


# For democracy: Planning and publics without the state

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## Abstract

This article argues that planning should develop a robust conception of “publics without the State.” We should do so because the State is a necessarily oligarchical arrangement that prevents us from achieving real democracy. We should explore publics without the State in both theory and practice.

## Keywords

democracy, Hobbes, Locke, publics, State

## Introduction

To my mind, this collection of papers, which raises the question of the public interest in planning, is a good opportunity to interrogate what we mean when we say “the public.”<sup>1</sup> The question of the public is not new in planning, of course, and there are many different angles from which one might approach it (e.g. Friedmann, 1987; Harvey, 1983; Krumholz, 1999; Roy, 2001; Tait, 2011; Tugwell, 1975 [1939]). The angle I take is a particular one, and in taking it, I want to achieve something very specific: to bring to light our all-too-common practice of thinking of “the public” as equivalent to the State. This equivalence is everywhere in planning. We speak of “public schools” when we mean schools that are owned and operated by the State (Jud, 1985), or we say “public transportation,” which is a transportation that is built and operated by the State (Sanchez, 1999) or “public housing,” by which we mean housing built and managed by the State (Briggs et al., 1999). We say “publicly owned” land to indicate the land that is owned by the State (Cumbers, 2013). We say “public policy” to mean rules and regulations the State makes (Garde, 2008). We say “public services” to indicate services provided by the State (Speir and Stephenson, 2002). “Public administration” is our term for managing the State bureaucracy (Backlund et al., 2014). We say “public sector” to speak about economic activities

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that are carried out by the State itself, rather than just regulated by it (Krumholz and Forester, 1990; Susskind and Ozawa, 1984). The vaguer term “public sphere” usually refers to the activities of the State. Our habit of mistaking the State for the public runs wide and is deeply ingrained.

There are some few instances when the concept of public is distinguished from the State. The term “public sphere,” though it usually indicates State affairs, does sometimes refer beyond the State to a broader idea of public. And when we talk of “public participation” (e.g. Alexander, 2008; Chettiparamb, 2007), as, for example, when a planner is interested in getting “the public” to participate in the planning process, the idea of the public usually indicates people who are *outside* the State, beyond, say, the planner’s colleagues at the City’s Department of Planning. And in fact, the idea of “the public interest,” the focus of this Part Special Issue, does have some degree of independence from the State (Alexander, 2002; Moroni, 2004). There is a sense in which it refers to the welfare of a group of people that is not necessarily the same thing as the body of State citizens. But still, even in these cases where we have put a little distance in our minds between the public and the State, the State tends to move in eagerly to reconnect the two. It commonly arrogates to itself the duty of representing the public, of standing in for it, of speaking for it. The State puts itself forward as the guardian or guarantor of the public interest. It prosecutes criminals, and fines polluters, and enforces zoning codes, and builds roads, and educates children, and houses the poor *in the name of* the public and in order to defend the public interest.

The point of this article is to argue against our habit of equating public and State. I argue that we should consciously resist that equation. We should seek instead those moments when the two terms are distinct, and we should actively ward off the State’s attempt reconnect them. In short, I urge us to imagine and create *publics without the State*.

“Why should we do that,” you might be saying, “what’s so bad about the State? Isn’t one of the foundational ideas of planning to use the police powers of the State to mitigate the destructive effects of the market (q.v. Klosterman, 2003)? Doesn’t the State prevent all sorts of evil (like pollution or sprawl) and produce all sorts of good (like mass transit)?” I don’t mean to argue for the market or for pollution or—heaven forbid—against mass transit. I mean to argue against the foundational political relation that the State institutes. That relation is a relation of oligarchy. What the State does—and it is designed expressly for this purpose—is to alienate people from their power and vest it in an entity outside themselves. As such, the State, by its normal functioning, necessarily blocks the path towards a more democratic society. Whatever real improvements the State might make in our material experience, therefore—whatever good it produces or evil it prevents—are achieved, necessarily, at the cost of diminishing democracy.

I should say that this characterization of the State is not meant to be hyperbole. I am not overstating the case in order to provoke reactions or incite debate. I am trying to offer a precise and clear-eyed theoretical definition of the State. I am trying to grasp, as soberly and accurately as possible, the meaning and purpose of the State. My goal is to capture the deep truth of the State, to understand that the State is an oligarchy whose purpose is to prevent democracy.

