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Abstract

Using Foucauldian and Freirean frameworks, this paper seeks to re-name inherent paradoxes in the history and development of youth and community work, and map ways in which these continue to influence contemporary practices. In highlighting these intrinsic dilemmas which result in amoral praxes, the paper begins to promote an imaginary that not only recognises youth work's current precarious predicament, but which draws upon and synthesises Trickster typologies and perspectives from Utopian studies to consider and affirm new ways ahead for the Profession which re-state its commitment to critical interruption.

Key Words: Control, Governmentality, Tricksters, #consciousuncoupling #utopianfutures

Introduction

At the heart of youth work lies a commitment to empower young people to think and act critically, democratically and morally in agentially shaping *their* worlds (Young, 2006). Yet:

> 'Most commentators seem to agree that an agenda of control has become more explicit and more dominant within youth work in recent years… there is an on-going debate about whether youth workers should embrace this control agenda as providing a socially recognised and valued rationale for the work, or whether it runs contrary to the values of youth work and corrupts its essential nature' (Jeffs and Banks, 2010:106).

This critique, together with continuing debates over the future of the Profession, and the hollowing out of its purpose, raise questions over whether state-funded youth work has any future at all (Jeffs, 2015). This paper furthers this discussion by developing cartographic imaginaries that map the roads travelled, plot new routes, and assess potential destinations. Drawing on Utopian thought, we seek to dream and name new ways of working that reclaim the Profession's *telos*.

The journey so far …

From the emergence of youth work as a philanthropic social movement that took hold in the wake of the industrial revolution paradoxes of emancipation and control, although epochally denied, have never been far from the Profession's collective pre-conscious (Bright, 2015a; Pugh, 1999). Youth work's pioneers, moved by the 'plight' of poor and working-class young people growing up in the challenging environments of Victorian and Edwardian Britain, were stirred to action by what many saw as the potential of young people to bring about change in their own lives and communities,

and by the perceived threat posed by the 'moral underclass' to the established order of control. Youth work's founders undoubtedly laid a seed-bed for collaborative engagement that has enabled the transformation of generations of young people's lives. Yet, undeniably, the Profession was born in, and continues to occupy complex and contradictory spaces (Batsleer, 2010) in which young people are both empowered *and* controlled (Coburn, 2011).

Despite these unfolding contradictions, youth work retained its status as an expression of the traditional conceptualisation of civil society – (in borrowing from Abraham Lincoln) "of the people, for the people, by the people" until 1916. The government, troubled by an ensuing moral panic concerning the behaviour of young people whose fathers were at the front, and whose mothers were working in jobs vacated by forces personnel, inaugurated a national network of Juvenile Organising Committees (JOCs) to co-ordinate youth work as a diversionary activity across localities (Bright, 2015a; Jeffs, 1979). The combination of restored moral order and post-war austerity largely cooled the state's interest until the threat of another war dawning on the horizon two decades later, witnessed the birth of government-sponsored youth work in 1939. The state's interest in youth work peaked again in the late 1950s with the advent of The Albemarle Report (HMSO, 1960) in response to the emergence of the teenager as an exchangeable commodity of human and economic capital, whose bio-politics the state willed to harness and govern for supposed wider public good. The patternation of moral panic and the utilisation of youth work as a mechanism of its public and political mitigation thus appear all too frequently in youth work's history (Bright, 2015a, 2015b).

In contemporising this discussion, the influence of the New Labour government of 1997-2010 and its continuing commitment to neoliberal economics and development of third way policy (Sercombe, 2015) has tattooed its influence on youth work policy and practice. Critical deconstruction of perhaps the most notable, and often cited social policy of the New Labour age – Every Child Matters (ECM) reveals this reality. In posing two questions repeatedly ('For what purpose?' 'In order to what?') at the other four outcomes, it becomes apparent that the now disaggregated ECM was less about its five expressed ideals, and more about the singularity of 'Achieving Economic Wellbeing' presented under the guise of concern for the wider ecology of children and young people's lives.

ECM was fundamentally tethered to discourses of *social* exclusion, a discursive mechanism that expressed a *universal* responsibility for people experiencing 'multi-faceted syndromes of disadvantage' (Coles, 2006:93). Joined-up problems required joined-up solutions (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998), and as successive policy initiatives flooded out of Whitehall, youth work was 'invited' to play its part in the unfolding drama of mitigating the socio-economic disease of the age. New Labour's vision for youth work as set out in *Transforming Youth Work* (DfES, 2002) represented a level of state investment arguably not seen since the heady days of Albemarle (HMSO, 1960). Yet with funding came expectation and regulation. Youth work could have its

'place at the table', but like so many other players was required to uncritically do the state's bidding in order to justify its position.   Accepting the 'King's Shilling', (Bright, 2015b:239), has resulted in the Profession being seized and annexed by the state for its own very particular purposes.

