

Spacing Out an Unsettling Utopian Ethics

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Because there is no time out from expressive being, perception of a situation and response are intertwined and assume a kind of "response-ability".

(Thrift 2004: 60)

Uncanniness is the basic state of Being-in-the-world, even though in an everyday way it has been covered up.

(Heidegger 1962: 322)

Is this feeling of being ill at ease, this uncanny, unhomely sensation... merely our fear of death? Or is it more like a pervasive, indeterminate anxiety, a fundamental or founding mood that Heidegger at times reads variously as joy, melancholy, and, most strikingly, profound boredom? In the face of what are we anxious, joyous, melancholy or deeply bored? Everything and nothing. ...An impersonal yet thoroughgoing alienation or expropriation marks our efforts to learn who we are.

(Krell 1997: 94)

1. Two questions

This paper seeks to attend to two considerations, or questions, that are pertinent to contemporary utopian thought. Both questions invite debate regarding the problem of ethics (and morality) to utopia. Furthermore, they encourage us to consider the fundamental difficulties that individuals' everyday and contingent ideas and ideals of "the good" pose for utopianism: at once, everything and nothing.

The first question is: if utopia is about the (or a) "good", then can we, and should we, attempt to extend that notion? For philosophers, this is a meta-ethical problem. That is, one embedded in the process of understanding how

something can be good. It is also normative. The question asks whether it is (now) appropriate to extend the notion of utopia, in light of so many well-worn critiques, and in light of an explosion of contemporary arenas within which utopian tendencies might be installed (Sargisson 1996 and 2000; Anderson 2002; Pinder 2002; Bauman 2003; Halpin 2003). This paper is narrowly concerned with the latter, normative problem, understood through practices, materials and affects. It argues that the notion of utopia should be extended to encompass that which is simultaneously banal, ephemeral and unsettling.

The second question is: what *place* for utopia? Utopia is also about the or a “good place”. In light of our first question, there is significant potential for contemporary theorizations of place and space from human geographers to attend to a summative problem: can our notions of the “good place” be extended? Human geographers have variously stressed the contingent, unsettled, performative and more-than-representational styles in and through which spaces are created and lived. This paper demonstrates how such different conceptualizations of space might affect the ways that we think about the good (place). In doing so, it highlights how, strikingly, much of what exceeds most utopian thought *is* concerned with the good place – albeit in manners simultaneously banal, ephemeral and unsettling.

I begin the paper by presenting a series of ways of thinking about space and place. Drawing on those, the rest of my argument is constructed through a series of “events” from a geography of a Steiner School in Pembrokeshire, UK. Kumar has argued that architecture is perhaps the most utopian of the arts, with its inherent futurity and (Modern) utopian heritage (Kumar 1991). Yet, in conceiving and researching space differently, through ethnographic engagement with everyday goings-on at Nant-y-Cwm Steiner School, it emerged that utopianism can be thought, practiced and felt in a surprising diversity of forms. Very often, these were specifically geared around “doing good” for children.

It is important to clarify that not all of the instances of doing good that took place at the school are essentially utopian. I would also rather avoid a lengthy discussion with regard to definition that any extension of utopianism might seem to necessitate. Utopia is, beyond the (inescapable) bounds of

representation, a way of feeling about the world and one's active place therein. Yet in that very ethical-affectual sense, it is possible to find crystallizations of feeling about certain phenomena or impulses (such as doing good for children), within which it can be agreed that a kind of albeit unexpected utopianism can be found, which may even be partially aligned with our more common-place understandings of the good place. For, I argue, seemingly banal "events" of the type I examine are rarely attended to by academics at the best of times; more rarely are they seen to hold ethical implications; and still more rarely could they be conceived as utopian – perhaps because they are too banal, perhaps not "representable" – or perhaps also because they are unsettled in nature, unsettling in impact, and, at times, desire the unsettling, worrying and anxiety-inducing (Kraftl 2004 and forthcoming; Sargisson elucidates a related argument about the "unsafe" [1996: 95]).

