Land Pedagogy in the Metropole: A co-produced research project into community-centred knowledge in Merseyside, UK

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Abstract

This paper examines a research project carried out in the city of Liverpool in Merseyside, UK, which drew on creative arts-based methodologies, popular education, and 'post-abyssal' epistemologies to co-create frameworks of knowledge with communities in struggle.

A 'spatial vocabulary of power' for Merseyside was developed to render explicit the tacit, embodied knowledge of project participants of their lived experience of their local spacetime. Coupled with a creative provocation, inviting participants to consider Liverpool and its surrounding area as an 'internal colony', participants became de-habituated to their everyday environment. This provocation was informed by histories both of enclosure and control of land in the UK, and settler colonialism as a structure.

The complex coloniser/colonised tacit knowledge of the participants was made explicit and shown to be in contradiction to the dominant ideology of capitalism, suggesting reasons why much of Merseyside has maintained an anti-capitalist counter-ideology. The resultant narrative suggests that a drama-based land pedagogy appropriate to the colonial centre can be developed so as to enable communities in struggle to transform into communities of resistance. The paper concludes by

considering ways in which this aligns with pedagogies emergent in the Global South, and how they can be developed further.

Keywords: *Land pedagogy; co-production; embodiment; emancipation; drama*

Introduction

We are living in an era that Boaventura De Sousa Santos has called "a time of perplexed consternation" (2018, p. 243). Mainstream critical thinking in the West has withdrawn from the project of prefiguring possible futures at exactly the moment when such a project is most necessary (Zizek, 2008). The epistemological ground has been abandoned to the necropolitical right, and populist notions of belonging, coupled with diagnoses of the state of the world that give expression to sometimes understandable and often desperate fears about being 'left behind', have spawned pseudo-rational narratives that seek to account for the neo-liberal immiseration of work and family life, and the conduct of the rich, the famous, and the powerful. All they succeed in doing is undoing – hastening the dissolution of our communities, our power to organise and our power to imagine.

This paper uses the example of the 'Radical Researchers' co-created research project to examine the evolution of 'Epistemologies of the South' from their roots in colonised countries, and to explore the extent to which such epistemologies can be applied within the Metropole. It will examine how this small research project, rooted in communities commonly labelled as 'marginalised', in a city regularly portrayed as 'ungovernable', suggests that the emergent 'Land Pedagogy' generated might be applied on larger scales, and might help reclaim the future from a ruling elite intent on engulfing the planet in both ontological and actual incineration. The manner in which the conceptual frameworks used in analysing this project were deployed co-evolved intuitively

with the project itself as the research progressed. Tacit knowledges both from the participants and the researcher became explicit, and were pragmatically aligned with a number of critical and liberational epistemologies, both Marxist, and 'more than Marxist'. It will be argued that these contributed to a polyphonic reading of the research, to creating overlapping and mutually informed 'ecologies of knowledges' where different but congruent concepts converge. The research investigated whether and how participatory arts-based methodologies can be used to create frameworks of knowledge that benefit communities in struggle in Merseyside. It cannot be understood without the context in space and time in which it took place. I will also be making myself, "the researcher", visible, and considering the nature of my position in this space and time.

Merseyside, also known as "Liverpool City Region (LCR)", has a population of 1.56m. It is made up of 6 Boroughs sited around the Mersey estuary in the Northwest of England. Its economy has historically been dependent on commerce based on the Triangular Traffick of enslaved people. In the 20th Century, its population and economy declined drastically. While the region is still engaged in trade, with Seaforth Container Port and productive manufacturing and public administration sectors, its economy is characterised by a low skills base, a large proportion of people kept out of work by illness and disability, and a slow recovery from the Pandemic[1]. The region is more deprived than the average: over a third of neighbourhoods are in the top 10% most employment deprived nationally[2]. Despite this it has vast cultural assets, such as a wealth of diverse communities dating back at least 250 years (Zack-Williams 1997), which is reflected in the number of grass roots organisations making art in the region[3]. Merseyside in particular and the North in general have been regarded as a problem for 'central' London based governments for much longer than is generally acknowledged (Frost and North, 2013). The former UK Prime

Minister Boris Johnson referred to a supposed 'Liverpudlian' identity, including 'mawkish sentimentality' with regard to the Hillsborough disaster and 'an excessive predilection for welfarism' (Scraton, 2019). The city is perceived as uniquely anti Conservative, but was in fact governed by a Conservative Council for most of the 20th Century (Jeffery, 2017). Attempts by the Militant led Council 1984 – 85 to set a deficit budget contributed to an emergent narrative of courageous resistance to an outside, undemocratic, power (Frost and North, 2013). Following allegations of corruption and mismanagement, Liverpool City Council was largely governed directly by the Department for Communities, a central government department, between 2021 and 2024. The process was expensive and not subject to local democratic oversight[4].

Collective Encounters (CE) is a Theatre for Social Change company that works across LCR with participants from marginalised communities. Theatre for Social Change uses a set of eclectic practices drawn from the work of Brecht, Boal, New York Theatre of the Oppressed, Rustom Bharucha (Brecht, 1964; Boal, 2008; Bharucha, 2011; LeoNimm, S. Morgan, L. and Rubin, K 2022) and others that tell untold stories and tackle local and international concerns. The "Radical Researchers", a participatory research and co-production group, was recruited by extending an open invitation to participants of CE's existing programmes. Every person recruited defined themselves as a member of a community in struggle and all but one had worked with Collective Encounters before. There were 11 members in all, though not all attended all or every session. All but one were women. 4 people were members of racialised groups. A majority of the group have experience of domestic violence, and of being single parents. A large majority of the group if not all have experience of long term mental and/or physical ill health. Most lived in precarious housing. 2 members of the group were retired but every other member was either self-employed, or in precarious employment, or not working due to ill health.

