

Deterritorializing the Bermuda Triangle: Popular Geography and the Myths of Globalization

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Despite its reputation for unexplained nautical and aeronautical disappearances, the area of the Western Atlantic known as the Bermuda Triangle has never been well defined territorially. First named by Vincent Gaddis in *Argosy* magazine of February 1964, the Triangle is generally supposed to be cornered by Miami, Puerto Rico and Bermuda. While the name has stuck, enthusiasts of the myth, including Gaddis himself, have regretted this act of mapping, since the idea of a triangle implies boundaries that contain the mysterious phenomena reputed to occur within.¹ This paper explores the unstable geography of the Bermuda Triangle to rethink cultural theories of globalization. One of the hallmarks of globalization research is the recognition that the increased interlinking of social relations on a global scale unsettles the spatial boundaries of those relations and therefore the geographical contexts in which they occur. Following Henri Lefebvre (1991), for whom space is the product of social relations under capitalism, researchers have asked how this renegotiation of spatial boundaries intersects the increased transnational mobility of people, money, commodities, and information.² Thinkers like Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1983), Manuel Castells (1989), and Arjun Appadurai (1996), emphasize the deterritorializing effects of globalization, arguing that the spatial formations of late capitalism are defined less by territoriality than by flow.³ The Bermuda Triangle offers an ideal site on which to investigate the relations between shifting geographical boundaries and disjunctive transnational flows. Not only does it attract multiple, inconsistent mappings but it reputedly interrupts the workings of transport and communication and even slows the passage of time. By studying the spatial constitution of this popular geographical formation, the present essay seeks to move beyond two apparently opposed approaches to globalization: Marxist theories that stress the division of the world according to center/periphery relations and poststructuralist theories that highlight the disruptive temporal dynamics of cultural hybridization.

A growing body of cultural criticism analyzes the topographical effects of new information and communication technologies; for example, the ethnography of markets generated by television satellite footprints or the restructuration of global/local relations by the Internet. However, there is relatively little work that examines the production of space within the discourses of popular culture.⁴ This field of study demands a consideration of the relations

between space and culture in an unusually direct manner. The space generated by a popular myth like the Bermuda Triangle, unlike that produced by a satellite footprint or a computer network (both of which generate markets, subcultures and communities) has no straightforward political, economic or social purpose. Nonetheless, it encompasses familiar areas of the earth's surface, including populated zones where people conduct their everyday lives. The Bermuda Triangle resists containment within spatial boundaries, but it is no less real and no more imagined than official geographical entities such as nation-states or free-trade zones. I argue that this popular geographical formation provides a partly compromised ground on which to question the late capitalist imperatives responsible for the current global reorganization of space and time. In so doing, I understand the Bermuda Triangle as a site of resistance in the global cultural economy, a space from which it is possible to challenge the dominant myth of globalization as the victory of capitalism.⁵

Despite its mysterious properties, the Bermuda Triangle does not generate watertight or uncompromised modes of resistance. The popular mythologies that construct this space are full of densely ambivalent meanings, which at once contest and corroborate global capitalism's fantasy of complete domination over the metaphysical dimensions of space and time. In this respect, the myth confirms neither the Frankfurt School view of popular culture as a degraded capitalist form nor the cultural populist understanding of the popular as a necessarily resistant set of cultural practices.⁶ The space of the Bermuda Triangle is both partially connected to and partially dislocated from the topographies of global capitalism. As such, it problematizes theories that treat globalization as a systematic process of capitalist development. According to the world-systems theory of Immanuel Wallerstein, for instance, the world is structured by a set of dynamic contradictions between all-powerful centers and relatively isolated peripheries.⁷ Inequalities of wealth and power determine the intensity and direction of transnational flows and the world moves slowly toward a higher form of order. The Bermuda Triangle myth suggests a less stable scenario. Boundaries between center and periphery are in constant flux and flows of culture and information are subject to unpredictable displacements in space and time. It is as if capital had relinquished its control over transnational processes or as if chaotic forces had diminished or overpowered the abstract logic of capitalist rationality.

Whatever the metaphysical implications of this space-time disorganization, it does not license an approach that downplays the workings of

1. See Gaddis 'Twilight Zone of Death' (1975) for his admission of regret at the territorial implications of the term 'the Bermuda Triangle.'

