



Somatic pedagogies: Critiquing and resisting the affective discourse of the neoliberal state from an embodied anarchist perspective*

Rhiannon Firth

abstract

This paper takes as its context widespread feelings of anxiety within neoliberal society caused by a combination of material and discursive factors including precarious access to work and resources. It is argued that the state uses ‘discourses of affect’ to produce compliant subjects able to deal with (and unable to desire beyond) neoliberal precarity and anxiety. Critical education theorists have argued that discourses of ‘well-being’, emotional support and self-help have gained increasing purchase in mainstream education and in popular culture. These discourses are dangerous because they are individualized and depoliticized, and undermine collective political struggle. At the same time there has been a ‘turn to affect’ in critical academia, producing critical pedagogies that resist state affective discourse. I argue that these practices are essential for problematizing neoliberal discourse, yet existing literature tends to elide the role of the body in effective resistance, emphasising intellectual aspects of critique. The paper sketches an alternative, drawing on psychoanalytic and practiced pedagogies that aim to transgress the mind-body dualism and hierarchy, in particular Roberto Freire’s work on Somatherapy

* This paper was presented at the Media Discourse Seminar Series at DeMontfort University on 5th March 2014, at the University of East London Research Conference on 25th June 2014, and in the Critical Pedagogy stream at the London Conference in Critical Thought at Goldsmiths University on 27th June 2014. I am grateful to all attendees for the supportive discussions that ensued. Thanks also to Ant Ince and Andy Robinson for their valuable feedback on drafts.

Introduction

This paper emerges from the ‘turn to affect’ in the humanities and social sciences. Explicit use of the terminology of ‘affect’ generally comes from critical paradigms, yet I argue that this response is situated within a wider context of neoliberal state discourse that harnesses affect to produce compliant subjects. In particular, the paper targets the public discourses and educational policies of what Kathryn Ecclestone and Dennis Hayes (2008) call ‘therapeutic education’, and the limitations of existing critical debate on this topic. In summary, I argue that the current epoch of neoliberal globalization has led to more precarious forms of life and work, and an increase in indebtedness. This emergent social structure causes widespread anxiety throughout society, which is harnessed by the state using discourse and policy ostensibly designed to reduce fear, by promoting ‘well-being’, resilience, therapeutic practices and ‘security’. Critical responses quite rightly argue that such policies actually (re-)produce anxiety by placing responsibility for both the causes and the consequences of good/bad well-being on the individual, creating narcissistic, vulnerable and compliant subjects. This creates a de-politicized culture and undermines capacity for collective social action.

The response from radical approaches has been to posit critical pedagogies that problematize and critically explore affective states, raising the political consciousness of students or learners. I argue that while these approaches are important – indeed essential – strategies of resistance, they also maintain certain assumptions: the conflation of affect with subjective emotions, a separation between mind and body, and that education is essentially discursive. In order to think beyond these assumptions, I draw on examples of utopian practices that involve learning through movement, play and physical activity. The examples I have chosen incorporate elements of ‘somatic’ theory that takes an holistic approach to the relationships between body, mind and (human and non-human) others. My hope is to approach the conditions for a non-hierarchical and non-vanguardist pedagogy able to resist state structurations of affect – the social reproduction of oppressive emotional regimes – without reproducing some of its key assumptions.

Neoliberal anxiety

Theorizing affect has been an important concern of recent research in the social sciences and humanities, to the extent that that many have referred to a ‘turn to affect’ (e.g. Clough and Halley, 2007; Lather, 2009; Hemmings, 2005). These engagements draw on a broadly post-structural tradition. Spinoza (1994: 157-

159), and later Nietzsche (1968: 354) then Deleuze (1986: 36-37), are careful to distinguish affect from conventional understandings of subjective emotion insofar as they give affective states a material foundation in the body: thoughts and feelings are ultimately inseparable from physical states, which incorporate relations with human and non-human bodies. Nonetheless, I will argue later, many recent take-ups of the concept sidestep the issue of the body entirely, or render it in highly abstract terms. At this point I would like to provide some context as to why affect has recently re-emerged as a key conceptual category, and briefly explore the nature and dynamics of affect in contemporary society.

In an important and timely article, the Institute for Precarious Consciousness argues that we are entering a new era of affective sensibility. The early industrial period, as famously portrayed by Marx (1867: Chapter 25) was characterized by *misery*. The Fordist period was characterized by *boredom* in secure but monotonous jobs and an anxiety relieving but bureaucratic welfare infrastructure (Institute for Precarious Consciousness, 2014: 247). The contemporary neoliberal period, by contrast, is characterised by *anxiety* as the dominant affect, and this is closely associated with precarity (*ibid.*: 275).

The idea of precarity arose from Italian autonomism before spreading more widely through critical discourse (Federici, 2006), frequently defined in contrast to Fordism, as ‘the labour conditions that arose after the transition from life-long, stable jobs common in industrial capitalist and welfare-state economies, to temporary, insecure, low-paying jobs emerging with the globalization of the service and financial economy’ (Casas-Cortes and Cobarrubias, 2007: 115). Precarity leads to anxiety in a variety of ways. Temporary and zero-hour contracts cause feelings of uncertainty about access to resources needed for a stable life and personal development (Precarias a la Deriva, 2004). Endless cycles of debt trap people in perpetual toil and deferred pleasure (Escalate Collective, 2012). Casualised contracts, unpaid internships, intermittent work and labour migration impact on sociality as maintaining close friendships and starting a family become increasingly difficult (Tari and Vanni, 2005). People are expected to be always on-call and communicable by employers, family, friends and lovers through mobile phones and the internet without real social contact, whilst working from home dissolves the boundaries between work, family and leisure (Taylor, 2012; O’Carroll, 2008).