Of course, the idea that the State’s purpose is to prevent democracy poses a serious challenge to planning, since planning has always been intricately entwined with the

State. Moreover, as we just saw, planners are in the habit of equating public and State, and virtually all planning practice takes the goal of safeguarding “the public interest” to be integral to its mission (e.g. Campbell and Fainstein, 2003). And so, there is a very real danger that some large percentage of planning activity stands, structurally and necessarily, as an impediment to democracy. I think we should take this danger extremely seriously. Doing so would mean honestly examining whether the relationship between planning and the State is a necessary one. Could they be disentangled, so that we could do planning without the State, or is the State (and its police powers) *necessary* to planning? We should be similarly honest about the question of the public. I do not think we need to abandon the idea of the public. Rather, I think we are better served if we engage a project, in both theory and practice, of uncoupling the public from the State. What would be left of “the public” after such an operation?

Of course, the impetus for imagining publics without the State is my argument that the State works to prevent democracy. If I want to make this argument, certainly I will need to say more about both the State and democracy. And so, the first section of the article makes a relatively long case for why the modern State, all the way down to its foundation, is designed to separate people from their power. Then, in the latter part of that section, I offer a radical conception of democracy that understands it to be a political relation that works in precisely the opposite direction from the State, a relation in which people refuse to be alienated from their power, and they use that power to manage their affairs for themselves.

Once that case has been made, the rest of the article then explores some implications for planning, and for its publics, if we decide to see the State as antithetical to democracy. If planning wants to remain committed to the idea of a “public interest,” and at the same time, we want to move in the direction of democracy, we will need to imagine publics without the State. What would that mean, publics without the State? The article is not so presumptuous as to try to offer a definitive answer to that question since any answer would have to be worked out by people themselves. Instead, I take the more tentative step of proposing some habits of thought that I think can help us begin to conceive of what life might be like in publics without the State, and what role, if any, planning might play in those publics.

## The state against democracy

### *The state*

Somewhere there are still peoples and herds, but not where we live, my brothers: here there are states.

State? What is that? Well! Now open your ears to me, for now I shall speak to you about the death of peoples.

State is the name of the coldest of all cold monsters. Coldly it tells lies too; and this lie crawls from its mouth: “I, the state, am the people.” (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, First Part, On the New Idol, 2005)

Nietzsche has it mostly right, but we are getting ahead of ourselves. To understand the State, our modern State, we need to start with Hobbes. In 1651, he published *Leviathan*, a painstaking and brilliant book whose purpose was to save us from ourselves (Hobbes,

1996). The first 12 chapters, which were the painstaking part, make an argument about what the human condition is like in the absence of State power. He calls this condition without the State the “state of nature.” In the state of nature, he tells us, we are all roughly equal, which is to say each of us possesses more or less the same intelligence and physical strength. Each person’s only purpose in the state of nature is to survive, and so each uses his or her power to do so. Hobbes says that in the state of nature, each of us has a *right* to do anything we think will help us survive. This right is not a legal right, of course, since there is no State. Rather it is what he calls a right of *nature*, and it authorizes us to take whatever action we think will help preserve our life. He stresses that there is no other code in the state of nature, no other set of moral or legal rules to govern our behavior. Any one of us can harm, or even kill, any other if she thinks it will benefit her own survival. Of course, if we all possess roughly the same amount of power, and if we all have a natural right to do whatever we think will help us survive, then, logically, every person is a potential mortal threat to any other. Thus, Hobbes arrives at his famous conclusion: the state of nature, our life without the State, is necessarily a *bellum omnium contra omnes*, a war of each person against every other person.

To be a bit technical, Hobbes does not think this *bellum* is an *active* war: each person is not actually attacking every other person at all times. Rather, it is a *potential* war: every person has the potential to attack any other at any time. Clearly, this *bellum* is no kind of life, and that is precisely what Hobbes wants us to conclude. He drives the point home with his most famous line, calling this life without the State “nasty, brutish and short.” But, Hobbes says, there is a way out. Fortunately, in nature, we possess another faculty, the faculty of reason, and we use reason to perceive the one law that *does* exist in the state of nature, the Law of Nature, which says that we should endeavor peace. Our reason tells us that we do not want to live in this *bellum*, that it is not conducive to our survival, and so we must work out a way to leave the state of nature. Now, because it is precisely the power that each of us has by the right of nature to do whatever we think will help us survive, reason tells us that what we must do, if we want to escape the *bellum*, is to *surrender* this power. If having our own power is what endangers us, then we must permanently forswear that power if we are to save ourselves.