2. For Lefebvre's definitive work of spatial theory see *The Production of Space* (1991). Recent adaptations of Lefebvre's work for the analysis of contemporary capitalism include Harvey *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) and Soja *Postmodern Geographies* (1989).

3. See Deleuze and Guattari *Anti-Oedipus* (1983), Castells *The Informational City* (1989), and Appadurai *Modernity at Large* (1996).

4. Previous studies of popular geography include Lutz and Collins *Reading National Geographic* (1993), Sharp 'Publishing American Identity: Popular geopolitics, Myth, and *The Reader's Digest*' (1993) and the essays in the 'Popular Geographies' issue of *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* edited by Philip Crang (1996).

None of these works share my emphasis on the significance of popular geography for theories of globalization.

5. On spaces of resistance see Miyoshi *Sites of Resistance in the Global Economy* (1995) and Pile and Keith *Geographies of Resistance* (1997). Smith *Millennial Dreams* (1997) studies the fantastic dimension of the triumphalist myth of globalization as the victory of capitalism.

6. The classic Frankfurt school statement on popular culture is the chapter on the culture industry in Adorno and Horkheimer *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1991). Fiske *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989) is an influential text of the cultural populist school, which emphasizes the appropriation and reception of popular texts by their audiences.

7. For key interventions of 'world-systems theory' in contemporary cultural analysis see Wallerstein.

transnational capitalism and reduces the material inequalities of the contemporary world to their symbolic dimensions. Poststructuralist thinkers like Homi Bhabha emphasize the disjunctive effects of cultural hybridity, equating the intercultural dynamics of globalization with the iterative temporality of language as described by Jacques Derrida. Such an approach can explain the disruptive capacities of the Bermuda Triangle, including its ability to impede the passage of time, but it is relatively ineffectual for understanding the socio-spatial constitution of this anomalous zone. Before the enigmatic powers of the Bermuda Triangle both political economic and poststructuralist theories of globalization appear inadequate and susceptible to revaluation.

To investigate the production of space in the Bermuda Triangle the present essay draws on Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of globalization as a dynamic of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. I contend that the Triangle's plural mappings represent attempts to contain or reterritorialize the processes of deterritorialization. The shifting borders of this amorphous zone register unsuccessful efforts to pull capitalism away from its schizophrenic limit. These arbitrary boundaries are the marks of failed attempts to control or triangulate the transnational circulation of information and culture. Deleuze and Guattari argue that capitalism requires the forces of reterritorialization to guarantee its smooth functioning. Understood in this light, the unstable geography of the Bermuda Triangle poses a threat to the internal equilibrium of the capitalist system. I claim that the unsettled boundaries of the Bermuda Triangle register the possibility of what might be called wild globalization, an alternative economy of global space in which transnational flows become detached from the operations of capital. At a time when capitalism's hegemony is unquestioned by a lack of systemic alternatives, a study of this popular geographical formation offers a means of imagining a future that lies outside or beyond the logic of capitalist accumulation.

Where is the Bermuda Triangle?

The question of the Triangle's location is crucial to understanding the significance of its spatial constitution. Gaddis's initial mapping of the area as a triangle cornered by Miami, Bermuda, and Puerto Rico is controversial, because subsequent commentators quickly expand these boundaries. Alternative mappings represent the area as a trapezium stretching up the US coast as far as New Jersey and encompassing the greater Caribbean islands (figure 1).

In *The Devil's Triangle* (1974), Richard Winer characterizes the Triangle as 'a four-sided area in which no two sides or angles are the same,' explaining that 'the first four letters of the word *trapezium* more than adequately describe' the mysterious properties of the area. The most extensive mapping of the Triangle is offered by John Wallace Spencer in *The Limbo of the Lost* (1969). Expanding the area to encompass the Gulf of Mexico and the Sargasso Sea, the legendary 'Graveyard of Lost Ships' in the mid-Western Atlantic, Spencer extends the Triangle east as far as the Azores Islands (figure 2). What is the significance of these shifting boundaries, and what do they tell us about the social and cultural forces responsible for the production of space in the Bermuda Triangle?



Figure 2. From Larry Kusche. *The Bermuda Triangle Mystery Solved* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books). Copyright 1986. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.



