

Paper

UTOPIAN IMAGINATION IN ACTIVISM

Making the case for social
dreaming in change from the grassroots.

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Abstract

Social, economic, and environmental inequalities are becoming ever starker. Unrest grips certain areas of the world incidentally, but no structured and promising movement beyond neoliberal capitalism is on the horizon. The status quo is consolidated as the only alternative. Grassroots activists working towards better worlds are often put in their place for being utopian, thus unrealistic. Therefore, much of today's activism is rooted in an anti-stance working towards little reforms to prevent the worst. Is there any hope? This research aims to uncover whether or not utopian imagination (UI) could be one option leading in a new direction and subsequently how this imagination could be fostered. After reviewing and analysing the existing literature, a qualitative survey with activists was conducted. The findings suggest that while conceptions of a better world motivate and inform activism they are often hidden and rarely fostered or used in a structured way. Activists mostly see a high value and many benefits in UI. Only a few manageable negative side-effects were discovered. A multitude of tools for fostering UI was compiled from the findings. It became clear, however, that beyond fostering the imagination there is the need for a framework to translate visions into actions and transformation. Prefiguration, story-telling, and popular education are promising concepts and open the space for further research.



Illustration 1: A Wordle of the 80 most used words in the thesis without 'respondent'.

1 Introduction: There is no alternative?

Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand. (Albert Einstein)

There is no alternative. TINA. Thatcher's narrative and the idea of Fukuyama's 'end of history' and their modern actualizations have permeated the fabric of western society throughout, including members of social movements. It closes down our minds to merely think along that what is, finding it harder and harder to imagine that what could be. This has also influenced the way activists do activism, leading to mostly resistance based, reactionary approaches to activism using a fixed set of old tactics. At the same time, neoliberal capitalism has survived its heaviest crisis and emerged even stronger, despite all the efforts activists have put into affecting change. Is neoliberalism just too intelligent and too powerful for any resistance to be successful or is there a need to revise activist strategies and tactics?

Most activists' actions are motivated by the rejection of how a certain aspect of life is at the moment, or by protecting a current state from a change that might lead to an even worse situation, inspired by the thought that a better world is possible. Therefore they try to exert influence on "policy, institutional and organizational systems, or cultural norms" (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 8), especially for those who do believe that the problems are rooted in the foundation of the system. However, as Reinsborough (2010, p. 70) says "people will only go someplace they have already been in their mind". This shows the importance of continual imagination towards a new narrative, a new vision for a post-capitalist order in a collective process. In the last forty years, it has become more important for many activists to create the wished for social norms and values in the here and now, mainly in their internal processes, an aspiration called *prefiguration* (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, pp. 9–11).

Drawing from and combining the ideas of utopianism (Levitas, 2010, 2007b; Sargisson 2007; Jacobs, 2007) and radical imagination (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2010, 2014; Khasnabish & Haiven, 2012) this research uses the concept of utopian imagination:

Utopian Imagination is something we *do* together, envisioning and working towards a better future that is radically, from its roots, different to the present. Utopian Imagination grows by bringing conflicts and differences into the open, leading to multiple, rough, and fussy ideas of how things could be better. It serves to give direction, inspire, and mobilise to action. It can be seen as a dynamic process of small steps, of trying out and leaning into with constant re-evaluation of values, horizons, and directions.¹

The aim of this research is to explore utopian imagination as one method to make

1 This definition was compiled by the author and used in the survey.

changes more likely, and to provide movement actors with any learning gained. By doing so it will hopefully contribute to the ability of movement actors to incorporate utopian imagination into their practices and lead towards a narrative of 'There are many alternatives (TAMA)'. Therefore, this research set out to explore the following questions:

1. *To what extent does utopian imagination play a role in activism?*
2. *What is the state of utopian imagination in activism?*
3. ***Is utopian imagination beneficial or detrimental for activism?***
4. *How could utopian imagination be fostered?*

These questions were explored by conducting qualitative surveys with activists as well as a literature review. For the purpose of this paper, the focus will lie on exploring the benefits and detriments of utopian imagination. The other aspects are only mentioned briefly, and can be found for detailed exploration in the full thesis² on which this paper is based.

In the following chapter this research will be placed in context by exploring what it could mean for activist research that is itself a project of prefiguration, creating insurrectionary knowledge in solidarity and with relevance to activists. This is followed by a short description of the methodology of the research. After a brief literature review, the findings of the survey are presented. Subsequently, the findings are analysed and discussed exploring the implications for theory and practice of utopian imagination. The paper ends with a conclusion and outlook for further research and action.

2 Prefiguring activist research

“Be realistic. Demand the impossible!” (Wallslogan, Paris, 1968, cited in Moylan, 1986, p. 15)

Being the project of an activist-researcher, this research tries to challenge power and knowledge as it is usually re-produced in academia, producing information that is of value to “struggles for collective liberation” (Luchies, 2015, p. 524). In order to do that, Luchies (2015, p. 524) proposes ethics of *relevance*, *anti-oppression*, and *prefiguration* which this thesis aspires to follow. This research is relevant to and beneficial for the advance of theory and practice of social movements. Further, results were made accessible to movement actors³. As prefigurative research this paper aims to shift the focus away from understanding movements towards imaginative activism that contributes to radical imagination (Khasnabish & Haiven, 2012, p. 411) and social

2 <https://ggnetwork.blackblogs.org/fostering-radical-imagination/>

3 The location of this information was communicated to participants in the invitation to the survey. It can now be found at: <https://ggnetwork.blackblogs.org/fostering-radical-imagination/>

change.

Locating this research within a postmodern ontology helps to question power and knowledge, contesting what 'truth' and 'reality' really are. How people think about things becomes highly relevant when reality is “co-created by mind” and by the environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 102; Lincoln & Guba, 2005, p. 195). The imagination of what *could* be can play a big part in making the wishes come true. This suggests that those forms of activism which are mostly concerned with countering the perceived negative aspects in society might be reproducing exactly those aspects which they set out to oppose. According to Heron & Reason (1997), there are four aspects of knowledge in a postmodern frame: “experimental, presentational, propositional, and practical” (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 103). This research concerns itself with the propositional form of knowledge with the aim to propose why it is relevant to concern ourselves as activists with the conscious re-production of society using utopian imagination. This doesn't devalue other approaches to activism or to a conscious re-production of social environments.

The research starts with a literature review focused on defining and learning lessons for utopian imagination as a strategy for social change, including the benefits and potential dangers. As most of the literature is based on and revolving around utopia in fiction and theory, the review was combined with consultation of activists. An online qualitative-survey focused on the research questions was designed using a data and privacy conscious open source provider⁴, while leaving space for any other thoughts people wanted to share. No meta-data such as location was recorded.

The survey was sent to two activist friends for testing⁵. The revised form of the questionnaire was sent out in personal emails to 27 activist friends spread over Europe and partly followed up with face-to-face conversations. Additionally, it was sent to the Galway Grassroots⁶ email list (about 50 subscribers), an email list of about 20 anarchists in Ireland, and to an anarchist activist email list centred in Europe with a few situated beyond all over the world (about 400 subscribers, some of which represent groups with an unknown number of members). Additionally, survey respondents were asked to forward the invitation for the survey to email lists and/or activist friends of theirs (a snowballing approach). In the two weeks that the survey was available, 38 people visited it, 21 of them leaving complete responses, 8 people leaving incomplete responses and 9 leaving no responses at all.⁷

The survey responses were analysed using a thematic analysis following an approach

4 The open source platform used was LimeSurvey (available at <http://www.limesurvey.com>) using their hosting platform LimeService (available at <https://www.limeservice.com/en/>).

5 Some of the responses were used as well and are accordingly labelled.

6 About Galway Grassroots Network: <https://ggnetwork.blackblogs.org/about/>

7 The answers of respondents are given using the ID the survey software assigned to them. No meta-data on the respondents was collected.

adopted by Savin-Baden & Major (2013, pp. 439–440). Certain limitations and difficulties emerged from the research design that was chosen for this study. In alignment with the ontology and epistemology, no certain 'truth' could and wanted to be found. Further, the scope of replies could be limited and biased pro utopian imagination. The findings cannot be generalised to a higher level but do indeed provide insight into what activists think which has some theoretical universality.