2. Space, spacing and utopia

Space and place are crucial to utopia. To say this is not to elide the importance of time, or process, to utopia. For, quite simply, time and space are inextricably implicated in the going-on of (utopian) existence – whether dialectically (Harvey 2000) or performatively (Grosz 2001). In this sense, many features of contemporary geographical thought about space will feel strangely recognisable to readers not familiar with the discipline of human geography. Indeed, both a stress on process and open-endedness, and on deconstruction of ends and means, are key features of post-structural and feminist utopian theory (Sargisson 1996; Sandercock 1998; Grosz 2001; Levitas 2003). Nevertheless, there are four specific characteristics of space that I wish to suggest should be, and in some senses already are, important to utopia (for a fuller review, see Lorimer 2005). These raise ethical points in themselves, and extend what we conceive to be good, in or about places.

Space is a verb, not a noun

Usually, space is considered to be a noun – a thing, that can be visited, or a container, for action. However, our experiential and imaginative encounter with spaces is often (but not always) otherwise. Spaces are complex: to talk of them

in such neutral terms belies the sheer “complexity, contradictoriness and contingency” of “space(s)” in particular (Renold 2001: 372). That is, in any given “geography”, at any given time, there will be *loads* going on, on all sorts of levels (Horton & Kraftl 2005: 136). Spaces are multiple, created in, as and through bodies, personal and collective: “instead of a single space-time, we will generate as many spaces and times as there are types of relations” (Latour 1997: 174). Spaces *are* processes, made up of constantly shifting relations, assemblages and bundles of materials (Law 2002). Objects and events are not set *a priori* into spaces but become-spaces, they make space. Hence, space may be better conceived of as *spacing*:

I use the term “spacing” in terms of “space” for similar reasons that “consuming”, “ordering” and “clubbing” are more useful conceptually than “consumption”, “orders” and “clubs” respectively... Spacings differ conceptually from spaces in that the former are explicitly “never finished”, always open to negotiation and thus always in a process of becoming. Further, many “sets” of spacings (or spatial *orderings*) may co-exist within the same physical space. (Malbon 1999: 94)

Or, “this is a world bowling along, in which decisions have to be made for the moment, by the moment” (Thrift 2000: 216). This is “the buzz of existence (...). The buzzing is, first and foremost, *unsettling*” (Doel 2001: 503, emphasis added). Since the world does not come to rest, we cannot always or ever step back to imagine it other, because it is *always-already other*: the world has already eluded us. The implication of this is quite the reverse of a foreclosure of utopianism and utopian space. It is instead a call to engage somehow with utopian spacing: the unutterably complex and banal which is always new, yet only sometimes infectiously creative. We might read a kind of latent utopianism into what Nigel Thrift terms “*the push* that keeps the world rolling over; the energy that fuels change; the work of transformation which ensures that ‘the reproduction of the other as the same is not assured’” (Thrift 2000a: 216; cites Phelan 1993).

Much of what goes on is more-than-representational

The implications of the above for representation should be clear. A “crisis” of representation in the social sciences has been apparent for some years, for

various reasons (Wittgenstein 2001; Harrison 2002). With regard to our above discussion of spacing, it would be at least tactful to deny someone's claim that they have "represented" a space or even spacing. There are two particular facets of spacing that justify this denial. First, and simply, there is much that goes on that evades and exceeds representation – that is impossible to write, explain or subject to cognitive thought. These acts, emotions and impulses are either ignored, or "deadened" in attempts to represent them. We need more and other ways to release them from the shackles of representation, to bear witness to spaces, "to move towards an account that takes seriously the world's own forces" (Dewsbury *et al.* 2002: 440). Second, consider the word: re-presentation. The very idea evokes an attempt to conjure what once was, to repeat the present, to produce sameness (Deleuze 2004). But the world can only be engaged in producing variation (Thrift 2000): an incessant buzzing (Doel 2001). It is not possible to repeat because the present can *never* be repeated: to repeat it would be to do exactly that – to repeat, but not at the same time/place, and, crucially, as a repetition (not for the first time, not as that very moment). A repetition, even identical, is still and always that moment *again*. So, to re-cap: places and spaces are not necessarily "things" that can be described, because they are active, and evade definition. They are thus unsettling. This is true even (and perhaps especially) of utopian spaces – at least, of the most *powerful* of utopian spaces. Ironically, many of these go un-noticed, in a pervasive but understandable emphasis on utopian texts and pre-defined communities: this paper is one attempt to re-dress the balance.

