

## Prosaic geographies of stateness

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### Abstract

Despite long-standing calls to rethink the state ‘as a social relation’, reified understandings that view the state as a differentiated institutional realm separate from civil society are notably persistent in academic and political debate. By contrast, this paper focuses on the myriad ways in which everyday life is permeated by the social relations of stateness, and vice versa. The paper reviews the conceptual difficulties in defining ‘the state’ and suggests that these can be addressed in part through a focus on the mundane practices that give rise to ‘state effects’. It considers how the concept of prosaics, based on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, might provide a fruitful approach for studying such practices, their geographies and the geographies of state effects. A case study of the governance of anti-social behaviour in the UK is used to show the potential application of this approach in empirical research. The paper concludes with some reflections on possible future avenues of research.

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### Introduction

Spectacular expressions of state power are everywhere. From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, in the war in Iraq and the conflict in Israel/Palestine, in the Russian government’s relations with the oil industry, and in China’s sabre-rattling over Taiwan, states across the world appear to have lost none of their appetite for enforcing their will over their own citizens, territories and resources, and, on occasion, over those of other states too. Such big-power politics are

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undoubtedly important, and should certainly give us pause before we accept too readily the argument that the nation—state has had its day. Here, though, I want to focus on the more prosaic manifestations of state processes and on the ways in which everyday life is permeated by stateness in various guises.

In industrialized countries this permeation of stateness into the everyday is evident in almost every area of social life. Giving birth, child rearing, schooling, working, housing, shopping, travelling, marrying, being ill, dying and countless other activities all involve us, to a greater or lesser extent, in relations with state institutions and practices, often in ways that are so taken for granted they are barely noticeable. In the United Kingdom by law a midwife must attend the birth of every child. The birth must be registered within six weeks and the mother and baby visited at home by a ‘health visitor’ (a state employee) to ensure that the child is well cared for. Until the child is sixteen, his or her primary carers will receive a fortnightly payment from the state to assist with the cost of its upbringing. By law every child must receive an education between the ages of five and sixteen, which for most children involves attending a state-funded school to learn a government-prescribed curriculum. As the child grows up, the state decides at what age and under what circumstances he or she can work for money, be held responsible for committing a crime, have sex, consume intoxicating substances, drive a motor vehicle, marry, vote and go to war.

The British state documents and monitors this young life by issuing a birth certificate, a health card, examination certificates, a National Insurance number, a driver’s licence, a marriage certificate, an electoral register, an income tax file number, perhaps a passport and, in the not too distant future, an identity card. Behind each of these registration numbers, licences and certificates are yet more documents and records held in state archives tracking employment, earnings, criminal convictions, academic performance, visits to doctors and hospitals, ownership of vehicles and landed property and numerous other features of individuals’ ‘private’ lives. If, weighed down by anxieties about the scope of the state’s knowledge of us, we repair to the local pub for a drink, we will find that the state decides when and where the pub can open, the possible sizes of our serving of beer, how much of its price goes in tax, whether our children can come to the pub with us, whether we can listen to live music while we drink and how our drinks are labelled, and that it sets the standards of hygiene required in the pub kitchen and the minimum wages paid to the staff. Such is the role of the state in the simple action of going out for a drink that the Electoral Commission in the UK used this example (as well as several others from daily life) in a poster and newspaper campaign to encourage people to vote in elections (see Fig. 1).

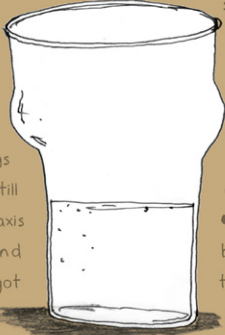
The permeation of social relations by the state is nothing new, of course, and has been a long-standing concern of state theorists. Writing over twenty years ago, Joachim Hirsch used the term ‘statification’ to describe how ‘the state apparatus extends deeper into the social organism and connects closer to the social structure’ (Hirsch, 1983: 79). Hirsch and other neo-Marxist writers emphasize the structural relationships involved. In this paper I want to draw attention to the mundane *practices* through which something which we label ‘the state’ becomes present in everyday life.

I will refer to this intense involvement of the state in so many of the most ordinary aspects of social life as the *prosaic* aspect of the state. There are four reasons for drawing attention to the state’s prosaics. First, theories of the state all too often remain dominated by what might be called the ‘separate spheres’ assumption (Painter, 2005; Peck, 2004: 397). This is the idea that the state constitutes or occupies a distinct and identifiable segment of the social whole (‘the sphere of the state’), which then ‘interacts with’, ‘intervenes in’, ‘depends upon’ or ‘regulates’ other distinct social spheres such as ‘the economy’, ‘civil society’, ‘private life’ and so

How politics affects...

# YOUR NIGHT OUT

It decides where and when you can buy an alcoholic drink • says at what age you can buy an alcoholic drink • sets the amount of tax that you have to pay every time you buy one • decides where and when you can listen to music and whether it can be played live • controls how loud that music can be and whether or not you're allowed to dance to it • decides what is acceptable behaviour when you're under the influence and what is liable to get you arrested • affects the number of police officers patrolling town centres at night • says what substances are illegal and what will happen to you if you're caught with them • decides what time trains and buses stop running and whether or not there will be a night service • says how much you can legally drink and still drive home • controls the licensing of taxis. Controls the licensing of doormen and bouncers. Decides how long you've got to finish that pint.



**ELECTIONS JUNE 10<sup>th</sup>**  
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Fig. 1. How politics affects ...YOUR NIGHT OUT. The text reads: "It decides where and when you can buy an alcoholic drink. Says at what age you can buy an alcoholic drink. Sets the amount of tax that you have to pay every time you buy one. Decides where and when you can listen to music and whether it can be played live. Controls how loud that music can be and whether or not you're allowed to dance to it. Decides what is acceptable behaviour when you're under the influence and what is liable to get you arrested. Affects the number of police officers patrolling town centres at night. Says what substances are illegal and what will happen to you if you're caught with them. Decides what time trains and buses stop running and whether or not there will be a night service. Says how much you can legally drink and still drive home. Controls the licensing of taxis. Controls the licensing of doormen and bouncers. Decides how long you've got to finish that pint."

on. Focusing on the statization of the everyday is one way to undermine the separate spheres assumption by disrupting the binary logic of state/non-state formulations.

Second, a concern with prosaic relations and practices adds a further challenge to reified understandings of the state. Reification represents the state as a thing: a more or less unified entity that can be the subject of actions such as deciding, ruling, punishing, regulating, intervening and waging war. Understanding states in terms of prosaic practices reveals their heterogeneous, constructed, porous, uneven, processual and relational character.

Third, thinking about the state in prosaic terms draws attention to the intense statization of social life. Among other things, this casts further doubt on discourses of the decline of the state. These discourses include those associated with neo-liberalism ('de-regulation' and the 'rolling-back of the state') and claims about globalization, the end of sovereignty, and the emergence of a borderless world.

Fourth, by emphasizing the role of practices, the concept of prosaic stateness reveals the geographies of state power with greater complexity and subtlety than more reified approaches. The idea that social life is suffused by state practices not only extends the apparent spatial reach of state power, but also reveals its geographical unevenness. The doctrine of sovereignty holds that state power is exercised uniformly and absolutely across a state's territory and then stops at the international border. An analysis of the prosaic practices and relations through which state power is constituted shows this doctrine to be precisely that: a doctrine or claim that is never wholly fulfilled.