Nevertheless, for some members of the group (probably a majority) there were also contradictions of position, in that a majority were white, and 6 had accessed higher education, some to degree level.

The workshops were based on the Spiral Model of Popular Education (Arnold, R., et. Al., 1991). They were guided by a facilitator, and I took this role during the participatory part of the research. My position was a complex one. I embody advantages based on gender, whiteness and education to degree level. Equally significant but less visible are long term mental health problems related to extended childhood experiences of domestic violence followed by a period of homelessness in temporary accommodation as a family. The extent to which I am sometimes an insider and sometimes an outsider of the group is therefore a consideration, as are my experiences as a motivation for engaging in struggle. This will be addressed in the discussion.

There were 9 participatory workshops between December 2021 and May 2022, each lasting approximately 2.5 hours. Workshops 1 and 2 invited participants to map their relevant lived experience, their local area, and consider what the concept of research means to them. Workshop 3 introduced more formal models of local 'spacetime' frameworks – this was continued in an additional Workshop, 3.5, in which some of these concepts were discussed in more depth. Workshop 4 introduced a 'provocation', and the next three workshops (5,6,7) explored land, belonging, and erasure, generated creative responses to these themes, and invited critical discussion. The final Workshop (8) collated what participants had learned and generated new frameworks that will enable them to advocate for social change in their communities. Learning from each workshop affected the design of the subsequent workshop. A review workshop involved a presentation of emergent themes from the narrative analysis. Participants discussed and commented on these using a facilitated process in both small

groups and a plenary session. Comments and outcomes were recorded by the collection of texts, and the audio recording of the plenary.

Conceptual Frameworks

The evolution of our co-created understanding of the various frameworks explored was intuitive. For example, within the academy, terms such as 'neo-liberalism' are used freely, and often refer to 'canonical' sources such as Harvey (2005) or Brown (2015). The participants in this project however do not use such terms in everyday conversation. An additional workshop (3.5) was used to explore what it might mean to them. One participant addressed it as follows:

> I'm learning as I go. I've come across the word but I've never actually stopped and thought about what it means although I understand the things that we just spoke about then I know what they are, but I never put them under that word

This section will examine the emergent conceptual frameworks that mapped onto the group's learning process. The importance of an historical understanding of land, and of enclosure in the UK, was revealed. It became necessary to consider how theories of 'internal colonisation' apply to our locality. These made visible contradictions of position embodied by all the participants and researcher. In the process, our tacit knowledge was transformed and made explicit, and this moved us towards a 'post abyssal pedagogy'. All these frameworks developed in a 'spiral' mode as the learning process unfolded.

The erasure of land issues in the UK is quite astonishing and possibly atypical from a global perspective. The impact of the massively unequal distribution of the ownership and control of land has been obscured, and is usually experienced today through processes of gentrification and loss of community which are implicitly and explicitly violent. Enclosure is the commodification and

privatisation of those resources within the metropole which prior to their being enclosed, existed in non-monetarised forms as 'the commons'. Enclosure requires both dispossession and the imposition of price value, which so far can only be accomplished by force. Enclosure of land is widely documented, although its results are disputed (Hayes, 2020, Thompson, 1963/1991). Historically, 5,000 acts of enclosure broke up 6m acres of common land (Hobsbawm, 1975, p.153), and laws such as the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act were created by the UK Parliament, at that time largely dominated by Whig landowners and a newly enfranchised bourgeoise class, to control landless and propertyless people. It replaced a system of relief based on the local parish with forced confinement in Workhouses. It had the express intention of making 'the workhouses as like prisons as possible' (cited in Thompson, 1963/1991, p. 295). This fed the development of the 'carceral' state, colonisation by transportation, and the subordination of legal processes to ruling class violence. It served the growth of the British Empire (Godfrey & Dunstall, eds. 2005), and laid the foundations for 'immigration law as colonial violence' (El-Enany, 2020). According to the contemporary journalist William Cobbett, whose 'Rural Rides' documented the changing ways of peasant life in the early 19th Century, enclosure was probably less efficient for food production than the previously existing arrangements. He observed that a 150 acre area of smallholdings, called Horton Heath, produced as much as 200 acres of enclosed land. He suggested that land values and ownership were more important to the enclosing landlords than the welfare of tenants. Land enclosure was not more efficient at feeding people, as they were driven off the land that had formerly provided them with a good living, but it was essential in driving up crop prices (cited in Clarke, 1977, p. 29).

Land ownership in the UK is taken for granted today in a way which might have surprised peasants living under the feudal system (Dyer, 1989). The reduction of

the commons and the almost complete enclosure of public open spaces in cities is still ongoing today as 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2005; Hodkinson, 2012), through which whole communities have their existence called into question, including those to which the participants belong (Thompson, 2017). As this participant makes clear, the objection is to the development of land *for profit, in an expulsive mode*:

> Me and you live in the same area don't we, so between us we've come up with about three, four different types of leisure centres, schools and colleges that have all been flattened and been bought with private houses, what we're saying like is that if it was accessible or social housing or the council you wouldn't be that bothered but because it's not accessible to the likes of me then it pisses you off a bit you know. That's my 5p

Marx became interested in the dynamics of land ownership early on in his writing (Foster, 2000). In the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1884) he developed an analysis of 'estrangement', and showed how private property (as a producer of rents) arises from alienation of labour on the land. This is a violent process, because "Man lives on nature…. nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die" (Marx, 1884, p.31). In his later writings, particularly Capital, he made this more concrete in the concept of 'Metabolism'. Processes of enclosure and appropriation of land into private property create a 'metabolic rift'. Kohei Saito argues that the concept of the 'metabolic rift' is more relevant than ever, enabling us "to critically comprehend the historical dynamics of capital accumulation and its contradictions from an ecological perspective, especially by those ecosocialists who employ the concept of 'metabolic rift'" (Saito, 2022 p.245). It also allows us to consider the violence experienced by project participants in a context that connects their experience with global understandings of capital accumulation

that are linked with the bodily price of this 'somatic oppression' in pain, disease and dehumanisation[5].

