1 The Enigma
International Law's Forgotten Geography

Geography occupies an enigmatic place within the discipline of International Law. It is at once ubiquitous and unspoken – present in the everyday assumptions and categories through which legal reasoning unfolds, yet largely absent as an object of sustained theoretical reflection. International lawyers routinely engage with geographic terms and logics – territory, territoriality, jurisdiction, borders, extraterritoriality – without necessarily interrogating the conceptual histories or spatial imaginaries that underpin them.[1] Geography, in this respect, functions more as an implicit background condition than as a critical interlocutor.

Despite this apparent marginality, International Law has long been entangled with geographic thought. Indeed, during the formative centuries of European and colonial expansion,[2] the emergence of International Law relied heavily upon spatial ontologies constructed by Eurocentric geographers. The state system, juridical territoriality, and the cartographic ordering of the planet emerged through overlapping cartographic and legal rationalities. Geography, in this context, did not merely describe space; it produced it, giving form and authority to legal concepts that underwrite the statist international order.

And yet, few legal scholars today recognize the extent and influence of this historical and ontological association. This is in part because statist cartography – so central to both the emergence of disciplinary International Law and the political imaginary of modern Europe – achieved such dominance that its geographic foundations became

[1] Sir Daniel Bethlehem, "The End of Geography: The Changing Nature of the International System and the Challenge for International Law," *European Journal of International Law* 25, no. 1 (2014): 9–24.

[2] Jordan Branch, "Mapping the Territorial State," in *The Cartographic State: Maps, Territory, and the Origins of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 68–71; see also Denis Wood, *The Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford Press, 1992).

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naturalized.[3] By the founding of the United Nations, cartographic conventions had rendered the spatial logic of International Law seemingly self-evident: sovereign states enclosed within bounded territories, arranged across a flat, gridded map of the Earth.

But the story of geography does not end with the institutional triumph of statist mapping. Contemporary Geography, as a discipline, has undergone significant internal transformations, distancing itself from its earlier affiliations with imperial mapping, determinism, and spatial fixity. Today, many geographers – particularly those working in critical, historical, and human geography – strenuously reject the legacy of cartographic essentialism and instead advance plural, relational, and dynamic accounts of space.[4] They inquire into the politics of scale,[5] the infrastructures of mobility,[6] and the atmospheric,[7]

[3] Bruno Latour, "*Onus Orbis Terrarum*: About a Possible Shift in the Definition of Sovereignty," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 44, no. 3 (2016): 305–20, at 308–9.

[4] Rob Kitchin et al., "Unfolding Mapping Practices: A New Epistemology for Cartography," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38, no. 3 (2013): 480–96; Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge, "Rethinking Maps," *Progress in Human Geography* 31, no. 3 (2007): 331–44; Rob Kitchin and Oliver Dawkins, "Digital Twins and Deep Maps," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 50, no. 1 (2025), e12699, https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12699; Matthew H. Edney, "Cartography and Its Discontents," *Cartographica* 50, no. 1 (2015): 9–13; Matthew H. Edney, "Historical Geography and the Cartographic Illusion of Exceptionalism," *Journal of Historical Geography* 88 (2025): 27–38; Anne Kelly Knowles, "Why We Must Make Maps: Historical Geography as a Visual Craft," *Historical Geography* 42 (2014): 3–26; and Matthew David Unangst, "(De)Colonial Historical Geography and Historical GIS," *Journal of Historical Geography* 79 (2023): 76–86.

[5] Simone Tulumello and Roberto Falanga, "Homeland as a Multi-Scalar Community: (Dis)continuities in the U.S. Security/Safety Discourse and Practice," *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 40 (2021): 143–64; Danny MacKinnon, "Reconstructing Scale: Towards a New Scalar Politics," *Progress in Human Geography* 35 (2010): 21–36; and Rowan Rush-Morgan, "Geographies of Queer Economies," *Geography Compass* 17, no. 8 (2023): e12719, https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12719

[6] Rob Kitchin et al., "Data Mobilities: Rethinking the Movement and Circulation of Digital Data," *Mobilities* (2025): 1–19, https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2025.2481309; Mei-Po Kwan and Tim Schwanen, "Geographies of Mobility," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 106, no. 2 (2016): 243–56, https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2015.1123067

[7] Michael Cassidy et al., "The Ethics of Volcano Geoengineering," *Earth's Future* 11, no. 10 (2023), 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1029/2023EF003714; Andy Parker et al., "Stopping Solar Geoengineering through Technical Means: A Preliminary Assessment of Counter-Geoengineering," *Earth's Future* 6, no. 8 (2018): 1058–65, https://doi.org/10.1029/2018EF000864

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algorithmic,[8] and affective dimensions of spatial governance. In doing so, they challenge the very coordinates that continue to underpin much of international legal reasoning.

What emerges from this disciplinary disjunction is a provocative question: What might it mean for International Law to revisit its own forgotten geography? To move beyond tacit reliance on inherited spatial assumptions and instead engage critically with contemporary geographic thought? This introductory chapter begins that inquiry by unpacking the historical intimacy between cartographic and legal projects, tracing how the conceptual architecture of International Law has been shaped – often invisibly – by geographic imaginaries. It also invites international lawyers to consider how those imaginaries might be rethought in light of the critical spatial theories that have emerged over recent decades.

Far from a peripheral concern, geography remains central to how International Law imagines its jurisdictional reach, organizes authority globally, and encodes legal responsibility. To ignore shifts in geographic thinking is thus to risk intellectual detachment. To engage them, however, is to open new conceptual terrain – one that promises to recast foundational legal categories and expand the horizons of international legal thought itself.

Yet one need not rely solely on the claims of contemporary geographers to perceive this shift. International lawyers, after all, were not absent when disciplinary Geography itself voiced a decisive departure from the ontological foundations of Eurocentric cartography. A particularly illuminating episode in this regard is the rise and fall of the International Map of the World (IMW) – a century-long cartographic endeavor that, although once administered by the League of Nations and later the United Nations, remains virtually unknown within legal

[8] Mei-Po Kwan, "Algorithmic Geographies: Big Data, Algorithmic Uncertainty, and the Production of Geographic Knowledge," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 106, no. 2 (2016): 274–82, https://doi.org/10.1080/00045608.2015.1117937; Thomas Skou Grindsted, "Algorithmic Finance: Algorithmic Trading across Speculative Time-Spaces," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 112, no. 5 (2022): 1390–402, https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2021.1963658; Louise Amoore, "Cloud Geographies: Computing, Data, and Sovereignty," *Progress in Human Geography* 42, no. 1 (2018): 4–24, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516662147; and Louise Amoore, "Algorithmic War: Everyday Geographies of the War on Terror," *Antipode* 41, no. 1 (2009): 49–69.

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scholarship. Its cancellation in 1986 is especially revealing, not because it failed on technical grounds but because it collapsed under conceptual pressure – specifically, doubts voiced from within the geographic and cartographic community about whether a singular "World Map" could ever faithfully represent a geographic state of nature.

First proposed by geographer Albrecht Penck in 1891 and formally launched in 1913,[9] the IMW was among the most ambitious cartographic undertakings of the twentieth century (see Figure 1.1). Envisioned as a universal, standardized, and objective representation of the Earth's physical geography, the project aimed to consolidate global geographic knowledge into a coherent visual framework.[10] It would do so through a series of national contributions to a standardized "base map" at a scale of 1:1,000,000 – approximately sixteen miles to the inch – intended to serve as an authoritative reference for both scientific and geopolitical use.[11] Rooted in the positivist aspirations of its age, the IMW reflected the belief that cartography could produce a single, universal image of terrestrial reality, free from interpretive contingency.[12]

And yet, after decades of meticulous labor, numerous international symposia, and over 800 map sheets submitted by contributing states,[13] the United Nations officially dissolved the project just shy of its completion – missing only Greenland, Antarctica, and parts of southern Africa.[14] On the face of it, the decision may

[9] See Albrecht Penck, "The Construction of a Map of the World on a Scale of 1:1,000,000," *The Geographical Journal* 1, no. 3 (1893): 253–61.