An immediate difficulty is that the English language lacks the words to talk about states in terms of practices, processes and relationships. In contrast, the theoretical literature in French uses several terms that add substantially to the meanings that can be expressed, including *étatique*, *étaticité*, *étatisation*, *étatiser*, *étatifier*, and *étatisme*. *Étatique* is often translated as 'state-controlled', but this does not exhaust its usage in the state theory literature. When Henri Lefebvre writes of '*le mode de production étatique*' he is not referring only to direct state control on the Soviet model, but to a more general pattern of state influence that is also evident in capitalist societies. With no direct English equivalent ('state-ic?'), '*mode de production étatique*' is translated as 'state mode of production' (e.g. Elden, 2004: 222).

In addition to its standard translation as 'establishment of state control', *étatisation* also conveys a gradual process through which society becomes increasingly dependent on, or dominated by, relations with the state. Several writers (e.g. Jessop, 1997, 2000a) now use 'statization' (and the related terms de- and re-statization) to express more processual meanings. The paucity of English in this area is illustrated by the fact that the word *étatisme* and the related term *étatist(e)* are actually listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, where *étatisme* is defined as 'extreme development of the power of the State over the individual citizen', and *étatist(e)* as 'characterized by *étatisme*'.

*Étaticité* ('state-icity') does not appear in the main dictionaries of the French language, but it is current in academic writing and is another useful term with no direct translation into English. The only obvious candidate, 'statehood', refers almost exclusively to the recognition of a state in international law. Here, I have used 'stateness'—a word also adopted by Francis Fukuyama (2004), albeit to rather different ends—as an approximation for the senses conveyed by *étaticité*.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section reviews the conceptual difficulties in defining 'the state' and suggests that these can be addressed in part through a focus on the mundane practices that give rise to 'state effects'. I then consider how the concept of prosaics, based on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, might provide a fruitful approach for studying such practices, their geographies and the geographies of state effects. Next, a case study of the governance of anti-social behaviour in the UK is used to show the potential application of this approach in empirical research. The paper concludes with some reflections on possible future avenues of research.

### From state-as-object to stateness-as-effect

The concept of 'the state' is a notoriously slippery (Pierson, 1996). Opinion has been sharply divided over whether it is useful or even possible to devise a consistent definition of 'the state',

whether any workable definition would refer to something real and objective (whether abstract or concrete) or to something imagined or ideal, and whether, indeed, a rigid distinction between the real and the imagined is meaningful.

State theory has typically posited the state either as an organizational actor in its own right, or as a set of organizational resources through which other agents (such as classes or elites) act. In both cases the state is seen as consisting of a more or less coherent matrix of institutions. This institutional view of the state owes much to Max Weber's classic organizational definition (Weber, 1968: 56). From this perspective, the task of definition seems to be one of determining which organizations comprise the state and why. It is not adequate simply to list a set of organizations that are conventionally understood to make up the state (the judiciary, the armed forces, the legislative and executive branches of government and public services, for example), since this begs the question of what it is about these organizations that makes them state institutions. Moreover, many organizations are not intrinsically part of the state, but only contingently so. State hospitals are common in some countries, but not in others, for example. Equally, non-state actors from the private and voluntary sectors are deeply involved in what appear at first glance to be purely state institutions. For example, the judicial system depends on the work of vast numbers of private lawyers, while policing relies on numerous private contractors, from computer programmers and data analysts to caterers and motor mechanics.

State theorists have tended to characterize the specificity of the state in one of three ways: in terms of the state's distinctive functions, mechanisms or spatiality. Each of these is problematic. It is impossible to identify any functions that belong exclusively to the state. Somewhere, sometime any given state function has been, or could be, undertaken by some other organization. In relation to mechanisms, it is often argued that the state is distinctive because of its 'monopoly of legitimate physical violence' (Poulantzas, 1978: 80). Yet in practice both the monopoly and the legitimacy of the state in this respect can be questioned. State violence is by no means always accepted as legitimate, and some non-state violence can achieve a degree of legitimacy (as, for example, when paramilitary organizations operate in quasi-judicial capacities in areas where the state's justice system has broken down or is not popularly accepted). Legitimacy is also central to another common essentialist definition of the state, namely that the state is the legitimate source of authoritative rule making for its members (backed by its supposed monopoly of violence). However, the whole question of legitimacy is a vexed one, for the following reasons.

In this context 'legitimate' has two distinct meanings. The first is 'in accordance with the law'. Since the state is the source of law, the suggestion that the state can be defined in terms of its monopolization of legitimate authority or legitimate violence is a tautology: the state is that which is legitimate, but what is legitimate is decided by the state. The argument is circular.

The second meaning of 'legitimate' is 'valid' or 'justified'. Here too, the law may be the arbiter of what is valid or justified, but there are forms of validation and justification other than purely juridical ones. There are two aspects to the question of political legitimation. One concerns the normative and philosophical principles according to which a form of rule or a particular state may be considered to be legitimate. Much of the extensive debate on the nature of democracy, for example, is concerned with whether and how different models of democracy function to legitimate the exercise of state power. The other focuses on an empirical question: to what extent is the state (or, more likely, some specific state) able to command legitimacy in practice (Pierson, 1996: 23). To some extent the two aspects, legitimacy in principle and legitimacy in practice, converge in discussions of legitimation problems and crises (e.g. Habermas, 1976).

Moreover, there are many reasons why something may be accepted without being legitimate. David Held lists seven reasons why a rule may be accepted: coercion, tradition, apathy,

pragmatic acceptance, instrumental acceptance, normative agreement, and ideal normative agreement (Held, 1989: 101). For Held, only ‘normative agreement’ and ‘ideal normative agreement’ can be the basis of genuine legitimation (1989: 102) and neither of these is common in modern societies.

Another way of identifying the singularity of the state is in terms of its spatiality. For Mann (1984), it is the *territoriality* of the state that is its defining characteristic. Anthony Giddens explicitly excludes the ‘claimed monopoly of the means of violence [...] and] the factor of legitimacy’ from his definition of the state but retains territoriality from Weber:

A state can be defined as a political organization whose rule is territorially ordered and which is able to mobilize the means of violence to sustain that rule. (Giddens, 1985: 20)

This is consistent with Giddens’ suggestion that the nation–state is the pre-eminent ‘power-container’ of modernity (1985: 13), but, like its claims to legitimacy and monopoly use of violence, the state’s territoriality is in some respects also only a claim. Instead of treating territory as a fundamental basis of statehood it should rather be seen as itself a product of social and material practices that are marked by uneven development and all kinds of imperfections.

The limitations of these three broad approaches to defining the state are reflected in the substantial literature critiquing reified understandings of the state. Despite these critiques, reified understandings of the state are extremely persistent, especially in the media and political discourse. This suggests that they are socially significant and should not be treated simply as ‘flawed science’, ‘false consciousness’ or ‘popular misapprehensions’. A number of writers have pursued this possibility in productive ways.

