UtopiaS and Reimagining the Reimagining of Higher Education

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Abstract

Critiques of contemporary UK higher education oscillate between troubling ideological influences and working within the remit of these matters. In response to such circularity, this paper examines the contribution of future-oriented discussions that concern the 'what *could* be' rather than that 'which *is*'. This is achieved first through a genealogical analysis of utopian thought and theory that traces from the modern's problematic and potentially totalitarian preoccupation with the realisation of grand visions to the postmodern and feminist poststructural interest in the abstract utopian "wish" (Jameson, 2005), and second through applying these observations against existing "reimaginings" of higher education. Upon observing the emphasis these reimaginings place on expertly developed blueprints and singular frameworks for change, the final part of this paper develops a means of researching and teaching the future of and within higher education that favours the multiple and the subjective. Although this method, utopiaS, does not promise nor seek the concrete realisation of an objectively better sector, the perspectives that arise from its application will offer further insight into the shortcomings of the contemporary university. By supporting the exchange of ideas, utopiaS may also broaden the hopes and imaginative horizons of researchers, teachers, participants and peers, thereby pushing against the walls of the circle between ideology and utopia.

Resumen

Las críticas a la educación superior británica contemporánea oscilan entre inquietantes influencias ideológicas y las que trabajan en el ámbito de estos asuntos. En respuesta a tal circularidad, este documento examina la contribución de los debates orientados al futuro que se refieren a "lo que podría ser" en lugar de "lo que es". Esto se logra en primer lugar mediante un análisis genealógico del pensamiento utópico y sus teorías que se remontan desde la preocupación problemática moderna, potencialmente totalitaria, por la realización de grandes visiones hasta el interés posmodernista y feminista postestructural en el "deseo" utópico abstracto (Jameson, 2005), y en segundo lugar, contrastando estas observaciones con las "reinvenciones" existentes de la educación superior. Al observar el énfasis que estas ´reinvenciones´ ponen en los planes desarrollados por expertos y los marcos singulares para el cambio, la parte final de este artículo desarrolla una forma de investigar y enseñar el futuro de la educación superior desde dentro, que favorece lo múltiple y lo subjetivo. Aunque este método, utopíaS, no promete ni busca la materialización concreta de un sector objetivamente mejor, las perspectivas que surgen de su aplicación ofrecerán una mayor comprensión de las deficiencias de la universidad contemporánea. Al apoyar el intercambio de ideas, las utopías también pueden ampliar las esperanzas y los horizontes imaginativos de investigadores, profesores, participantes y pares, flexibilizando así los límites del círculo entre la ideología y la utopía.

مُلخّص

تتأرجح الانتقادات الموجهة للتعليم العالي المعاصر في المملكة المتحدة بين التأثيرات الأيدلوجية المقلقة والعمل ضمن مسؤوليات هذه القضايا.تجاوبًا مع هذا النقاش الدائر، تدرس هذه الورقة إسهام النقاشات ذات التوجهات المستقبلية التي تهتم "بما سيكون عليه (المستقبل)" بدلاً من "ما هو عليه الحال (الوضع الراهن)".وتتحقق هذه الدراسة من خلال: أولاً: تحليل أصل نظرية وفكر اليوتوبيا والتي ترجع إلى الانشغال الإشكالي الحديث والمحتمل كونه شموليًا بتحقيق الرؤى الكبرى، وإلى الاهتمام الحداثي والنسوي مابعد البنيوي ب"الأمنية" اليوتوبية المجردة (جيمسون، 2005). ثانياً: عبر تطبيق هذه الملاحظات على الرؤى المعاد تصورها للتعليم العالي والموجودة حاليًا. يقدم الجزء الأخير من هذه الورقة وسيلة لبحث وتعليم مستقبل التعليم العالي داخل إطاره، بحيث تدعم هذه الوسيلة التعددية والموضوعية، وذلك من خلال رصد التركيز الذي تضعه الرؤى المعاد تصورها على الخطط المطورة ببراعة وكذلك الأطر الفردية الهادفة إلى التغيير.على الرغم من أن هذا المنهج "اليوتوبيات" لا يقدم وعوداً ولا يسعى إلى تحقيق ملموس لقطاع أفضل موضوعياً، إلا أن وجهات النظر التي تنشأ عن تطبيقه سوف تقدم المزيد من الرؤى حول أوجه القصور التي تعيب الجامعة المعاصرة. إن دعم تبادل الأفكار سوف يسمح لليوتوبيات أيضاً بتوسيع الآمال والآفاق الإبداعية للباحثين والمدرسين والمشاركين وكذلك الأقران وبالتالي الدفع نحو إزالة الفجوة بين الأيدلوجيا واليوتوبيا.

