TRANSFORMATIVE STATE PUBLICS

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Biographical Details

Davina Cooper is Professor of Law & Political Theory at the University of Kent (UK). Her academic work focuses on the conceptual dimensions of transformative politics. Her most recent book, *Everyday Utopias: The Conceptual Life of Promising Spaces* (Duke 2014), explores the generative qualities of experimental progressive spaces for developing new conceptual imaginaries. Her current work takes up this methodology while revisiting the state. Earlier books include *Sexing the City* (1994), *Power in Struggle* (1995), *Governing out of Order* (1998), and *Challenging Diversity* (2004). In the 1980s, she was an elected member of a radical London authority.

Abstract

Against the conventional assumption that publics, and particularly radical publics, are outside the state, this article explores their mutual combination and entanglement in order to consider how states might contribute to progressive politics. At the heart of this account is a concept of the state that incorporates the dissident and fleeting, and a conception of transformative publics based on four modalities: prefigurative, improper, liberatory and unconditional. Transformative publics can be found within state formations; they also combine with them to produce new political governance relations. To develop this argument, the article focuses on two kinds of publics: those involving compelled state actors, such as school children and prisoners; and those, such as protest camps, taking shape through grass-roots political action.

Keywords

Counter-publics, public sphere, radical political theory, activism, state theory, political concepts

TRANSFORMATIVE STATE PUBLICS[1]

[A]ny conception of the public sphere that requires a sharp separation between (associational) civil society and the state will be unable to imagine the forms of self-management, inter-public coordination, and political accountability that are essential to a democratic and egalitarian society.[2]

Introduction

This article addresses the conceptual relationship between progressive publics and the state. Focusing on neo-liberal democratic states in the global north,[3] it aims to explore this relationship in ways that foreground the state's relevance for a transformative left politics - a politics attuned to the substantial changes required to support greater equality, ecology, relations of care, public responsibility and participatory governance. The article's core move is to treat the relationship between state formations and progressive publics as deeply entangled and mutually constitutive. This is a move at odds with much scholarship on publics

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[1] My thanks to Didi Herman, Nick Mahony, the anonymous referees, and journal editors, Jocelyn Boryczka and Jennifer Leigh Disney, for their very helpful feedback and advice on early drafts.

[2] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", *Social Text*, 25/ 26 (1990) pp. 56-80 at p. 76.

[3] My focus, in particular, is Britain, the USA, and Canada, although I also draw on discussions relating to other jurisdictions.

and the public sphere, which typically stresses the distinction, and relationship of externality, between publics of all kinds and the state.[4]

In her seminal work on subaltern counter-publics, Nancy Fraser argues that publics are usually associated with opinion formation and discussion within civil society.[5] For Fraser, non-state publics which aim to "mediate between 'society' and the state by holding the state accountable" are weak publics; strong publics, by contrast, involve decision-making as well as opinion forming, and strong publics can include state publics. Yet, while Fraser recognises the possibility of state-based publics, her conception of the state narrows the kind of publics so imagined to parliamentary and similar decision-making bodies. In this article, I want to explore how else we might think about this relationship. Thus, the article contributes to three academic conversations which it also combines: how to identify the parts that make up states; conceptualising progressive publics; and exploring how publics and state interrelate. In relation to the first, the article argues for a conceptual framework that treats dissident and fleeting interactions, forces, and encounters as part of state formations; in relation to conceptualising progressive publics, this article moves away from the language of counter-publics to focus instead on four different kinds of transformative public register; and in relation to how progressive publics and state engage, this article foregrounds their fusion, attachment, and incorporation rather than their separation.

The reason for these conceptual moves lies in the state's importance for a progressive transformative politics. In the global north, left-wing critiques of the state from Marxist, anarchist, feminist, queer, and postcolonial perspectives are extensive and hard-hitting.

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[4] See for instance, Michael Warner, *Publics and Counter-publics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

[5] Fraser, *ibid*, p. 75.

Modern states are criticised for their repressive, coercive, regulatory, functional, and extractive practices, particularly in relation to penal policy, workfare, market enhancements, welfare, privatisation, and coercive-military engagements.[6] While some work critically responds to particular state developments and policies, an important current in critical work treats capitalist states or, indeed, *all* states as inherently oppressive.[7] But not all critical and progressive work "writes off" the state.[8] While this article is attuned to the concerns of anti-state scholarship, it also shares an anxiety that politically abandoning the concept of the state risks withdrawing important organisational scales for planning, redistribution, and decision-making; assumes a clear division between state and non-state practices and politics; and gives up the state to elite and dominant forces; leaving progressive constituencies with a set of "less than the state" institutions. But holding on to the state does not mean holding on to a particular apparatus, institutional structure, set of functions, or even scale. First, as different

[6] See for instance Bob Jessop, "The 'Return' of the National State in the Current Crisis of the World Market," *Capital & Class*, 34:1 (2010), pp. 38-43; Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (2012) *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York, NY: Knopf Doubleday, 2012); Loïc Wacquant, "Crafting the Neoliberal State: Workfare, Prisonfare, and Social Insecurity," *Sociological Forum* 25: 2 (2010) pp. 197-220; Keith Woodward, and Mario Bruzzone, "Touching Like a State", *Antipode* 47: 2, (2015) pp. 539-556.

[7] E.g., Saul Newman, "War on the State: Stirner's and Deleuze's Anarchism," *Anarchist Studies* 9:2 (2001) pp. 147-164.

[8] E.g., Deborah Martin and Joseph Pierce, "Reconceptualizing Resistance: Residuals of the State and Democratic Pluralism", *Antipode* 45:1 (2013) pp. 61-79; Janet Newman and John Clarke, "States of Imagination", in Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin (eds) *After Neoliberalism? The Kilburn Manifesto* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2015).

writers have explored, the structures, systems, and functions of the state can be revised in more progressive ways.[9] Second, what can also be revised are our conceptions of what it means to be a state: specifically, what states do, what makes them up, and how they interface other aspects of the social.

Contemporary scholarship approaches the state conceptually in ways too varied and extensive to set out fully here. Academics diverge on whether the state is an actor, organisation, structure, field, intangible effect, or idea; on its functions and role; on the degree, character, and conditions of its autonomy or boundedness; and on its power, composition, ethos, and modalities of change. The scale of divergence between treating the state as institutional machinery, an organic formation encompassing civil society, and a relation between classes reveals the state's conceptual plasticity as well as the political stakes in how it is framed. This is not just a scholarly dilemma. Material effects follow from how states are imagined by officials, politicians, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and others,[10] as the recent development of neoliberal statehood reveals - a political-economic project firmly embedded in, and supported by, competitive marketized conceptions of what states should and could become.[11]

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[9] E.g., Erik Olin Wright *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London: Verso, 2010).

[10] E.g., Nick Gill "Tracing Imaginations of the State: The Spatial Consequences of Different State Concepts among Asylum Activist Organisations," *Antipode*, 42:5 (2010) pp. 1048-1070; for a different geopolitical context, see Shu-Yuan Yang, "Imagining the State: An Ethnographic Study," *Ethnography* 6:4 (2005) 487-516.

[11] E.g., Philip Cerny "Paradoxes of the competition state: the dynamics of political globalization," *Government and Opposition* 32:2 (1997), pp. 251-274.