Most banal, material practices go un-noticed

As much as spaces and places are contingent and unsettled, they require a tremendous amount of work, from human and non-human agents. To recognise this is a moral point in itself (Smith 1994). Moreover, the attentions of geographers and others have been drawn to the unequal manners in which spaces are divided, represented and experienced (Harvey 1975; Cosgrove 1998; Hinchliffe 2000). More lately, there has been a significant move to consider what might be termed the geographies and sociologies of banality and materiality (Latour 1999; Seigworth 2000). Each of these manoeuvres has

brought a distinctive flavour to our understandings of “everydayness” and everyday spacing. These are more-than-adequately documented elsewhere (Bingham, 1996). I wish to consider three specific implications of material practices for utopianism. First, with a very few exceptions (Anderson 2002; Bann 2003), there has been precious little engagement with banality and materiality, as understood by post-structuralists, outside of fictional texts. Matter matters to human life: “consider things, and you will have humans. Consider humans, and you are by that very act interested in things” (Latour 2002: 20). More to the point, “there is so much to learn not only from the things we value, but from the rubbish, detritus and discarded things” (Attfield 2000: xv). If this is the case, why are utopian academics so *disinterested* in engaging wholeheartedly with things? Second, the relationship between utopia and work is under-theorised. Material practices – like cleaning toilets, carving door-handles, making apple crumble, cuddling – are crucial to our experiences of places. Not only must one work to obtain utopia (whether one knows that this is what one is doing), but work might itself *be utopian*. The most banal, mundane, laborious tasks might – perhaps retrospectively – become utopian. Third, taken together, such small materials and practices might be constituent parts of seemingly larger, fundamentally important ethical ideals with regard to what is good. Conversely, such small materials and practices might themselves be massively important to certain individuals’ experience of place, to the extent that they might be termed utopian. In this paper, ideas and ideals of the good with regard to childhood are our primary focus.

Utopia affects us profoundly

The emotional tug of reading or experiencing utopia is often sickeningly profound (Kraftl 2006). The impact of utopia is often said to be nostalgic, provocative or compensatory (Garforth 2005). Yet, aside from largely theoretical discussions of hope drawing on Bloch (cf. Levitas 1990), there has been little consideration – and particularly empirical consideration – of the place of emotion in utopia. Specifically, drawing together the three characteristics of space outlined above, there is a need to consider *affect*. Affect is more than emotion. It exceeds an individual or place, residing more ineffably in a moment

or event as atmosphere or tension: it could be “the *push* of the terrain upon the ‘muscular consciousness’ of the body (...) the spiritualized *pull* or uplift of a chord of music, [or] the stillness struck by the colour of paint. Affects are not about you or it, subject or object. They are relations that inspire the world” (Dewsbury *et al.* 2002: 439). Affect is an emergent, but pervasive feature of an event. As a qualitative mode of feeling or intensity, it is increasingly subject to political, cultural and economic control in minority world countries (Thrift 2004). Yet, for instance, “[g]iven the utter ubiquity of affect as a vital element of cities...you would think that the affective register would form a large part of the study of cities – but you would be wrong. (...) [S]ystematic knowledges of the creation and mobilisation of affect have become an integral part of the everyday urban landscape (...). [T]hese knowledges are not only being deployed knowingly, they are also being deployed politically” (Thrift 2004: 57-58). By extension, one would imagine that Thrift’s “affective register” would form a large part of the study of utopia: one can only imagine both the mundane and spectacular ethico-political implications of such mobilisations of affect in city planning, community building and consumption practices. Yet, with a few exceptions (Sandercock 1998; Anderson 2002; Pinder 2005), this is lacking. We should attend better to patently un-representable, fleeting moments of not only hope but affects like nostalgia, euphoria joy, boredom and anxiety (Kraftl, forthcoming). Although sometimes un-planned, contingent, fleeting and momentary, perhaps too small-scale to notice, these affects and the spacings, materials and practices attached to them *have the potential to be(come) utopian*. In terms of ethics, these affective spacings have clear implications for what we judge or feel to be good or right, whether before, during and/or after a moment of affective encounter.