But to whom should we surrender our power? Not to other people, since people having power is exactly the problem. The state of nature is so unbearable because our power is available to us, at hand, vested in our bodies, immanent to the mass of people. So we must surrender our power to something *outside* of ourselves, to a separate entity: the modern State. Hobbes reinforces the point that the State must be entirely other than us by defining the State to be a qualitatively different kind of thing than we are. In the state of nature, we are all what Hobbes calls “natural persons,” but the State is an “artificial person,” a novel entity that is outside of us, alien to us, invented from scratch expressly to do the work of holding our collected power separate from us, away from us, safe in the hands of something that is *not us*. So the State exists, expressly, *to alienate our power from us*.

And there is more. Not only must the State alienate our power from us, it must also *transcend* us, loom over us and exist as an unquestioned higher power that has no superior on Earth. The inscription, from Job, that floats above the famous frontispiece to the book reads, “*Non est potestas super terram quae comparetur ei*: There is no power on

Earth that compares to it.” The State’s purpose, Hobbes makes clear, is to collect our natural power, all of it, and use it to control us, to “overawe” us, as he puts it, into behaving peaceably. The State must be sovereign, and we must obey it. If we do not, we are put back into a state of nature, which is necessarily a state of war. We cannot really hope to survive unless we surrender our power to the State. And since survival is our primary purpose as human beings, surrendering our natural power to the State and offering it our unquestioning obedience is our inescapable fate as a species.

At this point, you might be itching to raise the objection so dear to the heart of those in liberal-democratic societies:

Why is he going on and on about Hobbes? Hobbes’ State is certainly objectionable, but of course, it is not the State we ended up with in contemporary liberal-democratic societies (thank goodness). What we actually have is *Locke’s* State, the limited, liberal State whose power is not at all the absolute, terrifying power that Hobbes envisions.<sup>2</sup>

It is true. For Locke (1988 [1689]), in *The Second Treatise on Government*, when we leave the state of nature and enter into State society, we surrender much less power than we do in Hobbes. Locke’s State, what we now call the liberal State, has only limited powers, and it is granted a much smaller sphere of control. It is tasked primarily with the power to judge offenses against the Law of Nature<sup>3</sup> and to punish the offenders. However, this smaller purview for the State in Locke, while it changes the *quantity* of power we must surrender to the State, does not change the *quality* of the relationship that Locke imagines between persons and the State. Exactly as in Hobbes, in Locke people choose to leave the state of nature and enter into State society by surrendering (some amount of) their power to the State. That power (in whatever amount) is alienated from people, and it is vested in an entity that is separated from them and has sovereign authority to rule them.<sup>4</sup> Although Locke’s legislative has limited powers, he is at pains to stress (in chapters 10 and 11) that within its purview those powers must be sovereign. The legislative’s judgment must be accepted over all others. While in Locke, the amount of power we surrender is less than it is in Hobbes, nevertheless the act that founds the State is the same: people agree to surrender their power. Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, it doesn’t matter. The founding act is the same: we cease being a natural person in the state of nature and become a member of a State society by surrendering our power to a separate, transcendent and sovereign authority.

And so the modern State—whether in its pure, absolute, Hobbesian form or in its limited, liberal, Lockean form—is, from its inception, a political relation designed to alienate people from their power. It is designed explicitly to be *not the same thing* as the people. This separation is embedded in the founding idea of *all* modern States. They exist in order to be *other than* the people.

Of course, this operation, separating people from their power and using it to rule them, produces an acute need for legitimation, for an argument that defends why this operation is should happen, why it is just. All of early modern political thought is really just an extended (and fevered) attempt to make legitimate the State’s founding alienation. We have already seen how stridently Hobbes tries to convince people that they should surrender their power. The same is true for Rousseau. He starts *The Social Contract* by

saying, “Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains.” But he does not offer to free us from our chains. His book is, instead, an argument for why those chains are legitimate. It is not hard to see, in the past and on through to today, the State scrambling to legitimate its authority.<sup>5</sup> One well-worn strategy is for the State to simply deny the problem of separation and instead baldly claim that it is identical to the people. “The people rest, your honor.” The State commonly speaks as though it were the same thing as the public, “This is publicly owned land.” Of course, this attempt at legitimation is one primary source of the established habit of conflating the public and the State that I discuss above.

So we can see that Nietzsche’s condemnation entirely hits the mark: the State is a cold monster because it is an artificial person, not a real one, and it tells lies because it claims to be the people (and the public) when in fact it is not.

## Democracy

This fact, that the State is not the people (or the public), is vital to the question of democracy. It is vital because, at its core, democracy means that people retain their power and use it to manage their own affairs. That is a very compact definition, so let me elaborate it by way of an etymology.