Introduction

The almost inevitable oscillation between troubling ideology and working within its clutches means academic critiques of contemporary UK higher education (HE) feel somewhat circular and futile. For example, researchers concerned with tracing the inhibiting manner of competitive frameworks, such as the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and university league tables, are caught in the same bind they interrogate, with perceived research quality informing the allocation of subsequent research funding (See REF, 2019). Given that such mechanisms thus subsume the criticisms made against them, "knowing" of their undesirability does not in itself support change (Bacevic, 2019a).

This paper therefore questions whether thinking in relation to the desirable, rather than the undesirable, holds greater potential in terms of problematising the hold that competitive and outcome-focussed imperatives have over HE. Indeed, as Levitas (2013) notes, "the imagination of society and ourselves expands the range of possibilities" (p.218). Future-oriented thinking is not without complications, however. For Ricoeur (1986), images of the future are embedded in ideology: "people are now more paralysed than blind. We know it may be ideology that causes us to react as we do" (p.313). Nevertheless, Ricoeur also suggests that "waging" on with a "certain" set of values pushes this circular relationship into a spiral. Accordingly, this paper examines the influence the values of multiplicity and subjectivity could have in terms of forging emancipatory avenues for HE research.

Reimagining the structures informing HE is not a novel activity. Instead of working with the subjective hopes and desires of individuals within the sector, however, authors (such as Barnett, 2013; Connell, 2019) have assumed the best interests of these individuals and so speak *for* and *to* them as opposed to *with* them. Since this tendency reflects early conceptualisations of utopian thought and action, this paper conducts a genealogical interrogation of utopian theory and reviews forward-thinking HE research in light of this analysis. The crux of this interrogation centres around the eradication of utopia's undemocratic and totalitarian elements through the abandoning of blueprints for realisation (Hudson, 2003). When utopia is merely understood to be the imagined reconstruction of society (as with Bauman, 2010; Levitas, 2013), utopian thinking exists even when it is not named as such. This transforms imaginaries into vehicles for expression rather than dictation, thereby permitting the articulation of unheard, and maybe even unthought, possibles.

The structural make-up of this paper is as follows. The first section revisits the democratic implications of placing and displacing utopia. Drawing from this discussion, the second section argues that the reimagining of HE continues to prioritise grand visions, blueprints and singular frameworks for change. The third section proposes a more idiosyncratic course of action for teaching and research. Due to the breadth of utopian thought, an eclectic collection of authors and social theorists is referred to throughout the paper. Although a comprehensive examination of any one utopian theory is not offered, a genealogical analysis confronts the power

implications of discourses that attest to being "scientific" (Hook, 2005). Certainly, the purpose of this discussion is to challenge conceptualisations that fail to account for injustice and oppression. Hence, the aim is not to equip the reader with knowledge of utopia, but to confront their perceptions of what it means to work with the future in and of HE.

Placing and displacing utopia

Coined by Thomas More in his 1516 novel, *Utopia*, utopia first referred to a fictional island in which the communal efforts of inhabitants centred around providing for vital human needs. The novel details the rivalry between Utopia and the society depicted in Plato's Republic, with the former putting in place the ideals merely described by the latter. Because of this, Utopia is said to have earned the name "happy place" or "eutopia", and it is delineated that Plato's land represents "utopia", meaning "no place" (Niklas, 2007). While this implies a hierarchy between the imagined and the implemented, a competing interpretation is that More's play on words frames the ideal, the presumed "happy place", as "no place" – nowhere. Similarly, the following critique is underscored by the belief that utopia can be invigorating, respectful and democratic, if only there is a refusal to place it.