Figure 1. From Larry Kusche. *The Bermuda Triangle Mystery Solved* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books). Copyright 1986. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

In one sense, these remappings are reactions to the myth's disbelievers, who dismiss the exotic theories evoked to explain the vanishings in the Bermuda Triangle by claiming that many of the supposed disappearances have occurred outside the area as traditionally mapped. Spencer enlarges the Triangle to include the Sargasso Sea, citing names such as Columbus, who reports strange lights and unusual compass movements in the area, to add cultural authority to his work. Similarly, Winer stretches the area to encompass a host of possible disappearance sites that fall outside the central Triangle. These include the alleged disappearance point of five US Navy bombers that vanished in December 1945, the Triangle's most celebrated mystery. In 'Twilight Zone of Death' (1975), Gaddis writes that 'these marine mysteries take place all around a shapeless area in the Caribbean Sea and out into the Atlantic Ocean, including part of the Sargasso Sea' (1975: 3).

Despite this uncertain geography, the question of the Triangle's boundaries cannot be traced in a ready series of debates and cross-references. Proponents of the myth tend to base their claims on oral narratives and inductive reasoning, taking any abnormality in the Western Atlantic as evidence for their case. By contrast, their detractors stress critical thinking and archival research. Typical of the mystery's opponents is Larry Kusche, a librarian at Arizona State University, whose *The Bermuda Triangle Mystery—Solved* (1976) represents years of meticulous research into the Triangle's most reputed disappearances. Making recourse to insurance and meteorological records, Kusche seeks 'logical explanations' (1976: xiii) for the incidents he studies. The book concludes that the Bermuda Triangle is a 'manufactured mystery' (1976: 277), but paradoxically it strengthens the area's reputation. Perhaps this is because Kusche's investigations, like those of his more esoteric adversaries, are carried out not in the annals of science or the jargon of government reports but in the discourses of popular culture. Kusche declares that he 'like everyone else' enjoys 'a good mystery' (1976: 277), and the cover art and pricing of his book suggest that he seeks a similar audience to writers who promote the mystery. Whether approached from a skeptical or celebratory standpoint, the myth of the Bermuda Triangle clearly inhabits the sphere of popular culture.

From the mid-1960s, the myth has given rise to a plethora of magazine articles, paperbacks, B-movies, television documentaries, T-shirts, bumper stickers, and more recently, web sites (see <http://icarus.cc.uic.edu/~jdregel/toby/triangle/tri.html>). As items of a predominantly US popular culture, these products have experienced worldwide dissemination. Doubtless audiences have interpreted these texts at will in their various sites of reception. The more pressing question for this paper concerns the way in which textual representations of the Bermuda Triangle trace out topographies that connect them to historical and geographical settings. Cultural critics possess a variety of methods for analyzing the political meanings of popular culture, including social semiotics, Marxist communication theory, and audience ethnography. These techniques can describe the conditions surrounding the production, distribution and reception of popular materials, but they cannot explain the significance of the geographical formations generated by a popular myth like the Bermuda Triangle. Studying the renegotiation of boundaries in this enigmatic zone means moving the critical debate about space, culture and globalization away from the dominant discourses of nationalism, economic regionalism, and transnational corporatism. The Bermuda Triangle attracts an extraordinarily high degree of cultural and capital flow. It is at once the world's busiest shipping lane, an important drug smuggling zone, and a popular tourist destination. The area occupies a precarious position between the imagined geopolitical coordinates of North and South, separating the US and Europe from Latin America and the Caribbean, Paris from Port-au-Prince ... Miami from Havana. To understand the cultural significance of this popular geographical zone it is necessary to ask how the Triangle's uncertain location affects its famed ability to interrupt transnational flows.

Consider again the various mappings of the Bermuda Triangle. As first described by Gaddis the area is delimited by three sites: Puerto Rico, a US territory with a long history of exchange with the mainland; Bermuda, an island state that recently voted to remain within the British

