Review of International Studies (2010), 36, 975–987 © *2010 British International Studies Association*
doi:10.1017/S0260210510001397

Interruption Ashley

CYNTHIA WEBER*

Abstract. Rather than reading the work of Richard K. Ashley as iconic – as some dead, stable image used to signify the whole of post-modern or post-structural International Relations (IR) in a single swoop – this article considers Ashley's work as an interruption to the discipline of IR (mainstream and critical). In so doing, the article suggests that what is important about Ashley's work is how it creates a thinking space where it is possible to think again about international politics, about international theory, about what Ashley's interruption itself permits and limits and about how this interruption unfolds and sometimes folds back on itself.

Cynthia Weber is Professor of International Relations at Sussex University and co-Director of the media company Pato Productions. She has written widely on International Relations theory, feminist and queer theory, and US foreign policy.

Richard K. Ashley is an iconic figure to many in the discipline of International Relations (IR), and he hates this. Rightly so. As an icon – a dead, stable image used to signify the whole of post-modern or post-structural IR in a single swoop – Ashley is regarded as an object of uncritical devotion by some admirers and as a heretical iconoclast hell-bent on destroying traditional IR by some detractors.[1] Both

* Thanks to David Campbell, Francois Debrix, Roxanne Doty, Anne-Marie Fortier, Mark Lacy, Marianne Marchand, V. Spike Peterson, and Mike Shapiro for their comments on this article and to Kyle Grayson for organising 19 April 2007, 'Critical Reflections on Professor Richard K. Ashley' Conference at Newcastle University where this article was presented.

[1] Mark Laffey's article, which follows in this special section, is worth mentioning here because of how it has a foot in each of these categories and, in so doing, performs the very objections Ashley has to iconic readings (see Mark Laffey, 'Things Lost and Found: Richard Ashley and the silences of thinking space', *Review of International Studies*, 36:4 (October 2010). Laffey's article simultaneously seems to regard some aspects of Ashley's work with uncritical devotion (the 'Marxist' bits) while it seems to be hell-bent upon destroying other aspects of Ashley's work (the 'post-structuralist' bits). What makes Laffey's article's seemingly contradictory position possible is its determination to exclude one of the most significant aspects of Ashley's work from Ashley's texts – the claim by Ashley that he is writing critically in relation to all structuralisms, including Marxism. So, while on the one hand, Laffey's article wants to credit Ashley's work because Marx, capital and especially labour were there all along, Laffey's article also insists that post-structuralist readings of Ashley's work are not based upon close textual readings but merely upon over-identifications with and sympathies for Ashley's *intentions* about his work. In other words, Laffey's article suggests that Laffey's analysis offers the hard materialist facts of the matter, while particularly my reading of Ashley's work in this article offers merely soft *sentiment and sentimentality*. This is why, from the perspective of Laffey's article, Laffey's reading of Ashley is counter-memorialising and therefore truly broadening of 'thinking space' while mine is memorialising, static, and constrictive of 'thinking space'. There are several ironies here. I will mention just two.

First, it is ironic that what makes Laffey's reading possible is his article's analytical confusion between Ashley's textual *engagement with* structural Marxism (about which Laffey's article is correct – it was there all along) and Ashley's textual *embracing of* structural Marxism (which was not and is not the 'material fact' of Ashley's texts). This conflation of 'engaging' with 'embracing'

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001397 Published online by Cambridge University Press

positions are absurd. That Ashley could be regarded in these ways could not be more ironic, for what his work does is critique claims to 'the Word' or 'the Image'

depends upon a necessary exclusion employed by Laffey's article – one that forgets how the lessons of 1968 lead Marxist-influenced thinkers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida to take seriously the resilience of capitalism. This lead them to develop alternative understandings to Marxism that broke free of Marxism's determinist logics and laws of contradiction, with concepts like power/knowledge in Foucault's case and differentiation and différance in Derrida's case. It is only by erasing this intellectual history of the relationship between Marxism and post-structuralism – by effectively narrowing our 'thinking space' about how post-structuralism historically and intellectually grew out of what it perceived to be the failures of Marxist praxis and of how this spoils the wished-for Marxist-inflected continuity in dissident critique that Laffey's article so desperately desires – that Laffey's article can conflate Ashley's engagement with Marxism with an embracing of it. Yet this is precisely what Laffey's article does (although the 'Postscript' to Laffey's article claims otherwise; see, Laffey, 'Things Lost and Found'). Not only that. Laffey's article evidences and sustains this confusion not only by deploying very simplistic and contentious, even demeaning, dichotomies (for example, hard, masculine, materialist textual facts on the part of his article vs. soft, feminine, immaterial intentions on the part of my article and of Ashley's self-readings, implying that my and Ashley's analyses are not textually based) that evidence a regrettable 'intolerance of intellectual difference at the margins' (also see the 'Postscript' to Laffey's article which dismisses my point-by-point analytical reply to Laffey's article in this footnote as 'a little hysterical', by which it does not mean funny; see Laffey, 'Things Lost and Found'; and for the quote on intolerance, see Kyle Grayson, 'Disidence, Richard K. Ashley and the Politics of Silence', *Review of International Studies*, 36:4 (October 2010). Laffey's article also reveals the very 'protocol of reading' upon which its entire argument is based – a silencing of its own sentimental attachment to Marx and Marxism as the originary, continuous, undifferentiated, and uninterruptable sources of dissident critique out of which all of Laffey's article's arguments and occlusions of history flow. This is what makes it possible for Laffey's article to come to two contradictory conclusions at the same time. On the one hand, Laffey's work concludes that 'in thinking space the Marxist trace in the poststructuralist text is simply ignored' (Laffey, 'Things Lost and Found') because my article does not mention Marxists *enough*. Yet, on the other hand, Laffey's article concludes that Ashley must be involved in disciplinary boundary-work against Marxists and Marxisms when he recalls Marx *at all*, like when Ashley asked of Laffey in response to Laffey's presentation of his draft article, 'Don't you think Derrida read Marx?' (Newcastle Conference, 17 April 2007).

