

---

## ARTICLES IN ENGLISH

*Davina Cooper*

### **RETRIEVING THE STATE FOR RADICAL POLITICS— A CONCEPTUAL AND PLAYFUL CHALLENGE**

Whether states can ever contribute to progressive social transformation has long divided the left. But is this division dependent on a particular state conception? If the state can be meaningfully conceptualised in multiple ways, are there ways of conceptualising that might bridge this political divide, granting the state a constructive part within radical left politics? This essay adopts a utopian conceptual methodology to consider more politically hopeful ways for reimagining what it means to be a state. It challenges an anti-state left perspective on four grounds: to avoid the reification of a bounded state; to avoid romanticising civil society as the state's antithesis; to pay attention to dissident intra-state actions; and to recognise the importance of different governing scales. But if the state concept should be retrieved, what can statehood mean? Does local government offer a more progressive paradigm than the nation-state with its radically different relationship to space and governing? And what then follows? What does imagining progressive states do since they cannot be practiced in any simple sense? If reimagining the state is not to be hopeless, are modes of take-up available that can prefigure the state without relying on its material actualisation? This essay explores the possibilities 'play' offers for representing what states and institutional systems could be like. Taking pop-up republics, crowd-sourced constitutions, fictive feminist legal judgments, and local currencies as contemporary examples, it considers play as a register for experimenting with other modes of political government. The essay closes by addressing two questions: if counter-representational forms of play involve performing institutional activities differently, are there good reasons to articulate these together into reimagined states, using play to experiment

---

Davina Cooper—PhD, Professor of Law & Political Theory, University of Kent, the UK. Email: [d.s.cooper@kent.ac.uk](mailto:d.s.cooper@kent.ac.uk)

with new forms of assemblage? Second, what can playing at other kinds of states or institutions accomplish politically?

*Key words:* the state; radical politics; concepts; play; political simulation

The state is a subject that divides the left. It divides them when they contemplate what political community could be like, and it divides them when they assess the political communities of the present. But is this division inevitable? More specifically, how far is it dependent on a particular conception of what it means to be a state? In this short essay, I want to respond to contemporary anti-statist left perspectives by suggesting we reimagine statehood. My argument is organised around three sets of questions: why should we retrieve the state as a concept; what could statehood mean if its ties to the nation-state were properly loosened; and what kinds of playful collective practices might enable people to creatively reimagine other ways of doing the state?

To pursue this argument, I adopt a utopian conceptual methodology, set out in more detail in Cooper (2014). Starting from a commitment to other more just ways of living and organising, it recognises the combined importance of the imagination, speculative thinking, material practices, and experimentation in developing new 'conceptual lines' that draw on what *is* to think about what *could be*. To help develop this approach here, I take as my interlocutor anarchist-informed state critique. Anarchist work on the state is extensive. For reasons of limited space, my discussion engages with a handful of contemporary writers, whose work captures some of the key claims and perspectives currently held on the anti-state left. The essay, I should say, is also written from the geo-historical context of Britain in 2016. Although my discussion is not restricted to the British state, it is animated by concerns and debates—academic and political—percolating in this context.

### **Reimagining the State**

Everyday discourse typically treats the state as an object; a thing—like a tree or house—that we can know and describe. Although some writers describe the state as an intangible effect of material and cultural practices, the left generally treats the state as a phenomenon possessed of the necessary force and tangibility to impress itself upon social life. In his discussion of Gilles Deleuze and Max Stirner, post-anarchist theorist Saul Newman (2001:4) writes: 'The state is an abstract principle of power and authority that has always existed in different forms, yet is somehow "more than" these particular actualisations.' While the state takes shape in historically evolving ways, it cannot be reduced to any particular instantiation. At the same time, as an abstract expression of relations of domination, the state is too corrupted to be retrievable for radical politics. Radical anti-state scholarship emphasises the state's relationship to

violence, coercion, modes of transnational exploitation and capitalism. As a result, even when left forces appear to capture state structures, the state's necessary relationship to domination, power, and authority shapes and saturates whatever left forces try to accomplish. Simon Springer (2012: 1610) writes: 'any state, whether controlled by the bourgeoisie or captured by the workers, will inevitably come to function as an instrument of class domination.'

