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Postanarchism and Space

Revolutionary Fantasies and Autonomous Zones

Saul Newman

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Author Biography

Saul Newman (PhD UNSW 1998) is a Reader in Political Theory at Goldsmiths, University of London. His research is in continental and poststructuralist political thought, postanarchist theory, contemporary radical politics and critical IR. He is the author of *From Bakunin to Lacan* (Lexington Books, 2001); *Power and Politics in Poststructuralist Thought* (Routledge, 2005); *Unstable Universalities* (MUP, 2007); *Politics Most Unusual* (Palgrave, 2008); *The Politics of Postanarchism* (EUP, 2010); and *Max Stirner* (Palgrave, 2011), as well as many journal articles.

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Abstract In this paper, I call for a re-consideration of anarchism and its alternative ways of conceptualising spaces for radical politics. Here I apply a Lacanian analysis of the social imaginary to explore the utopian fantasies and desires that underpin social spaces, discourses and practices – including planning, and revolutionary politics. I will go on to develop – via Castoriadis and others – a distinctly post-anarchist conception of political space based around the project of autonomy and the re-situation of the political space outside the state. This will have direct consequences for an alternative conception of planning practice and theory.

Keywords

planning theory, (post)anarchism, Lacan, revolutionary politics, autonomy 'Only the autonomous can plan autonomy, organize for it, create it' (Bey, 1991: 100). Social theory has in recent times taken a spatial turn. In the case of political theory, discussions about the spatial dimensions and imaginaries of politics have drawn on political geography in order to investigate the contours of pluralism, the public space, democratic agonism, social movements, and the post-national spaces of globalisation (see Massey, 2005; Sassen, 2008; Mouffe, 2000; Connolly, 2005). Here the question of planning – the planning of cities, urban landscapes, autonomous spaces, aesthetic communities and so on – inevitably arises. Indeed, politics and urban planning have always been intimately connected, whether we think of utopian imaginaries of Fourier or Saint-Simon, with their rationally planned communities, or the way that the planning of modern cities and metropolises has always been haunted by the spectre of insurrection and dissent. Planning practices and discourses may be seen as a

¹ Steve Pile explores the repressed unconscious of cities and urban spaces, suggesting a kind of Freudian 'dreamwork' to bring this dimension to light (see Pile, 2000: 75–86). In a similar vein, could we not say that central to radical politics is a kind of dreamwork that seeks to reveal the antagonisms that underlie and continue to haunt our pacified social spaces?

sublimation of politics, as well as a crystallization of conflict. If one casts a parallax gaze on our cities today, one finds traces everywhere of the repressed political dimension.¹ Space is therefore always political. Indeed, as Henri Lefebvre shows, space is a particular constellation of power and knowledge that reproduces the social relations of production; space has a political function in providing a kind of integrative framework for the capitalist mode of production and for political power (1991: 9). However, if space is seen as a framework for dominant political and economic interests, my aim here is to explore the ways in which this hegemonic space is challenged, contested and reconfigured, as well as the fantasies and desires invested in political spaces. It is in this context that I would like to consider the question of space for radical politics, and, in particular, for that most heretical of all radical political traditions – anarchism. After showing that anarchism is more than simply the anarchic disruption of space – indeed, anarchist thought and politics suggests an alternative construction of space – I will go on to explore the way in which social and political spaces are imagined in revolutionary discourse. It is here that a Lacanian analysis of the social imaginary becomes important, as it not only reveals the utopian fantasies and desires that underpin social spaces, discourses and practices – including planning – but also makes visible the hidden structural link between revolutionary politics and political authority; between the desire for revolutionary transgression and the affirmation of a new Master. Taking Lacan as a critical point of departure here, I will go on to develop – via Castoriadis and others – a distinctly postanarchist conception of political space based around the project of autonomy. This will have direct consequences, as I will show, for an alternative conception of planning practice.

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1. Anarchism and Planning

Is radical politics simply a disruption of the existing order of space, or does it invent its own alternative spatial imaginaries; and, if so, what are these imaginaries? What is the space of radical politics today? What spaces does it occupy, contest and imagine? In the once vacant symbolic place left by the collapse of the state socialist systems, we have seen the emergence of a new radical spatial imaginary defined not so much by institutions and political parties, but by social movements which create, in their practices, discourses and modes of action, new political, social and economic spaces, new imaginaries. What shapes this alternative political space is, I would argue, the idea of autonomy. Rather than seeking to take over state power, or to participate in state institutions at the level of parliamentary politics, many contemporary actors and movements endeavour to create autonomous spaces, social practices and relations, whether through the permanent or temporary occupation of physical spaces – squats, community centres and co-operatives, workplace occupations, mass demonstrations and convergences – or through the experimentation with practices such as decentralized decision-making, direct action or even alternative forms of economic exchange, which are not striated, conditioned or 'captured' by statist and capitalist modes of organisation. This new form of politics demands a certain reconsideration of anarchism. I would like to understand anarchism – or as I conceive of it, postanarchism – as a new way of thinking about the politics of space and planning, one that I see as becoming more relevant today. This no doubt appears a strange undertaking. Anarchism is usually associated with a kind of wild disordering of space, as a politics and practice of disruption and spontaneous insurgency – the very opposite of planning. Should we not recall the nineteenth-century anarchist Mikhail Bakunin's dictum about the 'urge to destroy'? However, we should remember that, for Bakunin, this 'urge to de-

stroy' was also a 'creative urge'. Anarchism is as much a project of construction and creation as it is about destruction. Indeed, for anarchists, it is the order of state and capitalist economic power, with its depredations and disruption of autonomous social life, which is violently destructive. If left to themselves, people would find ways of peacefully cooperating with one another. Anarchy is order, the state disorder – as the old saying goes. Therefore, anarchism has to be considered as much a project of order as disorder; or perhaps a project of ordered disorder (or disordered order). No doubt there will be a moment of spontaneous revolt, of insurrection, of the tearing up of paving stones and the erection of barricades; a confrontation – possibly violent – with the mechanisms of state power. But this would be accompanied by a process of rational planning, based around the possibilities of cooperative and communal ways of life. We find in anarchist writings many examples of utopian planning, despite the assertion of the classical anarchists that they were not utopians but 'materialists'. There were various models put forward of federalism and libertarian collectivism; arguments for decentralized forms of agricultural planning, and for local, small-scale rural production over large-scale industry (see Kropotkin, 1985). Contemporary anarchist thinkers have also engaged extensively with environmental questions, analysing the link between human domination and ecological despoliation. It is argued by some that we should think in terms of an overall 'social ecology': not only is the destruction of the natural environment a reflection of the forms of domination, hierarchy and exploitation found in social and economic relations; but also the possibilities of a free and rational society. As Murray Bookchin² puts it: 'Our continuity with non-hierarchical nature suggests that a non-hierarchical society is no less random than an ecosystem' (1982: 37). At the

² For an evaluation of Bookchin's impact not only on anarchist theory, but also on ecology and urban planning, see White (2008).