We usually take democracy to be made up of *demos* and *kratia*, both of which come from Greek. In the modern era, we tend to think *demos* is self-evident, it means “the people.” But in ancient Greece, or at least for Plato and Aristotle, it meant only the many workers, those who were not able to take part in politics because they were too busy doing the jobs that were necessary to keep the *polis* functioning (Aristotle, 1997; Plato, 2008; see also Rancière, 1999 [1995]). In the modern era, however, and again this starts with Hobbes, *demos* has come to mean everyone, all people without qualification. Hobbes’ argument in chapters 1-12 is meant to set down the most general condition of humans without the State, and so he does not distinguish among different kinds of persons. He speaks only of “natural persons” in the abstract.<sup>6</sup> When natural persons agree to the contracts that found the State (in chapter 17), each person makes a separate contract with every other person. There is no possibility of excluding any portion of the population from the contract since that would be a recipe for future faction, conflict and war, which is precisely what Hobbes is trying to avoid. So in Hobbes, *everyone* must be included, without qualification. All persons must be equally subjected to the authority of the State. So our modern idea of *demos* is once again from Hobbes: to us, it means *everyone*, every person in the society.<sup>7</sup>

*Kratia*, the other root of democracy, is perhaps a bit trickier to parse. Its most immediate meaning carries the sense of a government, a ruling authority. That sense conveys the idea of a “power over,” a power that controls or limits or even dominates. And *kratia* does in fact have those connotations, both in the way it was used in Plato and Aristotle’s Greece, and in the meaning of our own words in English that bear its imprint (like aristocracy, bureaucracy, meritocracy, etc.). But if we dig a bit deeper, we find another, more general word, *kratos*. This word carries a different idea, the idea of a power that is more productive, something we might call “strength” or “might” (Harper, 2014; Soanes and Stevenson, 2008; Weekley, 1952). Drawing inspiration from Spinoza (and Nietzsche after him), we might read *kratos* to mean something like the power that humans have to

act into the world, the capacity we have to make a tangible impact on our surroundings.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, *kratos* takes on a meaning more like a “power to,” a power to create, to invent something new, to produce changes in the world.<sup>9</sup> And so if we go back to the first word, *kratia*, we can reappropriate its meaning, insisting that while it did eventually come to bear the meaning of a governing “power over,” it also evokes, from down deeper in its roots, the idea of a “power to,” the idea of our human capacity to act into and change the world.<sup>10</sup>

If we reassemble this (admittedly atypical) etymology, we get a concept of “democracy” that joins the modern idea of *demos*—all people without qualification—to an idea of *kratia* returned to its roots in *kratos*, the power people have to act into the world to produce something new. And so, if we choose to interpret democracy this way, it becomes a form of life in which all people are joined to their *kratos*; they retain it and they use it together to directly produce and manage their lives in common.

But as we saw, the founding act of the modern State is precisely to alienate the *demos* from their *kratos*—either wholly (Hobbes) or in part (Locke)—and vest it in a separate and sovereign authority. The modern State, therefore, works actively and intentionally to prevent democracy. It is designed to separate *demos* and *kratos*, to make democracy impossible. The key to rediscovering democracy today is to unequivocally refuse this separation of *demos* and *kratos*. In democracy, *kratos* is not surrendered to the State; it remains immanent to people themselves. And so we must declare the social contract<sup>11</sup> null and void, affirm that it does not bind us, that *we do not agree* to surrender our power to the State, that it is no longer sovereign over us.

It is worth noting that this desire to retain our own power is already there in Locke. He insisted stridently that even though people agree to let the State govern them, they nevertheless still retain, distantly, an ultimate control over the power they surrender. That is because they reserve the right to rebel. If they feel the State is not governing them according to the terms by which they surrendered their power, they can decide together to dissolve it. Locke says that such rebellion happens only very rarely, but even so it must always be part of the political relation, an always-present threat, in order to prevent the State from abusing its power. Hobbes, of course, abhorred the idea of rebellion since it would necessarily cast us back into the state of nature (*bellum*), an outcome far worse than life under the State could ever be. But even if Locke and Hobbes differ in how they value the right of rebellion,<sup>12</sup> there is, in the work of both thinkers, the specter of a life beyond or without or outside the State. Permanently implied in the contract by which we surrender our power, inherent to the very concept of the modern State, already there at the beginning of the idea, is the fact that at any time *people can always renounce their surrender*, they can always make their power their own again and use it as they see fit. *We* are the specter that never ceases to haunt the modern State. *We* are its greatest fear.<sup>13</sup> The *demos* joined with its *kratos*—Democracy.

