TOWARDS A CRITICAL UTOPIAN AND PEDAGOGICAL METHODOLOGY

Abstract

This paper seeks to develop a methodology suitable for researching the pedagogical aspects of utopian communities and autonomous social movements that engage in prefigurative political practices. The paper describes 'critical utopianism' as an approach to social change that is anti- rather than counter-hegemonic and has affinities with epistemological and political anarchism. In practice, critical utopias include a range of spaces such as intentional communities, eco-villages, housing co-operatives and the temporary occupied spaces of autonomous social movements. There is limited space in universities and academic discourse for identifying and thinking about utopias, and particularly the pedagogical processes of such movements, because they exist purposefully beyond established formal institutions of politics and education and engage in practices that transgress individualist and hierarchical assumptions. It is argued that even radical approaches to studying such spaces, such as critical pedagogy and public pedagogy can exhibit essentializing and recuperative aspects when applied to utopias. The paper therefore suggests a new methodology inspired by anarchist, post-colonial and Deleuzian theory.

Introduction

This paper seeks to explore the possibility of developing an ethico-politically coherent and practical research framework for studying the learning and knowledge production and dissemination processes of utopian groups and movements. The project originates in my effort to find appropriate methodologies and methods for working with utopian communities and autonomous social movements who adopt anarchist ethics and organizational structures (Firth, 2011, pp. 159-163). I seek to develop understanding of utopias by identifying and conceptualizing their pedagogical aspects. At the same time I begin to develop a methodology that is appropriate for understanding the pedagogical processes of utopian communities through a critique of existing approaches. My starting point is the assumption that when studying utopias, we need utopian

epistemologies, methods and praxis that do not reduce or recuperate transformative, transgressive otherness. The purpose of this paper is therefore to contribute to the construction of a research framework that does not take the current socio-political frame for granted, is critical of the status quo, open to difference and imaginative alternatives and is non-hegemonic. Whilst this is often the starting point for critical pedagogies, the paper argues that many existing theories and practices make tacit assumptions about hierarchy and essential claims about human nature. The paper seeks a methodology that does not assume or impose values and desires but rather explores and valourises processes of desiring-production (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 35) whilst owning the impossibility of taking a value-free approach to pedagogy and pedagogy research (Macedo, 1998, p. xxvii; Mueller, 2012). By bringing utopian experiments to a discussion of pedagogy, the paper highlights residual formations of representation and hierarchy in existing radical approaches to pedagogy including the concepts and praxis of critical pedagogy and of public pedagogy, and suggests a new methodology inspired by anarchism, post-colonial theory and concepts drawn from the works of Gilles Deleuze.

Sandra Harding (1987, pp. 2-3) distinguishes between methodology as ‘a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed’ and method as ‘a technique for (or a way of proceeding in) gathering evidence’. Often empirical research treats methodological debates as merely technical or practical matters but in reality methodology frames the questions that can be asked, the categories used to understand reality, the evidence that can be collected and the criteria by which it is judged acceptable, the modes of analysis and interpretation and ultimately the ideas and ideologies that are propagated as a result (Smith, 2012, p. 144). Research methodologies are therefore intensely political, and often contain an implicit utopian element: an image or boundary delimitation of the life-world that they wish to advance (McManus, 2005, p. 1). In academic research, for example, this has tended to reify dominant and hierarchical ways of knowing and learning such as Western, masculine, heteronormative, able-ist (Burdick and Sandlin 2010, p. 351; Smith 2012; Denzin Lincoln and Smith 2008; Denzin and Giardina 2007; Sandoval 2000; Harding

1989). In this paper I will critique both established ways of studying learning and pedagogical processes, or research praxis, and existing conceptual frameworks, although there is necessarily some slippage between these different aspects.

I begin the paper with a consideration of the types of spaces and practices that I am examining under the rubric of 'utopia', defending my use of this contested term. I will argue that there is limited space for studying and thinking about utopias in universities and in existing social theory, which exhibit a tendency to individualize collective praxis and recuperate their radical otherness for broader, hegemonic (or counter-hegemonic) aims. I will then turn to a consideration of pedagogy as essential to defining, and studying, both utopian theory and practice. I proceed to outline the reasons that the established concepts and praxis associated with radical approaches to pedagogy including 'critical pedagogy' and 'public pedagogy' are inadequate for approaching the learning processes of practical utopian experiments. I will argue that their methodologies are insufficient because whilst they move some way beyond the individualized, hierarchical and recuperative practices of mainstream social theory and research practice they still exhibit representative and potentially colonizing tendencies. In light of this critique I will offer a defence of radical research, with the proviso that in order for research to remain radical one must critically re-think the nature of research, the conceptual relationship between research and pedagogy and the embodied relationship between the researcher and participants.

I will use this outline of the conditions and imperatives for a critical utopian pedagogical research as the basis for an initial sketch of a critical, utopian and pedagogical methodology drawing theoretical influence from three very broad categories of thought. I will draw on postcolonial theory for its understandings of epistemological decolonization and transgression; I will draw on anarchism particularly for its theorization of immanent praxis and collective experiential learning; and I will draw on poststructural political theories, particularly those of Deleuze, Stirner and Levinas for their understandings of transformational and co-creational

becoming through interaction with otherness. I will use the ideas and concepts put forward as a basis for imagining a research praxis that critically recognizes the utopian and pedagogical nature of the research process itself and its products or outputs, and performs these through a process of desiring-production rather than social-production.