3 Learning from utopian studies

“Things are too urgent now to be giving up on our imagination”. (Morris cited in Giroux, 2014, p. 105)

Activists are often dismissively confronted with word 'utopian' when they fight for the betterment of certain aspects. This research aims to reclaim the word utopian, promote a new, positive understanding of it, and use it boldly to promote ideas and emphasise that change is possible. Both critiques and praise of utopianism and the lessons learned are briefly named below.

Author's who have voiced critique about the utopian method such as Popper, Schapiro, Fukuyama, Marx, Arendt, and Dahrendorf serve as learning ground to draw conclusions informing a utopian activist practice. Among others, these aspects can be found in the literature: Distraction from urgent work (Arendt, 1998; Fitting, 2007; Sargisson, 2007), diversion of transformative energy (Moylan, 2007; Sargent, 2007), perfectionism (Popper as quoted in Levitas, 2007b; Popper, 1966), closure (Moylan, 2007), and ideological fixation (Dahrendorf, 1958) as well as authoritarianism (Schapiro, 1972). It became clear that the argument mainly is based on a hidden utopian project for (neo)liberalism which turned into an established ideology (Goodwin, 1980; Paden, 2000).

Working towards an activist utopianism and reclaiming the word utopian in a positive sense can lead to using dreams to energize practices, and support them with hope and direction. Making sure energy is directed accurately and avoiding closure and control keeps any project open to dissent, change, and adaptation.

Most of those who write and think positively about utopianism go back to the original writings of Bloch (1959) and Polak (1973). Utopianism is seen as necessary for change (Sargent, 2007; Strasinger, 2010a; Geras (2000) and can be used to pull the future into the here-and-now with thoughts and dreams⁸ (Bloch cited in Gunn, 1987; Gunn 1987; Polak cited in Sargent, 1982). It can further function to show alternatives and give

8 This claim is very closely related to the idea of Law of Attraction which has become more popular on the personal level in forms of self-help books. Combining the ideas of Polak and Bloch seems to suggest that this will work on the collective level as well. One definition of the Law of Attraction: “I attract to my life whatever I give my attention, energy and focus to, whether positive or negative.” (Losier, 2012, p. 12) See for example 'The secret' (Byrne, 2006). See also the film with the same name (<http://www.theseecret.tv>).

direction for achieving change (McManus, 2007; Goodwin, 1980; Sargent, 1982; Geras, 2000). Hopes, dreams, and visions are central aspects for motivation and for inspiration (Sargent 1982; Hobbes cited in Gunn, 1987; Bloch, n.d.; Albert & Hahnel paraphrased in Moylan, 1986; Grossman, 2006).

Further, utopianism can serve to raise consciousness and empower people, supporting the necessary step to move from imagination to transformation (Geras, 2000; Zikode, 2006; Levitas, 2010). Utopianism can also be used as a tool to avoid accidentally perpetuating current oppressive structures (Gloria Anzaldua cited in Strasinger, 2010a; Maria Lugones cited in Strasinger, 2010a; Strasinger, 2010a).

Attention needs to be paid to transforming the utopian thoughts into utopian actions, to alter the social matter in the general direction of utopia. As Sargent (1982) argues, one of the potential downsides of utopianism is exactly the fact that transformation away from the status quo gets forgotten and all “practical difficulties” of the change are ignored (Sargent, 1982, pp. 580, 583). That should not mean reducing the utopian strivings to the possible or realistic but concerning oneself with potential pathways. A strong concept for that is prefiguration. By transforming ideals into means, the achievable can be tested on small scale and can be continuously adapted.

4 What activists say

“We must do and think the impossible.” (Derrida cited in Giroux, 2014, p. 105)

Participants were asked to provide three words to describe the world they are trying to create through their activism. These were processed⁹ and a tagcloud was produced using Wordle¹⁰ as an unscientific method that nicely illustrates a snapshot of the most common values expressed by participants¹¹.

9 Some words have been combined, as they can be seen as holding similar meaning: free-dom, just-ice, equal-ity, peace-ful

10 <http://www.wordle.net/create>

11 Two annotations were removed in the processing:

“free (in all senses of that word...)” (Respondent 1 (tester))

“Freetogether (i.e. free, but not in the individualist, consumerist sense, rather in a more collective together sense of free)” (Respondent 33)



Illustration 2: Wordle of values

In the following, the findings of the survey are reported in accordance to the questions that were asked and structured along the themes that emerged as well as those anticipated through the literature review.¹²

4.1 The state of UI in activism

Some respondents put their statements on the state of the utopian imagination in the context of what they think the state of activism in general is. According to Respondent 43, activists “lack hope”, “work on auto-pilot” and “can't imagine a different reality”. Respondent 23 adds that activists are afraid to mention, let alone act on, their ideals:

“Imaginations might seem very far out from what is today, so people don't dare go act out with it a lot” (Respondent 23).

Furthermore, “activism will never solve the problems it claims to attempt to solve, but essentially depends on for fuel” (Respondent 33). Some respondents describe a situation of activism at the moment as being reactive:

I have the impression that many activists are very concentrated on what is wrong about the status quo and what to do against that. (Respondent 15)

12 Divergence from common spelling was left in the original form.

The state of UI in activism

In the last years we constantly were forced more to defend than to extend our possibilities. (Respondent 24)

Looking at the extent of use of utopian imagination in activism, many respondents did make clear that they can only talk about the utopian imagination in their limited experience of activism. One person reported too much imagination in “the ultra radical left, or anarchism” (Respondent 6) and two people (Respondent 8 and 26) stated that they were quite happy with its extent at the moment and that it exists widely:

Utopian imagination plays a big role in the activism I have part taken in and experienced so far. (Respondent 26)

Three respondents (15, 23, 25) acknowledge the existence of utopian imagination but state that it is enveloped in silence:

Although i believe that most activists have their idea of how things should be better [...] people's different utopias aren't discussed so much. (Respondent 15)

Eight persons stated that there is little utopian imagination. For example:

Limited! Activism has either been hijacked through the government funding of NGOs or limited in a narrow window of political possibility, even in the left. (Respondent 18)

Five people stated that there is little imagination connected with the need for more. For example:

I think it could be used much more. (Respondent 9)

4.2 Benefits of UI for activism

The respondents reported a wide array of ways how UI could benefit activism. From bringing people into activism through emotional support and giving direction, the findings suggest that people see it as a worthwhile endeavour.

Some influence on potential activists was mentioned: it can serve in “getting people politically active and engaged” (Respondent 8), it can “arouse” (Respondent 18), it can “broaden horizons and highlight how constructed and normalised a lot of the organisation of life on this planet is” (Respondent 22) as well as “enlighten [and] inspire” (Respondent 40).

Some respondents stress that there are certain emotional benefits related to utopian imagination. It can support “psychological satisfaction” (Respondent 5), it can “give social and spiritual strength ... to change world, first in our minds and hearts ... [and] allow us to continue to think that we will make it, it is possible” (Respondent 19). Respondent 24 states that it “trains the brain to imagine a time after revolution :-)”. It can further “create desire” (Respondent 9) and give “energy” (Respondents 17, 23) and

“motivation” (Respondent 17).

Four respondents see UI playing a big role in motivating and driving activism: it is the “main driving force and main motivator for activism” (Respondent 26), it can “remind ourselves there's something worth fighting for” (Respondent 43). Respondent 39 shows interest in “how it can play a role in keeping the sparks that originally drove one into activism not just glowing but also bursting into flame.” Two respondents stress the importance of hope and of dreaming: “it can bring hope” (Respondent 43) and that “if we don't dream about it, it won't get reality. it's like che guevaras quote 'Let's be realistic, demand the impossible'. try to get 150% and you will get 100%.” (Respondent 24).