A second irony of Laffey's article is that it tries to draw its readers into a debate about deciding who really is 'the essential Ashley' and about how Ashley's work essentially or properly or best opens up 'thinking space'. Such a debate is neither counter-memorialising as it claims to be (for it is about arguing over which 'essential Ashley' – as if there were one – to memorialise; here I agree with Kyle Grayson that there are multiple and I would add indeterminable 'Ashleys', see Grayson, 'Dissidence') nor productive (don't we all have more important political projects to be getting on with than one that revolves around trying to determine which 'iconic Ashley' – and presumably the 'Marxist one' or really the one remixed with Laffey's brand of Marxism – is the proper representative of Ashley's textual opus?). Most importantly, though, such a debate detracts from what Ashley's texts themselves do in and for IR, which is they emphasise the undecidability of all ontologies and all grounds for making ontological claims – not only about mainstream and dissident/critical IR but also about IR theorists like Ashley himself or about his body of work, not to mention about political and economic theorists like Marx or about his body of work.

The merits of Laffey's intervention, then, lie not in the points his article invites us to debate (about which 'iconic Ashley' to 'counter'-memorialise while, it should be stressed, always leaving relatively uncontested and un-remixed yet ever memorialised some desired-for sense of Marx and Marxism that provides continuity to dissident critiques by erasing the very critical differences in Ashley's work that give it its rich interruptive character, of IR generally and of Laffey's brand of undifferentiated dissident critique specifically). Rather, the merits of Laffey's article lie, first, in performing the very reasons why I suggest Ashley sees these debates as counter-productive and why I suggest Ashley therefore hates to be regarded as an iconic figure. Second, the merits of Laffey's article lie in reminding us of how limiting the presumed truly broader 'thinking space' of the specific brand of Marxism employed by Laffey's article can be when its persistent reply to interruptions by post-structuralists is to insistently forget the material historical conditions that made it necessary for post-structuralists – including Foucault, Derrida, and Ashley – to not only think *with* Marxists but also to think *beyond* the limits of Marxism.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001397 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as summary statements of anything.[2] In this regard, Ashley and his work are not iconic. Nor are they iconoclastic, for while they take on established beliefs and institutions in IR, they never position themselves in opposition to IR, even if others attempt to position them there. Instead, Ashley and his work are interruptive.

Interrupt – 'to stop or hinder by breaking in; to break the uniformity or continuity of *x*; to break in upon an action, esp. to break in with questions or remarks while another is speaking'.[3]

One word Ashley interrupts is realism.[4] One image Ashley interrupts is realism's image of itself. As Ashley puts it, 'I raise questions for which that discourse typically *presupposes* answers and, hence, I raise questions that that discourse characteristically finds no need to entertain'.[5] In so doing, Ashley politicises realism – particularly neo-realism and its contemporary structurationist variant – returning it to the realm of the political by insisting that realism critically reflect upon the inter-subjective meanings it relies upon to construct common-sense ideas about global political life. He describes his arguments as 'like warning shots, meant to provoke a discussion, not to destroy an alleged enemy'.[6]

A volley of warnings issue from Ashley's direction. He cautions IR theorists against modernist forms of reasoning that exclude critical self-reflection, whether these be technical rationality,[7] liberal positivism,[8] or economism.[9] He warns them about neo-realism which, in its structuralism, statism, utilitarianism, and one-dimensional positivism, serves the hegemonic state.[10] He advises discretion before embracing IR practices like the dichotomisation of domestic/international and community/anarchy that fail to describe global political life,[11] that arbitrarily limit

[2] As Ashley and Walker put it, 'Words can no longer *do justice* because they no longer bear a promise of certain, liberal judgment on behalf of a social order, a community, a discipline, a culture. As a result, the very possibility of truth is put in doubt'. See Richard K. Ashley and R. B. J. Walker, 'Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline: Crisis and the Question of Sovereignty in International Studies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34:3 (1990), p. 378.

[3] *Webster's Dictionary*.

[4] Realism, neo-realism, and contemporary structurationisms function in Ashley's work as illustrations of modernist discourses. As Ashley explains, he could just as easily target other modernist discourses – like Marxism or Kantianism – for critique. His choice of realism, neo-realism, and contemporary structurationisms have to do with their hegemonic status in the discipline of North American IR.

[5] Richard K. Ashley, 'The Eye of Power: The Politics of World Modeling', *International Organization*, 37:3 (1983), p. 521. While in this passage Ashley is speaking specifically about world modelling projects, he could just as easily be speaking about realism.

[6] Richard K. Ashley, 'The Poverty of Neorealism', *International Organization*, 38:2 (1984), p. 229.