[10] Alastair W. Pearson and Michael Heffernan, "Globalizing Cartography? The International Map of the World, the International Geographical Union, and the United Nations," *Imago Mundi* 67, no. 1 (2015): 58–80, at 59.

[11] A. R. Hinks, "The International One-in-a-Million Map of the World," *Royal Engineers Journal* 17 (1913): 77–86, at 78.

[12] Hinks, "The International One-in-a-Million Map of the World," 77–78; William Rankin, "Zombie Projects, Negative Networks, and Multigenerational Science: The Temporality of the International Map of the World," *Social Studies of Science* 47, no. 3 (2017): 353–75, at 356–57.

[13] United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Report of the Meeting of the United Nations Ad Hoc Group of Experts on the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale (IMW), 9–11 December 1986: Papers Submitted by the United Nations Secretariat at the Fourth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas, 23–27 January 1989, Item 5(f) of the Provisional Agenda* (New York: United Nations, 1989).

[14] United Nations, *Status of Publication of IMW Sheets as at 31 December 1986*, U.N. Doc. ST/ESA/SER.D/17, Supp. 3 (New York: United Nations, 1987).

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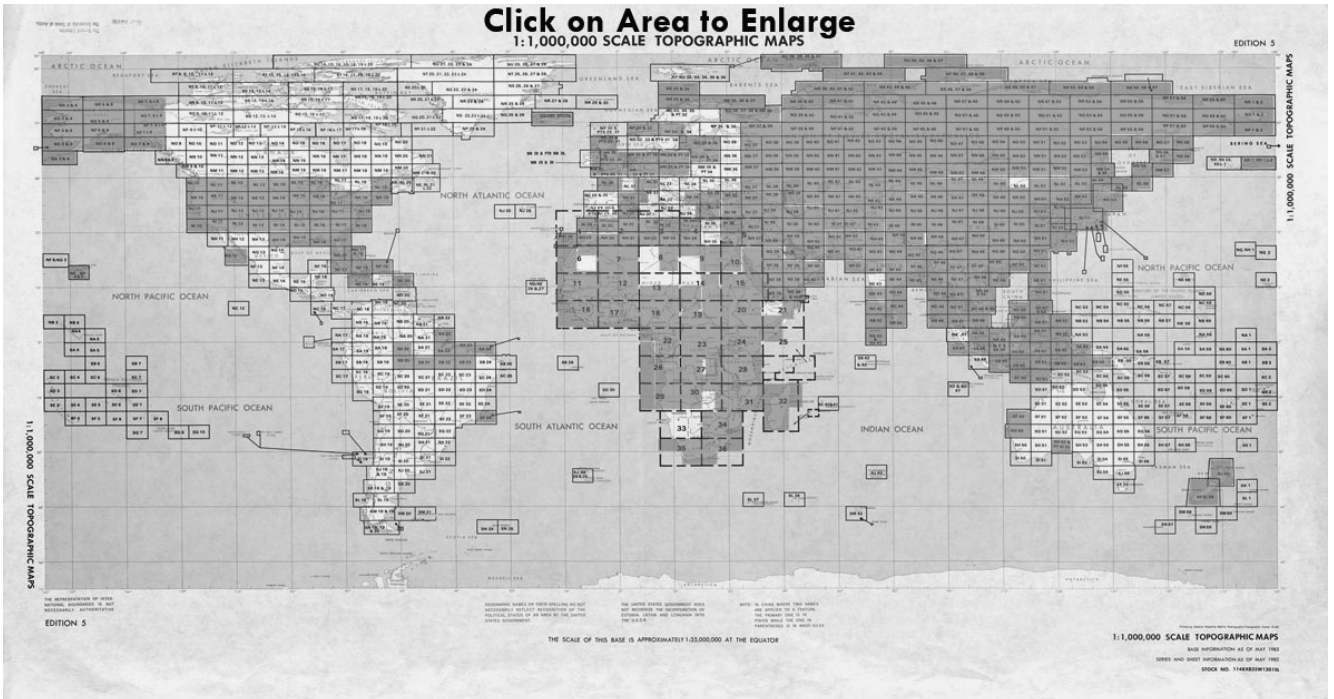


Figure 1.1 IMW, 1:1,000,000 sheet index (global grid). The IMW scheme divides the globe into 2,160 sheets. Public domain image courtesy of the Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas Libraries, accessed November 24, 2025, https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/imw/index_world.html

appear perplexing: Why abandon a project so close to fruition? But as William Rankin has shown, the IMW's demise was less the result of institutional fatigue and more a product of ontological disillusionment.[15] By the late twentieth century, many critical cartographers had begun to reject the foundational premise of the IMW itself – namely, the notion that the complex, plural, and contingent spatialities of the Earth could be reduced to a single, homogeneous, and ostensibly neutral cartographic image.[16] They came to see the IMW not as an innocent scientific instrument but as an enactment of spatial power: a strategy that sought to discipline and universalize space under the guise of objectivity.

What is striking, then, is that the IMW's collapse was not forced upon Geography by external political forces; rather, it emerged from within its own disciplinary ranks. The abandonment of the "master map" marked a moment of internal rupture – a recognition that geographic knowledge could no longer pretend to speak from nowhere or to produce an apolitical, all-encompassing view from above. It signaled the fatigue of a particular spatial imaginary – one that had also informed the legal architecture of international order. However, this moment of cartographic reckoning has passed almost unnoticed within international legal discourse. The IMW project – and its quiet demise – offers a profound, if largely forgotten, episode through which to reexamine the spatial assumptions still animating much of international legal thought.

The demise of the IMW is particularly instructive for international lawyers, not merely as a historical curiosity but as a revealing episode in the making of spatial ontology. Here was a United Nations-administered global project – rooted in the same institutional terrain where many international legal doctrines take shape – that ultimately collapsed because geographers themselves had reassessed its foundational ontology of visualization. The project's abandonment stemmed not from diplomatic failure or technical incapacity but from an internal disciplinary reckoning: a growing recognition among geographers and cartographers that the aspiration to produce a universal,

[15] Rankin, "Zombie Projects, Negative Networks, and Multigenerational Science," 357.

[16] Jerry Brotton, *A History of the World in Twelve Maps* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 443–45.