An incisive critique of the problems of reification was provided by Philip Abrams in a paper written in 1977 (though not published until 1988, after the author’s death; see also Hindle et al., 2002). According to Abrams, ‘the state conceived of as a substantial entity separate from society has proved a remarkably elusive object of analysis’ (Abrams, 1988: 61). He goes on to propose that the state should be understood or studied not as a thing, but as an idea:

My suggestion, then, is that we should recognize [the] cogency of the *idea* of the state as an ideological power and treat that as a compelling object of analysis. But the very reasons that require us to do that also require us not to believe in the idea of the state, not to concede, even as an abstract formal-object, the existence of the state. (1988: 79)

Abrams has some sympathy for functionalist political sociologists such as David Easton (1965) who reject of the concept of the state in favour of ‘political system’. But he criticizes Easton’s systems approach for being more concerned with the effect of social processes on the political system, than with the impact of the political system on social life. ‘Overwhelmingly, attention has been paid to the grass-roots processes of the polity and not to the coordinating, power-deploying central functions’ (Abrams, 1988: 65). Abrams insists that attending to the political processes that affect social life does not require a concept of the state as a coherent agency that acts on society. However, it does mean recognizing ‘that the *idea* of the state has a significant political reality’ (1988: 68). In the end, for Abrams, the state is an ideological construct.

Timothy Mitchell (1991) makes a somewhat similar argument to Abrams, although he specifically rejects the phrase ‘ideological construct’ on the grounds that it tends to result in the dismissal of the state as a field of study, to be ‘passed over in favor of more real, material realities’ (1991: 95). For Mitchell, the state is neither a concept that should be abandoned (as in the ‘political system’ approach) nor an institutional reality that needs to be ‘brought back in’ (as argued by Evans, Rueschemeyer, & Skocpol, 1985). Instead the state

needs to be analyzed as [...] a structural effect. That is to say, it should be examined not as an actual structure, but as the powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist. (1991: 94)

He continues:

In fact, the nation state is arguably the paramount structural effect of the modern social world. It includes within itself many [...] particular institutions [...], such as armies, schools, and bureaucracies. Beyond these, the larger presence of the state in several ways takes the form of a framework that appears to stand apart from the social world and provide an external structure. (1991: 94)

Mitchell rejects calls to ‘bring the state back in’ to political analysis (Evans et al., 1985; cf. Jessop, 2001), arguing that they depend precisely on the sharp distinction between ‘state’ and ‘society’ that needs to be questioned. Mitchell is also sceptical of critiques of reification and separate spheres that abandon the concept of the state altogether (1991: 78–81). As he points out, replacing the concept of the state with that of the political system hardly gets us very far from the problem of defining boundaries between separate parts of the social whole (1991: 78).

Building on Mitchell’s and Abrams’ interpretations, it makes sense to define ‘the state’ as an imagined collective actor in whose name individuals are interpellated (implicitly or explicitly) as citizens or subjects, aliens or foreigners, and which is imagined as the source of central political authority for a national territory. The use of ‘imagined’ here does not mean that relationships and processes involved are illusory: social imaginaries can have very real effects (Anderson, 1991; Castoriadis, 1987). Moreover, the practices, mechanisms and institutions through which processes of interpellation take place are very real. When I apply for a passport identifying me as a citizen of a state, the passport, the office and the officials that issue it, and the border post through which it allows me to pass all exist. However, the state in whose name they function is neither an aggregation of these elements, nor a separate reality behind them, but a symbolic resource on which they draw to produce their effects.

From this perspective, therefore, statization can be defined not as the growing control of society by a separate sphere called the state, but as *the intensification of the symbolic presence of the state across all kinds of social practices and relations*. Again, this does not mean that real institutions are not involved; courts, police, schools, councils and so on all exist. But whether their activities constitute statization depends on the nature of the practices in which they are engaged, not on the categorization of any particular institution as a part of the state or not. Thus, statization can occur through practices undertaken by nominally non-state organizations, such as private businesses and, in principle, organizations that are nominally part of the state could be mechanisms for a de-statization.

Another kind of critique of reification and the separate spheres assumption comes from the relational state theory proposed by Poulantzas and developed by Bob Jessop and others (Jessop, 1985, 2002; Poulantzas, 1978). There are substantial affinities between their approaches and the arguments presented here, although I want to argue that state relations are less systematized and coherent than Poulantzas implies. The affinities can be seen in Poulantzas’s insistence that, with the development of the modern state, ‘*there can be no limit de jure or in principle to the State’s activity and encroachment in the realm of the individual-private*’ (Poulantzas, 1978: 70 *emphasis original*). This accords with Giddens’ critique of the concept of civil society:

With the rise of the modern state, and its culmination in the nation-state, ‘civil society’ in this sense [of something separate from the state] simply disappears. What is ‘outside’ the

scope of the administrative reach of the state apparatus cannot be understood as institutions which remain unabsorbed by the state. (Giddens, 1985: 21–22)

Poulantzas argues that the definition of a separate political sphere is itself the outcome of the social relations of the capitalist state, and that the appearance of separation does not involve the insulation of ‘society’ from ‘the state’ but is in fact ‘one specific form of the State’s presence in socio-economic relations’ (1978: 70).

Poulantzas’s work is the inspiration for the oft-quoted phrase that ‘the state is a social relation’. He proposed that the state ‘should not be regarded as an intrinsic entity’, but as ‘a relationship of forces, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions’ (1978: 128). This formulation, he believed, would allow us to ‘avoid the impasse of that eternal counterposition of the State as a Thing-instrument and the State as a Subject’ (1978: 129). This accords with the position taken in this paper. In the end, though, Poulantzas still wished to hold on to a notion of the unity of the state (1978: 136–137) and here I am more sceptical. In my view it is better to restrict the idea of the unity of the state to refer to the symbolic unity of the state understood as an imagined collective actor.

Mitchell explicitly distances his notion of ‘the state as a set of structural effects’ from Poulantzas’s ‘structural approach’ (1991: 94). Mitchell is rightly concerned that we should not replace one reification (state-as-entity) with another (state-as-structure). At the same time, Poulantzas’s concept of ‘institutional materiality’ is a useful—and remarkably geographical—way of thinking about the state apparatus, or what we might call (for the sake of consistency with my earlier definitions) the *institutional mechanisms of statization*.

One implication of these critiques is that it is possible to minimize the problem of reification through a focus on the production of state effects and, I want to suggest, through a particular emphasis on the *practices* through which such effects arise. Rather than focusing on formal and structural relationships, such an emphasis would examine in detail what the statization of social life involves and would describe the actual practices through which social relations of stateness are reproduced. It is here that the notion of the *prosaics* of statization can provide useful insights.

## Prosaics

Many writers have emphasized the importance of the mundane and the everyday in the constitution of social life, although rather fewer have applied those insights to the study of state institutions and practices and state effects. Those who have considered the social significance of the quotidian include Michel de Certeau, Fernand Braudel, Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre. Here, I want to consider the contribution of another writer, the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin.