Time is cut into commodified packets that can no longer be enjoyed at the slow pace required by creative and pleasurable emotions (Berardi, 2009: 91). Precarity produces feelings of guilt and inadequacy as workers compare their achievements unfavourably to the full-time permanent positions that comprised the ‘post-war imaginary’ (Tari and Vanni, 2005). Anxiety is associated with

physical affects: Berardi argues that the speed of information flows combined with the fragmentation of life leads to a constant bodily excitation without release (Berardi, 2009: 91). The assumption of this paper is that anxiety is a real affective force that acts on individual and collective bodies and is created by global material and economic conditions. I do not wish to suggest that anxiety is a discursive construct, but rather that states can alter structures of affect through policy and discourse, and they do so to suit the needs of neoliberal capital. I argue that any viable resistance to state structurations of affect needs to critically reveal existing structures of affect, and resist these through a reconceived understanding and the creation of new affects at an embodied level.

How states harness affect

Affect, as theorized by Spinoza, Deleuze, Nietzsche and others, is an holistic concept that draws together bodies and their environment and relations with other bodies through ‘forces of encounter’ (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010: 3). Affect is concerned with a body’s *becoming*, and how it transforms in interaction with the world. This requires a de-individualised understanding of what constitutes a body: ‘with affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself – webbed in its relations – until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter’ (*ibid.*: 3). Nonetheless, this paper contends, states are able to exploit affect in order to fragment and individualise affect, alienating people from their relationships and environments, to suit a neoliberal agenda. They do this through ‘discourses of affect’ that harness bio-power to produce compliant subjects able to deal with (or, unable to look beyond) neoliberal precarity and anxiety.

The example I draw on to illustrate this phenomenon is what Ecclestone and Hayes (2008) call ‘therapeutic education’. In the education system there has been a ‘deluge of interventions [to] assess the emotional needs and perceived emotional vulnerability of children, young people and adults and...develop their emotional literacy and well-being’ (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008: ix). Examples derive from all levels including primary, secondary, colleges and universities and the workplace. Furthermore, these interventions are not limited to formal institutions but are part of what Furedi (2004) calls ‘therapy culture’. This ethos is seen to have emerged in Anglo-American culture and politics over the last 40 years (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008: x). Examples include discourses of ‘vulnerable’ and ‘at risk’ learners, interventions intended to foster higher ‘self-esteem’, ‘confidence’, ‘emotional literacy’ and ‘positive attitudes’ in schools and other institutions (*ibid.*: xi); provision of services for young people with perceived behavioral and emotional problems; therapeutic support for emotional

difficulties and stress; and academic subjects designed to develop resilience and flexibility (*ibid.*: 374).

Taking the UK as an example, one might be inclined to question whether discourses and debates surrounding well-being, therapy and resilience are historically situated within the previous New Labour government's agenda, and that the current Conservative government conversely appears to be placing more emphasis on discipline and securitization and even militarization, which have become key in the government's attempts to create compliant subjects (Chadderton, 2013). Nonetheless, recent speeches and policies by former Education Secretary Michael Gove and government initiatives continue to place emphasis on 'emotional intelligence' and 'resilience' (see Walker, 2013; Williams, 2010). Discourses of well-being are explicitly linked to the need to create compliant subjects in the UK research agenda. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Delivery Plan 2011–2015 places emphasis on 'Influencing behaviour and informing interventions' as one of three strategic priorities for the time period. This is explicitly linked to a discourse of well-being: 'How can interventions to improve health and wellbeing draw upon advances in social science?' and potentially coercive elements are made explicit: 'What is the appropriate role of public policy in terms of coercion through legislation, persuasion via incentives or social marketing, or coherent combinations of approaches?' (ESRC, 2011: 6). Well-being is linked in the document to willingness/ability to work, meeting corporate interests, and the desire to reduce welfare expenditure (*ibid.*: 7). Furthermore, emergent discourses of discipline and securitisation also mobilize affect in the form of *fear*. They rest on similar assumptions of vulnerable subjects in need of state protection, and the desire to restrain and control bodies (DeLeon, working paper). Aside from governmental standpoint and policy, a culture has become deeply embedded whereby happiness and wellness are assumed to be moral imperatives, rather than matters of choice or privilege (Cederström and Spicer, 2015).