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heart of anarchist theory is the image of a rationally planned society; but not one whose order is imposed from above by a class of enlightened technocrats – an idea anarchists absolutely despised – but, on the contrary, a rational, non-hierarchical order immanent in social relations and emerging organically from below. This concern for social ecology and the human environment accounts for the interest anarchists take in geography, physical spaces and the history and design of cities. The great anarchist geographer Elisée Reclus wrote about the impact of the layout of cities on their inhabitants, and the deleterious effect of overcrowding, poor planning, pollution and the lack of hygiene. He likened the city and its inhabitants to a collective organism whose health and quality of life would be improved through good planning and urban renewal, with attention given to street cleaning, rubbish disposal, as well as the establishment of municipal parks. The idea of the garden city was advocated by Reclus, and many other anarchists, as a way of making cities more liveable.³ What is important here is not only the project of designing cities around the needs of ordinary people, but also allowing the spontaneous and organic expression of a city's unique beauty, as appropriate to its individual natural environment, rather than imposing upon it, bureaucratically from above, a rigid, uniform design. As Reclus put it: 'True art is always spontaneous and can never adapt itself to the dictates of a public works commission' (cited in Clark and Martin, 2004: 193). Furthermore, the city is often conceived of as a political space, a site – or a potential site – for popular self-determination and decentralized democratic decision-making.

Kropotkin, another geographer, saw the medieval city as an autonomous political space with its own set of rules, customs,

³ Reclus' ideas of social solidarity and ecological balance had a strong influence on the sociologist and town planner, Patrick Geddes, whose plans for urban design were adopted in different cities of the world in the early twentieth century (see Law, 2005: 4–19; Geddes, 1927).

practices and institutions, where individual freedom and cultural life flourished (see 1943). This autonomy, however, was gradually lost and obscured under the looming shadow of the sovereign state. The city is therefore seen as an important space of independent political life, in opposition to the encroachment of the authoritarian, centralized state apparatus. In the same vein, Bookchin explores the history of cities as spaces of public participation in politics, looking back to the democratic traditions of the Athenian agora. The city is thus imagined as the model for a renewal of public life, as a form of political being-in-common, one that differs from the anonymity of the bureaucratic processes of 'statecraft' (see Bookchin 1995:⁴). Far, then, from anarchism simply being an anti-politics of disruption, it is also – indeed, primarily – a politics of planning. Central to anarchist theory is a conflict between two opposed spatial imaginaries, two opposing ways of organising political and social life: one the one hand, a rational and libertarian space, a federation of free communes and cities; on the other, the state-capitalist order, a space of irrational authority, hierarchy and violence. The former spatial arrangement promotes individual freedom, cooperation, equality, as well as the close involvement of ordinary people with decision-making processes; the latter fosters domination, inequality, servitude and the absolute alienation of people from political power. Planning theory

⁴ One should be wary about drawing too sharp a line here between the anarchist and Marxian traditions here. We must remember that Marx shared the same aspiration as the anarchists for a stateless society based on free association. We should also recall that even Lenin, despite his vanguardist strategy of seizing control of the state, nevertheless declares a certain affinity with the anarchists in regarding the state as an instrument of domination whose eventual transcendence was the ultimate aim of a communist revolution: 'We do not at all disagree with the Anarchists on the question of the abolition of the state as an aim. We maintain that, to achieve this aim, temporary use must be made of the instruments, means, and methods of state power against the exploiters, just as the dictatorship of the oppressed class is temporarily necessary for the annihilation of classes.' (see 1990: 52).

the recent democratic insurrection in Egypt, where Tahrir Square, the symbolic centre of the protest, was transformed into an autonomous liberated zone. This was something that suggested, in the words of Richard Seymour, a 'new model commune':¹⁸

First of all, they took over a nominally public space which the state wished to exclude them from access to, Tahrir Square. Having taken it over, and affirmed that they wouldn't simply go home at the end of the day – something we might want to think about – they saw off wave after wave of assault on the protests, from police and plain clothes thugs. They set up committees to keep watch for government men... They set up a network of tents for people to sleep in... There are toilet arrangements – no small logistical matter when there are routinely hundreds of thousands of people occupying the capital's main intersection. They rig up street lamps to provide electricity. They set up garbage collection, medical stops – they occupy a well-known fast food outlet and turn it into somewhere that people shot at or beaten by police can get treated. They set up a city within a city, and collectively coped with many more challenges than the average city would have to face in an average day (Seymour, 2011).

Can there be any better demonstration of autonomous planning – of the utopian desires, insurgent energies and organizational capacities of ordinary people to transform their social space?

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¹⁸ For a different vision of an autonomous commune organised as an insurrectional urban space, see 'The Coming Insurrection' (Invisible Committee, 2009; see also Merrifield, 2010).

autonomous planning practices engaged in everyday by people and movements of resistance to statism and capitalism. Here I am inspired by the idea of ‘insurgent planning’ as explored by Faranak Miraftab in her account of an anti-eviction campaign on the part of slum-dwellers South Africa (see 2009: 32–50). These were grass-roots mobilizations of ordinary people who built makeshift shacks and community centres on the side of the road in protest against the neoliberal policies of slum-clearance that had made them homeless. Importantly, they were acting directly and autonomously, rather than voicing their grievances through the official channels and through the usual representatives, such as the NGOs, who would no doubt be regarded as the only legitimate participants in the dialogue under the collaborative model. Thus, for Miraftab, the insurgent planning model challenges the notion of ‘citizen participation’ central to neoliberal governance. Moreover, while it is clearly agonistic rather than consensual, its rejection of representation and the formal institutions of power, and its emphasis instead on direct acts of resistance and self-organisation, opens up a new kind of autonomous political space which is no longer adequately accounted for in the agonistic model.

