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Published online: 26 Mar 2024.

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Beyond hope and despair: The radical imagination as a collective practice for uprising

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the concepts of hope, despair and the radical imagination, driven by the following questions: Can we exist beyond the binaries of hope and despair, two key concepts that drive educational practices? What is the radical imagination and what are the conditions for it to be put to work in educational spaces? First, education is explored as a hyperobject that is owned, imagined and practiced collectively. The semiotic square is introduced as a heuristic tool to illustrate the limitations of the binary opposition between hope and despair, and allows for an exploration of what is possible when these binaries are being set aside. The radical imagination then, is described as a collective practice that is radical in the sense that alternative social forms can always be imagined once we acknowledge that every social form is the result of the collective imagination. Finally, the paper explores conceptual as well as practical ideas that underpin Education for Uprising which is understood as the emergence of micro-political, autonomous spaces of direct action where community, solidarity and self-organization are key principles. Education for Uprising allows us to radically reimagine how we view education and to actively engage in alternative world-making.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to cultivate alternatives that lie beyond the ubiquity of the crisis narratives that mark research, theory and practice in education. Central to the arguments is the development of the radical imagination as a collective practice that can drive what David Graeber (2007) calls 'insurrectionary moments' in our work as educational researchers and practitioners. With this work, I offer ways of being, thinking and doing that 'not only help reveal structures and systems of violence, exploitation and domination…it must also contribute to people's capacity to imagine and forge paths beyond them.' (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 85).

Education discourses are dominated by what is referred to as a 'learning crisis' (UNESCO, 2014, UNESCO., 2021; World Bank, 2019) which exists alongside the climate crisis, migration crises, political crises and so forth. Crisis is taken as self-evident by educational researchers and practitioners who are mostly focused on problem-solving. In many cases, the crisis seems to be a 'manufactured crisis' (Berliner & Biddle, 1996) that justifies short-term developments oriented towards quick fixes.

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In earlier work I explored Ruth Levitas' utopia as method as a way for educational researchers and practitioners to engage with alternative futures that go beyond problem solving (see Van Dermijnsbrugge & Chatelier, 2022). In this paper, I further expand the work of utopia as method by looking more closely at the concepts of hope, despair and the radical imagination, driven by two questions. The first question is: Can we exist beyond the binaries of hope and despair, two key concepts that drive educational practices? And if so, what does this place look like? I argue that we need to think and act beyond the binaries that are limiting our educational work as well as society at large. Binaries are based on the premise of exclusion (this, not that) and are thus not only limiting, but also oppressing and damaging. The arguments are conceptualized and visualized in a semiotic square of hope and despair, inspired by the work of activists and scholars Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) who developed a semiotic square focused on the concepts of success and failure in their work on researching social movements. The semiotic square 'offers a profound heuristic tool for taking apart binary thinking and pluralizing the horizons of thought' (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 123). I analyze all four sides of the semiotic square (visualized in Figure 1), thereby providing examples, ending with the bottom side, which visualizes the non-binary space between not-hope and not-despair. It is in this space, which Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) call 'the hiatus', that the radical imagination can be put to work, and this is the focus of the second question: What is the radical imagination and what are the conditions for it to be put to work in educational spaces?

The radical imagination is 'a space where an awareness of difference can lead to new ideas, alliances, solidarities and possibilities' (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 244). I further develop the notion of the radical imagination as a collective, ethical practice that can play an activating role in educational communities. Following Unger, the imagination 'has a role in preventing social change occurring in a catastrophic or revolutionary manner: it "does the work of crisis without crisis"' (Levitas, 2013, p. 139). This is the important work that needs to happen in education, wherein the field of education has to be reimagined and expanded. I introduce the notion of Uprising, in analogy with Max Stirner's thought, and call for the formation of anarcho-syndicates that engage in the creation of alternative futures whilst being 'worthy of the present' (Braidotti, 2013).

