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# In the Shell of the Old: Anarchist Geographies of Territorialisation

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**Abstract:** This paper applies an anarchist approach to ongoing debates on the politics, nature and function of territory. Recent work in geography has problematised dominant modes of territory, but has stopped short of a systematic critique of how statist spatial imaginations and practices reproduce and perpetuate the dominance of both capitalism and authority in society. In this paper, I deploy anarchist thought and practice to argue that territory must be viewed as a processual and contested product of social relations. This is linked to the notion of prefiguration; a distinctive concept in anarchist thought and practice embedding envisioned future modes of social organisation into the present. Using examples from fieldwork with anarchist-inspired groups, I explore anarchist prefigurative politics as a means to re-imagine how practices of territorialisation and bordering might be deployed as part of a broader project of social transformation.

**Keywords:** anarchism, territory, bordering, relations, prefiguration

It is plausible to suggest that the minor but notable resurgence of anarchism in radical geography in the 1970s was, in part, a response to impoverished binary discourses between the globalising market-capitalist states of the West and the “socialist” bureaucratic-capitalist states of the Soviet Bloc. Geographers of a radical persuasion recognised that neither option offered a genuinely liberatory political project; instead, scholars writing in *Antipode* (eg *Antipode* 1978) explored the possibilities of anarchism as a socialism that offered both liberty and equality. Although anarchism offered a radically different political imagination in the Cold War years, it also offered an alternative *spatial* imagination, constituted by a careful unpacking of the capitalist and authoritarian organisation of society.

If political geography in the 1990s, the decade following the fall of the USSR, was characterised in part by an excited exploration of all things “borderless”, “deterritorialised” and “global” (see Brenner 2003), then the 2000s have been driven partly by a reaction against this laissez-faire triumphalism, asserting the enduring importance of bureaucratic and politico-institutional territories such as states (eg Gritsch 2005). There now exist tensions between globalised and transnational flows of bodies, culture and economy, and the “lines on the map” that regulate these flows. Much like the dilemma faced by radical geographers in the 1970s, we are thus offered a “choice”: either we draw from the “borderlessness” hypothesis—asserting the triumph of global capitalism over territory—or we emphasise the enduring centrality of the state—implying that state-led regulatory governance is the only other territorial category next to a deterritorialising global free market. Given this impoverished binary—even if we accept that both approaches contain an element of truth and are not so clear cut—it is not surprising that debate

over the nature and function of territory as a geographical phenomenon has re-emerged in recent years.

Whatever our misgivings about the “borderlessness” hypothesis, the increasingly connected world has certainly destabilised the certainty of territory, both among elite policy-makers and business, and within popular discourses (Reid-Henry 2010). Neoliberalisation and the opening up of global markets, as well as intensifying the modes and level of exploitation that take place through capital accumulation, has been a major driving force in the disruption of territory as a factor in political economy, culture and identity (Flint 2002). The enduring importance of supra-national institutions, such as the European Union, likewise continue to disrupt (ostensibly state-oriented) treatments of territory as an exclusive, sovereign spatial unit (Leitner 1997). Although these supra-national bodies are co-ordinated and populated by state actors, growing reactions from the political right against their powers demonstrate the strain that they can place on national identity (Koefoed and Simonsen 2007).

At the same time, however, the forms of regulation and discipline within and between states and territories have also intensified, with the increasingly aggressive protection of state borders in the face of a sense of growing vulnerability of their territorial integrity (eg Gill 2010). Increasingly sophisticated state disciplinary and surveillance mechanisms also ensure that everyday life remains highly structured by territorial parameters and technologies. The enduring presence of territorial state apparatus and the ongoing march of globalisation thus demand of us a nuanced treatment of territory that pays close attention to the intersections of, and tensions between, a range of territorial dynamics.

This paper discusses how an anarchist treatment of territory might help us to re-cast territory as a tool of political praxis produced and contested chiefly through *relations*. The idea of territory, imbued as it is with undertones of statism and authoritarian control, is anathema to most anarchists, and it is likely that the participants in the empirical sections would be wary of using such terms. However, rather than eschewing the concept altogether, I contend that not only is territory compatible with an anarchist framework but it also provides opportunities for political action. By mobilising an anarchist critique of the interlinked system of capital and authority, and proposing a “prefigurative” understanding of territory, we have opportunities to theorise territory, and related processes of territorialisation and bordering, in a way that opens up our spatial and political imaginations to radical alternatives.

The rest of the paper is divided into five sections. The next section considers some key academic theorisations of, and debates over, territory. Developments in geography noting the processual notions of *territorialisation* and *bordering* are useful in unpacking the dynamics of territory in practice. The following section introduces anarchist theory and spatial imaginations, and I draw out the implications of autonomous and prefigurative anarchist principles for our understanding of territory. After a short introduction to the case studies and methodology, the final substantive section explores the territorial practices of three anarchist-inspired groups in the UK. I argue that these support an anarchistic approach to territory that is processual, contested and produced through the prefigurative reconstitution of social relations.

2  
3 They are indicative of an understanding of territory that need not be static, defensive  
4 or reactive. In the concluding section, I argue that these insights have significance  
5 not only for academic debates but also for practical action for social change that  
6 refuses the false binary between bureaucratic state regulation and global capitalist  
7 deregulation.  
8

## 10 **Geographical Engagements with Territory**

### 12 ***Territory: An Elusive Term***

13 In his classic work on territory, Gottman (1973: ix) lamented that “although much  
14 speech, ink, and blood have been spilled over territorial disputes”, there was  
15 “amazingly little” academic interest in territory. Since the emergence of globalisation  
16 studies, there has been a growing literature on the nature and politics of territorial  
17 practices and institutions. In one recent overview, Antonsich (2009) identifies three  
18 primary ways in which social scientists have sought to engage with territory. Two  
19 approaches understand territory as a biological or anthropological concept, both  
20 of which underpin an essence of territory that is naturalised into social interactions.  
21 These have tended to identify territory as a spatial phenomenon imbued with  
22 unequal power dynamics through an (often imposed) territorial imagination of  
23 authenticity and belonging.

