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The Poetic Generation of Place: Ethnography for a Better World

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Abstract

In this article, I employ the ethnographer poetic as a strategic provocation to rethink the foundation of contemporary ethnography. The root of the word poet or poem is the ancient Greek concept of poiesis. Poiesis is defined as making. While in the Greek tradition poiesis foregrounded an analysis of the arts or aesthetics, contemporary usages highlight the making of a social or political dimension. Drawing from the social and political dimensions of poiesis, I argue that the ethnographer does more than simply represent a social context, and, instead, calls the place into existence. The ethnographer poet transforms ethnography from a representational form of inquiry into a generative poetics of place. This allows for a new social mythos to emerge in which the field of ethnography is brought into the service of envisioning and working toward a society that is hopeful, abundant, vibrant, and just.

Introduction

Contemporary ethnography exists in a constant state of disorientation: occupying an uneasy liminal geography that is at the same time generative and perplexing. Is the ethnographer an entertaining storyteller playing with the aesthetics of language or a scientist disciplining language in the service of objectivity? Traditional norms of ethnography suggest that the ethnographer employs a series of techniques and strategies to unveil a social reality. The techniques and strategies that ethnographers employ straddle literary and scientific conventions in which the literary goal of "thick description" is for the purpose of showing the reality of a social context. According to Fetterman (2010) the ethnographer is a storyteller and a scientist in which the purpose "is about telling a credible, rigorous and authentic story"[1]. Ethnographic research techniques and strategies are often based on a scientific tradition intended to establish a valid and reliable story about a social context[2]. In ethnography, this is never decided and remains always a question: To what degree does the story authentically represent the reality of a situation? For Clifford Geertz (1973) the answer is obvious, ethnography is the process by which, "the scientific imagination brings us in touch with the lives of others."[3] For all its literary puzzlements and interpretive entanglements (is it a wink, a blink, or rapid eye movement) ethnographic research from this perspective rests firmly within the scientific tradition.

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[1] Fetterman, David. Ethnography: *Step by Step* (3rd edition). (Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage Publications, 2010): 3

[2] Lecompte, Margaret & Goetz, Judith. "Problems of Reliability and Validity in Ethnographic Research." *Review of Educational Research*, 52(1),1982: 31-60.

[3] Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" ed Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. (New York: Basic Books, 1973): 16

Lest we become too enamored of such confident proclamations, the disorientation of ethnography has certainly not been quelled. Contemporary ethnographic incursions have embraced the disorientation that exists at the scientific/literary intersection. Patti Lather notes that qualitative forms of inquiry, such as ethnography, must proceed from an anti-foundationalist discourse theory so that a new more vibrant yet elusive science of human social relations might emerge. The techniques and strategies of ethnography constitute, not a valid or reliable narrative, but an "incitement to discourse"[4].

Emerging from this reimagination of what can be considered valid and reliable ethnographic research, what might be called "experimental ethnographies" have pushed the limits of the field through textual and experiential interventions.[5] Laurel Richardson and Ernest Lockridge explore the intersection of science and literature in an ethnography that collapses literary sensibilities and scientific imaginings[6] as the ethnographer works at the limits of language sculpting the evanescent and transitory into substance. Lisa Messeri offers an ethnography of the future, imagining life on other worlds from current scientific work. She foregrounds the imagination to understand how scientists transform the space of extraterrestrial planets into places[7]. These experiments in the ethnographic tradition challenge the scientific conception of ethnography and open doors to a more poetic and imaginative practice.

This special issue of The Ethnographic Edge is an invitation to query the concept of an ethnographer poet. I am intrigued by this image of a researcher who engages poetry as the foundation for inquiry. Yet, there is more to poetry than the writing of verse. I begin my investigation by interrogating the etymology and the meaning of the concept poet and poetry. I suggest that what is referred to as poetry in contemporary discourse has its roots in the much more ancient concept of poiesis. I intend to show that, it is from its root in poiesis that the ethnographer poet emerges as the instigator of mythopoetic places that can offer new images of human flourishing. To be an ethnographer poet means less that the ethnographer uses poetry or a poetic sensibility in their work and, instead, references the way the poet and/or the ethnographer actually generates the possibility of human social experience.