An important element of autonomous, postanarchist planning practice is what might be referred to as prefigurative practices, which seek to realize alternatives to capitalism and statism within the current order – a kind of moment of utopian rupture within the present (see Gordon 2008, 34–40). We might think here of directly democratic forms of decision-making employed by activists, or cooperative practices employed by self-organized communities, or even the organization of protests and mass convergences, in which the carnival like atmosphere and the reclaiming of physical spaces is just as important as the voicing of demands and grievances (see Graeber, 2002; Day, 2005; Pleyers, 2010). Perhaps the most stunning example of this prefigurative planning was seen in

can therefore gain a great deal from an engagement with anarchism. Indeed, as Peter Hall recognizes, anarchism has historically had a strong influence on the planning movement, inspiring an ethos of planning based around small-scale communities, voluntary cooperation and free association: ‘The vision of these anarchist pioneers was not merely of an alternative built form, but of an alternative society, neither capitalistic nor bureaucratic-socialist: a society based on voluntary cooperation among men and women, working and living in small self-governing commonwealths’ (1996: 3). Perhaps the clearest exponent of anarchist principles in questions of planning and urban design was Colin Ward, who wrote extensively about the anarchist inspiration behind direct action practices such as squatting, DIY building, tenant cooperatives and community gardening. Central to these practices, according to Ward, was the idea of people acting autonomously and collaboratively to reclaim control of spaces in order to survive, and, in doing so, radically transforming, from the ground up, their physical environment (see Ward, 1982, 2000, 2002; Crouch and Ward, 1997). Furthermore, anarchism raises the crucial question of who plans? Planning, as it is usually conceived, is an elite practice and discourse: it is the idea of a certain order of space imposed from above upon pre-existing social relations by a cadre who claim a superior technical knowledge. The very notion of planning seems to convey the idea of a technocratic activity, in which a particular vision is bureaucratically forced upon society. Anarchists are particularly critical of this sort of mentality. Bakunin, for instance, accused Marx and his followers of scientific elitism: ‘scientific Communists’ sought to organize the people ‘according to a plan traced in advance and imposed upon the ignorant masses by a few “superior” minds’ (1953: 300). Therefore, if we can speak of ‘anarchist planning’ it must be a form of organisation that emerges spontaneously, and which people determine freely for themselves. We have no reason to believe that this would be chaotic, and, indeed,

there are many examples of self-organized communes and collectives which have arranged their own spaces in highly rational and efficient ways. We think here of the anarchist collectives in Spain during the Civil War, which were organized democratically and non-hierarchically, and which provided services like free health care, education, care for the elderly, as well as running cooperative industries, workshops, farms, food distribution centres, restaurants, hotels and public transport systems. Or, in our time, we might think of the Zapatista autonomous communities, which provide schools and health care facilities to the indigenous people of Chiapas. The point of an anarchist approach to planning would be therefore to question and break down the hierarchical structures and the intellectual division of labour usually associated with the planning process; to show that people have a capacity to plan for themselves and to act cooperatively in the organisation of physical space. An anarchist approach is based around what Jacques Rancière would call the equality of intelligence (see 1991); planning should be an expression of the presupposition of equality, the equal capacity of everyone to plan for themselves, in cooperation with others. Planning does not belong to an elite class or discipline, nor should it be the prerogative of governments; it is not a science or a professional discourse, but rather the active expression of a politics of libertarian egalitarianism.

2. Revolution As a Spatial Fantasy

If anarchism gives us new ways of thinking about space and planning, then how should we approach the question of revolution? Revolution would suggest the violent disordering and de-planning of existing spaces, and the replacement of one social plan – one spatial order – with another. As we have seen, anarchism seeks the abolition of the political space of hierarchy and authority – the space constituted by state power and

Mouffe (and Schmitt) – only makes sense if it is thought of in terms of a politics of autonomy. The re-situation of the political dimension away from the hegemony of the state is what I see as central to postanarchism (see Newman, 2010a). Moreover, if we are to think about democratic politics as autonomous and as not bound by the state, we can take heed of Abensour's argument that genuine democracy articulates itself in opposition to the state; indeed, he posits a notion of 'insurgent democracy' as a democracy against the state – 'democracy is anti-statist or else it is not' (2011: xxxiii). Indeed, Abensour distinguishes 'insurgent democracy' from what he calls 'conflictual democracy', or what I understand as 'agonistic democracy':

*Insurgent democracy is not a variant of conflictual democracy, but its exact opposite. Whereas conflictual democracy practices conflict within the State, a democratic State which in its very name presents itself as an avoidance of the original conflict, inclining as a result conflictuality towards permanent compromise, insurgent democracy **situates conflict in another space**, outside the State, against it, and far from practicing the avoidance of the major conflict – democracy against the State – it does not shrink from rupture, if need be (Abensour, 2011: xl [italics are mine]).*

Just as it is claimed (rightly) by proponents of agonistic democracy that the communicative/ consensus model occludes or disavows the antagonistic dimension present in social relations, could we not say that the agonistic model itself is based on a disavowal of a more fundamental antagonism – that between an 'anarchic' democracy and the order of the state itself? If radical models of planning are to give space to political antagonism – to not shy away from it or try to domesticate it under some imagined consensus – then they must recognize the genuinely political (and democratic) moment of opposition to the state. A planning model of this kind would acknowledge and, indeed, construct itself around

framework of the state, and it is unable to conceive of politics outside this framework. We can see this in a number of aspects of Mouffe's thought – for instance, in her hostility to notions of transnational activism and cosmopolitan politics. While she is perfectly correct in her criticism of certain neoliberal, as well as social democratic, visions of cosmopolitan globalization, her approach seems to reaffirm the concept of state sovereignty, and regards the nation state as the only legitimate site of democratic politics, thus ruling out any conception of transnational political spaces.¹⁷ Furthermore, we find in Mouffe's theory of democracy a strong defence of parliamentary institutions because of the way that they stage antagonistic relationships, transforming them into 'safe' forms of agonism (see 2005: 23). This seems a somewhat limited model for a radically democratic politics to follow. By situating democratic agonistic struggles primarily within the state and its parliamentary institutions, Mouffe leaves the actual political space of the state unchallenged. Instead of this, I would like to propose an alternative theoretical model based on the politics of autonomy, which contests the idea of the state being the exclusive site of the political; on the contrary, I see the state as a machine of depoliticization and governmentality, what Rancière would call 'the police' (see 1999). Moreover, it contends that genuinely political relationships always stage a confrontation with the state and can only be realized in opposition to it. The existence of autonomous movements, organizations and political spaces forces us to re-situate the political dimension away from the centrality of the state and towards alternative practices and forms of decision-making. If I could formulate it in this way: the autonomy of the political – the category central to