Eight respondents stress the function of UI to give struggles a goal and direction (Respondents 5, 8, 9, 18, 21, 25, 33, 41). For example:

It can be very powerful when there's a bigger amount of people imagining the same or a similar future [...] because then, there's so much energy created to pursue this aim that it is more likely to become true. (Respondent 9)

Utopian imagination could help provide the goal or the "for" part as juxtaposed to the "anti" part of activism. [...] While utopian imagination can help focus on DIRECTION, it too doesn't necessarily focus on the "PROCESS". Process is as important as goal in many cases. (Respondent 33)

Three respondents mention that UI is not only about a goal, but also about the means: “it help to try things out, to change them in practice, creating pockets of change within society from time to time” (Respondent 23). Respondent 25 points out that UI also manifest “in how we do it - in the way we treat eachother, we talk to eachother, we live together... creating the utopia we envision for the world in our own small contexts”. Respondent 22 adds that it could empower people if visions “were enriched by concrete little steps”.

4.3 Detrimental effects of UI on activism

One respondent rejects utopianism, as they understand it, in principle. Speaking about the “ultra radical left, or anarchism”, Respondent 6 thinks of utopian imagination as ideologically closed:

Utopian thinking dominates to a point of blindness and inertia. There is a constant reiteration of how we want the world to be [...], whilst ignoring how the world currently is and [...] an avoidance of tactical and strategic thinking, and a 'if you don't agree with our style of thinking and philosophy almost instantly, go fuck yourself.' [...] It is [...] mostly concerned with its own egotistical survival and [...] it fails to account for real, tangeable, material inequalities that people face. [...] The focus should be on short term gains that we can actually achieve rather than blind, repetitive rhetoric that never amounts to anything. [...] the means must be strategically considered in terms of *how society works now* rather than how we want it to work in the future [...]. (Respondent 6)

Detrimental effects of UI on activism

Some respondents offered their opinions on potential dangers or problems with utopian imagination: Respondent 17 sees the risk that “stronger voices can dominate the direction of a vision” Respondent 5 warns that it might be dangerous to “compare it [the image] too rough with what we live in; and expect it to change to radically and on a big scale [...]”. Such things lead to burn-out and seeing no meaning in activism.”

Another detriment that came up was the potential to distract from more important work:

Making the case for utopian thinking is a good thing to do I think, but it should be as grounded in reality as possible and any such efforts should emphasise the greater importance of actual activism work. (Respondent 8)

Other respondents, while being not fully opposed to the idea of utopianism in activism, do see the need to focus on transformation and strategic thinking.

The aim of imagining, for me, should always be to make more clear how I/we might work towards actually achieving our imagined futures. (Respondent 44)

Respondent 9 stresses the importance establishing a “link to connect [...] [thoughts and reality] and to use it to go forward”. Respondent 19 sees the detriment when “utopia becomes something only theoretical”, requiring little steps and the need that “words [...] become facts, even if they seem small” (Respondent 19). Lastly, Respondent 40 warns of the risk of “not be[ing] strategic enough to recognize the forces working against you”.

A few respondents were wondering how to turn UI into action:

I find the concept quite difficult to engage with. I can see its relevance but I am unclear how it could be 'operationalised' systemically in my activism. [...]I wonder what my activism would look like if it was really guided by an approach of utopian imagination. (Respondent 44)

Some of the respondents already ventured some ideas on the question of application, reported in table 1.

Table 1: Tips for the application of UI

Tips for application of UI	
Application	“One of the sticking points could be the translation of imaginings that emerge into actions that engage, energise and transform.” (Respondent 39)
	“Keeping a kind of two-focused approach can help with this the big picture is held while at the same time the small steps and gains along the way are worked with and where possible celebrated.” (Respondent 39)
	“I would find it beneficial to have a framework to help me integrate utopian imagination better into my work.” (Respondent 44)

5 Discussion

*When you told me about the spark
I said it was a firefly
She said it was a rocket,
gone astray from the fireworks at the funfair
and someone murmured
from behind a dark corner
it was just the glowing eyes of a cosmic leopard,
staggering across our skies tonight
and as the blackberries ripened
at the side of the national road
and the smell of gasoline filled our nostrils*

*the answer touched down
softly on the black asphalt
neither of us understood
its language*

And left. (Respondent 22)

This research project began with one central concern in mind: how can activism become more successful? Following one possible lead, an investigation into the potential of positive thinking in the form of utopian imagination was conducted. While exploring in brief the state of activism and utopian imagination, the paper focused on the question around potential benefits and disadvantages of UI for activism, based on utopian studies and as seen in a survey of mostly anarchist activists,. Thoughts on barriers as well as tools to foster UI are also briefly mentioned.

The high participation in the survey indicates interest and enthusiasm for utopianism in activism. Most people were not familiar with the term UI but could relate to the concept with their thoughts and experiences. However, some people had the popular understanding of utopian strongly in their minds, leading to a confusion of terms or a rejection of the definition provided in the survey.

The crisis of activist imagination can be seen as an opportunity. Looking at how the respondents talk about the current state of affairs in activism leaves a bleak picture. Activists seem to be stuck loosing a defensive battle that leads to inadvertently spending energy for the further consolidation of the the status quo. However, activists think that UI is important for changing the world. While a fertile ground for UI exists in activist contexts there is the need for more place and time to foster it.

UI is a worthwhile process that can be experienced in spaces of prefiguration and community. There seems to be value in UI to leave behind habitual, purely resistance based activism towards building new strategies of change in activism. The extent to

which UI is practised in activist circles at the moment justifies efforts in introducing and improving the process more widely. Turning resistance into proactivity, prefiguration, emphasis on the sustainability of activism¹³, and a model of dual power¹⁴ could be pointing in a good direction.

5.1 The many benefits for activism

UI has a big array of benefits on activism and activists. It can bring people into activism, support optimism and positive thinking, motivate people to keep going and prevent burn-out. It can further impact the construction of the material world, point activists towards prefigurative politics and give direction through focusing on what one wants.

UI has the power to pull people into activism. The findings suggest that it can raise consciousness and awareness in a way that is more sustainable than the motivation based on rejection of present ills. This adds the additional potential, but also challenge, on how to engage people in and expose to practices of UI who are not yet activists.

UI is beneficial for motivation and hope. The findings reflect the statements of the utopian writers in many ways. It seems to supply motivation and energy that drives activists as well as create and strengthen desires and the hope that positive change is indeed possible. This can support and be supported by optimism and positive thinking. Emphasis on our thoughts and our (day-) dreams can help to pull the future into being with the power of our imaginations. In 'real' dreams at night, our mind is able to construct whole worlds with their own rules, assumptions, and functioning. I argue that the mind also has a profound impact on the 'material' world that goes beyond what can be observed as evidence.

UI can make activism more sustainable and enduring. Resistance based activism runs the high risk of burn-out and a frequent turn-over rate that makes activist circles very volatile, often enough leading to iteration of processes and to limited knowledge transfers. Some respondents see the role of UI in keeping people going through a more long term involvement and development. This keeps individuals active over long periods of time and thus allows movements and groups to evolve, learn, and grow over longer time periods. This means putting emphasis on sustainable activism and activist self-care.

UI can give activism direction. As many activists seem to be stuck in resistance and anti-stances of involvement, the utopian imagination can help create a positive pole as a balance. When fighting against one ill after another, the direction can get lost. UI can

13 See this zine on sustainable activism: <http://cre-act.net/sustainable-activism/sustainable-activism/> or this web-resource: <http://knowyourix.org/dealing-with/dealing-with-activist-burn-out-and-self-care/>

14 See also <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/scott-crow-anarchy-and-the-common-ground-collective> and <http://www.fifthestate.org/archive/390-fall-2013/mutual-aid-times-crisis-ecological-economic-political/>

serve as a tool to help activists align their actions with their visions and goals. This opens the chance for fighting against the worst present ills while making sure that strategies and tactics have the potential to go beyond resistance. For many respondents, the function of UI as giving direction to their activism seems to be a very important one.