Bakhtin’s work has received only limited attention from geographers (Folch-Serra, 1990; Holloway & Kneale, 2000), although some have used a number of his key concepts such as the carnivalesque (Brown, 2004), polyphony (Crang, 1992) and dialogism (Chatterton, 2006; Sutherland, 2004). For my purposes here, it is Bakhtin’s theory of ‘prosaics’ that is most relevant (see also Campbell, 1996). In fact the term ‘prosaics’ itself was not used by Bakhtin but is a later coinage. It has been proposed by Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson to refer to two interrelated aspects of Bakhtin’s work. In contrast to ‘poetics’, *prosaics* ‘designates a theory of literature that privileges prose in general and the novel in particular over the poetic genres’ and, much more broadly, ‘it is a form of thinking that presumes the importance of the everyday, the ordinary, the “prosaic”’ (Morson & Emerson, 1990).



Writing in the Soviet Union during the 1930s, Bakhtin—in contrast with many conventional literary critics—argued that the prose novel is not inferior to poetry and is in some respects superior. Novels, argued Bakhtin, are inherently ‘dialogic’. In dialogic language, the meanings of terms arise through their interaction with other terms and meanings. Monologic language, on the other hand, conveys meaning authoritatively and absolutely. Dialogism occurs because all written terms and spoken utterances must take their place in an existing discursive field—and take their meanings from their relations with other terms. Meanings are thus relative, not absolute, because each use of language has to compete with diverse pre-existing definitions. These arguments are also related to Bakhtin’s use of the concepts of ‘heteroglossia’ (‘differentiated speech’), which refers to the complex stratification of language into forms, genres, registers, dialects and so on, and ‘polyphony’ (‘many voicedness’). Bakhtin’s ideas emphasize the importance of the context, both social and linguistic, within which and through which meaning arises. Whereas poetry tends to be associated with monoglossia and monologic language, prose novels necessarily operate through heteroglossia and dialogism.

For Bakhtin, therefore, prose is often better able than poetry to convey the ebb and flow and complexities of everyday life. Indeed, Bakhtin took the view that there is no sharp division between artistic, literary language and non-literary, practical, everyday language. The mundane and the ordinary are key sources of social change and creativity (Morson & Emerson, 1990: 23). As Morson and Emerson note, though, while Bakhtin may have been the first to develop the notion of *prosaics* as a literary theory, he shared his more general concern with the importance of the everyday with several other Russian writers and thinkers, notably Anton Chekov and Leo Tolstoy. In a separate commentary on *War and Peace*, Morson writes that, for Tolstoy,

[t]he really important events in history are those that no one notices because they are so common and because there is nothing dramatic about them. [...] History is made, Tolstoy suggests, only by the countless, small daily actions, hidden in plain view, whose motives and cumulative operation we do not understand. (Morson, 1987: 126)

Furthermore,

One of the reasons Tolstoy’s novels are so long is precisely that his art is centered on the depiction of minute changes in consciousness, on the tiny alterations that ultimately determine everything. [...] The many “irrelevant” details to which the critics so strongly objected derive from Tolstoy’s sense that it is precisely the irrelevant that is most relevant, and the undramatic that is really most dramatic. Tolstoy is the poet of *prosaics*—of the infinitesimal, of the accidental, of the trifling incidents on which everything ultimately depends. (Morson, 1987: 221)

Tolstoy and Bakhtin not only emphasize that mundane and everyday actions often pass unnoticed, but also draw attention to the effectivity of the *prosaic*. Indeed Tolstoy goes so far as to suggest that ‘ordinary and undramatic events are the *only* important events in the chain of historical causality’ (Morson, 1987: 126, original emphasis). Be that as it may, it seems to me that the theory of *prosaics* has some interesting implications for our understandings of state institutions and practices.

### **Prosaics of stateness**

*Prosaics* highlights the intrinsic heterogeneity and openness of social life—its ‘many-voiced’ character. It challenges all authoritative monological master subjects, (God, Man, the

Unconscious, the Sovereign as well as the State) and their efforts to impose authoritative meanings. The utterances, writings and pronouncements of state officials and institutions not only enter an already dialogized discourse, but they are themselves characterized by heteroglossia. This can be seen easily in the diverse genres and registers of state discourse, consisting as it does of everything from the most solemn legal documents to policy papers, advertisements, political tirades, official labelling regimes for consumer goods, highway signage, public information services, tax demands, public service announcements, school prospectuses and so on. Moreover, Bakhtin's insistence that there is no intrinsic difference between literary and non-literary forms of communication affirms the importance of the everyday discourses of state actors.

Narrative and discourse, in both their everyday and more authoritative forms are integral to the notion that the state is best understood as an imagined collective actor. The state emerges as an imagined collective actor partly through the telling of stories of statehood and the production of narrative accounts of state power (Hansen & Stepputat, 2001; Meadowcroft, 1995; Neocleous, 2003). Another key mechanism is the symbolic relationship between state and nation that underpins state actors' claims to be acting on behalf of 'the people'. Considering these narratives through the lens of dialogism and prosaics highlights their potential instability, historicity and artefactual character.

The arguments of Bakhtin and Tolstoy about the *effectivity* of the mundane and the ordinary encourage us to rethink both the functioning of state institutions and the mechanisms that give rise to state effects. For example, passing legislation has few immediate effects in itself. Rather, its effects are produced in practice through the myriad mundane actions of officials, clerks, police officers, inspectors, teachers, social workers, doctors and so on. In addition, the act of passing legislation in the first place also depends on the prosaic practices and small decisions of parliamentary drafters, elected politicians, civil servants and all those who influence them, including journalists, electors, letter writers, campaigning organizations, lobbyists, academics and others. Furthermore, all of these interactions are characterized by heteroglossia and—another Bakhtinian keyword—unfinalizability. Thus, the outcome of state actions is always uncertain and fallible.

This may seem obvious, yet it is striking how infrequently the gap between state institutions' claims about their effectiveness and their actual effects is recognized in academic state theory. When that gap is noted, it is often explained by systemic factors or structural tendencies (think of Claus Offe's important work on the contradictions of the welfare state, for example). This lacuna in theoretically informed research on state formation arises in part from the academic separation (indeed antipathy) between mainstream political science and state theoretic accounts. The former tends to focus on individual agency and behaviour, rational choice, the role of lobbyists and interest groups, and the process—and problems—of policy formulation and implementation, while the latter, with some exceptions, have tended to be more concerned with structural analysis, the identification of general laws and tendencies and explaining state form and function as the products of supposedly more fundamental (typically economic) relations. Meanwhile, organizational analysis, which does take seriously the problem of translating policy into practice through the mobilization of mundane practices, is often seen as an under-theorized preserve of business schools.

Insofar as state theorists have considered the relationships between day-to-day actions on the one hand and institutions and social structures on the other, they have often been framed through the terms of the 'structure-agency' debates, the concept of structuration, and/or the epistemology of critical realism (Cerny, 1990; Giddens, 1985; Jessop, 1990). Some aspects of these accounts resonate with the theory of prosaics sketched above. For example, the

emphasis they place on the constitutive role of routine social action echoes Bakhtin and Tolstoy's emphasis on the influence of everyday interactions. Thus Roy Bhaskar, in one of the founding texts of critical realism, argues for a 'transformational model of social activity' (TMSA) in which society (including, by implication, the state) 'must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform' (Bhaskar, 1979: 45; see also Sayer, 1992: 96–98).