¹⁷ For instance, Mouffe is particularly critical of Hardt and Negri's politics of the multitude, which invokes the idea of a form of global democracy beyond the nation state (see 2005: 113–14).

capitalism – and the creation of an alternative social space of free communal arrangements. However, when we think of revolution – a concept central to the radical political tradition – in spatial terms, as a political space, the picture becomes somewhat ambiguous. What exactly is a revolution? What sort of space does it imagine and occupy? The classical model of revolution is constructed around the image of a centralized place of power – the political space of the state – which can be seized, taken over, mastered by a revolutionary vanguard. This particular conceptualisation of the revolution, it should be noted, is not the anarchist one but rather the Marxist one, or, to be more accurate, the Leninist one.⁴ It is based on the Jacobin model of the revolutionary leadership which seizes control of the state, and uses state power to revolutionize society. As Gramsci perceived, the Leninist strategy was based on a certain spatial mapping of society, one that was suited to the conditions of Tsarist Russia at that time: a centralized, autocratic state, with the Winter Palace as its symbolic place of power, which would be seized in what Gramsci termed a war of 'movement' or 'manoeuvre'. This was in contrast to the 'war of position' which involves building counter-hegemonic practices and institutions at the level of civil society, a strategy that was better suited to the more complex and developed society/state structures of Western democracies (see Gramsci, 1971). However, if the revolutionary strategy thus diagnosed by Gramsci was not suited to more complex societies in his time, it is perhaps even less so today, where new forms of 'networked' sovereignty have proliferated in an increasingly globalized and integrated world, and where a symbolic centre of power is much harder to discern

⁵ Of course, Foucault's understanding of power as dispersed and co-extensive with social life, has made the classical revolutionary narrative far more ambiguous. The idea that there is a symbolic centre of power to be seized disguises the fact that power relations have permeated the social fabric in a much more infinitesimal way, and that therefore revolutions are often unable to address the problem of power (see Foucault, 2002c: 123).

(see Hardt and Negri, 2000). There is no more Winter Palace to storm, and radical political theory is faced with the task of mapping a much more complex and fragmented field of power relations.⁵ In thinking through this problem, psychoanalytic theory may be of help – in particular the thought of Jacques Lacan, which has been applied to an analysis of the social imaginaries, utopian fantasies and desires which underpin the practices and discourses of both politics (see Žižek, 1989, 2000; Stavrakakis, 1999, 2007; Dean, 2009) and planning (see Gunder and Hillier, 2004; Hillier, 2003; Gunder, 2004, 2010). There are two main aspects of Lacanian theory that I see as particularly useful for critically reflecting on this idea of revolution. Firstly, Lacan’s theory of the four discourses, articulated in response to the radicalism of May ’68, reveals the structural link between revolutionary desire and the position of authority that it contests. We might recall here Lacan’s ominous warning to the student militants: ‘The revolutionary aspiration has only a single possible outcome – of ending up as the master’s discourse. This is what experience has proved. What you aspire as revolutionaries to is a master. You will get one...’ (2007: 207).⁶ What exactly did he mean? Lacan sought to understand communication, and social relations generally, in terms of structural positions or ‘discourses’: discourse refers to a structural position constituted by relations of language, but which is nevertheless beyond actual words and utterances (see Verhaeghe, 1995). There are four discourses – the University, Master, Hysteric and Analyst – and they might be seen as different ways of articulating social relations and functions. In this sense, they are crucial to the question of radical politics because they are a way of explaining social changes and upheavals. For the purposes of this discussion, I shall focus on two of these discourses – the Master and the Hysteric – and the paradoxical relation-

⁶ For a more extensive discussion of importance of Lacan’s four discourses to radical political theory see Newman (2004a).

a neutral framework, collaborative planning theory imagines a level playing field where differences in power and wealth are somehow counteracted. Innes and Booher describe the approach in the following terms: ‘The proposal here is that participation must be collaborative and it should incorporate not only citizens, but also organized interests, profit-making and non-profit organizations, planners and public administrators in a common framework where all are interacting and influencing one another...’ (2004: 422). Yet, we see how this formal neutrality and equality – where everyone is included as a ‘stakeholder’ – can function in an ideological way to legitimize an already assumed economic consensus, while de-legitimizing antagonism and dissent as irrational, violent and undemocratic. As an alternative to the collaborative/communicative model, Hillier has proposed a model based around the recognition that contestation and antagonism are central to the political, and which seeks to create a forum whereby these antagonisms can be brought to the surface and mobilized in a democratic form:

Since we cannot eliminate antagonism, we need to domesticate it to a condition of agonism in which passion is mobilized constructively (rather than destructively) towards the promotion of democratic decisions that are partly consensual, but which also respectfully accept unresolvable disagreements (Hillier, 2003: 42).

This agonistic model is derived from Connolly, and from Chantal Mouffe, who has sought to revitalize democratic theory through a combination of pluralism and the Schmittian friend–enemy opposition (see 2000, 2005). The advantage of this model over the collaborative one is that it seeks to make visible what Mouffe calls ‘the ineradicable dimension of antagonism which exists in human societies’, and which is central to the category of the political (2005: 119). At the same time, however, I find this model, particularly in the form presented by Mouffe, itself insufficient for thinking about a genuinely radical politics today. In this model, democratic agonism always takes place within the unacknowledged

as we have seen characterizes the revolutionary fantasy – the utopian insurrectionary ‘fantasy’, by contrast, teaches us to desire differently; it disrupts the usual circuit of desire, opening it up to the Other, to what is different, to what is outside itself.