Such refusal is not unprecedented. Despite discussing utopian socialism, Marx and Engels (2011 [1848]) deny the need for comprehensive accounts of the future. For Leopold (2007), such denial is indicative of a faith in the immanent resolution of social and political problems, a position certainly iterated in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: "New superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society" (Marx, 2010 [1859], p.93). In comparison, Webb (2000) associates Marx and Engels's refusal with democratic concerns. Should the emancipation of the proletariat depend on the realisation of one vision, then the proletariat is deprived of the ability to determine their future. In support of this perspective, Marx has also argued:

> Every individual must admit to himself that he has no precise idea about what ought to happen. However, this very defect turns to the advantage of the new movement, for it means that we do not anticipate the world with our dogmas but instead attempt to discover the new world through the critique of the old. (Cited in Bosteels, 2016)

These conflicting interpretations reflect ongoing debates as to the desirability of utopian realisation. The likening of utopian blueprints with danger and fantasy, a likening described by Levitas (2016), dates back to *Utopia*, in which the attractiveness of a circumstance where citizens have no input in social structures is deliberated. The character, Morus, for example, argues for a worldview that "adapts itself to the play at hand" as opposed to one which "thinks that everything is suitable to every place" (Cited in Niklas, 2007, p. 222). Beyond fiction, attempts to bring a particular ideal to fruition are devastating. Take the regime that succeeded the Nazi image of Volksgemeinschaft (Kjøstvedt, 2016) or Mao Zedong's 1958 proposition for

a "Great Leap Forward", an outline supporting large scale transformation in China that has since been associated with an estimated 30 million deaths (Schram, 1994). Another poignant example comes from Australia, where in 1928 German settlers named the red landscape "Utopia", despite the then occupation of over 1,000 Australian Aboriginals. Although land-claims have since been settled, that this particular stage is yet to adapt "to the play at hand" is evident in the impoverishment still experienced by these communities (Darian-Smith, 2016).

The preoccupation with implementation coincides with "solid" modernity's championing of wholeness, order and progression. In this form of modernity, advancements in science, industrialisation and capitalism insinuate an absence of limits to human endeavour, thus giving way to a "grand vision of a better and radically different perfect society" (Bauman, 1989, p.91). Bauman argues that this instigates social engineering by framing some members of the population as undesirable, and therefore deems modernity responsible for producing the "necessary conditions" for the Holocaust by facilitating a "unique encounter between old tensions … and the powerful instruments of rational and effective action that modern development itself brought into being" (p.11). Comparatively, O'Kane (1997) questions whether the enforcements introduced by Nazi Germany bear greater resemblance to outdated and "ancient" ideals than to rational modern ones. In either case, such violent realisation is accompanied by a promise of refuge from loss and ambiguity. The proliferation of utopian fictions (e.g. Bellamy, 1996 [1888]; Morris, 1993 [1890]; Wells, 2005 [1905]) in the 19th century and attempts at realisation in the 20th certainly occurred at points of societal transformation. It can therefore be wondered whether such ideas and efforts represent an attempt to end: "uncertainty and insecurity: to wit, a fully predictable social setting free of surprises and calling for no further reforms and reshuffles" (Bauman & Haugaard, 2008, p.127).

In *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]) and *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (2017 [1951]), Hannah Arendt also credits the modern's assumption that "everything is possible" with undercutting spaces of human freedom. One of these spaces, the political, is predicated on the understanding that "men, not man, live on earth" (1998, p.9). The plurality of those within the political – plurality being the capacity of each person to act in novel and unpredictable ways – ensures: "political action quite literally has no end, its results often are uncertain and unpredictable" (Niklas, 2007, p.211). Should plurality represent "humanness", as Royer (2019) interprets it to, then the placing of utopia prioritises cohesion, thereby: "homogenizing, regimenting, standardizing and destroying life." (Havel, 1986, cited in Clarke, 2013, p.131).

This criticism applies not only to grand visions for society but to academic attempts to understand utopia. Academics have distinguished between the abstract and the concrete (Bloch, 2000 [1918]); the program and the impulse (Jameson, 1982); the pragmatic (Rorty, 1999) and the feasible (Barnett, 2013), as well as between utopias featuring an "expert ruler" (Niklas, 2007) and those which reject all rulers (Clarke, 2013), and the self-identifying utopia and the anti-utopia utopia (Levitas, 2008). Underlining these ideas is a general agreement that utopia

constitutes a set of desirable circumstances "not yet" (Bloch, 2000) in place. This implies that utopia is located in the imagination, however, and so, like the political, utopia is characterised by changeability, inconsistency and ambivalence. To assume, then, that images of the future can be used or described in either *this* or *that* way places a limit on the imagination and, as will be discussed, disregards context.