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objective map of the world was neither ontologically neutral nor politically innocent.[17]

For disciplinary International Law, this episode raises profound, if largely unacknowledged, questions. The IMW's collapse highlights how a discipline equally invested in representing and ordering planetary space came to critically question its own practices.[18] One might expect a comparable reflexivity within International Law,[19] particularly given the extent to which legal doctrines of territory, jurisdiction, and statehood have drawn from earlier geographic and cartographic logics.[20] Yet, despite the IMW unfolding within the very institutional architecture of the United Nations, its ontological significance has gone almost entirely unremarked in legal discourse.[21]

The disciplinary boundaries have proven remarkably resilient. International legal thought remains tethered to what might be called a "Westphalian base map" – a visual and conceptual schema in which global authority is imagined as a mosaic of discrete, bordered sovereignties plotted across a stable terrestrial grid.[22] This image continues to structure how legal claims are visualized, how jurisdictional reach is conceptualized, and how international space is ordered. But unlike disciplinary Geography, which has largely moved beyond this static imaginary, International Law has yet to confront the ontological implications of its own spatial assumptions.[23]

This enduring reliance on a cartographic imaginary questioned by its original disciplinary source invites serious reflection. It suggests that International Law's conceptual and visual architecture may be

[17] William Rankin, *After the Map: Cartography, Navigation, and the Transformation of Territory in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 65–69.
[18] Rankin, *After the Map*, 65–69.
[19] See Cedric Ryngaert, "Representations of the (Extra)Territorial: Theoretical and Visual Perspectives," *Utrecht Law Review* 13, no. 2 (2017): 1–6.
[20] Stuart Elden, *The Birth of Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 322–27.
[21] United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General: Termination of the International Map of the World Project*, E/CONF.82/9 (1986), ¶ 11; Rankin, *After the Map*, 69.
[22] See Nikolas M. Rajkovic, "The Visual Conquest of International Law: Brute Boundaries, the Map, and the Legacy of Cartogenesis," *Leiden Journal of International Law* 31, no. 2 (2018): 267–88.
[23] Martti Koskenniemi, "The Politics of International Law: 20 Years Later," *European Journal of International Law* 20, no. 1 (2009): 24–26.

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increasingly out of step with the spatial realities it purports to govern. If legal doctrine continues to rely on inherited cartographic abstractions, it risks reproducing forms of reasoning that obscure rather than illuminate the shifting conditions of global legal ordering.[24] The death of the IMW, in this sense, is not a marginal cartographic event – it is a diagnostic moment, revealing the need for international legal scholarship to reengage critically with the spatial foundations of its own normative world-making.

1.1 International Law and Geographic Forgetting

What, then, explains International Law's apparent indifference to the spatial critiques that have reshaped disciplinary Geography over the past half century? Enigmatic problems, by their nature, resist simple explanation. They emerge not from a single cause but from the convergence of multiple, interwoven dynamics – disciplinary habits, conceptual inheritances, institutional inertia. The chapters that follow will examine several of these dynamics in detail. But part of what makes such enigmas especially persistent is their apparent simplicity. Foundational presumptions, long internalized and rarely questioned, can create the illusion of clarity even as they obscure deeper complexities. What appears canonical or intuitive may in fact be the residue of older ontologies – ones that go unchallenged until disciplinary reflexivity demands their excavation.

That reflexivity, when it does occur, is rarely smooth.[25] As with other disciplinary reckonings, it often arises only through a kind of intellectual disruption – an intradisciplinary food fight, as it were. A useful parallel can be drawn here with the pathbreaking critique offered by Martti Koskenniemi several decades ago, when he called attention to the way International Law had largely ignored its entanglement with liberal political and social theory. As he wrote:

[24] See John Pickles, "What Do Maps Represent?" in *A History of Spaces: Cartographic Reason, Mapping and the Geo-Coded World* (London: Routledge, 2004), 27–59.

[25] For example, in relation to the history "turn" in International Law, see: Anne Orford, "History and the Turn to the International," in *International Law and the Politics of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 70–104.

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[T]he whole of international legal "talk" is an extended effort to solve problems created by a particular way of understanding the relationship between descriptions and prescription, facts and norms in international life. My argument is that the persisting disputes within the realms of theory and doctrine result from the fact that these disputes bear a close relationship to controversial topics encountered beyond specifically "legal" discourses. The ideas of statehood, authority, legitimacy, obligation, consent, and so on which stand at the heart of international law are also hotly debated issues of social and political theory. In each of these realms the problems turn on the justifiability of assumptions about what the character of the present social world is and how it should be changed. It would be futile to assume that the assumptions which characterize modern social and political discourse are different, or separable from those which control legal discourse on these same matters.[26]

Koskenniemi's intervention marked a turning point in international legal scholarship – compelling many to acknowledge that the doctrinal core of the discipline was structured, in part, by unstated political and philosophical commitments. The argument advanced here builds on that reflexive move, extending it into another domain of conceptual silence: the spatial and geographic. Why is it that a discipline whose very name – International Law – signals a constitutive relationship to space, geography, and the spherical Earth remains so curiously disengaged from contemporary geographic thought? Why has there been so little sustained reflection on the spatial assumptions embedded within international legal thought?

The absence is not merely incidental. It reveals a deeper ontological and normative void, one that is arguably as significant as the neglect of political and social theory that Koskenniemi identified. And as with that earlier silence, interrogating it opens the door to interdisciplinary engagement. One of the virtues of cross-disciplinary inquiry is that fundamental questions in one field often have analogues in another. They may not be direct counterparts, but they often circle shared concerns – concerns that, when translated with care, can illuminate disciplinary blind spots.

The earlier story of the IMW was offered to illustrate precisely this point: that neighboring disciplines – particularly Geography and

[26] Martti Koskenniemi, *From Apology to Utopia: The Structure of International Legal Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4–5.

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International Relations – may contain insights of direct relevance to international legal thought. Consider, for instance, J. B. Harley's influential 1989 critique of statist cartography. Writing from within the discipline of Geography, Harley warned of the degree to which the iconic World Map had come to imprison that field's own ways of seeing – limiting the capacity to imagine alternative spatial orderings.[27] His intervention helped catalyze the emergence of Critical Geography and Critical Cartography, both of which have since become central to spatial theory.[28] These movements did not merely offer new methods; they challenged the very ontological and political foundations of how space had been visualized and governed.

The provocation for international lawyers is clear. If disciplinary Geography has confronted the limits of its visual regimes and reoriented its conceptual architecture accordingly, what prevents disciplinary International Law from undertaking a comparable reckoning? If inherited cartographic imaginaries have been revealed as instruments of spatial power in one discipline, might they not operate similarly in another – particularly one so invested in the governance of global space?

Yet to detour into the full literature of Critical Geography at this point would be premature. A more pointed entry can be made by stating directly what is at stake: Critical Geography challenges the canonical spatial imaginary that continues to underpin much of international legal thought. Put bluntly, International Law's visual and doctrinal privileging of the approximately 280,000 kilometers of state borders has long obscured the material and juridical significance of other,[29] equally consequential, global infrastructures – such as the 64 million kilometers of highways,[30] 2 million kilometers of oil and gas

[27] J. B. Harley, "Deconstructing the Map," *Cartographica* 26, no. 2 (1989): 1–20, esp. 2–5.

[28] See Reuben Rose-Redwood, "Introduction: The Limits to Deconstructing the Map," in "Deconstructing the Map: 25 Years On," special issue, *Cartographica* 50, no. 1 (2015): 1–8; Martin Dodge and Chris Perkins, "Reflecting on J. B. Harley's Influence and What He Missed in 'Deconstructing the Map'," *Cartographica* 50, no. 1 (2015): 37–50.

[29] Central Intelligence Agency, "Land Boundaries," *The World Factbook*, accessed August 10, 2025, www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/about/archives/2022/field/land-boundaries

[30] Central Intelligence Agency, "Roadways: World (2023)," *The World Factbook*, accessed August 10, 2025, www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/about/archives/2023/field/roadways/

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pipelines,[31] 1.1 million kilometers of railways,[32] and over 1.4 million kilometers of undersea internet cables.[33] These are not merely technical systems; they are lines of trans-territorial authority, legal rule, and spatial (re)ordering.