Critique of state discourse of affect

Such discourse and interventions are problematic for many reasons. They individualize responsibility for economic problems and re-cast social problems as emotional ones (Furedi, 2004: 24). This enables policy makers to evade discussion of material causes and effects (Eccleston and Hayes, 2008: 12). The discourse promotes a particular kind of subject: one that is introspective and narcissistic (*ibid.*: 136). It erodes social ties as personal relationships are increasingly feared as potentially dysfunctional, abusive and dependent (*ibid.*: 136; Furedi, 2004: 61), whilst discourses of 'parenting skills' and 'social skills'

presume homogenous desires and expert knowledge that colonise personal relationships (Furedi, 2004: 98). This fragments the informal networks that people might previously have drawn on for support, which in turn undermines the potential for collective political struggle (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008: 141). It also leads to increased dependence on professionals who are implicated in practices of surveillance as people are expected to reveal more and more of their private and inner lives (*ibid.*: xiii). Staff appraisals and personal development expectations in the workplace integrate therapeutic terms with performance targets (*ibid.*: 18) and student satisfaction surveys are used to discipline academic staff (Amsler, 2011: 51). They promote a particular limited and limiting account of what it means to be human: a 'diminished self' (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008: xi), who is lacking something essential (Cruikshank, 1999: 3) which undermines the radical and transformative power of education and of human beings (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008: 161).

This lays the ground for the production of conformist neoliberal subjects with truncated hopes, dreams and desires (Cruikshank, 1999: 2; Amsler, 2011: 50-51). Those who do not fit this image are shaped and excluded through diagnoses and medication (Furedi, 2004: 99). Political interest in emotional skills is integral to the demands of the market, particularly in the emerging service economy and public sector jobs: 'the education system plays a key role in socialising the "right" forms of emotional labour for different jobs' (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008: 18). Therapeutic education is therefore a normative and dangerous combination of discourses and policy. It has real effects on people's bodies, which are subject to surveillance, fragmented from social relationships, medicalised, and trained to conform to particular types of labour. This is all ostensibly a response to – but actually reproduces – neoliberal anxiety and precarity. So the key questions become: How can we 'unlearn' dominant notions of well-being and resist neoliberal structurations of affect without inputting another normative notion of physical and mental 'good'? If subjects are trained to accept, adapt to and ultimately desire precarious life in neoliberal societies, how might we persuade them otherwise without also assuming a 'diminished subject' or attempting to *impose* revolutionary desires?

Critical pedagogy and affective resistance

The works by Ecclestone and Hayes and Furedi are largely critical-deconstructive and leave the alternatives to therapeutic education largely implicit. Nonetheless, they rely on a liberal-humanist view of the subject, and call for a return to progressivist forms of education based on 'rational philosophy that focuses on the ability of humans to transform the world by making scientific and social

progress through reason' (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008: 161). As such, they bypass poststructural critiques of privileged knowledge, exclusion of marginal knowledges, representation, misrecognition, social hierarchies and violence, and the ways in which discourses of 'progress' and 'reason' have tended to reify dominant and hierarchical ways of knowing and learning such as Western, masculine, heteronormative, able-ist (Burdick and Sandlin, 2010, 351). This omission can be deeply problematic, for example Furedi's critique of state intervention in private relationships evades the gendered nature of unequal power in the domestic sphere (e.g. Furedi, 2004: 80-81) with the dubious implication that domestic violence and oppression ought to remain a 'private' matter.

Amsler however takes up this challenge in the context of Higher Education, arguing that 'affect is central to both learning and to any viable conception of socially responsive education' (Amsler, 2011: 52) and that 'transitions from therapeutic to political education in neoliberal societies cannot be accomplished without recognition of the affective conditions of critique and non-essentialized subjectivity' (*ibid.*: 56). In a society where people are affectively trained to conform to neoliberal desires, the prospect of critique can be challenging and even frightening, whilst the affective sensibilities which might motivate political action to change their conditions are likely to expose them to feelings of alienation that they might not otherwise have felt or recognized (*ibid.*: 55-56). Contrary to the assumptions of Freire and other critical pedagogues one can no longer assume an essentially critical subject that desires transcendence and an end to oppression. Critical educators in existing institutions like universities are likely to face resistance (Motta, 2012), whilst radical pedagogical projects face the problem that neoliberal anxiety and its submersion within dominant discourses is a 'public secret' (Institute for Precarious Consciousness, 2014: 275).

Responses to this problematic involve developing critical awareness of the role of emotions and affect, problematizing emotional responses to critique. Amsler argues that we should 'establish affect as a site and resource of both learning and political struggle' (Amsler, 2011: 58). This can begin in non-hierarchical spaces for discussion and engagement with otherness, both within and outside existing institutions (Motta, 2012). In the university, discussions can evoke multiple perspectives and epistemologies (Andreotti, Ahenakew and Cooper, 2011) and encourage 'embodying and practicing other forms of politics' (Motta, 2012: 93) by 'fostering discussion [and] enabling active listening and respect between all members of the classroom space' (*ibid.*: 92). This can initiate a polyphonic dialogue to prevent ideas from becoming stagnant, or fixed, at an epistemological level (Bakhtin, 1984: 21). Opening up ambiguity and complexity in the classroom can mean acknowledging an important pedagogical role for *unpleasant* affects

and emotions such as discomfort (Burdick and Sandlin, 2010; Zembylas, 2006; Boler, 1999). The aim of discomfort is not to prescribe any single course of action, but rather ‘for each person, myself included, to explore beliefs and values ... and to identify when and how our habits harm ourselves and others’ (Boler, 1999: 185). In radical spaces and social movement practice, the Institute for Precarious Consciousness (2014: 278-283) argues for a revival of the feminist practice of consciousness-raising in radical social movement spaces, which involves speaking from experience, validating submerged realities and constructing voice within safe space as a basis for affective transformation.