Whither utopia?

These four characteristics of space *do not* imply that we need to ignore or move away from utopian texts, or architectural designs and visions. Instead, in this brief review, I have demonstrated that there is much else in which we should be interested. If utopia is at least partially about space, there are so *many* ways to think about space that we might be presented with a multitude of other ways to

think about utopia. The four facets of space above (a bare description of some of many facets) suggest that if we *care* that space can be ongoing, unsettled and hard to represent or explain, that banal, small-scale things and practices matter, and that moments of nostalgia, euphoria or anxiety are profoundly embroiled in the production of the ethical, we might be well-placed to question what we mean by “the good” and by the “good place”.

The rest of this paper follows a series of instances at which these considerations are thrown starkly into relief. Through ethnographic, critical architectural research at a building – that most utopian of artistic edifices – I present a number little intersections through and of spacings. I do not pretend that these are fully non-representational, or encompass all four characteristics of space. Instead, these snippets bear witness to *more* ways in which life lived with a building might bear utopian potential in perhaps novel ways.

3. Nant-y-Cwm Steiner School

Nant-y-Cwm Steiner School is located in South West Wales, UK. It is a privately-run Steiner School, which charges termly fees for attendance and/or asks parents to compensate for shortfalls in payment by working at the school. The school was built between 1979 and 1990 by a group of parents and teachers who were disenchanted with mainstream education. As explained below, the majority of the money, labour and materials were provided by this founding group. Steiner education is based around art- and movement-based teaching methods, and is geared towards a holistic, protective *and* creative nurturing of children’s psychological and physiological development (see Steiner 1909 for more). One of the parents was an architect, Christopher Day, who interpreted Steiner’s educational principles in the design of several “ecological” buildings at the school. The kindergarten, for four-to-seven year-old children, is, with its grass roof, wavy walls and warm, enclosing rooms, the best example of such environmentally and aesthetically sensitive architecture at the school (Plates 1 and 2).



Plate 1: Kindergarten at Nant-y-Cwm, exterior. As an unusual building, the school stands out with its irregular grass roof and undulating, deep pink walls. Author's photograph.



Plate 2: Kindergarten at Nant-y-Cwm, looking into classroom. Upon entering the building, the children walk along a dark, labyrinthine, corridor, painted in yellow-green. The classroom is beyond, painted a deep pink-orange, with table and chairs set for a meal, and an alcove in the background. Author's photograph.

Nant-y-Cwm's story represents in many ways a struggle to realize a vision for a better education – and childhood. The kindergarten symbolizes a strikingly ruralised, idyllic and “British” notion of childhood, sited on a wooded hillside above a rushing stream, inhabiting a protected, nurturing, warm and “cuddly” interior. Such

appeals to community, childhood and the correcting influences of architecture seem easily bound up in enduring