Before addressing the questions posed above, I first provide context and justification for the use of the semiotic square, as well as a brief conceptualization and definition of
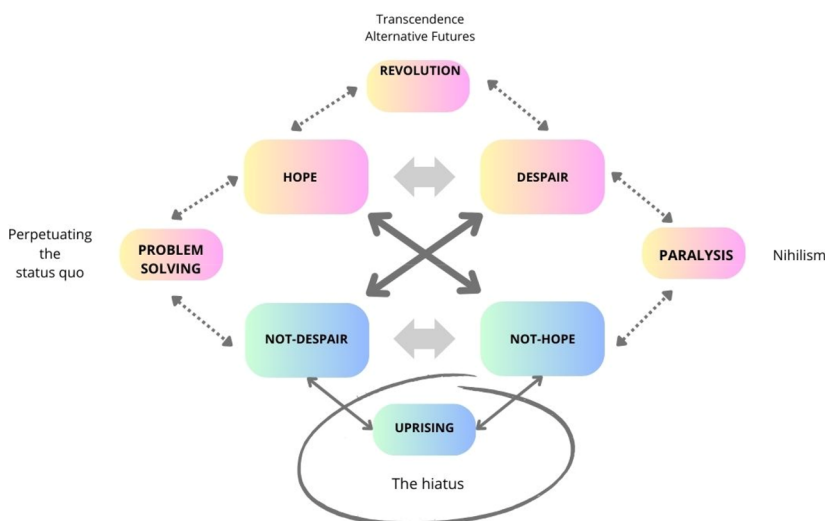

Figure 1. The semiotic square of hope and despair.

education as a hyperobject (Morton, 2013) that is 'everything everywhere all at once'. I problematize the binary opposition between education and non-education and argue that the 'explosion' of education- to borrow an image from Ward and Fyson (1973) beyond the confines of schools and institutions is necessary if we want to put the radical imagination to work.

Education as hyperobject

The hyperobject as a heuristic technique

Morton (2013) describes hyperobjects as 'things that are massively distributed in time and space, relative to humans' (p. 1) and that 'undermine the notion of "away"' (p. 36). Hyperobjects are difficult to point at directly, but they are there, not just mentally, but also physically (Morton, 2012, 2013) and we, as human beings, are surrounded by them, and part of them. Morton (2013) analyzes ecology and the environment as examples of hyperobjects and critiques the fixation with notions such as global warming, as the latter is only a smaller and singular aspect of the much larger omnipresence of the hyperobject called 'environment'. The danger with focusing on piecemeal entities such as global warming is that we, as human beings, think that we can distance ourselves from the very hyperobject this entity is enmeshed with and thus risk failing to acknowledge our responsibility and our contributions to, in this case, the environment. Morton (2013) states: 'No, we are not in the centre of the universe, but we are not in the VIP box beyond the edge, either' (p. 18). In short, we cannot think of ourselves outside of hyperobjects: we are nature; we are ecology.

Exploding education

If we imagine education as a hyperobject, it becomes impossible to think of a space of non-education or, to put it differently, to think of a space of education outside of which humans exist. Knowledge, understanding, values and experiences are common goods that emerge, change and expand through human interaction (see also Papastephanou et al., 2020). When we close the school gate, education does not all of a sudden stop. In times of war, education is still there. Education as a hyperobject exists beyond space and time, and it consists of real as well as sensual objects (Harman, 2018), with the latter referring to an 'appearance-for another object' (Morton, 2013, p. 118). Education has developed as a hyperobject through the occurrence of an increasing number of objects, real and sensual: schools, teachers, policies, conversations, science, syllabi, chalkboards, tests, students, exams, study desks, diplomas, books, etc. All of these objects make up the hyperobject called 'education' but it is not limited to them, as they are all linked together and interconnected with other (hyper)objects in what Morton (2012) calls 'the mesh'. Reducing education to schooling (cf. the reduction of ecology to global warming), as is often done, is not only a reduction and limitation of what education actually can be and where it exists. It also implies that 'we are stuck to the notion that we must improve ourselves, our society, our world, and that education is the necessary path to this ever-receding condition of fulfillment' (Peim & Stock, 2022, p. 259). Furthermore, informal, less institutionalized spaces of education (e.g. neighbourhood communities, youth clubs, etc.) are being separated from education, as if education cannot happen there. If we imagine education as a hyperobject that is 'everything, everywhere all at once', we 'create possibilities and spaces of hope' (Van Dermijnsbrugge & Chatelier, 2022, p. 1) and reclaim education from the clutches of the untenable status quo, the surveillance, the confined (pay)walls of institutions and schools. Peim and Stock (2022), in their worthwhile analysis of education as a hyperobject, go further and call 'into question … assumptions about both the nature of education and its potential future' (p. 257). They see questioning

education itself as 'a vital endeavour to be acted upon before (perhaps futile) attempts to move outside of it' (Peim & Stock, 2022, p. 257).