Whilst ostensibly youth work under New Labour represented a gateway for young people's positive participation in the new social order, in actuality, the Profession became a cog in the machinery of neoliberal control. Symptoms of multifarious social ills were treated with prescriptive policy pills which supposedly represented an individualised and person-centred approach to (young) people's lives. Yet in reality much intervention was framed by positivistically uniform processes (Hine, 2009) that did little to address many of the underlying structural issues which caused them. Young people discoursed at greatest risk were subject to increasingly rigourous forms of surveillance, intervention and control. Resultantly, much youth work became targeted to this end (Cooper, 2012; Lehal, 2010). When young people didn't 'improve', they became increasingly subject to tacit and overt processes of responsibilisation. Services too were responsibilised, with those failing to meet imposed outcomes deemed inadequate. The remedy to this 'inadequacy' was the enforcement of closer partnerships, which demanded increased information sharing, monitoring, surveillance and targeting. This coerced individual youth workers to comply, or self-identify as 'failing'.

The election of a very different government in 2010 heralded the development of a non-approach to youth work. The combination of the financial crisis and a dogmatic commitment to a neoliberally induced decimation of the state in the name of fiscal sensibility, radically altered the landscape of many public and welfare services, including youth work.

Youth work providers were expected to come from a much wider field, with increased priority given to community leaders and volunteers, over local or national government. Businesses were also identified as potential providers highlighting the continuing shift towards a closer allegiance with corporate bodies, who saw the potential of provision as an effective, and efficient model to 'reach and engage' young people. Schemes such as the National Citizen Service, further diverted state support from local authority work, towards the contractual delivery of narrower forms of provision (de St Croix, 2011, 2015).

The continuing shift toward commissioning extended the reach of state-focused obsessions regarding surveillance, targeting and outcomes to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), (DfE 2012, Norris & Pugh 2015), thus undermining its strengths and independence (Bucroth and Husband 2015). Having effectively 'tamed' statutory provision, the state now appeared determined to co-opt the VCS.

Naming Landscapes

The position that youth work currently finds itself in has moved beyond a few wrong turns. The surrounding landscape is fundamentally changed. In examining this in more detail, we seek to understand the forces that have reformed the terrain and identify where we may find some safer ground on which to re-group.

Youth workers have always worked in partnership (Bunyan and Ord, 2012; Wood et al, 2015). Traditionally, these *p*artnerships have been grounded in flexible and *generative* processes that are responsive to grass-roots needs and developments. However, *P*artnerships under recent successive governments have become monolithically *generated* and imposed structures, methodologically designed to ensure synergised professional and organisational conformity in the name of wider social good. *P*artnership and integrated working thus remain central to curative, controlling and panoptical endeavours.

Trends towards the formalisation of *P*artnerships can be seen in a growing number of examples since the 1980s (Rhodes, Tyler & Brennan 2003). Whilst these rhetorically linked empowerment with partnership, they have increasingly become aligned with competitive processes (Atkinson 1999).

Under New Labour, the organisation of *P*artnerships across economic sectors and organisational boundaries was structured by neoliberal ideals which were sold on the basis of third way pragmatism – it mattered little who did the work, as long as it was managed with the greatest 'efficiency'. *P*artnership, it was contended, would enable synergised approaches to practice that eliminated duplication, 'ensuring' the better utilisation of resources; whilst competition would lead to improved standards, choice and value for money. Processes of tendering and commissioning required that organisations demonstrated a commitment to agendas, outcomes and managerialism, whilst continuing to feed off, and contribute to, negative discourses about young people, in order to justify their work. The result of these combined processes saw youth work being driven by inputs, targets, outcomes, spreadsheets and inspection frameworks which represented the panoptic gaze of new public managerialism (Burton, 2013, DfES 2002). The inevitability of ever-increasing forms of 'efficiency' and capricious rationalisation in the meat market that has become youth work and children and young people's services has inevitably led to evermore being required of ever fewer people. Those left, find themselves required to engage in a puppetry of performativity that repeatedly bashes 'resistant' young people with state's subjugating truncheon.

Ever 'closer' and increasingly contrived forms of *P*artnership and inter-professional working have become the assumptive *epistemes* of practice (NYA/LGA, 2010-2013). These simultaneously glue and homogenise practitioners from different disciplines, subsuming them into genericised structures. *P*artnerships have assimilated a range of professionals, coalescing them around a bland skills/competency-ruled middle ground, with a focus on similarity and compromise, rather than difference.