In this light, the discipline's continued emphasis on state-centric cartographies appears curiously limited and even anachronistic. International legal scholars, like many social scientists, have inherited an ahistorical and overly static image of spatial order – one that struggles to grasp how contemporary global authority is continually materialized through the interplay of algorithmic governance, biometric identification tools, ISO standards, EU directives, World Bank performance metrics, satellite data, port security procedures, customs regulations,[34] and even the data analytics of private corporations such as Google, Meta, OpenAI, and Palantir.[35] These developments signal a shift in the spatial logic of power – from territorial sovereignty to infrastructural and informational control – yet legal doctrine continues to depict global space through the inherited optic of statist cartography.

[31] GlobalData, "Oil and Gas Pipelines Length and Capital Expenditure (CapEx): Market Analysis," product page, April 17, 2023, accessed August 10, 2025, www.globaldata.com/store/report/oil-and-gas-pipelines-length-and-capital-expenditure-market-analysis/

[32] World Bank, "Rail Lines (Total Route-km)," *World Development Indicators* (indicator IS.RRS.TOTL.KM; source: UIC Railisa), accessed August 10, 2025, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IS.RRS.TOTL.KM; see also United Nations, *LLDCs Global Report* (2017), table "Rail lines, total route (km)" (listing "World: 1,051,839"), accessed August 10, 2025, https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/LLDCs-Globl-Report_11_25_2017_SPREAD_LowVersion.pdf

[33] TeleGeography, "Frequently Asked Questions about Undersea Submarine Cables," *TeleGeography Blog*, accessed August 10, 2025, https://blog.telegeography.com/frequently-asked-questions-about-undersea-submarine-cables; see also Parag Khanna, *Connectography: Mapping the Global Network Revolution* (New York: Random House, 2016), 11; Douglas Guilfoyle, "Reading *The City and the City* as an International Lawyer: Reflections on Territoriality, Jurisdiction and Transnationality," *London Review of International Law* 4, no. 1 (2016): 195–207; and Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

[34] Mark B. Salter, "Introduction: Making Assemblages International," in *Making Things International 2: Catalysts and Reactions*, ed. Mark B. Salter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), xvi.

[35] See Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (London: Verso, 2014), 16–19; Benjamin H. Bratton, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016).

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This raises urgent questions for the discipline: How are boundaries of authority to be visualized when geopolitical and geoeconomic practices increasingly transcend the lines drawn on traditional maps? Has international authority evolved beyond the spatial coordinates that modern cartography once offered as the base map of legal reality? Has the visual grammar inherited from modern cartography outlived its capacity to render global legal space intelligible? These are not abstract inquiries. They are the real, material conditions under which international legal authority is now constituted and contested. This book addresses them through an interdisciplinary lens, illustrating the scope of what has been overlooked and inviting international lawyers to pursue similar inquiries at the intersection of International Law and contemporary geographic thought.

To do so is to confront an uncomfortable truth: While International Law has long relied on cartographic assumptions and spatial forms of reasoning, it has rarely acknowledged them as such. Trained to prioritize doctrinal coherence and internal consistency, International Law has long eschewed questions about its own spatial premises.[36] Yet for how much longer can traditional textbooks, methodologies, and terminologies sustain this silence? As global authority diffuses across public and private actors, the inherited maps and taxonomies of the discipline appear increasingly strained. When companies such as X or Meta exercise jurisdiction-like powers across national boundaries – through content moderation, data governance, or algorithmic sorting – the cartography of authority on which International Law has historically relied demands critical reexamination.

For some time, however, the discipline has sought to address these pressures obliquely. The rise of Transnational Law and Global Administrative Law (GAL) has often been treated as a way of filling ontological cracks in the doctrinal edifice without disturbing its cartographic foundations. By layering new accounts of functional governance, administrative coordination, and norm diffusion on top of the classical doctrines, these approaches have enriched the field empirically but left intact the underlying ontology of a world imagined as a mosaic of contiguous, sovereign polygons. In effect, they have offered a functionalist supplement rather than a conceptual rupture: introducing new layers of practice without interrogating the cartographic

[36] Martti Koskenniemi, "What Is International Law For?" in *International Law*, ed. Malcolm D. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 41–43.

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imaginaries that continue to structure the doctrinal core. As such, their contributions – valuable though they are – have rarely been mobilized to challenge International Law's reliance on inherited spatial assumptions or to reflect on its curious lack of engagement with spatial theorizing.

What is needed is a renewed and explicit engagement with geographic and spatial theory – an inquiry into the premises and visual infrastructures that have long conditioned how International Law imagines authority, space, and boundary.[37] Spatial categories such as "international," "transnational," "global," and "regional" are not neutral descriptors. They are socially constructed "frames,"[38] encoded and materially reinforced by rules, norms, metrics, and institutionalized practices that harden what begins as conceptual into seemingly naturalized fact.[39] They are further embodied through legitimating visual devices – above all, the iconic World Map of states, which has functioned simultaneously as a symbol and an infrastructure of legal cognition. That this optic has become so deeply naturalized underscores its productive and structuring power (see Chapter 3): Statist cartography has shaped not merely how we see "the world" but also how International Law has learned to govern it.[40]

This both confirms and critiques the salience of social constructivism for international legal theorizing. Constructivist approaches rightly reveal the contingency of categories such as sovereignty, territory, and jurisdiction, but they often stop short of asking how such

[37] Nikolas M. Rajkovic, "On Fragments and Geometry: The International Legal Order as Metaphor and How It Matters," *Erasmus Law Review* 6, no. 1 (2013): 6–16; Philip Liste, "Colliding Geographies: Space at Work in Global Governance," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 19, no. 2 (2016): 199–221, at 200–201; and David Koller, "and New York and the Hague and Tokyo and Geneva and Nuremberg and … The Geographies of International Law," *European Journal of International Law* 23, no. 1 (2012): 97–119.

[38] On the significance of "framing" for "fixing the limits of possible knowledge for modern minds and the conditions of rule in the modern world," see: Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, *The Mightie Frame: Epochal Change and the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1–11, at 9.

[39] Branch, "Mapping the Territorial State," 68–71; J. B. Harley, "Historical Geography and the Cartographic Illusion," *Journal of Historical Geography* 15, no. 1 (1989): 80–91, at 85; Boaventura de Sousa Santos, "Law: A Map of Misreading. Toward a Postmodern Conception of Law," *Journal of Law and Society* 14, no. 3 (1987): 279–302, at 282.

[40] Latour, "*Onus Orbis Terrarum*," 309.

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categories are materially sedimented. Once institutionalized, these imaginaries are cognitively sustained and reinforced through, for example, treaties, procedural norms, bureaucratic routines, and statistical practices that give them tangible durability. In other words, the very "constructedness" of International Law's spatial categories is precisely what makes them so hard to dislodge: They are not merely ideas but infrastructures of practice.

Nevertheless, even deeply embedded imaginaries – however foundational – must eventually respond to changing material and normative practices. The cartographic logic that has long structured international legal reasoning is increasingly out of step with the cellular, incontiguous, and pointillistic geographies of authority and power that now shape global governance (see Chapter 5). While state borders and territorial controls persist, they are increasingly supplemented – and in many cases eclipsed – by material infrastructures such as data centers, logistics corridors, biometric databases, and satellite constellations, as well as by normative practices of algorithmic regulation, corporate rule-setting, and standards-based coordination across borders. Legal anthropologists describe these as forms of "spatial discipline" and "static violence,"[41] highlighting how new modalities of exclusion and control are encoded both in territorial lines and in infrastructures of digital surveillance,[42] algorithmic governance,[43] and remote-sensing technologies.[44]

[41] Andrea M. Brighenti, "Lines, Barred Lines: Movement, Territory and the Law," *International Journal of Law in Context* 6, no. 3 (2010): 217–27, at 221; see also Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[42] Stephen L. Roberts and Stefan Elbe, "Catching the Flu: Syndromic Surveillance, Algorithmic Governmentality and Global Health Security," *Security Dialogue* 48, no. 1 (2017): 46–62; Samuel N. Chambers and Gabriella Soto, "The Geography of Intent: The Bodily Implications of Border Surveillance Technologies," *Political Geography* 120 (2025): 103332, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2025.103332

[43] Carola Westermeier, "From Flows towards Updates: Security Regimes and Changing Technologies for Financial Surveillance," *Review of International Studies* 49, no. 4 (2023): 615–36; Rocco Bellanova and Marieke de Goede, "The Algorithmic Regulation of Security: An Infrastructural Perspective," *Regulation & Governance* 16, no. 1 (2022): 102–18, https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12338; and Fleur Johns, "Global Governance through the Pairing of List and Algorithm," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 1 (2016): 126–49.