The idea of prefiguration is the probably most concrete way forward for an activist practice of UI. What aspects of our utopian image can we actually start with in the here and now? Not only do these efforts at realising utopia provide vital lessons for learning but they also offer small steps people can do. The findings suggest that there is value in creating Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ) as described by Bey (1991, 1993). They provide spaces for experimentation and learning as well as bases for spreading new ideas and concepts. The ideas of TAZ and prefiguration are closely interlinked. The hope is that they will become more permanent and grow in diversity, size, and number. However, a future practice of UI needs to go far beyond today's understanding of prefiguration.

The idea of agency wasn't mentioned in the responses. This non-appearance suggests that activists already see themselves as agents of change. However, it could also mean that it is difficult to admit that one is being active while not believing in their own power. Is much of the activism actually limited by a disbelief in agency leading to the stuck state of activism as some respondents have described? I do think that UI has the power to help people realise that they have the ultimate agency to change and not technology, the economy, or the elites.

5.2 Limited detrimental effects

All of the potential detriments can either be used as a valuable opportunity for learning and creating best practice UI or be discarded. The process of imagining needs to be interlinked with transformation, free from oppression, transparent, and sustainable. Prefiguration is one way to show the value of UI as actual work.

The anti-utopian opinion of Respondent 6 does give good insight in the presently dominant understanding of utopian as well as in the recurring reform vs. revolution debate. While I would agree that there are certain covert restrictions on thoughts and actions in anarchist circles, this might heavily be due to a lack of imagination and to predominately resistance based tactics. At the same time the efforts that many anarchists put into projects of prefiguration do show that there are many forms of anarchism and that the experience of those circles can vary widely. I would also agree that many of the strategies and tactics should be informed by the present state of things. But that doesn't mean to be ignorant of where one wants to go in the long run or to only select those tactics that are offered by the system. This leads towards a revolution through the everyday act, be it by prefiguration or in challenging and subverting existing tactics.¹⁵

15 Such as holding a protest march, but not announcing, or even begging for permission, where the law

Limited detrimental effects

The risks of dominant voices, communication, secret agendas, and being overly self-critical need to be considered. Attention needs to be paid to who is contributing how much to visions that a group is setting themselves to avoid reproducing patterns of dominance within activist groups. There is the need for transparency and openness to avoid secret agendas. Lastly, it seems to be important to go easy on oneself. There is the risk of constant disappointment that might lead to despair and burn-out. All the energy created through UI in the first place could be lost if there is limited acceptance of seeming failure as part of success. This calls for sustainability within UI and activism to keep the energy going.¹⁶

UI is valuable and actual work. There was little evidence for the idea that activism would be distracted from its real purpose if at all or too involved with UI. However, is real activist work more important than UI? UI in the form of prefiguration plays a major part in the work of anarchist activists at the moment and also spreads increasingly into other organisations and networks who would be hesitant to call themselves anarchist. Thinking of UI as actual work might help to legitimise time and space that is spend on it.

UI and transformation need to be linked. The argument for focusing on transformation as part of utopian practice was made by a few respondents. The danger of staying in the place of pure theoretical even if artistic conceptions of utopia relates to the criticism of utopianism as mentioned in the literature review. That means nothing more than acknowledging the realities of the present moment as they are necessarily the point of departure for any transformation. Seeing UI and transformation as two ideas that are closely interlinked in a strategic concept helps to use the power that is ascribed to UI in those processes of transformation and might make them more successful.

5.3 Learning from the barriers

Looking at the barriers (see appendix) is helpful as it provides information on how to create and sustain practices of UI.

UI could play a role in approaching differences in activists' motivations, opinions, and practices in a new light and see them as something positive and something that improves activism. This is partly the case within the Global Justice Movement (GJM) where it is understood "as a resource and a value at the same time" (Teske and Tetreault as cited in Strasinger, 2010b, p. 88).

Activist self-care and sustainable activism are needed. How could UI play a role in providing the space for these very personal and subjective but also highly political processes of mental health in a collective manner? Could activists see crisis as an

might ask for it.

16 See this zine on sustainable activism: <http://cre-act.net/sustainable-activism/sustainable-activism/> or this web-resource: <http://knowyourix.org/dealing-with/dealing-with-activist-burn-out-and-self-care/>

opportunity for change, as the original Greek meaning suggests?¹⁷

5.4 A first collection of tools

A full collection of all the tools people have suggested in the survey can be found in table 2 on page 22 in the appendix. People, for example, suggested looking at utopian (science) fiction writing, to immerse oneself in any form of utopian cultural production, to make use of rituals, and to make use of reflective spaces of self-publishing, such as zines. The importance of intersectionality was also mentioned. Additionally, a lot can be learned from people and movements who are already making their steps towards concrete utopias. Meetings and workshops were a further tool that was suggested. This emphasises that UI needs to be a collective process and not something people do at home on their own. That supports the learning and the spontaneous ideas that can only emerge when creative minds share common space.

5.5 Finally, some answers

1. To what extent does utopian imagination play a role in activism?

UI plays a limited role in activism at the moment. Where it exists, it is hidden as a basic understanding that is not openly, let alone methodologically addressed. Activists see the importance of visioning processes. The wish for things to change positively forms the basis for many activists and provides fertile ground but rarely informs strategies and tactics.

2. What is the state of utopian imagination in activism?

UI is in crisis, with sparks of hope. Creativity and imagination is limited in the context of strong hegemonic conditioning through the status quo and habitual, mainly resistance based activism. Activists identified the lack of space and time as major barriers. However, prefiguration is increasingly practised and shows a path out of the crisis.

3. Is utopian imagination beneficial or detrimental for activism?

UI can have many benefits on activism and on achieving positive change. After thorough consideration of the few detriments, valuable learning can complement the many benefits such as bringing people into activism, keeping people going, and giving direction. UI can lead to more sustainable activism, support new and creative strategies and tactics, and help to re-construct the world in thoughts and action.

4. How could utopian imagination be fostered?

UI can be fostered with a wide array of tools and methods reaching from exposure to utopian literature through intersectionality and working with children to formal and

17 “Latinized form of Greek krisis 'turning point in a disease' (used as such by Hippocrates and Galen)” (http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=crisis)

informal meetings and workshops. Retreats from the status quo, systems thinking, and popular education can help break the conditioning. Getting inspired by other movements opens thought horizons. It is necessary to promote the usefulness of UI as an important and collective endeavour to facilitate the introduction of those tools.

5.6 Implications for the books

The understanding of utopia as a process was found as expected. Looking at the results more broadly in light of the theory discussed in the literature review, it becomes clear that the definitions and thoughts about what utopianism is are very much in line with what activists think about it. This might, though, be influenced by the definition given in the survey. Further research into the understanding of what utopian imagination means to activists would need to be formulated more openly. The replies by some of the respondents confirm that prefigurative politics is a concept that is used and practised without necessarily referring to the term itself. The responding activists confirmed the idea that activism is rooted in resistance and emphasised the need to go beyond the anti-stance.

None of the respondents saw any real danger in practising UI, refuting a warning that is even made by some advocates of utopianism. In terms of the potential shortcomings, the idea that utopian imagination is a distraction from real activist work did come up, confirming the theory. It is further interesting that none of the respondents spoke about the possibility of their utopia being someone else's dystopia. This could mean that activists assume that there are fundamental values that are widely shared or that the sample was not diverse enough. The idea that utopia needs or leads to perfection didn't come up, showing that this is an outdated conception of utopianism.

5.7 Implications for the streets

The findings show that there is the need to practice UI in activist contexts. The expected benefits make it worthwhile. The toolbox collected through this research project can be a good starting point for activist self-research, workshops¹⁸, and further development of the concept as well as the practice. However, it became clear that fostering utopian imagination alone is not enough. Some respondents were rightly wondering how to systematically turn UI into a practical approach for action.

How can the missing link between imagination and transformation be build? How can utopian imagination be practised by activists?