commonwealth; and Miami, the ‘capital of the postmodernism of the right’ (Beverley and Houston 1996). Surely if mapped in this way, the Triangle demands a different interpretation than the expanded version of Winer, which encompasses Cuba and Haiti, two Caribbean nations with complex (and differing) anti-imperial histories. By grouping the US eastern seaboard with the greater Caribbean islands, Winer’s mapping suggests that the Bermuda Triangle myth dramatizes anxieties peculiar to the Americas, be they associated with immigration, race or the revolutionary politics of Cuba and Haiti. The even larger mapping of Spencer, which extends to the Azores Islands, suggests that the myth derives meaning from the complex transcultural history of the Atlantic. From this perspective, the Triangle’s dangers would be engendered by Europe’s commerce with the Americas, infused with the blood of the African slave trade, and perpetuated in the tectonic politics of the new world order. Whatever the plausibility of these interpretations, the Triangle’s significance cannot be assessed by studying the implications of its individual mappings. These cartographies are the mere husks of the Triangle, contingent attempts to stay its shifting borders. At stake in this popular geographical myth is a chaotic production of space, unpredictably mutating across unstable territorial boundaries. The Bermuda Triangle is an amorphous and ultimately unlocatable zone, which constantly exceeds its bounds, nullifying the territorializations that call it into being. This displacement of boundaries involves not an accelerated version of the means by which official political and economic borders move, but a mode of deterritorialization that contests linear/causal models of historical and social change. In other words, the Bermuda Triangle myth upsets not only the predominant view of space as an abstract and empty container of material objects, but also the understanding of time as a homogeneous and unidirectional process of becoming.

Periodizing the Bermuda Triangle

At the end of a recent television documentary concerning the Bermuda Triangle, *The Bermuda Triangle: Mysteries Revealed*, the narrator, Richard Crenna declares that while the anomalies of the area are perhaps inexplicable, there will always be a Bermuda Triangle. Such projections of the myth into the future are as endemic to the end of narratives about the Bermuda Triangle as claims for the mystery’s archaism are to their beginnings. Like acts of national imagining that seek to elide their modernity by proclaiming their antiquity, stories about the Bermuda Triangle often repeat tales about Columbus’ encounter with the Sargasso Sea or claims for the area’s dangers as documented by Phoenician and Carthaginian sailors. The mysterious properties of the Western Atlantic even rate mention in anthropological documents such as Claude Lévi-Strauss’ *Tristes Tropiques* (1976). Lévi-Strauss recalls the ‘anxious haste’ of sailing through this area, as if the boat ‘only had a short period of grace in which to escape being smothered’ (1976: 87-88). Not surprisingly, the mystery’s proponents can cite dozens of disappearances from the 19th- and early 20th- centuries, including the famous case of the *Mary Celeste*, but they generally agree that there has been an escalation of vanishings since 1945. Indeed, the end of World War II marks the most extraordinary incident to have occurred in the Triangle, the disappearance on 6 December 1945 of five US Navy bombers and the Martin Mariner flying boat sent to rescue them.

While the Bermuda Triangle has also claimed many commercial and pleasure vessels, this incident, often simply referred to as the disappearance of Flight 19, commands a special relevance for its enthusiasts. Not only does it occupy pride of place in all the books and movies, but it has prompted expensive underwater searches (most recently involving robotic vehicles), and even provided the background story for Stephen Spielberg's film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1980). Perhaps the privilege accorded to this disappearance can be explained by its involvement of the US military. The myth of the Bermuda Triangle is strongly articulated to a discursive formation that both celebrates and questions the authority and power of the US armed forces. While the myth's enthusiasts launch attacks upon military secrecy, they make much of the occasional references to the mystery in official military documents; for example, the US Coast Guard form letter (File 5720) that describes the Bermuda Triangle as 'an imaginary area ... noted for a high incidence of unexplained losses of ships, small boats and aircraft' (cited in Berlitz 1974:10). What is interesting about this rapprochement of the myth with the US military (and in particular the case of Flight 19) is that it suggests that the Bermuda Triangle phenomenon is a manifestation of US Cold War paranoia. Might this allow us to periodize the Triangle, to treat the mystery as an allegory of the cultural anxieties of the dominant sectors of US society during the Cold War era?

Such a reading has its attractions, considering the genesis of the myth in the mid-1960s (in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis), and the two major waves of interest that coincide with important events in Cold War history (the energy crisis and détente in the early 1970s, and the Black Monday crash and the fall of the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s/early 1990s). It can also explain the persistence of the myth into the 1990s, given the tendency of US popular culture to sustain Cold War thematics and modes of representation; for example, the 1995 Miami-based film *Fair Game* in which William Baldwin and Cindy Crawford save the world from a Russian nuclear submarine based in Cuba. Indeed, the proximity/inclusion of Cuba to/in the Triangle has prompted much speculation over the years.

In *The Bermuda Triangle: An Incredible Saga of Unexplained Disappearances* (1974), Charles Berlitz claims that, at the time of its disappearance in 1963, many attributed the loss of the Marine Sulphur Queen, a 425-foot freighter, to confiscation or capture by Cubans or Cuban sympathizers (1974: 57). Yet, if such Cold War paranoia has surrounded the Triangle, the more prevalent explanations have been much more extraordinary.