The poet ethnographer engages herself in the immersive generation of a social truth. This is not simply a researcher accurately representing their understanding of a social setting, rather, it is the ethnographer and the social setting working at the limits of a dialogic and recursive relationship creating each other. It is a reciprocal co-emergence in which the being of the ethnographer and the being of the social emerge simultaneously. Theoretically, how is it possible to make sense of such a process, when the ethnographer has been given the task of authentically describing social and cultural settings?

As the title suggests this article focuses on the poetic generation of place, and I draw from principles of poetics to conduct my investigation. Poetics, states Todorov (1978), is "in contradistinction to the interpretation of particular works, it does not seek to name meaning but aims at the knowledge of the general laws that preside over the birth of each work"[8]. Poetics in literary studies reveal the potentialities from which a particular text arises. As a social production, a text emerges into the world through the intentional integration of the concrete aggregate of signs, human activity and abstract discursive principles. Poetics is the work of poiesis through which the text that is society emerges into the world. To illustrate how ethnography can be viewed as the poetic generation of place, I draw upon three overlapping and linked concepts that help to unravel the puzzle of ethnographic poetry: Poiesis, Mythopoiesis, and Utopia.

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[4] Lather, Patti. Fertile Obsession: "Validity after Poststructuralism." *The Sociological Quarterly*, 34(4), 1993: 670

[5] Poewe, Karla. "Writing culture and writing fieldwork: The proliferation of experiential and experimental ethnographies." *Ethnos*, 61(3-4), 1996: 177-206.

[6] Richardson, Laurel & Lockridge, Ernest. *Travels with Ernest: Crossing the literary/Sociological divide.* (Walnut Creek, Ca.: Altamira Press, 2004).

[7] Messeri, Lisa. *Placing outer space: An earthly ethnography of other worlds.* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2016)

[8] Todorov, Tsvetan. *The poetics of prose*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978): 2

Ethnograhy as Poiesis

My primary concern in this article is with the concept of poet. While the root of the words poet, poetry or poem is neither clear nor agreed upon there is often a connection to the ancient Greek word poiesis. Poiesis is a concept that simply means to make. Aristotle placed poiesis within an intellectual triumvirate that includes praxis, theoria and poiesis. In short, praxis is doing, theoria is contemplation and poiesis is making. The doing of Praxis is an activity that has its own value and is for its own sake. Praxis in contemporary thinking is often understood as a kind of contemplative, thoughtful political action[9] Poiesis, on the other hand, is an activity with "a distinct end that is separate from the activity"[10]. In poiesis, there is an endpoint a product that is as important as the activity itself.

Poiesis has a complex relationship with ancient Greek ideas. The concept is often used in the understanding of an aesthetic endeavor, originally poetry in the presocratic traditions and later adapted by Aristotle for theater[11]. The concept also enjoys a certain favor in literature in the form of poetics. More recently Poiesis has figured in inquiries into social relations and politics [12]. Plato considered poiesis to be an imperfect and at times misleading activity. Whereas objects exist in the realm of ideal forms, the making of an object in the real world was a step removed and inferior to the perfection that exists in the ideal realm. The maker of a bed, for example, is only making an imperfect, if usable object. A painter, on the other hand, is actually representing moral or ethical life and can do so in an inappropriate manner, thus misleading citizens in an area that is essential to the functioning of the polis.

Heidegger originally reformulated poiesis so that it was fundamentally about the nature of being and the world. Poieis became an "original site of truth" for examining the very nature of being[13]. Heidegger defines poiesis as,

> Physis, also the arising of something from out of itself, is a bringing forth, poiesis. Physis is indeed poiesis in the highest sense. For what presences by means of physis has the bursting open the bringing forth, e.g., the bursting of the bloom into a blossom in itself.[14]

Physis is understood as the physical world and Poiesis is the opening into a 'being in the world' *(Dasein)*. Poiesis is the arising of something out of itself and is a self-organizing emergence. Through poiesis, the world is in a constant emergence; becoming through the reciprocal interaction of self and world. The truth of the world and the truth of the self is made as we emerge into it through our generative creativity and *vice versa*. Poiesis is the making or the remaking of human experience.