Consideration of fundamental differences in professional value bases and purposes have been stifled. Instead, *P*artnerships have come to produce a form of shared expertism which concurrently provide the power of a collective monotonic voice which few dare challenge, *yet*, which strip professionals, and youth workers in particular, of their distinctive capacity for critical dissent (Davies, 2010a).

*P*artnerships are presented ostensibly as key mechanisms of accountability; yet they have become oppressive deprofessionalising structures which systematically strip practitioners of their phronetic agency and individuality (Ord, 2014). Whilst government calls for a unity of purpose, aggressive marketisation of the sector allows the state to govern organisations (and through them young people) by stealth. This undercurrent is perhaps best expressed as a process of 'divide and conquer'. Exacerbated by cuts and fear of reprisals, many youth workers no longer dare speak out (Hughes et al, 2014). The reach of neoliberal rationality in silencing voices (Couldry, 2010) has extended to youth work. It has muted, or at least quietened, a profession founded on enabling others to name the world (Friere, 1972) and 'come to voice' (Batsleer, 2008:5). Youth work must, more than ever, name and challenge its own oppression and oppressiveness.

Neoliberal Terraforming

This unfolding discussion points us towards the application of Foucauldian analysis on governmentality, a concept which critiques ways in which states, directly through policy diktat, and more importantly indirectly through a 'bundle of discursive practices' (Hearn, 2012:90) direct the lives and practices of their citizenry. Discourses surrounding young people and what they 'ought' to be, how they 'should' behave and what they 'must' do, have, and continue, to punctuate policy and practice. Such processes of governmentality are presented through 'multi-directional diffusion of ideas, concerns, aims and objectives between various spheres such as the political, medical, educational, commercial and personal' (Smith, 2014:9). Olssen (2008:35) advances the concept of governmentality further, arguing that it 'refers to the structures of power by which conduct is organised and by which governance is aligned with the self-organizing capacities of individual subjects.' For Dean (2010:17ff) governmentality can be summed up as 'the conduct of conduct', the processes through which individuals control, govern and responsibilise self in relation to the normative discoursed requirements of an external body, usually the state. The modern state is thus 'individualising and totalising'; it is concerned with the welfare of 'each and all' (Smith, 2014:13). In this regard, Smith further argues that: 'The insight from the governmentality literature is that subjectivity – the relationship of the individual to the self – is constituted via the multifarious forms of knowledge and expertise deployed in practices of government.' (ibid.:194). In the context of the UK, it is perhaps ECM that is the most obvious example of governmentality in action. While it is no longer propagated as formal policy, its mantra continues to run through professional discourse like letters through rock. Practitioners work (through discourses, *P*artnerships and regulated practices) to achieve responsibilised young

people who are healthy, stay safe, (enjoy) and achieve, make a positive contribution, and above all, achieve economic wellbeing.

Neoliberal governmentality has re-constructed the landscape and architecture that surround practice. Like a well-constructed traffic management system with new, smooth, clearly-defined, and fast moving highways, the route taken feels 'natural', well-integrated and effectively managed. It channels and directs practice, and warns of areas to be avoided. It shepherds, shapes and ultimately controls the route taken. Its real effectiveness however, is its subtlety - slow incremental changes have substantively avoided the outcry of Professional concern, and resulted in an environment that invisibly controls Professional behaviour. Youth work has been re-positioned miles from its original location.

Analysis of governmentality thus highlights the ways in which *P*artnerships, organisations and youth workers, have been programmed to uncritically pursue the 'welfare' of 'each and all' (*op cit*). Utilisation of these frameworks therefore suggests that youth work has, in various ways played a significant, but not always self-critical role in imbuing, pedalling and perpetuating often rather narrow constructions of socialised self-governance in young people's lives. The Profession was once sanctioned and privileged for this expertism by the state, society *and* young people. The dynamics of its position have however changed: neoliberal rationality has rendered youth work an enclave within the complexities of wider partnership and integrated practice. Organisations are compelled to compete aggressively (Buchroth and Husband, 2015) for ever smaller funding pots designed to meet incrementally narrower agendas which increasingly prescribe how young people should self-govern.

Youth work agrees to operate within the confines of these prescribed *P*artnerships, in order to survive, and, perhaps, if lucky, attempt to speak critically from within. Yet all of this comes at a cost. Youth work, under the auspices of 'citizenship', 'safeguarding', 'NEETness', 'inclusion' and various other discursive practices has become part of a mechanism of surveying the lives of *all* young people, whilst focusing on those who the state deems are at (or, perhaps more accurately pose) greatest risk (Belton, 2009; de St Croix, 2010).