utopian moralities. Indeed, in some ways, they are, and it was this which attracted my initial interest in the school. Yet it transpired that there was no overall plan for the school's building-up, still less one to build the type of close-knit community that has emerged there. For instance, the kindergarten, built eleven years after the school's founding, was built (pragmatically) to cater for Nant-y-Cwm's expanding pupil numbers. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the *many ways* of "doing good" that I encountered in my work at the school link with and extend more traditional and even post-structural theorizations of the utopian. Over a period of nine months, I undertook a "critical architectural geography" (*apud* Lees 2001) of the life and spaces of the school, and especially the kindergarten (the main focus for this paper). I interviewed teachers, parents and former pupils, and participated in school life by acting as a classroom assistant. Therein, drawing on geographical theories of spatiality, I followed how the spacings of the school were created, worked and invoked, contingently, through diverse arrays of practices and materials. Similarly, I attended to the ways in which certain atmospheres or affects were evoked – sometimes unplanned – in moments, events and feelings which became "good" (or bad). In the rest of the paper, I explore how four of these moments were attached to, and exceeded, more explicitly utopian themes connected to childhood, education and community.

Building the school: a pioneering (community) spirit

For Nant-y-Cwm's founding parents and teachers, the periods during which the school was built were fundamentally important to its ethos and teaching practices. In particular, they draw attention to the ways in which people, place and materials (were) worked such that a sense of community was built *with* and as the school. In other words, that community did not exist *before* the school; nor was it an abstract, bounded aim; instead, it emerged through its very construction.

S It was very different from now. People were still full with this *pioneering*, building spirit and you never *thought* about money or anything like that, we just thought about *ideas*, and how to make them come true. So we sit around now in our fifties, sort of harking back to the good old days when, you know, it was *possible* to do that sort of thing. And it was *great*. In the way of material things, everybody was happy to hand

down old clothes, and old cars which were barely moving, cheap cement or planks of wood. Yeah, we didn't know what was going to happen next, but it was really a *wonderful* time. (Founders, ex-parents, male and female)

P From having watched this school grow, using gift-labour, using it as a way of also bonding the community. When I'm in the classroom, and you look at all the things in the school, that's been made, the beautifully-carved door-handles and windows, and, invariably, you would have a child saying, my Dad did that or, my Mum did that, and, as a result the children look at the school in a totally different way. I just think it's a fantastic example, educationally, for children to see adults say, we need this, we'll build it. (Male, ex-parent)

V [W]e learned to work the render (...) it was very tactile and enjoyable. (...) Parents saw their children's reactions when the water first came down to the pond and things like that. So, it did help a great deal in, building an identity of the children and parents of the School together. (Female, founding parent)

A set of larger-scale, familiar utopian themes pervades these quotations: an attachment to utopian styles and modes of education has been apparent for some years (Halpin 2003; Freire 2004). Furthermore, S's nostalgia for the *community*-focussed "pioneering spirit" attached to the realisation of albeit abstract goals is particularly affecting. Her assertion that it was "wonderful" is a *result* of the unsettled, contingent, even anxious period during which the school was constructed. Hence anxiousness and contingency in themselves may become affectively utopian (cf. Kraftl, forthcoming). However, the point is simultaneously that these *specific* actions, and these memories, were and are given such meaning by multifarious little materials and practices – getting involved, working render, old clothes, building materials, door-handles, and much, *much* more. Neither these materials and practices, nor the buildings, are merely symbolic of that time: as both P and V explain, these were active in bonding and inculcating Nant-y-Cwm's community. Most importantly, these little practices were just as important as, and provided the flesh and connective tissue for, the "ideas" that were so important. In fact, it would be sensible to suggest that these *were* in some senses those ideas: for both P and V they embodied the creation of community which therefore emerged as an important part of the school's life, and its retrospectively defined teaching goals. For instance, one idea(l) that is "good for children", forming part of their education, is to see adults in the process of realising a vision. Stories about this process are also an important part of the school's history and ethos beyond simple curricular concerns (almost everyone I spoke to recounted the same story).

Therefore, when a child of today runs their hands over the same door-handle as their father carved, this education is constantly re-enacted, tacking together seemingly abstract discourses of community, education and a “pioneering spirit”. These idea(l)s, materials and practices are then set to work in everyday practices at the school, such as teaching at and maintaining the buildings.