First, we need to bring education back into our everyday existence as human beings, in our mundane interactions, in our thoughts and actions, in our ways of being. Second, when we reimagine education beyond the binary of education and non-education, education becomes an act of world-making (Meyerhoff, 2019). The responsibility we have as educational researchers and practitioners has to do with 'identifying which informal spaces enable the centralization of power and studying how different ways of organizing, opening and diffusing formal spaces can serve to prevent rather than facilitate the centralization of power'(Crimethink, 2020, n.p.). In this reimagined educational hyperobject the radical imagination can be put to work, as I will demonstrate later, after first providing context and justification for the use of the semiotic square.

The semiotic square: Looking beyond the binaries

The semiotic square, otherwise known as the 'Greimas square', after its creator, is a tool originally used in semiotic theory wherein each side of the square makes visible the ideological tensions that exist between binaries (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014). Yet the square also illustrates that new possibilities lie beyond the binary. The square has a positive (left) side and a negative (right) side; a top side that illustrates the binary opposition and what happens when the binary is transcended; a bottom side that moves away from the binary and brings in a non-binary, more plural space. It is Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) application of the semiotic square that served as an inspiration for the visual presented in Figure 1. In their semiotic square, they analyze the notions of success and failure of social movements, but they expand the square by describing what the consequences of the binary oppositions on each of the four sides of the squares look like. In their analysis they describe the top side as the ideal side, the place where all challenges are overcome; the negative (right) side – failure and not success – often leads to burnout; the positive (left) side – success and not failure – can lead to gains (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014). Their analysis of the bottom side (in their version the side of non-success and non-failure) is productive as this is the space of tension beyond the binaries where, they argue, the radical imagination can be put to work. It was this positioning of the radical imagination that brought me to the development of the semiotic square of hope and despair.

Can we exist beyond the binaries of hope and despair, two key concepts that drive educational practice? And if so, what does this place look like?

Formulating a possible answer to this question requires us to look at the four 'sides' of the semiotic square of hope and despair. I start with the top side in Figure 1, the side where hope and despair are in binary opposition.

Transcendence and revolution: The worst kind of utopia

The dispositions of hope and despair shape our ontology. We hope for something or despair of something. It shapes the way we view the causes and consequences of our own actions, as well as the broader dynamics of society. This outlook also impacts our educational practices as well as our view on the purposes of education. We first focus on what unites hope and despair and what lies beyond this binary. This requires us to imagine that neither hope nor despair have any further function as we have transgressed this binary and exist in a utopian world where 'we have conclusively overcome all the sorts of oppression and exploitation that frame (and benefit from) our current ways of thinking' (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 125).

This is a world where education has successfully achieved social transformation. We have transcended our current reality and moved into a world that lies 'just over the horizon of our thinking' (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 125), where the alternative futures we are dreaming of today have been achieved. The achievement of this state of affairs sounds deceivingly positive.

Yet, it is this impossible world that is being imagined by revolutionaries who wish to overthrow the current (capitalist, neoliberal) authority and replace it with what they view as a better alternative. This is a problematic ideology, because, as Erik Olin Wright (2019) argues: 'the results of such revolutionary seizures of power, however, were never the creation of a democratic, egalitarian, emancipatory alternative to capitalism' (p. 40). To put it differently: revolutionaries are wedded to the idea of an external authority, and thus start from a position 'outside', 'away from' the world they wish to change, in many cases giving power to one individual who leads the masses towards liberation (see also Newman, 2017). If we accept a world made up of hyperobjects, this revolutionary ideology is impossible as one cannot exist outside of things. This ideology is also, as argued earlier, problematic as it leads to a denial of one's own responsibility in the current and future authoritarian structures. As history has shown us, revolutionary ideologies (e.g. fascism, capitalism) are used to justify violence and oppression as important contributions to this ideal, transcendental society that lies within reach. In such revolutionary projects, education is used as a strictly controlled instrument that has to teach the masses about this ideal world and their role in it. In our current context, education is operationalized in a similar way by neoliberal authorities through interference in curricula, setting criteria for qualification, ranking of students and schools, etc., all of which is intended to bring us closer to this transcendental, singular future. However, as Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) aptly summarize: 'we are left only with the residual dreams of the powerful, and for the vast majority they are not experienced as dreams but as nightmares of insecurity, precarity, violence and hopelessness' (p. 3–4).