24 The third approach discussed by Antonsich concerns territory conceived as a  
25 politico-institutional space, which is arguably the most established conception of  
26 territory in contemporary geography. This refers to territory as a spatial concept  
27 linked to bounded systems of governance, through which a governing body and its  
28 various bureaucratic and coercive apparatuses regulate and control those settled in,  
29 or passing through, a defined geographical region. This approach to territory has  
30 been the one most readily identified by scholars as a target for deconstruction on the  
31 basis of the growing anxieties and complexities of territory in a globalised world,  
32 with multiple spatialities that transcend or disrupt politico-institutional territories  
33 such as the state (eg Agnew 1994; Debrix 1998; Massey 1994).

34 In light of the exploration of new conceptions of territory through neo-  
35 Foucauldian and Deleuzian poststructuralisms (eg Dewsbury 2011) the notion  
36 in political geography, following Gottman (1973), that territory is a functional  
37 partition of space into containers for the ease of governance and administration  
38 has undergone profound scrutiny. Although it is accepted in poststructuralist-  
39 influenced work that “[t]he frame is what establishes territory” (Grosz 2008:11),  
40 these approaches indicate that territory as a concept and practice is contestable,  
41 historically contingent and in flux. Indeed, Deleuze’s thought on territorialisation  
42 suggests that it is actually a form of *stagnation* within fluid processes of assemblage  
43 (Deleuze and Guattari 1988; Legg 2011).

44 Neo-Foucauldian work on governmentality has sought to explore the ways in  
45 which technologies of control enacted through politico-bureaucratic structures also  
46 operate through the shaping of attitudes, knowledges and relationships in territories,  
47 rather than simple coercion (eg Flint 2003; Murdoch 1997). In rendering territories  
48 “governable” from a distance in a way that is enacted by *both* institutional structures

and social practices, it is possible to imagine territory as not so easily divisible between social and institutional spheres. Although poststructuralist scholars have progressed our understanding of the contested spaces of governance, the area currently lacks an emphasis on empirical political-economic work concerning the state and capital, as well as non-state actors (Rose-Redwood 2006).

Following scholars of governmentality, I consider territory in a way that seeks to avoid divisions between social and institutional imaginaries, preferring to follow Painter (2010) in conceiving of territory as a unitary effect of social interaction based on (aspirations to) contiguity, continuity and boundedness. Division of territory into separate spheres risks positioning social life as separate or independent from the institutions that govern it. Instead, it is productive to think about these social and institutional elements of territory as interrelated, co-constitutive currents that run through multiple processes of territorialisation. Organisation studies literatures have repeatedly warned against perceiving institutions as external to social relations and practices, emphasising the fragile and contested reality of outwardly stable institutions (eg Doolin 2003; Oswick, Keenoy and Grant 2000). If we understand *institution* not simply as a static, bureaucratic structure but as operating through an everyday “pattern of human relations” (Neilson and Rossiter 2006:397), then institutional and social spheres of territory become rather blurred. Indeed, geographers have made similar observations about the state, noting how we must “contemplate the social relations within which the nation-state is enacted” (Mountz 2003:624; cf Painter 2006). The institution thus operates through a structure of social relations, activities and processes. This subject is explored in more depth in the empirical sections of the paper.

### ***Beyond Statism: Territory as Diverse and Processual***

The overriding conception of territory has hitherto engaged with the state as a sovereign territorial space. This emphasis on the state has arguably reproduced broader state-centric spatial imaginaries and knowledge production paradigms:

The role of states as significant centres of symbolic power in modern societies is not without consequences. One of these is that much social scientific knowledge is still discursively related to the state. . . . Among the “statist” discursive limits [is] the conception of “society” as a territorially confined unit defined by the national state (Häkli 2001:417).

Agnew (1994), similarly, argued that an enduring assumption of international relations scholars and some geographers—the so-called “territorial trap”—was the conflation of the state and territory. The historical context provided by scholars such as Häkli (2001) demonstrates the powerful nexus of state and scholarship in the constitution of our understandings, in this case, of territory. Emphasising the historically contingent nature of territory and its uses, Elden (2010:757) likewise argues that territory “must be conceived as a historically and geographically specific form of political organisation and political thought”. For Elden, although he only engages with Western philosophy, the concept of territory pre-dates the state as we know it, and thus that nascent states in fact appropriated and re-cast the concept for their mode of governance.

As such, it is important to note how territory is produced, reproduced and contested over time by competing political and spatial imaginaries. One key means through which scholars have sought to position territory as generated out of such processes is through various notions of *territorialisation*. Early scholarship on globalisation often referred to the “deterritorialisation” of society as the process of removing territorial demarcations such as borders and state regulatory functions to the movement of goods, capital and services around the globe (Taylor 1996), along with the “enmeshing” (Ó Tuathail 1998:85) of states into supra-national institutions. In turn, scholars of globalisation have identified the deterritorialisation of phenomena such as identity and belonging (eg Papastergiadis 2000; Roy 2004). Geographers have investigated a range of phenomena that have at least in part developed alongside or out of this perceived deterritorialisation, including transnational communities, outsourcing, migration, unstable electoral patterns and a range of geopolitical dynamics (Behr 2008; Brun 2001; Hudson 2000; Ó Tuathail 1998).

The social and cultural anxieties produced by this fragmenting process of deterritorialisation have often been articulated, politically, through spatial practices that can be understood as efforts to *reterritorialise*. Alongside state efforts to reterritorialise through the re-scaling of governance (Brenner 1999), the rise of the far right in Europe, for example, can be seen as a search by some, in the face of perceived ethnic and social fragmentation, for the re-establishment of a lost sense of homogeneous and territorially bounded, “authentic” community (Ince 2011). However, the articulation of reterritorialising politics is not necessarily reactionary, and more progressive forms of place-based politics that engage with global processes may also enact or propose reterritorialisations (eg DeFilippis 2001).