[7] Ashley, 'The Eye of Power' and Richard K. Ashley, 'Three Modes of Economism', *International Studies Quarterly*, 27:4 (1983), pp. 463–96.

[8] Ashley, 'The Eye of Power'.

[9] Ibid., 'Three Modes'.

[10] Ibid., 'The Poverty of Neorealism'.

[11] Richard K. Ashley, 'The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space: Toward a Critical Social Theory of International Politics', *Alternatives*, 12 (1987) pp. 403–34.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001397 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the exercise of reason,[12] and that privilege 'the sign of reasoning man' over 'the question of the *historicity of man*'.[13] And he expounds the price of dismissing IR theories and practices that infuse IR theory with critique.[14]

The potency of Ashley's warnings comes not only from the force of his arguments but from the fact that he discharges them from a myriad of directions. This is because Ashley situates himself as a failed hermeneutic interpreter of realism,[15] a conversationalist with world modelling,[16] a peace researcher unravelling the taboo term 'economism',[17] a critical analyst,[18] a post-structuralist attempting to expand the agenda of social theory,[19] a dissent speaking the language of exile,[20] and a critical spirit returned to IR debates after a nearly 10-years recess.[21]

The plurality of Ashley's arguments and self-positionings make sense when one takes account of the array of critical theorists and philosophers who inform his work. Early appearances by Jurgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Antonio Gramsci, Paul Ricoeur and Ferdinand de Saussure give way in later work to a persistent return to figures like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Butler. Yet early influences never seem to be abandoned by Ashley but instead are recast, complicated, followed less devoutly, appreciated for their limits as well as for their insights.

Utilising all of these arguments, self-positionings, and critical influences, Ashley cuts in on IR's cozy conversation insisting on dialogue – even heterologue – instead of traditional monologue.[22]

Two of Ashley's favourite monologists to interrupt are Kenneth Waltz and Alexander Wendt, for both are central to the construction of what currently passes in the discipline of IR as global social theory. Ashley engages with Waltz because 'as Waltz's work so clearly illustrates, realists disallow critical interpretations of [. . .] intersubjective processes even as they depend upon them'.[23] And Ashley engages with Wendt because Wendt propagates a contemporary structurationism 'that would pretend in all earnestness to gather and represent the critical

[12] Richard K. Ashley, 'Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique', *Millennium*, 17:2 (1988), pp. 227–62.

[13] Richard K. Ashley, 'Living on Border Lines: Man, Poststructuralism, and War', in James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro (eds), *International/Intertextual Relations* (Lexington MA: Lexington Press, 1989), pp. 259–321.

[14] Ashley, 'Living on Boderlines'; Richard K. Ashley, 'Sovereignty, Hauntology, and the Mirror of the World Political: Some Thoughts Too Long Retained', paper presented at the International Studies Association Annual Convention, Los Angeles (2000); Richard. K. Ashley and R. B. J. Walker, 'Speaking the Language of Exile: Dissident Thought in International Studies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34:3 (1990), pp. 259–68; Ashley and Walker, 'Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline'.

[15] The failure here is important because a failed interpreter is one 'whose expectations are persistently disappointed' by the object he interprets so much so that he 'evidently has not become part of the world he would interpret'. See, Richard K. Ashley, 'Political Realism and Human Interest', *International Studies Quarterly*, 25:2 (1981), pp. 212.

[16] Ashley, 'The Eye of Power'.

[17] Ibid., 'Three Modes'.

[18] Ibid., 'The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space'.

[19] Ibid., 'Living on Border Lines'.

[20] Ashley and Walker, 'Speaking the Language of Exile'; Ashley and Walker, 'Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline'.

[21] Ashley, 'Sovereignty, Hauntology, and the Mirror of the World Political'.

[22] Ibid., 'Living on Border Lines', p. 282.

[23] Ibid., 'Political Realism and Human Interest', p. 217. See, Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001397 Published online by Cambridge University Press

historicizing forces of *différance* while in fact immunizing the ideal of the heroic scholar who will never fail to know how to determine difference from the standpoint of an identical agent *or* structure and who also, through a kind of intellectual hopscotch, can reassure himself and other would-be heroes that he will never be caught flatfooted on an ontological ground that, he acknowledges, is already quaking beneath his feet'.[24] Ashley insists on reading these and other monological scholars not only through critical theorists but through all brands of IR theorists, including classical realists like Niccolo Machiavelli, Reinhold Neibuhr, Hans Morgenthau, and John Herz, idealists like Karl Deutsch, and English School theorists like Hedley Bull, Martin Wight, and E. H. Carr.

Ashley's interruptions work not only by forcing a conversation among IR scholars, philosophers, and critical theorists, but they also function performatively. By employing endless verb clauses and digressions, by methodically pluralising every aspect of every argument, and by anticipating challenges and responses to his arguments before they have been voiced, Ashley's work stylistically mimes the theoretical interruption it offers. It makes one dwell on points that he, unlike 'would-be mainstreamers', refuses to stabilise.[25] Ashley's interruptions make one think, and think again, and think yet again, and on and on, utilising a protracted Ashley sentence in an interminable Ashley text.