18 During the process of writing this thesis, I hosted two workshop on radical imagination. The outlines of those workshops can be found in the Appendix and can serve as a further resource.

Implications for the streets

First leads point in the direction of prefiguration^{19,20}, dual power²¹, intersectionality, popular education, and narrative story-telling²². Some of the respondents already ventured some ideas on the question of application as reported in table 1 on page 12.

What could such a framework look like? What does this mean for overall activist strategy? How can small steps of activist work be kept in orientation towards long term goals? And how could those actions be designed in a way that they support sustainability in activism?

An initial research brought up three books that could be used as a point of departure for researching this important aspect of practising utopian imagination:

- 'From anticipation to action' (Michel Godet, 1994)²³
- 'Creating Futures' (Michel Godet, 2006)²⁴
- 'Sociology of the Future' (Bell & Wau, 1971)

Lastly, activists could use the power of the mind that the Law of Attraction promises. The assertion of Polak (1973)²⁵ that imagination will lead to the future being magnetically pulled into the now is worth further consideration. Popular literature suggests that the elites of today, organised in social networks called secret societies, use this idea methodologically and constantly to achieve what they want or more so to keep things the way they already are.²⁶ They use the power to imagine together which gives more strength. Activists could systematically use the information provided in Law of Attraction resources to create the world that they want to counterbalance and eventually

19 According to Antfliff (2010), one precondition for utopian and radical imagination is an anarchist version of prefigurative democracy and “political federation” (Antfliff, 2010, p. 61), as methods of self-governance.

20 A lot was written about prefiguration in wake of the alter-globalisation movement, such as prefiguration and emotion (Brown & Pickerill, 2009), prefigurative politics in Tahrir Square (Sande, 2013), prefiguration in interpretation collectives (Baker, 2013), prefiguration and actualization (Murray, 2014), in relation to state engagement (Petray, 2012), and rethinking prefiguration (Yates, 2015), to name a few. See Boggs (n.d.) for the concept of prefigurative communism.

21 Dual Power: “resisting while building counter institutions” (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/scott-crow-anarchy-and-the-common-ground-collective.pdf>) See also a short video interview: <http://www.submedia.tv/stimulator/2016/02/17/dual-power/> & <http://www.scottcrow.org/#/interview-video-on-dual-power-transitions/>

22 Selbin (2009) writes about the role of story in achieving change. As stories can be used to tell tales from the future, they can give direction, warn, motivate and make things seem possible, affecting the ideological as well as material world. Stories can empower and connect people to work towards change together (Selbin, 2009, pp. 3, 16, 189).

23 <http://en.lapropective.fr/dyn/anglais/ouvrages/from-anticipation.pdf>

24 <http://en.lapropective.fr/dyn/anglais/ouvrages/creatingfutures2006.pdf>

25 Download the book here: <http://en.lapropective.fr/dyn/anglais/memoire/the-image-of-the-future.pdf>

26 This audio-course is allegedly based on information from secret societies: <https://archive.org/details/YourWishIsYourCommandCompleteCDAlbum>. In the audio course, this new, more publicly accessible, network was mentioned: Global Information Network (<https://ginevolve.com/>)

overbalance the mind efforts of the elites.

5.8 Directions for further research

This research provides important and valuable first insights into the power of utopian imagination for activism. What next? Many questions that need to be addressed come to mind:

How can imagination be translated into transformation? What conditions would enable activists to engage in processes of UI? Are there any concrete and successful movements, campaigns, or projects based on UI? What can be learned from intentional communities and autonomous zones around the world? How can a balance be achieved between building autonomous zones while at the same time having a wider influence beyond? Will practising utopian imagination actually make activism more successful?

Most pressing, further research into the matter of finding concrete ways of how people can transform the power and benefits of utopian imagination into real change are needed and offer exciting discoveries. For example, a group, campaign, or movement²⁷ with a positive vision that is interested in experimenting with the tools and concepts could be the basis for a long-term intensive case study aiding activist self-research. This would offer the opportunity to see how thoughts are translated into action and what impact this has on the group of activists, their well-being, the sustainability of the cause, as well as any concrete successes in relation to the vision.

6 Conclusion: There are many alternatives!

I am hopeful for the state of utopian imagination, even on this island! (Respondent 44)

This research set out to find a way to make activism more successful. After describing the situation that most activists find themselves in and stating the research questions that serve as pointers towards finding a possible solution, the research project was placed in the context of anti-oppression, prefiguration, and movement relevance. The following literature review offered crucial insights into the state of knowledge in utopian studies at the moment and provided useful lessons for utopian imagination as an activist practice. The findings from a qualitative survey conducted with over 21 activists were presented and subsequently analysed.

The research showed that the state of utopian imagination in activism is mostly bleak. But there are also aspects of it hidden in activists' lives and organising. Many activists see valuable uses in utopian imagination for their activism and for achieving change,

27 One interesting project is 'Equilibrismus e.V.' which tries to consult with small island states to establish their ideas. They aim at "a complete change of paradigm in regard to ecological and social issues", presenting "new concepts instead of reforms" (Equilibrismus e.V., n.d.). See their website for further information: <https://www.equilibrismus.org/en/>.

Conclusion: There are many alternatives!

and the detriments are light if practices are designed carefully with the risks in mind. The research provided a big collection of ideas on how imagination can be fostered in activist circles to reap the benefits of UI as an approach in activism. However, fostering the radical and utopian imagination alone can only be the first step in an activist strategy based on utopianism: there is the need to link the imagination with action and transformation.

The findings of this project legitimize the use of time for utopian imagination as part of activist practice as well as giving an array of ideas to start from. They form an important step in translating the idea of utopia from literature and other art-forms into a strategy of achieving fundamental change that can be applied by activists on the ground. Such an activist strategy based on utopian imagination could start with prefigurative internal processes of horizontality, inclusion, and empowerment. Messages and communication could focus on positive framing and alternative institutions could be created. Further, emotional spaces could be mutually supportive and power and resources redistributed. These are first starting points for groups and movements to experiment with and develop further.

The crisis of neoliberalism offers an opportunity for activists to create, live, and spread their alternative visions of the world. Projects such as the Kurdish liberation in Rojava, the unemployed workers movement in Argentina, as well as the autonomous zone of the Zapatistas in Chiapas all show that cracks in the system can be occupied with alternatives. The impact of austerity measures in Greece made way for the raise of solidarity economics. The Mondragon collective based in the Basque area shows that different forms of production and reproduction are possible. The situation looks bleak but offers so many chances and opportunities that need to be imagined and created.

There is no alternative to exploring the many alternatives. It is high time for activists to leave pure resistance once and for all behind. Enough fighting for small little reforms that strengthen the system! Let's start to build in the cracks that the status quo leaves behind. Let's get active and start creating, first in our minds and dreams – and then in the 'real' world. There are many alternatives!

7 Appendixes

7.1 ToolBox

In the table 2, all the tools that were suggested are listed and categorized as a start of a toolbox. These will be shared with activists in general and made publicly available. In table 3, tips for practice as given by the participants are recorded.