Domination, violence and exploitation are terrible processes, but how we tie them to the state depends on how we conceptualise it. If we treat the state foremost as a set of governmental apparatuses, the state may be seen to cause deprecation and harm but this is not inevitable. By contrast, if we conceptualise the state as institutionalised domination, the possibilities for retrieval disappear. Since the state is a concept rather than a thing (see, also: Hay 2014) it can and has been constituted in many different ways. As a concept, I suggest, the state takes shape in the oscillation between those socio-material practices identified as state practices and imaginaries of statehood<sup>1</sup>. Focusing on this movement avoids the idealism of imposing meaning on social life. It also avoids the opposite problem in which the state is treated as a real object that simply needs conceptual extraction/abstraction from political and institutional formations. Instead, we can treat the concept of the state as continually taking and retaking shape as political imaginaries and material practices inform and constitute each other.

How this is undertaken will vary; there is no one right way of being or knowing the state. Scholarship and political discourse reveal how the state is variously conceived as an intangible idea; coercive and ideological apparatuses of governing; condensed social relations; a terrain of political activity; and an agentic force among others. And so, faced with these different conceptions, we might ask: What do we want our conceptions of the state to *do*? Left-wing conceptions tuned to critique typically emphasise state power, coercive intent, and unity of action. What might conceptions look like if they were tuned instead to the state's relevance for progressive transformative politics? This is a question whose answer will vary by time, place and situation; it also begs a prior question: why retrieve the concept of the state, even one radically modified? If the aim is to establish common political ground between pro and anti-state radicals, would it not be more fruitful to choose some other, less charged, terrain?

One important reason for politically retrieving the state is, paradoxically, to avoid its reification, something that happens when a sharp state/non-state distinction is drawn and states become imagined as territories or things with clear distinct boundaries. While radical anti-state scholars recognise that states may be tangled up with other bodies and forces, they tend to treat the state as an entity with an outside; and it is there where real transformative politics occur (e.g., Newman 2016:4). But if the state has such an 'outside', what or where might this

---

<sup>1</sup> Which practices are identified as state practices will vary as the state is reimagined (see, Cooper 2014).

be? Are, for instance, commercial providers of public services outside the state or service 'users'? What about homes, food, and water subject to, and shaped by, state regulation (Carroll 2009)? Many radical anti-state writers describe how state logics and rationalities saturate social life; at the same time, they claim, the possibility for an 'outside' remains. For some, it exists in the alternative bounded worlds people create when state authority is refused (e.g., see Frenzel 2014). For others, it exists in the possibility of liberating oneself from the idea and power of the state in order to develop non-state registers for interpersonal relations and self-government. Here, the state becomes the antithesis of a certain kind of emergent freedom, one that does not yet exist but must be created.

One problem with investing so much in the political distinction between state and outside, in conditions where radical transformative change can *only* happen in the latter, is that it creates an overly compartmentalised notion of social life (e.g., see Holloway 2010: 58). It treats the state/non-state divide as real and solid rather than as contingent, porous and malleable (Mitchell 1991; Painter 2006) and, explicitly or implicitly, often ends up aligning this divide with others: powerful/powerless, oppression/resistance (or insurrection), unjust/ just, change/reaction in ways that create an overly-dichotomised account, with neatly matched pairs.