One of Ashley's most effective performative strategies is to 'throw his voice'. In his early work, this occurs by having others speak for him. For example, isn't it Ashley alluding to an earlier incarnation of himself when he writes, 'Herz understands that being a committed realist means being a critical nonrealist at the same time'?[26] Or when Ashley writes of Hedley Bull's 'sardonic grin, a grin expressing a hint of irony' at North American IR theorists' reliance upon the domestic analogy, surely it is Ashley who is smirking in the background.[27]

In his later work, Ashley 'throws his voice' not because he is using others to speak for him but because it seems he no longer feels comfortable making a claim to any stable speaking position. This leads him to an incessant repetition of 'if I were to', 'I would want to', and 'I might say' statements. He writes, 'If I were to respond to Steve [Krasner]', and 'I would want to underscore three closely related points', and 'I might say that this question is the essentially political question [. . .]'.[28] In these statements, actions that would make a definite claim to authorship are always deferred. And this, of course, is among the points of Ashley's work – that claims to authorship must be studied by IR theorists, not merely repeated by

[24] Ibid., 'Sovereignty, Hauntology, and the Mirror of the World Political', p. 8. See Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[25] Ashley, 'Sovereignty, Hauntology, and the Mirror of the World Political'.
[26] Ibid., 'Political Realism and Human Interest', pp. 227–8.
[27] Richard K. Ashley, 'The Powers of Anarchy: Theory, Sovereignty, and the Domestication of Global Life', in James Der Derian (ed.), *Critical Investigations* (London: MacMillian, 1988/1995), p. 87.
[28] Ashley, 'Sovereignty, Hauntology, and the Mirror of the World Political', p. 8 and Richard K. Ibid., 'The Political, Statecraft, Sovereignty', paper presented at the International Studies Association Annual Convention, Chicago (2001), pp. 7, 13.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001397 Published online by Cambridge University Press

them. Indeed, according to Ashley, it is because many IR theorists reproduce such instatements of authorship that they are so inept at understanding how international politics – and especially statecraft – works.[29]

This in part accounts for where Ashley chooses to locate his interruptions. Ashley's interruptions are generally situated at an ontological intersection of three concepts at the heart of traditional IR theory – sovereignty, anarchy, and statecraft. Sovereignty, 'viewed as an unquestioned and unquestionable foundation of critical inquiry – to one or another arbitrary historical interpretation of rational *being*' is 'the regulative ideal' of modern discourses of politics.[30] Anarchy, 'like *terror*, is one of those words that modern discourses use to mark off those critical practices that refuse to speak from a sovereign center and that are therefore to be feared, excluded from serious discourse, and disciplined if necessary'.[31]

Regulating the tension between sovereignty and anarchy is not a pre-given state but the practice of statecraft. Statecraft is 'the craft of founding, the craft of stating the name of a self-naming sovereign onotologized *we* and rendering it effective in history'.[32] 'The primary problem of modern statecraft – a problem never finally resolved – is to stabilise the sovereign grounds of legitimate violence in modern politics by enframing and inscribing the domestic domain of "sovereign man" which the state can be understood to represent'.[33] Or, put concisely, 'Modern statecraft is modern mancraft'.[34]

As Ashley's reworking of the concepts sovereignty, anarchy, and statecraft makes clear, one cannot comprehend the meaning and function of these terms and their relationships to one another without grasping their ontological debt to an apparitional figure of 'modern reasoning man'.[35] Making sense of Ashley making sense of IR, then, makes no sense without a persistent – and insistent – questioning of ontology.

This is as true for the international politics IR theorists study as it is for their study of international politics. For Ashley, statecraft crafts not only the sovereign state but also the state of the discipline. 'Would-be mainstreamers' come to represent the collective voice of sovereign reasoning man while critical social theorists like post-structuralists are coded as anarchical, hazardous, and full of peril through disciplinary performances like Steve Krasner's quip, 'I just have to say, poststructuralism is dangerous!'[36] As Ashley points out, such disciplinary performances are not only possible because 'would-be mainstreamers' behave as though 'reality' were unmediated and non-performative[37] but also because they 'never ask that most politicizing of questions: the impossible-to-answer question, who are we?'[38] And so Ashley interrupts them, displacing the mainstream 'question of *what* the foundations

[29] Ibid., 'Living on Border Lines'; Ashley, 'Sovereignty, Hauntology, and the Mirror of the World Political'; Ashley and Walker, 'Speaking the Language of Exile'; and Ashley and Walker, 'Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline'.
[30] Ibid., 'Untying the Sovereign State', pp. 231, 238.
[31] Ashley, 'Living on Border Lines', p. 284.
[32] Ibid., 'Sovereignty, Hauntology, and the Mirror of the World Political', p. 15.
[33] Ibid., 'Untying the Sovereign State', p. 256.
[34] Ibid., 'Living on Border Lines', p. 303.
[35] Richard K. Ashley, 'The Achievements of Postmodernism', in Ken Booth, Steve Smith, and Marysia Zalewski (eds), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 240–53; Ashley, 'Sovereignty, Hauntology, and the Mirror of the World Political'.
[36] Quoted in Ashley, 'Sovereignty, Hauntology, and the Mirror of the World Political', p. 6.
[37] Ashley, 'Untying the Sovereign State'.
[38] Ibid., 'Sovereignty, Hauntology, and the Mirror of the World Political', p. 11.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001397 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of modern life are with the question of *how* foundations [like sovereign reasoning man as the unquestioned ground of the state and the state of the discipline] might be imposed'.[39] In so doing, he reminds theorists and practitioners of IR that a 'global crisis of representation' that denies them the last word about IR theory and about international politics is not as easily resolved as they might imagine.[40]