Displacing the modern utopia

Utopia's totalitarian characteristics can emerge from more than overtly oppressive or colonial regimes. Erik Olin Wright (2010) argues for the construction of "real" utopias. These utopias differ from "fantasies" concerned with the running of general society in that they provide "hard-nosed proposals for pragmatically improving our institutions" (p. 5-6). Despite acknowledging how the implementation of these proposals may lead to unintended consequences, Wright claims these consequences must be dealt with "after the revolution" (p.6). This assumption that the revolution will lead to a preferable way of being, regardless of its negative effects, therefore highlights the superficial nature of the differentiation between "real" and fantastical utopias, implying that even the former is done onto others and not by them. Furthermore, even though Wright's utopias seek emancipation from capitalism, with this emancipation brought about by radicals on the left, the casting aside of the unfavourable arguably gives permission for those on opposing political sides to do the same. Speaking with regards to the use of violence to tackle violence, Butler (2020) asks: "Does that not lead to the possibility of a situation in which others with contrary intentions rely upon that revitalized license in order to realize their own intentions [?]" (p. 14).

The violence that arises from the realising of utopia can perhaps be avoided by viewing utopia according to a pluralised perspective. Hudson (2003) argues for the collection of personal imaginaries – the hopes and desires possessed by each individual. This, he believes, values conceptualisations of what *could* be – imagination without bars – as much as conceptualisations of what *should* be – what societal norms dictate is sought after or feasible. This injection of alternative ideas into discussion therefore broadens both imagination and the sense of possibility by challenging taken-for-granted ideas about the running of things. To some extent, the partial nature of Hudson's approach appears postmodern. Responding to the modern's concern with wholeness, postmodernism rejects the "incredulity of metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984). As there is no single truth to science, reason, experience or the self, the postmodern society is heavily fragmented (Peters, 1997). In comparison to solid modernity, the postmodern is "liquid" in the sense that it pushes against the solidifying of new social forms (Bauman, 2000). Since grand visions cannot be held onto, liquid modernity is thus hostile to utopian placing (Aidnik and Jacobsen, 2019). Hudson (2003) certainly rejects postmodern ideals, arguing that should there be no objective form of experience then utopian imagination is redundant since the future cannot be definitively better. As such, he argues, collected

imaginaries should be compared, rated and used to inform the construction of concrete frameworks for change. While Hudson maintains these frameworks will be democratic rather than imposed, it remains unclear as to how they are developed and there is little discussion as to how individual hopes are heard and negotiated. In addition to this, there is no consideration for social inequalities. Should it be the case that the hopes described by the socially advantaged are disproportionately heard or prioritised, then existing power dynamics will be reproduced rather than transformed. This is not to suggest that social groups only hope in ways that address their own interests, but that the overrepresentation of certain groups will reinforce taken-for-granted assumptions about voice, including who speaks and who is spoken for.

In contrast, Jameson (2004) maintains that postmodern fragmentation, the "turbulent restlessness of the real-world", opens up space for "utopian-creative free play" (p.46). Following this play, the individual – or "archaeologist" – fits together the emergent flashes of hope to create the utopian image. Although this treats wholeness as the logical end to playing and hoping, Jameson distinguishes between utopian "form" – comprised of concrete visions and blueprints – and the subjective utopian "wish" made up of vague and abstract hopes for the future (Jameson, 2005). Similarly, Bauman's (2010) "active utopia" and Levitas's (2016) notion of utopia as "method" liken utopia to a thought experiment that encourages thinkers to transcend that which currently is by engaging in the imagined reconstruction of society. Yet, disconnecting utopia from tangible outcomes arguably speaks to a feminist poststructuralist discourse. Thinkers within this tradition maintain that the preservation of inequalities can be countered by the interrogation of the humanist desire for "binaries, hierarchies, grids of intelligibility … that reward identity and punish difference" (St. Pierre, 2000, p.480). This differs from the postmodern's cultural shift towards fabillist beliefs by problematising particular structures of meaning; if there is no truth of things, there can be no innocent way of knowing (Lather, 1991). There is, then, no innocent way of describing, knowing or realising utopia.