In the Greek meaning of the concept there are two specific forms through which human experience is generated, Techne and Mimesis. Techne translates to craft or craftsmanship. It is a form of knowledge that is concerned with the concrete and the here-and-now, with a tangible and utilitarian production that, "signifies clear, reliable, specialized and authoritative knowledge"[15] (pg. 3). This is knowledge that is to be used for a specific and identifiable outcome and a purpose. Yet, there is more to techne than just the production of an object, and it references the making of particular forms of life and life experience. As such, techne can also refer to the production of moral knowledge. It is a way of thinking about moral knowledge not as a system of abstract universal concepts that are contemplated but as a form of concrete life experience that can be clearly determined and used to constitute

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[9] Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

[10] Bernasconi, Robert. "The Fate of the Distinction Between Praxis and Poiesis." *Heidegger Studies*, Vol 2, 1986: 111.

[11] Di Pippo, Alexander. A Concept of Poiesis in Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics. *Thinking Fundamentals*, vol. 9, 2000: 1-45.

[12] Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1995).

[13] Alexander DiPippo pg. 44

[14] Heidegger, Martin. "The Question Concerning Technology" In ed David Krell, Martin Heidegger: *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper Collins, 1977): 317

[15] Roochnik, David. *Of Art and Wisdom: Plato's Understanding of Techne*. (State College, Pa:Penn State Press, 2010): 3

everyday life. As a techne the outcome is not so much the knowledge but how the knowledge emerges into and through a moral life.

Mimesis in an Aristotelean formulation means imitation. This form of imitation typically addresses an aesthetic representation of life, such as drama, painting or sculpture. Traditional interpretations of mimesis suggest that the poet or artist is articulating a correspondence between reality and its representation, whether in words, paint, movement or sound. But for Aristotle this is not the causal one to one correspondence of modern science, neither is it a techne in which a concrete object is produced. Mimesis is a revealing of the thematic structures of life as represented through aesthetic dimensions of harmony, rhythm and metre. The purpose is not to accurately and faithfully reproduce in detail the contours of an object, but to intentionally highlight, foreground and expand on the fundamental ideas and principles that guide and emerge from life. Aristotle explains,

> The poet being an imitator, like a painter or any other artist, must of necessity imitate one of three objects, - things as they were or are, things as they are thought or said to be, or things as they ought to be[16]

Mimesis is a generative process where the artist chooses particular values to guide their work. They may hold a value of correspondence to represent things as they are; they may have a linguistic or discursive point of departure, or they can be creative and forward-looking. In either case, the artist seeks to imagine then generate a world of experience that uncovers the broad themes of life by bringing them to the foreground; highlighting and expanding them. As a form of poiesis mimesis extends beyond the concrete and material aspects of what is observed or experienced to capture its potential. For example, the different literary forms of comedy and tragedy have a responsibility to represent social life but in a way that highlights different themes emergent in life "For comedy aims at representing men as worse, tragedy as better than actual life."[17] There is no sense that mimesis is concerned with a one to one, causal or objective representation of social life. It is an aesthetic representation in which certain aspects of social life are transformed in an effort to highlight the ideas, themes and values that can be extracted from life.

> But whatever his media, the maker aims, by the application of rational method, to bring something into being, and in the case of the mimetic arts this is, if successful, a unified construction which must be comprehended as embodying a possible reality.[18]

In an ethnographic poiesis, Mimesis and techne generate different aspects of everyday life: Mimesis the aesthetic dimensions and techne the more practical and utilitarian aspects. In the case of the ethnographer poet, individual and social activities are not simply interpreted and represented they are manufactured into existence.

Ethnography as Mythopoetics

As a form of poiesis, ethnography is the creation of the essences and limits of the human condition through techniques and strategies of inquiry that ultimately become ethnographic narratives. It is important to understand these narratives as something more than stories that are entertaining or informative and that actually merge the reader and the author into a shared context that forms the particular rules, limits and regularities of the world and the way it can be. Ethnography, then, is a mythopoiesis.

Timothy Leonard and Peter Willis define mythopoiesis as the active construction of stories and narratives that "give us a place to stand in this world"[19] by activating the imagination within an ethical

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[16] Halliwell, Stephen. *Aristotle's Poetics*. (Chicago, Il: The University of Chicago Press, 1998): 56

[17] Aristotle, Poetics pg. 47

[18] Aristotle Poetics pg. 56

[19] Leonard, Timothy & Willis Peter. "Chapter 1: Introduction". In T. Leonard & P. Willis (Eds.). *Pedagogies of Imagination: Mythopoetic Curriculum in Educational Practice*, p 2. (Houten, Netherlands: Springer, 2008)

movement to define and provide meaning to our place in the world. In this sense, a myth is more than a narrative or a story and is the employment of signs (language, artifacts, bodies) in the generation of a place not yet, or a space other than but intimately connected to the here and now. In a Mythopoetics ethnography is the creation of a new mythos that can guide and focus the creative work of the ethnographer to the constitution of new social forms.