Such a perspective enables us to connect and analyse violent ruptures across colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism, which De Sousa Santos refers to as 'the three modes of domination' (2018). Enclosure of land is one aspect of the process sometimes called 'The Enlightenment' in the West. It is a highly gendered phenomenon. Its enclosure of knowledge created a patriarchy (Grosfoguel, 2013). Sylvia Federici in 'Caliban and the Witch' (2004) synthesizes a large amount of research into an account of capitalism as essentially dependent on gendered violence. Although the Enlightenment conception of 'human rights' creates an individualized idea of gender equality, the conceptual framework of these rights is androcentric (Vergès, 2020). Federici develops the analysis both as critique and an extension of Marx's argument. Anything can be enclosed, from land, to traditional knowledge, to our bodies, to women's reproductive knowledge and labour. In Europe, during the early medieval period, a crucial aspect of the formation of the mercantile economy was the rendering of women into property, owned by men who traded the loss of autonomy they had enjoyed during the feudal system for collusion in patriarchy. This was paralleled by structures of oppression in the newly colonised territories of 'America'.

Colonialism is the structural means of accumulation and dispossession of resources not contained within the metropole (Wolfe, 2006). It is characterised by settler invasion, the erasure of the native, and the creation of slave labour (Tuck and Yang, 2012). The concept of the 'internal colony', though highly relevant (and contested) today, has deep roots. W.E.B. Du Bois (quoted in Trafford, 2020) developed a concept of 'semi-colonial people', to describe the oppression of African Americans in the United States in the early 20th century.

Aimé Césaire in the Discourse on Colonialism (1972) describes a process (the 'Colonial Boomerang') whereby techniques used to govern colonies are visited on the colonisers; at which point some colonisers are perturbed by them – as he puts it "before they were victims, they were accomplices". Edward Said characterises colonialism as binary and oppositional in its social and economic relations, observed in an 'us and them' relationship (Said, 1978). De Sousa Santos has refined this concept into the notion of 'the abyssal line' (2018). He makes a crucial distinction between 'abyssal exclusion' and 'non-abyssal exclusion'. One of the central creations of the European Enlightenment is the 'efficient man', the template for being treated as 'human'. The abyssal line, no longer geographically determined, distinguishes between people on this basis. De Sousa Santos gives this example: a Black man (in a polity such as the UK) who is a teacher will experience non-abyssal exclusion in his working environment, which in theory at least may be addressed within the law; but on his journey home he may be singled out and harassed by the police, culminating in a violent beating, and experience has shown this is unlikely to be redressed legally (2018, p22). El-Enany shows how this is enacted by internalisation of border controls, which configure the UK as a "domestic space of colonialism in which colonial wealth is principally an entitlement of Britons, conjured as white, and in which poor racialised people are disproportionately policed, marginalised, expelled and killed" (2020, p.14). This 'Hostile Environment' (see Goodfellow, 2019) tends towards extension of the abyssal line, because of its usefulness to sections of the elite in enabling a huge acceleration in the process of accumulation by dispossession.

Virdee (2014) shows how completely integrated is the formation of class with the formation of racism and colonialism in England. He argues that the seminal accounts of the making of the English working class (e.g. Thompson, 1963/1991; Hobsbawm, 1964) "equate the history and the making of the

working class in England with the white male worker". He then demonstrates that this is at best an incomplete account, not remedied by the efforts of historians to address 'Black History' (e.g. Fryer, 1984)[6]. He argues that the working classes in England have been radical to the extent that they are led and partially composed of 'racialised outsiders'. This category is fluid: at various times Irish and Jewish people have been regarded as 'racially inferior', but then at other times have been uneasily admitted to the category of 'whiteness'. As he says: "The English working class in particular was a heterogenous, multi-ethnic formation from the moment of its inception" (p. 102). Such fluidity creates a group of people who are both colonised and coloniser – for example the Irish were often on the front line of colonialism, as soldiers of the British Army[7]. This, Virdee argues, becomes part of the habitus of English life. The ruling class created a patriotic or 'respectable' vision of 'the working man', to be set against the 'problem' of an undeserving and radicalised underclass. This habitus is male, whereas implicit throughout this research is the idea that communities in struggle are led by women. This is evident in the make-up of the participant group. The specific communities represented by the participants in this research are communities in struggle who find themselves sharing various kinds of attachments to place and identity that put them in opposition to the dominant 'habitus of English life', where state power is used to aggressively to assert it. The habitus may be equated with the *erasing* of the abyssal line.

From tacit to explicit understandings of habitus, and 'spacetime'

The abyssal line is crossed by people with complex (coloniser/colonised) identities. This mapped onto the experience of project participants both metaphorically and in the form of lived experience. One participant describes a local 'micro' example of such a line explicitly

> I actually live near a police station and I don't feel safe in the area, I'm constantly seeing flashing lights going somewhere or doing something but actually with the police station I also see people you can see when somebody's stole a bike and they're actually riding one bike and dragging the other one

The sense of the abyssal here is conveyed by the implication of abandonment – despite the presence of a police station, the area has been 'given up' and the participant went on to describe how the lack of safety impacted in major ways on her life.