Suggestions for radical praxis within and outside formal institutions tend to locate resistance to affective oppression in critical thought, discussion and dialogue (e.g. Cruikshank, 1999: 2). There is an assumption that emotions are discursive, arising from cultural processes and meanings, rather than physical in origin and effect, and that resistance resides in raising critical consciousness rather than constructing new affects. Zembylas and Boler (2002: 9) define emotions as ‘discursive practices that constitute one’s subjectivities’. By situating both emotion *and* resistance in discursive practice these critical pedagogies inadvertently maintain an alienating mind/body dualism and hierarchy. The tradition of sitting down and talking in academic – and even in radical – spaces maintains separation: ‘we don’t need proximity or contact to participate in a debate’ (Goia, 2008: 56).

Motta develops a role for bodily movement, encouraging students to move around the space, and work outside, in order to transgress ‘the rigidity of fixity and stillness of normal classrooms’ and bring ‘physical fluidity to the space’ (Motta, 2012: 92-93). This is an important point yet remains under-theorized in existing literatures. Existing theory offers pointers for opening up discussion of ways in which emotions and the body are sites where oppression, inequality and affective control are played out, felt and embodied. Yet there is little consideration of how the body and its affects are always-already a utopian site: ‘a locus of freedom, pleasure, connection and creativity’ (Shapiro, 1999: xx). Ignoring the body’s capacity for agency leaves it ‘paradoxically, in a peculiarly objectified state’ (Shapiro, 1999: 20). Shapiro therefore calls for a ‘critical pedagogy of the body’ that begins from an understanding of ‘not only how it is socialized into heteronomous relations of control and conformity, but is also a site of struggle and possibility for a more liberated and erotic way of being in the world’ (*ibid.*: xx). Understanding the body as a utopian site of resistance involves coming to understand the Cartesian mind/body distinction as a cultural construction. This creates possibilities for a critical discourse that expands our understanding of the body and practices that foster bodily creativity, connections and compassion (*ibid.*: 18-19).

As discussed, the philosophical tradition from which the concept of affect is drawn already constructs it as an holistic concept, involving proximity and interaction of the body with other bodies and the environment. Where neoliberal state discourse has tended to individualize affect and limit desires, turning subjects inwards, critical responses have perpetuated the exclusion of physical interaction by relying on a discursive framework for praxis. In the following sections I will explore theories and practices that take a radically different, and expanded understanding of what constitutes the human body, and practices involving movement and touch that work with this understanding, therefore transgressing the mind/body dualism founds the basic assumptions of both mainstream and radical pedagogies. My wish is not to supplant existing critical pedagogies, nor to posit an alternative essentialist understanding of being or affect. Rather, I seek to explore alternatives that might supplement them, by transgressing the fixed binary of 'mind/body' therefore triggering new affects and creative resistances. Aspects of the theory and practices that I draw upon are self-avowedly utopian, and therefore may not be suitable to transpose exactly as described to formal and restricted institutional spaces such as the school or university. Nonetheless it is my hope that ideas might be adapted to inspire further somatic praxis in a range of spaces including universities, schools, social movements and radical spaces.

The body unconscious

In order to further elucidate the relationship between emotions, affect and the (reconceived) body or 'Soma', it is worth spending a moment to reflect upon the tradition of psychoanalysis and in particular theories of the unconscious. While much educational work on affect tends to elide psychoanalytic thought, it often forms the starting point for political philosophies of affect (e.g. Deleuze and Guattari, 2004a: 188; Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b: 286-289). In this section I define the psychoanalytic tradition broadly, to include the debates and critiques of Carl Gustav Jung and Wilhelm Reich who began working within, but were expelled from the Psychoanalytic Movement. I also include contemporary theorists such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari who claim to deviate entirely from the basic premises of psychoanalytic theory, developing a new theory of 'schizoanalysis', yet engage with psychoanalytic subject matter and debates.

Throughout psychoanalytic theory, the 'mind' is split into 'conscious' and 'unconscious'. In various ways throughout different theories, the unconscious is perceived to be within, to affect, or be affected by the body. For Sigmund Freud for example, an unconscious blockage can cause symptoms such as 'hysterical paralysis' (Freud and Breuer, 2004). Jung (1968) views the unconscious as a

collective, quasi-spiritual phenomenon that manifests through various individuated personality types and narrative archetypes. Wilhelm Reich inverts these theories to produce the idea of ‘character armour’ – rigidity within certain parts of the body – as well as neurotic symptoms, caused by a combination of the inability to achieve full orgasm (Reich, 1972: 16-17) and authoritarian social structures with an investment in the suppression of sexuality (*ibid.*: 281). Because of the unconscious, however conceived, emotions can arise without apparent conscious cause and emotions can manifest in bodily states or sensations when they are not otherwise consciously apparent. The problem is not simply a technical one of addressing the body and not the mind: the blockages in the body occur with an underpinning in what Lacan terms ‘the Imaginary’ (Lacan, 1988: 74), or within the realm of archetypes in Jung (1968). They are blocked because of meanings or images which shut them off or exile particular energies or parts of the self, whilst separating ‘inside’ from ‘outside’ through processes of alienation (Lacan, 1988: 294).