It is not my intention to dredge up all the paranormal, prehistoric and extraterrestrial theories floated to explain the mysterious disappearances in this area. Suffice it to say that many of these theories present the Bermuda Triangle as an area plagued by what Andrew Ross calls strange weather. Numerous meteorological oddities have been invoked to explain the mystery. These include wind shear, freak tidal waves, falling asteroids, and underwater methane spouts. At the more 'far out' end of the spectrum, we find speculations involving electromagnetic anomalies (the Triangle is one of a few areas on earth where compasses point to true

north and magnetic north at the same time), sea monsters, gravity sinks, and, of course, UFO kidnappings. One widely publicised explanation was supposedly predicted by Edgar Cayce, the famous sleeping prophet of Virginia, who died in 1944. Years before the invention of laser beams, Cayce suggested that the ancient Atlanteans used crystals to generate electricity. These crystals were specifically located in the Bimini area and subsequently sunk in the Tongue of the Ocean, a huge underwater canyon in the Bahamas where electromagnetic irregularities have been observed. Cayce's explanation gained popularity in 1968, when researchers discovered near Bimini an underwater arrangement of rectangular stones; the so-called Bimini road, supposedly the remains of a UFO landing strip for the sunken continent of Atlantis. In the most extraordinary version of this theory (developed by Charles Berlitz in *The Bermuda Triangle*), the disappearances are benevolent UFO kidnappings by ancient Atlantean time travelers. These visitors from the past seek to ascertain the extent of human technological progress to save the contemporary world from the fate that befell Atlantis, the submersion of the continents due to global warming.

8. On the potentially subversive implications of UFO abduction narratives see White 'Alien Nation' (1994).

This prehistoric-eco-extraterrestrial fantasy has quite different implications from the myth's entanglement with the US military, which is after all one of the world's grandest polluters. Theories of this type have the force of subversive texts. Not only do they launch attacks on government secrecy and orthodox science, but they traffic in the awkward politics of our times, negotiating differences between familiar and alien cultures, and recognizing the need for ecological limits to economic growth and technological progress.⁸ These countercultural elements of the Bermuda Triangle myth prevent its reduction to an allegory of US Cold War paranoia. Such a periodization of the mystery is thwarted not only by the ambivalent politics of its parascientific and ecotopic aspects, but by a corresponding problematization of assumptions regarding time and history.

The ancient Atlantean version of the story embodies a temporal paradox in so far as it involves visitors from the past who come to save the contemporary world from its future. But such temporal anomalies are endemic to the myth, even at the level of individual disappearance narratives. Consider the case of the *Star Tiger*, a British South American passenger plane that disappeared during a regular flight from the Azores to Bermuda on 29 January 1948. According to James Raymond Wolfe in 'Of Time and the Triangle' (1975), radio operators up and down the US Ber-

muda Triangle exists as some sort of ‘time trap.’ According to this theory, the Triangle is an area in which time does not always travel in a straight line, but unpredictably breaks away from the main flow, carrying with it whatever might be in the area at the moment. Quite apart from implying that disappeared vessels may have been transported to the past or future (or to some parallel universe), this frustrates the established notions of temporal duration that lend themselves to the act of historical periodization. If time cannot be assumed to move at a uniform pace and in a single direction it becomes impossible to identify blocks of time or periods that give the impression of a historical totalization, a seamless web of phenomena that express a consistent world-view or unified set of structural categories.

In his essay ‘History and the Social Sciences: The *Longue Durée*’ (1980) Fernand Braudel claims that historical periods ‘can be recorded only in relation to the uniform time of historians, which can stand as a general measure of all these phenomena, and not in relation to the multiform time of social reality, which can stand only as the individual measure of each of these phenomena separately’ (1980: 49).

Similarly, in *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Frederic Jameson explains that ‘individual period formulations always secretly imply or project narratives or stories—narrative representations—of the historical sequence in which such individual periods take their place and from which they derive their significance’ (1981: 28). As long as stories about the Bermuda Triangle embody an element of interrupted or delayed temporal flow, they will question the sequential narratives that enable the recognition of discrete historical periods. To this extent the mystery challenges the model of historical time that underlies its reading as a Cold War allegory.