7. Conclusion: Towards a Postanarchist Theory of Planning

I have developed a postanarchist conception of politics, understood in terms of an ongoing project of autonomy and a pluralization of insurrectional spaces and desires. Does this point towards a new way of thinking about planning? I have argued above for an alternative, (post)anarchist-inspired conception of planning, based on autonomous, ground-up practices of direct action – in opposition to traditional conceptions of planning as a top-down technocratic activity and discourse (the Master’s discourse). But how does postanarchism distinguish itself from other, more seemingly democratic approaches to planning, where there is a greater emphasis on collaboration and consultation with those outside the planning profession? The collaborative model of planning (see Healy, 1997; Innes, 2004; Innes and Booher, 1999, 2004) is problematic on a number of grounds. As argued above, it presupposes a fantasized utopia of undistorted rational communication, something that is not only structurally impossible from a Lacanian point of view, but also works to occlude the properly political dimension of antagonism and disagreement. Moreover, as Mark Purcell contends, the collaborative planning model is not only insufficient for resisting neoliberal rationalities at work in economic policies and planning strategies, but might actually serve to legitimize them by providing them with a veneer of democratic inclusiveness which, in reality, suppresses and disempowers more marginalized voices (see 2009: 140–65; see also Gunder, 2010). In assuming that communication and dialogue can operate in

ship between them. The discourse of the Master is the discourse that embodies self-mastery – the attempt to constitute an autonomous ego, one whose identity is secure in complete self-knowledge. This discourse is characterized by the dominance of what Lacan calls the Master Signifier, through which the subject sustains the illusion of being identical with his own signifier. In order to sustain this self-identity, this discourse excludes the unconscious – the knowledge that is not known – as this would jeopardize the ego’s sense of certainty and autonomy. Therefore, the discourse of the Master stands in a particular relation of authority to knowledge, seeking to dominate it, and exclude the knowledge of the unconscious. The Master’s position of authority over knowledge also instantiates a position of political authority: political discourses are, for instance, based on the idea of being able to grasp the totality of society, something that is, from a Lacanian point of view, impossible. Implicated in this discourse, then, is the attempt to use knowledge to gain mastery over the whole social field; it is a discourse of governing (see Bracher, 1997: 107). In this sense, we might see top-down planning practices as examples of the Master’s discourse.⁷ The discourse of the Hysteric, by contrast, is associated with the practice of protesting, and in this sense it is always pitted against the authority of the Master. In psychoanalytic terms, the Hysteric is the figure who identifies with her lack, with the absence of the *objet petit a* – the lost object of desire, the impossible *jouissance* – and who demands of the Other to fill this lack; her lack is thus address to the Master, of whom she demands to be told the truth of her desire. However, the Master is unable to give her this knowledge which he himself does not have, and so through this (knowing) demand of the Hysteric’s, the Master’s impotence and imposture, his symbolic castration, is exposed. As Kirsten Campell explains: ‘the

⁷ For an extensive discussion of Lacan’s four discourses and planning see Gunder (2004).

Discourse of the Hysteric articulates the ‘truth’ of the Master’s Discourse: namely that it is founded on the operation of castration and that its effect is the unconscious’ (2004: 52). What might be the political implications of this paradoxical relationship between the Master and Hysteric? What is being explored here is the dialectic between the law and transgression, between political and social authority and revolutionary desire. Lacan shows that these two positions are actually dependent on and sustain one another, much like the Master/Slave dialectic in Hegel where the identity of the Master is dependent on its recognition by the Slave. Radical political thought must thus come to terms with the possibility that revolutionary practices might actually sustain the symbolic position of authority – the place of power (see Newman, 2004b) – that is being challenged here. We can see this in a number of ways: for instance, the act of protesting and resisting can actually symbolically legitimize the state as ‘democratic’ and ‘tolerant of dissent’⁸; or the way that in making radical demands on the state – demands which by their nature cannot be met – activists might in a sense be playing a hysterical game with power, a game that only reaffirms it. As Slavoj Žižek puts it, in his criticism of Simon Critchley, whose position is more characteristic of anarchism: ‘Critchley’s anarchic ethico-political agent acts like a superego, comfortably bombarding the state with demands; and the more the state tries to satisfy these demands, the more guilty it is seen to be’ (Žižek, 2007). However, it seems to me that Žižek’s alternative neo-Leninist strategy – which he sees as breaking out of this deadlock of mutual parasitism in ‘passing to the act’ and seizing control of state power, rather than impotently resisting it – fares little better. While this might escape the Hysteric’s stance, it only ends up in the lap of the

⁸ Žižek gives the example of the mass protests against the war in Iraq in 2003, showing how they allowed George Bush to actually legitimise the war, claiming that it will bring the same democracy and the freedom to dissent to the Iraqi people (see Žižek, 2007).

conscious is a vital source of creativity, allowing the subject to create new social meanings out of the multiplicity or ‘magma’ of significations; the unconscious is the source of the radical imaginary (Castoriadis, 1997: 370–73). Moreover, the social dimension of the unconscious (for Castoriadis, the radical imaginary refers to both the dimension of the social-historical and the psyche-soma [1997: 339]) shows that autonomy is always a collective experience: just as the subject becomes autonomous precisely through the recognition of his rooted-ness in the unconscious, and just as he uses unconscious as a resource for creativity and freedom, his autonomy is only realized collectively through relations with others (see Castoriadis, 1997: 107). What is important about Castoriadis’s understanding of autonomy is not only this collective dimension – that demonstrates that autonomy is meaningless if it is only the freedom of atomized individual – but also the emphasis on desire, creativity and imagination in consciously creating alternative social relationships. Here, the question of utopia arises again, albeit in a different form. This might seem odd, given that I have used Lacanian theory precisely to interrogate the utopian fantasy of revolutionary projects; but nevertheless, we must recognize the utopian desire that fuels every insurrectionary project. We should not dismiss the powerful drive and political value of the utopian imaginary as a form of critical reflection on the limits of our world. However, rather than seeing utopia as a rational plan for a new social order, we should see it, as Miguel Abensour puts it, as an ‘education of desire’: ‘to teach desire to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and, above all to desire in a different way’ (see Thompson, 1988: 791). Does not Lacan himself formulate fantasy in the same way, as the means by which the subject sustains his or her desire? However, insurrectionary utopianism, in my understanding, subscribes to a different logic: whereas fantasy in the psychoanalytic sense is always the same ‘fundamental fantasy’ around which neurotic desire endlessly circulates and repeats itself – something which