If one agrees with Reich that unconscious blockages can manifest as character-armour and bodily states, then practices I will describe might compose acts of resistance, involving processes of unblocking similar to Deleuze and Guattari’s negative or deconstructive stage of schizoanalysis (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004a: 325-354). Whilst Freud and Lacan view neurosis as essential to humans with origins in the triadic (Mother-Father-Me) familial assemblage (e.g. Lacan, 1977: 205; Freud, 1956), Reich and later Deleuze and Guattari propose that neurosis is actually the product of wider neurotic and authoritarian social structures, of which the family is one manifestation (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004a: 303-304). Resolution of psychic conflict therefore necessitates critique of the social system (Reich, 1972: 233). Such a process involves ‘untying knots’ or undoing social codes, such as taken-for-granted assumptions about the Oedipal family, and the participation of such institutions in ‘a pedagogical social machine in general’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b: 327). This negative/critical phase sets the scene for further positive tasks that construct new ‘desiring machines’ (*ibid.*: 354).

‘Affect’ therefore has a broader meaning than usually understood. Spinoza refers to impacts on bodies by other bodies, which increase or decrease their powers by combining to form different bodies (Spinoza, 1994: 154) through affective connections between ‘lines, planes, and bodies’ (*ibid.*: 153). ‘Bodies’ in this sense transgresses the individualized (neo-)liberal human and refers to immanent affective connections with natural causes and phenomena (*ibid.*: 157, 202), yet no distinction should be made between mental and physical life: ‘An idea that excludes the existence of our body cannot be in our mind, but is contrary to it’ (*ibid.*: 160). Deleuze and Guattari use the term ‘affect’ in relation to bodily postures and movements and related ‘discharge of emotion’ (Deleuze and

Guattari, 2004b: 441) implying that an 'affect' is a point of contact between bioenergy inside and outside the body; a flow which goes across the boundary of the body. A 'reactive' affect is one which is turned inside or displaced (*ibid.*: 441) and causes 'blockages' in Reich's terminology (Reich, 1972: 17). This is useful in distinguishing 'affect' from 'emotion'. In everyday language, emotion usually refers to an individuated physical feeling (not mental or intellectual) that is passive (not active) and has a more-or-less irrational relationship to the world and outer life. In contrast, affect, as constructed by these thinkers is a necessary part of social and ecological assemblages, which passes through the unconscious field. Thinking beyond discursive pedagogies requires a reconceived understanding of the body, and indeed what it is to be human. To avoid confusion, some theorists and practitioners working with this approach have introduced a new term, 'Soma', to describe an understanding that both transgresses and encompasses the mental/discursive and the physical.

Possibilities for somatic pedagogy

The word 'Soma' is derived from Greek, meaning 'body', but tends to be used as an alternative terminology to describe a much wider understanding of embodiment: 'it incorporates the body's extensions, such as its desires and ideals, thoughts and attitudes, ideology and love, profession and social life. A human 'Soma' is everything that a person is, including how and with whom she or he has relationships' (Freire and da Mata, 1997: 3). The works of somatic theorists can be traced back to the thoughts of Wilhelm Reich, discussed above. Reich's work is important because it transgresses the Cartesian mind/body dualism, illustrating the possibility of a neurophysiological basis of repression (Hanna, 1970: 125) and a somatic understanding of the human body extending to relationships and social and economic environment. Affective discourse of 'therapeutic' education that attempts to homogenise desires by creating compliant subjects would for Reich be complicit in perpetuating bodily repression. This offers a starting point for thinking through ways in which working within a certain economic and social structure means 'to be inserted into a way of life that appropriates one's productive energies for specific purposes' (Shapiro, 1999: 58). This opens the doors for a range of somatic pedagogies exploring the ways in which our bodies absorb, embody and can potentially resist their social constructions: 'When people can't be themselves nor live out their ideas and desires, they enter into a defensive neurotic state. The neuromuscular armour is, therefore, a direct consequence of an authoritarian pedagogical game that teaches us to accept standards that are not our own' (Freire and da Mata, 1997: 7).

The primary example I would like to draw on in this paper is Somatherapy. The first time I encountered Somatherapy was in 2007 during my doctoral studies, when I helped to co-organize a KnowledgeLab event,¹ during which I chose to attend a workshop entitled ‘SOMA – an experiment in anarchism – Consensus decision making without the mind/body split’, with very little idea of what to expect. The workshop was facilitated by Jorge Goia, whose subsequent writing I have cited in this paper (Goia, 2008).² The workshop consisted of an opening talk on the history and ideas behind Soma, which I will touch on later in this paper, a series of group physical exercises designed to build body-awareness and solidarity, and a ‘sharing’ discussion afterwards. I left the workshop feeling deeply connected to the other participants, and with a profound sense of euphoria, apparently a common response (Ogo and Dejerk, 2008: 44). The workshop was intended as a ‘taster’ of what Somatherapy can be like. To engage in a full course of Somatherapy one would have to commit to a year or more of monthly meetings (Freire and da Mata, 1997: 13-14). To my knowledge there are no full-term workshops in the UK. This is my only personal experience with practising Soma. My sources are therefore based on the limited work of Roberto Freire published in English (most of Freire’s original work is written in Portuguese and remains untranslated), a conversation with Jorge Goia, an experienced Somatherapist who trained under Freire, and on secondary writings by Goia and others. In what follows I explore Somatherapy as a potential source of inspiration for somatic pedagogies. In particular, I will focus on the questions: How does it resist state structurations of affect? How does it transgress existing critical pedagogies, assumptions of mind/body dualism and discursive/dialogical modes of practice? After considering this example, I will signal other potential sources of inspiration, and attempt to consider ways in which these might inform and shape existing critical praxis.