Critical realism provides the epistemological, ontological and methodological basis of Bob Jessop's evolving strategic–relational approach to state theory (Jessop, 2002: 5; see also Jessop, 1982: 213–220, 1990: 294–297). Jessop provides perhaps the most sophisticated structural (though not structuralist) analysis of the modern capitalist state, but he pays relatively little explicit attention to questions of agency, action and practice, often invoking an abstract notion of 'social forces' to explain change. On the other hand his work increasingly emphasizes the importance of the lifeworld (2002: 35). He also points out that 'structural forms and institutions never wholly constrain actions' (2002: 34) and that

structural constraints can only be meaningfully defined in relation to specific agents pursuing particular strategies over definite time horizons; [...] the scope for agency (and thus power) is itself constituted in and through the operation of structures as well as strategic conduct. In this sense structures can prove facilitative as well as constraining [...]. (Jessop, 1990: 250)

This formulation, like Bhaskar's TMSA, is similar in many respects to Anthony Giddens' (1979, 1984) discussion of the concept of structuration (though there are also many differences between Giddens', Jessop's and Bhaskar's approaches). Both Giddens himself and Philip Cerny have applied the concept of structuration to their accounts of state formation (Cerny, 1990; Giddens, 1985). Cerny sought to elaborate 'an analysis which looks at political structures such as states as processes of structuration—as complex patterns of ongoing but uneven interactions between agents and structures, and as complex mixes of stasis and change' (1990: 22). Giddens' own arguments place great weight on the importance of routinized social practices and thus seem to bear superficial similarity to the theory of prosaics.

Despite these various affinities however, the notion of prosaics differs from structurationist, critical realist and strategic–relational approaches to state formation in important respects. For one thing, the latter all place considerable emphasis on structure and system, which are represented (in critical realist accounts at least) as the 'underlying' realities that 'cause' or 'give rise to' the surface phenomena of events and actions. Thus, they see the social world is as fundamentally ordered. The theory of prosaics, by contrast, understands 'the panoply of discordant voices, abundance of disorder, and the clash between centrifugal (unofficial) forces and centripetal (official) forces' as 'part and parcel of an antisystematic philosophy of the everyday and the ordinary' (Campbell, 1996: 20). As Morson and Emerson have it, 'prosaics focuses on quotidian events that in principle elude reduction to "underlying" laws or systems' (1990: 33).

Another difference concerns the question of agency. Although critical realism emphasizes both the unacknowledged conditions and the unintended consequences of human actions, the conception of agency set out in Bhaskar's *The Possibility of Naturalism* relies heavily on the idea of intentionality. For Bhaskar human actions are intended, even if they have unintended consequences (Bhaskar, 1979: 44). Similarly, Giddens' structuration theory depends on the notion of rational action by 'knowledgeable and capable' human actors, while Cerny's account of state structuration is framed in terms of individual rational choices, albeit ones limited by structural constraints. While some critical realists have been critical of Giddens' notion of agency

(e.g. Archer, 1990) both critical realism and structuration theory tend to neglect crucial constituents of agency including emotion, affect, desire, embodiment, faith, subjectivity, and materiality.

To be sure, it would be absurd to suggest that the notion of prosaics offers a ready made theory of agency incorporating all these elements. Nevertheless, the idea of prosaics is intrinsically open to the importance of the affective, the non-rational, the non-cognitive and the practical in ways that distinguish it sharply from critical realist and structurationist accounts. With its stress on dialogism and unfinalizability, prosaics also offers a handle on becoming emergence, creativity and the production of newness. For Bakhtin, 'creativity is always and everywhere' (Morson & Emerson, 1990: 40). Although critical realism and structuration theory purport to address the question of transformation and change, in practice their emphasis tends to be on the reproduction of structures and relations.

Bakhtin's work, and the theory of prosaics derived from it by Morson and Emerson, thus provides a distinctive starting point for social analysis that offers an alternative to the more structural and systematizing approaches that have dominated state theory in geography. It is by no means the only such alternative, of course. Actor–network theory and the work of Deleuze and Guattari, to name but two, have also begun to influence work on the geographies of state institutions and practices, while Matthew Sparke's eloquent discussion of 'postfoundational geographies of the nation-state' draws on a wide range of post-structuralist and post-colonial writings (Sparke, 2005). Nevertheless, prosaics' emphases on the effectivity of the ordinary, on the diverse genres and registers of state discourses and the necessarily dialogized character of narratives of stateness can all add useful insights.

A concern with the effectivity of discourse is of course also central to Foucauldian approaches. The notion of prosaics, however, is rather different. Foucault is often concerned with the disciplinary effects of different discursive formations and epistemes. His work focuses particularly on what Bakhtin calls 'authoritative discourse' which tends to be monological. By contrast, the dialogized discourses that are fundamental to the theory of prosaics cannot be wholly disciplinary in Foucault's sense because of their stress on openness and creativity. Approaches to the state that draw on prosaics can also be distinguished from the Foucauldian notion of governmentality. Governmentality draws attention to the construction of the objects of government, and to the logics, rationalities and technologies of rule, whereas prosaics highlights the unsystematic, the indeterminate and the unintended. On the other hand, the two perspectives do converge in their focus on mundane practices and the productive nature of discourse.

## **Geographies of stateness**

The spatialities of state formation have been a long-standing focus of research in political geography and related fields. Much of this work has focussed on institutional geographies, territory and territorial sovereignty, and scale and has been framed in neo-Marxist, structurationist, strategic–relational and/or critical realist terms (e.g. Brenner, 2004; Brenner, Jessop, Jones, & MacLeod, 2003; Clark & Dear, 1984; Johnston, 1989; Painter, 2000; Peck, 2001, 2003, 2004). Work drawing on theories of governmentality has begun to consider the spatial practices and technological geographies of statization (e.g. MacKinnon, 2000; Murdoch & Ward, 1997; Painter, 2002; Raco, 2003). In addition, the developing encounter between feminist geography and political geography (e.g. Staeheli, Kofman, & Peake, 2004) is the setting for a number of innovative accounts that emphasize the complex connections between gendered practices and state

institutions, as the contributions to a recent issue of *Political Geography* show (Desbiens, 2004; Fan, 2004; Hyndman, 2004; Mountz, 2004; Silvey, 2004; Walton-Roberts, 2004). Recently, accounts that draw critically on deconstruction and other post-structuralist approaches have also begun appear (e.g. Sparke, 2005). A focus on prosaics can complement these various approaches in at least five ways.

Firstly, if we agree that ‘the state is not a unitary object but is, rather, a set of practices enacted through relationships between people, places, and institutions’ (Desbiens, Mountz, & Walton-Roberts, 2004: 242), then our accounts must give full weight to the heterogeneity, complexity and contradictoriness of state institutions. There is, of course, a large literature within the historical materialist tradition concerning the contradictions and crisis tendencies of the capitalist state (e.g. Habermas, 1976; Jessop, 2000b, 2002; O’Connor, 1973; Offe, 1984). These writings tend to locate contradictions and crisis tendencies at the level of the system. As I have suggested, the focus on prosaics advocated here questions the notion of the state as a coherent system (even a contradiction-laden one). Ideas of ‘failure’, ‘breakdown’, ‘disorder’ and so on, are thus somewhat problematic, because they imply ideals of ‘success’, ‘effective operation’, and ‘order’. It may be better, therefore, to use less value-laden terms such as ‘variability’. In some situations, terms with some positive connotation may even be appropriate, such as ‘improvisation’, ‘spontaneity’, ‘adaptation’ and ‘creativity’, to reflect the fact that what may be failures, breakdowns or mistakes from the point of view of state elites can sometimes have positive social consequences. An extreme example of this is the recently publicized case of Frank Foley, an official at the British Embassy in Berlin in the 1930s who, in wholesale breach of official policy and procedure, issued thousands of visas to German Jews to allow them to escape Nazi persecution (Aris, 2005).