Critical Utopias in Theory and Practice

Utopias come in many different forms, including fiction, social theory and experiments in alternative living arrangements (Sargisson, 2000) and they also vary in content, so that whilst a common practice is to associate utopias with socialism or anarchism, the existence of fascist, totalitarian, fundamentalist and even neoliberal utopias should not be dismissed (Sargisson, 2007; Levitas, 1990, p. 185; Sargent, 1982, p. 580). Despite differences in form and content utopias serve a similar double function: by depicting contrasting alternatives to (or sometimes idealized versions of) the *status quo* 'they hold up a mirror (to the flaws of the present) and they inspire (saying "things could be so much better")' (Sargisson, 2012, p. 8). A distinction should be made between totalitarian, hierarchical utopian blueprints and critical, transgressive, processual utopian theory and experiments (Firth, 2011; Bell, 2010; McManus, 2005; Sargisson, 2000; Moylan, 1986). Critical utopianism is a practice of simultaneous and ongoing critique and creation; critical utopias are critical not only of what exists, but are explicitly self-critical and proceed through immanent critique. Fictional critical utopias, such as those found in the works of Ursula LeGuin and Samuel Butler, articulate differences, antagonisms and imperfections arising from within. This approach suggests a kind of epistemological anarchism whereby no overarching system sets the boundaries or limits of the possible. Such utopias are 'anti-hegemonic' (Moylan, 1986,p. 49) rather than counter-hegemonic insofar as processes of internal critique prevent structures from ossifying. Critical utopias can also exist in practice, where groups and movements articulate 'an ethos of experimentation that is oriented toward carving out spaces for resistance and reconstruction here and now' by creating 'something other than and outside of the hyper-inclusive logic of

neoliberalism' (Coté, Day and de Peuter 2007, p. 317). They transgress the hegemonic logic of neoliberal capitalism and also the counter-hegemonic logic of Marxism since 'they seek radical change, but not through taking or influencing state power, and in so doing they challenge the logic of hegemony at its very core' (Day, 2005, p. 75).

There is a long tradition and large literature and in the interdisciplinary field of utopian studies on small-scale practical utopian experiments (Spiro, 1962; Kanter, 1972; Veysey, 1978; Abrams and McCulloch, 1976; Sargisson, 2000; Sargisson and Sargent, 2004). Such spaces are usually taken to include groups such as intentional communities, housing co-operatives, religious communes and kibbutzim, where people choose to live and work together for a shared vision or common purpose. More recently, social movements who do not necessarily live together or permanently attach themselves to a particular locality have entered the utopian studies canon because they engage in prefigurative practices such as consensus decision-making, non-hierarchical organization and direct action (Day, 2005; Anon, 1999; Robinson and Tormey, 2009).

There is a large literature in the interdisciplinary field of utopian studies on utopian practices, but such studies usually focus on values, beliefs, organization, histories and wider socio-political implications and very rarely on pedagogical processes. There is an emerging literature on explicitly educational spaces that express the critical utopian logic of anti-hegemony, including A.S. Neill's Summerhill school (Meuller, 2012, pp. 21-22; Suissa, 2006, pp. 93-96), and other free schools (Fremaux and Jordan, 2012; Motta, 2012; Schantz, 2012; Suissa, 2006, pp. 75-93), colleges instituted by social movements like the Industrial Workers of the World (Pinta, 2012) and radical student collectives (Boren, 2007). The pedagogical aspects of social movement struggles in the global South have also been the subject of research (Breidlid, 2013; Motta, 2011; Munir, 2007), perhaps reflective of the wider and more explicit role played by critical pedagogy and popular education in struggles in this area. However, it is very rarely that the sociological and political literatures on utopias in the global North have examined the pedagogical features of groups that

serve a primary or explicit function *other* than education, with the exception of Weinstein's (2012) study of the pedagogical functions of the street medic movement, whose ostensible function is first aid and free healthcare for protest movements, and some studies of anti-racist cultural groups (Alleyne, 2007; Srivastava, 2007).

Invisibilizing Utopian pedagogies

Utopian pedagogical practices are very hard to think about within established academic discourse and research practice. That these practices have rarely been researched or theorized is I believe in part the result of the inadequacy of existing research frameworks for comprehending such processes, and in part because these practices are operating outside and beyond established, easily identifiable political and educational institutions: 'Pedagogical anamolies … are difficult to see as pedagogy only when we view them from the 'centre' of dominant educational discourses and practices – a position that takes knowledge to be a thing already made and a thing already known' (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 5). I argued earlier that our methodologies shape the phenomena we are interested in as well as the concepts that structure our thoughts and interpretation. There are a number of reasons that existing methodologies – taken as both conceptual and institutional frameworks that shape research praxis - are inadequate for understanding the pedagogical processes of utopian groups. This may partially account for their invisibility in dominant research paradigms.

Prevalent research paradigms throughout the social sciences have notoriously been criticized for the extent and modes of representation that they engage in (Deleuze, 2004; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). This issue is particularly pertinent when working with utopian groups and movements who critique political representation in their very existence (Tormey, 2006; Holloway, 2002). Sara Motta (2011: 180) argues that researchers of prefigurative groups and movements need to take the critique of the politics of representation to the epistemological realm in order to construct ethical and political coherence and integrity. Structural approaches to academic research such as Marxism, some neo-Marxisms (with the exception of autonomous Marxism) and critical realism

tend to rely on a conceptual dualism between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge suggesting a division of labour whereby the expert academic produces universal theoretical knowledge and the social movement produces concrete practical knowledge. Many critical theories lack an empirical element and are therefore unconnected to the movements they purport to refer to. This results in ontological reification and epistemological vanguardism (Motta, 2011, p. 185), which are ethically and politically incompatible with the anti-hegemonic ethos of prefigurative groups and movements.