The binary of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, however, is problematic. Rising levels of defensive and reactionary assertions of place-based politics teach us to be wary of fetishising place and local territories as containing unproblematic sources of alternatives to globalised capitalism (eg Laurie and Bonnett 2002; Bonefeld 2004). A deeper concern with the de/reterritorialisation binary is that it arguably closes down the myriad processes of territorialisation into two distinct “directions”. In doing so, scholars may fail to grasp the ways in which territory is made and re-made through practice. As Ó Tuathail (1999:143) argues: “[i]t is not simply that there is no de-territorialisation without re-territorialisation, but that both are parts of ongoing generalised processes of territorialisation”. In this sense, it is worth noting scholarship of complex geopolitical regions such as Palestine–Israel (Yiftachel 2006) and Tibet (McConnell 2010) that emphasises the contested nature not only of territory as a disputed area of land but also as something that is imbued with political, cultural or symbolic meanings, contested through practices and relationships that are not necessarily located within the territory in question. Allen and Cochrane (2007:1171) have argued that territory is not always bounded in a conscious or deliberate manner, with even powerful actors being “lodged” within territories or regions in ways that are not of their choosing. Thus we must understand territorialisations as ongoing, uneven and contested processes associated with a range of powerful forces that are not solely or necessarily linked to the dissolution (deterritorialisation) or assertion (reterritorialisation) of territory itself. Instead, we must view territorialisation

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2  
3 as a process constituted by diverse territorial practices that are not easily identifiable  
4 as “good” or “bad”, but are infused with multiple political, cultural, economic and  
5 social trajectories and intersections (cf Marston 2000; Valentine 2007).

6 Much like this processual, contested notion of territorialisation, other categories  
7 related to territory have also been increasingly viewed as a process. Bordering  
8 has become an increasingly standard term, denoting “the spatial strategic  
9 representation of the making and claiming of difference” (Berg and Van  
10 Houtum 2003:2). Not only, however, does bordering assert difference, much like  
11 territorialisation, it is a powerful mechanism through which groups solidify, define  
12 and defend (various perceptions of) sameness or common purpose. For example,  
13 a number of geographers have demonstrated how state border regimes have  
14 been increasingly tightened and immigration discourses have become increasingly  
15 important as discursive and regulatory controls in the constitution of a sense  
16 of “national identity” (eg Gill 2010; McDowell 2009). Sociologists of race,  
17 likewise, consider the ways in which practices of ethnic identity negotiation are  
18 simultaneously produced through assertions of diversity within “the nation” and  
19 adversity towards those beyond its borders (eg Fortier 2008). In these examples,  
20 bordering is undertaken not only through technologies of physical separation but  
21 also through internal mechanisms of identity formation as a mode of social control  
22 *within* state territories.

23 However, it is simplistic to suggest that all borders are negative in all contexts.  
24 As some have noted, certain kinds of borders can act as facilitators as well as  
25 preventers (eg Newman and Paasi 1998; Timothy 1995). Even among anarchists,  
26 whose politics reject the legitimacy of *state* borders, there is a tacit recognition  
27 that bordering practices—of group membership, for example—can be useful and  
28 sometimes necessary, echoing the suggestion that “there is nothing *ipso facto*  
29 regressive about bounded spaces” (Antonsich 2009:796; cf Castree 2004). As partly  
30 a tool of territorialisation, bordering offers an important means of understanding  
31 how territorialising processes take place through everyday practice.

32 While there is a growing body of work concerning the bordering practices of  
33 cultures and identities (Madsen and Van Naerssen 2003; Van Houtum, Kramsch  
34 and Zierhofer 2005; Vila 1999), there is far less that discusses the role of bordering  
35 in the constitution and mobilisation of political subjectivities. Those works that do  
36 engage with this subject are instructive, and emphasise how bordering practices  
37 need not always take place *at* the border itself (eg Bigo and Guild 2005). Bordering  
38 provides us with a possible means of interrogating the ways in which groups  
39 develop—consciously or otherwise—their particularity and identity, territorially,  
40 such as through citizenship (cf Fuller, Kershaw and Pulkingham 2008). Much like the  
41 contested processes of territorialisation, bordering also emphasises the processual,  
42 everyday constitution of subjectivities and identities, located in particular places and  
43 demarcating certain physical or symbolic territories. Although identity is the most  
44 prominent product of bordering practices it can also be a facet of spatial strategy in  
45 political organisation, and literature to date tends not to foreground this issue (cf,  
46 however, Jamoul and Wills 2008). In the remainder of this paper, I sketch an anarchist  
47 approach to territory that foregrounds bordering as a legitimate spatial strategy that  
48 refuses and moves beyond a statist-capitalist framework for understanding the role

2  
3 and nature of territorial practices, and that can produce emancipatory spaces in the  
4 process.

## 5 6 7 **Anarchism, Territory and Social Relations**

### 8 9 *Territory and the Anarchist Spatial Imagination*

10 I now turn to an explicitly anarchist engagement with territory. First, I undertake  
11 a brief consideration of anarchist theory and strategy, and the spatial imagination  
12 that is produced through it. Anarchist thought is incredibly varied, and in this paper  
13 I focus on arguably the most popular and well known of anarchisms. Anarchist  
14 communism is a strand of communist thought that, although it has origins in  
15 the early nineteenth century (see Marshall 1993), emerged as a distinct school of  
16 thought and action after the 1872 split between the anarchists and Marxists in the  
17 First International. Anarchist-communists tend to agree with Marxists in the sense  
18 that society is divided between the vast majority—workers, unemployed, home-  
19 makers, etc—and a tiny minority who govern our lives and live off the proceeds  
20 of our activity (eg Berkman 1942 [1929]). However, anarchism has developed a  
21 distinctive political philosophy that has profound implications for the way we view  
22 territory. Two key principles guide anarchism: the critique of authority and the idea  
23 of prefiguration.