Secondly, a concern with prosaic practices highlights the socio-spatial unevenness of statization both between and within countries. Prosaics challenges the idea of the singular master narrative of state formation. In the spirit of Bakhtin’s emphasis on unfinalizability, Western liberal democracy should not be seen as the historic end point of a necessary evolutionary path, but as one among many possible and actual institutional condensations. Other kinds of states are not ‘failed’ deviations from the Western norm, nor are they ‘backward’ or ‘underdeveloped’ versions of an ideal state. Rather they have to be understood as products of specific sets of practices, including prosaic practices, with a variety of possible futures.

An appreciation of the everyday practices of statization also allows investigation of the unevenness of statization within countries. As statization depends on and proceeds through mundane practices undertaken by thousands of individual state officials and citizens, there is considerable scope for what is seen as failure, disruption, and breakdown, as well as qualitative and quantitative social and spatial variation. Prosaic statization thus necessarily proceeds unevenly, and so geographical variations in the provision of health care, policing, education and so on are not ‘aberrations’ but integral to the operation of modern state institutions. The propensity for such differentiation increases with those institutions’ size and complexity. Although social and spatial standardization and a desire to eliminate unintended variation are central goals of much contemporary government, such measures can at best only reduce unevenness and in some cases may give rise to additional contradictions and pressures. The complex geographies of central-local relations contribute to the production of unintended state effects and to state practices that escape the control of the actors who initiated them.

Thirdly, the idea of prosaics highlights what might be called the ‘porous geographies’ of the state apparatus. Although we do not need to follow Althusser (1971) in extending the idea of the state apparatus to include large parts of what are more often thought of as civil society, it is important to retain the idea that there is no sharp institutional distinction between ‘state’ and

‘society’. The legal system, for example, depends on the activities of numerous organizations and individuals, not all of whom are conventionally understood as parts of the state. In English law, barristers are ‘officers of the court’ and the legal system depends on their intellectual labour. Yet they are also self-employed professional working in private businesses, whose conduct is regulated by a professional authority, rather than a state institution. Witnesses in court cases are typically private citizens, yet they too are enrolled as participants in a processes of statization, as are members of the jury, and so on. Similar arguments could be made for most other areas of state activity. Far from being a ‘difficulty’ for those trying to define or delimit the state, the porous boundary between state and society should be seen as part of the character of the state apparatus.

Fourthly, the approach advocated here blurs a set of conventional spatial distinctions between Self and Other. For example, it is no longer possible to draw an absolute distinction between an essentialized Western liberal state (democratic, stable, constitutional) and an essentialized Oriental despotic state (authoritarian, unstable, arbitrary). ‘Non-Western’ states are not deviations or dead ends. Nor are they earlier stages through which the West has already passed. Spatial differences (between societies in different parts of the world) should not be misinterpreted as temporal differences (between societies as different stages on a common developmental path). In similar vein a focus on prosaics also undermines sharp distinctions between democratic and totalitarian societies. As others have pointed out (e.g. Giddens, 1985: 310; Poulantzas, 1978: 69–75), modern state apparatuses exhibit strongly totalizing tendencies, even in formally democratic systems. By challenging the idea that the state is a separate, self-contained political realm, an emphasis on the prosaics of stateness can reveal the extent (and also the limits) of the statization of social life.

Finally, the idea of prosaic statization requires us to reconsider the notion of territorial sovereignty. From the perspective advocated here, territoriality is not the stable foundation of state sovereignty, but is rather the unstable effect of prosaic practices of statization. The routine and everyday production of territory through the maintenance of border crossings, the decisions of immigration officials, the issuing of visas, the policing of smuggling, the drawing of maps and the provision of national infrastructures all speak of the mundane labour involved in making territory. But because territory has no real existence independent of all these various markers, it needs to be constantly reproduced, in the active sense of being re-made each day. Territory too, that seeming bedrock (literally!) of each nation–state polity, turns out to be, in Mitchell’s terms, another ‘structural effect’ laboriously generated through complex uneven networks of countless mundane actions.

### **Prosaic stateness and anti-social behaviour**

In this section I want to illustrate how we might apply the concept of the prosaics of state-ness to a case study: the British government’s policy on anti-social behaviour (ASB). Tackling ASB is a high priority for the current New Labour administration. After the 2005 General Election Prime Minister Blair said that he wanted to instil a new ‘culture of respect’ in British society. In his recent book on respect, Richard Sennett points out that there is a long history to official efforts to influence behaviour of individuals (Sennett, 2004: 172), but ASB has acquired a particular prominence in contemporary British politics.

The term ‘anti-social behaviour’ could encompass a vast range of activities from drink driving to environmental pollution and from smoking in public to corporate profiteering. However, in current British public discourse it has a narrower set of connotations. According to the *Crime*

and Disorder Act 1998 anti-social behaviour has occurred if someone has acted in ‘a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as himself’. A study for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) used a working definition that emphasized the *cumulative* impact of repeated actions that are not in themselves criminal offences or are only minor offences when considered in isolation (Millie, Jacobson, McDonald, & Hough, 2005: 2). The same study distinguishes between three main types of ASB: interpersonal ASB (e.g. intimidation); environmental ASB (e.g. graffiti); and ASB that restricts the shared use of space (e.g. street drinking).

The JRF study emphasizes the importance of a clear, restricted and shared definition of ASB for fair and effective policy making and implementation. From the perspective of prosaic state-ness, however, the *lack* of a clear definition in ASB discourse is particularly notable. For example, public statements by politicians often cast it in terms of ‘yobbishness’ or a general lack of respect for others. ‘Yob culture’ has become a staple of tabloid newspapers and it is often impossible to tell whether policy makers are responding to public concern as expressed in the print media or whether newspapers are popularizing a discourse generated initially by politicians.

The centrepiece of the government’s efforts to reduce ASB is a novel judicial instrument, the Anti-social Behaviour Order, or ‘ASBO’. ASBOs were one of the measures in the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998* and were introduced in 1999. An ASBO is a civil order that can be made against an individual or a group of individuals whose behaviour falls within the Act’s definition of ‘anti-social’. An application for an order can be made to a magistrate by the police or a local authority or other social landlord. ASBOs, which can apply to children as young as ten, prohibit individuals from entering specified areas and/or carrying out specified acts for at least two years. A breach of an order is a criminal offence, carrying a penalty of up to five years in prison. According to the government’s Crime Reduction Website, between April 1999 and September 2004, 3826 ASBOs were issued in England and Wales.<sup>1</sup> Their popularity appears to be increasing rapidly. Nearly three times as many ASBOs were issued in the first nine months of 2004 as in the equivalent period in 2003.