Maintaining that traditional approaches to theorising the future struggle to reflect all ways of "being and experiencing", Darian-Smith (2016) describes the "indigenous" utopia as a means of privileging of "peasant, indigenous and other non-modern modes of thinking … these alternative epistemological frameworks suggest ways of relating to each other that were often intentionally eviscerated from the modernist paradigm" (p.170). Disconnecting from modernity's binaries of "private/public, human/ non-human, man/ nature … civilised/uncivilised, object/ subject" (Darian-Smith, 2016, p.178), the "indigenous utopia" recovers non-western discourses and rejects the colonial faith in one future. Despite providing "instructive alternative visions of our collective futures" (p.178), the recognition of cultural context suggests these utopias and their visions are individualistic, and thus develops the perspectives held by Hudson (2003), Jameson (2004, 2005) and Levitas (2016).

The idea of recovery echoes with Levitas' (2016) assertion that utopia as method supports the re-emergence of silenced desires. Should there be no innocent way of knowing utopia, however, then it can be wondered whether these desires *should* be heard and whether they

should be heard by *all*. Having researched the separation of majority (white) and minority (Maori and South Pacific Island) students in a classroom context, Jones (1999) suggests the recognition of difference provides a way of "access for dominant groups to the thoughts, culture and lives of others" (p.310). The white students' confusion at the minority group's

eagerness to be separated is described by Jones as an inability to see the limits of knowledge, representing a "cannibal desire to know the other through being taught or fed by her" (p.313). This suggests that there may be ethical value in refusing to use utopia as a tool for knowing or being "fed" possibilities for the future. Hence, the only form of intent possessed by the partial, feminist, poststructural or indigenous utopia should be that concerned with thinking and acting beyond the singular, realisable and knowable image of the future.

The placement of utopia in HE

Over the course of 30 years, HE in the UK has undergone extensive transformation in pursuit of a "globally competitive" labour and university market (The Dearing Report, 1997; Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2010). As a result, the once publicly funded universities now compete for status, applicant attention and various forms of external funding, including research grants and alumni gifts (Bacevic, 2019b). Theoretically, this competitive arena is occupied by "men, not man" (Arendt, 1998, p.9). Nevertheless, the stage is not "suitable for to every place" (More, 1516, cited in Niklas, 2001, p.222) and universities are not equal players, with each one in possession of a unique history, financial endowment and connection with the local and global community. Quantitative criteria such as high entry points, graduate outcomes and impact scores struggle to account for this variation, continuing to favour the cultures within ancient, presumed prestigious and academically selective institutions (Complete University Guide, n.d.; Department for Education, 2017). Despite hoping to "enhance the strengths" of HE (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2010), competitive policy agendas therefore assume that the interests and strengths of the privileged accord with the interests and strengths of all.

In addition to this, the preoccupation with measuring and then developing teaching (as per TEF) and research quality (as per REF) translates into increased pressure on academic staff. Macfarlane (2019) argues that the responsibilisation and individualisation supported by competitive ideals allows universities to frame performative expectations as duty and view the employment of permanent staff as risk. This subsequently creates a defence for the growing reliance on precarious contracts, outsourcing and goodwill (UCU, 2016). In spite of this, widespread discontent is evident. In two years, the UCU (2020) has led three sets of strike action against formal matters such as pensions and pay conditions. In confronting these issues, such actions also highlighted more general concerns regarding the marketisation of HE. For example, a number of "teach-outs" that accompanied the strikes addressed the purpose of HE in the 21st Century (See UCU Cambridge, 2019; UCU UCL, 2019; UCU QMUL, 2019; UCU York, 2019), with the picket-line experience described as collaborative opportunity for reconfiguration: "We were fighting for a better university … They [students] also brought us

their perspectives on learning at the university – how it is for them and how it could be different" (Ahmed, 2019).

Despite this appetite for change, the "reimagining" of HE within academic thought prioritises realisation and visions presented in the singular, meaning the system is not reimagined so much as rebranded and reproduced. The most obvious example of this lies with the images for change described by individual academics both within and outside the UK (e.g. Christensen and Eyring, 2011; Blackman, 2019; Connell, 2019; Staley, 2019). It is not the motivations behind these demarcations that are of concern as such. Indeed, the authors are often disparaging of the described changes made to HE. Issue instead rests with the use of shared language, such as "we", "us" and "collectively", and the exclusion this language signifies when the vision being shared derives from one person's imagination. The cited authors have each held lengthy academic careers and affiliations with high-status institutions. It cannot be assumed that the hopes presented by this group represent the breadth of hopes across HE, particularly since the desires of those at differently positioned institutions – who encounter the current system in other ways and so may redesign it differently also – remain scarce. Such ideas reproduce existing hierarchies by allowing the "leaders" of the present to become the "leaders" of the evolving new. Of course, not all "grand visions" function as end points; some merely provide starting points for thinking beyond the boundaries of ideological constraints. In any case, should these starting points all derive from similar places, then emergent imaginaries may still be limited and steeped in institutional privilege. This paper does not itself evade such criticism.