6. Radical Imaginings and Utopian Desires

In this sense, I prefer to see autonomy as an ongoing project of political spatialization, rather than a fully achieved form of social organization. Despite the important differences between Lacan and Cornelius Castoriadis (see Stavrakakis, 2007: 37–65), Castoriadis’s psychoanalytically based conception of autonomy is particularly useful for thinking through what autonomy in a political sense means. For Castoriadis, autonomy is central to any genuinely revolutionary project, as it implies the freedom and capacity of people to determine their own conditions of existence – to consciously re-make their social world, a world that they usually experience in the alienating form of anonymous social, political and economic institutions over which they have no control. In this sense, for Castoriadis, the project (of autonomy) must be distinguished from the plan: the former is ‘a determined praxis, considered in all its ties with the real’; whereas the latter ‘corresponds to the technical moment of an activity, when conditions, objectives and means can be and are “exactly” determined’ (1997: 77). While revolutionary projects always require planning, the creativity and spontaneity of project should not be subordinated or reduced to the ‘rationality of the Plan’, as has often been the experience of previous socialist revolutions (1997: 109). Castoriadis, furthermore, bases the project of autonomy on the Freudian psychoanalytic narrative of the subject gaining a clearer understanding of, and thus a certain reflective distance from, the unconscious fantasies and heteronomous desires that otherwise have such a determining effect upon him or her. However, it is not a matter, of course, of ‘freeing’ the subject from the unconscious – the un-

as the Paris Commune and the Shanghai Commune – events that posit a moment of rupture with statist modes of organisation and prefigure alternative forms of politics. Yet, what is curious about Badiou is precisely his ambivalence on this question, expressed in his sense of discomfort about the proximity of his thought to anarchism (see Newman, 2010b).

Master: indeed, in seizing control of the state and using it to revolutionize society, the vanguardist strategy only reaffirms and reproduces state power. So, from a Lacanian perspective, the discourse of the Master encompasses even those revolutionary theories and political strategies which seek to overthrow it. As Lacan says:

What I mean by this is that it embraces everything, even what thinks of itself as revolutionary, or more exactly what is romantically called Revolution with a capital R. The master’s discourse accomplishes its own revolution in the other sense of doing a complete circle (2007: 87).

The revolution remains trapped within the Master’s discourse and thus fails to effect a genuine transformation. The revolution believes that it can master the state, to seize and control it at its helm; but what always happens is that the state masters the revolution – or rather the revolution installs itself on the throne of power, becoming the new Master (which is the same thing). The circle is completed. It may be that revolutions ultimately fail precisely because they are totalising discourses – because, in other words, they propose an absolute break with existing conditions and a radical transformation of the totality of social relations; they imagine an Event that encompasses everything, that emancipates us from existing conditions and oppressions and produces a different kind of social order. This brings me to my second point: Lacan allows us to perceive the utopian fantasy underlying any notion of social wholeness or totality, including, and especially, that imagined in the narrative of revolutionary transformation. Central to Lacan’s theory is the notion of the real, that which cannot be represented or signified – a kind of void or absence in the chain of signifiers that create meaning. Indeed, this gap in signification is why the subject cannot form a complete, whole identity – while he or she is forced to seek meaning within the external world of language, there is always an absence in the field of meaning, an absence that corresponds

to the lack of the object of desire: 'This cut in the signifying chain alone verifies the structure of the subject as discontinuity in the real' (Lacan, 1977: 299). The real, in Lacan's sense, has nothing to do with 'reality' as such; rather, it is what displaces what is commonly understood by reality. Our reality – the reality of our identities and our way of seeing the world – is fundamentally conditioned by symbolic and fantasy structures; and it is the real – that which cannot be integrated into these structures – which jeopardizes this reality, making our identities precarious and at times incoherent. The real is therefore the point at which these symbolic structures break down and the contingency of their operation is exposed. It may be seen as an irreducible void around which identity is both partially constituted and dislocated. Thinking about the relationship between the real and reality in these terms has important consequences for any understanding of social and political relations. Lacan's theory shows that not only is the subject lacking – in the sense described above – but also the external objective order of meaning, the Symbolic Order, is itself lacking and incomplete; there is no Other of the Other (see Stavrakakis, 1999: 39). This means that 'society' itself can never be realized in its fullness, that social relations can never be grasped in their totality, precisely because of this structural void that interrupts the closure of meaning. This is why the Master's discourse, which seeks to express the totality of social relations, fails – there is always an excess of meaning that escapes it. Here, however, the role of fantasy – particularly as it functions in ideological systems – is to obscure or cover over this void in meaning, to disavow the real, and to present an image of society as a graspable totality (see Žižek, 1989: 127). Fantasies, of course, function in all political discourses. Indeed, we might say that the fantasy of achieving some kind of social harmony – whether through the idea of the rationally functioning market, or through communist modes of organisation – coupled with the structural impossibility

and non-exploitative? We think of the multiplicity of experiments in alternative, non-statist forms of organisation – whether in the form of squats, occupied buildings, factories and universities, reclaimed physical spaces, climate camps, independent media centres, localized and transnational activist networks, communes, food co-ops, community action groups, indigenous autonomous communities, and so on (see the work of Chatterton, 2010; Esteva, 2010; May, 2010; Fuller et al., 2010; Kasnabish, 2010).¹⁴ However, surely we can only rarely speak of an absolute autonomy here – those involved in these alternative political spaces still engage with the 'outside' world, including with the state; people move and live in different social spaces, often simultaneously. Indeed, the relationship between autonomous spaces and the state is particularly ambiguous and problematic: what does it mean to be autonomous from the state; and, moreover, to what extent does this autonomy actually threaten the state? My answer here is that we should think about such spaces not as fully-formed totalities, but rather as an ongoing form of experimentation with what Foucault would call 'practices of freedom' or 'counter-conducts' (see 2002b),¹⁵ or what Alain Badiou, in a different register, refers to as politics that 'puts the State at a distance' (see 2005: 145).¹⁶

¹⁴ Another important theoretical intervention here is that of Italian autonomia – a heretical form of Marxism that emphasises the militant self-organization of workers as separate from representative agencies like trade unions and political parties. For a survey of this tradition see Steve Wright (2002) and Lotringer and Marazzi (2007).