[44] Katharine Hall Kindervater, "The Emergence of Lethal Surveillance: Watching and Killing in the History of Drone Technology," *Security Dialogue* 47, no. 3 (2016): 223–38, at 224.

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Faced with these shifts, core categories of International Law – sovereignty, jurisdiction, territorial integrity – are compelled to stretch, mutate, or double back on themselves, straining to accommodate phenomena that no longer conform to the planar geometries of statist cartography. Consider jurisdiction: Traditionally tethered to territory, it is now reconfigured through data localization laws that tie authority to server locations, or through corporate content moderation systems that regulate expression across millions of users irrespective of state borders. Sovereignty, too, is recast when Arctic seabed claims hinge on geological continuities beneath melting ice, or when satellite-based monitoring allows states to assert control over airspace and maritime zones at scales far beyond their territorial borders. In such cases, the core categories of International Law function less as stable foundations than as unstable placeholders – invoked to preserve doctrinal coherence even as the practices they are meant to capture increasingly bypass, perforate, or recast boundaries.

These developments do not merely augment the contiguous border; they transform the very meaning of boundary-making on the legal globe.[45] Yet international legal scholarship has only lightly engaged with what such transformations imply for its inherited frameworks. Doctrinal assumptions remain tethered to a visual grammar defined by statist cartography, even as operative sites of legal and political authority increasingly exceed or perforate territorial boundaries.[46] This is not simply a matter of updating doctrine to accommodate new actors or regulatory instruments. The deeper issue is conceptual:

[45] Vijay Varadharajan, and Neeraj Suri, "Security Challenges When Space Merges with Cyberspace," *Space Policy* 67 (2024): 101600, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spacepol.2023.101600; Benjamin Johnson, "Sensing the Arctic: Situational Awareness and the Future of Northern Security," *International Journal* 76, no. 3 (2021): 404–26; Huub Dijstelbloem et al., "Surveillance at Sea: The Transactional Politics of Border Control in the Aegean," *Security Dialogue* 48, no. 3 (2017): 224–40; Lars Gjesvik, and Johann Ole Willers, "Beyond Control? The Political Economy of Private Interception, Intrusion, and Surveillance Markets," *Review of International Political Economy* 31, no. 6 (2024): 1840–64; Didier Bigo, "Security, Borders, and the State," in *Borders and Border Politics in a Globalizing World*, ed. Paul Ganster and David E. Lorey (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 109–21; and Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 11–13.

[46] See Quinn Slobodian, *Cracked-Up Capitalism: Market Radicals and the Dream of a World without Democracy* (London: Penguin Random House, 2023).

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a persistent set of spatial assumptions continues to structure how international legal thought visualizes "the World."[47]

This spatial imaginary – reproduced through maps, textbooks, and jurisdictional schemas – has not kept pace with the transscalar, non-contiguous, and often intangible architectures through which authority is now exercised. Reliance on the state-centric map constrains the legal imagination, narrowing the capacity to apprehend governance mechanisms that operate through data infrastructures, logistics networks, borderless enforcement regimes, and corporate platforms. The result is a growing disjuncture between the inherited image of international legal space and the dispersed, infrastructural, and often opaque practices that now organize global authority.

What is at stake is not simply a call for interdisciplinarity, but a more fundamental rethinking of how disciplinary International Law imagines and represents space. The tools for such reflection already exist – for example in the critiques advanced by Critical Geographers, in the reconceptualizations of space emerging from Science and Technology Studies, and even within the legal field's own peripheral discourses.[48] But drawing those tools into the disciplinary mainstream requires recognizing that International Law's conceptual and visual infrastructures are not neutral.[49] They are historically contingent artefacts – forms of legal seeing – that must be reevaluated if the discipline is to remain responsive to the spatial dynamics of the unfolding present. To recognize this is to accept that if the discipline is to remain responsive to the spatial dynamics of the present, it must subject its own cartographic foundations to sustained critique and reimagination.

[47] Karin Mickelson, "The Maps of International Law: Perceptions of Nature in the Classification of Territory," *Leiden Journal of International Law* 27, no. 3 (2014): 621–39, at 639; see also Branch, "Mapping the Territorial State."

[48] See Daniel Neep, "State-Space beyond Territory: Wormholes, Gravitational Fields, and Entanglement," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 30, no. 3 (2017): 466–95, at 467; Rankin, *After the Map*, 357; Floor M. Fleurke et al., "Constitutionalizing in the Anthropocene," *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment* 15, no. 1 (2024): 4–22; Itamar Mann, "Law and Politics from the Sea," *International Theory* 16, no. 1 (2024): 78–101.

[49] See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964; repr., Berkeley, CA: Gingko Press, 2013), 8–9.

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1.2 The Reign of Statist Cartography

The visual legacy of statist cartography has not only shaped how international lawyers imagine space; it has also insulated the discipline from confronting the ontological significance of novel material and normative developments. In recent decades, the rise of Transnational Law, GAL, and Informal International Law-Making (IN-LAW) has illuminated transborder practices that diverge sharply from the orthodox World Map. These literatures have highlighted new modalities of authority – decentered, informal, privately enacted, or digitally encoded – yet their implications for International Law's underlying spatial assumptions remain largely unexplored. Despite their empirical richness, they have not dislodged the conceptual and visual hegemony of the World Map of states.

Indeed, one reason for this persistence is that these fields often operate as functional supplements rather than conceptual ruptures. By documenting emergent practices of regulation and coordination, they add empirical density to the picture of global governance, but they do so without disturbing the cartographic ontology that underwrites International Law's doctrinal core. The World Map remains the silent backdrop against which transnational, administrative, and informal practices are narrated, leaving untouched the deeper question of how spatial imaginaries organize the discipline's categories and claims to authority.

In this way, statist cartography is not simply left intact – it is subtly reinforced. By treating the state map as a naturalized canvas upon which new legal practices unfold, these literatures reproduce its authority even as they describe its limits. The effect is paradoxical: The more International Law expands its descriptive range to include, for example, transnational and informal practices, the more it recenters the statist map as the unquestioned framework of intelligibility. What emerges is less a displacement of statist cartography than its quiet revalidation, ensuring its continued reign as the conceptual and visual infrastructure of international legal thought.

Against this backdrop arises a critical challenge: How might International Law renew its dormant dialogue with spatial theory to better theorize legal authority as it is actually constituted, practiced, and spatialized in the present? This is a deliberately large question – one that signals the need for sustained interdisciplinary engagement.

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It rests on a simple proposition: international legal authority cannot be fully understood in abstraction from the spatial theories and visual infrastructures that define what counts as "international" in the first place. The visual construction of legal space is not a peripheral concern; it is central to how authority is recognized, enacted, and contested.