Whilst structural approaches to learning exhibit problems of intellectual vanguardism, Kilgore argues that agency-centred theories are too individualized and lack the ability to conceptualize collective learning processes. This is particularly poignant when studying social groups and movements – in the current context those engaging in prefigurative utopian practices – that share a vision of social justice that drives their action (Kilgore, 1999, p. 191). Mayo (2003, p. 39) argues that the individualization of research paradigms reflects the demands of a neoliberal economy which treats individuals like producers and consumers of knowledge. This leads to methods for data collection that are also individualized, which in turn fail to offer a perspective on collective learning or learning for social transformation.

Individualism is just one aspect of a Western, patriarchal approach to epistemology that claims to be value-free and neutral, placing value on knowledge that meets standards of rationality and truth which are particular but posited as universal (Smith, 2012; Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, 2008; Denzin and Giardina, 2007; Battiste, 2007; Sandoval, 2000; Minh-Ha, 1991; Spivak, 1988; Harding, 1987). This devalues knowledges that are embodied, particular, local, affective or related to emotion or spirituality (Amsler, 2011; Zembylas, 2006; Boler, 1999). Utopian groups and communities, such as intentional communities and housing co-operatives are unambiguously local, whilst global social movements tend to organize and operate through networked, small-scale local groups (Kilgore 1999: 200; Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 9; Karatzogianni and Robinson 2010) or

‘temporary autonomous zones’ (Bey 1985). De-valuing local, particular and embodied knowledge therefore leads to the invisibilization of prefigurative and immanent utopian knowledges.

Furthermore, universities in which researchers work are not exempt from individualized, hierarchical, colonized and marketized practices that are reinforced through a combination of surveillance, accountability, and market incentives which ‘keep a check on deviance and resistance’ (Sibley, 2004). Such practices can silence or discipline radical voices within the university and diminish epistemological pluralism and difference (Andreotti, Ahenakew, and Cooper 2011; Cheek, 2007) and discourage academics from maintaining relationships with groups outside of the duration of funded research projects or publishable outputs (Sibley, 2004). Universities are often viewed as sites of privilege which are alienated from society (Shannon, 2009, p. 184) and from the groups that they study, leading to an unequal power relationship between the researcher and research subjects that is incompatible with the ethos of non-hierarchical movements.

Perhaps through a combination of these factors comes the damning analysis that academic theory and social movement research are simply not relevant to movements themselves, despite evidence that many activists do engage with abstract and quite difficult materials (Bevington and Dixon, 2005, pp. 193-4) and that social movement scholars are often drawn to the field through interest, sympathy and support (Ibid, p. 197). There is a disjuncture caused by a combination of alienated institutional practices, methodological factors such as theoretical blind-spots and methods which irreconcilably separate researcher from participants, which makes it difficult for researchers and utopian groups to co-produce useful knowledge. Nonetheless pedagogical research approaches exist which seek to operate both inside and outside established institutions, to account for and engage in collective knowledge production and to overcome hegemonic relations of knowledge production and hierarchy between researcher and participants. In particular, the literatures on public pedagogy and critical pedagogy show some promise, yet I will argue that in the context of critical utopian groups and movements they exhibit residual representative and hegemonizing aspects.

Public Pedagogy

Public pedagogy is a way of theorizing and researching 'spaces, sites, and languages of education and learning that exist outside schools' (Burdick and Sandlin, 2010, p. 349). Examples of radical groups, spaces and practices studied within this literature include social movements (Lampert, 2010), student activism (Templeton and Dohrn, 2010), fanzines and the self-publishing movement (Moore, 2010) and culture jamming movements that resist advertising culture (Sandlin and Milam, 2010). Public pedagogies, it is argued, give us a glimpse of a 'pedagogical *Other*' (Burdick and Sandlin, 2010: 349) which acts to de-essentialize, critique and transgress taken-for-granted educational and cultural assumptions, institutions, discourses and mores (Ibid, pp. 351-352). They emphasize learning through practice and embodied experience rather than through abstract theory and fixed curricula (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 1). Giroux takes a cultural studies approach to argue that contemporary culture is the site of dominant public pedagogy. He argues that contemporary culture is a pedagogical force marked by "a powerful ensemble of ideological and institutional forces whose aim is to produce competitive, self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain." (Giroux, 2004a, p, 73). Critical utopias might be taken as a partial antidote to this, and as spaces in which new forms of culture, collectivity, politics and pedagogy can emerge. Giroux signals to utopian pedagogies when he states that: "another element of politics focuses on where politics happens, how proliferating sites of pedagogy bring into being new forms of resistance, raise new questions, and necessitate alternative visions regarding autonomy and the possibility of democracy itself." (Ibid, p. 74). Utopias might be seen to create a space for experiments in new forms of thought and practice through relative autonomy from the ideological forces that Giroux argues constitute neoliberal subjectivity through dominant public pedagogy (Giroux, 2004a, p. 82).

The notion of public pedagogies therefore offers a possible avenue into thinking about utopian spaces as sites of learning. However, the archive of public pedagogies is much wider than