Tacit knowledges, habitus, and the space and time in which people live are co-produced. Participants described in a number of ways how they understood this, for example:

> There's no one model [of understanding], it's not always as straightforward as you might think and then you've got to go back and forward and back and forward until you get to be where you want to be

Tacit knowledge is not of necessity collective or 'socialised'. As Wainwright points out, the concept was appropriated by Hayek to justify the idea of the free market as the only mechanism for co-ordinating a kind of individual entrepreneurial knowledge that could not be written down or centrally organised. She asserts that tacit knowledge is also embodied in the practice of social movements (Wainwright 2019). De Sousa Santos proposes a category of knowledges that emerge from tacit knowledges, are embodied, and community centred. He refers to these as 'artisanal' (2018). These exist in a context, or 'spacetime', in which they are co-created by communities, and which itself is co-created by modes of production, resulting in a given habitus. Henri Lefebvre shows how this production of space serves the hegemonic elite of a given period in creating a system of domination (Lefebvre, 1991). Spaces created in former

periods overlap with emergent spaces, some of which may liberate, and others which may be forming as an expression of a new mode of domination (Lloyd, 2008). Doreen Massey argues that space and time need to be considered as a unified 'spacetime', which is 'annihilated' or 'compressed' by the speed up and internationalisation of all aspects of our lives (Marx, cited in Massey, 1994, p.147), and gendered. The indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith explicitly draws on Lefebvre to develop a concept of colonial spacetime:

> Henri Lefebvre argues that the notion of space has been 'appropriated by mathematics' which has claimed an ideological position of dominance over what space means. Mathematics has constructed a language which attempts to define with absolute exactness the parameters, dimensions, qualities and possibilities of space. This language of space influences the way the West thinks about the world beyond earth (cosmology), the ways in which society is viewed (public/private space, city/country space), the ways in which gender roles were defined (public/domestic, home/work) and the ways in which the social world of people could be determined (the market place, the theatre). Compartmentalized, space can be better defined and measured. (1999, pp. 50-51)

The habitus that is created in this compartmentalised spacetime erases the epistemological space on the exclusionary side of the line, making a world in which there is no alternative, and in which tacit and artisanal knowledges are invalidated (and the technocratic culture of the elite is dominant).

The key features of 'Artisanal' knowledges are that they are rooted in struggle and resistance, and that they are a 'craft' rather than a science (De Sousa Santos, 2018, p.37). They respond to time and place, and are contextualised rather than universal. They aim to connect struggles on both sides of the abyssal line. They are pragmatic, working with what is considered most effective for a given struggle situation. They are collective, combine both objectivity and

subjectivity, but are not neutral in the way Western science claims to be. When combined, they collectively form an 'ecology' that De Sousa Santos refers to as 'Epistemologies of the South'. He defines these as "the production and validation of knowledges anchored in the experiences of resistance of all those social groups that have systematically suffered injustice, oppression, and destruction caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy" (2018, p.1).

These generate the 'post abyssal pedagogies' of *absence* and *emergence*. Absence is observed by making tacit knowledges explicit, especially where these arise from 'non-efficient' people and communities, that is, those considered unclassified, unproductive or untouchable. Emergences follow from absences, using the 'building blocks of hope' revealed. They can include 'ruin seeds' (the abandoned future spacetimes of the past); 'counter hegemonic appropriation', in which the 'Master's tools' are explicitly used against the Master (see Lorde, 1978[8]); and liberated zones, in the present, where the three modes of domination are temporarily suspended, not only through struggle but through celebration, carnival, and in this case creative, embodied performance practice as enacted through Theatre for Social Change.

A specific example of a pedagogy of absence used in this research is Smith's 'Spatial Vocabulary of Power'. Using an open taxonomy of 'the line, the centre, and the outside' she demonstrates how colonial space can be produced, and also how it is lived:

> The 'line' is important because it was used to map territory, to survey land, to establish boundaries and to mark the limits of colonial power. The 'centre' is important because orientation to the centre was an orientation to the system of power. The 'outside' is important because it positioned territory and people in an appositional relation to the colonial centre; for indigenous Australians to be in an 'empty space' was to 'not exist'. (Smith, 1999, p. 53)

Such a pedagogy tends to dehabituate those engaged in 'artisanal' reflection and exploration, in that it calls attention to that which is lived unconsciously until articulation is facilitated in the service of struggle. It is artisanal in the sense described above not least because it is specific to a given spacetime (in the case used by Smith, 19th Century Aotearoa). In this context, Lines include not only maps and charts, fences and walls, but also territorial claims (legal lines) and genealogies (racialised lineages). The Centre includes both the Metropole, the mother country, but also the projection of the Metropole into the colony, such as churches, prisons, court houses, flagpoles. The Outside is that which is abyssally excluded – for example, in the case of Australia, Terra Nullius, both a doctrine of erasure and a 'unplace', an absence.

The Investigation: Methodologies and Questions

The ordering of the conceptual frameworks above is an after-the-fact arrangement that has been composed into a narrative as a *consequence* of the co-produced learning that took place in the Radical Researchers Project. This project co-created its own facilitation and learning space. As one participant put it:

> It's just simple what we're doing really, it's like taking three hours out of our time to just be here and collaborate our ideas our interests our passions, where we're struggling, where we're not. It's interesting that we're not actually doing it more often

The research proceeded using the open workshop structure described above. Theatre for Social Change (TfSC) techniques were used to 'play out' and experiment with the ideas and frameworks that were shared in the discussions that took place in the workshops. The participants used drama to illustrate situations and feelings that emerged from this process, and produced a 'work in progress' script[9]. We now turn to examine specific workshop techniques, that of

the 'Provocation', and the way in which the drama practice explores embodiment.