Table 2: Tools to foster the utopian imagination

Tools to foster UI	
Type	Suggestion
Artistic & Fun	Read science fiction as inspiration (Respondent 1 (tester))
	Use creative, soulful, intuitive methods (e.g. SoulCollage) ²⁸ (Respondent 17)
	Use ritual-like practices (shamanic or wicca, or...) (i.e. starhawk.org – combines activism and ritual ²⁹) (Respondent 17)
	Use more utopian art: music, poems, crafts, movie, sketch, show, etc : “We're all big children, and it's widely known, that You learn the fastest when You're having fun at the same time.” (Respondent 28)
	“The [Galway grassroots] zine ³⁰ provides a space for alternative ideas to be discusses and shared. The physical printing and distribution of the zine in the city is an important 'intervention' in the city space, opening up space for these alternatives through chance encounters” (Respondent 44)
Books & Literature: visions, eutopias, dystopias	Book “bolo'bolo” ³¹ (Respondent 23)
	Venus project ³² (Respondent 8)
	<p>“Have a booklist of utopian and dystopian books/films for sharing.ask everyone for suggestions” (Respondent 17)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fiction: '1984' (Orwell, 1949), 'Animal Farm' (Orwell, 1945), 'Brave New World' (Huxley, 1932), 'Woman on the Edge of Time' (Piercy, 1976), 'Oryx and Crake Trilogy' (Atwood, 2003, 2009, 2013) 2. Non-fiction: Starhawk³³, 'The Great Turning'³⁴ (Joanne Macy)

28 “SoulCollage is a process for accessing your intuition and creating an incredible deck of cards with deep personal meaning that will help you with life's questions and transitions.”
(<http://www.soulcollage.com/>)

29 Earth Activism: “In this workshop, we’ll use ritual, meditation, guided journeys, dance and song to connect with the deep wellsprings of inspiration that the earth offers us. We’ll explore the internal and social barriers that keep us from stepping into our full power. And we’ll work with tools and insights that can help us become more effective co-creators of the new world we must bring to birth.”
<http://starhawk.org/event/earth-activism-weekend-workshop-kressberg-germany/>

30 <https://ggnetwork.blackblogs.org/tag/zine/>

31 http://sfbay-anarchists.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/bb_3.pdf

32 “The Venus Project proposes an alternative vision of what the future can be if we apply what we already know in order to achieve a sustainable new world civilization. It calls for a straightforward redesign of our culture in which the age-old inadequacies of war, poverty, hunger, debt and unnecessary human suffering are viewed not only as avoidable, but as totally unacceptable.” -
<https://www.thevenusproject.com/>

33 Starhawk: see writings on the website, i.e. 'The City of Refuge'

ToolBox

	<p>Look at authors: Eduardo Galeano, Gustavo Esteva: video 'social movement and hope'³⁵ (Respondent 19)</p> <p>Look at writings from activist perspective of Westoby³⁶, McIntosh and Jensen, in Solnit and Griffiths (Respondent 39)</p> <p>Writings not from activist perspective who “mange to be open to possibility and share that through their writings e.g. Macfarlane, Jamie, Maitland writing about landscape, poetry and silence among other things.” (Respondent 39)</p> <p>Look at “fourfold process of transformation” (Matthew Fox³⁷)³⁸ (Respondent 39)</p>
Intersectionality	<p>“the linking of issues” (Respondent 3 (tester))</p> <p>“combining issues to have more people with similar ways of thinking together. like having a camp” (Respondent 28)</p>
Children ³⁹	<p>“Work with children” (Respondent 1 (tester))</p> <p>“Addressing young people, especially children who still have the natural ability of thinking radically. Their [UI] [...] can be preserved by working with them, learning from them and with them” (Respondent 3 (tester))</p>
Meetings	<p>“Meetings that are dedicated to just imagine together with others what we want the world to be like, being open to new action ideas” (Respondent 9)</p> <p>“Practicing UI will improve the method” (Respondent 21)</p> <p>“introduce the concept to more people and meet to practise it, brainstorm ideas and actually implement them” (Respondent 22)</p> <p>“It needs an open mind to think of a different world. And such an openness needs places and times for people to creatively think, of what could be different, what they could live like if things would be different.” (Respondent 23)</p> <p>Discussing “ideas of how things could be better [...] might be a helpful start for discussing the strategies to get there.” (Respondent 15)</p> <p>“I think the most important is that people come together and have time to imagine and brainstorm things. You will never get as much ideas and dreams in an online platform or chat or whatever, as with some people sitting together on a bonfire or spending a weekend together.” (Respondent 24)</p> <p>“important too to have fun, get togehter, build community, potluck shared dinners, musicking etc” (Respondent 17)</p> <p>“Working in dialogue, to question, explore and create meaning together.</p>

(<http://starhawk.org/writing/books/city-of-refuge>)

- 34 “The Great Turning is a name for the essential adventure of our time: the shift from the industrial growth society to a life-sustaining civilization.” (<http://www.joannamacy.net/thegreatturning.html>)
- 35 Can't find the video.... other one: Esteva, Video: 2006 Oaxaca Police killings, democracy now: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMMo23neIOo>
- 36 <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=2PXSnsHsAAAAJ&hl=en>
- 37 Matthew Fox is a “Dominican priest” (see also for details and critique) (<http://www.dialogueireland.org/dicontent/resources/dciarchive/zheresyhope.html>)
- 38 “Matthew Fox speaks about of the Via Positiva needing the Via Negativa in order to access the Via Creativa which leads to the Via Transformativa and back into the cycle once more.” (Respondent 39)
- 39 Some ideas could potentially be found in Ginwright (2008).

ToolBox

	<p>This could be as informal as having chats over tea or a formal organised workshop (Respondent 44)</p> <p>“I link the idea of utopian imagination to Paulo Freire's idea of consciensiation⁴⁰: supporting individuals and groups to develop an analysis that challenges the hegemonic 'common sense' of elites. In this sense, popular education approaches and methods could be seen as fostering a utopian imagination.” (Respondent 44)</p>
Retreats	<p>“Taking long breaks from capitalist society, being given an opportunity to be, think, reflect” (Respondent 1 (tester))</p> <p>“So places where people get together and do something in a different way can create such an atmosphere, even if it is only temporarily. Places where people try to live different ways over a longer period (like communes, ...) also can help to foster imagination” (Respondent 23)</p>
Inspiration	<p>“Being open to new action ideas, inform yourself about struggles and methods of other activists” (Respondent 9)</p> <p>“Taking the time to share utopian ideas, thereby inspire each other, thereby become more inspiring for others. This leads to positive feedback by seeing people become more open to ones ideas...” (Respondent 15)</p> <p>“Learning more about what happened in Spain in the thirties⁴¹, and what is happening in Kobane and other parts in Kurdistan/Syria⁴² at present in the midst of all the violence..to spread that info and be inspired.” (Respondent 17)</p> <p>Home weeks⁴³ of CDRA (Community Development Resource Association)⁴⁴ in Cape Town (Respondent 39)</p> <p>“First Nations communities in Canada that through a process of utopian imagination that emerged from the grassroots the model of service delivery was abandoned and a new model is being experimented with that builds on traditional ways of doing things that work through the idea of interconnectedness⁴⁵.” (Respondent 39)</p> <p>“Spreading the ideas, solutions, initiatives, ways of struggling with different issues.” (Respondent 28)</p> <p>“And isn't maybe art another indicator for the presence of UI (for example utopian architects after French Revolution⁴⁶, ideal workers city⁴⁷ etc.)?”</p>

40 See also: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TioH-t9FWMU> and

<http://www.freire.org/component/easytagcloud/118-module/conscientization/>

41 Spain in the 30s: The Respondent most likely refers to Spain's Revolutionary Anarchist Movement. See <http://flag.blackened.net/liberty/spain-rev.html>, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/david-porter-spain-model-for-anarchist-organizing> and <https://libcom.org/history/1868-1936-anarchism-in-spain>

42 See for example <http://anarchism.pageabode.com/andrewnflood/resources-rojava-revolution-kurdistan-syria>, <http://anarchistnews.org/tags/kobane> and <http://www.submedia.tv/stimulator/2015/02/21/anarchy-rojava-libertarian-revolution-middle-east/>

43 “During home weeks the focus of the organisation is on itself and what is happening within it. Everyone is involved in this process no matter what their job description is. In this way they engage with not only what is emergent but also with what is being hidden the shadow side of things.” (Respondent 39)

44 <http://www.cdra.org.za/>

45 Some information on interconnectedness: <http://firstnationspedagogy.ca/interconnect.html> and https://secure.cihi.ca/free_products/mentally_healthy_communities_aboriginal_perspectives_e.pdf

	(Respondent 24)
Individual	<p>“Apply this imagination [...] also just for your own life, starting with small goals that are easier to achieve and that make you trust in that way of trying to change the world, focus on one goal at a time to not overload yourself”. (Respondent 9)</p> <p>“I think a few lead questions would help, also maybe just little inspirations how to creatively escape the pre-fabricated cage of a mind within which I think, could help. Like, day-dreaming while you ride your bike downhill to imagine how you really want things to be. No compromise.” (Respondent 22)</p>

