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Prefigurative politics as pedagogical practice? "Grounded" utopianism and the Occupy Movement. (Darren Webb)

Prefigurative politics – building a new world in the shell of the old, be the change you want to see, etc. – has long been the focus of attention within anarchism and social movement studies. This paper takes one recent movement (Occupy!) and explores the *pedagogical* operation of prefigurative politics. On the one hand, Occupy! can be examined through the lens of public pedagogy. Here one would consider the ways in which it sought to transform mainstream political discourse and encourage a process of-contaminationism through various tactics of awareness-raising and persuasion. More interestingly, perhaps, Occupy! can be considered through the lens of radical pedagogy. Many commentators and activists have argued that the movement served to open the radical imagination, broaden political horizons and transform subjectivities. In and through the process of participation, movement actors gained an enhanced understanding of the scope for collective human action and a confidence in the capacity of human beings to enact systemic change. I have referred to this elsewhere as "transformative hope," and this paper explores the extent to which Occupy! can be considered a radical pedagogy of transformative hope. Attention is focused on two key aspects that link the pedagogical operation of the movement to the notion of grounded utopianism. Firstly, the radical pedagogy of Occupy! was grounded in the lived experiences of the participants. A transformed (utopian) subjectivity emerged in and through the process of participating in prefigurative politics. Secondly, the radical pedagogy of Occupy! was quite literally grounded in a concrete physical space. Occupy! explicitly positioned itself as a pedagogical project of commoning public space and transforming it into a site of utopian experimentation. Through a critical evaluation of the theory and practice of Occupy!, the paper reflects on the possibilities and limitations of grounded utopianism.

Grounded utopianism and revolutionary change. (Laurence Davis)

What is the meaning of utopia today? In answering this question contemporary students of utopia sometimes find it difficult to steer a careful course between two epistemological extremes: on the one hand, the Scylla of capitulation to dominant understandings of political possibility; and on the other hand, the Charybdis of reinforcing the prevailing association between utopia and deeply problematic ideas about human perfectibility. The primary aim of this paper is to contribute to utopian studies scholarship by developing a radical conception of

'grounded' utopianism that avoids both these extremes. The plan for the paper is as follows: first, I will critically evaluate a form of neoutopianism that has achieved prominence in recent English-language political theory, what the sociologist Erik Olin Wright has termed 'real utopias'; second, I will analyse an opposing turn in contemporary utopian studies towards a prescriptive and monistic utopian holism; and finally, I will develop an alternative conception of grounded utopianism which aspires to be both rooted *and* revolutionary, illustrating my argument with examples drawn from both literature and history.

Optimism in Education. (Emile Bojesen)

Based on close textual engagement with Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as work by Leo Bersani, José Esteban Muñoz, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, this paper outlines the ways in which it might be possible to be usefully optimistic about and within educational contexts in manner which lends itself to definitions of grounded utopianism. It will argue that, once our situatedness is accepted, real, ethical, and singularly responsive positive change is possible. Crucially, this argument for optimism as grounded utopianism in educational institutions suggests that optimism should not primarily be inspired by educational ends but rather the ends which best serve those involved in formal educational contexts. The grounded utopianism, characterized as optimism, elaborated on in this paper is positioned against idealism and fatalism, instead articulating a utopianism which optimises the context and means at the disposal of those involved. A grounded utopian disposition and theoretical approach will be developed that will be applicable in whatever educational context individuals happen to find themselves.

Education and Non-Domination: Prefigurative Practice and Utopian Politics. (Judith Suissa)

Several anarchist theorists regard non-domination as the central anarchist value, both as an ideal of non-statist societies and as a principle of organizing (see e.g. Samuel Clark, Uri Gordon, Ruth Kinna). Recent theorists have also analysed how, in the work of social anarchist theorists such as Proudhon, the conception of freedom as non-domination led, unlike within neo-Republican political theory, to a trenchant critique of wage labour and the capitalist system.

In several contemporary radical education experiments, the lived experience of students and teachers can be seen as a form of prefigurative practice in which the school becomes a lived utopia, embodying relations of non-domination. Davina Cooper, for example, in her work on what she calls "everyday utopias", explores how the experience of children and teachers at Summerhill can "create forms of imagining" that unsettle and challenge conventional understandings of property, personal space, and trust, enabling "other more critical reversals in how social relations are imagined".

Yet while these experiments are radical in their rejection of the state schooling system and its inherent hierarchies, they raise interesting questions and possible tensions to do with the need to offer a rigorous critique of the capitalist state as part of defending and imagining alternatives. Both liberal and libertarian educational theory have typically been suspicious of the "politicization" of education reflected in projects like Critical Pedagogy, that reject the idea of a "neutral" educational process as both conceptually incoherent and ideologically dangerous. At the same time, radical educators working within a Freirian tradition have insisted on the

need to offer a political education that engages students critically in the realities of oppression and their structural causes. Does the anarchist tradition, with its emphasis on prefigurative practice and its insistence on the need for an ongoing project of challenging and dismantling forms of domination, rather than imagining a perfect utopia free of all relations of domination, offer a way to rethink this apparent tension? Can educational spaces where social relations of non-domination are played out outside the state schooling system offer a form of radical pedagogy that engages students in utopian politics, at the same time as refusing the dominant political narratives of mainstream educational theory and policy?