In their work on the economy, JK Gibson-Graham set out to think differently about its present forms.[12] Instead of imagining an ideal or socially transformed *future* economy, Gibson-Graham reimagine the economy *as it is*. Their depiction of contemporary economic relations provides a purposive challenge to the "naturalized dominance of the capitalist economy" as they seek to "make a space for new economic becomings". This article takes a similar approach. It seeks to reimagine the state *as it is*, challenging the assumption that the state is only made up of *dominant* interests, beliefs, systems, logics and practices. It aims to support progressive state thinking by foregrounding the state's *dissident* and *transient* parts. While from a global perspective, some progressive initiatives and policies seem to be driven by centralised, unified states asserting their will, this seems less evident in contemporary neo-liberal democratic states of the north. Here, progressive developments frequently appear as fleeting, oppositional activities in the interstices of dominant state practice.

Approaching the state in ways that recognise dissenting, minority beliefs, values, interests, and forces as part of what composes it, of course, does not mean dissent is inevitably left-wing. There are many instances of conservative dissident state action - not least those early 21st century state registrars who refuse to marry gay couples.[13] Publics, as I discuss, can also take a conservative form, legitimising and entrenching authoritarian, hierarchical, and exclusionary state practices. However, the dissident publics addressed in this article, namely those which seek to transform social and political practice in progressive ways, are vitally important in rendering states relevant to the left through their emphasis on

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[12] J.K. Gibson-Graham, The End of Capitalism (as We Knew it): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 2006 [1996]), p. xii.

[13] Davina Cooper, "Bringing the State up Conceptually: Forging a Body Politics through Anti-Gay Christian Refusal", *Feminist Theory* 16:1 (2015), pp. 87-107.

the commons, liberation, and collectively held public responsibilities. In this way, publics

provide a counterpoint to the increasing entanglements and alignments between liberal post-

industrial states and commercial interests, something Bonnie Honig also explores in her work

on "public things" as objects of democratic desires and affections.[14]

Publics provide a counterpoint to the assumption that people's desires and affections

are exclusively embedded in individuated lives and choices. This does not mean extrapolating

a universal common good from differentiated interests, a process that tends to reinforce

already hegemonic norms. The phrase publics rather than public or public sphere emphasises

plurality as Squires's work on black publics explores.[15] But plurality also does not have to

mean group-segmented *interests*.[16] What the concept of publics, as developed here, offers, is

a way of framing concerns and political projects, from sexual liberation to "no borders"

migration, as matters of *public* concern and interest. But why treat such publics as parts of, or

as intimately connected to, the state? Publics may emphasise the collective, open-ended

character of concern-driven social action, but what is gained by suturing publics to the state?

In the face of the counter-claim that the political value of publics, and particularly

radical publics, comes from their independence and state-distance, I want to propose three

reasons for foregrounding a state nexus.[17] First, it illuminates the networks that form around

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[14] Bonnie Honig, "Public Things: Jonathan Lear's *Radical Hope*, Lars von Trier's

Melancholia, and the Democratic Need," *Political Research Quarterly* on-line (2015).

[15] Catherine Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for

Multiple Public Spheres," *Communication Theory*, 12:4 (2002) pp. 446-468.

[16] E.g., see Fraser, *ibid*.

[17] Asserting a division between publics and state also risks creating political and affective

polarities – not simply between the terrains of state and community grass-roots (or civil

progressive or dissident policy ideas *within* state formations.[18] This claim echoes Samuel

Chambers' approach to the work of radical political theorist Jacques Rancière.[19] Against

interpretations of Rancière which divide institutional order from democratic politics,

Chambers interprets Rancière to suggest that politics - the disruptive and challenging

assertions made by the excluded in equality's name –is always entangled with the "police"

order rather than separate from it. Focusing on state publics then provides a way of tracing

the ebb and flow - the transformations, silences, and erasures - that shape radical politics, as

dissident political currents weave through everyday institutional "police" life. Second, tying

transformative publics to the state highlights how progressive and dissident action takes up

and draws upon state-generated statuses, access, and resources. Reading such action as

resistance, necessarily located outside centres of power,[20] can obscure and attenuate the

power that subordinate forces can and do make use of through their state location – whether

as street-level workers, school students, or prisoners. Third, recognising the state-shaped

character of social life makes it possible to explore the complex ways state and other

(including grass-roots) governance logics and processes combine rather than assuming they

meet as discrete independent forces. I return to these claims in the third section of the paper

society), but between those values, rationalities and modes of organising, which get mapped

onto the state/ community distinction, eg see Saul Newman, 2001), *ibid*.

[18] See Janet Newman, *Working the Spaces of Power: Activism, Neoliberalism and Gendered Labour* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), where she discusses feminist activist trajectories across different state and community institutional spaces.

[19] Samuel Chambers "Jacques Rancière and the Problem of Pure Politics," *European Journal of Political Theory* 10:3 (2011)pp. 303-326.

[20] John Holloway, *Changing the World without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

which explores how transformative publics connect to the state. However, before doing so, I want to briefly situate my approach to the state, and then turn to transformative publics.

States and Their Parts

For many critical scholars, state formations in the global north represent historically evolving institutional structures anchored in prevailing social interests and logics, most notably capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. While much of this work remains with large abstract categories, a different contemporary current, drawing on assemblage theory, has sought to trace how the imbrications between political governance and dominant social relations operate at a higher analytical magnification. For my purposes here, what an assemblage approach usefully contributes is a way of understanding the diverse elements that make up contemporary and historical states – from practices, systems, buildings, computers and budgetary statements to laws, personnel, recipients, feelings, utterances, and sounds. While assemblage-based writing on states (or political rule) draws on different genealogies (including that of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari),[21] one influential line comes from Actor-Network Theory (ANT), a methodological framework that focuses on how networks made up of diverse "actants" (elements that contribute to action through being part of an actor-network) get built, maintain themselves, and fall apart.[22] This article does not take up and

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[21] Martin Müller, "Assemblages and Actor-Networks: Rethinking Socio-Material Power, Politics and Space," *Geography Compass* 9:1 (2015) pp. 27-41; Jason Dittmer, "Geopolitical Assemblages and complexity," *Progress in Human Geography*, 38:3 (2014) 385-401; see also Tania Murray Li, "Practices of Assemblage and Community Forest Management", *Economy and Society* 36:2 (2007) 263-293.

[22] On ANT see for instance, Michel Callon, "The Sociology of an Actor-Network: The Case of the Electric Vehicle", in Michel Callon et al., (eds) *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and*

apply ANT; nevertheless ANT-influenced state scholarship is helpful here. According to

Passoth and Rowland, "seeing the state as a network offers a process-oriented view of

political institutions and political structures, which explicitly challenges the conceptual

apparatus through which the state can be thought of as a monolithic actor. Rather than seeing

the state as a stable and static political entity, the network approach sees statehood as a much

more contingent and unstable process of governance."[23] Other state literatures also focus on

process, change, and instability; however, treating the state as an assemblage foregrounds the

work involved in creating linkages and connections as political projects bring new elements

into the network and eliminate (or abandon) others.[24] Assemblage approaches foreground

composition. Denaturalising taken-for-granted notions of what is part of the state network

(and what is not), assemblage readings highlight unexpected, heterogeneous and changing

state parts. But in making room for these unexpected state parts, an assemblage approach also

generates some vexing questions: what makes a network a *state* network; when is it the *state*

rather than something else being performed? If dissident forces "act", when do their actions

count as *state* action? These questions cannot be resolved empirically; they depend on how

the state is conceptually framed: whether it is defined primarily by its historically evolving

functions, by its form, purpose, or in some other way - for instance, in terms of how it is

recognised, spoken for or hailed.