Driven by crisis: Problem-solving or paralysis

We now move to the left and right side of the semiotic square in Figure 1, whereby the left side represents hope/not-despair, and the right side represents despair/not-hope. It is appropriate to discuss both sides together, as they are driven by the same principle: the notion of crisis. As stated in the introduction, crisis discourses are problematic as they do not tackle the underlying causes of issues whilst also 'bolster(ing) the "conservative" desire for social stability' (Cordero, 2014, p. 500). In other words, 'the crisis trope encloses our collective imagination of what is possible, narrowing it to focus on the crisis as defined by those with the power to proclaim it' (Haiven & Khasnabish, p. 31–32). It is this narrowing perspective that motivates both those driven by hope (not-despair) and those motivated by despair (not-hope), yet their responses look radically different.

Actions of hope/not-despair are what Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) call 'practical and material victories' (p. 127). They are short-term quick fixes that do not tackle underlying causes or look at larger complex dynamics of inequality, climate issues, oppression, etc. This simplistic perspective leads to a perpetuation of the crisis, and results in a never-ending chain of crisis-responses that can only exist if the crisis continues to exist. This logic also underpins educational practices such as Education For Sustainable Development (ESD) which is mostly focused on economic growth (see Kopnina, 2020). Schools engage in beach cleanups, donations, meat-free days, banning straws. Teachers facilitate student projects on green cars and sustainable marketing. Each of these initiatives is premised on the logic of problem solving within the crisis-ridden status quo. With ESD as one example, schools become some of the most important executors of transnational educational policies that serve anything but social transformation.

Shifting now to the right side of the semiotic square, the side of despair/not-hope, a different attitude emerges. On this side, the ubiquity of crisis talk and the perpetuation of crises do not lead to action, but to paralysis. Based on their research in and with social movements, Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) discuss the emergence of a 'more profound socio-psychological dimension' (p. 127) that is underpinned by 'not only pessimism about the possibilities for real change (success) but a weariness and cynicism that was wounding to the soul itself' (p. 127). In relation to the climate, we see this playing out at a larger scale in the emergence of pathologies such as climate anxiety and eco-depressions, alongside professions such as climate psychotherapists. These pathologies are also making their way into schools where an increasing number of young people feel anxious, depressed, and, indeed, paralyzed because of climate-related events (see Hickman et al., 2021).

The stalemate in which the two sides of the semiotic square (hope/not-despair and despair/not-hope) find themselves, does not offer possibilities for social transformation given the limiting effect of the crisis discourses that mainly serve the conservative agendas of those who benefit from the status quo. Is there any space left for hints of social transformation to emerge? For this, we turn to the bottom side of the square, the side of not-despair and not-hope.

The hiatus dwellers: Where insurrectionary moments emerge

The space between not-despair and not-hope is where the binary of hope and despair is being abandoned. It is 'the space of active waiting, of anticipatory pragmatics, of the pregnant hiatus' (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 136) where productive tensions lead to possibilities. What is important here, is that 'hiatus dwellers' are neither revolutionaries nor believers in a transcendental future. They are navigating 'the ongoing difficulties, pitfalls, and irreconcilable conundrums' (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 136), neither paralyzed nor driven by short-term problem-solving, but driven by immediate action out of solidarity with their communities. Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) saw this attitude among a number of activist members of social movements in their research who did not only possess 'the ability to dream of different worlds, it is the ability to live between those worlds and this one'(p. 130). In other words, these individuals acknowledge their responsibility for and entanglement with the hyperobjective reality and see themselves as 'crisscrossed with interobjective calligraphy', as Morton (2013, p. 88) beautifully puts it. In this hiatus or site of struggle, human existence is marked by relationality, interconnectedness and solidarity. The challenges and responsibilities of the current moment are being acknowledged and critically evaluated, and individual as well as collective actions are geared towards social transformation. Or, to put it differently: 'When we *imagine* more, when we *explore* multiple futures, we *perceive* more in the present'(Damhof & Gulmans, 2023, p. 52).