radical practices and also includes hierarchical practices involving alienated forms of representation and communication such as commercial television and advertising, and sites of consumption such as Disneyland or McDonalds (Burdick and Sandlin, 2010, p. 349) and policy discourse and dominant cultural discourse (Sandlin, O'Malley and Burdick 2011, pp. 351-353). 'Public pedagogy' arguably becomes an all-encompassing term, which creates the possibility of reading pedagogy into, for example, counter-cultural practices such as hip-hop music (Williams 2010) and graffiti art (Christen 2010). Whilst I would certainly agree that such practices involve learning processes and may also encompass a wider educative function, there is a danger that privileging the pedagogical function might diminish or colonize immanent artistic and expressive desires. This is, of course, a danger in studying any aspect of a phenomenon and one must be wary when attending to pedagogical aspects of utopias that one does not therefore assume these to be prior to other functions. Nonetheless, much public pedagogies research seems to be subsumptive rather than expressive, illustrated by the fact that conceptually and methodologically the literature tends towards counter-hegemonic discourse, so that the term public pedagogy is 'mythologized', concealing differential levels of access to knowledge and situated experience behind totalizing notions of 'the public' (Savage, 2010, p. 103). This reliance on counter- rather than anti-hegemonic resistance can create a praxis that veers away from utopias and autonomy, for example Giroux argues that formal public and higher education ought to be primary sites of resistance, since whilst not free from commercial interests they 'at best, provide the spaces and conditions for prioritizing civic values over commercial interests' (Giroux 2004a: 77). The problem here for studying utopias is that whilst critical utopias can have a wider pedagogic value in illustrating that another world is possible, more often their pedagogy begins from autonomy and invisibility as a basis for rebuilding community and lost skills (Firth 2012) and experimenting immanently with new forms of politics and citizenship (Sargisson 2000:74).

As such, my paper emerges at the margins of the public pedagogy literature, analogous to what Triggs et. al. (2010, p. 299) call 'decentred public pedagogy'. This approach moves beyond the equation of 'public' with the status quo to argue that 'publics are never given and must always be invented anew' (Ibid, p. 302). Public pedagogy should therefore not attempt to simply represent, or communicate with/to publics, but rather initiate 'experimental endeavours of sensing our commonalities through making something new of our particularities' (Ibid, p. 302). This idea of pedagogy as becoming and creating something new resonates strongly with my own (utopian) approach, and will be developed below.

Critical Pedagogy

The theory and praxis of critical pedagogy offers another way in to thinking about utopian pedagogies. Theorists and practitioners in the tradition of critical pedagogy and popular education do not take existing circumstances as limiting. They open possibilities for thinking about and enacting pedagogy beyond existing institutions and hierarchies, and for humans to articulate their own words and desires beyond conditions of oppression and silencing. Critical pedagogy overcomes issues of colonizing and totalizing discourse and hierarchical research praxis discussed above by postulating a participatory, dialogical and action-oriented methodology. It was mainly developed in settings of popular class struggle (Freire, 1972) and in working with minority students in formal education settings (hooks, 1994 and 2003) and assumes the need to construct communities of resistance. The transposition of the theoretical approach is not unproblematic when dealing with groups already engaged in pursuing their own dialogically constructed visions of anti-hegemonic social change. For Freire, oppression is maintained through domination, but also insidiously through internalization of the oppressor's mentality, leading to an existential duality of the oppressed and a 'submersion of consciousness' (Freire, 1972, p. 54). Freedom thus requires the oppressed to 'reject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility' (pp. 23-24). Friere explicitly criticizes notions of 'false consciousness' (p. 101) and revolutionary vanguardism (p. 97)

yet lack of an adequate theory of representation (pp. 134, 145) leads to the assumption that unproblematic notions of reality can be uncovered and that humans to have a certain unity of desires. Ontological representations of 'the human' tend rely on constitutive exclusions. For example, Freire tended to essentialize 'the oppressor' (pp. 108-109), whilst many critical utopian groups are more concerned to identify and overcome their own complicity in replicating learned patterns of hierarchy, domination and exclusion (Firth, 2011, pp. 100-110; Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2006). A non-vanguardist, anti-hegemonic methodology might therefore encourage both researcher and participants to reflect on their own complicity in practices of domination (Motta, 2013, p. 84) and the constant potential for the re-emergence of oppressive practices.

Whilst both critical pedagogy and public pedagogy exhibit problems of residual hierarchy and vanguardism, they offer a conceptual way in to thinking about learning and knowledge production processes outside established institutions, which critique and transgress the status quo whilst engaging with radical alternative learning practices. They also move some way towards thinking about a research praxis that does not separate the researcher from participants in an individualized and hierarchical relationship.

Pedagogical Aspects of Utopias

The theme of pedagogy runs throughout theories of utopia and indeed educative features are often taken to be definitional. I would step back from essentialist definitions, with the intention that in studying pedagogical aspects of utopias one does not diminish other aspects such as the expression of hope and desire, the commoning of enclosed space, the reconstitution of social bonds and autonomy from the state. Nonetheless some of the most seminal theorists of utopian studies, taking a broad view of the concept, have argued that utopia should be defined by its function: 'the education of desire' (Levitas, 1990, pp. 106-130; Abensour, 1973; E.P. Thompson, 1976 and 1977). This does not mean imposing a blueprint or hegemony by educating one to desire a particular utopian form or content. What is important for these scholars of utopia is not *what* one imagines but

rather *that* one imagines (Levitas, 2009, p. 57). Utopias educate – not by positing a blueprint or social totality, but rather illustrating other ways in which difference could be articulated. By setting up an estranged space, utopias allow one to reflect upon the *status quo* from a new vantage point, and can therefore disrupt habitual ways of thinking, transgressing boundaries between disciplines, conceptual boundaries, and the boundaries that establish norms of behaviour (Sargisson, 2000, p. 10) therefore enabling the previously unthinkable to be thought and desired (Sargisson, 1996, p. 59). Whilst this conceptualization is largely theoretical, the educative function also applies to utopian practices. Utopian practices tend to be defined by their prefigurative or immanent approach to social change (Robinson and Tormey, 2009). What this means is that utopias are defined by an approach to social change opposed to vanguardist revolution and based on the ability to transform individual consciousness through immanent practice and to transform society by means of example. This is intensely pedagogical on many levels, but has rarely been theorized as such.