Technology (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 19-34; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social:*
An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory (Oxford: OUP).

[23] Jan-Hendrik Passoth and Nicholas Rowland, "Actor-Network State: Integrating Actor-
Network Theory and State Theory," *International Sociology* 25: 6 (2010) pp. 818-841.

[24] John Allen, "Powerful Assemblages?"*Area* 43:2 (2011) pp. 154-157; Patrick Carroll
"Articulating Theories of States and State Formation," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 22:4
(2009) pp. 553-603.

Conflicts over definition, which of course extend to conflicts over how to identify

which particular forms, functions, and effects are *state* ones, come to a head in relation to the

capacity of gendered, racialized capitalist states to advance subordinate interests, a subject of

intense debate amongst left-leaning scholars and activists.[25] Can states act in ways that are

genuinely progressive, or are such actions necessarily temporary and expedient – intended to

mask or legitimate the state's "real" interests and agendas? How this is answered depends on

how the conceptual contours of stateness are drawn. In this article, exploring how states

might contribute to progressive politics, I work from the premise that states, as political

governance formations, condense the social relations of their environment, and this includes

the conflicts and challenges present there also. In other words, progressive and dissident

agendas and forces exist within states, even if they are usually overruled or squashed. But do

such forces merely function *within* states or are they also *part* of states?

Passoth and Rowland argue that states should be approached not as "containers for

political action, but registers of political actors, networks and actions."[26] Thus, instead of

assuming radical forces operate either outside the state or on its terrain, it may prove more

productive sometimes to identify such forces (with their beliefs, values, actions and ethos) as

state parts - challenging a depiction of the state as "an inert structure that somehow stands

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[25] See for example Johanna Kantola, *Feminists Theorize the State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave

Macmillan, 2006); Piven and Cloward *ibid*; Axel Van den Berg, *The Immanent Utopia: From

Marxism on the State to the State of Marxism* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers,

1988); Sophie Watson (ed) *Playing the State* (London: Verso, 1990).

[26] Passoth and Rowland, *ibid*, p. 832.

apart from individuals, precedes them, and contains and gives a framework to their lives."[27] But does this mean everything is part of the state? According to Patrick Carroll, "every aspect of the built environment, from the sewer trap under every kitchen sink to the roofs over our heads… … can be seen… to constitute the reality of the state".[28] Joe Painter explores how states are symbolically present, and constituted through, a huge variety of everyday practices and mechanisms[29] that might include passports, drivers' licenses, and manufactured goods as well as border crossings, witnessing a crime or participating in a contract. But locating state presence within everyday life does not mean states necessarily saturate, monopolise, and dominate social practice. Social forces and things can be parts or carriers of state formations when they participate in processes of political governance, while still participating (including simultaneously) in other kinds of action. States also contribute to diverse actor-networks – from the regional assemblages Allen and Cochrane discuss, with their mix of elements from state, agency, and business systems,[30] to the "mash-ups" of state and grassroots governance addressed at the end of this article.

Transformative Publics

If states can be usefully thought of as political governance formations composed of different elements, including dissident and less powerful agendas, forces and discourses (even as being part of a state shapes those elements in turn), then publics might be understood as forming

[27] Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics," *American Political Science Review* 85:1 (1991) pp. 77-96, at p 94.

[28] Carroll, ibid, p. 591.

[29] Joe Painter, "Prosaic Geographies of Stateness", *Political Geography* 25 (2006) 752-774.

[30] John Allen and Alan Cochrane, "Assemblages of State Power: Topological Shifts in the Organization of Government and Politics," *Antipode* 42:5 (2010) 1071-1089; Allen, *ibid*.

state parts, but what kinds of publics would these be? The concept of publics is heavily

indebted to Habermasian work on the public sphere, and to the counter-public literature that

developed after Nancy Fraser's ground-breaking 1990 article. Michael Warner's work has

also been particularly influential here.[31] For Warner, (counter) publics are open, self-

organised spaces that exist by being addressed. Clive Barnett draws on Warner's writing to

describe publics as "circulatory space[s] of address, constituted through relationships of

attention between subjects who approach each other as strangers."[32] Although I treat publics

here as socio-cultural *peopled* formations rather than relations of address or attention, these

discursive ways of thinking about publics are helpful. They emphasise the emergent character

of publics in contrast to an approach which treats publics as "expressions of pre-existing

interests, issues and identities";[33] and they foreground the *constitutive* work being "hailed" as

public performs.

Whether publics are understood as spaces of relational address or peopled formations,

what is central to their emergence are the differently scaled anxieties and issues around which

they form.[34] Publics are often hailed or summoned by governments, particularly when crises

or emergencies are declared.[35] Then governments speak in the public's name, drawing on

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[31] Warner, *ibid*.

[32] Clive Barnett, "Convening Publics: The Parasitical Spaces of Public Action", In Kevin Cox

et al., (eds.) *Sage Handbook of Political Geography* (London: Sage, 2008), p. 408.

[33] See Nick Mahony et al., *Rethinking the Public: Innovations in Research, Theory and

Politics* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2010), p.8.

[34] Nick Mahony and John Clarke, "Public Crises, Public Futures," *Cultural Studies* 27:6

(2013) pp. 933-954.

[35] Ibid.

"common concerns" to legitimate political action, whether it is going to war or reforming public services. "Domesticated" publics can also be summoned as service "users",[36] or through new consultative structures which make certain forms of voice possible.[37] But more important, for this article, are those instances when publics take on a less obedient shape. For instance, governmental address against immigration or for war becomes reversed by those who, also speaking in the public name, challenge its presumed terms. Transformative or dissident publics can also arise in less reactive ways. Nick Mahony and John Clarke comment: "Here publics are neither spoken of, nor for: rather they have to 'come to voice', become embodied, generate the material and infrastructural conditions of their existence and find ways of expressing and enacting themselves."[38]

Not all summoned publics materialise, but when they do materialise, publics do things.[39] Liberal public sphere scholarship focuses on such activities as reading, discussing, and opinion-forming, but publics also engage in other activities, from policy creation to setting up protest camps, stopping deportations and cultivating alternative life-worlds. In this sense, as Warner remarks on counter-publics,[40] publics don't simply reflect (upon) the social relations that exist, they also act to create new relations and cultures. An important dimension

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[36] Janet Newman, "Re-mapping the Public: Public Libraries and the Public Sphere," *Cultural Studies* 21:6 (2007) 887-909.

[37] Barnes et al., "Constituting 'the Public' in Public Participation," *Public Administration* 81: 2 (2003) pp. 379-399; Janet Newman and John Clarke, *Publics, Politics & Power* (London: Sage, 2009), p. 151.

[38] Mahony and Clarke, *ibid*, p. 948.

[39] Newman and Clarke, *ibid*, p. 12.

[40] Warner, *ibid*.

of this, routinely neglected when publics are tied to rational discourse, is the sensory. Publics may engage in speech and speech-based forms of protest; but, as socio-cultural formations, they also respond and act in other ways, including through desiring, feeling, touching and tasting. This sensory dimension becomes important in the discussion that follows, which focuses on four different kinds of *transformative* publics: un/conditional, improper, liberatory, and prefigurative. Although overlapping in practice, these registers offer different approaches to the question of radical publicness.