Creating a binary division between politics and state can also over-romanticise civil society as Springer (2012: 1617), for instance, writes: 'Anarchist geographies of co-operation are to be born from outside the existing *order*, from sites that the state has failed to enclose, and from the infinite possibilities that statist logics ignore, repel, plunder, and deny.' In so doing, it can ignore the dissident practices taking place within state institutional formations, practices that may not adopt (or fully adopt) the state-like ways of behaving and thinking, radicals such as John Holloway (2010: 59) fear. Transformative progressive beliefs, values, actors and knowledges are typically marginal or disavowed within liberal, capitalist, democratic states; but they can still have an institutional presence in texts, conversations, decisions, policies and subversive acts as Janet Newman (2012) explores. More generally, dissident forces may exercise the power that role-institutionalisation makes available to them as teachers, students, officials, and others, including access to particular personnel, spaces, communication networks, policies, texts and operational practices (Cooper 2016a). This access and its evolving changing usage are typically discounted by a framework that assumes contact means co-option and which equates power with domination rather than with the means of action (and inaction).

Finally, I want to retrieve the concept of the state for reasons of scale. Publicly managing and coordinating social life is politically important, and cannot just happen through small, autonomous, self-managing communities (see, also: Wright 2010). In making this point, some care is needed. Geographers have done important work critiquing naturalised conceptions of scale; emphasising too how state practices don't just reflect but also establish scales of action (Brand et al. 2011). At the same time, larger-scaled governmental formations

seem to be needed to deal with certain externalities, resource distributions, rights and freedoms, and to coordinate and represent collective concerns and responsibilities (e.g., Cumbers 2015). How to democratise these formations is an important concern. But also important, and arguably less discussed on the left given the pervasiveness of critique, is the potential value of systems, routines and other forms of mediation associated with larger-scaled political governance forms. Institutionalised, mediated practices are often slated by anarchist-inspired radicals, committed to direct, non-representational forms of governance and politics. At the same time, radical scholars of grass-roots politics recognise the need for new forms of institutional (or counter-institutional) action (e.g., Murray 2014). One challenge for the left may be how to combine systemic processes and mediated forms of governance, on the one hand, with ad hoc, improvised, spontaneous, resistant, responsive ways of doing things, on the other. I return to this below in considering whether play can help to imagine and fashion new kinds of institutional connection. However, if conceiving statehood as sovereign control over people and territory has little merit for a radical politics that seeks not simply to redirect the state but to reimagine its terms, how else might we conceptualise the state?

The approach I have taken in recent writing, oriented to the state's contribution to a progressive transformative politics, is to approach the state as plural, overlapping, non-sovereign, political governance formations (Cooper 2015, 2016a, 2016b), bearing sedimentary layers of past historical moments (Martin, Pierce 2012). But while I use the language of statehood, it may not much matter what we call them. Thus, my argument for retrieving the state does not depend on its terminology, but on the questions and issues the state's retrieval and reimagining foreground. What would it take to imagine states as non-hierarchical: interacting horizontally with, and so without authority over, users, staff, citizens and residents, those different role-based relations through which people encounter and participate in states? Can states be actively participative? Can they be activist, advancing political projects that respond to claims of injustice, even as 'responding' to injustice will always also be a translation?

I have said we need to hold on to larger scale formations; at the same time, the state does not have to refer exclusively to nation-states; it might also refer to micro, local, regional and global states (e.g., Aretxaga 2003; Scott 2014). Local states are not necessarily attractive forms for progressive politics, with their propensity for parochialism and xenophobia. At the same time, experiences of radical municipal government, such as in 1980s Britain (Lansley et al. 1989), provide inspiring grounds for reimagining more progressive states (see, Cooper 2016b). First, they demonstrate how statehood can be more horizontal and modest, detached from the grandeur and majesty assumed by nation-states, more readily subject to other agendas and movements. Second, they suggest other possible relations between states and space. Conventionally, states are associated with territories that they control, govern, are responsible for, and

exploit; where some (but not all) are members and belong. While scholars, such as Joe Painter (2010: 1094), argue for a reconceptualization of territory as 'porous, historical, mutable, uneven and perishable', progressive municipal authorities demonstrate how relations to borders, migration and mobility can operate through far more inclusive principles. Third, local government provides a paradigm of statehood that re-fashions what governing entails. While typical instances of local government make this claim seem far-fetched, radical municipal states have experimented with participative, socially activist registers of governing, embedding themselves in non-elite communities while they advance a range of causes (such as gender equality, anti-poverty initiatives, international solidarity, ecology and peace). As the case of 1980s British municipal socialism reveals, these initiatives often collapse. Nevertheless, their pursuit poses interesting questions about what governing could involve.