That is why Hobbes is at such pains, in chapters 1–12, to establish the horror of life outside the State. It is precisely to prevent democracy, to convince us *not* to reclaim our power and not to reassert our ever-present right to rule ourselves. Hobbes fears democracy so much because he thinks that without a State, we would necessarily devolve into *bellum omnia contra omnes*. But despite Hobbes’ painstaking argument, that “necessarily” is spurious. Not even 30 years later, Locke argued instead that without a State, we



actually would be able to live together peaceably. Locke says that in the state of nature, there would be a “Law of Nature,” and because we are rational, we would all know this law and understand that we should obey it. In Locke’s state of nature, just as in Hobbes’, we retain our right to use our power as we see fit, but in Locke, we seem to be able to produce a largely peaceful and economically productive society.<sup>14</sup> Rousseau (1987) chimes in to agree with Locke that we are largely peaceable creatures in the state of nature, but Rousseau thought it was because we had “pity,” or the capacity to feel empathy for our fellow human beings.<sup>15</sup> Rousseau even says explicitly that Hobbes missed the faculty of pity in his account of humans in the state of nature, and that is why he wrongly assumed it to be a horrible *bellum*.

So given this diversity of opinion, it seems reasonable to conclude that in the state of nature, or, to say it plainly, in a human community without a State, we are capable of the full range of human behaviors and relations. We might enter into Hobbes’ *bellum*, or we might use reason to see that we should respect each other’s person and property according to Locke’s Law of Nature, or we might be peaceable because of Rousseau’s feeling of pity. Or, looking farther afield, we might find our true selves in cooperative production (Marx), or organize ourselves through rational discussions about the meaning of justice (Aristotle), or relate to each other through an active ethics of care (Noddings, 2003), or even take frivolous pleasure in torturing those who are weaker (as with the nobles in Nietzsche, 1989b, second essay, section 6). In the absence of the sovereign State, it seems clear, we are not fated to war. Rather, much more plausibly, we are capable of anything.

Therefore, democracy means that the future is open, and it is up to us to create it. This orientation towards the future is important. Despite the way the early modern political thinkers put their argument, democracy is not to be achieved simply by sloughing off the State and falling back into a primordial condition of democracy. Democracy is not waiting for us in an ideal past. Rather, democracy is better understood as perpetually inchoate, as a necessarily ongoing project that we carry out together into an uncertain future. Democracy must always be a community to come, always constituted by our active ongoing struggle to manage our affairs for ourselves.<sup>16</sup> That means democracy is very demanding. Not only does it require that we perpetually resist the temptation to surrender our power to the State, but it also requires that we never stop learning about our own power, never stop improving our collective capacity to manage our affairs for ourselves.

## Planning and publics without the state

And so Hobbes’ cold monster does not bind us. The modern State is entirely optional. We can perfectly well live without it, and we can choose instead to take up the difficult but joyous project of democracy.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, when we conceive of and create “the public” in planning theory and practice, we need not think of it as the same thing as the State. Public and State are not bound together in any necessary way. We are entirely free to imagine properly democratic publics, which is to say publics without the State. And, more than that, if we are serious about democracy, then we *need* to imagine publics without the State. It is an idea we have to theorize and practice well.



We have arrived where I wanted this article to take us, to the point of grasping the importance of non-State publics and raising the question of what they should be like. The reader might expect the rest of the article to provide an answer to that question, to set out a detailed vision of the way I think publics without the State should be. But that is not the right course at all. The whole point of the first part of the article was to free us from the limiting assumption that we must be coupled to the State and to open up the possibility of our being together without the State, democratically. It would be a step in the wrong direction for me to immediately close down those possibilities by declaring the specifics of what non-State publics are and are not. Moreover, democracy obviously requires that people in each public work out for themselves what those specifics are. However, what is perhaps appropriate for me to do is to propose some methodological rules of thumb—some “habits of thought” for how to think about “the public”—that follow from my arguments mentioned previously. These are intended to help us get out of the habit of thinking the public with the State and into a frame of mind conducive to imagining and creating democratic publics, or publics without the State.

### *Some habits of thought*

There are any number of questions that are important to explore in thinking about publics without the State. Are they singular or plural? How homogenous do they have to be? How should they make decisions? What kinds of spatial and social relations should they produce? What values should they defend? Do they favor conflict (and if so what kind), or do they prefer agreement and harmony? And so on. Anywhere is a good place to begin, and so I have organized my thoughts around the very lucid questions posed by Malcolm Tait, who organized the panel at the AESOP/ACSP conference. These questions focused their attention on how a particular community (however defined) should relate to other communities, and more specifically, how a particular community might relate to a wider “public.”