1.   Un/conditional publics

In addressing the challenge of how to imagine publicness beyond its currently limited terms, Derrida's work on the un/conditional provides one useful path. In his later writings, Derrida addressed a series of concepts, including the gift, apology, justice, and hospitality to explore an unconditional, more utopian version of these concepts, as well as how such versions related to their more conditional counterparts.[41] Unconditional forgiveness, for instance might signal a willingness to forgive the unforgiveable; an unconditional gift depends on nothing being sought in return. Unconditional hospitality is one offered to an unlimited number of unknown others to an unlimited extent. Unconditional forms, as Derrida notes, are self-contradictory; impossible to know and impossible to achieve,[42] even as their provisional elaboration gestures to something fundamental and forceful in how these concepts, as put-

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[41]   See for instance Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority," in Drucilla Cornell and Michael Rosenfeld (eds) *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (New York: Routledge, 1992) pp. 3-67; Jacques Derrida *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992; trans. Peggy Kamuf); Jacques Derrida, "A discussion with Jacques Derrida," *Theory & Event*, 5:1 (2001) online.

[42] Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality," *Angelaki* 5:3 (2000) 3-18.

into-practice *normative* concepts, operate.[43] According to Derrida, the unconditional requires the conditional to avoid being "abstract, utopian, illusory."[44] At the same time, everyday practices of gifting, forgiveness, and hospitality take the unconditional form as a standard, aspiration, or critical compass.[45] In relation to hospitality, Derrida writes: "conditional laws would cease to be laws of hospitality if they were not guided, given inspiration, required, even, by the law of unconditional hospitality".[46]

In relation to normative *publics*, the conditional form is only too apparent, whether in the historically exclusionary, typically masculine, white bourgeois public sphere,[47] or in the contemporary form of neoliberal governmental address (with all its gendered, racialized, and class-saturated implications). Today, in countries like Britain, normative publics are typically hailed (whether explicitly or tacitly) as proprietary and interest-bearing, responsible and behaved, loyal and attached.[48] In other words, normative publics are assumed and are addressed as being paradigmatic liberal collective subjects – moderate, self-actualising, disciplined, connected to their past, oriented to their future, "right" thinking. They are not crowds, hooligans, terrorists or radicals. But if this is the form conditional publics take

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[43] Derrida, *ibid*, 2001.

[44] Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle *Of Hospitality* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) p. 79.

[45] See also Paul Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010) pp. 45-51.

[46] Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *ibid*, p. 79.

[47] Fraser, *ibid*; Joan Landes *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); Squires, *ibid*.

[48] See also Mahony and Clarke, *ibid*.

(particularly those governmentally addressed), what might *unconditional* publics look like?[49]

The unconditional, it would seem, suggests a public of indefinitely extended openness, transparency and impersonality in terms of membership, concerns, values, geographies, scales and modes of operating, where those included in an address are not just members of a group, neighbourhood or nation. An unconditional public would extend, globally, and include diverse life-forms (non-living forms perhaps also).[50] As Marres and Lezaun comment, in their discussion of "the role of material objects in the organization of publics"; this would imply "a move 'beyond the human', a broadening of the range of entities that ought to be considered relevant to the fabric of political communities."[51] An unconditional public *address* would, it seems, be impersonal, inclusive and equally summoning; it would reach beyond particular activities, such as reading or discussing, and would embrace an infinitely extended agenda or set of issues.

Imagined as such, an unconditional form of public subsumes everything leaving nothing private, intimate, differentiated or part of a bounded life-sphere from which some people, issues, flows and things are excluded (or decentred); and in these terms it is clearly unrealisable. In part, this is because the concept of public depends on a relationship to that

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[49] Certainly, not all the elements that go to make up publics can be thought of in conditional/ unconditional terms. Some qualitative dimensions seem unable to be sensibly converted into a public paradigm based on conditions, role expectations, limits and their infinite extension, breach or unravelling. However, other dimensions of publicness can be approached as signalling (and so as capable of being imagined beyond) specific limits.

[50] Derrida, 2001, *ibid*, para 43.

[51] Noortje Marres and Javier Lezaun, "Materials and Devices of the Public: An Introduction," *Economy and Society* 40:4 (2011) pp. 489-509, at p. 493.

which remains private, partial, closed and intimate. It is also because equating publicness with universality (rather than multiplicity) ignores the hugely asymmetrical conditions that different constituencies face in taking part in public life as well as the culturally specific norms and character evident in an actual public's substance and style.[52] But infinite publicness, as an absence of differentiation and character in the nature of address, also appears neither desirable nor effective.[53] As feminists and queer scholars have argued, and argued over (disagreeing on how the distinction and boundaries between public and private should be drawn), not only do the *terms* of public participation need to change rather than just get extended, but intimacy, partiality, domesticity and differentiation are necessary, positive qualities. In his interesting account of city publics, Kurt Iveson asks how would it be possible to sustain a "cruising counterpublic sphere" if participants could not differentiate between interested, indifferent and hostile strangers?[54]

At the same time, Derrida's approach is helpful for thinking about transformative publics. Focusing on the conditional/ unconditional relationship underscores the aspirational dimension of many publics, their orientation towards change, and the way any public address or formation is subject to assessment and review through the normative terms publicness

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[52] Fraser, *ibid*, p. 64.

[53] See Pheng Cheah, "Hospitality and Alienation" in Thomas Claviez (ed). *The Conditions of Hospitality: Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics on the Threshhold of the Possible* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2013) pp. 57-80, where he explores the problems of a Derridean notion of unconditional hospitality when applied to capital flows rather than to people. Radical conceptual imaginations, Cheah suggests, require some kinds of closure (p. 79).

[54] Kurt Iveson*, Publics and the City* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2007).

makes available. In this latter vein, Marian Barnes and colleagues critically discuss several British state participatory initiatives, exploring their failings as a result of the exclusionary and asymmetrical terms established for public involvement, the marginalisation of counter-public voices, and the preference given to "notions of a general public interest".[55] Falling short of the unconditional is not just a failing of government. However, explicit attempts to establish more open, inclusive public formations, *against* governmental limits, can be seen in political movements to support asylum-seekers and those left vulnerable by immigration laws. Several scholars have taken up and developed Derrida's account of un/conditional hospitality to explore, critically and aspirationally, what refuge does and could mean.[56] What public as a concept adds here is an attention to how the "we" is framed. Instead of the host/ guest dynamic, "public" foregrounds political community, with its attentions and concerns. Challenging the very limited formulation of a domestic public of legally documented citizens, radical migration politics, such as the "no borders" movement or Sans-Papiers activism in Paris, posit a transformative public "we".[57] This is a "we" defined by presence, by historical

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[55] Barnes et al., *ibid, p. 396.*

[56] See for instance, Jonathan Darling, "Becoming Bare Life: Asylum, Hospitality, and the Politics of Encampment," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27:4 (2009) pp. 649-665; Mustafa Dikeç, "*Pera Peras Poros*: Longings for Spaces of Hospitality," *Theory, Culture & Society* 19:1-2 (2002) pp. 227-247.