Within the context of poetic generation, myths generate life-worlds that acquire an importance for human existence stretching into the realm of the imaginal and the fantastic. A place, then, is more than just a geography or a location and is generated at the intersection of experience, imagination, and the human condition. There is something distinctly concrete and corporeal about the places that myths create. A myth begins with the ethical and cosmological context of human existence to form a particular place that exists across dimensions of space and time. Myths are "emplaced," meaning that knowledge and story place people within a particular geography. Story, people and geography co-emerge into a place as it could be[20]. In myth, place is much more than a geography that exists outside human consciousness and crosses the boundary between past, present, and future; between self and world, and between external and internal forms of life experience. Myths generate a geography where "our life experiences on a purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive."[21] Mythopoiesis is a generative activity co-creating the life-worlds of consciousness and the material conditions of experience.

The ethnographer poet does not just create poems that represent some aspect of their research, nor does she engage in a more poetic style of writing to represent what they have observed. Instead, the ethnographic process as a whole constitutes a place. The ethnographer as poet is implicated in the co-emergence of the place through experiences with the people, geographic features and artifacts of the place. Place is constituted through a dwelling within a location, in which consciousness, location, artifacts, social interactions, objects, conversations etc. (the stuff of the ethnographic project) are integrated into a whole. A place is an emergence: A constantly transforming whole that is something different than the sum total of all its elements. It is equal parts corporeal, ideational and spiritual.

It is clear that the ethnographer does not mechanically reproduce or mimic a particular place or its lived experience. The ethnographer poet wills themselves and the context into a particular kind of existence through their explorations. In one sense the presence of the ethnographer changes the patterns of lived experience simply by inserting themselves into a situation. An example from one of my favorite ethnographies brings this concern into stark relief. In "Never in Anger an ethnography of Inuit life" by Jean Briggs (1970) the author details a particular experience within the tribal setting she is researching that highlights how her presence changed the lived dynamic of the people. Not long after arriving in the village the author observed an incident in which a neighboring group borrowed then broke a canoe. The author reacted to this in what she called a "mild display of anger". As a result of her emotional "outburst" she was ostracized by the group. Rather than give up the study the author chose to detail how this incident changed the social dynamics of the group and their relationship to her. She describes "incidents that awakened me to the intensity of the irritation I aroused."[22] The author's presence and her actions created an emotional intensity in the group that may have otherwise not occurred. She was making the social dynamic not just describing it.

While the ethnographer's lived experience within a social setting makes that social setting into something particular, the outcome and the writing also manufactures the place. For example, at the beginning of the book, the author does a bit of writing that is very common in ethnography that I call the insertion story. Here the author describes how they become part of the environment and the cultural group that will constitute the study. Briggs describes her first encounter with the environment where she would be living for the next 18 months,

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[20] Weiner, James. "Afterword". In A. Ramsey, J. Weiner (Eds.) *Emplaced Myth*. (Honolulu, Hi: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001). 1-18.

[21] Campbell, Joseph. *The Symbol Without Meaning*. San Anselmo, Ca.: The Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2013): 5

[22] Briggs, Jean. *Never in Anger: Portrait of an Eskimo Family*. (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1971): 196

> Flurries of snow had fallen for a week or more already, and the ground crunched frozenly, though it was only August. Would I be able to survive the arctic winter without benefit of any of the accoutrements of civilization[23]?

The author is not just objectively describing a context she is generating a myth of the place as cold, inhospitable and even dangerous. Moreover, she contrasts the environment as something other than civilization continuing a trope that is common throughout ethnography and its precursor ethnology. As the author transforms her experience in the material place into a symbolic representational place, she and the place co-emerge as the material and representational place fold into one another. The identity of the author and the identity of the place become inseparable.