Teaching with buildings

Broadly speaking, there are many different ways of caring for, and protecting, children. In the UK, although many of these increasingly involve more rational, “accountable” and represent-able practices, much work is done in both mainstream and alternative school environments to ensure the right affective “atmosphere” for children. This is particularly the case at Nant-y-Cwm’s kindergarten. There, a tremendous amount of work is done *with* the building and very specific assemblages of materials, toys and foods. The fundamental implications of such work mix a normative ethics with a particular ethics of care (*apud* Darwall 1998: 217-228), even though they seem quite banal and common-place.

M It’s meant to be dreamy and sleepy and, in their imaginations, in their own little cubby-hole kind of areas. Playing with dolls, or playing kitchen, rockets or setting up a shop and selling stuff. Going off to imagine, role-play really. And also, a lot of what they’ve experienced at that age is just like being in the home. So they want them to feel, I suppose what a Steiner home might feel like. Like, there’s a little kitchen in each classroom, and they do baking, chopping apples for apple crumble, making millet bake. Because I suppose proper Mums would do baking... (Former pupil, female)

T Well, the school has changed in that, when we started, it was just people wanting to carry out their ideals. And, then, over the years, things like Health and Safety applied to you as well. (...) And these mad rules came out where you weren’t allowed to touch children under any circumstances. Which was so alien to us, you know, if a child cried, you’d put a child on your lap and cuddle them. (...) It was like being thrown into, into a colder time all of a sudden. But it was maybe, leaving this sort of blissful and rosy time behind all of a sudden. (Female, ex-teacher, parent)

It became clear that an atmosphere of “homeliness” was the greatest affective good that the school could create. In a normative, ideal and discursive sense, a condition of homeliness was one that *should* be achieved – either to nurture a rather universalising notion of the “state of being” of a young child, or as a remedy for social malaises varying from divorce to car travel. T contrasts

M's sense of what "proper Mums would do" with more recent, "colder" legislation (such as Health and Safety policies) which affects all schools. For T and others, the importance of touch, of cuddling – something perceived to be almost innate – is indicative of a "blissful and rosy time". Yet this normative position requires constant negotiation and performance: it cannot be merely an abstract goal, and can never be afforded by the building alone. Therefore, "proper" Mums are defined by each teacher (male or female) and the skills and materials – and children – available to them. Practices such as cooking, baking and cuddling *should* evoke some affective, perhaps abstract notion of home. At the same time, these quotations generalise specific events of homeliness which are important in and for themselves: they (fail to fully) depict the vitality of the moment when a child cries, or when a teacher must decide what atmosphere to create for *these* children, on *this* day – and how. Therefore, the creation of homeliness is perhaps doubly ironic and unhomey (read as the Heideggerian *unheimlich*): first, in the simple truism that the school is not a home; second, in the very contingency and momentariness of the creation of the homely as a form of *car-ing*, of *do-ing* good – of *spacing*.

Maintaining the school: cleaning toilets is "good"

It would be easy to over-hype the importance of the banal (Seigworth 2000), especially in an over-eagerness to extend utopian thought. Yet, seemingly mundane materials and practices do matter, fundamentally, to all sorts of places, in all sorts of ways. At Nant-y-Cwm, this is especially the case for maintenance work undertaken on the buildings. Such work matters in a joint, two-fold sense: in the context of the "pioneering" work carried out by the school community during the 1970s and 1980s; and as a method for the performative perpetuation of the school's community and accompanying ethos.

J The parents are in the school, they know what's going on. They hear everything, and they hear the lessons from the outside, when they're cleaning the toilets or sweeping the floors. So, the parents are, *in* the school ideally, the children *feel* that the community of parents is around them, carrying the *fabric* of the school, essentially. It's happened to greater effect at Nant-y-Cwm I feel. So that's one, fundamental aspect that keeps the school going, that the parents are there, caring for the physical, everyday, ongoingness of the school. (Female, parent, five years)

PK So how do you think the School will be in the future?