The mechanisms of localised *P*artnership have become the panoptical instrument by which the state surveys youth work practice in the surveillance of young people's lives. Thus *P*artnerships have become integral mechanisms of moral containment, rather than creative spaces for shared learning (Wenger, 2013) and critical praxis. Hall (2013) argues this point eloquently, contending that the way in which those engaged in targeted youth support work are increasingly required to approach integrated practice in a manner more akin to care management. This, it is argued, moves youth work away from its grounding in informal education, towards the realms of 'second class social work'.

Analysis of the relationship between much of youth work's governed position within current multi-disciplinary, interagency and integrated frameworks is therefore essential. Present organisational mechanisms appear fundamentally grounded in governmentality: they attempt to ensure youth work governs itself in line with state agendas, in order that young people behave in doing the same. The result is that statutory, and some voluntary sector youth work, is no longer grounded in civil society. The 'rump' (Jeffs, 2015:77) that remains appears increasingly to be 'of the state, by the state, for the state' (Sercombe, 2015).

Regaining the steering wheel

Mapping this terrain highlights paradoxes and uncomfortable contradictions in youth work's recent history and contemporary practices. It is a profession that espouses a critical and emancipatory praxis with people; yet analysis demonstrates that recent practice has navigated a route that steers closer to perpetuating and supporting dominant structural hegemonies, and avoided the more difficult terrain involved in challenging these. Youth work must, in line with its grounding in critical pedagogy, continue to name the world; yet it must also name itself. Failure to do so risks rendering youth work complicit in the systems it should interrogate. Coburn (2011:62) argues that: 'The starting point for critical pedagogy is the learner and not the teacher or the state.' This is a commitment that youth work must take seriously. Critical pedagogy however calls us not only to 'name' but to act (Cho, 2013). In the United Kingdom youth work faces disassemblage (Youdell and McGimpsey, 2014). Undoubtedly, there are important practical and organisational decisions to be made regarding how to proceed. Yet of more fundamental importance are the moral and ethical mazes the Profession must orienteer in its regeneration and 'reassemblage' (ibid, Jeffs 2015).

In many instances, youth work has presented itself to young people as one thing, whilst in reality being something else. For a profession founded on principles of relational trust (Seal and Frost, 2014), such Janus-like behaviours might be deemed amoral, or at very least problematic. Others, however, might view this as a protean, chameleon-like necessity, a requirement to subversively support young people's informal and critical education. To this end, Tucker (2006:81ff) points out youth work is involved in a 'game', the rules of which are ambiguous and ever-changing. In Foucauldian terms, 'games of truth' must be deconstructed in order to illuminate them for what they are. This is a game which throws youth workers and young people into a matrix of discourse-fuelled power relations that entwines a range of institutions (Nicholls, 2012). It is a game played by the state's rules, in the eternal pursuit of moral containment. It simultaneously seeks to involve and include young people whilst holding them at a distance until they are socialised into compliance. At present, and perhaps more so than at any other time, it is a game in which youth workers and young people are being manipulated for particular performative purposes. This is a game that must be named in order to be understood. If we understand it, and the fluidity of its rules (Tucker, 2006), then perhaps we stand a

better chance of 'tipping [the] balances of power and control in young people's favour' (Davies, 2010b:3). The Profession, therefore, has an ethical duty to recognise the changing nature of the game it is caught up in, and to continue to name it to and with young people.

Trickery? Redrawing the map.

Analysis of the game however ought not to result in fatalistic capitulation. Deconstructive processes illuminate 'realities' and open up possibilities for agential action. 'Ignorance' conveniences the presumption of power, but knowledge holds the potential to challenge systems and catalyse change, thereby turning 'powerlessness' toward empowerment (Apple, 2013; Schirato et al., 2012). These ideas of games and power, point us towards re-considering the potential of youth work as a typology of trickery (Richards, 2014).

The trickster in mythology represents a being who utilises covert knowledge in order to usurp powerful systems and undermine convention. Such a notion is of course not new to youth work – which is grounded in principles of interruption (Belton, 2010), and embodies a commitment to sabotaging critical naivety (Bright, 2015b). Tricksters are driven to bend the rules for their own or others' benefit. They operate according to the terrain – often by stealth, but sometimes through brave, outlandish (and occasionally apparently foolish) public displays. These are playful characters who understand the game and how it might be made different. '…the trickster figure serves as a chaos-inducing element intent on challenging the existing order of things' (Bassil-Morozow, 2015:11). They work as critical, adaptive, shape-shifting operatives at the nexus of the structure-agency binary to expose and disable assumed and constructed fallacies and taboos in order to laugh at them. Tricksters are engaged in the clever disruption of power and oppression - a notion youth work claims it aspires to.