It is exactly this kind of outlook that Graeber (2007) has in mind when he calls for 'insurrectionary moments' or Uprising. Following Max Stirner's thought, the notion of Uprising is understood as 'the creation of autonomous communal spaces and modes of interaction' (Newman, 2017, p. 285) that emerge from 'within the fabric of existing social relations' (Newman, 2017, p. 285). Uprising is thus as much about organization as it is about 'suspending the operation of power' (Newman, 2017, p. 288) and 'opening up spaces of resistance and autonomy' (Newman, 2017, p. 285). Education for Uprising, therefore, serves direct action, at micro-political level, and is not envisioning a transcendental, utopian blueprint. It is about being 'open and attentive to interruptions, failures, gaps, lacunae, sticky pots and agonism' (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 220). Following Newman's (2017) description of insurrection: 'It does not seek to impose a unified political will to reshape or reconstitute society according to a particular vision or plan but, rather, affirms, in a pre-figurative way, a free form of activity and being-in-common in the present' (p. 285).

In many cases, these moments and activities have marginal chances of success and often insurrectionists are criticized by those paralyzed by despair/not-hope who do not see the point of action given the very likely unsuccessful outcome. However, the very fact that a collective

can imagine alternative futures in the present that emerge from difference, struggle and action, is evident of the possibility of their project. I return to this collective imagination in more detail in the next section. In education, these moments occur when difficult conversations are being held, when challenging actions are being undertaken, when spaces are created 'where an awareness of difference can lead to new ideas, alliances, solidarities and possibilities' (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 244).

What is the radical imagination and what are the conditions for it to exist in educational spaces?

The radical imagination as a collective practice

Defining the radical imagination requires us to first understand the collective character of the imagination. Komporozos-Athanasiou (2017), drawing on the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, describes the imagination as a practice that 'transcends individual/collective and private/public dualisms: it contains an instituting (open, creative) and an instituted (closed) dimension, both of which exist in tension, and which sets in motion the imaginary constitution of societies' (n.p.). Thus, the imagination does not only exist at an individual level, in dreams and wishes, as is often assumed, but is also a collective practice. 'Behind this idea', Bottici (2019) contends, 'is a complex view of the relationship between individuals, who can only exist within imaginary significations, and a social imaginary, which can only exist in and through individuals themselves' (p. 436). To put it differently: 'the imagination is a collective process rather than an individualized thing, and that its wellspring is not individual romantic geniuses but communities and collectivities as they work their way through the world' (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 62). This view implies that all social forms are collectively imagined and that although they seem permanent, these forms really are 'the temporary solidifications of the (shared) radical imagination' (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 6).

This temporary character of social forms as well as the collective nature of the imagination are important realizations as they point to the radical character of the imagination. As Bottici (2014), drawing on Castoriadis, summarizes: 'imagination is radical in the double sense that, without it, there could not be any reality as such and that it can always potentially question its objects by disclosing possible alternatives (Castoriadis 1987, 1991)' (location 190–194). In other words, possibilities for alternatives to the dominating neoliberal and capitalist social forms do exist, despite the conviction of many, including the late Margaret Thatcher, who famously stated that 'There Is No Alternative'. If we acknowledge that social forms are imagined, we also have to acknowledge that social forms – and all their principles and practices – can be reimagined, which lies at the heart of the work of many social movements, collectives, communities and activists who are 'dwelling in the hiatus'. It is these hiatuses or these glitches in the matrix that are populated by collectives concerned with social change.

The radical imagination at work in education

If we apply the radical imagination to the context of the massive hyperobject of education, we have to acknowledge that we do not only – individually as well as collectively – imagine what education is, but we also always have the possibility to reimagine education and to act upon what it could be (see also Peim & Stock, 2022). As education researchers and practitioners we thus have the responsibility to do more than merely mirroring and articulating crises (Gergen, 2015). 'The vast share of research today', Gergen (2015) states, 'remains dedicated to "revealing", "illuminating", "understanding", or "reflecting" a given state of affairs' (p. 291). This often critical work is important, yet it does not engage in actions that 'create what is to become' (Gergen,

2015, p. 294), that imagines alternatives from the manifold hiatuses in the system. At best, educators talk and write about inclusion, diversity, oppression, alternative educational policies and practices, etc., but do not necessarily put them into practice. As educators, rather than complaining and complying, we have to populate the hiatuses and 'build non-coercive, non-oppressive, non-hierarchical and non-exploitative relationships and institutions today that would be worthy exemplars of the world we want to create' (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 2). That is what the radical imagination allows us, urges us, to do. Now it is time to turn to the conditions for the radical imagination to be put into practice.