Concerns also arise with regards to those who maintain that the ideal university can be realised if only the correct way of thinking is followed. Barnett (2013) argues that "feasible utopias" – feasibility referring to the extent to which changes could be implemented in current infrastructures – incite change by underscoring the avoidable failures of existing systems. Not only does this tie imagination to the limitations of the present, but there is a distinct lack of clarification as to how feasibility is determined and, crucially, who this matter is determined by. Barnett's typology of the various types of imagination indicates a recognition of the flexibility of hope, as does his call for the collection of multiple and far-reaching visions of what could be. As with Hudson (2003), however, his faith in the need for concrete frameworks comes paired with little insight as to how these ideas will be gathered, measured and weighted. It is not clear how, or if, existing power relations will be negotiated in such considerations.

Others believe HE can be reimagined and transformed as a consequence of emancipatory approaches to teaching, such as critical (McArthur, 2011) and utopian pedagogy (Coté et al, 2007). Broadly speaking, critical pedagogy imagines that, upon being alleviated of their false consciousness, oppressed individuals become empowered to enact change (Zembylas, 2018). In comparison, utopian pedagogy maintains that emancipation derives from more than the recognition of flawed societal structure; the utopian pedagogue must also equip students with the knowledge and initiative required to reject the present and inhabit a new world (Coté et al, 2007; Webb, 2017). Adopting a critical pedagogy stance, McArthur (2011) argues that contemporary HE encourages students to encounter "the value of creativity or initiative solely

in terms of exchange value rather than as an aspect of what makes us intrinsically human and, hopefully, good citizens" (p.743). The critical pedagogue, however, can facilitate the reconceptualisation of HE's economic purposes by encouraging students to celebrate their identity separate from commercial and financial discourses. This nevertheless accepts that the pedagogue possesses the superior ability to see beyond these discourses. Even though

McArthur's pedagogue seeks to incur a "higher education that helps to make us all happier, more virtuous, more creative and more human" (p.747), the reaffirming of authority supports dualistic perspectives, such as voice/silent, oppressed/liberated, liberator/oppressor, teacher/student (Orner, 1992).

Due to the utopian pedagogue's role in facilitating a new way of being, such criticism can also be leveraged at this individual. With that said, the extensive performative demands placed on UK academics have been related to feelings of being controlled (e.g Leathwood and Read, 2013; Raaper, 2016), a relation which problematises the notion that the critical or utopian academic hold a superior, emancipated state. For utopian pedagogy theorist, Webb (2018), this is issue transcends the academic and pulls into question the possibility of liberation within the university:

> the emphasis on creating radical experimental spaces within the academy needs to shift toward operating in existing spaces of resistance outside it … "critical utopian politics" can take place in … housing collectives, squats, art centers, community theatres, bars, book shops, health collectives, social centers, independent media and, increasingly, of course, the digital sphere? (p.99)

Since university teaching is inevitable, some believe that flawed or at least "minimally utopian" spaces are preferable to none (Bojesen and Suissa, 2019). Resonating with Ricoeur's (1986) postulation that waging on with a set of values pushes the circle of ideology and utopia into a spiral, Harney and Moten (2013, cited in 2020) argue for a "criminal" relationship to the university in which the "subversive intellectual" sneaks "into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission … to be in but not of" (p.454). Applied to the discussion at hand, this suggests that the pedagogue, despite their own lack of liberation, is able to "steal" from the university by using its spaces, its courses and its students to further the interrogation of power structures and the imagining of alternative systems, including those within the institution itself.