24 The critique of authority arguably sets anarchism apart from most other socialist  
25 philosophies. Anarchists note how power structures and relations in society produce  
26 and perpetuate inequality. Inequality, for anarchists, does not simply (or even  
27 primarily) stem from economic inequalities but is often most clearly manifested as  
28 such. Crucially, inequality of opportunity to live a free and fulfilling life is perceived by  
29 classical and contemporary anarchists alike as an entirely separate sphere of injustice  
30 from economic injustices, although they are clearly linked (eg Rucker 2004 [1938];  
31 Sheehan 2003). Thus, the critique of authority is at once an empirical analysis and an  
32 applied moral theory advocating “a new sense of right” (Rucker 2004 [1938]:80).

33 Authority is conceived as an asymmetrical power relation which operates through  
34 social relations and institutional structures to produce and perpetuate inequality  
35 (McLaughlin 2007). Classical anarchists referred to the notions of “liberty” or  
36 “freedom” as the phenomenon constitutive of society without authority (eg  
37 Malatesta 2001 [1892]). However, contemporary anarchists have developed the  
38 term “autonomy” from its Italian Marxist origins, which implies more strongly the  
39 positive freedoms and collectivity of anarchism (eg Garland 2010), and distances  
40 itself from the lexicon of the free-market “libertarian” right.

41 The state is the central institution of authority, claiming a monopoly of violence  
42 over a certain territory. The state is understood as an apparatus for supporting,  
43 regulating and perpetuating unequal capitalist relations in society, which, in  
44 turn, entrench and strengthen authoritarian institutions such as the state by  
45 disempowering the majority relative to a privileged elite. This does not only link  
46 the bourgeois state to the enduring presence of capitalism, but it also foregrounds  
47 authority as the definitive marker of power in present society. Authority is conceived  
48 by anarchists as an unequal relationship that represents the illegitimate expression



of coercive power relations, through which human freedoms are constrained and material inequalities perpetuated and intensified (McLaughlin 2007). As such, it is distinct (at least ontologically) from questions of expertise, knowledge or experience. Authority stands separate from (but nonetheless necessarily linked to) the class struggle, as its own distinct sphere of oppression. Although class remains a central focus of much anarchist literature, *theoretically speaking*, it matters little whether a fascist or socialist government is in power—to anarchists, the sovereign state is an authoritarian structure with its own distinct set of power asymmetries that endure independently of capitalism (Bakunin 1990 [1873]).

Authoritarian power relations produce complex intersections of oppression that encompass but cannot be reduced to the individual components of class, gender, ethnic and other oppressions. The extent to which this is embedded within the social fabric of everyday life necessitates the dismantling of existing structures of power as a fundamental element in any revolutionary strategy (Price 2007). However, as mentioned above, it is not possible to easily differentiate between institutions and social relations, since the former are entangled in patterns of the latter. As such, authority is all-pervasive and inescapable without the transformation of the very *relationships* through which it operates. This paper does not engage directly with anarchist critiques of capitalism and authority *per se*, but the emphasis on relationships is central to the second key principle of anarchism.

The answer to how anarchists seek to undertake this transformation of relationships brings us to the second distinctive principle of anarchism. Long before the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, anarchists had already warned of the dangers of a political strategy that did not explicitly deploy the principles on which a future society would be based (eg Bakunin 1990 [1873]:178).

While it would be unfair to say that the experiences of the twentieth century “proved” the anarchist perspective to be universally correct, this point is nonetheless extremely powerful. Such concerns have led anarchists to the development of what can be called *prefigurative* politics. Rather than believing that it is possible to use authoritarian or undemocratic means to create a free and equal society, anarchists have developed ways of embedding the political principles of an envisioned anarchist society into the ways they organise in the here-and-now (eg Gordon 2007; Graeber 2009). Early anarchists undertook “propaganda by the deed” as a proto-prefigurative deconstruction of statist-capitalist apparatus, often painted in the mainstream press as terrorism due to some participation in targeted acts of political violence. Despite some broader working class support at certain points (Wellbrook 2009), later anarchists took inspiration from other prefigurative practices enacted in the era of classical anarchism such as co-operative cultural and productive enterprises, libertarian schooling and member-run anarchist unions and tenants’ groups.

Prefiguration, however, is not purely a strategic or tactical move—prefigurative praxis involves a fundamental acknowledgement that no revolution is ever “complete”. As Rocker (2005 [1956]:111) notes: “I am an anarchist not because I believe in anarchism as a final goal, but because there is no such thing as a final goal. Freedom will lead us to continually wider and expanding understanding and to new social forms of life.”

Although contemporary anarchists recognise the need for moments of upheaval and rupture, revolutionary change takes place over a long period of time during which ways of organising and relating are gradually reconstituted. The fundamental basis of anarchist strategy and philosophy is the recognition that society is constantly in process, in *becoming*, and that revolution is likewise an unending process of development. Utopia is an unattainable goal which will never be achieved, but in striving to achieve it, we can move towards revolution through the constant creation and adaptation of revolutionary practices and relations in everyday life. This acknowledgement radically transforms the spatialities (and temporalities) of revolutionary praxis, producing political spaces that are processual and in tension between the present and future; between the actual and the possible. It is in this tension that anarchism resides.

### **Towards an Autonomous Conception of Territory**

From these points, it is possible to make initial comments concerning an anarchist treatment of territory. First, current geographical analyses emphasise the contested and processual nature of territorialisation and bordering. Anarchism offers a framework for understanding the politics of what work these processes actually do. Foregrounding the political nature of process itself is central to making sense of the implications of such geographical approaches. Anarchist prefigurative politics resides in the contestations and practices of everyday life, producing a revolutionary imagination that is rooted in process and becoming. If territory is constituted and reconstituted over time, then there is scope for interventions in the fabric of territorial processes that might wrench territory from the statist and authoritarian discursive and power frameworks that have hitherto chiefly characterised it.

Second, the interactions between territory as an institutional space and a social space can be teased apart through an anarchist analysis of territory as entwined in social relationships. The contestation and negotiation of territorialities is partly expressed through bordering practices, which have an ambiguous relationship to the political philosophy of anarchism. An anarchist approach to territorial and bordering practices that emphasises the social relations that bond territorial spaces (eg through institutions) may offer a powerful toolkit for analysing social and institutional dynamics as part of a broader framework concerning power and authority in social life.