Somatherapy combines therapy and pedagogy, arts and science, politics and emotions (Goia, 2011a). It was created by the Brazilian psychiatrist and anarchist activist Roberto Freire (who bears no relation to Paulo Freire) in the 1970s in the hope of providing a therapeutic pedagogy that could support people resisting the

1 KnowledgeLab is a networked collective dedicated to providing space for anti-capitalist reflection. More information on the group can be found at its Wiki: https://www.knowledgelab.org.uk/Main_Page. The specific event that I helped to organize was hosted at the University of Nottingham, with information on the event archived here: <https://www.knowledgelab.org.uk/FourthKnowledgeLab>.

2 When I decided, several years later, to write this paper I discovered that Goia was living in London, and I met with him to discuss this paper and am extremely grateful for the ideas he contributed.

dictatorship (Goia, 2011b). In developing Somatherapy, Freire explicitly drew on a wide range of influences, including theories of the body, emotions and the unconscious drawn from Wilhelm Reich, combined with insights from Frederick Perls, Gregory Bateson, Thomas Hanna, Max Stirner, anarchist politics and organization; anti-psychiatry, Gestalt psychotherapy and the Brazilian martial art Capoeira Angola (Goia, 2008: 57; Freire and da Mata, 1997; Goia, 2011a; Goia, 2011b; Ogo and Dejerk, 2008). A 'course' of Soma has about 30 sessions facilitated by an experienced practitioner in a non-hierarchical manner inspired by anarchist politics and organization. The aim is through enjoyable play, games, sound and co-operative movement exercises to 'salvage spontaneity, playfulness, creativity, and awareness of anarchist organization where no one is boss' (Goia, 2011a). The purpose is to challenge authoritarian politics and competitive capitalist social relationships at a personal level, by cultivating bodily awareness and producing non-authoritarian social relationships (*ibid.*). An accessible introduction and fuller description of the process can be found in the article by Ogo and Dejerk (2008).

Soma works to break down divisions and hierarchies not only at the social level but also at physical, unconscious and affective levels: 'When the body is in articulation, it is in transformation. The more articulations we make, the more we are affected, the more we become sensitive to difference, and the more we can refine our senses to perceive, opening possibilities of new engagements' (Goia, 2008: 60). Soma is explicitly political, beginning from the body and the politics of everyday life: 'we raise awareness and bring out the physical reality of our bodies educated in the capitalist culture of fear and security' (Goia, 2011a). Somatherapy transgresses the construction of mind and body as separate: 'The politics of everyday life does not happen only through arguments, discussions and critiques in the search for rational ideas about life and relationships. We are concerned with the politics of the body, to break down cultural prejudices against the forgotten body' (Goia, 2008: 58).

Nonetheless Somatherapy does involve discussion, which takes place after the games, where participants discuss the feelings and physical sensations that they experienced (Ogo and Dejerk, 2008: 44). There is an orientation towards avoiding interpretation, analysis, 'why' questions, or general claims in favour of describing physical and emotional sensations, 'how' questions and building solidarity and sincerity across differences (Goia, 2008: 57-58; Ogo and Dejerk, 2008: 46). Soma participants are also encouraged to undertake independent and group readings, and practice in Capoeira Angola, leading to a learning experience that transgresses traditional 'therapy' and encompasses 'a skill share, and an experiment in anarchism applied to personal dynamics' (Ogo and Dejerk, 2008: 47).

The theme of celebrating rather than suppressing bodily differences speaks directly to the key theme of this paper: resisting the state homogenization of affect and production of compliant subjects through a non-vanguardist approach to pedagogy. Freire argues that 'driven by the economic power of the state, authoritarian societies need to standardise human behaviour in order to facilitate control and domination' (Freire and da Mata, 1997: 3). Thus, a core purpose of the games and exercises is to identify and eliminate the effects of homogenizing discourses on our bodies in order to 'encounter the originality in the lives of each one of us' (*ibid.*: 3). Rather than seeking to impose psychological diagnoses and 'truths' on the body, Soma aims to 'create singular experiences' and 'perceive more contrasts' (Goia, 2008: 60-61). The process of producing and celebrating individual difference seeks to politicize personal and everyday life and the ways these are permeated by state authoritarianism and capitalist values such as private property, competition, profit and exploitation:

It is impossible to deny the influence of [state and capitalist] values in vital areas of social relations, where feelings (jealousy, possessiveness, insecurity) and situations (competition, betrayal and lies) seem to reproduce on the micro-social level, the authoritarianism of states and corporations. The political starts in the personal, and this is where the mechanisms that maintain social order are born. (Goia, 2008: 58)

Soma seeks to explore micro-political dynamics starting from the body and to resist them by challenging participants to 'reinvent relationships' (Goia, 2008: 60) using games to foster trust, co-operation and sharing, and mechanisms for dealing constructively with conflict (Goia, 2008: 56).