It is worth spending a moment to consider some examples of practices whose study might benefit from a conceptual framework that combines pedagogy and utopia. Consensus decision-making is a well-established procedure for community decision-making that avoids representation and hierarchy. It requires not only the agreement of the majority of participants but also the resolution or mitigation of minority objections through an inclusive and creative but often lengthy process of discussion and modification of ideas and plans (Firth, 2011, p. 164; The Seeds for Change Collective, 2007, p. 53; Graeber, 2009). Participants are required to modify their existing knowledge, hopes, desires and values in light of new information and perspectives provided by other participants, resulting in an often lengthy process of discussion, which yields sometimes surprising, original, creative and effective results. Consensus does not exist for ostensibly educative purposes but involves a mutually transformative collective learning processes that is intensely pedagogical, reflecting Ellsworth's (2005, p. 4) conception of knowledge as 'as a becoming, an emergence, and as continually in the making'. Nonetheless consensus has rarely been theorized at all, let alone in terms of learning, pedagogy and knowledge production.

Utopian living also requires technical knowledge and practical skills that are rarely acquired through formal education – maintaining a large building or land, generating electricity, growing vegetables, farming animals, fixing bicycles, non-violent communication, self-defence – are some of the activities I encountered in previous research and have been documented in activist literature (Firth, 2011; The Trapese Collective, 2007). Groups also engage in theoretical knowledge, such as developing group ethics, strategies and organizational procedures and engaging with political theory (Colectivo Situaciones, 2007; Borio, Pozzi and Roggero, 2007). Furthermore, utopian communities and social movements often see their role as educating wider society towards, for example, ecological living, sustainable building, new-age spiritual practice, and may engage in activities such as producing and disseminating literature and providing resources, setting up and hosting workshops and visiting schools and community groups. In line with their ethos of anti-hegemony, the educative activities of groups are often organized informally, non-hierarchically, collectively and through practice. These groups and movements illustrate a new approach to sustainable, non-hierarchical and anti-hegemonic living and learning that is difficult to access, study or think about from the vantage point of existing institutions without recuperating its transgressive otherness for wider purposes. Nonetheless I would defend the value of researching, writing and teaching about such practices.

In Defense of Radical Research: Conditions and Imperatives

In defending the value and possibility of radical research on utopian pedagogies I will also develop an outline of the conditions and imperatives for moving towards an ethically and politically coherent methodology for undertaking research with utopian groups. It is my argument that the concept and praxis of pedagogy is indispensable for conducting such research. Nonetheless, pedagogical theories and methods have rarely been brought into dialogue with existing utopian practices.

Whilst it was argued that universities are colonized, marketized, privileged spaces which diminish the capacity for radical thought and research within institutional confines, it should be noted that universities are also sites of struggle, resistance and possibility (Crowther, Galloway and Martin 2005, p. 3; Motta 2013; Neary 2012) whilst academics' identities are also fluid and multiple, and sites for resistance and contestation (Minh-Ha, 1991, p. 226). Boundaries between universities and radical spaces are not impermeable; many activists and inhabitants of utopian spaces (in the United Kingdom) have been to university and many scholars are also activists, and find creative and original ways to combine and negotiate these identities (Chatterton, 2006; Chatterton, Hodkinson and Pickerill, 2010). Nonetheless, it should not pass unproblematized that one can hold onto activist and academic identities simultaneously without tension or conflict, which sets the scene for a first condition and imperative for a utopian and pedagogical methodology: that researchers and academics talk openly and reflectively about self-interest and investment in their careers and about institutional boundaries and constraints in research papers, with students and colleagues and with research participants (Shannon, 2009, pp. 185-186). Other theorists have discussed this kind of reflexivity and ambiguity in terms of 'discomfort' (Burdick and Sandlin, 2013, p. 357; Zembylas, 2006; Boler, 1999) and whilst I think this term is effective to describe a process of affective reflexivity that proceeds without hope of resolution, I think it is also important to recognize the affirmative aspect to this process; that 'critical thinking is empowering!' (Shannon, 2009, p. 186). Feelings such as discomfort are only really useful insofar as they act as 'vehicles for action and change' (Zembylas, 2005, p. 21) and encourage critical educators 'to open classroom spaces in which otherness and difference can be felt and articulated' (Zembylas, 2006, p. 307, see also Motta 2013). Such spaces need not be restricted to formal teaching spaces but also include spaces with colleagues (Shukatis, 2009, p. 167) and spaces of meeting and discussion outside the university (Motta, 2012; Shannon, 2009, p.186; Chatterton, 2006), all of which are potentially utopian and pedagogical.

Research is important, because research itself is pedagogical: it creates and disseminates values to other academics, to students and to wider society. Critical researchers may attempt to avoid practices of representation and indoctrination, yet it is impossible to communicate whilst avoiding representation entirely. Nonethless 'business and industry have no similar responsibility to forsake their strategic visions of profit and technical progress' (Kilgore, 1999, p. 194; see also Mayo, 2003, p. 39). It is therefore important to defend radical research that contests and problematizes hegemonic ideologies and practice, whilst also preventing embryonic counter-hegemonies from becoming ossified. This leads to a second condition of radical research: that it should be open and reflexive about values. It is neoliberalism which claims to be value-free, critical research and pedagogy need not (Meuller, 2012, p. 22). And here lies the critical importance of talking about methodology. The concepts that we create, create our worlds (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 15-34), for example to posit a concept of collective learning means opening up the possibility of thinking about, creating, and encouraging collective learning, which is to posit collective learning as a value. As with other concepts, collective learning need not necessarily compete with or oppose individual learning (Kilgore, 1999, p. 199) but it does re-problematize it, opening up a field of thought to difference. This reflects the view that research itself can be an articulation of critical pedagogy, and marginal voices are needed in writing and in institutions to decolonize dominant structures (Smith, 2012, p. 17; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p. 3-4).