Instead of assuming states are inevitably engaged in top-down forms of rule, their 'better' form might involve managing, coordinating, representing, and sharing. This might involve the heavy-duty work of social repair, the mundane work of maintaining everyday life, and taking responsibility for the structures that could ensure equal access to material and cultural goods. We might think of states, in this sense, as rather comfortable, un-chic-like formations, while innovative, cutting-edge developments happen elsewhere. States may, of course, support innovation and experimentation through the resources they control and make available, including staff, money, spaces and communication systems, while relinquishing the role of innovators. Alternatively, progressive state formations could be experimental in their own right, trying out and advancing new forms of participatory, activist governing.

The complexity of reimagining the state in more progressive ways poses challenging questions about what we can imagine and what we can accomplish – knowing, as we do, the multitude of ways in which more radical forms of governing are stymied when they attempt to acquire a practical form. For some, such difficulties make reimagining the state a pointless, even dangerous, task. However, in the mix of approaches that radical political action might take, there is a place for exploring what political governance could be like. But how might we go about exploring it? And what do we do with the ideas and practices generated in the process? Historically, utopian fictional texts and grassroots political action have provided two distinct, if complementary, registers through which new ideas of 'better futures' have been fashioned and, in some instances, given material shape. In the second part of this essay, I want to consider a third register for refashioning what the state could become, namely play.

### **Prefiguring states through play**

Adopting a utopian attitude, we can imagine conceptions of the state as horizontal, plural, and activist, ecologically attentive, supportive, and caring.

But is this a conception of the state that makes sense to take up *prefiguratively*, that is in how we imagine and practice what it means to be a state today? Prefiguration has become a popular, anarchist-inflected method of doing politics, with its refusal to separate means and ends, approaching desired outcomes as if they can (and should) be actualised in the present (see, generally Boggs 1977; Maeckelbergh 2011; Yates 2015). However, prefiguring the state (as opposed to prefiguring better grassroots politics) carries distinctive 'capacity' challenges. The power and authority to act as a state formation, particularly a formation that can make laws, adjudicate, tax, and provide expensive complex public services, is very narrowly distributed and hard to seize. Does this, then, make prefiguring the state impossible? Or do we need to find glimpses of it in other kinds of places and activities?

Counter-institutional structures, from squats and social centres to new forms of commoning and democratic schools, provide one constellation of organised practices that might be read as prefiguring what public governance could be like. I want here to consider a different, less studied register, and that is play. Play, in this context, can take several forms. It can involve playfully bringing into being actual counter-institutions; or it can involve playfully representing what could be. Chiara de Cesari (2012) has done interesting work in this regard, exploring the 'anticipatory representation' of the Palestinian state through cultural initiatives such as participation in European biennales and establishing a national museum. These measures deliberately represented the Palestinian state as if it existed in order to help it to exist. Later, I turn to the thorny question of what such initiatives can accomplish, but first I will say something more about play.

How might play prefigure statehood? How can it represent and enact 'counter-state' practices – imaginatively refashioning institutional life in ways that counter the inequities, injustices and hierarchies associated with neoliberal states? Let me emphasise here that my focus is not on how states play, the typically agonistic competitive interactions between nations or politicians, for instance, or the ways states draw tacitly on role-play and fictional scenarios to support their goals (Aretxaga 2000). My focus is not on the use of games or gamification by policy-makers to make resourcing decisions more palatable to communities (e.g., Lerner 2014). I am also less concerned with play as ludic clowning. Much has been written on the use of clowning, humour and 'performative irony' (Tabako 2007: 24) to disorient and undercut state gravitas and power. Discussing democratisation movements in late 1980s Poland, Tomasz Tabako (2007: 23) describes how protestors deliberately treated 'what seems to be real' – such as a showdown with riot police – as if it were, in fact, 'a spectacle, a fiction, a play.' Instead, because my focus is on play as a means of reimagining statehood rather than critiquing it, I want to explore what playful simulation can offer in representing and experimenting with what could be.