[57] Bridget Anderson et al., "Editorial: Why No Borders?", *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 26:2 (2009) online ; Anne McNevin, "Political Belonging in a Neoliberal Era: The Struggle of the Sans-Papiers," *Citizenship Studies* 10: 2 (2006) pp. 135-151; William Walters, "No Border: Games With (out) Frontiers," *Social Justice,* 33:1 (2006) pp. 21-39

rights to recognition and compensation as colonial subjects, and by the politically ambitious transnational norm of a borderless *right* to move and settle.[58]

2.   Improper publics

Approached as an un/conditional concept, "publics" pushes up against the paradox of its limits; the notion of *improper* publics takes a different direction. Indeed, improper publics may involve not so much *accentuating* public norms of openness, transparency and inclusion, as bringing what are deemed to be private or intimate norms and conduct into visible public spaces. Feminist politics often invokes this kind of strategy, developing political actions that bring women's bodily discharges (or notice of them) from menstrual blood to breast milk into legislative assemblies, streets, shops, and restaurants.[59] Queer counter-publics also make "improper" forms of sexuality and gender publicly visible, whether it is non-normative sexual bodies, erotic encounters, the "political vomiting" Sandra Jeppesen evocatively describes,[60] or the presence of queer venues on public city streets.[61] In their work on "social flesh", Chris Beasley and Carol Bacchi explore the complex interrelationship between bodies and sociality, "grasping simultaneously the sociality of flesh and the physicality of social life'.[62] Improper

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[58] *Ibid.*

[59]   For instance see Alison Bartlett, "Scandalous Practices and Political Performances: Breastfeeding in the City," *Continuum* 16:1 (2002) pp. 111-121; Kate Boyer, "'The way to Break the Taboo is to do the Taboo Thing': Breastfeeding in Public and Citizen-Activism in the UK", *Health & Place* 17:2 (2011) pp. 430-437.

[60] Sandra Jeppesen, "Queer Anarchist Autonomous Zones and Publics: Direct Action Vomiting against Homonormative Consumerism," *Sexualities* 13:4 (2010) pp. 463-478.

[61] Warner, *ibid*, pp.62-63.

[62]   Chris Beasley, and Carol Bacchi, "Making Politics Feshly: The Ethic of Social Flesh," in Angelique Bletsas and Chris Beasley (eds) *Engaging with Carol Bacchi: Strategic*

publics foreground a similar move. Repudiating the social imperative to hide, for instance, women's lactating or menstruating bodies, improper publics assert an *embodied* materiality with all its odours, sights, clots and fluids, destabilising that tendency which understands and prefers publics to function as intangible formations exclusively composed of circulating discourses. Bringing physicality in recognises that bodies act politically *through* relations of touch, sight and smell, even when they are reading, listening, and speaking.[63]

Interventions and Exchanges (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2012) pp. 99-120, p. 105.

[63] For a nice example of this, see the following item on a nudist community meeting attended by local politicians standing for electoral office; see 'Town holds clothing-optional political debate', http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1795229/posts. While words, opinions and arguments circulate as at any other husting (where competing candidates speak and present themselves to voters), the proximity of naked bodies - both to each other and to the dressed town council candidates attending - suggests a supplementary form of public relationship. It is not a sexual public (even as it may provoke some to think about sexual publics). At the same time, an "improper" mingling of bodies and political speech is invoked, as the (imagined) dermal meeting of those sitting side by side touches and unsettles the rhetorical register in which political canvassing occurs; see also Davina Cooper, *Everyday Utopias: The Conceptual Life of Promising Spaces* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), ch. 4. What a nudist husting also unsettles are conventional democratic norms, as electoral involvement, and so responsibility for the commons, is linked to a public constituted in defiance of colonial rules of "civilised" dress; see also Irene Watson, "Naked Peoples: Rules and Regulations," *Law Text Culture* 4:1 (1998) pp. 1-17.

Improper publics bring what should be concealed to the surface. But their subversive authority lies also in the complex and particular character of self-interpellation as a *public* rather than, say, an interest group. As Newman and Clarke write, "the combinations of things, sites, people, ideas and the rest are not permanently or intrinsically public: their construction as public matters involves political struggles to make them so."[64] In the case of prisoners, for instance, being addressed or self-addressed as a public challenges the idea of prisoners as foremost legitimate *objects* of other publics' scrutiny and judgment. Prisoner publics may emerge through concerns with prison conditions, but, importantly, they aren't restricted to this terrain. Discussing Martin Luther King, Jr., Houston Baker alludes to the "black public sphere of the jail", as custodial sites became places where racism, oppression, and liberation from white domination and exploitation were addressed.[65] Stephen Hartnett and colleagues describe how prisoner writing projects enable prisoners "to think of themselves as members of the world, as engaged citizens with public voices… whose words mingle in the international sphere of infinite linking," while "bearing witness" also to prison cruelties, most starkly on death row.[66]

Prisoner publics challenge the assumption that prisoners have forfeited the right to act as a public – an assumption powerfully encoded in laws and policies that deny prisoners (and

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[64] Newman and Clarke, 2009, *ibid*, p. 2.

[65] Houston Baker, Jr., "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," *Public Culture* 7:1 (1994) pp. 3-33, at p. 15.

[66] Stephen Hartnett et al., 'Turning Silence into Speech and Action: Prison Activism and the Pedagogy of Empowered Citizenship', *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 8:4 (2011) pp. 331-352, at pp. 336, 345-7.

in some jurisdictions ex-prisoners also) the vote.[67] In this sense, prisoner publics are improper

for refusing to accept that the terms of penalty include being shut-away and discounted.

Prisoner publics also improperly exceed two other normative assumptions. First, that the

impoverished and stigmatised conditions of custodial existence mean prisoners are

emotionally, socially, and institutionally incapable of expressing and acting upon shared

concerns, particularly concerns beyond their own situated imprisonment. Second, that

prisoner concerns and interests are *only* of interest to prisoners, that they are a private matter

in contrast to prisoners' status as properly public objects, with few accorded rights to an

intimate and private life. Fundamentally, prisoner publics are transgressive because they

speak the language of publicness rather than sectoral interest, examining, addressing, re-

imagining, and taking responsibility for how the world is and could be, with its racisms,

poverties, and other injustices, whether it is the world of the prison or some-place else.

3.   Liberation publics

If improper publics foreground transgression and the crossing of boundaries, liberation

publics foreground departures and arrivals. While feminist, anti-racist, queer, and other

critical scholars routinely worry that the unmoderated language of publicness is a language of

common departure that erases asymmetries of social experience, liberation publics bring the

relationship between unequal social positioning and discourses of common good to the fore.

In this way, they turn a collective gaze towards the conditions subjects should be liberated

from as well as towards those emancipatory experiences that should be shared. The former is

evident in prison abolition or asylum movements, where freedom from detention and

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[67]   Vanessa De Greef, "The Prisoner's Right to Vote: The Creation of an Abnormal and

Excluded Public", in Claudio Michelon et al., (eds). *The Public in Law: Representations of

the Political in Legal Discourse* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012) pp. 147-160.

migration restrictions are advocated by those subject to restraint, as well as by those whose personal status is more privileged. Pell's discussion of the struggle against gentrification in Vancouver illustrates a similar process.[68] Her study examines how the inclusive public discourses which developed around a concern with working-class neighbourhood dispossession, and the use of property for profit, placed low-income people at the centre of an anti-gentrification movement that involved others also.