By questioning totalizing historiographical schemes, the Bermuda Triangle myth performs a popular translation of complex theoretical notions such as Walter Benjamin’s *Jetztzeit* or Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial time-lag. In his ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ (1969), Benjamin shifts the focus of historiography away from totalizing narrative forms by declaring the revolutionary potential of an interruptive or Messianic time. He pits his argument against the idea of historical progress, which he understands as the functional replacement within modernity of the homogeneous, empty time established by tradition. Benjamin’s critique of modern time-consciousness exerts strong influence on poststructuralist theorists like Jacques Derrida, whose understanding of the linguistic sign as iterative temporal structure questions modernist narratives of progress. Transferred to the debate about globalization, this deconstructive emphasis on the rhetoric of temporality contrasts theories that stress the production and politics of space. For instance, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha brings a deconstructive reading of Benjamin’s *Jetztzeit* to the study of the cultural relations between colony and metropolis. Bhabha self-consciously casts his argument against ‘the more *‘spatial’* traditions of some aspects of postmodern theory’ (1994: 239). For him, the temporal discontinuities that separate colony from metropolis produce a time-lag, which fractures the ‘*contemporaneous reality*’ (1994: 244) supposedly implied by the postmodern fascination with mapping. Significantly, this theoretical division between iterative time and

socially produced space also appears in the founding text of contemporary spatial theory, Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre accuses poststructuralist thinkers of 'promoting the basic sophistry whereby the philosophico-epistemological notion of space is fetishized and the mental realm comes to envelop the social and physical ones' (1991: 5). The Bermuda Triangle myth suggests a reconciliation of these rival theoretical positions since it produces a space that both impedes the flow of time and maintains a physical presence upon the earth's surface.

Like Bhabha's third space, the Bermuda Triangle is 'continually, *contingently*, "opening out," remaking the boundaries' to produce a time in which 'the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory' (1994: 219). Yet it is also a social space, since, as Lefebvre writes, it 'cannot be resolved into abstractions and ... consists neither in a collection of things in space nor in an aggregate of occupied places' (1991: 402). By giving a terrestrial grounding to poststructuralist notions of disjunctive temporality, the Bermuda Triangle myth rescues Bhabha's time-lag from a purely formalist reading. As Peter Osborne worries in *The Politics of Time* (1995), Bhabha's trope of displaced repetition threatens to elide the social referent, reinstating 'original difference across its supposed temporal rupture in a ... purely constructed form' (1995: 199). The Bermuda Triangle performs radical temporal disruptions while maintaining an earthly positioning. Its uncertain placement between North and South generates temporal anomalies that problematize its periodization as a Cold War allegory. But this does not mean that the Triangle's mysterious properties can be explained solely in terms of its geographical placement. For while the area is inscribed upon the earth's surface, it resists definitive location. The Bermuda Triangle creates 'atopical' disturbances in the production of space, exposing the unmappable topographies that lurk within every cartographic projection (cf. Miller 1995 concerning the 'atopical' and the 'unmappable' in poststructuralist theory). Yet it is not a purely discursive construct or what Lefebvre would call a 'representational space' (1991: 39), a space lived only through its association with symbols and signs. Unlike the unmappable loci identified by poststructuralist theorists in literary and philosophical texts (for example, the Derridean idea of the crypt), the Bermuda Triangle is at once concrete and abstract, material and metaphorical, real and imagined. It is a version of what Edward Soja (1996) calls real-and-imagined space, a space that has an actuality other than the abstract signs and real things it attempts to contain. This dual capacity of the Bermuda Triangle, its ability to encompass both poststructuralist theories of temporal difference and Marxist notions of socially produced space, makes it a particularly potent locus for rethinking the workings of globalization.

Wild Globalization

Consider the following phrases. I am a citizen of the Bermuda Triangle. A treaty signed in 1991 permits free trade in the Bermuda Triangle. My grandmother took a holiday in the Bermuda Triangle. My flight passed through the Bermuda Triangle. Of these, only the final two are plausible, and the second to last barely so. Clearly, the Bermuda Triangle is not a nation or an economic zone, or some other kind of territory defined by the social and economic axioms of

capitalism. Yet, as a renowned tourist area, the world's busiest shipping lane, and a heavy zone of drug transport, it might be justly called a space of flows. I use this term in a different sense than that applied by Manuel Castells (1989) to the informational city, since the Bermuda Triangle is not a demographic or technological centre that seeks to regulate the transnational movement of goods, information and capital. The space of the Bermuda Triangle is defined not by what it contains or even by what passes through it, but by what it consumes, traps, or detains, be that aircraft, information, or time itself.