One example of playful state fashioning concerns the 'pop-up' states formed when new people's republics are claimed. Playful assertions of seces-

sion may express opposition to government agendas, as in the declared People's Republic of Brighton & Hove in South England following the unexpected 2015 Conservative election victory. This started as a 'joke' (Vowles 2015), but quickly became a focus for popular local disquiet at the Tories' continuing austerity agenda. Pop up republics demonstrate forms of statehood in which many assumptions are up for grabs. While they can be hierarchical and undemocratic, they can also demonstrate counter-imitative forms of public governance, oriented around activist, horizontal, welfare-based projects.

The other examples of experimental simulation I want to mention are more politically fragmented; they involve simulating, in transformative progressive ways, institutional rather than state-based practices – a distinction I return to below. One is the 2015 'innovative civic engagement project' (Bryant 2015: 94), spearheaded by the London School of Economics, which aimed to 'crowdsource' a new People's Constitution. Rather than waiting for the British state to introduce a modern written constitution, the People's Constitution assumed for itself the job, producing a 'proper-looking' constitutional text that, in its finished form, prefigured governing principles for a secular, democratic, welfare republic (see, Gearty 2015). Also innovative was the process through which the text emerged. Central to the venture was the challenge of generating mass participation, reaching a new constitutional settlement through a heady mix of meetings and online engagement.

A parallel academic example concerns the jurisdiction-travelling Feminist Judgments Project in which feminist scholars, role-playing judges, re-wrote legal decisions (Hunter et al. 2010; Douglas et al. 2014). According to rules of play, judgments had to be based on knowledge and legal principles available at the time of the original decision. But, within these parameters, the aim was to explore how cases could have been decided differently if judges had adopted feminist forms of reasoning. Thus, the project simulated what the law could be like, with principles of care, equality and social justice underpinning or informing judicial decision-making.

A third example is that of local currency networks; imaginatively fashioned economic systems to develop local relations of trading and sociality, where money functions as a mode of communication and connection rather than as something to accumulate (North 2007). Punched into state economies and coinage, local currency networks are different to my other examples in one key respect; actualised rather than merely represented, they demonstrate the capacity of some playful activities to exceed the 'magic circle' in which many forms of play seem imprisoned.

Pop-up republics, crowd-sourced constitutions, feminist court judgments, local currencies – for the most part, these initiatives have not been interpreted as play; nevertheless, they demonstrate several core play features as Pat Kane (2004) describes in his discussion of the 'play ethic.' People participate voluntarily, motivated by the pleasures, challenges and satisfactions it is hoped the

venture will bring; projects are creative, interactive engagements with how things work; lines of action are tested and unsuccessful ones abandoned with minimal cost; and outcomes are evolving and open-ended. But while these features may seem positive ones, in supporting the development of new politically innovative ideas, I do not want to over-romanticise play. Play's experimental features mean it is not only progressive forces that make use of them. Corporations use 'serious play' in product development (Statler et al. 2011), while 'fun' and team activities are often calculated managerial techniques to generate enthusiasm, self-care, and motivation among employees performing routine, highly controlled work (e.g., Fleming, Sturdy 2009; see, also: Costea et al. 2007). More generally, play's reliance on rules can structure and constrain what is imaginable and able to be fashioned, while its focus on pleasure and simulation may seem to trivialise important political goals. Yet, despite these limits and constraints, play is an important means of practicing the imagination and putting the imagination into practice. In the context of a prefigurative politics, concerned with creating other possible worlds, including institutional ones, play opens up an experimental space, where practices can be trialled that could not yet be put into more 'concrete' effect.