Trinh T. Minh-Ha argues that whilst theory without practice is redundant, practice without theory is impossible; intellectual activity is an essential aspect of all social activity and everyday human behaviour and to invisibilize this is to naturalize the *status quo*. It is the binary divisions between academia and life that radical academics should fight, rather than intellectual activity itself (Minh-Ha 1991, p. 227-228). Furthermore, academic theory has a lot to offer utopian groups and movements. There are many issues that utopian groups are concerned with, such as countering the replication of exclusions (Dempsey and Rowe, 2004, p. 35), tensions between strategic and moral vision (Ibid, p. 35) and the tendency to essentialize the enemy (Ibid, p. 35). All of these are actual

issues with concrete significance to utopian groups and movements. Furthermore, it is evident that utopian groups and social movements do engage with theoretical material (Bevington and Dixon 2005, p. 186). A third prerogative for critically informed utopian methodology might therefore be to work with and to engage with movements in a way that is useful and relevant to them. This has been the premise of much participatory action research (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007) and critical pedagogy (Fals, Borda and Rahman, 1991; Freire, 1972). Whilst participatory and pedagogical methods are potentially a way of moving towards a less alienated methodology, they are somewhat problematized when working with groups that are already dedicated to political action as a lifestyle. Further, a critique of the alienation of academic theory from actual movement practices should not be taken to say that large-scale theory might not also be useful to utopian groups (Bevington and Dixon 2005, p. 189; Graeber, 2004). The imperative is therefore not that research should engage in any particular methods at the expense of others but that in selecting and designing methods it should engage with ethics and practices of dis-alienation.

In formulating a defence of radical research I have therefore moved towards a methodological formulation of three broad conditions and imperatives for a critical utopian methodology roughly relating to ethical, epistemological and political spheres of research practice: The first prerogative relating to researcher openness and self-reflexivity leads to an ethics that one should openly acknowledge and discuss one's own values and interests, embracing an active political and pedagogical role whilst avoiding intellectual vanguardism. Second, in avoiding practices of representation, one should attempt to de-colonize existing epistemological categories and structures in thought and in institutions, opening up space for the articulation of alterity, marginal voices, transgression, embodiment and otherness. This includes acknowledging the partiality of all knowledge, including one's own. Third, research should be movement-relevant and its politics should be localized and grounded in practice, whilst acknowledging a role for theory, based on an ethics of dis-alienation. In the following section I will consider a range of theories and influences that might begin to construct such a methodology.

Theoretical Influences

In line with the ethical imperative for multivocity, the epistemological framework includes a range of traditions, which should not, however, be taken as limiting; rather research should proceed with an ethics that valourises the proliferation of concepts and practices (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). In this section, I have chosen to concentrate on three very broad bodies of thought. First, Deleuze and other anti-representaitonal political theorists offer an ethical basis. Second, postcolonialism offers a non-recuperative epistemological model for approaching alterity and transgression. Third, anarchism offers theories of anti-hierarchical political organization useful for identifying and understanding anti-hegemonic practice and for imagining how to approach such practice as a researcher.

Post-representational, poststructural theorists who are particularly useful in the present context include Deleuze, Levinas, and Stirner. Although it is somewhat anachronistic to include Stirner within this body of thought it is not without precedent to retrospectively read poststrutural ethics through his works (Newman, 2001; May, 1994). The utility of these thinkers for a utopian pedagogical methodology lies in their formulation of a non-humanist and anti-foundational ethics. Positing that ethics can be anti-foundational or non-transcendental does not imply that these theorists disengage with ethics altogether, which has been a common criticism of poststructural thought. Rather, one might picture ethics as a Deleuzian rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, pp. 3-28) intersecting with formulations of power at tactical points rather than countering oppressive discursive power through a counter-hegemonic formulation relying on foundational ontological categories. It was previously argued that structuralist theories and praxis, including aspects of Freirian critical pedagogy tend to rely on the assumption of an essentialized subject which results in constitutive exclusions. This is anathema to post-structuralist ethics which is committed to the principle that ‘practices of representing others to themselves – either in who they are or what they want – ought, as much as possible, to be avoided’ (May 1994, p. 130). For these thinkers, the other

is ultimately unknowable and irreducible (Levinas, 2002, pp. 206-207) and that which is other is valued precisely for unknowability and irreducible heteronomy. Practices of representation are the foundations of alienation because they create separation between a person and the selves or relationships that they have the potential to create (Deleuze 1983, p. 53; Stirner 1993, p. 72). A related principle of poststructural ethics is that alternative practices should be valourised and allowed to flourish (May, 1994, p. 133; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 177). Whilst, to dispute common typecast of poststructural thought, all practice is not reducible to discourse, discourse can be seen a practice which creates and orders bodies and selves from a pre-individual field of desires. Post-structuralism therefore offers the potential for a theory of learning and a research praxis that are becoming dis-alienated. The Deleuzian concept of becoming is a way of articulating relations that move beyond representation, imitation and identification (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 263). Whilst, therefore, it might be impossible to move beyond representation in research, it becomes possible to imagine a research praxis that is not only able to uncover and theorize collective learning processes in utopian groups but which begins to acknowledge the ways in which the research process is a process of desiring-production (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 140) which mutually transforms the researcher and participants. As a praxis, this would involve situating and relativising existing perceptions, encouraging the ability to imagine other perceptions and relations, and the act of creating relations which are not reducible to one's existing submersion in an alienated representational world.