A quite different form of liberatory public occurs when social movements, such as queer, lesbian feminism or nudism, seek to free and extend dissident and repressed erotic, gendered, and bodily practices. While sections of these wider movements treat gay, transgender or nudist desires as *minority* interests deserving protection from discrimination, others accord same-sex, transgender, and nudist desires wider value. In this sense, these desires and practices are constituted as public in being available and relevant to an unbounded, indefinitely open population, where liberation comes from experiencing new transgressive forms of erotic and bodily freedom, sloughing off the restraints of a repressive, disciplined sociality. Early American nudist "explorers", Frances and Mason Merrill describe, for instance, how a young participant in German nudism told them, "If all the opponents of *Nacktkultur* [nudism] could be got into a *Freilicht* [open air, nudist] park, undressed, just for a day, by evening there wouldn't be any opponents."[69]

Liberatory publics are an important strand of transformative publicness; yet, in their more "evangelical" or "promised land" form they are often neglected, trumped by the

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[68] Susan Pell, "Mobilizing Urban Publics, Imagining Democratic Possibilities: Reading the Politics of Urban Redevelopment in Discourses of Gentrification and Revitalization," *Cultural Studies* 28: 1 (2014) pp. 29-48.

[69] Frances and Mason Merrill, *Among the Nudists* (London: Noel Douglas, 1931), p. 11.

prevailing paradigm of discrete minority group rights and interests. Progressive forces typically treat sexual orientation and transgender identities (the textile/ nudist distinction is usually ignored) as sites of oppression, marginality and discrimination, disregarding the claims that dissident forms of erotic encounter, gender enactment and undressed appearance *may* contribute to re-imagining social life in ways that don't simply incorporate more subjects into prevailing norms but change the norms. At the same time, the distinction between normative incorporation and transformation can prove muddier than is sometimes assumed. Lesbian and gay "policy-making publics"[70] illustrate this, revealing also how liberation publics can be deemed particularly improper when they acquire a formal institutional role and location.

At first glance, lesbian and gay policy-making publics seem far removed from a politics of liberation, concerned instead with a discrete group – gay men and lesbians – who deserve more equal treatment.[71] At the same time, early forms of institutionalisation, such as the gay equality policies developed in 1980s British local government, adopted a more liberatory perspective in relation to education provision in schools (alongside other more minority group measures). The development of curricular initiatives to normalise gay lives[72]

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[70] Policy networks function as publics when they are open to participation by an indefinite body of strangers, rather than a defined group of professionals, politicians and community representatives, and when they express their concerns, projects or goals in public rather than private terms.

[71] Davina Cooper, *Sexing the City: Lesbian and Gay Politics within the Activist State* (London, Rivers Oram, 1994).

[72] Such as those developed in the London Borough of Haringey, see the report *Mirrors Round the Walls: Respecting Diversity* (Haringey, London: Haringey Education Service, 1988).

was a particularly controversial aspect of British municipal lesbian and gay work that swiftly precipitated the Thatcher government's introduction of s. 28 Local Government Act 1988, rendering it illegal to "promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family." At the heart of opposition to "positive images", as the educational agenda became known, was the perception that it was proselytising.[73] Going beyond a policy of minority group accommodation, treating gay sexuality as normal, conservatives claimed, would lead children to experiment sexually. Conservative fears of that time that trying out homosexuality would produce "undesirable" tastes suggests a reversal of the more positive equivalence between experimentation and liberation that nudist and radical gay publics advanced; nevertheless, common to both was the place of new sensations as the motivating impetus, but also the effect, of radical public action.

4.   Prefigurative publics

The final transformative public register I want to mention concerns prefigurative publics. Prominent in the global north in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, prefigurative publics did not simply name and campaign against particular harms (such as global corporate power and state militarism), they also developed new, seemingly more hopeful, practices. Do-It-Yourself (DIY) initiatives ranged from food projects to the internet commons, alternative economies, and autonomous social centres.[74] As Pickerill and Krinsky

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[73] Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality in Britain 1968-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

[74] Patrick Bresnihan and Michael Byrne, 'Escape into the City: Everyday Practices of Commoning and the Production of Urban Space in Dublin," *Antipode* 47:1 (2015) 36-54; Davina Cooper, 2014, *ibid*; Daniel Murray, "Prefiguration or Actualization? Radical

discuss in relation to protest camps, such as those of the Occupy movement, which became a signature form of grassroots politics during this period, "[they] explicitly sought to circumvent traditional providers of services and rather than make demands [on the state] simply create the alternative."[75]

Tying transformative publics to prefigurative practices strongly reframes what it is to be a public – away from the conventional focus on opinion formation, debate and decision-making to practically enacting alternatives. Boggs describes prefiguration as "the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal."[76] Prefigurative practices have sometimes been criticised for focusing excessively on *how* politics are done – letting a preoccupation with horizontal, consensus-based decision-making trump a necessary attention towards external goals. But prefiguration also involves enacting desired economic, social, and political changes rather than awaiting their "right" time. More recently, anti-teleological currents have led prefiguration increasingly away from seeking to install "future" goals towards a more provisional and open-ended sense of change in which ethical and innovative political enactments are valued without knowing where they might

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Democracy and Counter-Institution in the Occupy Movement," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* (2014) online.

[75] Jenny Pickerill and John Krinsky, "Why does Occupy Matter?" *Social Movement Studies* 11:3-4 (2012) pp. 279-287, at p. 283.

[76] Carl Boggs, 'Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control', Radical America, 11:6 (1977) pp. 99-122 at p. 100. See also Luke Yates "Rethinking Prefiguration: Alternatives, Micropolitics and Goals in Social Movements," *Social Movement Studies* 14:1 (2015) pp. 1-21.

lead. Prefigurative publics may be framed as improper in the sense that they act rather than simply talk, and in the sense that they can act as if change's temporalities are knotted rather than linear. A liberation public may ask: how can we create the conditions in which people feel free to engage in nudism, gay erotic practices or non-normative genders? Prefigurative publics, by contrast, act *as if* nudism, gay desire and unconventional gender performances are already part of a shared public repertoire.

Bringing Transformative Publics into the State

So far I have traced four overlapping registers for thinking about transformative publics: as un/conditional, improper, liberatory, and prefigurative. I now want to explore how these publics might be thought of as part of (or entangled with) the state. Clearly, states can be productively imagined as institutional structures or formations that do *not* include transformative publics; indeed, this is the prevailing way states and progressive publics are discussed. Early in this article, I considered *why* we might think about the relationship differently so as to trace the ebb and flow of progressive state practice, develop fuller understandings of transformative public capabilities, and appreciate the subtle ways states combine with and structure the terrain of grass-roots political practice. Here, I give further texture to this public/ state relationship by considering in more detail the variety of forms it can take. It is important to remember, however, that a state relationship is just a *part* of transformative publics' practice and composition; it is not all such publics are.

According to Mahony and Clarke, publics are routinely produced through state forms of address;[77] yet, in the global north, transformative publics are rarely directly addressed or hailed by official state actors – at least not in positive terms. Transformative publics are more likely to emerge through the reversal or revision of state address, as evident in the Sanctuary

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[77] Mahony and Clarke, *ibid*.

City movement, which pressed local authorities to welcome refugees and provide them with services,[78] and the No Borders movement, which opposes forms of regulatory control based on national borders.[79] As publics, these movements take up state concerns with migration but reverse the "problem" to shine their critical light on state policies rather than on migrants. In approaching these public as state publics, I have suggested Derrida's conception of the conditional/ unconditional relationship is helpful. This is not only because it provides a framework through which to think about more radical public forms, but also because it emphasises the *interrelationship* between conditional and unconditional forms. As states bring into being, through their address, disciplined, entrepreneurial, and defence-conscious publics, they also make more expansive forms of publicness thinkable and available. But transformative publics are more than just the unintended by-products of neoliberal state practice and discourse. They also form within, and as part of, state practice - as with the policy publics identified above or in those cases where publics emerge through the spaces and opportunities state practice provides. In his ethnographic account of participatory budgeting meetings in Porto Alegre, Baiocchi describes how a public sphere was created in a "state sponsored setting" among local residents who convened to discuss policy priorities for funding. In the interstices of official structured discussions, lively talk took place on unrelated matters, leading in some instances to marches and other forms of political action.[80]

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[78] Darling, ibid; Jean McDonald, "Building a Sanctuary City", in Peter Nyers and Kim Rygiel (eds) *Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement (*London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 129-145.