Soma thus seeks to recreate politics at a fundamentally dis-alienated level, treating the moving, sensing, relating body as a utopian site where new relations can be configured. It resists dominant discourses without recourse to counter-discourse: 'a rebel body needs to articulate differences to challenge paralysing definitions...we give voice to the body to express doubts; questions, where often one prays for certainty. Soma doesn't try to define one's body, the process attempts to keep one's *soma* moving' (Goia, 2008: 60). This is an anarchist practice, seeking to inspire 'skills to build horizontal relationships' that can 'transform the way we perceive the world, re-building the body, its dwelling and livelihood' (Goia, 2008: 61).

Further body-focused pedagogies can be found elsewhere. Augusto Boal's work on *theatre of the oppressed* begins from a somatic assumption that bodies become alienated through labour; for example one who sits at a computer all day becomes 'a kind of pedestal, while fingers and arms are active' (Boal, 1979: 127)

while someone who stands or walks all day will develop different muscular structures. Boal develops a range of theatrical techniques to explore the limitations and social distortions of the body, and starting from this to learn once more to make the body expressive, affirming rather than denying one's own physical differences (Boal, 1979: 126). Sherry Shapiro (1999) argues for a critical pedagogy based on dance and movement, which begins from a critique of the commodification of dancers' bodies yet celebrates and brings to critical awareness the function of dance in producing pleasure, agency and freedom (Shapiro, 1999: 72). Jeremy Gilbert (2013) argues for a pedagogical technique in university lectures and seminars inspired by DJing in dance clubs that aims to mobilize affect to assemble a collective and empowered body. Bell and Sinclair (2014) argue for a reclamation of the 'erotic' in higher education in ways that refuse commodified sexual norms. This might involve exploring the relationship between knowledge and bodies, and recognizing love and nurturance in collegial and pedagogic relations.

Examples might also be drawn from practices at a range of international communities that draw on body-work and reconceived relations between the body and world. ZEGG Community (*Zentrum für Experimentelle Gesellschafts-Gestaltung*) in Germany uses a technique based on both words and movement to reveal parts of oneself to the community, and defines itself as a sex-positive community that embraces multiple different kinds of relationships (ZEGG, 2015). Findhorn in the UK similarly encourages healing techniques based on dance and movement, and embraces ontology that transgresses fixed assumptions about the relationship between body and environment. Several courses and workshops at Findhorn explicitly drawn on the work of Wilhelm Reich and other radical psychologists (e.g. Findhorn Foundation, 2015). Tamera in Portugal places focus on cooperation between human being, animal and nature and focuses on interpersonal intimacy as a means of freeing the individual (Tamera, 2015). Network for a New Culture in the US was originally inspired by ZEGG. Whilst this is not an ongoing populated community it offers summer camps, retreats and other experiences designed to build community and intimacy, encourage challenging oneself, and practice new ways of interacting (New Culture Institute, 2015).

Such communities often avoid some of the drawbacks of more typical self-help approaches in that they link personal growth and interpersonal connection to larger community and societal structures. Some of these ideas in the context of intentional communities in the UK are explored in Lucy Sargisson's book, which provides an exegesis of radical ecological ontologies that transgress dominant assumptions about oppositional Self-Other Relations (Sargisson, 2000: 117-151) as well as my own book, which examines holistic views of subjectivity (Firth,

2012: 131-135). Also relevant are groups such as the Centre for Nonviolent Communication (2015) and the Human Awareness Institute (2015). These organizations offer workshops examining ways in which cultural norms can alienate people from their ability to understand and communicate bodily needs and sensations, resulting in verbal and physical violence, and offer skills training to promote alternative, compassionate forms of communication and relationships.

Conclusion: Spaces of somatic becoming

In this paper I have critiqued and transgressed the assumptions of a specific area of pedagogic theory – in particular the uncritical conflation of education and learning with normative discourses of therapy and well-being. Rather than following existing literature by taking a critical standpoint yet retaining assumptions concerning the mind-body split and the discursive nature of pedagogy, I have attempted to adopt a utopian methodology (Firth, 2013), taking the reconceived body or soma as a starting point to think through ways of opening up this field of thought and practice to difference.

The question remains: where might somatic pedagogies take place? If, as the introductory sections argued, ‘therapeutic’ pedagogies are prevalent throughout many levels of society, both within educational establishments and outwith institutions through a wider cultural discourse, effective resistance also ought to take place both within and outside existing institutions. Since ‘therapeutic’ pedagogies begin from the earliest stages of school, pioneering teachers may be able to think through ways these might be resisted, within institutional constraints. Finding time outside curriculum activity, health and safety constrictions and rules on physical contact may make the school environment particularly prohibitive for Somatic pedagogies. Nonetheless, taking a critical approach within aspects of the curriculum imbued with ‘therapeutic’ discourse may be possible.