In spite of this, the unequal power relations between the subversive intellectual and the student remain intact. Despite recently arguing that the utopian pedagogue should interfere in reimagining as little as possible (Webb, 2019), Webb (2017) has previously maintained that:

"without a substantive normative vision to serve as a guide, utopian archaeology is conceptually flawed and practically ineffectual" (p.552). Guidance, he claims, must be offered through "substantive programmatic blueprints", which, while not imposed from "above", are

driven by the pedagogue's expertise. Although such blueprints limit possibility by seeking an end to "uncertainty and insecurity" (Bauman and Haugaard, 2008), they also prevent the emergence of the "vague" imaginaries that encourage us "to embark on trips that have no real destination at all" (Wright, 2010, p.6). The emphasis on expertise is nonetheless problematic due to the ongoing lack of representation within the academic profession that perhaps enshrines and suppresses certain forms of knowledge (Bhopal, 2019; Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission, 2019). In any case, the pushes and pulls of this discussion can be somewhat addressed by questioning whether blueprints need to be realised or whether they simply provide a means of making sense of desire. Borjesen and Suissa (2019) believe programmes should be "malleable and open to radical change" (p.293). Indeed, should the parameters and uses of hope depend on the limits of a person's imagination (as described by Hammond, 2017; Jameson, 2005), then the negotiation of hope is equally contingent; although some individuals may require blueprints or guidelines to navigate their desires, others may relish in vague imaginaries. This tasks the utopian pedagogue with considering and meeting the needs of students rather than their own.

Blueprints are as much the means of utopian pedagogy as they are a potential end. In a way that belies his individualistic understanding of utopia, Hammond (2017) employs a specific "Bachelardean" approach to teaching. Practicing this method in various sociologically-inclined undergraduate programmes, Hammond believes that exploring the traces of subjective encounters associated with "daydreams, astonishment, hope, escape" (p.14) permits learners the "articulation of key personal memories, popular cultural attachments and, ultimately, latent possibilities" (p.14). As such, "an archaeology of actual and creative childhood fragments can help us … begin to shed the shackles of our imposed histories" (p.64). By assuming that the return to childhood will facilitate utopian dreaming for all students, Hammond's teaching methods centre his personal vision of working with the future, a criticism which extends to McArthur (2011), Webb (2017, 2019), the authors of particular visions for HE and even this paper.

Utopia, education and policy are deeply and inevitably entangled. On an individual level, the acquisition of knowledge can support the realising of a career or personal ambition. At a policy level, education is perceived as a vehicle for achieving societal aspirations, including social mobility and competitive labour markets (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2010; Department for Education, 2017). These factors do not occur in isolation. Through being implicated in government agendas, for instance, educators and students must navigate personal, institutional and national hopes for the future. This also extends to educational researchers, who examine the effectiveness of teaching methods and competing models of education (Anyon et al., 2009), and who may be inspired by their assumptions concerning preferable systems, policies and practices. Levitas (2013) argues that inherent to sociological research are "repressed utopias", with researchers "driven by a critical conviction" that "inequalities are damaging and wrong" and so undertake research with an "implicit idea of a good society in which such inequalities are absent" (p. 538). In a HE research context, this take suggests that studies concerned with the detrimental effects of competitive policy in HE draw from an image

of the good university in which these policies do not exist – though, of course, work may also be motivated by research council strategies and imperatives. Nevertheless, all this implies that the "desire for a better way of being" (Levitas, 2007, p.290) is both explicit and implicit, conscious and unconscious, meaning the above discussion has touched only the surface of utopian influence in HE.

UtopiaS

Irrespective of developments in utopian theory, explicit discussions concerning the future of HE continue to emphasise the formation and realisation of frameworks for change. By employing open-ended and subjective understandings of utopia in HE, however, writers, teachers and researchers may contribute a greater range of ideas and possibility. This, it is now argued, requires engaging with utopiaS rather than utopia. Responding to criticisms relating to the modern belief that "everything is possible", utopiaS possesses no intent to create concrete or collectively-held guidelines for the becoming of the future. Consequently, there is no incentive to develop hierarchies of desires based on feasibility or popularity. In acknowledging that there can be no "placing" of hope, hope and its emergence is considered personal and contingent. For some, this may call to an Arendtian political space within which competing perspectives prohibit movement. Such concerns are nonetheless outweighed by what stands to be gained from this plurality. Ellsworth (1989) reflects on her engagement with students developing a course on anti-racism. Even though the students divided into identity-related affinity groups, this did not cause fractures within the programme but rather required the students to respect boundaries and identities, as well as support the actions of the other rather than act for the other:

> Realizing that there are partial narratives that some social groups or cultures have and others can never know … is a condition to embrace and use as an opportunity to build a kind of social and educational interdependency that recognizes differences as "different strengths" and as "forces for change". (p.319)

In utopiaS, boundaries of knowledge operate as a reminder that access to another person's vision is contingent on their permission. With the desire to know is still akin to being "fed" (Jones, 1999) ideas for the future, particularly when the request to know occurs across lines of identity and inequality, utopiaS upholds a respect for refusal.