[79] Anderson et al., *ibid*; Walters, *ibid*.

[80] Gianpaolo Baiocchi, "Emergent Public Spheres: Talking Politics in Participatory Governance," *American Sociological Review* 68:1 (2003) pp. 52-74.

State publics also emerge outside of institutional spaces. If we conceptualise the encounters and interactions that take shape around regulatory policies and laws as forming part of the state's make-up, then the queer publics cited earlier also form part of the state through their encounters and interactions with those regulatory edifices that, among other things, govern erotic life. This relationship can be read in terms of how states generate queer publics, but treating the interactions and encounters that take shape around state law as part of the state means the queer publics that form also constitute part of the state network. This doesn't mean such publics sustain states *as they are*. Improper and liberatory publics, whether queer or otherwise, routinely press upon different state parts: on law, policing, urban planning, arts policies, and state NGO funding. In the process, they may generate informal systems that shadow and interface official state ones as Rodriguez describes in his account of how, in the late twentieth century, Hispanic families migrating to the United States (US) outside of formal state immigration processes, came to temporarily produce *de facto* "popular" forms of migration policy and transnational relations.[81]

These different interrelationships are important in understanding how transformative publics can contribute to progressive state action. While research in this area typically emphasises the disciplining and regulatory effects of state bodies *on* publics, the concept of transformative state publics suggests some ways in which previously "unheard" concerns join institutional structures, disrupting existing political norms, boundaries and order as they extend and reconfigure the assumed public responsibilities of state governance. In the remainder of this discussion, I want to consider two other ways transformative publics and states combine. Both underscore the contribution transformative publics can make to radical

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[81] Néstor Rodríguez, "The Battle for the Border: Notes on Autonomous Migration, Transnational Communities, and the State," *Social Justice*, 23:3 (1996) 21-37, at p. 24.

moments of state action. The first emphasises the power available in the interstices of state formations along with the value in framing concerns, written off as fractional interests, as *public* concerns; the second highlights the creative energy that can come from state/ grassroots "mash-ups" – a term I use to identify the ways institutional norms combine in contexts where, unlike hybridity, their distinctions and tensions remain evident.

Taking up an institutional status and location is an important way in which publics act as part of state assemblages. Status and location may not be voluntary as the example of prisoner publics mentioned earlier reveals. Prisoners make up state formations because their institutional and legal status and residence tie them to coercive state apparatuses. But, prisoner publics are also part of the state when they draw on their institutional location, including their assigned stigmatised status and restricted conditions, to construct a public identity. School students also form state publics; even where schools are not directly controlled or managed by state officials, their densely regulated practice and enactment of key public governance concerns and responsibilities tie them to the state. Recent years has witnessed growing interest in young people's political activism and agency.[82] What, however, remains less studied are the ways school students periodically act politically within (and from) the institutional contexts in which they are located, a location that also shapes their

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[82] See for instance, Craig Jeffrey, "Geographies of Children and Youth II: Global Youth Agency," *Progress in Human Geography* 36:2 (2012) pp. 245-253; Kirsi Kallio and Jouni Häkli, "Children and Young People's Politics in Everyday Life," *Space and Polity* 17:1 (2013) pp. 1-16.

public formation as they organise around issues of common concern and interest, from international aid and militarism to school uniform and the curriculum.[83]

School children's actions can be understood in different ways. Reading such actions as those of a state public foregrounds children's distinctive capacity as members of an institutional structure and process to access, address and intervene in relation to places (school buildings, staffrooms), actors (teachers and other students) systems and procedures (from school attendance to examinations) , including by withdrawing their labour.[84] These spaces and procedures can be disrupted or entered by others, but school children's official status (particularly in relation to their own school) provides political resources; it also structures what actions mean and how they can be done. Identifying prisoner or school student publics as part of the state takes up the claim that these subject positions are created by the state and that, as publics, they are part of what assembles to constitute the state as they exercise and, importantly, *re-make* the state powers available to them, but it is also about something else. In their account of the state, Passoth and Rowland draw on the Actor-Network Theory notion of "punctualisation", a process where one part of an actor-network speaks for the whole.[85] Here, speaking with the authority of experience as school students or prisoners, these publics do not necessarily speak *as* the state; however, deploying the state name they have been given, they take it up subversively, making it do unintended work.

The second transformative public/ state juncture, I want briefly to discuss, concerns prefigurative publics combining with state formations to create new hybrid or mashed-up

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[83] Steve Cunningham and Michael Lavalette, "'Active Citizens' or 'Irresponsible Truants'? School Student Strikes Against the War," *Critical Social Policy* 24:2 (2004) pp. 255-269.

[84] *Ibid*.

[85] Passoth and Rowland, *ibid*.

governmental spaces; here contrasting norms, practices, procedures, and styles produce a terrain of discordant variegation or something more fused. The notion that prefigurative publics, such as protest camps or anarchist social centres, encounter the state in a relationship that is not entirely oppositional and combative is contentious. As Feigenbaum and her co-authors write, "protest camps [are]… spaces where people come together to imagine alternative worlds and articulate contentious politics, *often in confrontation with the state*" (italics added).[86] In left scholarship, accounts of state involvement with grassroots activist spaces typically focus on police coercion and brutality, the negative effects of regulatory state powers, and state bodies' use of ownership rights to thwart actions they deem institutionally unacceptable.[87] Given prefigurative publics' attachment to autonomous self-made spaces, this narrative of brutal and coercive encounters between two independent, politically divergent entities is unsurprising. But without denying the reality of aggressive, hostile state action towards many prefigurative publics, I am also interested in what other, less visible political governance formations may simultaneously be taking shape. If states are to be conceptualised in ways attuned to their progressive possibilities, however minor these currently appear to be, relations beyond the irreducibly oppressive also need identifying, relations that re-frame the diverse forms which the "statization" of everyday life,[88] including everyday *activist* life, can take.

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[86] Anna Feigenbaum et al., *Protest Camps* (London: Zed Books, 2013), pp. 1-2.

[87] See for instance, Sean Parson, "Parks, Permits, and Riot Police: San Francisco Food Not Bombs and Autonomous Occupations of Space," *New Political Science* 37:3 92015) pp. 346-362; Stuart Schrader and David Wachsmuth, "Reflections on Occupy Wall Street, the State and Space," *City*, 16:1-2 (2012) pp. 243-248; Woodward and Bruzzone, *ibid*.

[88] Painter, *ibid*.