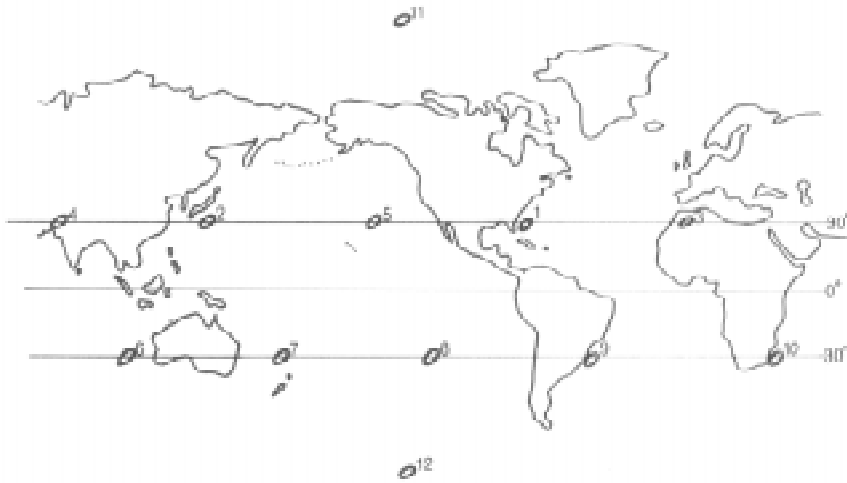
In this sense, the Bermuda Triangle might better be called a space of broken flows, since it performs radical space-time dislocations in practices of communication and transport, disjoining the flows that seek to constitute it as a readily mappable territory. The idea of flow has been crucial to studies of globalization but it has remained under-theorized, as if it described a continuous and direct transit of materials from one place to another. While the concept has philosophical precedents extending back to Heraclitus, it finds its most powerful modern enunciation in the work of Henri Bergson, who understands the experience of time as a continuous flux of qualitative heterogeneity. At least it is from Bergson that Deleuze and Guattari (1983) derive their influential theory of flow, that describes the anti-psychoanalytic operations of desire, whether embodied in the secretion of bodily fluids or the transnational circulation of capital (for Deleuze's engagement with Bergson see Deleuze 1988). For Deleuze and Guattari, flows obey the logic of deterritorialization, since they resist arrest or containment by regulating psychological or geographical systems. The capitalist system provides the primary means of attempting to control or reterritorialize flows in the contemporary world, restricting their movement through the institutions of the state. 'One sometimes has the impression,' Deleuze and Guattari write, 'that the flows of capital would willingly dispatch themselves to the moon if the capitalist State were not there to bring them back to earth' (1983: 258). Yet the Bermuda Triangle resists containment within boundaries while remaining on the earth's surface.

The Triangle functions as what Deleuze and Guattari term a 'machine' (1983: 36), an agency-without-subjectivity that breaks the flows that broach it. This disjoining of flows not only questions the continuity of time but also suggests a radical departure from capitalist modes of spatial organization. By resisting the forces of reterritorialization, the Bermuda Triangle exceeds what Deleuze and Guattari call the schizophrenic limit of capitalism, a limit that the system must repel and exorcise to function smoothly. The myth suggests a scenario in which capital loses control over the transnational movement of culture, information and people, causing flows to go astray, slow down, or simply disappear. Positioning the Bermuda Triangle in debates about the economy of space in the same way as Deleuze and Guattari position the Oedipal Triangle in debates about the economy of the psyche, we can say that it attempts unsuccessfully to contain the irrational phenomena that occur within its ever-shifting boundaries. It is as if the Triangle produces a space that confounds emplacement, defying the possibility of local knowledge.

In this regard, it is significant that the Bermuda Triangle is not the only anomalous area of its kind on the earth's surface. Researchers of paranormal phenomena have long recognized the existence of a similar mysterious zone off the southern coast of Japan, the so-called Dragon's Triangle. Bound by Yokohama in the north and Guam and the Mariana Islands in the south, this second enigmatic area occupies the opposite side of the earth's crust from the Bermuda Triangle for both longitude and latitude. As Charles Berlitz comments in *The Dragon's Triangle* (1989), surely it is not accidental that these two areas of unexplained disappearances exist 'right on the well-trafficked doorsteps of two of the world's leaders in electronics, computers and high technology' (1989: 22). Yet, if the technological, economic and cultural pre-eminence of Japan and the US have focused attention on these trouble spots, this has not prevented more ambitious scholars from seeking out further abnormal zones in less-trafficked areas of the globe.