Third, an anarchist approach affords us tools for conceiving of territorialisation as a potentially liberating practice. Through an emphasis on *the prefigurative*, it may be possible to embed within territorial practices certain organisational functions and structures that are at once effective in building spaces of struggle and developing modes of organisation that prefigure future worlds. One central facet of this is the notion of *autonomy*, promoting and practicing the collective self-management of struggles and structures while retaining a critical engagement with broader statist-capitalist society (Notes from Nowhere 2003).

Anarchist approaches to autonomy have emphasised the unequal power relations involved in everyday activities and interactions and have sought to develop forms of self-management that eschew, subvert and challenge mechanisms and institutions

of governance that structure everyday life. As Heckert (2005:np) notes: “autonomy, then, is empowerment—the realisation that power isn’t something that other people *have*, it’s something we do together . . . In autonomy power means working together by listening to each other, caring for each other.”

On a more philosophical level, the anarchist view of autonomy is linked to the anarchist commitment to the immanence of social agency and capacity, in which: “[a]narchist autonomy refers to the forces constitutive of beings, to their capacity to develop in themselves the totality of resources which they need in order 1) to affirm their existence and 2) to associate with others, and to thus constitute an ever more powerful force of life” (Colson 2001:47–48).

Self and other are directly co-constitutive, and are produced through immanent relations and practices that develop over time. If we run with this idea of the immanent co-constitution of self and other, then we can begin to build an idea of what an anarchist vision of territory might look like by expanding this “relational” view to incorporate the way we see territory. Relationality in geography has tended to refer to the constitution of cities (eg McCann and Ward 2008), economies (eg Bathelt and Glücker 2005), and so on, in relation to others elsewhere, but the anarchist notion of relationality originates with the philosophical idea that self and other are *a priori* co-constitutive. Although some geographers (eg Amin, Massey and Thrift 2003:2–3; cf Jones 2009) have counterpoised territory and relationality, in this anarchist framework, we see hints of how we might fuse the two in ways that respect the imminent, self-managed relations forged by practices of autonomy. Autonomous practice thus incorporates a range of spatial relations of differentiation, collectivity and negotiation that, since they are not mediated or regulated by external institutions, make space for the immanent intermingling of these relations through everyday practice. Autonomous configurations of territory might therefore focus less on controlling flows through borders and more on nurturing or adapting the relationships produced in the process of creating and sustaining autonomous spaces and spatialities.

As Pickerill and Chatterton (2006) note, autonomy nurtures spaces that fuse creation and refusal through practices of self-management that empower the individual and collective and provide “vantage points” to a future society in the shell of the present. The enactment of a prefigurative project is therefore also a strategy of social change. The spaces and spatialities produced through autonomous enactments of prefigurative politics imply a strong sense of boundedness and territoriality to anarchist praxis, but they also operate through existing spaces of “mainstream” society (Katsiaficas, 2006). Thus, perhaps, territorialisation need not be a practice that connotes exclusivity in the sense that the state’s territoriality implies. Following Kropotkin’s (1972 [1902]) anarchist *magnum opus* on co-operative practices within ecosystems, we need only look to nature to see how territories overlap and intermingle, creating a rich web of simultaneous territorialisations that co-exist interdependently. In an anarchist conception of territory, some territorialities may necessarily be antagonistic, while others will seek to forge relational points of connection, collaboration and cross-fertilisation—both geographically disparate and contiguous—which may produce growing constellations of self-management.

2  
3 In the remainder of this paper, I briefly discuss examples of anarchist(ic)  
4 territorial practices through ethnographic fieldwork with three anarchist-inspired  
5 groups in London. This empirical material is indicative of a possible anarchist  
6 treatment of territory based along the theoretical sketches outlined in this  
7 section. Autonomous articulations and enactments of territorialisation premised  
8 on relational, prefigurative praxis provide an opportunity for new understandings  
9 of territory to emerge that eschew territorial imaginations rooted in capital and  
10 authority.

### 11 12 13 **Researching Anarchistic Territorialisations**

14 The empirical material is drawn from ethnographic fieldwork in 2006–2008 as an  
15 active participant in three projects—two community-based squatted social centres  
16 in London and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a small radical trade  
17 union. Although none of the case studies explicitly position themselves as exclusively  
18 anarchist, they are profoundly influenced by anarchist principles and practices and  
19 also have strong historical connections to anarchist politics.

20 The two social centres—the *Ex-Vortex Occupied Social Centre* (December 2006–  
21 April 2007) and the *Hackney Social Centre* (HSC, February–May 2008)—were both  
22 located in the working class London borough of Hackney. They were relatively typical  
23 of the social centre movement in the UK, which is comprised of squatted, rented  
24 or co-operatively owned buildings organised as radical political, social and cultural  
25 hubs in particular areas. Since the early 2000s,<sup>1</sup> anarchists and other left-libertarian  
26 activists in the UK have seen social centres as potentially useful means of building  
27 and sustaining radical political activity in certain areas.

28 The third group, the IWW, was formed in Chicago in 1905 and seeks to build “One  
29 Big Union” of all workers as a means of both fighting for immediate workplace  
30 demands and developing possible structures through which capitalism might be  
31 replaced (eg Thompson and Bekken 2005). Although, in the 1920s, it numbered  
32 around 150,000 largely in extractive industries, a combination of its failure to adapt  
33 to economic changes (Hall 2001) and severe state repression (eg Chaplin 1971)  
34 led it to downfall and near non-existence for several decades. The late 1990s and  
35 early 2000s saw a renaissance for the IWW in North America, and since 2005  
36 the union has also had a section in the UK, with around 600 members in 2011  
37 concentrated largely in the public and service sectors. A commitment to avoiding  
38 political factionalism in the union has led the IWW to distance itself from particular  
39 communist or anarchist tendencies. However, the anti-capitalist, prefigurative and  
40 direct-democratic principles on which it is based, alongside a general eschewal of  
41 the state as an effective means of social change, makes the IWW closely related to  
42 anarchism in principle and heavily populated by anarchists in practice (Christiansen  
43 2009).