7.2 Tips for practice of UI

Table 3: Tips for practice of UI

Tips for practice of UI	
Tips for practice	“Making the case for its usefulness” (Respondent 8)
	“Developing the habit of not confusing radical imagination with unrealistic expectations and welcome it as something positive among activist”. (Respondent 22)
	“Anything that promotes positive (but realistic) thinking.” (Respondent 15)
	“A new frame of reference within which to operate, based in values ⁴⁸ which have a universal meaning, as opposed to tied to ideology”. (Respondent 18)
	“Some questions that guide me to think about some of the ideas given in the definition of utopian imagination would be useful at a personal level, while a similar process could be made into a workshop for groups who want to envision the future they are working towards. I would find an intersectional approach that explores how we challenge and transform class, 'race' and gender issues in the way we work crucial to any discussion of utopian imagination.” (Respondent 44)
	“Opposing the ideas and policies of Thatcher and of Reagan/Nixon and their modern day equivalents: May and Trump, by every possible means.” (Respondent 41)
	“Learn systems thinking” (Respondent 40)
	“Reinforcing feedback loops” (Respondent 40)
	“More networking with others who think the same in order to find the right way”. (Respondent 36)
	“I like the idea of "head/heart/hand" which I use to make sure I'm mixing up methods in the workshop between intellectual work, emotional work and physical moving about/creating work. I also find that paired discussions and

46 Unclear what exactly is meant. Possibly see <https://thecharnelhouse.org/2013/09/08/architecture-in-revolutionary-times/> and Vidler (1991).

47 Could refer to <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/apr/13/story-cities-21-adriano-olivetti-ivrea-italy-typewriter-factory-human-city> or to Menier Chocolate in Noisiel, France (established in 1825): <https://wiley-vch.e-bookshelf.de/products/reading-epub/product-id/577084/title/Redeveloping%2BIndustrial%2BSites.html>

48 An interesting organisation in this context is Common Cause Foundation: <http://valuesandframes.org/>

Tips for practice of UI

	small group work can be really important in supporting those who are less confident to speak in plenary groups to be able to contribute.” (Respondent 44)
	“Important to root utopian imagination in popular education (Freire, Augusto Boal's Games for Actors and Non-Actors ⁴⁹) and in narrative storytelling approaches (Centre for Story Based Strategy ⁵⁰).” (Respondent 44)

7.3 General activist strategy

Appendix: General activist strategy	
Respondent 40	“Give time by taking care of each other”
	“Build autonomous operating groups”
	“Donating to the direct groups a la effective altruism”
	“Build funds”
	“Build knowledge, resources for activism”
	“Convince the skeptic ones closer to you, fight the powerful far from you”
	“Seek allies among the powerful”
	“Frame around issues you have trouble winning their minds and hearts with”
Respondent 41	“Working collectively to educate and inform in small groups in communities and workplaces using community development principles.”
	“Actively opposing poverty and discrimination.”

7.4 Barriers for UI

Even though the question was not asking for the barriers but just using them as a point to depart, many respondents did list what they thought are barriers to utopian thinking, with some only listing barriers and no ideas on how to overcome them, some people explicitly expressing hopelessness. However, it seems that some respondents were thinking more broadly about the barriers that prevent success of activism in general, or aspects that make activist groups and movements less inclusive.

Appendix: Barriers for UI	
Space, time, and money	Lack of time. (Respondent 17)
	There is tension between action and reflection, as simple as it both demands time. (Respondent 40)
	Time constraints and the juggling of personal resources (money, food, other

49 “Games for Actors and Non-Actors is the classic and best-selling book by the founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal. It sets out the principles and practice of Boal’s revolutionary method, showing how theatre can be used to transform and liberate everyone – actors and non-actors alike!”

Download the book here:

https://geraldkeaney.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/augusto_boal_games_for_actors_and_non-actorsbookfi-org.pdf

50 <http://www.storybasedstrategy.org/>

Barriers for UI

	obligations) lead to compromises and maybe a lower level of radicality. (Respondent 22)
	Financial problems are a barrier. Lack of space and time is a barrier. (Respondent 24)
	Other than the barriers for utopian imagination that can't be overcome (biological and historical) I guess the only other barrier I can think of is that people don't see any value in utopian thinking. (Respondent 8)
	Status quo. (Respondent 33)
Differences	Lack of time lack of clarity, different motivations why people are in activism. (Respondent 17)
	Unfortunately I see more and more divisions all over in the anarchist/activist society. (Respondent 28)
Personal level	Most people somehow arrange with the situation as it is (which is important to feel good, I guess, but it can also lead to some laziness). (Respondent 9)
	The biggest limitation are the limitations we accept internally and challenging them is an internal process that might be very subjective and depends on different parameters. (Respondent 22)
	We have been conditioned so deeply, so long in repressive ways of being, patriarchy, capitalism/now neoliberalism. we lost connection to ourselves, to rest of nature etc. to have faith in what may emerge in crisis if we are very aware. (Respondent 17)
Status quo	Repression is a barrier. Hegemonic Education and Socialisation is a barrier. (Respondent 24)
	Exactly the lack of alternatives reinforces a feeling of helplessness. (Respondent 22)
	Desperation (Respondent 43)
	Maggie Thatcher once said "there is no alternative". That point of view is what is so restrictive - like Gramsci's "hegemony" as refined by Chomsky. It's a state of thinking that purports that what we have is the only possibility, that it's just "common sense". (Respondent 41)
	I think that the ravages of austerity/neo-liberalism have badly damaged utopian imagination in Ireland. (Respondent 41)
	The emphasis on evidence-based practice with evidence derived not from practice but from other sources discourages the use of the imagination ordinary, extraordinary or radical. (Respondent 39)
	However, I feel that there is a deeply seated distrust towards concrete steps towards improvement. (Respondent 22)
Urgency	It is often put in the defensive corner by (the perception of) more immediate, higher prioritized needs. (Respondent 40)
	Having urgent issues that are discussed or need to be dealt with (Respondent 9)
Other	When working on a specific topic it can be more difficult to envision radical change in society as a whole. (Respondent 38)
	The hegemonic discourses which activists operate within and enact" as well as by the lack of deep systemic analysis and exposure to radical ideas, approaches and alternatives." (Respondent 44)

Barriers for UI

	The same and quite fixed structures in political groups that don't allow much free thinking space together; the use of similar methods; the factor that people might think differently from "mainstream" society but still in shaped ways and routines. (Respondent 9)
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7.5 List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full
CDRA	Community Development Resource Association
EU	European Union
GJM	Global Justice Movement
IROS	Imaginary Reconstitution Of Society
LDT	Liberal Democratic Theory
RI	Radical imagination
SECC	The Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee
T.A.B.O.O.	There are Billions of Options
TAMA	There are many alternatives
TAZ	Temporary Autonomous Zones
TINA	There is no alternative
UI	Utopian imagination
zine	A self-published booklet, derived from magazine

7.6 Survey questions

The definition was presented in the welcome page of the survey as well as in two questions.

Utopian Imagination is something we *do* together, envisioning and working towards a better future that is radically, from its roots, different to the present. Utopian Imagination grows by bringing conflicts and differences into the open, leading to multiple, rough, and fussy ideas of how things could be better. It serves to give direction, inspire, and mobilise to action. It can be seen as a dynamic process of small steps, of trying out and leaning into, with constant re-evaluation of values, horizons and directions.

Question 0:	To warm up: What three words would you use to describe the world you are trying to create through your activism?
Help:	Be creative, there is no right or wrong!