Ashley's interruptions at the sovereignty/anarchy/statecraft axis of ontology not only change the relevant questions to be asked by and about IR theory and nullify any theory/practice divide.[41] They also affect a reinscription of the state, of international politics, and of the discipline of IR. '[T]he modern state comes to be seen, not as the central rational figure evolving in reflection of man, but as a construct without which it would be impossible to control ambiguity and differentiate and constitute the space, the time, the very figure of reasoning man as a rational identity'.[42] International politics becomes 'a practice of the inscription of the dangerous, the externalization and totalization of dangers, and the mobilization of populations to control these always contained traces of the outside within, and that is never more than an effect of the practices by which total dangers are inscribed'.[43] And the discipline of IR becomes a site from which 'would-be mainstreamers' presume 'to speak a sovereign voice, a voice beyond politics and beyond doubt, a voice of interpretation and judgment from which truth and power are thought to emanate as one'.[44]

In these ways and others, Ashley interferes with IR-as-usual, reintroducing into it terms it so long neglected or banished or glossed over. History returns to IR theory, not as 'anti-historical closure'[45] but as a concern with what North American IR discourse '*does* in history'.[46] Among the things North American IR discourse does is remove 'sovereign reasoning man' from history. Ashley re-injects IR theory with history by insisting on theorising the figure of sovereign man in its historicity, as 'the effect of presence [that] is attributable to never finished practices of differentiation and deferral without which it would be impossible to distinguish presence from absence, both spatially and temporally'.[47] Practice returns to IR theory, but not as it does in some contemporary structurationisms in which practice and process in one aspect of international politics – sometimes the state, sometimes international anarchy – can be studied so long as another aspect is 'bracketed' and assumed just to 'be'.[48] Instead, historical practices are seen to affect all ontologies all at the same time.

Critical social theory returns to IR theory. Ashley insists that 'the sphere of international politics is not necessarily beyond the reach of critical inquiry'.[49] The

[39] Ibid., 'The Powers of Anarchy', p. 119.
[40] Ibid., 'Untying the Sovereign State', p. 255; Ashley and Walker, 'Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline', p. 403.
[41] As Ashley reminds us, 'Theory and research, and their relations to practical knowledge, must themselves be regarded as proper objects of international relations theory and research'. See Ashley, 'Three Modes', p. 484.
[42] Ashley, 'Living on Border Lines', pp. 301–2.
[43] Ibid., p. 304.
[44] Ashley and Walker, 'Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline', p. 368.
[45] Ashley, 'Living on Border Lines', p. 262.
[46] Ibid., 'The Powers of Anarchy', p. 102.
[47] Ibid., 'Living on Border Lines', p. 262.
[48] Wendt, 'Social Theory'.
[49] Ashley, 'The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space', p. 405.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001397 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sphere of international politics becomes a site where dissident practices – like the reading and writing of dissident IR scholarship – need to be exercised and appreciated. 'To read dissident works [. . .] is to understand that they have helped to open up a space now richer in cultural resources, a space where a critical labor of testing limitations can be undertaken, a space where it is possible to do the ethically disciplined work of listening, questioning, and expanding the cultural spaces of freedom where just this ethically disciplined work can go on'.[50]

To write dissident scholarship is to interrupt would-be mainstream IR. In and around Ashley's interruption, colleagues, students, conversants contribute their voices to the heterologue – Jacqueline Berman, Roland Bleiker, David Campbell, William Chaloupka, Costas Constantinou, Francois Debrix, James Der Derian, Richard Devetak, Michael Dillon, Roxanne Doty, Jim George, Siba Grovogui, Debbie Johnston, Brad Klein, Yosef Lapid, Tim Luke, Kate Manzo, Scott Nelson, Spike Peterson, Timothy J. Ruback, Michael Shapiro, Nevzat Soguk, Christine Sylvester, Halit Mustafa Tagma, Rob Walker, me, and many, many more.[51] Some

[50] Ashley and Walker, 'Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline', p. 402.