The simultaneous privileging of plurality and denial is somewhat contradictory, and so it may seem unclear what utopiaS contributes is if not all utopias can be explored. The proposal here is that utopiaS can inform pedagogical approaches and future-focussed research methods. A pedagogy that draws from utopiaS appreciates not only the individualistic nature of hopes for the future but the unique facilitators for the emergence and re-emergence of hope. This could take the form of teaching the varying and historical uses of utopia and later asking students to consider how these conceptualisations correspond with their own ideas of what could be for

not only HE but also themselves and other areas in society. This approach deviates from some utopian pedagogical techniques by refusing to accept the need for blueprints (Webb, 2017). Even though this theoretically discourages the pedagogue from discussing or employing the theories that speak most to them, the pedagogue's superior position means students may nonetheless feel inclined to hear and consider the utopias or dreams possessed by the teacher. While it might be wondered whether viewing students as collaborators alleviates this possibility, this dilemma still returns to the question of what, if anything, utopian pedagogy can achieve within the remit of the outcome-centred university. It is therefore acknowledged that utopiaS as a pedagogical method requires further development.

In terms of research, UtopiaS extends Levitas's (2013) notion of utopia "as method". This method involves: "considering the kinds of people we want to become and that different forms of society will promote or inhibit … utopia as method is concerned with the potential institutions of a just, equitable and sustainable society" (p.18). Although the difference seems superficial, utopiaS informs empirical study by prioritising the collection of competing perspectives for the future to no end other than the recognition of difference. It is therefore not assumed that untethered thinking will inevitably incur ideas that orientate around the principles of social justice and equality. Even should unfavourable images emerge, utopiaS's separation from realisation allows the origins of these images to be interrogated before rather than after any "consequences" (Wright, 2010) come into play. In addition to this, utopiaS may provide further insight into the ways the sector is currently experienced, highlighting which – and whose – needs are not being met. While this perhaps focusses on *knowing*, a refusal to share a utopian wish is equally enlightening: "we must be willing to learn from those who don't speak up in words. What are their silences telling us?" (Lather, 1987, cited in Orner, 1992, p.81).

At present, there is a dearth of explicit exploration into what varying groups want for HE. It is crucial, however, that any research that delves into such discussion considers the opinions of those from institutions throughout the breadth of the sector. By focusing on the ways institutional context informs experiences, beliefs and desires, utopiaS as method complicates the view that universities are equal players in competition. With that said, utopiaS is not proposed as a means of resolving all discords in utopian theory. Two of the questions facing researchers and teachers looking to work with the concept are:

1. Does the purposeful application of utopiaS, in research as well as classroom and non-university spaces, indicate the presence of a grand vision for utopian thinking?
2. Does the subjective nature and presentation of utopia prevent the researcher from gaining any comparative insight with regards to participants' hopes and imaginings?

Concluding remarks

Despite the growing interest in reimagining universities, this paper has argued that such interest is yet to fully engage with developments in utopian theory. Having discussed the limitations of utopian ideas relating to progress and realisation, this paper has presented a conceptual tool, utopiaS, that draws purposefully from the imaginative capacity of each individual so to support the development of more subjective means of teaching and researching the future of and within HE. Without implying that utopiaS resolves the tensions between HE research on ideology and ideological constraints within HE, the experimental nature of utopiaS creates a kind of hermeneutic which, in pulling between ideas about what is and what could be, may succeed in pushing the Ricoeurian circle into a spiral. That said, utopian thought is itself circular, with discussions repeatedly taking place between and around the desire and distaste for utopian blueprints. Furthermore, it would be naïve to ignore how UtopiaS may itself be subsumed into research publications and pedagogical discussions that then inform competitive frameworks, particularly REF and TEF. Should this be the case, utopiaS will thus feed the same ideological force that forward-focussed thinking strives to interrupt. Perhaps, then, the sole purpose of utopiaS is to push and wage on in the search for something better – theoretically, methodologically and in practice – all the while accepting there can be no placing of hope.

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