Whether in every-day lived experience or in the writing process the ethnographer slowly generates the intersection of self and the place of inquiry. What these emergences accomplish is a mythopoiesis of our social relationships and our relationship to our environments. In a mythopoiesis, the place is poetically generated and integrated through interlocking layers of experience, story and meaning. In the mythopoetic construction of place, the ethnographer is unable to establish the transcendental observer as the objective voice of reason that tells an authentic story. Instead, it is the "mutual dialogical production of a discourse."[24] It is important to note that I consider discourse in the Foucauldian tradition in which it is the source of emergence of an object. For example, the discourses that form the Clinic allow the clinic to emerge as a particular kind of object with particular boundaries and parameters[25]. The discourse brings the object into existence, establishes its limits and defines its inner regularity[26] (Foucault, 1972). The ethnographer poet lives, works and produces enmeshed in the relationships of people, places, artifacts, ideas and discourses that constitute the inquiry. Together they form an emergence: a collective set of relationships that exhibits characteristics that are other than the sum of the parts.

The ethnographer poet calls social systems into existence through the variety of techniques and strategies that define their craft. The previous discussion theoretically considered the ways in which ethnography does more than examine and represent some social reality and is actually implicated in its creation. The next step in an ethnographic poiesis is to examine ethical imperative of putting this understanding of ethnography to work in generating a better world.

Ethnography as Utopian Transformation

The purpose of understanding ethnography and the ethnographer poet as the poetic generator of place is to refocus the purpose of ethnography from describing social reality to the generation of a better world. In many ways ethnography is the perfect place for such a project. As I indicated at the beginning of the article, ethnography as a field has come to a realization that the practice of ethnography does not necessarily participate in a rationally inductive process that yields a rigidly defined objective understanding of a social reality. The aesthetic and literary demands of unveiling the truth of complex social systems require attention to the silences and the profound entanglements of human sociality. In another sense, ethnography must intentionally refocus its efforts. Now that ethnography is implicated in the production of places, I would argue that the field has an ethical commitment to generating space and places of human flourishing. In some ways, ethnography has taken this task to heart already. Critical ethnography, for example, has argued that the field must pay attention to issues of oppression, and it must be part of a social justice agenda. This requires that the ethnographer be intentional in how they focus their research and their writing foregrounds and highlights the relationships of power that constitute a social setting. Soyini Madison (2012) argues that

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[23] Jean, Briggs. *Never in Anger: Portrait of an Eskimo Family*. p. 17

[24] Tyler, Stephen. "From Document of the Occult Document to Occult Document." In
      J. Clifford, G. Marcus (Eds.) (*Writing Culture*. Berkeley, Ca.: University of Berkley
      Press, 1986): 126

[25] Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*. (New York: Vintage, 1991).

[26] Foucault, Michel. *Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. (New York: Random House,
      1972).

ethnography should be in the service of fomenting social change and should be conducted based on a commitment to changing oppressive social conditions. She states that the researcher, in seeing oppressive conditions, "feels an ethical obligation to make a contribution to changing those conditions."[27] Ethnography should be about changing the world and making it a better place.

My argument is this article has been devoted to making a case for a perspective in which ethnography takes the next step. Rather than unveiling social problems or having a commitment to changing the world, ethnography is to be for the purpose of actually generating a better world into existence. My previous analysis has shown that, in fact, ethnography actually generates a place into existence, and my stance is that the ethnographer poet must approach their work intentionally for the purpose of generating a place conducive to human flourishing. Ethnography can no longer just be about representing social reality, no matter how complex poetic or aesthetic that representation may be, the ethnographer poet must be compelled to the next step.

Imagining and working towards a better world is a utopian endeavor and ethnography must embrace a utopian outlook. Utopia or utopia thinking is too often associated with the creation of an image of what society must be then followed to completion. This was never the intent or purpose of the original conception of Utopia described in the book written by Thomas More in 1516. Instead, Utopia was conceived as a playful conversation about the meaning and purpose of democratic governance.[28] More intended that Utopia foment conversation and debate about the best ways for a society to govern themselves. It was essentially a political statement in favor of democratic political processes.[29] Later scholarly work on utopia highlighted and foregrounded utopia as a method for generating democratic dialogue about the kind of society we, as a society, would like to see unfold.[30] Utopia assumes that we must intentionally work toward the kind of society we want to be part of. Otherwise, we do nothing more than "succumb to the dreams of the powerful."[31]

How might such a utopian perspective be put into practice in the work of the ethnographer poet? I believe that there are at least three strategies that can be taken. One is to intentionally focus attention on existing social settings that can be considered examples of an alternative form of social life. The second is to poetically reimagine a social setting so that it acquires the values and forms of life conducive to human flourishing, and third is an imaginative speculative ethnography of a world to be. In the following discussion, I will provide an example of each strategy.