[51] See Jacqueline Berman, '(Un)Popular Strangers and Crises (Un)Bounded: Discourses of Sex-Trafficking, the European Political Community and the Panicked State of Modern States', *European Journal of International Affairs*, 9:1 (2003), pp. 37–86; Roland Bleiker, 'Forget IR Theory', *Alternatives*, 22:1 (1997), pp. 57–85; David Campbell, *Writing Security: US Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); David Campbell, *National Deconstruction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); William Chaloupka, 'Immodest Modesty: Antinuclear Discourse, Lifestyle Politics, and Intervention Strategies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34:3 (1990), pp. 341–52; Costas M. Constantinou, *On the Way to Diplomacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Francois Debrix, *Re-envisioning Peacekeeping* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); James Der Derian, *On Diplomacy* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987); James Der Derian, 'The (S)pace of International Relations: Simulation, Surveillance, and Speed', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34:3 (1990), pp. 295–310; James Der Derian (ed.), *Critical Investigations* (London: MacMillian, 1995); James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro (eds), *International/Intertextual Relations* (Lexington MA: Lexington Books, 1989); Richard Devetak, 'The Project of Modernity and International Relations Theory', *Millennium*, 24:1 (1995), pp. 27–51; Michael Dillon, *The Politics of Security* (London: Routledge, 1996); Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Statecraft's Desire and Anti-Immigration in Western Democracies* (London: Routledge, 2002); Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994); Jim George and David Campbell, 'Patterns of Dissent and the Celebration of Difference: Critical Social Theory and International Relations', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34:3 (1990), pp. 269–94; Siba Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans: Race and Self-Determination in International Law* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Tagma Halit Mustapha, 'A Disciplinary Discipline: The Anarchy Problematique and the Construction of the International Relations Discipline', Thesis in the Department of Political Science (Arizona State University, in progress); Deborah S. Johnston, 'Constructing the Periphery in Modern Global Politics', in Craig Murphy and Roger Tooze (ed.), *The New International Political Economy* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 1991); Bradley S. Klein, 'How the West was One: Representational Politics of NATO', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34:3 (1990), pp. 311–26; Bradley S. Klein, *Strategic Studies and World Order: The Global Politics of Deterrence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Yosef Lapid, 'The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-Postivist Era', *International Studies Quarterly*, 33:3 (1989), pp. 235–54; Timothy W. Luke, 'Discourses of Disintegration/Texts of Transformation: Re-Reading Realism in the New World Order', *Alternatives*, 18:2 (1994), pp. 229–58; Kate Manzo, 'Global Power and South African Politics', *Alternatives*, 17:1 (1992), pp. 23–66; Scott G. Nelson, 'Sovereignty, Ethics, Community', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 30:7 (2004), pp. 816–41; V. Spike Peterson, *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 1992); Timothy. J. Ruback, 'The Three I's of the Thucydides Industry', *Alternatives*, (forthcoming); Michael. J. Shapiro, 'Strategic Discourse/Discursive Strategy: The Representation of "Security Policy" in the Video Age', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34:3 (1990), pp. 327–40; Nevzat Sogut, *States and Strangers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Christine Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001397 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of these 'dissident' disruptions run parallel to Ashley's, some are uttered with Ashley, and some are interruptive *of* Ashley. All result in an insistence on taking politics seriously, wherever and whenever it is found.

And this, of course, is Ashley's persistent preoccupation, for the theme of politics runs through every one of his works. Not surprisingly, Ashley's understanding of politics is as inconstant as the range and variety of his interruptions. Resisting the portrayal of politics as 'mere technique', Ashley's early work conceives of 'politics as a creative self-reflective enterprise, an enterprise by which women and men might reflect on prevailing structures, strive to shape freely their collective will, and orient and organise their practices in the co-production and transformation of the structures of their lives.[52] Later work emphasises a post-structural rather than structural take on politics, where politics is 'an attempt to *impose* exclusionary boundaries'.[53] 'It is a question of *how*, in history, meaning is imposed, put into question, reinterpreted, and fixed anew'.[54] And in his latest essays, Ashley articulates what has long been emerging in his work – how the question of politics *is* a question of ontology. 'Who are we? One might say that this question is the essential political question [. . .] The question opens to the political because it opens to the inescapable reality of power in language, to the way in which every attempt to speak, to be heard, to participate in the signification of selves and things is implicated in [. . .] the traumas of exclusion and abjection without which it would be impossible to effect what may be made to pass as language's prepolitical stabilizing ground'.[55] Overall, Ashley's political questions of IR-as-usual have the effect of pointing 'to dangers inherent in the displacement of *political* questions of modernity'.[56]

What makes Ashley's arguments about politics so compelling is not only their weight but their timeliness. Ashley is astutely attuned to history, grasping the connections between historical moments and intellectual histories as they occur. These include the rise of positivist structuralism in the US in the service of the hegemonic state at just the moment when structuralism's influence was waning in Europe and when theorists as diverse as E. P. Thomson, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault could be called upon to explore the dangers of neo-realism.[57] Ashley recognises that 'two decades after Bull offered his assessment [of anarchy as "the central fact of international life and the starting-point of theorizing about it"] nearly every theorist addressing problems of global collaboration and international order would seem to agree', even though these theorists then go on

International Relations in a Postmodern Era (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); R. B. J. Walker, *One World, Many Worlds: Struggles for a Just World Peace* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1988); R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, the State, and Symbolic Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Cynthia Weber, 'Good Girls, Little Girls, and Bad Girls: Male Paranoia in Robert Keohane's Critique of Feminist International Relations', *Millennium*, 23:2 (1994), pp. 337–49; Cynthia Weber, *Faking It: US Hegemony in a 'Post-Phallic' Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Cynthia Weber, *Imagining America at War* (London: Routledge, 2005).

[52] Ashley, 'Three Modes', p. 483.

[53] Ashley and Walker, 'Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline', p. 377.

[54] Ashley, 'Living on Border Lines', p. 283.

[55] Ibid., 'Sovereignty, Hauntology, and the Mirror of the World Political', p. 33.

[56] Ibid., 'The Powers of Anarchy', p. 123.