My own pedagogic experience derives from academic teaching and lecturing in universities at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, presenting at conferences, and from facilitating and taking part in grassroots popular education work in autonomous social spaces and with social movements. The first time I presented this paper at a university, a member of the audience quite poignantly pointed out that universities are perhaps the place where this kind of activity is *least* likely to be taken up, referring to the fact that when any participatory element is introduced in a lecture or conference paper, academic audience members – from undergraduates to staff – often shirk from joining in. The physical environment

of classrooms and lecture theatres is designed to facilitate sitting in rows facing the 'expert'. Academics are arguably the section of society most alienated from their own bodies due to the emphasis placed on intellectual power and 'the mind' (Bell and King, 2010). At the same time, implicit and commodified sexual economy and other embodied hierarchies (Bell and Sinclair, 2014) undermine possibilities for creating requisite conditions of equality and solidarity. However, it is important to note that cracks and spaces for radical activities do appear in universities and other institutions. The first time I encountered Somatherapy was at a university, albeit at an autonomously organized event. Many universities now encourage the use of innovative and critical pedagogies, albeit often in a de-politicized attempt at introducing 'novelty value' to enhance 'student satisfaction', which opens possibilities for more critical and interesting activities (Motta, 2012).

Somatic pedagogies might also take place outside formal institutions, in autonomous spaces such as autonomous social centres, squats, occupied protest camps, housing co-operatives and intentional communities. Activist social spaces already often host a variety of pedagogical activities with physical elements such as skill-shares and martial arts workshops. However, I have only occasionally encountered workshops that take the body itself as a starting point for critique and resistance. Somatic pedagogies might be of use to social movements since a widely acknowledged source of dissonance and conflict is the verbal dominance of more confident or educated people in meetings and discussions (Firth, 2012: 109). Somatherapy is designed to build solidarity through movement and the emphasis on physical difference rather than discussion and may ameliorate some of these problems. To end this paper, I would like to distil from the above some important themes that an interested pedagogue might consider when planning a workshop. I do not wish to offer a single concrete 'set of instructions', nor to recommend that a pre-existent practice, such as Somatherapy, be taken up in its entirety. The aptness of different techniques will vary according to the space, participants and context.

First, a facilitator might consider the approach that they would take towards critique and knowledge production. An underlying argument of this paper has been that in order to avoid (paradoxically) imposing anti-authoritarian values and desires, knowledge production ought to be non-vanguardist. Rather than taking as given any particular values and desires, one promotes epistemological practice that problematises the status quo, using concrete experiences of the body and its immediate relationships as a site of critique and resistance. The approach takes to its limit the feminist slogan that 'the personal is the political'. This involves processes similar to consensus decision-making combined with physical movement, producing new knowledge by bringing bodies into motion. Second,

the paper has argued that a genuinely non-vanguardist pedagogy ought to involve critiquing state structurations of affect and definitions of 'well-being' beginning from re-thinking the body as inseparable from the mind, other bodies and the environment and constructed through relationships. I have not argued for a closed definition of the body because this should be politicized and open to negotiation during classes or workshops. My hope is that definitions remain open to constant differentiation as bodies and understandings of bodies continually undergo change. Third, I have argued that such a pedagogy would celebrate rather than suppress or homogenize different bodies and desires. This would involve accounting for both physical and psychological difference, for example some participants may not like to be touched or may find different levels of closeness comfortable during workshops. Therefore processes for articulating and respecting personal boundaries should be incorporated.

Finally, resistance should be fun, joyous and playful. This last point is perhaps the most difficult to achieve in practice: how can we construct joy in a society where consumerism is central to enjoyment? Where activism is too frequently characterised by notions of selfishness, suffering and sacrifice? (Graeber, 2014). Somatic pedagogies should not lose their political, critical and resistant facets. In discussion with Goia, I was informed that in Brazil, Somatherapy has in some places become a recuperated practice, 'just another group therapy' widely used by people with spare time and money rather than radical activists. On the other hand, many radical social movements already embrace aspects of Somatic pedagogies, in the form of performance art and carnivalesque activities, for example the *Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army* (see Routledge, 2010). Such practices might benefit from engaging in Somatic critique, raising the issue of the body as a site of resistance in further pedagogical activity.

The nanopolitics handbook (The Nanopolitics Group, 2014a) explores recent political engagements with bodywork and social movement practice, showing how such practices can and do avoid recuperation into the mainstream. In particular it is important to note that whilst there is always a possibility that somatic practices might be recuperated back into the capitalist mainstream, this does not invalidate the necessity of critical practices of the body for radical politics. Indeed, politics must not reside only in voting or making statements, but 'politics can be a tangible experiment of feeling and acting that's based in our bodies and their ways of relating' (The Nanopolitics Group, 2014b: 19). A politics of the body can be a politics of joy, pleasure and immanent revolution (*ibid.*: 23) to be experienced in the present, rather than deferred to the future.

This paper is intended as a preliminary introduction of the concept of Somatic pedagogy into debates on education and pedagogy and it is beyond its scope to

offer extended ideas for practice. Nonetheless I have argued for the political significance of the body. Whatever concept of radical change we embrace, be it revolutionary, reformist, or through creation of utopian alternatives in the here-and-now, one cannot deny the importance of the body in radical praxis. Critical social change is unlikely to occur whilst we are sitting in front of a computer but will involve our collective hearts, minds and bodies.

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the author

Rhiannon Firth works as a researcher in the Cass School of Education and Communities at the University of East London. Her research interests include utopian and anarchist approaches to pedagogy, methodology, political theory and activism.

Email: r.firth@uel.ac.uk