44 The fieldwork was conducted through ethnographic fieldwork, supported by 13  
45 semi-structured interviews. Throughout, I emphasised mutual aid and solidarity in  
46 the research practice, in which I sought to build co-operative relationships with the  
47 groups; neither operating as a truly participatory project nor an extractive exercise  
48 of information-gathering. Such an approach was central to building trusting bonds

with often security-conscious group members, as well as gleaning rich empirical material.

## **Anarchistic Territorialisations in Practice**

### ***Territory and Strategy***

In this subsection, I discuss a number of stories from fieldwork to explore some of the ways in which the IWW and social centres have engaged in territorial practices in their spatial strategies. IWW strategy is broadly divided between two forms of unionism. First, the IWW operates as a standalone union like any other, seeking to build the union within a workplace and gain shop-floor power. Second, partly due to its small size and membership density in the highly-unionised public sector, the IWW operates a “dual-card” strategy, in which members operate as a network of grassroots militants within larger mainstream unions, advocating a militant and direct-democratic form of unionism (Freeze ND).

At the Showroom—an independent cinema in Sheffield, UK—initial efforts were made by employees to organise in 2008. The majority of the 25 front-of-house workers joined the IWW, and the union was forced to “go public” prematurely, when one activist was fired on dubious grounds linked to his union activity. Following actions such as mass pickets and a telephone and email “blockade” (IWW 2008) which shut down many functions of the cinema for a day, the union demanded formal recognition. After management flatly refused—offering the workers a “sweetheart deal” with another union, before back-tracking under pressure from IWW dual-card members in the other union—workers eschewed the legal route and instead focused on shop-floor direct actions. Successes from actions such as short work stoppages and mass meetings included the reinstatement of a suspended worker for a minor cash mishandling, the sacking of one manager and an overhaul in hitherto problematic scheduling arrangements. By late 2008, without a union contract, the IWW was operating as the de facto “recognised” union at the workplace. One employee wrote:

[I]t would be wrong to perceive the Showroom dispute as a failed recognition battle. The real gains that we made in terms of changes in conditions to the workforce, securing people’s jobs and getting contracts for bar workers were largely initiated outside of the recognition struggle and by much more informal action (Anon 2010).

This process of gaining de facto union power via unofficial direct actions produced an unusual territorial politics, quite distinct to that of dominant union strategies, which focus on the establishment of discrete territorial “bargaining units”. Instead, the workers produced a territoriality that operated through a network of working relationships, constituting territory not through the drawing of external lines but through a mass of actors “lodging” (Allen and Cochrane 2007:1171) in space. Through workers’ self-organisation, this strategy was autonomous and flexible, and produced a territorialisation that management was unable to effectively contain. Indeed, the changing relationships of the workers from colleagues to comrades produced profound shifts in the broader institutional context of the cinema. This strategy, although territorial in terms of seeking workplace control, refused a

bounded notion of legal union recognition covering a specific number of workers, workplace matters and period of time. Instead, it forged an approach that adapted itself over time and was powerful precisely because of its ungovernability and externality to the established institutional and jurisdictional frameworks of labour relations. This story provides an excellent example of how dominant institutional territorialities are vulnerable to ruptures and alternative claims to power (Painter 2006). The eschewal of external mediating institutions such as arbitration services, mainstream union officers or legal processes led to a form of action rooted in direct relations between workers at the cinema, and created a territoriality in their unionism that was likewise forged through direct co-operative relations with one another, and antagonistic relations with management.

More “physical” territorial strategies are present among social centres. The visceral territoriality of occupying and defending a squatted building was present in security practices in both the Vortex and the HSC. HSC had been dogged by illegal eviction attempts and violence from the police and property owner since before its launch in early 2008, and physical security of the building was at the forefront of the collective’s priorities: “The complexity of the [HSC] ‘experience’ was increased by . . . the often overwhelming amount of energy that had to be spent maintaining the physical security of the space and its occupiers” (Charlotte, email interview, April 2009). Occupying a legally “precarious” space meant that the HSC collective did not expect or receive protection from the police, and an attempted eviction by the landlord and his associates<sup>2</sup> led to a stand-off between them and the occupiers soon after the opening of the centre. Strategies to ensure self-defence were decided collectively and democratically, and included barricading entrances, lookouts with projectiles, a negotiating team, and a large group remaining off-site to “shadow” proceedings. “This may have seemed over the top”, read my fieldnotes, “but it was necessary to ensure a continued physical occupation of the building”. Paraphrasing a fellow occupier’s words, I continued that “when the law isn’t on your side, you must expect the worst” (fieldnotes, February 2008). Interestingly, not only was territorial defence necessary for the survival of the project, an earlier attempt at eviction by the police threatened to target non-British residents of the space for deportation (McCoy 2008), fusing internal statist territorialities of border control with the interests of property (cf Gill 2010).

Since HSC operated as a means of practising and promoting prefigurative forms of organisation, the territorial defence of the building represented the defence of those political principles and practices. Thus, the process of territorialisation is an inherently political one; entwining institutional form and social relations in particular configurations to produce political outcomes. While in this situation the spatial strategy enacted was superficially one of bordering, securing *the* HSC against those who wish to see it destroyed as an organisational entity, its primary purpose was not simply an assertion of collective identity or difference from an other (Berg and Van Houtum 2003). It was also, if not primarily, the claiming and defence of a particular configuration of territorialisation which was embodied in the HSC. Through this moment of defending borders, the ongoing political process of prefigurative territorialisation is secured in relation to competing territorialisations. Crucially, the self-organisation of the collective to enact this defence invoked an

1  
2  
3 autonomous organisational strategy, rejecting police protection (which, in any case,  
4 would almost certainly not be forthcoming) in favour of a strategy that relied upon  
5 the direct-democratic practices and self-taught skills of the collective. When the  
6 Vortex was faced with eviction by court-sanctioned bailiffs the collective mobilised  
7 effectively through the relationships that they had built during their enactment  
8 of broad-based campaigns in the local area, mobilising around 70–80 people to  
9 successfully defend the building from eviction:

10 [T]hat's the one thing that keeps me going—the fact that we managed to get people who  
11 weren't from typical, you know, left-wing, politicised-already cliques . . . [S]ome women  
12 who I met were actually politicised by the whole experience. These working class single  
13 mothers . . . [T]hat specific building, that specific kind of environment and atmosphere,  
14 and the whole engagement with the community, it was so valuable (Harriet, interview,  
15 August 2008).