[57] Ibid., 'The Poverty of Neorealism'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001397 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to reproduce the very problem Bull was pointing to.[58] Ashley observes a global crisis of representation that leads to sometimes hysterical invocations of a sovereign center of judgment, not only in the practice of international politics but also in the discipline of IR.[59] And in a move that underscores the continued timeliness of his interruption for the globalised, visualised era, Ashley's current work grapples with the implications of how what he sees as globalisations pressing question of 'who are we?' is endlessly – and visibly – posed by scholars, universities, national communities, and states.[60]

Along the way, Ashley's work introduces social constructivism (albeit in a different form than it was later elaborated by Nick Onuf and Alex Wendt)[61] and performativity (again, differently than Judith Butler)[62] into IR debates, while, like the work by other attentive readers of international politics, anticipates and participates in debates about globalisation, the 'end of history', the current 'War on Terror', and the on-going crisis over the role of the university.[63] As such, Ashley's work stands the test of time. For better or worse, Ashley's insights about sovereignty, anarchy/terror, and the crafting of political ontologies are as fresh and pertinent today as they were when he first introduced them into the discipline of IR some 20 years ago. Indeed, Ashley's work has had such an impact on IR theory and the discipline of IR that current generations of students and scholars might be forgiven for thinking that Ashley's work often states the obvious. It is worth reminding them that there was nothing obvious about Ashley's insights when he introduced them into North American IR in the early 1980s.

This doesn't mean that Ashley gets everything right. Far from it. Ashley's contextual focus on traditional IR concepts like the state, sovereignty, and anarchy and his persistent invocation of traditional IR theorists in most of his work does as much to centre the discipline around realism's core concerns and heroic male writers as it does to decentre these ideas and authors. I suspect that this is a shortcoming Ashley accepts as the price of pursuing his particular strategy of interruption, for how can one interrupt the 'we' of rational sovereign man as a figure in international politics or in the discipline of IR if one is not incessantly questioning each of rational sovereign man's hegemonic representations?

There are also problems with style. While Ashley's style necessarily mimes his theoretical argument, sometimes he is just too annoying to read. I often find myself wishing he would stop interrupting and repeating *himself* at least, stop closing down the opposition *before* they've had a chance to speak, and just get on with his point.[64] I get impatient with the disingenuous moments that pepper his writing,

[58] Ibid., 'The Powers of Anarchy', p. 94.
[59] Ashley and Walker, 'Speaking the Language of Exile'; Ashley and Walker, 'Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline'; Ashley, 'Sovereignty, Hauntology, and the Mirror of the World Political'.
[60] Richard K. Ashley, 'Can the End of Power Politics Possibly be Part of the Concepts with which its Story is Told? A Post-Hoc Thematic', paper presented at From Dissidence to Defiance: Resisting the Disciplines of Global Politics, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne (2007); Ashley, 'Sovereignty, Hauntology, and the Mirror of the World Political'.
[61] Ashley, 'Three Modes', p. 482; Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989); Wendt, 'Social Theory'.
[62] Ibid., 'Three Modes', p. 478; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990).
[63] Ibid., 'The Powers of Anarchy'; Ashley, 'Living on the Border Lines'; Ashley, 'Can the End?'.
[64] Since I was his student, I have teased Rick that he needs an editor. I worry as I write this article that I have finally become Rick's editor, narrativising Rick's opus into something short and punchy,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001397 Published online by Cambridge University Press

even when I find myself laughing out loud at his sometimes biting sense of humor. For example, in 'The Poverty of Neorealism', Ashley concludes with a 'self-critique', mentioning that he has 'nagging doubts about tone'.[65] And then he concludes the essay with this final passage – 'Let us play havoc with neorealist concepts and claims. Let us neither admire nor ignore the orrery of errors, but let us instead fracture the orbs, crack them open, shake them, and see what possibilities they have enclosed. And then, when we are done, let us not cast away the residue. Let us instead sweep it into a jar, shine up the glass, and place it high on the bookshelf with other specimens of past mistakes'.[66] Ouch.

I also find myself surprised that, even in his latest published work, Ashley's writing exhibits a tension between his performative style and his lingering economistic logic that always threatens to close – and too often does close – the performative openings he has worked so hard to create. This might explain Ashley's very different responses to the very different sorts of interruptions he experiences to his interruption. Ashley recognises and theorises Steve Krasner's pre-emptive interruption 'poststructuralism is dangerous' and is clearly stung by Robert Keohane's interruption of 'The Poverty of Neorealism' which works by including only the first two sections of that essay in the edited *Neorealism and its Critiques*.[67] Yet Ashley leaves other interruptions only partially processed. The most glaring example is in his essay 'The Achievements of Poststructuralism'. Ashley writes,

> A single sentence, interjected by a colleague into one of my more rambling attempts to make a point in the course of a discussion a few months back: 'You *boys* in IR,' my colleague exclaimed, arching her eyebrows chidingly upon inflecting the second of these words, 'you boys always talk as if you're out there on the plains somewhere, on horseback, galloping alone'. The comment, accompanied by my colleague's pantomiming of a rider gripping reins and by her own sound effects suggestive of racing hoofbeats, might have been immediately prompted by my own conversational turn. It was clear, though, that she was having her fun, not just with my words, but with the entire field of international relations.[68]

Ashley's analysis of this interruption first acknowledges his complicity in this macho, loner posturing – he is, after all, one of the boys and often one of these boys. But then it quickly deflects attention away from Ashley and his undisclosed statement as examples of this hyper-heroic man on horseback posturing his colleague is referring to toward a more generalised discussion and critique of the boys in IR, thereby missing an opportunity to further dwell on and destabilise the masculine position from which Ashley himself so often speaks and writes.[69] What

into something Rick never would or could write, into something that too many scholars and students might read before or instead of reading Rick. If that is the effect of this article, then it has failed. For instead of offering an interruption of Rick's interruption, it would have replaced critique with symbolic patricide and rendered what cannot be stabilised into something stable. Reading Rick is annoying *because* he destabilises everything, including himself. All of this is why reading Rick is well worth the effort and why 'substitutes' like this one will never adequately capture who Ashley is or what Ashley's interruption does.