A very wide range of behaviour has been the subject of ASBOs, including intimidation, noise making, begging, fly posting, drug- and alcohol-related activity, and graffiti writing. The vagueness of the legal definition of ASB has allowed ASBOs to be used or threatened against a variety of activities (such as political protest) that fall outside the professed targets of the legislation. In one highly publicized case a suicidal woman was banned from being near rivers, canals, or going onto railway tracks. In another, a child with Asperger’s Syndrome was prohibited from staring into his neighbours’ garden (Bright, 2005).

Numerous criticisms have been levelled at ASBOs by lawyers and civil liberties campaigners. A principal concern of critics is the blurring of the civil and criminal law that ASBOs involve. ASBOs are awarded in civil proceedings, which require a lower burden of proof than criminal prosecution, allow hearsay evidence and do not require the presence of defence counsel. Yet breaching an ASBO is a criminal offence and can incur a prison sentence. In consequence, people are being jailed as a result of activities that are not in themselves criminal offences. Conversely, there is evidence that ASBOs are also being used against alleged criminal activities in cases where there is inadequate evidence to warrant a prosecution. These features of ASBOs earned the United Kingdom a strongly worded rebuke from the European Commissioner for Human Rights (Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, 2005: 34–37). Other

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<sup>1</sup> [www.crimereduction.gov.uk/asbos2.htm](http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/asbos2.htm).

targets of criticism include the ineffectiveness of ASBOs (42% of are breached (NAPO, 2005: 1)), inconsistency in their application from place to place, and the inappropriate use of the orders against people with mental illness and behavioural problems.

Whatever the merits or otherwise of ASBOs and despite their high profile, they are ostensibly just one part of a whole package of policies intended to combat ASB. In January 2003 the Government established an Anti-Social Behaviour Unit in the Home Office (Interior Ministry). Two months later it published a White Paper entitled *Respect and Responsibility—Taking a Stand Against Anti-Social Behaviour* (Cm 5778). This trailed a number of measures that were included in the *Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003*. October 2003 saw the launch of an Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan and the TOGETHER publicity campaign. The TOGETHER campaign has involved a number of activities including roadshows, an ASB Action Line, a Website and an awards scheme (Home Office, 2005). In January 2006 the Government published its *Respect Action Plan* to promote a culture of respect in British society.<sup>2</sup>

The White Paper on *Respect and Responsibility* provides a particularly good demonstration of the value of the prosaic stateness approach outlined above. As a work of prose, the text is a good example of Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia. Terms such as 'yob culture', 'community', 'standards', 'nuisance' and 'respect' do not carry precise pre-formed or definitive meanings, but enter an existing field of meaning where they interact with existing usages and other related terms to acquire shifting but often powerful significance.

The document provides a striking illustration of the complexity of the apparatuses of governance (comprising both formally state and formally non-state organizations) that are being brought to bear on ASB. A simple content analysis of the text reveals that White Paper enrolls approximately 277 separate human and non-human 'agents' in the fight against ASB. Some are mentioned frequently; others just once or occasionally. Some appear as different kinds of agents in different places, in which case they were counted more than once (for example 'young people' appear as both 'victim' and 'perpetrators' of ASB). Some agents overlap (e.g. 'local authorities' and 'local public services' or 'police officers' and 'community beat officers'). However, the use of the different terms is assumed to be deliberate and in such cases both mentions were counted. Table 1 provides one possible classification of these agents into different types. As just one example of complexity involved, Table 2 lists the 30 actors within the justice system, each with a different institutional history, routinized practices and formal functions.

This simple analysis reveals some key features of the governance of anti-social behaviour. It confirms that it is impossible to draw a line between 'state' and '(civil) society'. A range of partnerships, community organizations, and voluntary bodies are enrolled not only as the objects of policy, but as the agents of policy too. This is not a classic case of Foucauldian governmentality in which individual members of the population come to be implicated in their own subjectification. Rather, the picture is one of a diverse set of assemblages that effectuate (or sometimes fail to effectuate) particular kinds of state effects. These assemblages are necessarily hybrids of nominally state and nominally non-state institutions, practices and actors.

Each assemblage comprises numerous prosaic relationships and activities. For example, the apparently straightforward process of obtaining an ASBO requires a whole set of practices and mechanisms to condense or 're-territorialize' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) around particular actions of a defined individual. The specifics will vary from case to case, but might include social workers, police officers, neighbours (as witnesses), teachers, magistrates, housing officers and

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<sup>2</sup> [www.respect.gov.uk/assets/docs/respect\\_action\\_plan.pdf](http://www.respect.gov.uk/assets/docs/respect_action_plan.pdf).



Table 1  
Typology of ASB-relevant agents mentioned in 2003 White Paper

Type of agent	No. of agents mentioned
Perpetrators of ASB (e.g. 'drunken yobs')	20
Victims of ASB (e.g. 'decent people')	13
Anti-ASB actors (e.g. 'Neighbourhood Watch')	108
Community actors	11
Education system	8
Fire service	4
Central government	18
Health service	3
Housing system	7
Justice system	30
Local government	12
Media	1
Private sector	4
Social services	5
Voluntary sector	5
Legislation (e.g. 'Police Reform Act')	19
Forms of anti-ASB intervention (e.g. 'ASBOs')	37
Government policies and strategies (e.g. National Policing Plan)	11
Programmes (e.g. 'New Deal for Communities')	40
Examples of local best practice (e.g. 'Dundee Families Project')	29
Total	277

newspaper reporters as well as the various technical instruments involved: case conference reports, witness statements, police notebooks, CCTV recordings, court documents and the order itself. The production of the state effect—fighting anti-social behaviour—thus depends not only on myriad mundane and prosaic practices, but also on these practices successfully combining in the particular time-space configuration that will enable the magistrate to make the order, that will allow the anti-ASB machine to *work*.

And of course sometimes it doesn't. The approach advocated in this paper stresses that state-ness is failure prone, partial and never completely fulfilled (see also Jessop, 2000b). In relation

Table 2  
ASB-related actors in the justice system according to 2003 White Paper

Association of chief police officers	Judges
Bailiffs	Judicial studies board
British transport police	Magistrates
British transport police graffiti unit	Magistrates association
Chief constables/Chief officers of police	Police authorities
Commissioner for victims and witnesses	Police officers
Community beat officers	Special constables
Community support officers	Special constabulary
County court	Street wardens
Courts service	Victim support
Crime & disorder reduction partnerships	Witness service
Criminal courts	Witnesses
Crown courts	Youth court
Crown prosecution service	Youth justice board (YJB)
Fine officers	Youth offending teams (YOTs)

to ASB, this is evident in the inappropriate use of orders, the ignorance, incompetence or intentional neglect of state officials, the resort to enforcement before support-based approaches have been exhausted and a host of other ways in which the system doesn't always work as ostensibly intended (Millie et al., 2005; Statewatch, 2005). Such failures are not universal. Often, even usually, things do go according to plan. However, from the perspectives of the prosaic stateness approach, intermittent failure is not anomalous, but a predictable, if not strictly inevitable, outcome of the operation of the very complex assemblages involved in the production of state effects. State actors are aware of this, of course. They engage in 'reflexive monitoring' of state effects and seek to influence how assemblages are materialized in an effort to achieve consistency. The 2003 White Paper can itself be seen as an attempt to align the plane of actual social and material practices involved in ASB reduction with the virtual plane of the idea of a smoothly operating, consistent and effective policy.