Particularly active in this project have been the researchers at SITU, the Society for the Investigation of the Unexplained, an organization headed by Ivan Sanderson, the ex-proprietor of a New Jersey roadside zoo. Employing a host of innovative methods, including the collection of data on television talk shows and the sticking of knitting needles through a child's globe, the SITU team was able to plot ten other aberrant zones on the earth's surface. Constellated at angles of 72 degrees around the 30th parallel of latitude north and south (and including the north and south poles), these so-called vile vortices (figure 3) are all reported areas of strange disappearances. In 'Worldwide Seas of Mystery' (1975), Sanderson claims that these vortices are lozenge-shaped. But if we consider that in one mapping the Bermuda Triangle stretches from the Gulf coast of Mexico to the Azores Islands (over 72 degrees of longitude), there is reason to suspect that these points might expand to encompass the entire earth. What is the significance of this bizarre act of globalization, in which the whole world becomes a Bermuda Triangle?

Following up on my previous speculations, I want to suggest that the vile vortices scenario represents a fantasy of globalization without limits. At stake is a process of wild globalization, which functions neither as a means of cultural homogenization nor as a way of instituting differences to make the world a friendlier place for capital. In this respect, the Bermuda Triangle myth questions the two prevailing views of globalization. First, it problematizes the world-systems theory of Immanuel Wallerstein and colleagues, which evolves from a mix of Marxist dependency theory and *Annales* school historio-graphy (For a recent example of world-systems theory see Arrighi 1994). Not only does the myth question the historical periodizations that lie behind this mode of thought, but by constructing a situation in which capital relinquishes control over global flows, it undercuts the systemic claims of this approach. In a world of chaotic or disconnected flows, it becomes impossible to identify large-scale structural oppositions (between center and periphery, North and South, McWorld and Jihad world) with which to study the totalizing effects of the world-system. The idea of wild globalization also upsets the alternative view by which the current global reorganization of space and time involves a mutual implication of global and local forces. Theorists who work in



The twelve "Vile Vortices"

Figure 3. From Larry Kusche. *The Bermuda Triangle Mystery Solved* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books). Copyright 1986. Reprinted by permission.

this paradigm argue that the world is becoming both more globalized (unified by flows moving across borders) and more localized (fragmented into enclaves of difference, coalition and resistance - see Wilson and Dissanayake (1996) and critiques by Robertson 1995; Grossberg 1996). These thinkers, who work predominantly in cultural studies, contend that the operations of global capitalism must be studied in the context of their concrete, local manifestations. At the same time, they offer symbolic tactics of cultural location and everyday life as modes of appropriation and resistance. The Bermuda Triangle myth projects a world in which there is no way of localizing culture, where everyday practices and performances cannot be tied to the idea of place. If cultural borders constantly shift and the idea of locality is swallowed in a vortex of disjointed flow, then local difference cannot be identified as the privileged site of agency and resistance. What the vile vortices phenomenon suggests is a mode of globalization in which restraining measures of reterritorialization cannot control the processes of deterritorialization, and transcultural flows break free from the axiomatic of capital. Obviously we do not live in such a world, but at a time when it seems that capitalism will die no natural death, this kind of thought experiment disrupts our sense of where the future lies.

Already in transnational cultural studies, I am thinking of the work of Arjun Appadurai (1996), we have a model of globalization that emphasizes not the conjunction of flows into unifying territorialities, but their disjunction according to a multidimensional economy of -scapes. Appadurai's work is by his own admission exploratory, but it does attempt to retain a model of socially produced space while stressing lags and disjunctures that question the totalizing propensities of the Marxist tradition. Whether Appadurai is ultimately successful in

this enterprise is a matter for future adjudication. There is always the danger that this kind of work will become enmeshed in an overfamiliar and perhaps unresolvable struggle between Marxist and poststructuralist theories. Until such a reconciliation is accomplished upon the theoretical plane, we might do better to understand the phenomenon of globalization by a closer and more serious study of popular geographical formations like the Bermuda Triangle.

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