The chapters that follow therefore issue a broader scholarly invitation: to reconsider the conceptual and empirical terrain of the discipline by recovering the analytical significance of spatial thought, theory, and visualization. Such a reorientation opens new pathways for understanding the legal, geopolitical, and socio-technical practices that now shape global boundary-making. It also asks a pressing follow-up to a long-standing concession: While it is now widely acknowledged that state, substate, and non-state actors participate in global boundary practices, the more difficult – and necessary – task is to leverage that recognition to interrogate the enduring hold of statist cartography over the discipline's spatial imagination.

At the heart of this problem lies the naturalization of core disciplinary concepts such as territoriality and jurisdiction. These categories are often treated as self-evident features of legal space – as if they were stable, objective, or geologically given.[50] This reflects what historical sociologists have described as the naturalization or *reification illusion*: the transformation of contingent legal and political arrangements into seemingly immutable features of global order (see Chapter 4).[51] In the case of International Law, this has allowed the cartographic "base map" of states to harden into a default ontological frame[52] – one that resists scrutiny precisely because of its apparent familiarity and simplicity.[53]

[50] See Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Jean Gottmann, "The Evolution of the Concept of Territory," *Social Science Information* 14, no. 3 (1975): 29–47.

[51] John M. Hobson, "What's at Stake in 'Bringing Historical Sociology Back into International Relations'? Transcending 'Chronofetishism' and 'Tempocentrism' in International Relations," in *Historical Sociology of International Relations*, ed. Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 6.

[52] Onuf, *The Mightie Frame*, 9–11.

[53] See Richard T. Ford, "Law's Territory (A History of Jurisdiction)," *Michigan Law Review* 97, no. 4 (1999): 843–930, at 843–45.

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Dislodging this framework requires more than critique at the level of doctrine or discourse.[54] While linguistic and doctrinal analysis can expose the rhetorical dominance of territorial language, the deeper challenge is to destabilize the ontological and visual infrastructure that continues to shape international legal reasoning. On this front, disciplinary Geography and International Relations (IR) have proven more reflexive. Both fields have developed extensive bodies of empirical and theoretical work that interrogate the spatial grammar of global rule.[55] International Law, by contrast, has often engaged these insights only tangentially – treating spatial transformations as factual developments rather than as conceptual or epistemological challenges to its foundational cartographies.

This distinction is critical. It marks the difference between accommodating new facts within an old map versus reimagining the map itself. As the next section will illustrate, even when empirically rich alternatives to the statist imaginary are developed – whether within International Law or International Relations (IR) – the World Map of states has shown remarkable resilience. Its visual and conceptual authority persists, often undisturbed by the very evidence that ought to challenge it.

1.2.1 Territoriality and Jurisdiction as a State of (Geographic) Nature

A major development in recent international legal scholarship has been the emergence of what is broadly characterized as postnational legal thought. Key strands of this work – Transnational Law,[56]

[54] Katja Freistein and Philip Liste, "Introduction: Fragmented Territoriality," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 19, no. 2 (2016): 193–98, at 194–95; see also Philip Liste, "Geographical Knowledge at Work: Human Rights Litigation and Transnational Territoriality," *European Journal of International Relations* 22, no. 1 (2016): 217–39.

[55] Some notable exemplars are: John Agnew, "Sovereignty Regimes: Territoriality and State Authority in Contemporary World Politics," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95, no. 2 (2005): 437–61; Elden, *The Birth of Territory*; Gearóid Ó Tuathail (Gerard Toal), *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

[56] See Peer Zumbansen, "Transnational Legal Pluralism," *Transnational Legal Theory* 1, no. 2 (2010): 141–89; Peer Zumbansen, "Transnational Law: Theories and Applications," in *The Oxford Handbook of Transnational Law*, ed. Peer Zumbansen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 3–30.

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GAL,[57] and IN-LAW[58] – have generated compelling empirical accounts of authority that transcend state borders and conventional jurisdictional frameworks. These bodies of research have significantly expanded the field's descriptive and analytical scope, particularly by documenting how authority and power are exercised across institutions, scales, and actors that do not conform to the familiar architecture of inter-state relations.

Yet this empirical richness has not unsettled the conceptual terrain upon which disciplinary International Law continues to rest. Instead of revising the field's spatial foundations, postnational innovations are often treated as exceptions to, or functional extensions of, an underlying normative order still presumed to be defined by state-centric legality. Trans-territorial practices may be acknowledged, but they are positioned at the doctrinal periphery, while the state-based imaginary remains entrenched at the conceptual core.

This tendency is clearly visible in the early framing of GAL. In their widely cited formulation, Krisch and Kingsbury described the emergence of GAL in terms that acknowledged profound change, while simultaneously maintaining a metaphorical distinction between doctrinal stability and empirical flux:

> Globalization and the rise of global governance are transforming the structure of international law, though much of this transformation takes place beneath the surface of the international legal order and often goes unnoticed. Global administrative law … starts from the observation that much of global governance can be understood as regulation and administration, and that we are witnessing the emergence of a "global administrative space": a space in which the strict dichotomy between domestic and international has largely broken down, in which administrative functions are performed in often complex interplays between officials and institutions on different levels, and in which regulation may be highly effective despite its predominantly

[57] Nico Krisch, and Benedict Kingsbury, "Introduction: Global Governance and Global Administrative Law in the International Legal Order," *European Journal of International Law* 17, no. 1 (2006): 1–13; See also Nico Krisch, *Beyond Constitutionalism: The Pluralist Structure of Postnational Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[58] Joost Pauwelyn et al., eds., *Informal International Lawmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 13–15; Joost Pauwelyn et al., "When Structures become Shackles: Stagnation and Dynamics in International Lawmaking," *European Journal of International Law* 25, no. 3 (2014): 733–63.

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non-binding forms. In practice, the increasing exercise of public power in these structures has given rise to serious concerns about legitimacy and accountability, prompting patterns of responses to those concerns in many areas of global governance.[59]

The significance of this passage lies not only in its descriptive acuity but also in what it inadvertently reveals about the spatial architecture of international legal thought. The metaphor of transformation "beneath the surface" presupposes a hierarchical geography of legal space: informal or trans-territorial practices are situated in a subordinate stratum beneath the canonical plane of state-based authority. Even as GAL seeks to capture the regulatory complexity of global governance, its imagery subtly reasserts the primacy of the state by relegating novel practices to a metaphorical subsurface. In doing so, it reinforces the very spatial assumptions that its empirical content seems poised to contest.

This tension raises a deeper question: What determines whether a legal practice is conceptualized as foundational or peripheral, visible or submerged, within the field's cognitive map? The answer is not found in empirical visibility or functional importance but in the theoretical categories that define what counts as legally intelligible. There is no natural "surface" of International Law, no geological divide separating the doctrinal from the marginal. These distinctions are historically contingent, reproduced through the spatial grammars the discipline has long employed to render authority legible.

Comparable problems are visible beyond International Law. In IR, John Agnew's critique of the "territorial trap" challenged the assumption that state territory constitutes a natural, fixed unit of political space. His intervention catalyzed a broader rethinking of how spatial categories organize global analysis. Yet even there, insufficient attention has been paid to the material and visual infrastructures – maps, diagrams, territorial schemas – that silently reproduce state-centric assumptions and confer upon them cognitive durability.

Agnew's key insight – that territoriality is not given but produced – has clear implications for legal thought. It demands that we interrogate not only the formal categories of jurisdiction and territory but

[59] Benedict Kingsbury et al., "The Emergence of Global Administrative Law," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 68, nos. 3–4 (Summer–Autumn 2005): 15–62, at 15.