One question asked how a given community might better take into account, and even value, the interests of people beyond their community. And, moreover, how they might do that when the interests of those outside the community conflict with the community’s own interests.<sup>18</sup> Here the classic concerns are (1) to avoid a sort of myopic NIMBYism in which, for example, a neighborhood opposes a plan that will have some negative outcomes for them but some positive outcomes for the city as a whole, but also (2) to ensure that the needs of that neighborhood are not ignored in favor of the needs of the whole city. The habit of thought I would advocate here is for us to think about this problem without recourse to the State. It is not difficult for a planner’s mind to see the role of the State here, as the sovereign authority that either requires smaller communities to accede to the needs of the wider public, or protects the rights of those smaller communities when they have been systematically neglected. But, the habit of thought I advocate here refuses to fall back on the State. It forces us to ask how we can negotiate these questions without the State. What if there were only the power immanent in communities and no transcendent sovereign power to judge and to decide? What relations should those communities establish with each other in the absence of a State to mediate them? Should they even conceive of a wider “public” when there is no State to conceive of it for them? If they do

conceive of a wider public, what should that term mean for them? How should the interests of that public relate to the interests of the smaller communities that make it up? Should the relation be associative, federative, or something else? Should people create non-State institutions to organize decisions? If so, how should those institutions be structured so as to avoid the alienation and transcendence of the State relation?

Those questions are normative and abstract, and that is one register in which we can operate. But we are not limited to that register. We can also very well ask such questions in an *empirical* register. We can ask how local groups actually *are* conceptualizing a shared idea of a public interest, right now, in the absence of State mediation. We can do this because even though we live in a society governed by a State, the State is not ubiquitous. In principle, every relation in its territory is subject to its sovereignty, but of course, in practice, the State is not always there, not always judging, deciding, and governing. There are countless examples of people working out questions like this for themselves, without any significant involvement by the State. These examples range from the mundane (neighbors negotiating how to use the parking spaces on their street) to the spectacular (people in informal settlements figuring out how to hook up and regulate an electrical system for tens of thousands of people). These kind of relations, both among communities and between smaller communities and wider publics, are being negotiated all the time, in real life, without the State, by urban inhabitants themselves. And so the empirical habit of thought here is: *pay attention* to these practices. We do not have to assume that life without the State only exists in the unrealistic fantasies of anarchists. Life without the State is, instead, a very real and very common fact of life. Publics without the State are being created and negotiated all the time, and in our empirical research we can choose to pay attention to them, record them, narrative them, compare them, and learn from them.

Another concern raised in the questions to the conference panel had to do with the proper role of professional planners in identifying and defending a wider public interest. Of course, most professional planners today are employed by the State and their judgment and decisions are backed by its sovereign authority. So, one obvious habit of thought we can adopt here is to abandon the idea that we need those kind of professional planners at all.<sup>19</sup> That would then prompt us to think about what it might mean to be a professional planner without the State. Would such non-State professional planners be needed, and if so, for what? What role should they play in defining and defending the public interest? Should they form non-State institutions, and if so, what kind of institutions?

And in the empirical register, what kinds of professional practices exist today that are beyond the impetus or auspices of the State, but that we might nevertheless call “planning”? And what is the difference between those “planning” practices and practices we usually call by other names, such as activism, organizing, mediation or consulting? To put perhaps too fine a point on it, is there anything left of professional planners and their work when we strip away the State’s alienated, sovereign authority? If so, what is it? If there is something remaining, it may well be a very tender plant, one we will have to attend carefully if we want it to grow stronger.<sup>20</sup>

A last concern that the questions to the panel evoked was how planners might design and carry out public participation processes that foster a greater awareness of a wider

public interest. Here, of course we should abandon the model in which the State initiates and manages a process whereby people offer input to State officials on a given planning question. Whatever participation processes exist should be created by people themselves. What sorts of processes should they create? How should they judge and decide, and on which questions? How routinized or institutionalized should those processes be? If they are institutionalized, again, how should those non-State institutions be structured? What role should a concept of a public interest play in those processes, if any?

And again, in the empirical register, what processes are people actually designing and using, today, in the countless examples of people making decisions for themselves without the oversight of a State authority? Here, again I think we can and should examine anything from the utterly mundane (e.g. a group of people deciding where to go to dinner) to the extraordinary (e.g. the experimentation during the various occupy movements with non-State institutional forms like general assemblies, spokescouncils, consensus processes and the like).