Where poststructuralism offers an anti-representational ethical standpoint, post-colonial theory is useful because it offers an epistemological basis for engaging with what Burdick and Sandlin term the ‘pedagogical other’ (Burdick and Sandlin, 2013, p. 352). Authors in the post-colonial tradition argue that colonialism is constitutive of modernity and rationalistic discourse, rather than derivative from it, and thus the utopian site of the new is situated within coloniality itself (Spivak 1988). This leads to a position where the location of the speaker and his or her experience of difference and oppression becomes the starting point for thought and action. Thus, resistance

comes not from any (Western) ethical 'roots' or theoretical foundations, but from the always-already disruptive plurality of embodied perspectives and experience, which a critical perspective is able to situate as partial, accounting for the origins of particular perspectives in social and discursive constructions and diverse relations (Robinson, 2011, p. 21). This approach is cautious and complements the poststructural critique of representation since it does not involve prescribing any single perspective. Nonetheless the approach should not be viewed as relativistic, since rather than denying the existence of truth or reality it promotes the view that: 'each perspective ... is a partial engagement with aspects of reality, a truth which is partial, relative and situated' (Ibid, p. 25). Post-colonial theory examines the ways in which Western epistemological practices colonize local knowledge and practice and has proved useful in theorizing and studying indigeneous knowledge-production practices (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). As a pedagogical approach it encourages the ability to imagine 'other' perspectives, encouraging 'bi- or multi-epistemic' worldviews (Andreotti, Ahenakew and Cooper 2011, p. 46-47). As a research praxis it involves the ability communicate, form solidarities and organize in open-ended, affinity- rather than identity-based relationships, networks and movements. It might seem somewhat anathema to attempt to bring post-colonial theory into dialogue with practices in Western utopian groups and movements which often exhibit problems of exclusivity and membership that is homogenized around white and middle-class identities (Chatterton and Hodkinson 2006: 312). Conversely, I would argue that it is essential to approach utopian learning practices in these terms, because critical and resistant pedagogies are often concerned precisely with '*unlearning* problematic cultural scripts' (Burdick and Sandlin, 2013, p. 352). Post-colonial theory offers a temperament for approaching the potentially radical otherness of utopian pedagogies without recuperating their transgressive otherness to the realm of formal educational discourse and institutions. Post-colonial theory therefore offers an approach to epistemology that is anti-hegemonic and non-vanguardist, opening up the possibility for understanding movements on their own terms (Motta, 2011). In so doing, one also opens up, yet simultaneously problematizes, the possibility of creating movement-relevant

research. In recognizing the partiality of one's own knowledge, the researcher loses his or her privileged position of detached, neutral observer and interpreter of pedagogical situation, and rather becomes an embodied and uncertain 'decentred participant' (Burdick and Sandlin, 2013, p. 355). Just as post-colonial theory has opened up the possibility of engaging with utopian practices epistemologically, it raises the question of whether it is then possible, coherent, or necessary to communicate such interactions.

Anarchism offers a partial response to this problematic. Anarchism is perhaps best viewed as a theory of organization (Ward, 1973, p. 7) and in this sense it offers pointers for methodology as anti-hegemonic praxis. Education has always been a central concern for anarchism, in large part due to its prefigurative and immanent rather than ruptural approach to social change (Meuller, 2012, p. 14; Spring 1975, p. 9). To many anarchists, the state is not a thing that can be destroyed in one fell swoop, through revolution. Rather, it is a particular type of relationship between people (Landauer, 1978, p. 141); in Stirner's terms, a 'spook' (Stirner, 1993, p. 39). It is a system of internal beliefs and values, rather than a concrete and identifiable external structure, which creates the conditions for agents of the state to act as agents of the state, and subjects of the state to act as such, and thus for the state to have any purchase in reality whatsoever. Echoing the theories of Deleuze, the structuration of desire into conformity is produced by an apparatus of domination, a pervasive climate of fear and jingoistic conformity that 'exists to shred and pulverize the human imagination, to destroy any possibility of envisioning alternative futures' (Graeber, 2011, p. 32). The situation is complicated by structural violence – the fact that systemic inequalities backed by the implicit threat of force (rather than observable violence) 'always produce skewed and fractured structures of the imagination' (Ibid, p. 42). The result on societal imagination, Graeber argues, is that whilst those at the bottom of hierarchies spend a great deal of time imagining and caring about the perspectives of those at the top, the reverse rarely happens (Ibid, p. 51; see also Scott, 1990). There are clear links here to Freire's theory that the oppressed internalize the mentality of the oppressor, although Graeber does not necessarily assume that a dichotomy exists at the level of the subject between

submerged consciousness and more fully 'human' liberated consciousness; rather the dichotomy is at the level of practice; between violent and non-violent, imaginative practices. Echoing Holloway (2002), Castoriadis (1998), Negri (1999) and Deleuze, Graeber counterposes to submerged consciousness, not a second unitary being, but an open process of becoming.

Methods & Praxis

Inspired by the theories of anarchism, post-colonialism and Deleuzian poststructuralism, one might therefore draw out three core themes to move towards a concrete critical utopian methodological and research praxis. I have argued that research should not assume or impose values, and that whilst owning the possibility of taking a value-free approach, it should resist ontological reification and epistemological vanguardism. Whilst, therefore, this paper has begun with an extrapolation of critiques and research ethics drawn from theory, the positive vision ought perhaps to start with practice. One way for a radical, non-vanguardist intellectual to proceed might therefore be through a reconceived ethnographic method; looking at those who are already creating viable alternatives to figure out what might be 'the larger implications of what they are (already) doing' (Graeber, 2009, p. 111). This would lead to what Graeber terms 'utopian extrapolation', that is 'teasing out the tacit logic or principles underlying certain forms of radical practice, and then, not only offering the analysis back to those communities, but using them to formulate new visions' (Ibid, p. 112), including opening up new spaces both outside and within existing institutions. A first pointer for methods therefore, is to take inspiration from anarchist organization by commencing from the bottom-up, taking inspiration from existing practices, through ethnographically inspired research. This proceeds not with the aim of recuperating and colonizing practice into the realm of theory or academic discourse, but rather with the aim of extrapolating and expanding utopian practice by making it mobile (Turnbull, 2000).