Conditions for the radical imagination to be put into practice

For this, it is important to first reiterate that a revolutionary approach, a belief in an transcendental and perfect future (cf. the top side of the semiotic square) is problematic because it is based on the assumption that there is an 'outside', and that an external authority can lead us towards an ideal future by overthrowing the present. This worldview, as argued earlier, is in tension with the notion of the hyperobjective reality within which we exist, which is imagined and thus can also be reimagined in the cracks that allow for spaces of difference (or: hiatuses) to emerge. The approach I want to argue should be premised on the idea of bottom-up social transformation with self-governance, solidarity and mutual aid as core principles. These features are opposed to the structure and purpose of large and often hierarchical bureaucracies because 'organization is, after all, only a means to an end. When it becomes an end in itself, it kills the spirit and the vital initiative of its members and sets up that domination by mediocrity' (Rocker, 1938, p.93).

In education, large hierarchical bureaucracies such as the OECD, national governments and regional organizations such as the European Commission are indeed often acting as organizations whose existence and domination of the transnational educational arena is an end in itself, taking advantage of and thus perpetuating the crises that surround education and society at large. As illustrated by their (trans)national policies and practices, these external authorities have an 'irresistible inclination toward despotism, be this the despotism of a person or of majority rule' (Arendt, 1998, p. 43). A very good illustration of the despotism of one person (and their global influence) in education is offered through the sharp analysis of the career of Sir Michael Barber by Auld and Morris (2023). Barber has led data- and evidence-driven global governance and education policy development, and has played key roles in the increasing implementation of international large-scale assessments (Auld & Morris, 2023). Auld and Morris apply elements of theology and philosophy to reveal 'the religious undercurrent to his revolutionary movement, and how apocalyptic symbolism and messianic pretensions have grown more pronounced as he scaled to become a global actor' (Auld & Morris, 2023, p.16).

Rather than relying on these oppressive external bureaucracies and despots, we need to shift our focus to the hiatuses in the system where, at micro-political level, insurrectionary moments create alternatives. An essential condition for the radical imagination to be operationalized is a type of self-organization that is inherent to anarchism. Anarchism here is understood as a general political philosophy that drives daily practices of 'liberation of peoples from political domination and economic exploitation by the encouragement of direct or non-governmental action' (Kinna, 2005, p. 3). I turn to anarcho-syndicalism in particular to further illustrate what kind of self-organization is desirable for the operationalization of the radical imagination and the important work of imagining alternatives in the present.

Anarcho-syndicalism emerged from the labour movement in the early 1900s (Chomsky, 1976) and thus has a historical connection to unionism. Linguistically, 'syndicalism' originates from the French 'syndicat' or 'union' in English (Prichard, 2022), yet syndicalism also 'signifies a more radical grass roots, bottom-up industrial unionism, encompassing all trades in a workplace, rather than the top-down, specialist trade unionism we are more accustomed to today' (Prichard, 2022, p. 34). The prefix anarcho is also important as it indicates that syndicates are opposed

to centralized power. This is one of the important reasons for anarcho-syndicates to be small by intention and to be self-governed (Rocker, 1938). Anarcho-syndicalists are concerned with solidarity amongst all community members, establishing common interest and thereby ensuring that 'mutual agreement is possible and serviceable to all parties' (Rocker, 1938, p. 113). I focus on its potential as an organizing structure to operationalize radical imaginative practices (see also Van Dermijnsbrugge, 2023).

Given their philosophical and practical principles, anarcho-syndicates operate at a micro-political level and are opposed to revolutionary practices. They engage in direct action based on principles of solidarity and the needs of their communities whilst acknowledging and working through the difficulties and challenges of the larger existing hyperobjects in which they are inevitably immersed. Indeed, anarcho-syndicalists are navigating 'the ongoing difficulties, pitfalls, and irreconcilable conundrums' (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 136) that come with 'dwelling in the hiatus', and are attempting to create the new in the shell of the old. Anarcho-syndicates, therefore, offer useful organizational principles and practices for the radical imagination – more specifically the collective endeavour of (re)imagining alternatives – to be operationalized here and now.