Trickster narratives often begin with the protagonist feeling trapped, or restricted. They want to feel free, and, like the youth work ideal, engage in audacious border or boundary crossings (Coburn, 2010) that seek to re-draw the maps of possibility. Bassil-Morozow (2015:16) notes that: 'The trickster's boundary-breaking and map-redrawing activities can be malicious, playful or heroic – and sometimes all three at once.' Youth work, needs to engage playfully and passionately in extending and re-drawing the once expansive boundaries of its practice, in order that it might generate a new critical imaginary of just possibility. Learning from tricksters in this regard may well be necessary.

Plotting utopia?

Before navigating the possibilities of a new youth work cartography, some dreaming is required and some questions are demanded. At its best what could and should contemporary youth work look like? How does this imaginary fit with or challenge social realities and possibilities? Drawing on Notturno (2003), Olssen (2010) suggests that all societies require engineering. Olssen argues that two forms of

engineering exist: the piecemeal and the utopian. Whereas, the piecemeal pays attention only to the most obvious and urgent of ills, the utopian expresses a holistic blueprint of the future and explores ways of getting there. Ontologically, utopian thought is grounded in an ideal of 'imagination otherwise' – it holds that new imaginaries of possibility are better than what currently exists. Drawing on Riceour (1986), Levitas (2011:89) contends therefore that 'the function of utopia is challenge, the best aspect being the exploration of the possible…' Utopic purpose is 'to expose the credibility gap wherein all systems of authority exceed… both our confidence in them and our belief in their legitimacy' (Riceour in Levitas *op cit*). In this way utopia represents 'the refusal to accept that what is given is enough' (Levitas, 2013:17).

A key role in utopian analysis is to raise consciousness of 'estrangement' - to create spaces and generate language that critically calls out the actualities of experience as it is lived and constructed, in order to set it in stark contrast with prophetically longed for futures. Therefore, 'The virtue of utopia is that it holds up an ideal, an ideal which encourages social progress' (Levitas, 2011:13). Thus, utopic thought concerns the possibilising of change and the subjective and relativist potentials of social transformation through the dreamt reclamation of futures (ibid). By drawing on Bloch's (1986) idea of, *docta spes* (educated hope) Levitas (2013:5) further highlights critical educative capacity of the utopic in the enactment of change – an idea that has clear synergy with the Freirean frameworks which drive critical youth work praxis.

Whilst many might yearn for the utopia of a radically different society, utopian thought teaches us to map the territory towards a new imaginary of aspirational possibility. There are of course totalitarian dangers in dreaming, but conveniencing and incapacitating inertia in not. Levitas (2011:4) notes: 'The elision between perfection and impossibility can serve to invalidate all attempts at change, reinforcing the claim that there is no alternative, [thereby] sustaining the status quo.'

New destinations

Cartographic conversations and action in mapping youth work futures are challenging, but crucial. Politically however, the array of utopian possibility is vast. Whereas right wing conceptualisations tend to be grounded in the individualising, libertarian socio-economic ideals of market rationality which result in widening social and economic inequity and alienation (Dorling, 2014; Winlow and Hall, 2013), the range on the left varies from the social democratic to varying flavours of radical Marxist thought. Whilst many Marxists tend to view utopia pejoratively as an abstract, mythical notion, that hinders true, radical social transformation, the socialist utopic has a long and distinguished history. Levitas (2011:42ff) contends utopian socialists like Henri Saint-Simon (1760-1825) and Robert Owen[i] (1771-1858) painted pictures of different possibilities in which society is more equitably and coherently advanced through localised communities which foster 'cooperation, association and harmony' - ideals of course, which underpin youth and community work practice. It is this *socialist* ideal of grass-roots localism which we believe speaks direction to youth

work's current predicament. As such, 'Organic restructuring [that] necessitates the development of a network of cooperative settlements which go beyond simple consumer or producer cooperatives' (ibid.: 53) needs to be considered in advancing alternative youth work futures.

Youth work needs to regain its status as a beacon of civil society. A contemporary utopian vision of civil society is presented in the ideal of 'spontaneous social self-organization independent of the market and state' (Levitas, 2013:164). This is cooperative landscape where youth work has come from. Despite the risk of appearing to capitulate to Big Society dogma stolen from this ideal, perhaps it is also the place we might return to in order to re-group and reimagine a different, more radical future that challenges the stealth of neoliberal statism, which has re-located the Profession in the corporate blandness of muzac-filled shopping centre uniformity. Practice must be re-imagined in order that we can collectively become architects of creative, community-shaped spaces. Such localised 'uncoupled' cooperative spaces, hold the potential at least, to enable the anarchic interruption of systems (de St Croix, 2014), and, 'replace market and state with an alternative economy and society' (Levitas, 2013:165).