Marinaleda as Present Day Utopia

In the heartland of the Spanish region known as Andalusia is nestled a village whose name, Marinaleda, some use in place of Utopia. The story of Marinaleda is detailed in the book, "The Village Against the World" by Dan Hancox (2013). When the author decided to write about the village, it had been described in a tourist brochure as a 'communist utopia of revolutionary farm laborers". Marinaleda is a small village that had been economically ravaged by the global economic crisis of 2008. Since then, workers in the village have engaged in a persistent and ever-present revolution to maintain ownership of the land and their own labor. In Marxist terminology, the workers cooperative has eliminated alienated labor. The workers, who were once marginalized in the political, cultural and economic functioning of the village are now at the center of life and decision making.

The author is clear in describing the advantages of the social, economic, and political system that is run by the workers. He states that in 2012, "Only 5 percent of the village working age population are unemployed, as compared to the 40-50% in the rest of Spain."[32] The low unemployment coupled with

[27] Madison, Soyini. *Critical Ethnography. Method, Ethics and Performance*. (Newbury Park, Ca: Sage 2011): 5

[28] Hayes, Michael & Marino, Matthew. "Utopia: An Imaginative, Critical and Playful Dialogue on the Meaning and Purpose of Contemporary Education." *The Journal of Elearning and Digital Media*, 2015,12(3-4): 327-342.

[29] Goodwin, Barbara & Taylor, Keith. *Politics of Utopia: A Study in Theory and Practice*. (New York: St. Martins, 1982).

[30] Levitas, Ruth. *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society*. (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2013).

[31] Haiven, Max & Khasnabish, Alex. *The Radical Imagination*. (London: Zed Books, 2014)

[32] Hancox, Dan. *The Village Against the World*. (London: Verso, 2013): Location 1201.

the autonomy and authority to make important decisions in the village has created a communal solidarity anchored by a shared dignity;

> the solidarity of struggle binds people together in an almost ineffable way through a shared experience, a shared goal, shared risks and hardships. Combine this with the comradeship of working together on a project which is the spoils of your struggle, and you have a loyalty greater than the sum of the parts.[33]

The author does not gloss over the difficulties of life in the village; farm labor is hard work, day in and day out, and there is a constant struggle against the government and neoliberal globalization to maintain their ways. A Utopia is not a leisured paradise, it is, instead, based on the flourishing of human dignity, self-worth and autonomy.

The story of Marinaleda is an example of how the ethnographic tradition can be intentionally directed at representing examples of social settings that offer real alternatives for how we would like to live. The author employed the concept of utopia throughout the book to reference the daily struggles of village life, holding Marinaleda as an example of a possible world.

Big Red and the Reimagination of Place

In an ethnography of an urban space, "Life in Big Red" by Dwight Conquergood (1991), the author describes a dilapidated tenement building in a Chicago neighborhood often referred to as "Little Beirut" because of the levels of ongoing violence. Big Red is one of those places that is colloquially referred to as the 'ghetto' or 'the projects' with all of the attendant racist connotations of poverty, violence and a daily struggle to survive. Conquergood offers an unflinching assessment of Big Red and its attendant social and economic conditions, yet his descriptions of everyday life reimagined the social relationships of the tenement in terms of human flourishing. Overall, he suggests that "Big Red was an extraordinarily pleasant place and human place to live because of the densely interlaced kin and friendship networks."[34] The human social relationships he describes are of an extended family who could always count on each other for support and assistance. In one instance two kids from the neighborhood come up to him, look in the grocery bag he is carrying, and take out two yoghurts. He is unfazed and acknowledges, "there was no need to ask for the food. The nature and history of our relationship enabled them to assume this relationship"[35]. The point of his story was to describe the nature of the kin like reciprocity that is available in this space. Later, he then describes an interaction two days later when the kids are in a car with an 'Assyrian male' who pulls over and offers him some of his shake. For Conquergood, this is an example of the "significant kindnesses and richly nuanced reciprocities."[36] (pg. 127) of life in Big Red.

For others researching places like Big Red or other urban spaces, the focus is on violence, drugs, poverty and racism. Conquergood wants to show the reader a different idea of what these spaces are like and what they can offer as a form of lived experience. Against what have become commonplace images of decayed urban space and their attendant social problems, Conquergood is participating in the poetic reimagining of a dilapidated urban tenement as a kind of oasis of generous and caring human social relationships and bonds. Big Red, rather than being a bourgeois nightmare is the neighborhood where we would like to live.