There are numerous contemporary examples of bottom-up initiatives built on anarcho-syndicalist principles that imagine radical alternative social forms. For example: Occupy Wall Street (the anti-capitalist movement that emerged in New York in 2011 in the wake of the financial crisis), and Occupy Sandy (community lead, small scale disaster relief set up in 2012 in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy in the United States, see Firth, 2022). In schools, similar 'disaster relief' initiatives were emerging during the Covid-19 pandemic when teachers organized lessons online, offered mental support to students and their families, delivered meals to the school community etc. Alongside these shorter term initiatives there are also longer term examples of radical alternatives that are complementary to anarcho-syndicalism, working across a wide variety of geographical and social contexts, for example: the Red Sunday School in Glasgow, Scotland (see Red Sunday School, 2024); het Oude RKZ, a longstanding community which originally started as squat but now operates as a legalized housing cooperative in Groningen, the Netherlands (see Oude ORKZ, 2024); Amala Education, an organization that offers education to refugees worldwide (see Amala Education, 2024).

It is not possible to do justice to each of these initiatives here. Yet, what unites many of these initiatives is that they are 'providing services not offered by the state at a time of crisis' (Shaw, 2023, p. 58). They operate beyond the crisis logic by going against the oppressive structures that external authorities impose, and they radically imagine alternatives through their immediate actions, each creating 'insurrectionary moments'.

Communities involved in these initiatives do not simply mirror or reveal (Gergen, 2015), but 'create what is to become' (Gergen, 2015, p. 294). If we return to the earlier made argument that education exists as a hyperobject beyond the binary of education and non-education, and beyond the binary of hope and despair, then education is present in all of these insurrectionary moments where radically different social forms are (collectively) imagined. It is this kind of world-making (Meyerhoff, 2019) that education can and should be part of. Taking the argument a step further, the claim could be made that education, when radically reimagined, is what happens in micro-political communities that are driven by self-organization, solidarity, and participation, in communities that reshape social forms. Indeed, this is an education 'worthy of the present' (Braidotti, 2013).

A provisional conclusion

I have explored conceptual as well as practical ideas that underpin an Education for Uprising which requires us to radically reimagine how we view education, and forces us to abandon binary thinking as a way to reveal oppression, exploitation or domination, and actively

engage in alternative world-making (Meyerhoff, 2019). I have drawn on Morton's (2013) concept of the hyperobject to rethink education as a practice that is owned, imagined and enacted collectively, and that exists everywhere, all at once. It is the responsibility of educational researchers and practitioners to contribute to alternative futures by allowing for insurrectionary moments to occur, rather than merely critiquing and mirroring existing crises (Gergen, 2015). The semiotic square was introduced as a heuristic tool to illustrate the limitations of the binary opposition between hope and despair as opposing, yet equally problematic, worldviews and driving forces in education. The square allowed for an exploration of what is possible when these binaries are being set aside and revealed the always-existing 'hiatus' where the radical imagination can be put to work. The radical imagination then, was described as a collective practice that is radical in the sense that alternative social forms can always be imagined once we acknowledge that every social form is itself the result of the collective imagination. I described how self-organization, exemplified following principles of direct action as practiced by anarcho-syndicates, is an important condition for the radical imagination to be operationalized. The operationalization of the radical imagination within self-organising groups who dwell in the hiatuses allows for an Education for Uprising, whereby Uprising is understood as 'the creation of autonomous communal spaces and modes of interaction' (Newman, 2017, p. 285) where social transformation happens.

Education for Uprising must be 'exploded' into all areas of life if we want to inhabit the planet ethically and live together in solidarity. The ideas presented here are not an end point, but rather a form of insurrectionary moment as well as a contribution to a 'philosophy of education in a new key'(Papastephanou et al., 2020). Or, to finish with Graeber's (2007) words: 'They are hardly meant to be definitive. They may not even prove useful. But perhaps they can contribute to a broader project of re-imagining' (n.p.).

Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

Dr. Elke Van dermijnsbrugge is Lecturer-Researcher in International Teacher Education at NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands. She is also one of the conveners of the Anarchist Studies Network. She focuses on alternative research methods (in education) and is interested in the application of utopian and speculative thinking, the punk ethos and anarchist organizational philosophy to reimagine educational policy, research and practice.

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