The Provocation connects theory and practice, providing a framework for the introduction of new knowledge to the participants through the popular education process. It serves to de-habituate the participants to the everyday social norms and behaviours that maintain oppression (Foster, 2016). This process of 'making strange' is analogous to the 'conscientisation' process in popular education. As Thornton (2014) has written, part of TfSC methodology is that

> We must come to understand that the system is a system: we must de-mystify and make strange our current political systems, understand the tacit agreements that sustain them, know them as systems and not as the natural order of things. (p.7)

This involves the posing of a question that can be explored through discussion and by 'acting it out'. This is congruent with Henri Lefebvre's idea of a 'strategic hypothesis', one which points

> towards the space of a different (social) life and of a different mode of production, this project straddles the breach between science and utopia, reality and ideality, conceived and lived. It aspires to surmount these oppositions by exploring the dialectical relationship between 'possible' and 'impossible', and this both objectively and subjectively. (1991, p.60)

The provocation for this research proposed the question 'Can Merseyside Be Conceptualised as Colony?'. Du Bois's idea of the characteristics of 'a semi colonial people' includes exclusion from political participation, poverty, lawlessness and crime, and economic exploitation (cited in Trafford, 2020), and Said (1978) shows how it requires a strategy of misrepresentation enacted by the coloniser, in which the colonised spaces are 'backward' and their inhabitants

'irrational', or as observed in the introduction, in the Merseyside context, 'ungovernable'. Communities within Merseyside have, over centuries, been subjected to colonial measures of repression by central government. The Irish Catholic community is very large and historically associated with Republicanism (Virdee, 2014), especially after 'Bloody Sunday' in 1972. After the 'race riots' of 1919 and the murder of Black mariner Charles Wootten[10] the Black communities based just south of the City Centre were also seen specifically as an 'internal colony', necessitating internal surveillance and control (Zack-Williams, 1997). This ultimately provoked the uprising of 1981, which led to headlines such as 'Toxic Toxteth' (Butler, 2020). These histories are explicit in the community knowledge of Merseyside residents (Clay, 2020). There is clearly an anti-colonial thread to this knowledge informed by learning from the countries of origin of the various diaspora (Zack-Williams, 1997).

The governing class also have long historical memories. The Triangular Slave Traffick created massive inward flows of capital that financed the industrial revolution but also created the founding institutions of modern capitalism in the British Empire (Mcdade, 2011). When the flow of goods has been threatened, the government has resorted to measures that are strongly suggestive of colonial intervention. Churchill, when Home Secretary, responded to the 1911 Dock Strike by sending in 5,000 troops and stationing a warship in the Mersey (Hikins, 1961). More recently, the UK central government has consistently taken an approach to the 'regeneration' of the area that is both ideological and extractive (Hazeldine, 2019). The North's resources are exploited for the centre, an argument known as the Branch Plant Thesis (Massey, 1994; Frost and North, 2013; Martin, Schafran and Taylor, 2018). Regeneration schemes, including the 'Northern Powerhouse' and more recently 'Levelling Up' have tended to impose private development vehicles subsidised by central government, run by absentee London based transnationals to extract profit from land (Thompson, 2017;

Webb et al., 2022). This drives the accumulation by dispossession which is one of the defining experiences of the participants as members of communities in struggle.

Some of the research participants are subject to internal colonisation by virtue of their race or status as members of externally colonised or othered peoples, resident within the domestic borders of the imperial power. The majority however live in the 'habitus' described by Virdee (2014) and so live with a coloniser/colonised contradiction. Of all the new frameworks introduced in the workshops, this was initially the most difficult but the most interesting for participants. It allowed them to think about power relationships in a new way, and to reflect on their position in those networks of power. It informed their perception of power relationships in their own communities. These were then physically articulated in the creative, embodied, drama process. There is an inherent difficulty in writing about embodiment. So much that is somatic is non-verbal. The exercises below were used in Workshop 2 to consider space and time at their most abstract level while introducing a kind of somatic constraint on participants suggestive of power. Although intended for group work, I invite readers to try them out at home and reflect for themselves on the perceptions and feelings that may be created.

> *Slippy space and sticky space*
> The room is divided into two areas by an imaginary line down the middle
> One side is 'slippy' and the other is 'sticky' – how does this affect how
> you move through the space? How does it affect what happens if you
> come close to other people?

Slow time and fast time

The group is divided into two. Half the group are moving in slow time and half in fast time. Explore this individually first. Then move around the room, making sure you keep crossing the centre. What happens if you approach someone who is moving in the opposite time to you? What happens if they are moving in the same time? How do you avoid collisions?

For the final exercise keep the time you are in. We have now reinstated slippy and sticky space – how does that affect you as you move around?

Once the group had made explored the abstract but embodied notions above, we then considered these questions:

Think about a typical weekday for you. Where do you go, and what do you do? What places - e.g. workplaces, shops and other businesses, public spaces, homes - do you go to? How do you get there? Do you mostly stay at home? If so, is that because of the pandemic, or for other reasons?

Who do you interact with on a typical week, in these places you go to, or at home? How do you speak to them? Is it formal or informal? How do you feel about how you are spoken to? Do you have much interaction with the local council in a typical week or month? How do those interactions make you feel? How are you treated?