Navigating new routes

Let us, for a moment, therefore, play a game with mapping new imaginaries of practice. Presently, the Profession engages in the trickery of Janus-like behaviour which presents its work to the state in one way, and to young people in another. The Janus typology however speaks to youth work in other ways. Janus as the Roman God of transition represents liminality – one face looks to the past, the other to the future. Janus' liminality speaks of the permanence of change: it is always with us. Whilst this signifies a truism, youth work (like so many other professions) currently faces a particularly striking transitory moment in its history in which three game options are available.

Firstly, youth work can continue to be played unwittingly within the existing system, accepting its continuing co-option in return for status and employment. However, the extent to which this form of practice can claim to be located within the Profession's values and pedagogies is highly questionable. Continuing down this track, might generate a range of people who 'work with young people', yet without youth and community work's distinctive ethos. This will inevitability lead to the Profession's physical and moral destruction.

Secondly, youth and community work could elect to play the game within the existing habitus, but with the explicit intention of manipulating and usurping it on young people's behalf. This is a version of the game which many youth workers have played from the origins of the profession, navigating a course between liberation and control, balancing the needs of the agency, the wider community and young people. Starting where young people are- but seeking to move them forwards, through conversation, creative action and engagement in a direction that is negotiated- but

agreed generally to be forwards (Rosseter, 1987; Jeffs and Smith, 2005). However this form of practice requires some space in which to create these educative processes - the question is whether the 'disassemblage' (Youdell and McGimpsey, 2014) of youth work has created an external environment that renders these kinds of survival tactics ineffectual? Workers may, occasionally, be able to punch a hole through the hedge to create a new route, or redefine locations that 'should' be headed towards - but fundamentally these choices are becoming more restricted, and the paths narrower. At an individual level playing the game this way provides a rationale and claim to professional integrity, but a failure to engage with this collectively appears to have steered youth work to the 'end of the road'. If we were to play the game, but aim for more than individual survival, the Profession must re-imagine itself as a transformative movement.

For those who remain in state-controlled (or commissioned) youth work, its disassemblage may yet provide the impetus to begin conversations that re-shape the theoretical basis of the work. This holds out hope for the Profession to form its own definitions- rather than clinging to those it has been ascribed. The re-deployment of colleagues, in different sectors, with differing approaches and traditions, could stimulate consideration about what still remains at the centre of practice, and how this might be named. In doing so, perhaps a new collective approach to playing the game can be formed - one with a more conscious and creatively disruptive style. However, this may involve being willing to cross some borders, to move away from current definitions of 'youth and community work' in order to explore common values and approaches within different traditions.

Perhaps the creative assimilation of co-productive processes, can move practice beyond convenient current interpretations of _P_artnership. If a fuller, more empowering conceptualisation of co-production is implemented, citizens could contribute, not only their own resources, but engage in dialogically shaping the re-creation of public services. Co-production might thus provide a context in which those from different traditions seek new shared destinations, routes and 'methods of transport'. In this context, the lines between playing within the existing habitus, and rejecting the current game to form another, may, however, become blurred.

Redundancies and redeployment have led to workers taking up posts in different arenas. There has been on-going interest in the skills offered by youth workers in housing and re-settlement, 'information and support' roles, and with young people who are disengaging on the edges of schools and colleges (Coburn and Gormally, 2015; Smith, 2013). Whilst still under the control of state funded agendas, workers may be able to find more elbow room to undertake work in these kinds of provision. For example, while housing projects may have stated goals around re-settlement and employment, there is time and space for conversations that are more open-ended in nature. Workers are able to take advantage of this space, to create opportunities that are educative, working alongside young people using art, participation and cultural residential trips. Perhaps these forms of practice, while not

radically re-shaping the map, could provide enough space for workers to continue to effectively play the game, and usurp the status quo, with and for young people.

New modes of transport and travelling companions?

Finally, youth work as an act of defiance and ultimate trickery might choose to *consciously uncouple* from the present game, in order to develop a new one which privileges rules of engagement negotiated by young people themselves.

In this vision the Profession engages in *actively chosen* processes of 'disassemblage' and 'reassemblage' (Youdell and McGimpsey, 2014) which enable the reclamation of its shared moral authority with young people, and a recovery of its truer ethos. Whilst this idea for some may have particular moral and vocational traction, it is a high risk strategy. There are a number of issues in plotting this direction of travel. These relate to three broad, yet interrelated themes: provision, resourcing and profession. *Initial speculative* discussion regarding these is offered here.