I have suggested that representational play often involves replaying institutional practices as if they were otherwise. It would seem as if there is far less playful prefiguring of states. Is this a problem? Should the left try and suture counter-institutional practices, developed through play, together to prefigure what states could be? In conditions where a rich and steady flow of counter-institutions exists, created through – but not only through – play, the benefits of linking them together to form (simulated) counter-states is not obvious. In tune with the pluralist ethos of much radical thinking, it might arguably be better for projects to remain separate, relatively autonomous initiatives, not forced to assemble into cohesive formations – even simulated ones. Separation and autonomy cohere with an anarchist ethos, attentive to the risks of control and discipline that come from trying to unify diverse ventures. Of course, prefiguring states through play does not have to mean simulating sovereign-seeking monolithic bodies; states can be represented in play as plural and overlapping. However, whether it is better to sustain separate, independent counter-institutions or link them together, even in the 'pretend' world of play, raises important questions about the differences between states and more fragmented initiatives. If we imagine the People's Constitution linking to the Feminist Judgments Project, to new micro-nations, free universities, local currencies and other counter-institutional projects, might this bolster and strengthen the elements that come together, making them sturdier and more sustainable than they would be as free-standing initiatives? But if counter-institutions are to be joined up, even as simulated play, what forms could this take?

Conventionally, states are held together in cohesive formations through a mix of directives, laws, symbols, funds, advice, contracts, systems, expecta-

tions, personnel hierarchies and more. These articulations may be tight and coercive, loose and flexible or simultaneously both. What, then, might counter-articulations look like? Erik Olin Wright (2010) addresses this in his work on 'real utopias,' where he explores how linkages based on accountability and communication could connect local bodies with centralised governmental authorities. In grassroots radical politics, linkages of accountability and communication often entail meetings and federated bodies. But if decisions do not just precede institutional action but happen – explicitly or tacitly – in the course of it, what other kinds of horizontal, ethical linkages could be imagined and explored, including in conditions where prefiguration gestures to a far more rhizomatic state than liberal capitalist states are typically understood to be? Alongside re-thinking the part played by conventional modes of assemblage, and the contribution positive emotions and pleasures might make to connecting forms of action, there is also important room to *play* at developing alternative new forms of articulation – not to create static linkages (like building a new house) but as evolving connections performed and practiced at multiple scales. Or, to put it another way, if we understand power as the generation of effects (rather than as necessarily domination), playing at counter-state formations is also about playing with the creation of new kinds of power, as these generate effects across different (simulated) institutional fields.

Finally, I want to turn to the question of what state play can *do*. At one level, we can identify the efficacy and value of play in participants' learning, the opportunity to collaboratively explore and develop new ideas, benefiting from the fact that play can involve material things and spaces, but without the constraining 'real world' associations of other forms of action. As witnessed in the Feminist Judgments Project, the judicial decisions written both were and were not judgments. Imitative play poses an interestingly angled form of political power deserving of more attention. However, one problem with play as a way of putting prefigurative ideas into practice is what is left once the play is over. Beyond individual growth and social well-being, beyond stimulating the political imagination and providing a critical mirror, what can any particular kind of play leave behind? Experiments and simulations can plant seeds in participants carried by them into other settings. But, I am also interested in whether play can work in other more cultural or structural ways, ways that do not rely directly on the mediating work transformed participants perform.

Central to play, in many ways, is its apparent lack of performativity when it comes to bringing into being the effects it promises beyond its own created world. As Kcasey McLoughlin (2015: 604) remarked on the Australian Feminist Judgments Project:

While all judgment writing might well be fictional, the fictive feminist judge has more heavy lifting to do in having their claims taken seriously, perhaps because their reasons are not imbued with the trappings of judicial authority.