The group then split into sections and created short drama pieces based on these explorations. One scenario saw four residents confront a local councillor over issues of concern to them. They presented the councillor as an empty chair, and

in all the dialogue, the councillor's responses are either implied vocalisations, or silences, for example:

> Resident 3: Councillor Dickie, can't you just give us straight answers to a simple question? There's no community hubs or anything for anyone to go to. No one belongs anywhere anymore, no one thinks about the people....(pause) No Councillor Dickie, I don't want to hear any more

This process and its outcome suggests the application of drama as a pedagogy of absences. The embodied exploration of spacetime creates an ontological and epistemological space in which questions about participants' lives are the more deeply felt, and are then re-embodied by being acted out. What is not clear in the script is the humour and playfulness with which participants performed Councillor Dickie as nominally present, but absent in terms of power and usefulness to the people he is supposed to represent. In the last line, it is the silence (the pause) that carries the most meaning. As argued above, it is *absence* that provides the building blocks for *emergence*. We co-created an emergent framework for the application of community centred knowledges to the struggles that participants are living, from a pedagogy of absences based on Smith's spatial vocabulary of power.

The movement from tacit to artisanal knowledges

The spatial vocabulary of power for Merseyside was created through the application of an embodied exploration of spacetime to the provocation. Workshop 5 of the series explored the relevance of Smith's open taxonomy in the context of Merseyside, following the introduction of the provocation in Workshop 4. Participants were asked to think about a piece of land near where they live, and consider whether it was built on or empty, used or disused, what is on it, what is it used for, who is welcome there, and who is not? They used

their intuition and tacit knowledge to discuss and develop their own readings of the Line, the Centre, and the Outside. These can be summarised as follows:

The spatial vocabulary of Participant localities in Merseyside:

The Line:

Borders, The railway, Roads, Liverpool Road, Maps, Yellow lines, Aircraft tracks, Telegraph lines, Brooks and rivers

The Centre:

Church, School, Restaurants, Roundabouts, Government, The council, Police, The City Centre, Shops, New housing estates

The Outside:

Different council area, Farmers' fields, Market gardens, The beach, 'Across the water', The coast, The posh area, Hidden, Neglected spaces, Upmarket

Reading the participants' spatial vocabulary reveals the physicalisation of power in their areas. Lines mark boundaries and borders, maps are specifically referred to, and major communications such as the main Liverpool - London rail line bisect the area under examination, dividing the locality for the purpose of connecting centres of metropolitan power. The centre is regarded partly as a place to meet, but also is identified with the exercise of authority, and orientation towards authority. As one participant said:

> And the centre, I put like core, equator, government, council, they should be the centre of importance for us to keep it going, and the government and council and the

police are kind of, they're the centre who we should be looking up to. I was struggling with that.

The outside too is to some extent oppositional, as well as being concerned with empty spaces. In this context these empty spaces are not formally declared by some equivalent of terra nullius, but rather are abandoned. The oppositional elements are sometimes a *reversal* of the idea of the hinterland, in that to some participants, the outside is the more centred area in terms of wealth, and in fact, the participants (and me) live in 'inner' areas that constitute an outside in their orientation to wealth and power:

> We have a council estate, but on one side as you come out of the estate it's then Moreton, so it's one road, and it's Moreton; and then you go the other way, it's classed as about three roads, it's them, the posh area

Participants then put their spatial vocabulary into a context of power and control. Spacetimes also have characteristics that are racialised, gendered and classed in both subtle and overt ways (Butler-Warke, 2020). As one participant said, it would not be easy to call attention to this, or to hold the owners or users to account:

> And who's not welcome? I imagine somebody like me going in there and saying why are you doing this, I don't think you should have done this. I'm sure I would not be welcome at all if I was to go in and complain to people, I think I'd probably be shown the door very quickly.

Several participants cited difficulties when raising such questions in relation to abandoned spaces such as neglected parks, wildlife meadows and brownfield sites. These 'undocumented' spaces are another kind of 'outside' vulnerable to 'locally unwanted land use', contributing to disputed geographies in which

people experience drastically life-limiting air, noise and refuse pollution[11], lack of access to green spaces, constant building work, impoverishment or withdrawal of shops and services, excessive policing, and decaying housing, akin to the 'zones of sacrifice' of 'rustbelt' United States (Lerner, 2010).

This example illustrates how the intuitive translation of tacit knowledge into something more explicit can be regarded as a pedagogy of absence. In the subsequent workshops the group applied this to create four categories of questions designed to mark absences, pre-figure futures, and create collective principles for action, including an ethic of care. These were:

Mapping:

What do you think of as 'your community'?

What changes do you want to make in your community/the world?

Imagining:

What would you do if you had power?

How do you plan for the changes you talked about?

Guiding:

What have you discovered in these workshops that will help you?

What principles do you think are needed?

Caring:

How do you respond to those who (violently) deny that any change is necessary?

How do you respond to people in power who tell you you are ignorant or wrong?

They then applied these in the light of their own communities of struggle, to provide what De Sousa Santos has called a 'radical diagnosis' (2018, p.29). This is converted by a 'pedagogy of emergence' into an artisanal framework of knowledge which produces a new spacetime that challenges the three modes of domination. The principles of this framework are:

- Autonomy – communities need to look after themselves
- Locality
- Collectivity – in learning as well as action
- An assumption in favour of preserving communities and their knowledge and environment
- Creating new ways of connecting and belonging
- Creating sustainable long-term spaces in which we can learn and explore together
- Rights to land – challenge the idea that landowners can act without regard to communities and consequences
- Transparency around finance in government
- Healing the rupture of colonialism, and the 'metabolic rift'

This framework contains elements of all three types of emergence proposed by De Sousa Santos. There are "ruin seeds", contained within the lived experience of the participants; counter hegemonic appropriation, in the use of law to fight for land rights and financial transparency; and the creation of liberated zones, of learning, exploration and healing.