Firstly, reassemblage of youth work in this fashion would have an undoubted impact on direct provision with young people. Localities with better established independent and voluntary sector provision could be the ones where practice might be more likely to flourish and where new *p*artnerships and creative pedagogical practices inform the work. Those areas with better established access to social, democratic and economic resources and stronger civil society traditions *may* be the ones to see youth work survive and grow, with areas of disadvantage risking the loss of youth work entirely.

Of course, the converse may also occur. Demand by young people for provision may well be higher and more vocally demonstrated in more marginalised areas. Collaborative and co-productive endeavour between independent funding bodies, charities, civil society (for example, theatres, arts groups, sports, libraries) and local communities in these spaces might well provide fertile ground for renewal and enable a *new form* of co-operative diversity.

At a local level, there is some evidence of workers re-assembling. In some cases offers of voluntary redundancy have led to the creation of social enterprises, community interest companies, mutuals or charities where workers attempt to establish their own forms of organisation and practice (de St Croix 2014). The pathways between processes of control and informal education still need to be negotiated; yet workers are re-claiming virtue and agency in its navigation.

Another potential version of reassemblage is the broadening of the definition of 'youth work'. Statutory withdrawal from 'universal provision' has highlighted what still exists. Some of this involves new players moving in, but much is work that has been on-going, but has fallen outside 'youth work' categorisation. A scan of local youth providers reveals sports, arts, theatre and music-based provision beginning to

feature more prominently, providing more activities, in wider locations, and in more universal terms. While the starting points for this provision are often focused around interest and skill development, as work expands, and becomes more accessible, these new providers are finding the need to respond to the ideas, concerns, and issues that young people themselves bring. Examining this practice identifies where there are similarities in values and approaches. Perhaps, once uncoupled, youth work needs to seek new partners and form new alliances, whilst simultaneously re-generating its value bases and creating a new language rooted in civil society (Jeffs 2015).

Universities, it should be remembered, were at the forefront of what would become youth and community work (McGimpsey 2001). Reimagining the Settlement Movement in which universities, as an expression of their commitment to social justice, engage with their local communities through practice should not be beyond the realms of possibility. Such an approach would allow opportunities for students to develop experience, and enable universities to widen participation and promote good research in the field. Reimaging university involvement would also meet practitioner need for collegiate spaces where people can breathe, consider, rejuvenate and generate critical and collaborative imaginaries of practice (Hughes et al, 2014). These imaginaries, it might be argued, are perhaps more reflective of the Profession's earlier ethos. Undoubtedly however, all this raises further challenges. The spaces vacated by existing provision might lead to their occupation by organisations with different, questionable or unacceptable values. But then, perhaps this is *already* happening.

The second issue that must be contended with is resourcing - a problem that has beset youth work from its beginnings. Perhaps reassemblage of the work, which incorporates ethical value-based social enterprises, can be fashioned in a way that connects self-finance, with forms of income generation that are cognisant of the need to challenge dominant neoliberal discourses in practice and rhetoric.

In reassembling practice, it may be important to look at resourcing beyond financial terms, to realise the potential of shared facilities and volunteering. Recreating *p*artnerships based on co-operation and co-production will be essential. These new alliances hold the potential to re-form wider networks and re-engage young people with adults in their communities.

The tradition of volunteering also need to be re-considered. The increasing 'professionalisation' of the work, with degree level entry and re-formed roles has led to the loss of the traditional part-time worker (or volunteer). These are the individuals who did another job alongside youth work, but contributed regularly, over the long term, bringing differing experiences to the work, and communicating its value back to a wider audience. Historically, the involvement of a wide range of adults in youth work generated benefits beyond what happened in its buildings: by engaging and investing their time, these adults became advocates for informal education, and

young people (Jeffs, 2015). In recent years however, volunteering itself has been subject to neoliberal rationality, with many now seeing it as a means to personal advantage in a competitive job market (Rochester, 2013). Locally, numbers of volunteers have increased, and contribute greatly as statutory services have sought ways to deliver 'more for less'. Reconstructing practice will therefore involve wider debates, not only about the utilisation of volunteers, but also regarding the role that civil activities play in creating a strong democratic society.