I also argued that one might conceive of research as a Deleuzian process of desiring-production, inspired by an ethics of active dis-alienation. The theme of dis-alienation is taken to the realm of

concrete praxis by Colectivo Situaciones, who argue for a new kind of relationship to popular knowledges, where the goal is ‘neither to politicize nor intellectualize the social practices’ but rather ‘it is about looking into practices for traces of a new sociability’ (Collectivo Situaciones, 2007, p. 188). A second direction for methods might therefore involve pedagogical activities such as collective reading, art and theatre workshops and critical mapping and cartography to ‘produce the conditions for thinking about and disseminating powerful texts’ (Ibid, p. 188). Such processes of collective knowledge production combine dis-alienation with the construction of utopian imaginaries, bringing together participants in a dis-alienated space to co-produce knowledge immanently. This would involve moving towards overcoming any distinction between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’, through a constant self-interrogation of the collective (Ibid, p. 192). Whilst an aim of ‘no distinction’ might be impossible to realize fully when one is employed as an academic researcher in a hierarchical institution, and is obliged to produce certain outputs and spend one’s time in particular ways, the ideas of desiring-production and co-production of knowledge open up the possibility for engaging in pedagogical methods without presupposing or imposing participants’ values and desires. Such research would not aim to represent, nor judge social practices but rather to create values, experiences and worlds (Ibid, p. 197).

I further argued that there is an ethical imperative for epistemological decolonization, recognizing the partiality of all knowledge (including that of the researcher) and encouraging multivocity. This is something that might also be achieved through pedagogical activities such as collective reading, art, theatre and cartography. Through working with and producing multiple utopian texts collectively, such activities might integrate a praxis of situating and relativising existing perceptions, encouraging the ability to imagine new perceptions and relations, whilst reconstituting social bonds through collective practice. One might also imagine encouraging research outputs that transgressed, as far as one might in academic institutions, traditional academic forms; to include for example personal narratives, stories, collectively produced maps and artwork, and theatre performances.

There are no easy answers to questions of method and praxis when operating within, but attempting to move beyond, hegemonic and vanguardist discourses and institutions, and more concrete suggestions for method might perhaps the subject of another paper. Nonetheless, one might discern a common theme of opening up dis-alienated, multivocal, disruptive, transgressive and creative utopian spaces in both theory and practice, and both inside and outside universities and other institutions.

Conclusion: Towards a Critical, Utopian and Pedagogical Methodology

Research is a utopian and pedagogical process. It transforms the researcher and it transforms participants, whether this is intended or not. The problematic motivating this paper was how to conduct research and use particular theories and methods without engaging in representation, or else how to engage in representation whilst being reflexive about it and avoiding violence to others' voices. Alejandro de Acosta describes schools as the institutional organization not only of knowledge and methods of passing it on – but of desire; 'calcification of the urge to teach' (de Acosta 2012: 303). As a concomitant to this, one might argue that institutionalized research is calcification of the desire to learn. The researcher/researched dichotomy is always-already imbricated in a process that reproduces uneven power relations. Seeking ground in practice and direct experience, anarchist approaches argue that a liberatory, anti-hegemonic approach to research should commence ethnographically (Graeber 2004; 2009; 2011; Ferrell 2009). However anarchism alone lacks a theory of epistemological transgression and de-colonization. Whilst some may see ethnography as helpfully dialogical, introducing dominant cultures to subcultures, others may cite the historical basis of ethnography in colonial anthropology, as way of appropriating and subordinating other cultures by representing them in a western frame, through privileged informants. Some may view pure theory as a way out of alienation in habitual realities, whereas others see it as ideology-building or alienated from social reality. Post-colonialism lacks anarchism's complex theory of organization for resistance and immanent praxis inside and outside

the academy. Both these theories lack the theorization of dis-alienation and creative, transformative becoming and learning through interaction with psycho-social assemblages that are offered by some poststructural theorists. I have argued for a methodology that recognizes the pedagogical, utopian character of the research process itself and not just the spaces or theories that it studies. This transgresses the boundaries between utopia and pedagogy and between research methods and pedagogical praxis, leading to a rather messy and confusing, yet transgressive and transformative situation. Whilst a methodology like this closes down some possibilities – for uncritical empiricism, for interpretation from a neutral or privileged vantage point, and for critique from an essentialized 'oppressed' human viewpoint, it also opens up possibilities – for the co-production of useful knowledge between researcher and participants; for the generation of collective rather than individualized 'data', and for tactical interventions with power through opening up new utopian space for critique and creation both outside and inside existing institutions. This leads to a final suggestion – that the research process itself can perhaps best be conceptualized and enacted in Deleuze and Guattari's terms of desiring-production. Deleuze and Guattari link psychic repression with social repression, and seek to recover the revolutionary potential of desire. Social production is desire that has been separated from what it can do, and operates through the realm of representation whilst desiring-production constitutes the forces of production in the broadest sense of both material and conceptual creation, which are the basis of social production. Whilst desire is therefore an affirmative force, there is always a suffering and a loss in becoming organized in one particular fashion rather than another (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 8). The prerogative, therefore, for a utopian research process which seeks to remain critical, is not to commit unshakeably to any particular theories or methods but rather to continually problematize existing frameworks and to open up possibilities for new connections, creations and dialogues between different theories and practices.

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