Discussion

The preceding argument has tried to demonstrate how the process of this research, which began intuitively, guided by the methodologies of Theatre for

Social Change, Popular Education and a Provocation, came to be congruent with certain Epistemologies of the South. Whilst drawing on Marxist and Feminist analyses of class, gender and colonialism, it developed its own 'artisanal' pedagogies of absence and emergence, in a language specific to the needs of communities in struggle in Merseyside. This is evidenced in the particular practice of a Land Pedagogy appropriate to this region.

The Coloniser/Colonised Dialectic

Crucial to the development of the Land Pedagogy is the complex relationship between class, race and gender in the region. People who live in LCR who embody both coloniser and colonised co-create counter-hegemonic artisanal knowledges to the extent that the spacetime they inhabit is shared with people abyssally excluded as 'racialised outsiders'. This is predicated on the particular histories of long-established 'colonised' communities in the region, such that the 'coloniser' aspect of people's heritage is subsumed by the 'colonised', and they therefore experience the same forced abyssal exclusions as diasporic communities.

As Virdee argues, the construction of class and race are completely intertwined. Where the spacetime is not colonised, it is often the 'coloniser' identity that comes to the fore. Liverpool undoubtedly has a strongly counter-hegemonic culture – but there is no room for complacency, as shown by attacks on a migrant hostel in Knowsley[12]. The participants in the Radical Researchers group demonstrate that complex intersectionalities assist in the development of 'intercultural translations' between different ecologies of knowledges that greatly facilitate the emergence of communities of resistance (De Sousa Santos, 2018). This was shown during the process of the workshops, as their tacit knowledge became explicit.

Status of tacit knowledges: How we work with artisanal knowledge is a normative decision

Tacit knowledge has limits. Generating community-centred knowledge requires more than just lived experience. It needs an awareness of place, and an awareness of what is not known. It needs a positive but critical approach to 'expert' or 'scientific' knowledge. As a participant says

> Thinking about making a plan if you like, obviously you need to be learning from others who are doing things right. Doing your research, is like key for it, discussion with others, leaning on experts for advice, taking advice from people who are very knowledgeable in these subjects.

It also requires people to invest time in relationships, through building community projects, and involves a commitment to resolving conflict. Additionally, to be able to *process* this new knowledge, people need a respite from the problem of everyday survival. As one participant said:

> I think everyday life is really hard. When you get back to the house at the end of the day you don't have the kind of energy. During this reality when you've been so exploited, and you have no energy at the same time it's a contradiction, gives you a power like I need to do something in my life, I need to change this, I can deal with this. [ ] I need to think about my everyday life and put some hours, I don't know how, for activism, because these realities only going to change when it's in a collective way. In my situation as an individual I cannot do everything.

In other words, the people who might most benefit from change have the least capacity to enact it. This 'paradox of change' is a major inhibitor in developing communities of resistance.

Participants understood the need to be able to use the knowledge generated to benefit their communities. The action must be collective to have an impact, and there is a kind of epistemological and moral imperative to act:

> when you have an idea you need to act upon it, and you can't do it on your own, you need a collective mind and people to support you and to act upon what is planned to be done

They recognise that social change requires a kind of critical mass: "you could undertake the best research in the world, but unless people want to change, nothing will change".

The retention of knowledge depends on a virtuous circle of creation, action and reflection. It is part of a positive feedback process that helps construct communities of resistance whilst sustaining the individual members of those communities, as expressed by one participant:

> Then you see and you find people together that want to make the change so gives you the energy and the belief to keep going, that's how important it is, and your life becomes more meaningful.

As Wainwright (2018) argued, there is nothing inherently oriented towards social justice about tacit knowledge (and 'direct lived experience' as it is often called by extractive researchers). The tacit knowledge of a group may be based on propaganda, or as in the example above, racist ideology. Therefore the process of mobilising it is an ethical and normative process, requiring reflexivity, critique, and most of all rooted engagement in struggle.

Conclusion

This research project demonstrated that an intersectional group of participants drawn from across the Liverpool City Region have a tacit counter-hegemonic ideology, based around historical awareness and collective action. This stands in contrast to the perceived dominant national ideology of 'British Values', individualism and 'equality of opportunity' in the marketplace. This ideology was rendered explicit by questioning the 'habitus' of the three modes of domination, capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy.

The methods used for this interrogative process are a combination of embodied drama practices, popular education and pedagogies of absence and emergence derived from a provocation, which developed into a fledgling 'land pedagogy' providing the framework for the disruption of the habitus. This also revealed congruence between concepts that contribute to a convergence of practice. These include the related concepts of 'dehabituation' 'making strange' and 'conscientisation'; 'provocation' and 'strategic hypothesis', and 'tacit', 'community-centred' and 'artisanal' knowledges.

It may be argued that given the nature of Collective Encounters' practice and the self-selected composition of the group, the outcome was both inevitable and insignificant, but this is to take the project in isolation from the spacetime in which it is located. Collective Encounters has been working since 2004, and so the relationship with the participants (some of whom have worked with the company for a decade or more) is an evolving and complex act of co-production of a 'liberated zone'. Moreover, there are many such zones in the Liverpool City Region. What this research explores are some of the conditions that make this a feature of the culture of the region. To what extent might these processes of co-production be post-abyssal, and to what extent might they usefully be scaled up?