At the same time, it is hoped, play can change things. This aspiration was behind the international 'playable cities' initiative, spearheaded by the Watershed in Bristol, South England, to promote and develop less alienated relations between people and their urban environment (Playable City 2016). It also lay behind the prefiguring (or 'anticipatory representation') of the Palestinian state that Chiara de Cesari (2012) discusses. But does the Palestinian example demonstrate the practical limits of play and art – the inability of cultural initiatives to actually turn a contested state into a reality? Or should we read the experience differently, focusing less on a sequential calculation of success or failure and rather more on tracing effects in non-linear, centrifugal ways? Particularly when it comes to prefigurative forms of representation, such as 'crowdsourcing the constitution', what is at stake may be how and whether simulated counter-institutions or states 'tip over' to become something else. When one play is over, do projects get abandoned or do they become part of something new; do they contribute in unexpected ways to new actor-networks, and so take on a new kind of life?

## Conclusion

This essay was motivated by the desire to explore whether any common ground could be struck between contemporary anti-state radicals and others in relation to public forms of governance, so radical politics might detach itself from the sharp (and, I think, unfruitful) division between those who reject the state and those who give it some constructive political role. Central to this endeavour was the challenge of reconceptualising what it means to be a state; otherwise we risk working with a notion of the state that may pre-emptively rule out more progressive uses. But what would statehood have to mean for contemporary anti-state radicals to consider it? Can we imagine states without hierarchy and authority, horizontal and multiply scaled? Or, is it better to leave the language of statehood in abeyance, bracketing terminological divisions as we explore how we might govern ourselves, recognising that this might require organisational scales that cannot fit together like a federated, nested *matryoshka* doll, and that it may involve mediated relations and systemic practices as well as direct, spontaneous, and improvised ones?

In considering these questions, my discussion turned to the place of play in experimenting with what could be, recognising the considerable challenges involved in trying to fashion new forms of political assemblage (even ones played at). It seems hard enough to envisage and simulate new counter-institutions, without bringing them into relation with each other through new radical forms of state articulation. But even if counter-states can be simulated, what can they accomplish? The problem of performativity is a difficult issue for representational forms of play that create and inhabit worlds marked off from everyday institutional and social life. Yet, if play has promise as a register of

action in which other worlds are not simply imagined but also fashioned and sometimes built, we need new ways of thinking about what the building of alternative worlds, including through play, can do. And we need accounts which are not limited to inspired participants taking lessons learned through play into the 'real world,' but address the capacity for play's materials, creations and outputs (from feminist judgments to local currencies) to endure and re-act, even as they may change form and purpose in the course of being taken up, and taking part, in new performances.

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the feedback from the journal's anonymous referees, and to Alexander Kondakov. This essay is based on a talk given to the New Anarchist Research Group in London on 28th May 2016.

### References

- Aretxaga B. (2003) Maddening States. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 32: 393–410.
- Aretxaga B. (2000) Playing Terrorist: Ghastly Plots and the Ghostly State. *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 1(1): 43–58.
- Boggs C. (1977) Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control. *Radical America*, 11(6): 99–122.
- Brand U., Görg C., Wissen M. (2011) Second-Order Condensations of Societal Power Relations: Environmental Politics and the Internationalization of the State from a Neopoulantzian Perspective. *Antipode*, 43(1): 149–175.
- Bryant P. (2015) Disrupting How we 'do' On-line Learning through Social Media: A Case Study of the Crowdsourcing the UK Constitution Project. *The 14th European Conference on e-Learning*, 29–30 October, University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield.
- Carroll P. (2009) Articulating Theories of States and State Formation. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 22(4): 553–603.
- Cesari C.d. (2012) Anticipatory Representation: Building the Palestinian Nation (-State) through Artistic Performance. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 12(1): 82–100.
- Cooper D. (2014) *Everyday Utopias: The Conceptual Life of Promising Spaces*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Cooper D. (2015) Bringing the State up Conceptually: Forging a Body Politics through Anti-gay Christian Refusal. *Feminist Theory*, 16(1): 87–107.
- Cooper D. (2016a) Transformative State Publics. *New Political Science*, 38(3): 315–334.
- Cooper D. (2016b) Prefiguring the State. *Antipode*, forthcoming.

