To see what is in front of one’s nose needs a constant struggle.
– George Orwell, 1968, p. 125

Shortly before he died, Pierre Bourdieu had this to say about globalisation that as an economic doctrine it relied upon a false notion of the inevitability of economic laws, a ‘reality’ that, in turn, required a politics of depoliticization. In response, what was required was a new kind of politics, ‘capable of addressing itself beyond the nation-state’ (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 1). I began this book by suggesting that a defining feature of republicanism in a global age was the idea of resistance and of the formation of a politics, an active, participatory notion of politics which was being exercised beyond the nation-state. For that reason, I suggested that this kind of political freedom could be described as a form of liberty after liberalim, for while the latter was a theory of state bound government, today it was possible to see a different, active political liberty being exercised in a cosmopolitan context.

However, the reflexive experience of ‘life politics’ in postmodernity must now contend with a new world order that is being constructed both mentally and physically. The focus of this book has been on the notion of political space and its relation to political agency. In this final chapter, I will examine some of the new spatial mythologies that are currently being developed around the notion of the postmodern state, empire and network. If the post-1989 world produced a mythic ‘end of history’ then the world post-September 11, 2001 is producing its own ideology of space and politics. That new moral and political myths are being produced – ‘theory doing imperial service’ (Mann, 2003) – in order to cope with the consequences of rapid changes in domestic and foreign policy initiated by some of the world’s most powerful governments is indisputable.
In response, in this final chapter I will reiterate the case for cosmopolitan agency but this time within and across the new context of empire. In so doing, I suggest that cosmopolitan liberty will sometimes mean the liberty to say no, to withdraw consent and to disobey state authority.

The liberty that Arendt identified as the freedom to resist oppression is no less relevant now than it was in her own ‘dark times’. Yet, the figure of the active citizen will be different. What I want to provide here is a sketch of this new kind of agency, the cosmopolitan citizen as postmodern nomad, an ironist, who recognizes the contingency of their own identity and allegiance to the state. Such recognition, rather than cause for despair, is a knowledge that empowers politically.

The cosmopolitan citizen will exhibit a highly developed degree of reflexivity and a sense of impartiality that is ‘many sided’ and ‘multi-dimensional’. Cosmopolitan selves are, inevitably, pulled in competing directions – the public sphere saying one thing, democratic institutions another and personal commitments, potentially, another. This kind of oscillation while it might be problematic is a feature of civic life in the postmodern contexts of empire and network.

7.1 The anti-political space of empire

Since the end of 2001, there has been a fairly consistent effort to respond to the new world of ‘terror’ by reconfiguring politico-spatial ideologies on the part of policy makers and liberal theorists sympathetic to their aims. The consequence of the spread of ‘global terror networks’, themselves (in part) products of now defunct Cold War strategies and financial freedoms made possible by economic globalization and the deregulation of financial controls, is the perception that the territorial sanctuary of liberal democracy is under threat. Some analysts have suggested that, as a consequence, globalization which opened up new spaces for politics during the 1990s is over and that a period of ‘regressive globalism’ is now under way (e.g. Anheier et al., 2003).

It has been argued that as a result of the tragic events of September 11, 2001 a fundamental challenge has been posed to one of the founding myths of the West, namely that modernity, the Enlightenment and its legacies of progress and scientific advance will eventually spread to every other nation. The idea that American-style ‘democratic capitalism’ was destined for export with the consequence that a universal civilization would come into being, and history come to an end is over (Gray, 2003). For many, the essential question to be asked now is how