[65] Ashley, 'The Poverty of Neorealism', p. 285.
[66] Ibid., p. 286.
[67] Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). See also, Ashley and Walker, 'Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline'.
[68] Ashley, 'The Achievements', p. 240.
[69] Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001397 Published online by Cambridge University Press

this passage marks is how Ashley – like so many (mostly male) IR theorists, alternative and otherwise – struggles with his engagements with feminism, gender, and sexuality. He knows he is positioned to 'speak with the force of the Word' when it comes to his sex, his gender, his sexuality, his class, and his race, and he does so consistently and comfortably in his conversations with other similarly positioned figures in the discipline of IR.[70] Occasionally, Ashley's self-consciousness about his positioning results in explicit gendered critiques[71] or in his insistent use of gender-aware phrases – his old favorite being 'women and men' and his new favorite being 'women, men, and children'. Yet all too frequently, Ashley's struggle with especially feminism, gender, and sexuality results in a deafening public silence on these issues, leaving Ashley's choked-back words uncomfortably echoing in some feminist and queer ears while Ashley as one heroic masculine voice singularly wages battle with a masculine chorus of mainstream IR.

Ashley recognises this, writing of his appreciation for the harm that a 'male-marked voice' of interruption and judgment does in IR specifically and in modernism generally.[72] This is one of those conundrums Ashley shares with so many others whose embodiment of master signifiers (whether they be white or male or straight) enables them to occupy and enjoy certain forms of hegemonic power, even when their impulses are to critique them.

My own critique of Ashley's often echoing silence on such issues is tempered by two sets of experiences – one involving what Ashley does and one involving what Ashley refuses to do. What Ashley does is the work of 'listening, questioning, and expanding the cultural spaces of freedom where [. . .] ethically disciplined work can go on', and this includes the work of feminist and queer scholars.[73] Take a case in point. Just after the publication of my queer, feminist book *Faking It*, Rick was asked by countless leading, straight IR scholars what he thought of my book. Rick's consistent reply was that it was important and necessary and that he loved it. He then turned to me and explained, 'What they were inviting me to do was to disown you intellectually. Now I know just how intellectually and ethically limited each and every one of them is'. This is what Ashley does. What Ashley refuses to do is just as important. He refuses to speak for feminist and queer students and scholars or to advise them on what to say or what to be. This is in stark contrast to some other IR scholars like Robert Keohane (1989) and more recently Adam Jones (1996), whose interventions into the IR feminist/gender debates have been less than welcomed by most feminists (Weber, 1991).[74]

All this results in the figuration of Ashley as a scholar who is utterly partial. He is partial *to* his project of interrupting traditional North American IR but also partial *in* the breath and depth of how he pursues this project. Ashley knows all this. He thinks about it, and then he thinks about it some more. He struggles with

[70] Ashley, 'Sovereignty, Hauntology, and the Mirror of the World Political', p. 22.
[71] Ibid., 'Political Realism', p. 225.
[72] Ashley and Walker, 'Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline', p. 405.
[73] Ibid., p. 402.
[74] Robert O. Keohane, 'International Relations Theory: Contributions of a Feminist Standpoint', *Millennium*, 18:2 (1989), pp. 245–53; Adam Jones, 'Does Gender Make the World Go Round? Feminist Critiques of International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 22:4 (1996), pp. 405–29. For responses see Weber, 'Good Girls'; Terrell Carver, Molly Cochrane and Judith Squires, 'Gendering Jones: Feminisms, IRs, Masculinities', *Review of International Studies*, 24:2 (1998), pp. 283–97.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001397 Published online by Cambridge University Press

it. He acknowledges it in oblique confessions. He writes, 'I, too, have wanted there to be a mirror' to reflect a stable, speaking subject, but am 'coming to terms with this grief for all that is lost when one tries to impose upon oneself and others some Cartesian ideal of prepolitical sovereign being'.[75] Resisting the force of the Word and the Image, Ashley allies himself with other critical and 'alternative' theorists as just one more scholar 'who speak[s] in the knowledge that speaking is always political, always dangerous, always conducted without security', always ridden with failure.[76] In this way, he acknowledges what his speaking – and occasional lack of speaking – does, in contrast to 'would-be mainstreamers' who relish in a 'self-indulgent refusal of responsibility' even though they 'have every opportunity to think'.[77]

And that, really, is what Ashley's interruption is about – thinking. It 'is nothing more, and nothing less, than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think' – about international politics, about international theory, about what Ashley's interruption itself permits and limits, how it unfolds and sometimes folds back on itself.[78] There is nothing iconic or dead about thinking, and thinking again.

[75] Ashley, 'Sovereignty, Hauntology, and the Mirror of the World Political', pp. 31–2.
[76] Ibid., p. 36.
[77] Ibid., p. 5.
[78] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 386 quoted in Ashley, 'Living on Border Lines', p. 313.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001397 Published online by Cambridge University Press