A key requirement for Epistemologies of the South is that they are expressions of the artisanal knowledges of communities in struggle. They reveal the presence of the abyssal line, and embrace 'ecologies of knowledges' in so far as these contribute to the struggle. This can include critical thought from Western frames of reference ("Epistemologies of the North") where these reject the idea of 'neutrality' and choose alignment with the struggles of the global majority for liberation. This includes of course Marxist and Feminist analyses, as discussed above, but also suggests a 'more than Marxist' eclecticism of liberational practices. The group that co-created the research were drawn from communities in struggle. The signifier of struggle is the experience of violence (physical, epistemological, ontological) as this separates 'non-abyssal' and 'abyssal' exclusions (non-abyssal exclusions being those that do not render a person less than human). The research group, as an intersectional group some of whom embodied a coloniser/colonised contradiction, informed by historical understanding, are on the 'abyssal' side of the line.

However, the co-creation also involves me as a facilitator and researcher. Throughout this paper I have sometimes redacted myself into the passive third person, and at other times I have used the pronouns 'I' or 'we'. To what extent is my role as researcher and facilitator post abyssal? For myself, and for researchers in general, this raises the question of the extent to which we choose our engagement in the struggles of the communities with whom we research, and whether we are subject to the same abyssal exclusions as they are. This engagement has been described as 'militant' (Juris, 2007) or 'embedded' (Scheper-Hughes, 1995). More recently, De Sousa Santos has described this role as that of the 'rearguard intellectual' (2018). The implication of this research is that such a role has value, as no one framework of knowledge is enough; communities in struggle will benefit from shared knowledge when that creates new ideas and new methods for engaging in resistance, and also pre-figuring the

future. But currently there are still huge inequalities in the dynamics of such knowledge exchange, even when the researcher is part of or comes from the community which is in struggle (Crean, 2018). Such researchers should best be considered to be moving *towards* post-abyssal, non-extractive research, and the continuing work I am doing aims to be 'minimally extractive', as a way of acknowledging that currently it may not be possible to be non-extractive.

This paper both describes a set of methodologies that were already in use and only partially understood, and also prescribes a co-created evolution of them. Drama reveals the absence of the oppressors, who obscure their 'lived experience' and its effects in everyday life. This absence can be embodied and revealed through the creative process. Drama has always addressed narratives of struggle, and is congruent with the conscientisation process that Popular Education aims towards. This has also helped Collective Encounters understand why the embodied or somatic approach central to our practice is so useful in Theatre for Social Change. We are developing an 'Embodied Popular Education' which gives space to tacit, somatic exchanges of knowledge as well as those which are privileged by speech. The 'Land Pedagogy' for Liverpool, when combined with the other methodologies, fosters 'embodied conscientisation', by which the role of participatory drama in questioning and making strange can be combined with creating 'spatial vocabularies of power'. This enables facilitator/participants and participant/facilitators to build on processes of co-regulation[13] within the group, reclaiming embodied and artisanal 'knowing', de-internalising power relationships and generating awareness of oppressive environments as being susceptible to transformation.

We are now experimenting with scaling up this pedagogy, and trialling it with groups not previously experienced in any of our methodologies. To date, we have worked with public health officials, drama academics, researchers,

community development teams, students, and community health practitioners. This is contributing to both the development of our practice and the development of other research projects, in particular struggles for health equity in Merseyside. The potential for this methodology is also the subject of continuing research. We aim for this research to become increasingly co-produced, artisanal, and co-evolving with the struggles of our communities. In this it is part of what Federici describes as "a search for new models of protest and new relations between human beings and human beings and nature" (Federici, 2019, p 157).

Notes

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[1] LCR and Metro Mayor, (2020), "*Liverpool City Region Plan For Prosperity Evidence Base",* Liverpool: Metro Mayor's Department

[2] LCR and Metro Mayor, (2020), "*Liverpool City Region Spatial Development Strategy Evidence Base",* Liverpool: Metro Mayor's Department

[3] An umbrella organisation, Creative Organisations of Liverpool, has 31 members. See https://cool-collective.co.uk/members/ (accessed 21st October 2022)

[4] Halliday, J. 2021. 'Government intervenes to send taskforce into 'dysfunctional' Liverpool', *The Guardian* 24th March. (Online) Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk- news/2021/mar/24/commissioners-to-help-run-dysfunctional-liverpool-council (accessed 25th July 2022)

[5] I am grateful to the reviewers of this paper for drawing my attention to the ongoing debate around the question of 'Marx's Ecology', and drawing my attention to the work of Kohei Saito.

[6] The same is also true of work done that has written working class women back into English history (e.g. Rowbotham, 1992).

[7] See https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2020/0922/1166782-british-army-irish-recruits-1793-1815/ (accessed 12th August 2023): "Former soldiers were seen as suitable for colonising newly acquired overseas territories".

[8] There is a long running debate about Audre Lorde's famous dictum: "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (Lorde, 1978)

[9] A 'work in progress' script acknowledges that the work produced has creative as well as research value, but the creation of a fully staged play was not an objective

[10] BBC, 2023. 'Charles Wotten: Liverpool race riot victim to get headstone'. (Online) Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-65813499 (accessed 9th August 2023)

[11] Asthma and Lung UK Blog, Barnett, R. 2023. 'Air pollution is making Liverpool more unequal'. (Online) Available at: https://www.blog.asthmaandlung.org.uk/blog/ineqgc2pc60xziarji4qj46933eos5 (Accessed 9th August 2023)

[12] Liverpool Post, 20th March 2023. 'Racist phone calls, baton attacks and blood drawn: spate of hate crimes linked to Knowsley hotel protest'. (Online) Available at: https://www.livpost.co.uk/p/racist-phone-calls-baton-attacks?r=7h92b&utm_medium=ios&utm_campaign=post (accessed 9th August 2023). This article was written before the unrest of Summer 2024

[13] Co-regulation is the tendency for mammals to exchange physiological signals such that the rhythms of their bodies become synchronised. (Schwartz, 2021)

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