## Conclusion

[Philosophers] prefer a handful of certainty to a whole carload of beautiful possibilities. (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Part One, Section 10, 1989a)

So what should publics and “the public interest” be in the absence of the State? I do not know. But if we planners are interested in democracy, we need to become serious about theorizing publics without the State, and investigating empirically the countless examples of publics without the State that people are creating today. My hope, and my expectation, is that when we free ourselves from the habit of assuming the State, when we give ourselves permission to imagine publics without the State and begin to look actively for those publics as they actually exist, we will be amazed by what we see.

We will see, in the heart of the city, spectacular eruptions of people using their power to manage their affairs for themselves—like Paris in 1871, or Budapest in 1956, or Tiananmen in 1989, or Tahrir, Syntagma, Puerta del Sol, and Zucotti in 2011, or Taksim in 2013. We will see efforts in cities all over the world to reclaim popular control of important aspects of urban life, including temporary housing squats (in cities all over Europe), self-managed guerrilla gardens (e.g. in Detroit, New York and Baltimore) and shared transportation networks (in France during the transport workers’ strike of 2005 or more sustained networks in cities all over Africa). We will see even longer-term efforts, such as the autonomous villages in Chiapas, Mexico, the countless land occupations/inhabitations in both rural and urban Brazil, or the recuperated factories in Argentina. In some cases, people have chosen to create fairly robust institutions to organize their self-management, such as with some free software projects (e.g. Debian), or social centers in Italian cities, or the many neighborhood assemblies in cities in Spain and Argentina. In other cases, the methods of self-management being practiced are more spontaneous, less institutionalized, and more fluid. I think both kinds of efforts are important to take seriously and learn from.

We will also see self-management in desperate moments of survival—like New Orleans in 2005, Haiti in 2010, or Fukushima in 2011—where the State has gone missing

and people are left to fend for themselves, displaying at times both extraordinary humanity and appalling cruelty. And we should always remember to understand informal settlements in this context as well: entire urban worlds, with millions and millions of inhabitants, largely built and maintained and managed by those inhabitants themselves, typically with only sporadic and unpredictable State involvement.

If we pay attention, we will see that democracy is always emerging everywhere. People are constantly managing their affairs for themselves. All over the world, they are forging publics without the State, negotiating difference, arriving at agreement, setting up organizations, getting done what needs to be done. It is not at all a question of whether it is possible. Of course it is. The question is rather, how can we do it *well*? Because in every case where people create publics without the State, there will be both successes and failures, positive and negative outcomes, and better and worse communities. People are not naturally warlike as Hobbes led us to believe, but neither are they naturally cooperative beings who will always live in peace. "Real humanity," as Bakunin (1973) put it, "presents a mixture of all that is most sublime and beautiful with all that is vilest and most monstrous in the world"<sup>21</sup> (p. 127). We are both gods and monsters. Democracy is not utopia. Democracy means people retain their power and use it as they see fit. They can use their power any way they choose, and they can create any kind of community they desire. We should expect that those communities might exhibit any of the qualities of which humans are capable. There is no sovereign authority that will "overawe them all" into behaving one certain way. Democracy demands more from us. It demands that we work on ourselves, together, that we develop ourselves by deciding what kind of community we want to be, what kind of publics we want to create. Which aspects of ourselves, which capacities and qualities, do we want to augment? Which do we want to limit, and even cause to atrophy? How will we do this, together?

Given that the State has been so present in our lives, deciding for us for so long, we should expect that we have some hard work ahead. We are not, most of us, *in the habit* of making decisions for ourselves. We have some growing up to do. Hobbes would tell us that this is exactly why we need the State: to prevent us, in our inexperience, from doing harm to ourselves. But Hobbes is wrong. The State is precisely the problem. It is the main reason we are so inexperienced, because it has prevented us from developing our ability to manage our own affairs. We do not need the State. We need democracy. We need more practice governing ourselves, more experience using our collective power together, productively. As long as the State holds that power in receivership, under the assumption—Hobbes' assumption—that we are not responsible enough to use it well, we will remain incapable, beholden, and subjected. When we refuse the authority of the sovereign State and reclaim our power, we are deciding to begin the project of democracy, the collective project of becoming capable, responsible and, at last, really alive.

And so what does all this mean for planning? I think at this point, for a profession and a discipline so absorbed in the State, so steeped in the assumption of the State's sovereign authority, we need to begin slowly by adopting and extending the habits of thought I have proposed. We need to begin the project of training ourselves to think without the State, to imagine publics without the State, to pay attention to the non-State publics that already exist, to learn how they operate, where they have been successful and where they have failed. Once we develop those habits of thought, once we have trained ourselves to think

and see without the State, I think then we will be in a better position to ask what planning should mean, what the practice of planning should become, in democratic publics without the State. It is an enormous project, one that promises seismic shifts in our thinking and practice. But it will also be, I believe, a joyous project, one that will trade our present handful of certainty for a whole carload of beautiful possibilities.