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also the visual and material techniques through which they are constructed and stabilized. In International Law, territoriality and jurisdiction continue to draw their normative weight from entrenched cartographic conventions – conventions that depict the world as a mosaic of bounded, statist units. This appearance of naturalness is the effect of a visual ontology – a legacy of how international lawyers have been trained to see, map, and order legal space.

Chapter 2 takes up Agnew's critique in greater depth, drawing out its implications for international legal thought. In particular, it explores how Agnew's deconstruction of territorial assumptions has resonated within IR while remaining largely unexamined in our neighboring legal discipline. For now, it is sufficient to register both the critical force of his intervention and the notable silences it leaves intact – silences that reveal how spatial perception is as much a product of visual habits and institutional aesthetics as of conceptual insight.

Confronting this legacy does not require abandoning territorial categories altogether. What it does demand is a critical engagement with their historical contingency, their spatial mediations, and their visual scaffolding. The task is not to replace one binary with another – doctrinal versus nondoctrinal, formal versus informal – but to move beyond such oppositions toward more flexible and adaptive theoretical vocabularies. As in horticulture, transformation rarely advances through rupture; it proceeds through accretion and recomposition, with new growth altering inherited structures even as it emerges from them. By the same token, international legal thought must learn to treat its maps less as static containers than as grafted landscapes – layered, provisional, and open to reconfiguration. Only then can the discipline begin to rethink the visual and conceptual premises through which it maps, understands, and legitimates the legal globe.

1.2.2 The World Map and Its Visual Infrastructure

Agnew's "Territorial Trap" spurred a wave of critical scholarship across the social sciences, emphasizing that geographic space is not absolute but historically contingent.[60] This ontological shift paralleled earlier theoretical developments influenced by Derrida, Foucault,

[60] John Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-Visioning World Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), 76–80.

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and others, in which critique focused on the discursive architectures underpinning dominant social and political meanings. The effort was to deconstruct not only what was said, but also how meaning was spatially arranged and institutionally sedimented.[61]

Yet this fertile critique ultimately encountered a spatial impasse – akin to the limitations observed earlier in GAL's disciplinary reception within International Law. On the one hand, the "Territorial Trap" catalyzed rich discursive analyses that challenged the fixity of territorial categories. On the other, it left largely unexamined the bounding practices that visually and institutionally stabilized the very cartographies of statism it questioned. As Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden have noted, the turn to discourse often encouraged a pivot toward new semantic categories – such as place, scale, or networks – without a corresponding interrogation of the visual and material infrastructures that sustained the illusion of perfected and permanent territorial order.[62] Consequently, the problem of "clear spatial demarcation" – which Agnew had originally identified as central – remained undertheorized.[63] The critique faltered when it came to analyzing how state authority is authenticated visually, through repeated exposure to maps that naturalize the world as a discrete collection of sovereign units.

What this reveals is a disjunction: a rejection of territorial fixity at the level of theory coexisting with the uncritical retention of the very cartographic forms that instantiate it. Visual infrastructures – especially the repeated depiction of the globe as a World Map of states – play a central role in legitimating legal order. As Mark Salter has argued in the context of sovereignty, critical discourse must attend

[61] Peter Andreas, "Redrawing the Line: Borders and Security in the Twenty-first Century," *International Security* 28, no. 2 (2003): 78–111; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Deborah D. Avant et al., eds., *Who Governs the Globe?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Darin Barney, *The Network Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004); Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006); Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, *Remapping Global Politics: History's Revenge and Future Shock* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Andreas Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth," *International Organization* 55, no. 2 (2001): 251–87; Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics*.

[62] Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, "Henri Lefebvre on State, Space, Territory," *International Political Sociology* 3, no. 4 (2009): 353–77, at 356.

[63] Agnew, "Territorial Trap," 53–54.

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not only to meaning but also to the material media through which meaning is stabilized and circulated:

> When we look at the architecture of particular discourses, practices, institutions, or installations, there can be a tendency to focus on the deconstruction of meanings rather than on the physical circulation of documents or the medium of communication. The best kinds of these analyses acknowledge that these discourses are not abstract and immaterial, but rather come in very material packages. Ideas are expressed in language, which is printed, posted, broadcast, and read. Culture is written, performed, and received. Ideas are discussed, debated, written down, transmitted, translated into forms, evaluated. While we connect ideas and signifiers together to create *post hoc ante* a coherent or messy discourse about sovereignty from treaties, UN declarations, diplomatic talk, and day-to-day life, these ideas and words circulate in very material ways: as diplomatic cables, as interdepartmental memos, as briefing notes, as newspaper stories, as memes on the Internet, as buildings, as posters, as practices. If we look at the material expressions of discourse, rather than a disembodied discourse, then we reveal other kinds of power at work.[64]

Salter's insistence here is crucial. Legal practices, like all social practices, are never immaterial. They come to life through documents drafted and archived, speeches delivered and recorded, rituals performed in courtrooms and conference halls, and, not least, through the visual technologies that orient actors toward a particular conception of "the World." What Salter describes with respect to sovereignty applies even more forcefully to territorialization. Territorial rule is not merely represented but actively enacted. Boundaries acquire durability because they are repeatedly drawn and redrawn, written into treaties, marked on maps, taught in classrooms, invoked in judicial reasoning, circulated in government communiqués, enforced through police orders, materialized through customs forms, and made visible through fences, checkpoints, and boundary markers. Territorialization is thus inseparable from the material practices through which it is continually reproduced.

The challenge, then, is not only discursive but irreducibly material. International Law has long been shaped by a cartographic regime that spans centuries of map-making – an enduring visual infrastructure that compresses legal, political, and social life into the bounded frame

[64] Salter, "Introduction," xvi.

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of the state. As Anssi Paasi has argued, such maps constitute a process of "spatial socialization," rendering "the World" legible through a singular visual schema.[65] Yet this schema privileges a narrow set of forms – maps, atlases, globes, GIS projections – even though territorialization in practice depends on a much wider range of artefacts, performances, and infrastructures.

Historically, globes, atlases, and classroom wall maps trained the eye to see "the World" as a mosaic of bordered states. Today, authority and power are increasingly projected through pointillism and pixels: Satellite imagery, digital mapping platforms, and algorithmically generated borders render territory as constellations of data-points, layers, and coordinates (see Chapter 5). These technologies potentially open up new ways to trace how territory is enacted – for example, by visualizing flows, networks, or shifting boundaries that conventional cartography cannot capture. Yet within international legal practices, these expanded possibilities remain largely peripheral. The International Court of Justice annexes sketch maps to its judgments in boundary and maritime delimitation cases, where they do more than illustrate – they structure the Court's reasoning in drawing lines across seas and landmasses. International Law textbooks likewise reproduce political maps that present the state-based world as natural and given, shaping generations of students' spatial imagination. In these sites, a cartographic ontology keeps the material register narrow, privileging a handful of familiar visual infrastructures over the broader repertoire that emerging technologies and other social practices could make visible.

Broadening the spectrum of material practices that International Law acknowledges is therefore essential if the discipline is to grasp how territorialization actually works today. To decompress this visual legacy does not mean rejecting it wholesale. Rather, it requires a more supple conceptual metaphor and methodological posture – one capable of recognizing both continuity and transformation. As noted earlier, the metaphor of horticulture is instructive: New forms of thought do not displace what came before, but reshape it. In that spirit, this book calls for an accretive critique – one that challenges the narrowing cartographic ontology of International Law while remaining attentive to

[65] Anssi Paasi, "Bounded Spaces in a 'Borderless World': Border Studies, Power, and the Anatomy of Territory," *Journal of Power* 2, no. 2 (2009): 213–34, at 226.