¹⁵ Of course, Foucault was particularly sensitive to the relationship between power and space, and therefore to the power implications of particular spatial configurations and architectural designs, both in the 'institutions of confinement' as well as in what might be called 'liberated' spaces and 'heterotopias'. In an interview on 'Space, Knowledge, Power', Foucault says, 'I think that it [architecture] can and does produce positive effects when the liberating intentions of the architect coincide with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom' (see Foucault 2002a: 355)

¹⁶ Here Badiou refers to a politics that exceed the Party-State form, such

seen as central to insurrectional politics today. We cannot understand autonomy as a fully achieved, consistent, fixed identity. We know from Lacan that there can never be any pure autonomy, as the subject derives meaning only through external structures of language over which he or she has no real control; desire is always the desire of the Other (see Stavrakakis, 2007: 47). This does not mean, of course, that one cannot use linguistic, symbolic and social practices to create spaces for greater freedom and autonomy, both individual and collective; but the point is that these are always shaped and realized in relation to existing social structures. Indeed, we could say that the dimension of the real is, paradoxically, what makes autonomy both possible and impossible: insofar as it is external to the symbolic order, it provides a certain distance, a critical point of departure, or even a possible space of resistance to existing socialpolitical-economic structures; at the same time, it is what prevents an autonomous space from being completely realized. Indeed, the real itself is characterized by Lacan as an 'excluded interior' or 'intimate exterior' – both inside and outside the symbolic order simultaneously (see Miller, 1996). Thus, a particular space can never be said to be fully outside in a self-enclosed, autarchic way. Rather, we should see spaces of autonomy as always contingent and indeterminate. As Marcus Doel says, referring to the spatial practice of poststructuralism:

[it] would not constitute a unique and self-contained position. Rather, it would take the form of a Möbius (s)trip, through which the apparently secure threshold between what is inside and what is outside gives way to an undecidable and open multiplicity in continuous variation (1999: 34).

How then should we think about autonomous political spaces in our contemporary world – spaces in which alternative practices, relationships and modes of organisation are actively produced, and in which we see a conscious effort to live in ways that are non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian

of achieving this, is a dialectic of desire which continually produces new political identifications and renewed attempts to grasp social totality. As Stavrakakis says: 'Our societies are never harmonious ensembles. This is only the fantasy through which they attempt to constitute and reconstitute themselves' (1999: 74). Thus, every revolutionary project of instituting a new society has to be seen as ultimately a utopian illusion.

3. Open Spaces: Politics and Planning

The above conclusion would seem to have rather depressing consequences for radical politics. However, I shall propose instead that it leads to an opening up of new conceptual spaces for political activity, while at the same time forcing us to re-think the notion of revolution as a totalising event. I shall say more about this later, but it is important to consider here the implications of Lacan's theory not only for the conception of political space, but also for the practice of planning, which is also a form of political practice. Indeed, we could say at this point that Lacanian theory can lead to a certain radicalization – even 'anarch-ization' – of the discourse and practice of planning. For instance, the position of mastery implicit in most conceptions of planning would be exposed as an impotent gesture, one of absolute imposture, one, moreover, that is blind to its own failings and to the social knowledge that eludes the planner, or the element of contingency, unpredictability and antagonism that simply cannot be planned for. As Michael Gunder says, planners (along with everyone else).

Construct a shared social reality that creates illusions and fantasies of clarity and completeness that are readily acceptable, while somehow at the same time blindly overlooking, or at least not challenging, what is lacking and contradicting, so as to make like appear more readily predictable and stable (2004: 302).

Furthermore, Lacanian theory allows us to perceive the utopian fantasies at work in planning theory, particularly the fantasies of consensus in planning decisions. Here Jean Hillier uses the Lacanian notion of the real to problematize the idea that through a Habermasian-style process of rational communication – based around the fantasy of the ideal speech situation – planning decisions can be arrived at in a consensual and transparent way, without the distortions of power, ideology and disagreement, in other words, of politics: ‘Deliberation is thus “a kind of purification”... which leads to consensus and certainty through critical reflection. Lacanians would argue that this is impossible’ (Hillier, 2003: 48). The real as the lack or void in discourse, preventing perfect and transparent communication, is therefore what disrupts this consensual model of decisionmaking in planning. It is not that the real makes consensus impossible, but rather that it forces us to question the assumption that consensus based on rational deliberation is the only legitimate model for planning or politics to follow. What becomes apparent in this application of Lacanian theory, is a certain ‘anarchic’ displacement of the authority of planning discourse: not only is the Master’s gesture of epistemological authority exposed in all its impotence and imposture, but the claim to consensus – which is at heart simply another claim to mastery and authority in the guise of democratic and rational dialogue – is shown to be a utopian fiction.

4. Revolution/Insurrection

In light of this Lacanian intervention, it is necessary to rethink the notion of revolution. I am not suggesting that the term be abandoned altogether, but that its spatial contours be redefined. No longer sustainable is the vanguardist-Jacobin model of the revolution imagined as the seizure and control of

from its technologically driven (and therefore at some level technocratic) connotations, suggests forms of autonomous self-ordering from below, and a practice of caring for, conserving, incorporating, and, only where necessary, modifying existing ways of life, practices and traditions.

5. Postanarchist Spaces and the Project of Autonomy

Design, if applied in this way, also suggests that there is nothing immanent or naturally pre-destined about the emergence of anarchist spaces. That is to say, the autonomous spaces of communal free association are always political spaces – they have to be constructed, fought for, negotiated, ‘designed’. They do not result from a certain rational plan that is somehow immanent in nature or social relations, and which unfolds dialectically as, for instance, Bookchin believes (see 1982: 31). This is where my postanarchist approach departs from the essentialist categories and positivist approaches of classical anarchism.¹² Postanarchism, or if you like, post-foundational anarchism, conceives of a political space which is indeterminate, contingent and heterogeneous – a space whose lines and contours are undecidable and therefore contestable. Postanarchist political space is, in other words, a space of becoming.¹³ This motif of becoming allows us to reflect more carefully on the idea of autonomy, which I have

¹² For a more extensive discussion of postanarchism and where it departs from classical anarchism, see Newman (2010a).