16 Notwithstanding the extensive debates in geography concerning community,  
17 a major factor in the mobilisation with community members at the Vortex  
18 was a successful campaign to prevent the Vortex building from being converted  
19 into a Starbucks. This campaign provided a locus for community action, while also  
20 enacting ways of doing politics—such as non-hierarchical organisation and direct  
21 action—that embodied anarchist principles in practice. The campaign was framed  
22 as a campaign to protect the neighbourhood as a whole, and was linked to a broader  
23 campaign to retain the space as a community resource whether or not the Vortex  
24 collective endured.

25 In bringing together diverse groups with different interests—such as young  
26 creative populations who mobilised against the erosion of independence and  
27 creativity, or the established working class residents who mobilised against further  
28 gentrification—the Vortex was able to tap into a range of territorial imaginations  
29 concerning the protection of a certain (real *and* symbolic) territory. In this case,  
30 the social centre, which was crucially not affiliated to any particular group or party,  
31 operated as a hub for a range of social groups who might otherwise have been  
32 unlikely to organise together. In a press release made by the Vortex after their  
33 victory, the collective wrote:

34 We see this as a victory not only for the social centre [and] the campaign to keep Church  
35 Street free from the further encroachment of corporate chains, but as a positive step  
36 when ordinary people can join together to have an impact on those things that directly  
37 affect us and the way our environment is used . . . We will continue to campaign against  
38 the closure of the social centre and support any self-organised community campaign  
39 that prioritises community need over private greed (Ex-Vortex OSC 2007a).

40 The territorialisation produced through the anti-Starbucks campaign did not  
41 simply stop at the prevention of unwanted business—it provided a space for  
42 the promotion of broader principles of direct democracy and anti-capitalism in  
43 neighbourhood and planning affairs. Crucially, through the Vortex's participatory  
44 democratic practices, discussed below, the campaign also demonstrated a means  
45 of *enacting* precisely this direct-democratic principle in practice, thus claiming  
46 prefigurative space for anti-authoritarian political possibility in the present (Franks  
47 2006).  
48

In these examples, two key observations can be made. First, that territorial practices can be counter-institutional; operating to subvert or confront dominant modes of social organisation. In this sense, the prevailing assumption in geography (and among many anarchists) that territory is a spatial tool of elites or the state is incorrect (Häkli 2001). Second, it is important to note how the territorial practices taking place were operating *within* the spaces of the dominant territorial order. While both the Showroom and the Vortex were bounded spaces of private property, the territorialisations of the IWW and social centre activists were independently claiming territorial control through their collective action (cf Rose-Redwood 2006) and, following Painter (2010), the territory produced was simply an imminent outcome of organised social action. In the next subsection, I explore the internal territorial and bordering practices involved in the democratic processes and identity formation of the groups.

### ***Direct Democracy and Membership: Bordering Autonomous Space***

One factor that cut across all three groups was distinctive enactments of bordering through internal democratic processes. Both social centres struggled to fight against the liberal cross-class conception of community politics as promoted in policy discourses (Holgersen and Haarstad 2009). The tension between broad-based campaigning and refusing access to business interests, landowners and their associates was profoundly geographical, as Adam, a Vortex activist, explained:

[R]adical politics [has a] community that is structured in a completely different way to a local community. On a physical level, that community becomes communal because they live together, not because they have the same ideas. You know, there's an "anarchist community" because it's made up of anarchists, not because people live in an anarchist area... So [we at the Vortex decided that] if we want to have a stable activist base, you know, have a group of people living in one area and doing one project (interview, November 2008).

Balancing different images of community led to extensive internal debate at HSC also, with one meeting agreeing that "to talk of one local community is a misnomer. We have to recognise the plurality of the area in order to identify different interests and concerns if we are to have any meaningful presence" (fieldnotes, February 2008). Responses to the internal fractures and power asymmetries within localities often manifested themselves through bordering practices of the centres, whereby at the Vortex clear access and participation guidelines were collectively agreed. For-profit initiatives, police, bailiffs and projects actively opposing the principles of the centre were barred from involvement. The latter caused the most debate, with a decision-making structure that required organisers of events and projects essentially "pitch" their idea to the collective's weekly open meeting. From the empirical material, the position of liminal entities such as co-operatives or radical publishers is difficult to ascertain. Of course, it is by no means assumed that particular groups have the correct answers to certain problems, but that participants will take lessons elsewhere. As with other elements of prefigurative political forms, the ways



in which exclusions function are (at least theoretically) intended to be challenged, if not within the same project then in other times and spaces.

In one instance, an individual invited owners of some local businesses to a meeting, and was promptly reminded that “we don’t work with fucking business. . . [T]hat’s not a social centre!” (Sarah interview, August 2008). In doing so, the collective territorialised the space in a distinct manner. Business interests, no matter how small, were not welcome because their presence contradicted the principles of the centre as a space designed to prefigure a world without bosses. In this example, it is in the process of territorialisation where differing political imaginations competed territorially for the right to define “our community”. The power of group members to define the borderlines of the group is profoundly asymmetrical in relation to actors external to the group and, in this case, created a potentially problematic territorialisation that obfuscated the potential solidarities between the centre and some elements of the local petit bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, the decision to bar all for-profit initiatives opened up the centre to a broader audience that may not have allied comfortably with entrepreneurs, business owners and property developers. By forging a territorialisation that ran counter to prevailing territorial understandings of community, the Vortex promoted an alternative, if sometimes vague, vision.