- Costea B., Crump N., Holm J. (2007) The Spectre of Dionysus: Play, Work, and Managerialism. *Society and Business Review*, 2(2): 153–165.
- Cumbers A. (2015) Constructing a Global Commons in, against and beyond the State. *Space and Polity*, 19(1): 62–75.
- Douglas H., Bartlett F., Luker T., Hunter R. (2014) *Australian Feminist Judgments: Righting and Rewriting Law*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Fleming P., Sturdy A. (2009) 'Just be Yourself!': Towards Neo-normative Control in Organisations. *Employee Relations*, 31(6): 569–583.
- Frenzel F. (2014) Exit the System? Anarchist Organisation in the British Climate Camps. *Ephemera*, 14(4): 901–921.
- Gearty C. (2015) The Constitution. *The London School of Economics and Political Science*. Available at: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/constitutionuk/theconstitution/> (accessed: 09 August 2016).
- Hay C. (2014) Neither Real nor Fictitious but 'as if Real'? A Political Ontology of the State. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 65(3): 459–480.
- Holloway J. (2010) *Crack Capitalism*, London: Pluto Press.
- Hunter R., McGlynn C., Rackley E. (2010) *Feminist Judgments: From Theory to Practice*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Kane P. (2005) *The Play Ethic: A Manifesto for a Different Way of Living*, London: Pan Macmillan.
- Lansley S., Goss S., Wolmar Ch. (1989) *Councils in Conflict: The Rise and Fall of the Municipal Left*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lerner J. A. (2014) *Making Democracy Fun: How Game Design Can Empower Citizens and Transform Politics*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Maeckelbergh M (2011) Doing is Believing: Prefiguration as Strategic Practice in the Alterglobalization Movement. *Social Movement Studies*, 10(1): 1–20.
- Martin D.G., Pierce J. (2013) Reconceptualizing Resistance: Residuals of the State and Democratic Radical Pluralism. *Antipode*, 45(1): 61–79.
- McLoughlin K. (2015) Judicial Fictions and the Fictive Feminists: Reimagination as Feminist Critique in *PGA v The Queen*. *Griffith Law Review*, 24(4): 592–615.
- Mitchell T. (1991) The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics. *The American Political Science Review*, 85(1): 77–96.
- Murray D. (2014) Prefiguration or Actualization? Radical Democracy and Counter-Institution in the Occupy Movement. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, available at: <https://clck.ru/A4LoJ> (accessed: 09 August 2016).
- Newman J. (2012) *Working the Spaces of Power: Activism, Neoliberalism and Gendered Labour*, London: Bloomsbury.

Newman S. (2001) War on the State: Stirner and Deleuze's Anarchism. *Anarchist Studies*, 9(2): 147–164.

Newman S. (2016) *Postanarchism*, Cambridge: Polity.

Painter J. (2006) Prosaic Geographies of Stateness. *Political Geography*, (25): 752–774.

Painter J. (2010) Rethinking Territory. *Antipode*, 42(5): 1090–1118.

Playable City (2016) *Home Page*. Available at: <https://www.playablecity.com/> (accessed: 09 August 2016).

North P. (2007) *Money and Liberation: The Micropolitics of Alternative Currency Movements*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Scott J.C. (2014) *The Art of not being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland South-east Asia*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Springer S. (2012) Anarchism! What Geography still Ought to Be. *Antipode*, 44(5): 1605–1624.

Statler M., Heracleous L., Jacobs C.D. (2011) Serious Play as a Practice of Paradox. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 47(2): 236–256.

Tabako T. (2007) Irony as a Pro-Democracy Trope: Europe's Last Comic Revolution. *Controversia*, 5(2): 23–53.

Vowles N. (2015) 'Joke' People's Republic of Brighton and Hove Group takes Off. *The Argus*, available at: <https://clck.ru/A4Lfc> (accessed: 09 August 2016).

Wright E. O. (2010) *Envisioning Real Utopias*, London: Verso.

Yates L. (2015) Rethinking Prefiguration: Alternatives, Micropolitics and Goals in Social Movements. *Social Movement Studies*, 14(1): 1–21.