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## Notes

1. This article is one of a Part Special Issue that grows out of a session on the public interest in planning at the 2013 joint AESOP/ACSP conference in which participants responded to a series of questions posed by the organizer, Malcolm Tait.
2. Those (few) who would point instead to Rousseau will acknowledge that the purview and power of the State is even greater for him than it is for Hobbes.
3. Which in Locke is different than in Hobbes. For Locke, the Law of Nature says that we must not harm another in his person or property.
4. It is worth mentioning that in Locke, this alienation is double: first, the power of each person is alienated when all are “united into one body” (a body politic—this is in chapters 7 and 8), and then, second, the power of that body politic is alienated to the State (in chapter 8 and ff.).
5. It may seem superfluous to say this, but in the interest of being thorough, I will mention that this legitimating function is necessary precisely because of the alienation that the State institutes. Without this alienation, no legitimation is needed.
6. He does not even distinguish classes or genders or races among natural persons, although at times he does suffer from the habit of using the word “men” to refer to all humans.
7. Hardt and Negri (2004) credit Spinoza’s notion of “absolute democracy” (in chapter 11 of his *Political Treatise*) as the source of this shift. Spinoza was deeply influenced by Hobbes, and so it would stand to reason that he would have followed Hobbes’ lead here. *Leviathan* was published in 1651, and Spinoza’s work comes later in that century.
8. For Spinoza, I am thinking of the *Ethics* (2005); for Nietzsche, I am thinking of both *Beyond Good and Evil* (1989a) and *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1989b).
9. Deleuze and Guattari (1977 [1972], 1987 [1980]), writing much later but energetically mining this same vein of minor philosophy, call this power *puissance*.
10. Spinoza uses the terms *potentia* (power to) and *potestas* (power over), on which see Holland (1998), who refers the reader to Gueroult (1968/1974)). Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004), also inspired by Spinoza, conceive of something very similar. Their terms are “constituent power” and “constituted power.” There is a whole (minor) village of thinkers who propose something very like the *kratos* I am suggesting.
11. Whether it be Hobbes’ or Locke’s or Rousseau’s. All social contracts exist to alienate (at least some of) our power to the State, power that in democracy must remain immanent to people themselves.
12. And make no mistake, Locke did not see rebellion as a way to begin living without the State, in the state of nature. He imagined that in the wake of a rebellion and the dissolution of the present contract, people would quickly make a new contract with a new (and less abusive) State.
13. Some would ask, “Yes, but who is this ‘we’?” but they should know already that it is the

- demos*: everyone, without qualification.
14. The latter was of course Locke's overriding obsession.
  15. Rousseau's departure from rationalism here is very important, but to explore it further would be beyond the scope of my argument.
  16. There is an echo of Agamben's (2009 [1990]) "coming community" here, of course, as well as the vision of The Invisible Committee (2009 [2008]). Lurking behind them are Derrida's (1994 [1993]) idea of "democracy to come" and Deleuze and Guattari's (1994 [1991]) "people to come." See also, if you are intrigued by this idea, Nancy (2010 [2008]).
  17. I am a democrat writing for democracy, and I draw on the sources I think are important for that project, both classic (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Spinoza and Nietzsche) and more contemporary (Deleuze and Guattari, Agamben, Hardt and Negri, etc.). At the same time, I am aware that my argument against the State will cause some to expect a deeper engagement with anarchist thought, both classic (Bakunin, Proudhon, Kropotkin, Goldman, etc.) and more contemporary (Murray Bookchin, Paul Goodman, Todd May, Saul Newman, Richard Day, David Graeber, etc.). While I acknowledge the many overlaps, in my work (Purcell, 2008, 2013b) I just have never built my conception of democracy by using the anarchists.
  18. The questions posed "community" in the abstract. They were about communities of whatever kind.
  19. This idea has been raised by planners before, of course. See, for example, Heskin (1980), Leavitt (1994), Sandercock (1998).
  20. Saul Newman (2011), for one, suggests that there can be planning beyond the State, which he conceives of as "autonomous, ground-up practices of direct action" (p. 357). My own work (Purcell, 2013a) is less certain that what we know as "planning" would exist without the State. And Newman and I are not the first to explore these kinds of questions. See Banham et al. (1969), Friedmann (1987), and Ward (1990). See also Hughes and Sadler (2000).
  21. On the latter, see Cormac McCarthy's masterly *Blood Meridian*.

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