
- 2)        How many countries does name of organization have offices in ?
- 3)        How many members does name of organization have ?
- 4)        How many countries are name of organization's members from ?
- 5)        Any additional information on name of organization and membership :

**Electronic mail (e-mail)**

- 6) Does name of organization use e-mail ?
- YES            Please go to Question 7 below
- NO             Please go to Question 14 below
- 7) Are all of name of organization's offices linked to each other by e-mail ?
- YES / NO
- If NO, what percentage *are* linked ?
- 8) Can members of the public contact name of organization by e-mail ?
- YES / NO
- 9) Does name of organization ever use e-mail to contact the following people / groups :
- Existing members of name of organization
- YES / NO
- Members of the general public
- YES / NO
- British government agencies (eg MOD)
- YES / NO
- International organizations (eg EU, UN)
- YES / NO
- Other human rights / environmental etc organizations ?
- YES / NO
- News / media organizations ?
- YES / NO
- 10) Does name of organization ever use e-mail to send information to members ?
- YES / NO
- 11) Do you request e-mail addresses on membership applications ?
- YES / NO

- 12) Do you use e-mail 'mailshots' (ie sending unsolicited information on name of organization via e-mail) ? YES / NO
- 13) Any additional information on name of organization and the use of e-mail :

### The Internet

- 14) Does name of organization have a web-site on the Internet ?
- YES            Please go to Question 15 below
- NO             Please go to Question 20 below
- 15) Please give web-site address(es)
- 16) When was name of organization's first web-site established ?
- 17) Please estimate how many people have visited the site since it was established :
- 18) Is it possible to join name of organization via the web- site ?
- YES / NO
- 19) Does name of organization's web-site provide links to other organizations with similar concerns ? YES / NO

If YES, please give details :

- 20) Do you have plans to establish a web-site ? YES / NO
- If YES, when is the site likely to go on-line ?
- If NO, please give a reason :
- 21) Any additional information on name of organization and the use of web-sites.

**Communications policies**

22) Does name of organization have written policy on the use of network communications:

In UK offices:  
YES / NO

Between international offices :  
YES / NO

Between name of organization and other organizations : YES / NO

Please provide copies of communications policy documents if possible.

23) Does name of organization provide network facilities to any of the client groups it works with ? YES / NO

If YES, please give examples and enclose any additional information with your reply.

Questionnaire completed by:

Name of organization:

Job title:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.  
Jayne Rodgers

APPENDIX 2

JAYNE RODGERS  
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 LEEDS  
 LS2 9JT

## PHD QUESTIONNAIRE - FOLLOW-UP

ORGANIZATION: NAME

These questions are a brief follow-up to your responses to the earlier questionnaire on the use of network technologies at NAME. As before, it would be helpful if you could answer all questions if possible, providing general information where specific data is unavailable.

- 1 How often is new information added to your Web pages ?
- 2 Do you employ staff specifically to write copy for Web pages ? If so, where are they based ?
- 3 Who makes decision on the content of Web pages and how ?  
 (eg do decisions come from a single person, from a specific department / committee responsible, from individual offices etc. ?)
- 4 Is the content of Web pages also published in other formats ?  
 (ie are all items on the Web available elsewhere, say in pamphlets, or do the Web pages contain supplementary / additional information ?)
- 5 Does NAME publish Web pages in other languages ? If so, which ones ?
- 6 Does NAME keep an online archive ? If so, what sort of material does this contain ? (eg press releases, details of past campaigns, annual reports etc. ?)

Many thanks for assisting with this research. Your help has been invaluable.  
 Jayne Rodgers

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