The notion that anti-ASB action can only be effectuated by the coalescence of complex assemblages around specific 'problem' behaviours helps to explain the marked geographical unevenness of practical implementation. Despite the White Paper's insistence that ASB 'can occur anywhere' (Home Office, 2003: 6), it is clear in practice that the ASB targeted by government policy is concentrated in certain kinds of places and specifically in deprived public housing estates in cities. Geographical concentration is confirmed by the 2003/04 British Crime Survey which found that 61% of all respondents reported no bad effects from ASB, but that 34% of respondents in inner-city neighbourhoods thought there were high levels of ASB in their area (Millie et al., 2005: vii). Yet there is also substantial variation between deprived areas in the nature and intensity of the official response to ASB. For example, in the period from April 1999 to September 2004, 608 ASBOs were issued in Greater Manchester, 364 in Greater London and 118 in Merseyside. These figures equate to 24.5 ASBOs per 100,000 residents in Greater Manchester, 8.7 in Merseyside and 4.5 in Greater London.

Such variations arise because each of the myriad elements of the assemblage required to generate an ASBO is itself geographically differentiated. The resourcing and effectiveness of social services, the police, probation services and local housing agencies vary from place to place, sometimes dramatically so. These systems then have to be combined into a new assemblage to effectuate an ASBO, and the nature of their inter-relationships is also likely to vary spatially, which may further amplify geographical variations. Governments in general, and the present British government in particular, often seek to reduce geographical disparities in public service provision. Whatever the merits of such a policy it is clear that it is much more difficult to achieve if the provision concerned requires the concerted operation of several different organizations with different goals and working practices. A key reason for this is that the effectiveness or otherwise of interagency working and 'joined-up government' depends crucially on the effectiveness or otherwise of prosaic relationships between diverse individuals and institutions.

My content analysis of the White Paper points to the remarkable *intensity* of what I have labelled 'statization'. Considerable efforts are being made to focus the attention of all kinds of different service providers and enforcement agencies onto the problem of ASB. Far from being separate spheres, 'state' and 'society' here are so completely entangled that the daily lives and private relationships of large numbers of people are drawn into, and in many cases substantially constituted by, statized practices of various kinds. This perspective thus calls in question accounts of liberal governmentality that emphasize action at a distance. Personal behaviour here is being governed through the intensive use of quite proximate mechanisms.

A full assessment of the potential contribution of a theory of prosaics to understanding the governance of anti-social behaviour will require a separate study. However, I hope that

this example provides some evidence of the potential value of the approach developed in this paper.

## Conclusions

In this paper I have suggested that our understanding of the geographies of stateness would benefit from closer attention to the ordinary practices through which the state effects are actualized in daily life. By using the notion of prosaics, which draws on the insights of Mikhail Bakhtin and his concepts of dialogism, heteroglossia and unfinalizability, we can highlight the openness, porosity, heterogeneity, fallibility, unevenness and creativity of state practices.

As the brief review of Anti-Social Behaviour policy suggested, 'stateness' is the result of complex networks of prosaic practices of making, unmaking and remaking by actors within and outside state institutions. Further research into these practices and their geographies could be pursued through four complementary strategies. The first would involve producing ethnographies and histories of the 'internal' workings of state institutions, to disclose the mundane, but frequently hidden, everyday world of state officials, bureaucratic procedures, meetings, committees, report writing, decision making, procrastination and filing. A growing body of work has been undertaken in this vein in recent years, notably by anthropologists, but also by some geographers, historians, political scientists and others (see, for example, Hansen & Stepputat, 2001; Mitchell, 2002; Mountz, 2002; Ogborn, 1998; Shore, 2000; Shore & Wright, 1997; Thrift, 2000; Trouillot, 2001). Research using the notion of prosaics would usefully examine the productive gap between the rule-bound model behaviour ascribed to bureaucratic actors and their actual practices.

A second approach would focus on the production of state effects through a wide range of prosaic mechanisms and practices (e.g. Fuller & Bénéï, 2001) throughout society. In *Banal Nationalism*, Michael Billig (1995) described the ways in which nationalism and national identity are reproduced in mundane ways (from the coinage in our pockets to policies on national languages). A similar (indeed closely related) set of processes are involved in prosaic statization. An elected politician appearing on television and using the word 'we' to refer not to the government or a political party, but to the body of citizens as a whole, invokes stateness as well as nationhood. As we have seen, mundane practices of statization include regulation and standardization in fields such as medical care, health and safety, consumer protection, education and labour relations and involve prosaic activities such as accounting and auditing, providing incentives, advertising, media briefings, labelling, training, organizational and systems design and software development. Recent research on these kinds of practices has focused particularly on technologies of government (e.g. Barry, 2001), but other aspects of the socio-cultural practices of statization also important.

The third possible perspective would involve an examination of the statization (or de-statization) of everyday life. Rather than the prosaic mechanisms of statization this would emphasize the statization of the prosaic. It would mean analyzing the uneven intensification of those practices of government that inscribe the state symbolically in a wide range of the most mundane social relations. As Foucault (1979, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c) has emphasized, a concern with biopolitics is a relatively recent political innovation, but one that escalated during the twentieth century. In industrialized countries, recent developments associated with the so-called war on terror seem to mark a move from biopolitics as the government of economic welfare towards biopolitics as the government of the physical security of populations. Both of these fields—the

government of economic activity and the government of security—involve state institutions in the management of daily life to an historically unprecedented extent.

The fourth mode of research would focus on the prosaic construction of the *idea* of the state as a collective actor, master subject, separate sphere and symbolic presence in social life. According to historian James Meadowcroft (1995), until the late nineteenth century the idea of the state had little currency in British political thought, but in the period between 1880 and 1914 it came to occupy a central place in political debate. While state institutions have existed and continued to evolve over centuries, they were not always thought of as constituting ‘the state’. This is important as it suggests that for the state to be imagined as a collective actor and symbolic social presence it has to *come to be* so imagined. Mark Neocleous (2003) has recently argued that the state has been imagined in terms of its body, its mind, its personality and its home, each of which has different political implications, while in *The Magic of the State* Michael Taussig (1997) conjures the state in terms of spirit possession. Many of these constructions do, of course, involve the spectacular, the poetic and the monological as well as the prosaic, so I do not want to claim that a concern with prosaics can provide an exhaustive account. On the other hand it is often through prosaic practices that the state’s more spectacular aspects come to be socially embedded and reproduced.

Where, then, does this leave our understanding of ‘the state’? If we accept the value of the theory of prosaics to research on the geographies of stateness we need to move away from many of the structural approaches to the state which continue to dominate political geography. The idea of a prosaics of stateness accords with Abrams’ and Mitchell’s view that the state is not a structurally coherent object or even a rational abstraction. However *stateness* is not an illusion, but is actualized in countless mundane social and material practices within and outside the institutions conventionally referred to as the state apparatus. Theories of practice have become widely influential in human geography (including in political geography) and in the wider social sciences, but so far have had only limited impact on geographical work on the state. The concept of prosaics has the potential to make a useful contribution to such research in the future.

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