A Well what I would *like* it to do is *grow*. I do find there's some people who are, not letting go of the past? Which, in a way, is inhibiting growth for the future. People have been saying, oh, you know, all the *work* that was put into it, and, Chris Day designing it and blah blah, and isn't it all wonderful blah blah. But actually, there are people who do unseen boring work, that have helped keep the School going as well. (Female, long-term parent)

Interestingly, these quotations do not require over-zealous explanation. This is partly the point: seemingly banal practices are ethically important when they are experienced as such, yet also may *become*-important in reflection. Toilet-cleaning and the other types of “unseen boring work” that A describes are part of the constant production and reproduction of the school – the daily chores that allow it to function. A continuation of the mindset that rendered construction work a part of the school's ethos, such work almost reaches the status of “pioneering spirit”. In fact, in the face of the school's history, A argues that it is an equally important “good” as the school struggles to survive. Bizarrely, in a more traditionally hopeful mode of utopianism, toilet cleaning is identified as part of planning for the future. At the same time, it is quite *unsettling* that these banal, contingent practices could be so “good”. It is striking that one might *desire* work, but perhaps more striking still that one might desire such mundane work. This unseen, boring work is therefore doubly important to the school and its future: first, as the manner in which community, education and the good are most commonly actualised; second, as an affectual quality of life at the school. This latter sensing of work is both pragmatic and ideal, active and passive: it is a synthesis of many work-events, a pervasive appreciation of the ways in which the school is spaced out, and a source for an uncanny kind of hope for that which is good now, and in the future.

Aggregating affect: hope and pain

For many people, the school's close-knit community, its protective attitude towards children, its fees, and its constant requests for work, may all seem far from utopian. Indeed, several parents are either tired or angry (or both) with the ways in which the school has been managed and funded, and with its general isolation from the surrounding community. Yet all is not what it seems. And this

is the crucial point: it may be possible to identify and critique the elements – the form, function and content – of a utopia (Levitas 1990). It may be that hope and the good life may be contained within the content of many utopias, a more-or-less essential affective condition of reading certain texts (Garforth 2005). However, we may be constantly surprised by that which is utopian. A glance at the conference booklet for any Utopian Studies conference will illustrate this quite simply. More pointedly, though, we may be surprised or even shocked at that which is utopian (Kraftl, forthcoming). This is particularly the case when one attends to “real” practices which were not intended to be utopian – or, at least, not intended to spawn an unpredictable multitude of utopian morals and affects, some of which we have encountered in this paper. Spacing is, as I have already argued, contingent and unpredictable.

Hence, the spacing of the utopian – the utopian affect, the utopian moment, the utopian ethic – is *always surprising, always excessive* of intention. *How* could the struggle that characterises life at Nant-y-Cwm be utopian? How could door-handles and toilet-cleaning be utopian in themselves, or as part of a constantly mutating school ethos? One potential answer is contained in the following quotation from a parent at the school:

PK What were your first impressions when you came to this School?

J I was visiting a friend, and it was almost *painful*, because I liked it so much. I was living in Scotland, and I thought, I'd really like to send my children, but I don't suppose it'll ever happen. It was all quite painful! It just looked very idyllic to me, very green and, slightly scruffy. I thought it was fantastic, I mean it's magical, you know. Homely. Nothing clinical. And it's just lovely the way there's, flowers everywhere, and the paintings on the wall up the stairs. And, it all seems really, so different to anything. The styling of the inside, you know the rounded corners and everything, was just so different, it was brilliant. (Female, parent, helper)

Like many parents, J recounts how she was powerfully drawn to the school when she first arrived. There was much that was patently so powerful and affectual about this encounter that it exceeds representation in all but the barest and most inadequate of phrases: “idyllic”; “fantastic”; “magical”; “brilliant”. This (e)utopian *eu*-phoria is fundamentally affective and ethical. It affected and effected a decision about moving from Scotland to Wales, as well as J's compulsion to send her children to Nant-y-Cwm. Importantly, this euphoria is necessarily accompanied by paranoia and pain. This pain exceeds nostalgia,

although she does mention nostalgia for *that anxious* moment. Not only does pain accompany such intoxicating euphoria, but it is actively desired-for: J wanted to return to the school and wanted to send her children there. It is rare, I would suggest, that someone might visit a place and feel pain. Yet that pain seems to be part of a euphoric, anxious desire for something good.