Membership criteria for the IWW were also challenged from within and without, as new members were required to sign a declaration to affirm that they are “a worker and not an employer”.<sup>3</sup> Applicants on the margins of this distinction, such as those with line management responsibilities, were debated by the local IWW branch for approval:

We had a membership application from a woman who was a charity project manager with two administrative workers below her. When she asked to join, we had to ask her about her relationship to these workers. What level of unilateral power does she have over them? What level was she over-all in the organisation? I think she was a bit taken-aback at all these questions, but after a short conversation there was no reason why she shouldn’t join, and we signed her up (fieldnotes, May 2008).

Thus the borders of membership are flexible and in negotiation, despite the stark black-and-white categorisation that class membership superficially suggests. Membership discussions provide an opportunity for IWW and social centre identities, such as class, to be refined according to variations across time and space, thus affecting the internal spaces of the organisation and its self-perception potentially in an uneven manner.

This negotiation also shows how autonomous identity formation is malleable through everyday experiences of capital and authority. IWW and social centre self-produced identity is an autonomous, everyday process of bordering (Van Naerssen et al 2005), in which territory is both solidified and challenged. These contested bordering practices can be understood at once as a prefigurative assertion of democratic control by the grassroots and a practical tool in the renewal and adaptation over time and across space. Following Rucker (2004 [1938]:80; cf McLaughlin 2007), this practice of bordering territorialises internal spaces of the groups (eg meeting spaces) through a union of empirical analysis of society and the

development of “a new sense of right”. Such an approach feeds off the ability of localised actors to collectively shape central institutional forms and structures (eg the IWW as a whole) over time and across space almost in an inverted form of governmentality.

Everyday anarchistic bordering practices, far from producing homogeneous territory (singular), regulate and facilitate permeation and cross-fertilisation between territorialities (plural), precisely through territorial acts of inclusion and exclusion. Thus autonomy is partly facilitated by creating such permeable membranes between spaces, creating a constellation of negotiations, connections *and divisions* that reinforce and fuse autonomous territorialities. These bordering practices can be seen as strongly relating to the forging of particular social *relations* between those involved in such negotiations and connections. This decentred process of territorialisation through bordering practices foregrounds the idea that territory need not have a central point of control.

## Conclusions

[W]e push people to imagine and build these new, these alternatives to what the state and capital offers. But in the shell of the old; in the shell of what already exists . . . Really it’s the relationship that people have with their local resources, and whatever, that matters, as opposed to just what you call that relationship (Adam, Vortex activist, October 2008).

In this paper, I have made a number of key arguments concerning the development of an anarchist conception of territory. First, although the examples are small, the case studies are indicative of an alternative theory and practice of territory that eschews bounded statist notions of territory in favour of one rooted in the spatiality of relationships formed within and between territorialisations. In the face of destabilising globalisation, rather than simply seeking to reactively and singularly *re-territorialise*, it is possible to enact a range of territorialisations (Ó Tuathail 1998). Scholars also have noted how territory is in flux and can be manifested in a range of ways that do not always require a central command point, but an anarchist perspective draws out the possibilities of grassroots territorial agency in struggles over territorial claims to space.

Second, the territorial workplace and neighbourhood politics of the IWW and social centres demonstrates that it is possible to engage in territorial practices, while also confronting dominant territorial regimes and discourses. It is clear that the notion of “borderlessness” present in some globalisation studies literatures is problematic, and the re-scaling of governance has led to a range of new sub- and supra-national modes of territorial organisation (Brenner 1999). Broadening territory from politico-bureaucratic questions, I have sought to develop a framework that interrogates territory from the perspective of processes conceived as already-political, rather than as dynamics *of* politics. This offers a new angle on the way we think about territorialisation as a social process.

Third, the dominant notion of territory seeks a static, sovereign establishment of calculable space for the purposes of bureaucratic efficiency and control (Elden 2010). While the anarchist perspective agrees with critiques such as that of Elden, it offers a

more fundamental critique of authoritarian spatial configurations in present society. Exclusions enacted in the name of anarchistic projects are sometimes questionable, but they create distinct territorialisations that confront dominant territorial claims. These exclusions might also open broader questions concerning the generation or perpetuation of exclusions in research practice and methods. Classical anarchist texts may have been quite specific to the historical context of their analyses, but their present-day followers such as Franks (2010), Gordon (2005) and McLaughlin (2007) provide rich material for a rejuvenation of anarchist thought in political geography in general.

Fourth, the anarchist emphasis on prefiguration can offer geographers an opportunity to rethink the way we relate everyday practice to political organisation in general. The prefigurative dimension of anarchist thought offers geographers a powerful toolkit for unpicking the ways in which practices and structures are imbued with political meaning, and for conceptually drawing together the social and institutional fields of action. Territorialisation, as we have seen, is partly a process of forging and maintaining social relations in an institutional pattern across space. It is clear from the case studies that their self-managed territorialisations are vehicles for institutionalising modes of organisation and relating that prefigured possible future anarchistic worlds in the present.

In practice, anarchistic territorialisations are unusual—antagonistic towards and clearly excluding elite or reactionary tendencies, yet contestable from within and without, and negotiated through participative frameworks of action and deliberation for the majority. Not only is this conception of territory critical of the statist and capitalist notions of territory found in dominant discourses (Elden 2005; Häkli 2001) but it also proposes and prefigures relations and structures through which we might move beyond this “territorial trap” (Agnew 1995) once and for all.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The history of social centres, however, is much longer than this short period. We could trace a genealogy of social centres back to the socialist and anarchist workingmen’s clubs that became popularised in the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. However, the most recent manifestation of social centres draws its strongest inspiration from the Italian *Autonomia* movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which squatted empty buildings to create autonomous spaces much like contemporary examples (see Katsiaficas 2006; Ruggiero 2000). Autonomous movements around Europe and the Americas in particular (although with some examples in Asia, eg Instituta 2010) have developed social centres with their own cultures according to their interpretations of, and disagreements with, the Italian model (see, for example, Katsiaficas 2006).

<sup>2</sup> It transpired that the owner of the property was allegedly involved in organised crime, and there was a concern that his handling of the situation could have led to serious violence.

<sup>3</sup> Most trade unions in the UK allow high-level managerial staff into their membership, and this declaration is an important means for the IWW to articulate a confrontational working class agenda.

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