Finally, we must consider what youth work as a reclaimed profession might look like in the uncoupled game. The contemptuous disregard of much contemporary practice by the state, together with the ways in which it has been re-positioned by processes of neoliberal governmentality have, undoubtedly, undermined it. A vocation that fought a long and hard battle for professional autonomy and recognition has been fundamentally devalued by a combination of cuts and the strange homogony of *P*artnership and competition. The result of these processes has been the stealthy *deprofessionalisation* of the sector and its practitioners. This has reduced, practice to a competence based delivery of pre-determined programmes which are closely monitored to ensure 'success'. This is, however, perhaps the ultimate goal of governmentality in silencing alternative voices. The neoliberal project has rendered youth work, like society, diffuse and 'atomised' (Bauman, 2009) to the point vaporisation. In pursuing the uncoupled game, there is no longer a need to the fear the *loss* of a distinct collective professional identity, which has ceased to exist outside the boundaries of the Profession's own consciousness. Energy instead needs to be focussed on reimagining the phoenix of professional autonomy, collectivity and the potential of renewed public recognition in the new ecologies of practice. This demands that youth work engages in conversations regarding its professional re-organisation.

Traditional notions of 'profession' are, of course, externally shaped. The ascription by principal external others (i.e. the state), of 'profession' as an ideal and legitimising mode, fluctuates in line with the vagaries of social and economic mores. This can be seen especially in professions like youth work, which are arbitrarily deemed peripheral and non-essential. Social, economic and political conditions regulate market demand, and appreciate or depreciate professional stock through capricious investment, positioning and rhetoric. The recognition of youth work as a profession was hard won, and external categorisation is undoubtedly important to many; yet, solely externalised categorisations of profession are prescriptive and limiting. They fail to take account of the potential of internal identities and shared phronetic agency in shaping occupational futures. In this vein, Banks and Gallagher (2009) argue that professions need to continually, agentially and reflexively construct themselves in response to internal *and* external forces. In this view, the notion of the Profession is not solely reliant on external prescription and validation, (as has been seen in recent processes of de/professionalization); rather, it requires that youth work reimagines

forms of internal validation, which critically draw on the Profession's ethos and rich history in facing contemporary challenges.

In this way, professions can rebuff the singular, essentialist fettering of external logic and move to reclaim themselves as 'moral communities or practices that have notions of the good or human flourishing built into them in the form of their core purpose or service ideal' (ibid.:48). Movement in this direction enables youth workers to reclaim their practice as an ideal that is committed to working and thinking critically *with* young people. 'This, in essence, is why workers are professional. It is not a question of status. [Good] youth workers, whatever their employment or volunteering situation, want to do a job well' (Nicholls, 2012:103). Youth work is a passionate and resistant profession (de St Croix, 2013) that must be committed to imagining different futures with young people. It must re-envision and reorganise itself in line with that commitment.

Youth work has a long and distinguished history of collective self-organisation. It should not, therefore, be beyond the realms of possibility to consider ways in which the Profession might re-imagine and re-order *itself.* Generative and interconnected networks within youth work abound. Regional Youth Work Units, In Defence of Youth Work, Choose Youth, The Federation of Detached Youth Work, The Professional Association of Lecturers in Youth and Community Work, universities and The Institute for Youth Work, amongst a host of others, provide spaces for critical thought and collaborative action. Synergistically, these hold the cooperative potential to contribute towards promoting the internal consciousness and validity of the profession in the new uncoupled world. Collaborative organisation is however key. Regular local, regional and national fora which *intentionally* catalyse critical, creative and cohesive communities of practice (Wenger, 2013) in the service of young people and their communities must be prioritised. Such spaces offer renewed hope, and the potential of *generative p*artnerships which reclaim professional ethos, autonomy and internal regulation.

Conclusion.

This paper has sought to map and acknowledge terrains of practice, imagine new rules to play by, and new places to play. Although game-playing can be fun, it can also be socially problematic, psychologically damaging (Berne, 1964) and politically dangerous. Sometimes players who attempt to subvert games end up dead or morally ruined (Bassil-Morozow, 2015). The next moves that the Profession makes need to be thought about carefully. The stakes are high. We are after all playing with young people's lives, education, morality, consciences and democratic futures (Bright, 2015b; Giroux, 2013). Undoubtedly however, the Profession is currently involved in a game in which many practitioners and young people are being *played.* Morally, the Profession needs to *actively* play the game with and for young people (whether overtly or covertly) in order to re-shape the agenda towards them. The

unpalatable alternative is to continue to be passively played by the state for *its* increasingly narrow performative agendas. The Profession must be true to its heritage and ethos, yet responsive in meeting the needs of today's young people in through new and critical imaginaries. It must decide the versions of the game that it is willing to play, and rules it is willing to play by. Collective, resistant and grass-roots renewal is needed in plotting new possibilities. It is time to dialogue, map, and act. Let the games begin!

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[i] Owen's attempt to generate this ideal can still be seen in his new model village at New Lanark.