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[33] Dan Hancox. *The Village Against the World*. Location 1215.

[34] Conquergood, Dwight. *Life in Big Red: Struggles and Accommodation in a Chicago Polyethnic Tenement.* Working papers/ *Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research.* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1991): 124

[35] Dwight Conquergood. *Life in Big Red: Struggles and Accommodations in a Chicago Polyethnic Tenement.* 124

[36] Dwight Conquergood. *Life in Big Red: Struggles and Accommodations in a Chicago Polyethnic Tenement.* 127

An Imaginative and Speculative Ethnography of Schooling in a Post Alienated Labor World

In this final example, I describe a project I had recently completed.[37] I call it an imaginative speculative ethnography because I am imagining the nature of education at a future time. This future moment is marked by a shift in the economy such that technological advances will eliminate many forms of work. People will no longer be required to work and they will be able to effectively choose the kind of activity they would like to participate in. This can include multiple forms of leisure activities and/or work. Education will no longer be required to serve as an institution of social reproduction preparing a population for alienating work. The neoliberal ideologies that have formed contemporary education through a regime of testing and policies of accountability will give way to other possibilities. What, then, can education become in this new economic milieu?

Drawing from theories of Utopia and the imaginal[38], I argue that education will diversify and become many different things. An imaginative utopian method fosters diverse educational imaginations rather than a singular model. In a post alienated labor world, we will not participate in one kind of education but many that can satisfy a diverse range of needs. We have already seen the rise of informal learner activated education through the internet that includes YouTube, facebook and twitter, and the more formal, but choice driven MOOC's and educational platforms such as Wikiversity, Udacity and Coursera. What we call school can be further fractured from its base as formal academically driven schools to the autonomous Sudbury model or Democratic Schools. There can be the expansion of experientially-based on the job educational apprenticeships and internships and many more. Rather than one purpose and one choice educational alternatives will proliferate.

In a utopia, the purpose is not to describe a model to be pursued but to offer a method for engaging in a democratic conversation about the nature and purpose of a future world. As with More's original intention for writing Utopia, an imagined educational utopia would be the centerpiece of democratic debate, decision-making and action that could create a shared understanding and a 'fused horizon' about the nature and purpose of education.

The examples I have provided here show the different ways in which the ethnographer poet calls these places into existence. They are not just describing a particular geography or specific set of social relationships they are generating them into existence through ethnographic practice. The authors intentionally choose to imagine and bring into existence the place of their inquiry in an effort to make a better world. Each of the authors intended that their work would be aspirational, that is, it would lead to a rethinking of the nature of these places and what these places can say about our connected life on the planet. Through the whole of the ethnographic process, these places emerge into the democratic imagination as a provocation to see the world for what it can become rather than what it is. They are the new mythos for the generative becoming of a better world.

Conclusion

In this article, I have engaged in an inquiry into the nature of the ethnographer poet. The term ethnographer poetic I take as a strategic provocation that requires rethinking the very foundation of what ethnography is and what it seeks to accomplish. The poet is not simply someone who engages in a form of representation but works through poiesis as a creator, generator or producer of a place. The poet transforms ethnography from a representational form of inquiry into a generative poetics of place. It is the generation of the place in which we would choose to dwell.

Unfortunately, we are all aware of the dystopic and sick versions of the future that populate the media. We seem stuck in narrow dystopic visions of what our society could be[39]. New myths are required that

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[37] Hayes, Michael. "Education as Utopian Method: Reimagining Education for a Post Alienated Labor World." In M. Peters, P. Jandric, A. Means (Eds.) *Education and Technological Unemployment*. (Singapore: Sage Publications, Forthcoming)

[38] Bottici, Chiara. *Imaginal Politics: Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014)

[39] Hedges, Chris. *The World as it is: Dispatches from the Myth on Progress*. (New York: Nation Books, 2013).

can help us to envision and work toward a society that is hopeful, abundant, vibrant and just. Ethnography can be brought into the service of creating such myths. The Ethnographer Poet calls into existence the power and beauty of our conjoined lived experiences on the planet in a teleopoiesis across space and time. She does so by poetically generating these places in the present and offering them as gifts to a time not yet.

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