But what good, exactly? Although it might be fallacious to pinpoint exactly that which is “good” about the emergence of this euphoria, we might be able to offer some related suggestions. First, J’s reaction is an *affective* one: it exceeds any personal reaction to the school, and is a function of her being affected by the school’s architecture and atmosphere. This reaction is represented by generic affectual adjectives such as “idyllic” and “scruffy”. Second, J’s memory of this affecting event is structured by recourse to a number of *material* objects – flowers, paintings, rounded corners and so forth. Third, the combination of atmosphere and materials is something which has been achieved by the ongoing (ethical) spacing of the school – by the types of *work* about which we have already heard. This is implicit in J’s reaction – yet far more explicit a part of similarly euphoric affective responses to the school:

S But, funny things happen because, I remember, one person talking to X, and X was saying, how many years since he had worked at the Kindergarten. This person was nearly in *tears*, and saying, I’m so moved by this, because it’s so, so *amazing*, this dedication, you don’t *find* that sort of involvement, very often. (Female and male, founders, ex-parents, teacher)

The two excerpts from J and S also demonstrate the combinative complexity and dynamism with which places – spacings – may *become-utopian* at a given moment (rather than in any essential, continuous sense). The school’s ethos, its history, its materials, buildings and work which render it actively spaced, all of these are combined in the production of responses to the school which are powerfully emotive. Moreover, an emergent ethics is evoked in each case, centred around childhood in the first instance (J’s extract), and “dedication” in the second. In other words, a place may *come to be good* – very good – in and as small-scale yet momentous moments such as these responses, and in and as the many events, materials, affects and ethics they synthesise.

4. Conclusion

This paper has begun to consider how, in theoretical and empirical senses, we might extend our notions of that which seems and becomes good, of the good place, and hence of the utopian. Specifically, via a critical architectural geography of a school, it has advocated a kind of *spaced-out, surprising, utopian thinking*, whose ephemerality and contingency, materiality and affectivity, point to ineffably irrational, banal, delirious and unsettling – yet uncannily *real* – modes of utopianism. Underpinning this argument is a set of four of many ways to theorise space – and spacing – which have the further potential to extend an attention to “the good (place)”. Empirically, this should incite us to follow materials such as buildings and door-handles; to follow practices such as building and toilet-cleaning; to follow utopian affects that are painful and paranoid, euphoric and hopeful. In this paper, the spotlight has been trained on the contentious and highly politicised issue of what is good for children, and for school-life more generally. It has highlighted an ever-increasing and diversifying excess of utopian moments, which are in the main *unintentional* as utopias *per se*, yet whose mixture of affective and ethical *work* has the capacity to imbue them with a sometimes maddeningly unrepresentable utopianism. These moments *become-good* – or very good – in themselves, and as constitutions of larger-scale idea(l)s such as childhood, community and education. Despite and because of an attention to protection, happiness, homeliness and comfort (perhaps some of the more traditional realms of the utopian), the *unsettling* and *unhomely* capacities of some (but not all) utopian affect-ethics are brought into stark relief.

Both theoretically and empirically, to pursue an argument such as that presented here as *spacing* is to raise a set of *ethical* questions about what is good, in meta-ethical, normative and performative, momentary and more-than-representational manners. Three of the most important concern the relationships between childhood and utopia, between intentionality and utopia, and between the (affective) unsettling and utopia. There are many more questions with regard to this and other equally pertinent debates: yet without an attention to the ways in which ethics of the good are spaced out, in practice and

in theory, we will never even raise some of the most fundamental questions. A spaced-out, surprising and delirious utopian ethics of materiality and affect would be well-placed to pose – and to deal with – such timely questions.

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