Question 1:	What do you think about the state of utopian imagination in activism?
Help:	Is it widespread? Is it limited? Is it used at all? + Definition

Survey questions

Question 2:	In what ways could utopian imagination be beneficial and / or detrimental for activism in general?
Help:	Feel free to take a strong position! + Definition

Question 3:	Think about the barriers for utopian imagination in your activism. What tools and methods could be developed and used to overcome those barriers and foster the utopian imagination?
Help:	Any ideas are helpful, no need to be detailed or complete! <i>The answers to this question will be compiled in a resource for all to use.</i>

Question:	Almost finished. Use this box for any comments, thoughts, or suggestions. Thanks!
Help:	

7.7 Survey invitation

Dear friend and activist,

in an attempt to improve activist strategies and tactics, I am working on a research-project at the moment, which explores whether or not we need (more) utopian imagination [1] in activism, if it is beneficial or detrimental, and how this could be implemented in our practices.

What do you think about the state of utopian thinking? Is it an helpful concept? And how could we include visioning, radical imagination, or utopian thinking, into our groups and movements?

I am dedicating my time working on the thesis with the aim to create a resource for all to use who are interested in changing the world starting with radical and utopian visions.

If you can dedicate a few minutes to contribute to this collective process, I'd be very much obliged. Please follow the link below to fill out the short survey. The information will be used in the thesis as part of my studies in MA Public Advocacy and Activism in Galway, potentially in an academic paper [2], and will additionally be compiled into a resource that will be made publicly available by the end of September '16.

Link to **survey**: <http://radical-utopia.limequery.org/929574?lang=en>

The **resource** will be made available here [3]:

<https://ggnetwork.blackblogs.org/fostering-radical-imagination/>

Survey invitation

Please answer the survey as soon as possible, the latest until July 31, 2016 (you know, these deadlines...).

Thank you very much,

Martin

Data security and privacy notice: The data you submit is anonymous, and I chose an open-source survey provider located under strict privacy laws, who will keep the information out of corporate hands.

Read more: <https://ggnetwork.blackblogs.org/2016/04/12/zine-1-prefigurative-activism-radical-imagination/>

Contact: ggn-utopia@riseup.net

[1] Some definition will be given at the start of the survey.

[2] The information will be handled not only in accordance to standard ethical considerations of academic research, but also according to activist-research ethics of movement relevance, anti-oppression, and prefiguration (see Luchies 'Towards an Insurrectionary Power/ Knowledge').

[3] You could subscribe to the blog's rss, to get notified when it's ready:
<https://ggnetwork.blackblogs.org/feed/>

7.8 Radical Imagination Workshop #1

Radical Imagination Workshop, WeCreate Wed 18th May 8-10pm

Goal: Create a space of dialogue and possibility, sparking the radical imagination towards a radically different future with focus on sustainability and the EcoVillage.

Materials needed:

- Paper & colour pens, different kinds
- Flipchart paper and colour markers
- Audio tape recorder (digital)
- Laptop & beamer to show future news video (2:01 min)
- Speakers

[Total time: 100 min!]

5 min Welcome & intro

10 min: Introduction:

5 min What 'is' radical imagination:

- based on The Radical Imagination Project (Haiven, Khasnabish)
- radical (lat. Radix: roots): change from roots, fundamental, systemic, unconventional
- imagination: forming mental images or concepts of what is not actually present

Radical Imagination Workshop #1

- capacity to project how world might be
- something we do together (not something one individual 'has')
- grows through overlap, conflict, contradiction, communication
- around stories, images, practices, beliefs, values, relationships, ideas, institutions

5 min **Connecting 1916 with radical imagination**

30 min: Part I: Imagining the ideal

5 min: **Intro to Part I**

2 min: show future news from wedeclare.ie:

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/FCHgWTYafeE>

- **It's about the process, not an outcome, no need to finish**
- As basis for later discussion
- Alone or in pairs
- think about your ideal society, local or global, in 2050
- How does the 'world' now feel like, smell like, look like? How do we interact with others and with our surroundings? What values are important?
- Start creating a short story, a drawing, a little poem, a short radio news item, or a poster, front page of newspaper (headings)

20 min **to start create**

5 min **to share** with the group

40 min: Part II: Radical imagination & the EcoVillage

5 min: **radical you** (short round OR open round)

- What does radical mean to you?
- Do you think imagination is important to achieve goals?

35 min: **radical we: Discussion**

- What is radical / imaginative / revolutionary about the EcoVillage?
- Where / How could the project be more radical / imaginative / revolutionary?

15 min: where do we go from here?

How can the radical imagination be fostered in the future (in the EcoVillage)?

END

7.9 Radical Imagination Workshop #2

Radical Imagination Workshop, Summer-Camp Fri 1st July 3-6pm

Goal: The goal of the workshop is to introduce utopian thinking and radical imagination as an activist process and enthuse people to incorporate it in their work within their groups.

Overall goal of the process is to improve activism, make it more creative and successful, be better in achieving what we want, by giving it direction and by inspiring change!

Materials needed:

- Paper & colour pens, different kinds
- (Flipchart) paper and colour markers
- bluetag or similar
- tape for names!
- Camera to archive stuff
- space in common area to showcase results

[Total time: 160 (180) min!]

15 min Welcome & introduction round

who am I, what's the workshop (it's in development process), aims of the workshop

(proposed outcomes, learnings to take home with

explore why utopian thinking / RI is important

overcome fears and difficulties around imagining alternatives, about

using artistic methods,

discover what you want

get inspired by other people's imagination

learn a process on how to foster the RI

a stronger sense of hope, understanding that there are many alternatives

)

who are they, why did they come, what do they expect?

15 min: Introduction:

10 min: **radical you** (short round) – put answers on mind-maps

- What does radical mean to you?
- What does imagination mean to you?
- Is imagination important for activism?

5 min **What 'is' radical imagination: (only add if missing)**

- based on The Radical Imagination Project (Haiven, Khasnabish)

Radical Imagination Workshop #2

- radical (lat. Radix: roots): change from roots, fundamental, systemic, unconventional
- imagination: forming mental images or concepts of what is not actually present
- capacity to project how world might be
- something we do together (not something one individual 'has')
- grows through overlap, conflict, contradiction, communication
- around stories, images, practices, beliefs, values, relationships, ideas, institutions

30 min: Values in ideal world

Which values do we want to see in your ideal world? (Recognize how that is influenced by what we don't want)

5 min: intro and set-up

/ groups of max 4 people – each gets flipcharts and markers

Draw a rough map of a planet
place on it in writing or images/sketches the positive values existing in utopian world. Only positive. Recognize what you don't want, use giving, to formulate positive wish.
this
it as direction

20 min: for the exercise

5 min: sharing

Every group: 3 values → noted down on a flipchart → put worlds on wall
wall

60 min: Imagining the ideal (take break at half time. Announce after 25 min over)

5 min: Set up and intro

people sit at tables, with paper and colours ready

Alone (2 min)

- Ask to close eyes. Then think about the values. **Then: How does the 'world' now feel like, smell like, look like? What can you hear?** Ask to put anything down on paper. A colour, anything abstract, be free!

Alone or in pairs:

- Now imagine aspects of your ideal society that you are most interested in, local, regional, or global, in 2116, drawing from values from previous step
- *How do we interact with others and with our surroundings? What does activity look like? How do we live? How do we eat? Envisage strategies and tactics, what does activism look like?*
- Start by creating
 - a short story (ie 'a perfect day in my life'),

Radical Imagination Workshop #2

- a drawing (ie 'my perfect neighbourhood'),
- a little poem, a poster,
- ...
- **It's about the process, not an outcome, no need to finish**

25 min: sharing results from previous step (creations & process)

10 min: ask for few volunteers to present what was created (10 min)
Offer to make a little exhibition for the duration of the camp in some common area, if people want that.

15 min: (go around in a circle) **Insights about/ through process**
comments on what it made people think of, any insights, inspiration, new thoughts, revelations, feelings etc they had, be they personal or on topic.

15 min: Conclusion & feedback (quality of workshop)

10 min: feedback (written) Ask to go around, and to come back to circle when finished.

What was good?
What could be improved? What could be added?
What are you taking home / what did you learn?

5 min: Thanks & goodbye!

END

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