One path for pursuing these relations follows the critique of grassroots autonomy, troubling the notion that groups can exist and function autonomously from states and capitalism.[89] In their discussion of grass-roots social politics, Pickerill and Chatterton suggest that groups, such as autonomous social centres, "incorporate… the realities of compromise with the state."[90] But the character of compromise and negotiation, including their capacity to generate new "mashed-up" forms of governance, remains under-addressed in academic writing, and when it is addressed is understood in largely negative terms as Sean Parson's striking account of the struggle of San Francisco's Food not Bombs group to provide meals for homeless people illustrates.[91] Are there then other resources available to draw out those dimensions of the state/ prefigurative public relationship which are about more than state coercion and discipline? Michael Menser's writing on the "disarticulated state" provides one way of thinking about more productive interconnected forms of governance.[92] Focusing, among other examples, on Participatory Budgeting (PB) in Porto Alegre, Brazil, he describes its mix of state and community norms. Part of an institutionally regulated system for spending public money, dependent on the mayor's office, and local legislature for approval,

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[89] Steffen Böhm, "(Im)possibilities of Autonomy: Social Movements in and Beyond Capital, the State and Development," *Social Movement Studies* 9:1 (2010) pp. 17-32; Jenny Pickerill and Paul Chatterton, "Notes Towards Autonomous Geographies: Creation, Resistance and Self-Management as Survival Tactics," *Progress in Human Geography* 30:6 (2006) pp. 730-746.

[90] Pickerill and Chatterton, *ibid*, p. 741.

[91] Parson, *ibid*.

[92] Michael Mender, "Disarticulate the State! Maximizing Democracy in 'New' Autonomous Movements in the Americas", in Heather Gautney (ed.) *Democracy, States, and the Struggle for Social Justice* (New York, Routledge, 2009), pp. 251-272.

PB in Porto Alegre also expressed community dynamics, took place in neighbourhood centres, and let local people set budgetary priorities. Whether this represents a fusion into a new form of community/state governance or something more variegated is unclear. However, the capacity of prefigurative publics to combine with state norms, processes, and activities in ways that create progressive fusions as well as discordances points to something important. Extensive research exists on new forms of governance emerging from relations between states and private corporations, as contracts, profitability, bureaucracy, and political agendas combine in configurations that sometimes mix the two systems to create new hybrids and sometimes suture together elements from each without explicitly transforming them.[93] To what extent is it possible to identify parallel processes between prefigurative publics and states of the global north - the focus of this article?

Certainly, the experience of many prefigurative publics, such as protest camps, is one of governments routinely refusing (or reluctantly providing) care and support, of withdrawing services and facilities so that sanitation, food hygiene, water facilities and health care become difficult or impossible to access, and camps are forced to establish their own supplies regardless of whether or not they desire to.[94] In other cases, as Max Liboiron describes in relation to Occupy Wall Street, competing state and activist claims to manage, for instance, waste demonstrate the practical and symbolic struggles taking place.[95] But, if states are not conceptualised as monolithic sovereign forms; if they consist not just of apparatuses, systems, rationalities and personnel intent on policing, punishing and controlling; if they engage in

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[93] Allen and Cochrane, *ibid*; Allen, *ibid*.

[94] Feigenbuam et al., *ibid*.

[95] Max Liboiron, "Tactics of Waste, Dirt and Discard in the Occupy Movement," *Social Movement Studies* 11:3-4 (2012) pp. 393-401.

other discursive, regulatory, coordinating, and welfare activities also; and if as networks they include the dissident and minority forces, values, interests and norms that gather around their diverse activities (as well as dominant interests, agendas, and concerns), then these welfare and dissident state elements (or, in ANT terms, "actants") may also contribute to new mashed up or hybrid governance forms, forging we might imagine a kind of *counter-assemblage*.

It may be easier to imagine state service users and progressive state personnel (teachers, healthcare workers and librarians, for instance) contributing to protest camps in ways that leave behind any train of state governance; but we might also consider other possibilities. Speaking in the name of a counter-state network, through actions as well as voice, examples could include school students bringing their interpretation of educational values and processes to the educational work of protest camps, publicly employed midwives supporting pregnant women campers, local city councils providing legal, technical, and publicity support along with much needed utilities, and publicly run recycling and ecological projects working with protest camps to generate new democratic forms of environmental sustainability. Prefigurative publics are often wary of measures that seem to entail dependence on state resources through fears of co-optation and the bureaucratisation of grassroots politics. While well-founded concerns, they assume the possibility of an alternative independence. What this article has explored, by addressing the character of state composition, are the myriad ways progressive and radical publics are always caught up with the state. But rather than approach this as inevitably negative or disempowering for grass-roots politics, this article has teased out some ways this relationship can be politically productive – both for transformative publics, and for imagining the possibilities for advancing progressive state practices.

Conclusion

Working from the premise that states are important formations for progressive transformative politics in the global north, this article asked how this capacity might be strengthened and extended. Different writers have addressed this question, focusing on material reforms, and more radical kinds of state transformation. This article has sought to complement this work by focusing on the state's relationship to transformative publics. This relationship is far from being the only path for progressive state action; however, it is one that is often ignored when progressive state action is equated with authorised and planned initiatives rather than subversive, contested, interstitial ones.. On the basis that both kinds of developments are necessary, I have explored what transformative state publicness might entail. Unconditional, improper, liberatory and prefigurative registers identify some ways of "doing" publicness that speak to core dimensions of progressive statecraft, namely of inclusiveness, openness, shared concerns, the creation of new forms of freedom, and the extension of public responsibility for the conditions of social life. *Conceptualised* as state parts, transformative publics are given shape by states; but they also take up and deploy the institutional spaces and statuses that states make available; generate new state forms; and combine with state regulatory processes to produce hybrid or "mashed up" forms of communal political governance.

But what does conceptualising transformative publics as entangled with states do? Does it offer anything more than an academic re-cutting of the state's conceptual frame so transformative publics find themselves tied up with the state rather than outside and apart from it? The primary concern of this article has not been to determine empirically or conclusively whether publics are (or are not) state parts or state partners, but to explore what it would mean to locate them as such. In what *different ways* can transformative publics be read as tied up with states and, more importantly, what do these different connections make thinkable and imaginable? What do they open up and foreground, as JK Gibson-Graham discuss in relation to the economy. This article has been concerned with the work different

conceptualisations do – work that will, of course, vary by time and place, by which actors' conceptualisations are in question, by what they do with them, and how they are sustained by wider social forces. Yet, with these caveats in mind, this article has suggested that we conceptualise transformative publics as tied up with states for two main reasons.

First, conceptualising publics as state parts reveals some of the resources available for dissident political action, providing, in turn, a more complex and fuller understanding of how dissident forces can exercise institutional power. More academic work is needed that traces the life of dissident state practices and politics, exploring how state powers are exercised, transmuted, withdrawn, held and accessed by different subversive and transformative forces. Choosing to recognise these exercises of power as parts of state practice, as part of what state assemblages in the global north *are*, helps illuminate how states change as well as detailing the generative ground that can become available – as resources, opportunities, discourses, and spaces - outside the terms of electoral, insurrectionary or revolutionary capture. Second, approaching prefigurative public action as a form of hybrid or "mashed up" state/community governance – that includes adversarial dimensions but is not just that – draws attention to different ways state and progressive grassroots norms, processes, cultures, modes of reasoning and affect combine. Extensive academic scholarship has explored how states dominate or colonise other rationalities, and how state norms combine with neoliberal commercial ones. This article does not dispute any of these conclusions, which are all too apparent. However, it argues that more attention could be paid to the productive mix that takes place when state and progressive modes of organising, including anarchist ones, overlie, combine or confront each other. In short, in the face of state violence, exploitation, militarism, welfare cut-backs, privatisation, and competitive market obsessions, this article has argued for progressives to hold on to the state/public nexus in various transformative registers in order for progressive forces to hold on to the state.