¹³ This idea of a postanarchist space of becoming is influenced by post-structuralist approaches to space, in which space is seen as an event that takes place, and is characterised by flows, fluxes, intensities, blurred lines, differences and multiplicities, rather than fixed identities and borders. See Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of ‘smooth’ as opposed to ‘striated’ spaces (2005: 474–500); see also Hillier’s application of Deleuze to planning theory (2008).

industrialisation was uprooting and destroying artisan and peasant communities and ways of life; and the way that, in our time, it is devastating the natural environment (see Gordon, 2008: 111–38).¹¹ So, perhaps we might see an insurrectionary politics of autonomy as involving a sensitivity to the fragility of what exists and to the different forms of natural, social and cultural life that should be preserved, along with a desire to radically modify other social forms. Here I find useful Bruno Latour's notion of design as embodying a degree of caution and modesty, and as a way of tempering the Promethean, modernist impulse, characteristic of revolutionary politics, to radically break with the past and build anew. Latour explains:

If it is true that the present historical situation is defined by a complete disconnect between two great alternative narratives – one of emancipation, detachment, modernization, progress and mastery, and the other, completely different, of attachment, precaution, entanglement, dependence and care – then the little word “design” could offer a very important touch stone for detecting where we are heading and how well modernism (and also post-modernism) has been faring. To put it more provocatively, I would argue that design is one of the terms that has replaced the word “revolution”! (2008).

While I am resistant to the element of technological fetishism implicit in this notion of design – and certainly with respect to Latour's idea that nature must be 'designed' or 'redesigned' – I think we can see a difference emerging here between two radical approaches to space: the revolutionary, modernist idea of the plan, which suggests an ordering of space imposed from above, and which therefore involves, at some level, a degree of coercion (the Five Year Plan, the Great Leap Forward); and the more 'postmodern' – and I would say (post)anarchist – idea of design which, if we can rescue it

¹¹ See the anarchist-primitivist critiques of technology from thinkers such as John Zerzan (1996) and Fredy Perlman (1983).

state apparatus, despite a number of recent attempts amongst continental philosophers to resuscitate this notion (see, for instance, Žižek, 2001; Dean, 2010; Hallward, 2005). However, we also have to question the broader notion of revolution as an all-encompassing event that emancipates us from all social, political and economic oppressions and ideological obfuscations, and which transforms the entirety of social relations; we have seen how this presupposes a utopian fantasy of social wholeness and harmony. Rather, we might think of revolution in terms of a multiplicity of insurrectional and autonomous spaces. Indeed, this alternative mapping of the political space is what is implicit in the anarchist idea of the 'social revolution', in which Bakunin called upon people to 'organize their powers apart from and against the state' (1953: 377). If we try to think what this might mean today, it can only be the creation of autonomous spaces which are heterogeneous to the order of the state and capitalism. Creating and defending these spaces would no doubt involve moments of confrontation with the state – and we see this all the time, in the clashes between police and those who occupy workplaces and universities, or between the military and indigenous collectives – but the emphasis would mostly be on fostering alternative ways of life, new relations and intensities. These are what might be called insurrectional spaces, and they can be seen as so many cracks within the dominant social, political and economic order.⁹ This idea of insurrection has a number of resonances. We should see it as a micropolitics which, rather than supplanting macropolitical practices (in which case it would become simply another form of macropolitics), acts to supplement them.¹⁰ It is here that

⁹ I borrow this metaphor of cracks from John Holloway's book *Crack Capitalism*, in which he argues that social relations can only be transformed in a micropolitical way through the multiplicity of everyday acts of resistance that are like so many cracks in the edifice of power (see 2010).

¹⁰ See Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the micropolitical, or 'molec-

we should pay careful attention to Max Stirner's distinction between the revolution and the insurrection:

The Revolution aimed at new arrangements; insurrection leads us no longer to let ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves, and sets no glittering hopes on 'institutions'. It is not a fight against the established, since, if it prospers, the established collapses of itself; it is only a working forth of me out of the established (1995: 279–80).

For Stirner, a revolution is the attempt to arrange the social space in a certain way, according to a rational plan. The insurrection, by contrast, defies the idea of a plan imposed upon society by institutions; instead, it consists of autonomous self-arrangement. This voluntary assertion of the freedom of self-arrangement means that one is no longer bound or enthralled to power; one disengages from established political institutions and discourses and invents something new. The insurrection, understood in this sense, is the unbinding of the self from his or her attachment to power. What Stirner is getting at with his notion of insurrection is what might be termed a revolution of everyday life. This is, of course, a thematic that was taken up by the Situationists, notably Henri Lefebvre and Raoul Vaneigem, for whom the revolution was something that occurred at the level of everyday practices and lived experiences. For Vaneigem in particular – and here his thought bears a striking resemblance to Stirner – it involved an insurrection of individuals against the established identities or 'roles' conferred upon them by consumer and statist society, and a kind a release of excess energy invested in everyday actions, driven by the creative and poetic power of one's imagination (see 2006). Furthermore, there is a call for revolutionizing the space–time relationship, for a kind of authentically lived experience that is no longer bounded and appropriated by capitalism and divided into measurable, quantifiable units that are constantly

ular', and macropolitical (2005: 208–31).

being counted down (see Vaneigem, 2006: 228; Lefebvre, 2008: 10).

In emphasising the singularity of experiences and desires, one also finds a certain parallel here with William Connolly's ethos of pluralization (see Connolly, 1995, 2005), which is understood as a form of micropolitics and ethics based around an agonistic respect for difference, singularity and heterogeneity. This is something that goes beyond liberal tolerance; rather it is a deep pluralism, embodying an ethos of generosity towards difference, multiplicity and becoming (see Connolly, 2005: 121–7). Central to this pluralistic ethos is some idea of autonomy – in other words, enabling spaces for difference and singularity, and indeed, Connolly believes that agonistic politics would work towards the fostering and deepening of such spaces: 'Spaces for difference are to be established through the play of political contestation' (Connolly, 1991: 211). Connolly's conception of agonism works through intensities, affects, singularities and becomings – showing that social and political transformation cannot come about unless there is a transformation at the level of micropolitical relationships as well. We are reminded here of the spiritual anarchism of Gustav Landauer, who argued that the state is not an institution that can be overthrown in a political revolution, but a certain relation between people, and therefore it can only be transcended through a spiritual transformation of relationships: 'we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently' (Landauer in Buber, 1996: 47). This also implies a further distinction between revolution and insurrection: in its totalising spatial logic, which seeks to remake everything according to a rational plan, revolution is in some respects insensitive to what already exists. Not everything has to be remade, and, indeed, the idea of autonomy draws on a certain ethos of care and conservation. For instance, anarchists have been sensitive to the dangers of technology: to the way that during the nineteenth century, technological development and