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the wider spectrum of material practices, old and new, through which legal space is made and remade. Decompression, in other words, is the necessary precondition for grafting: loosening the grip of inherited cartographic forms so that conceptual innovations can take root in more fertile ground.

1.2.3 Returning the G-word and Spatial Theorizing to International Law

To move beyond the conceptual constraints that continue to shape how International Law imagines space, the discipline must cultivate a form of development that is neither reformist nor ruptural, but grafted. The metaphor of grafting suggests that conceptual innovation proceeds not by abandoning inherited forms, but by recombining them into new configurations responsive to unfolding conditions. This approach captures the disciplinary challenge ahead: developing theoretical tools that remain attuned to the shifting spatial logics of legal authority while critically reworking the conceptual materials inherited from earlier thought.

Despite increasing awareness of legal pluralism and regulatory complexity, the conceptual architecture of International Law remains tethered to a spatial imaginary structured by assumptions of territorial contiguity and exclusivity. That foundational image – reinforced by the cartographic infrastructures discussed earlier – continues to visualize the world as neatly organized into bounded statist units. It has shaped not only how legal space is imagined, but also how emerging juridical formations are interpreted. Overlapping, diffuse, and reticulated forms of authority are too often treated as marginal or exceptional rather than as integral features of global legal ordering. The result is a persistent disjuncture between the categories through which legal authority is conceptualized and the spatial configurations through which it is increasingly exercised.

Acknowledging these shifts – however frequent in scholarly discourse – has too often remained descriptive. References to "multilevel" or "polycentric" governance proliferate,[66] yet rarely precipitate

[66] Rakhyun E. Kim, "Is Global Governance Fragmented, Polycentric, or Complex? The State of the Art of the Network Approach," *International Studies Review* 22, no. 4 (2020): 903–31; Maria Koinova, "Polycentric

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a sustained rethinking of the spatial assumptions that underpin international legal thought. The more urgent task is to ask: how can International Law more fully engage the diverse and dynamic spatial formations through which global authority is now constituted? What conceptual resources might enable us to move beyond inherited models of boundary-making? And how might such resources be cultivated within international legal theory in ways that are both critical and generative?

Answering the spatial challenges facing international legal thought requires more than doctrinal supplementation. It demands engagement with adjacent intellectual traditions – particularly in Geography, Constructivist International Relations, and spatial theory – that have long examined the production of space as a legal, political, and ontological project. For international legal scholars, this entails revisiting a largely occluded disciplinary relationship: the formative entanglement between legal, spatial and geographic thought. Restoring this connection is not merely an exercise in interdisciplinarity, but a means of recovering conceptual tools that have long existed at the field's margins sidelined by efforts to consolidate doctrinal coherence.

This book takes up that challenge. Organized as a series of interlinked inquiries, each chapter interrogates a different dimension of the spatial logics that continue to structure international legal reasoning, while proposing alternative frameworks grounded in critical geography, spatial theory, and socio-legal analysis.

Chapter 2, *Don't Look [Down]!*, begins by examining the conspicuous absence of spatial theorizing within International Law, particularly in comparison to the trajectory of IR. While IR underwent a spatial turn during its "Third Great Debate" – most notably through John Agnew's critique of the "Territorial Trap" – International Law has not pursued a comparable reckoning. The chapter situates this divergence in a set of historical and conceptual conditions, including postwar sensitivities around geopolitical language and a disciplinary

Governance of Transit Migration: A Relational Perspective from the Balkans and the Middle East," *Review of International Studies* 48, no. 3 (2022): 461–83; Ernst-Ulrich Petersmann, "Strengthening Multilevel Governance of Public Goods through Democratic and Republican Constitutionalism," *Cambridge International Law Journal* 11, no. 2 (2022): 180–201; and Tanja A. Börzel, "Multilevel Governance or Multilevel Government?" *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 22, no. 4 (2020): 776–83.

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preference for the triad of territory, sovereignty, and jurisdiction. Drawing on the work of Carl Schmitt and the cultural geography of "geopoetics," it shows how International Law's spatial perception has remained shaped by pastoral and statist imaginaries – limiting its capacity to engage emerging spatial forms of global legal authority.

Chapter 3, *Potere Incognito*, turns to the historical and ontological entanglement between legal authority and cartographic practice. It elaborates the concept of *cartographization* to describe the process through which maps have not only represented but structured legal space. Far from neutral instruments, cartographic forms have functioned as world-making devices that embed spatial assumptions into the ontological foundations of international legal thought. Drawing from critical geography, media theory, and constructivist IR theory, the chapter critiques the liberal-legalist tendency to bracket power, demonstrating how visual conventions have shaped what becomes legible within legal discourse and what remains occluded.

Chapter 4, From Jurisdictions to *Juriscapes*, shifts from critique to conceptual reconstruction. It proposes *juriscapes* as a complementary analytic to the conventional framework of jurisdiction. While jurisdiction remains central to organizing legal authority through bounded territorial logics, it tends to prioritize system maintenance and formal hierarchies. *Juriscapes*, by contrast, highlight the morphogenetic processes through which authority is constituted and distributed across noncontiguous, infrastructurally mediated, and trans-territorial spaces. The chapter draws on legal anthropology, infrastructure studies, and critical geography to foreground how authority and power are enacted through for example ports, data flows, supply chains, and algorithmic systems that often exceed the ontological register of a conventional jurisdictional map.

Chapter 5, *Vidi et Vici*, further develops this line of inquiry by tracing how the formation of mapped legal space was historically tied to imperial practices of extraction, enclosure, and spatial abstraction. Cartography, it argues, was not simply a descriptive device but a juridical means that enabled a vision of global order premised on segmentation and calculability. In contrast, the contemporary spatial logic of legal authority is increasingly defined by *pointillistic geographies*: fragmented but strategically connected sites – such as logistics hubs, data centers, and free trade zones – through which authority and power are exercised across territorial discontinuities. Business Logistics plays a

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key role in sustaining these arrangements, facilitating the projection of authority across infrastructural nodes. The chapter calls for a reorientation of spatial analysis in International Law, one that is historically grounded and sensitive to the material and transscalar conditions of contemporary rule.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 6, The Crisis of *Kartenpolitik*, synthesizes the book's core themes by examining the limits of the cartographic imaginary that has long anchored international legal thought. It argues that the spatial ontology of bordered statehood – visually stabilized by the iconic World Map of states – can no longer account for the distributed, overlapping, and often cellular spatial arrangements through which global authority and power are now extended. Developments such as climate governance, digital infrastructure, and global value chains increasingly challenge the coherence of state-centric territorial frameworks.

Rather than abandoning mapping, the chapter calls for its critical reconstitution. Revisiting the etymological meaning of *cartography* – to "write the earth" – it proposes that international lawyers develop new visual grammars and spatial vocabularies capable of engaging the diverse geographies of legal ordering. Legal authority today operates through formations such as extraterritorial sanctions, carbon accounting systems, drone corridors, and undersea cables – networks that defy inherited cartographic assumptions and demand more flexible analytic tools.

These developments do not displace conventional jurisdictional frameworks, but they do require their reconceptualization. The concept of *juriscapes*, introduced in the book, offers one such tool for analyzing how legal authority is enacted across spatially discontinuous, relational, and infrastructural domains. As the final chapter argues, meeting the challenges of contemporary global ordering demands a more responsive spatial imagination – one that neither fetishizes the coherence of the past nor ignores the complex spatialities of the present. The task is not to discard the map, but to rethink how we draw, read, interpret and use it.

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