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EDUCATIONAL STUDIES AND THE DOMESTICATION OF UTOPIA

1. INTRODUCTION

For a number of years now, writers have noted 'a surprising return to the theme of utopia in educational philosophy' and pointed to 'the educational comeback of utopia' more generally (Lewis, 2007, 683; Papastephanou, 2013, 23). The language here is interesting; utopia is making a surprising comeback. A comeback because utopian energies had long been pronounced 'exhausted' (Habermas, 1989, 48) and surprising because the concept had seemed irredeemably tarnished by the experience of actually existing socialism. The equation utopia = socialism = Stalinism had firmly taken root following the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Elliot, 1993) and utopia as a project came 'soaked with all the blood of the *gulag*' (Singer, 1993, 249). A successful comeback, then, seemed something of a longshot.

The key to understanding this comeback lies in understanding the ways in which utopia has been redefined in order to render it palatable. A decade ago Rüsen pondered:

> How can we understand utopia today? In order to avoid sacrificing its intellectual force without at the same time ignoring the bitter experiences of that which has been done in its name, we would have to redefine utopia in a way that distinguishes it from the utopia that played a role in the human catastrophes of the twentieth century (Rüsen, 2005, 278).

The process of redefining utopia has indeed taken place, the aim being to harness its transgressive force while avoiding the associated dangers. The redefined concept of utopia goes by the name 'utopian realism'. Coined by E. H. Carr in 1939, the term was given a new lease of life in the 1990s by (amongst others) Anthony Giddens, E. O. Wright and John Rawls. The term has subsequently been embraced by the field of educational studies and applied to the study of, for example, early childhood education (Moss, 2014), school leadership (Halpin, 2003a), citizenship education (Starkey, 2012) and the University (Barnett, 2013b).

This paper aims to do four things. Firstly, to outline the concept of utopian realism and highlight those aspects that are said to differentiate it from the utopia that supposedly played a role in the human catastrophes of the twentieth century. The paper secondly evaluates a selection of educational real utopias to assess whether they can, in fact, be said to have succeeded in the task of harnessing the intellectual force while overcoming the dangers of traditional utopianism. Thirdly, the paper offers a critique of utopian realism, arguing that the concept of utopia has become thoroughly domesticated. Finally, the paper concludes by defending the expansive and holistic concept of utopia

that utopian realism rejects. The argument here is that only when utopia is understood as a holistic system is it able to produce its most potent pedagogical effects.

2. UTOPIAN REALISM

The concept of 'utopian realism' was coined in 1939 by E.H. Carr. Referring to the sphere of international relations, Carr contrasted the 'utopian' and 'realist' approaches. Utopians, he tells us, devote themselves to elaborating visionary projects for a radically transformed society. Paying little attention to 'existing facts', and characterised by 'a failure to understand existing reality', utopians believe they can realise their vision by a mere act of will (Carr, 2001, 12-14). Realists, on the other hand, are said to be hardnosed cynics who emphasise the irresistible force of existing tendencies and preach the necessity of accommodating oneself to them. For Carr, realism provides a corrective to the naivety and exuberance of utopianism while utopianism provides a corrective to the barrenness and sterility of realism.

Fifty years later, Anthony Giddens resurrected the concept of utopian realism as a frame for rethinking the project of the Left in the wake of the fall of the Berlin wall. Emphasising the need for 'a *new* injection of utopianism', he cautioned that such a utopianism needed to be connected to 'real possibilities for change' (Giddens, 1990a, 21-22). Around the same time, E. O. Wright opened the first volume of the Real Utopias Project by echoing Carr's characterisation of utopias as 'fantasies, morally inspired designs for social life unconstrained by realistic considerations of human psychology and social feasibility' (Wright, 1995, ix). Against such 'purely utopian thinking' Wright contrasted 'real utopias' that are viable and achievable because 'grounded in the real potentials of humanity' (Wright, 2010, 21; 1995, ix). Carr, Giddens and Wright distinguish between two different modes of utopianism: a 'pure' utopianism and a utopianism tempered by a hearty dose of realism. The remainder of this section outlines three key factors that are said to differentiate utopian realism from pure utopianism.

The first factor is *immanence*. The claim here is that a 'realistic' utopianism should be grounded in existing trends, processes and tendencies. For Giddens it was crucial that utopianism maintained 'connection to immanent trends inherent in development' and that the futures constructed by the utopian imagination were 'immanent in the present' (Giddens, 1990a, 22; 1990b, 178). Utopian realism is frequently presented in terms of an 'immanentism' (Maffesoli, 2005). It is 'a concept of immanent utopia' (Coté *et al*, 2007, 14) characterised by the attempt 'to envisage alternative futures on the basis of institutionally immanent possibilities' (Hudson, 2003, 29).

The second factor is *partiality*. Introducing the concept of 'everyday utopias', Davina Cooper explains:

> at a time of considerable pessimism and uncertainty among radicals about the character and accomplishment of wholesale change, what it entails, and how it can be brought about, interest has risen in the transformative potential of initiatives that pursue in a more open, partial, and contingent way the building of another world (Cooper, 2014, 2).

Sargisson agrees, arguing that postmodernism and globalisation have created a wariness about 'complete utopias' that claim to present an 'absolute fix' to the world's problems (Sargisson, 2012, 14). As a consequence, utopian realism rejects the project of making existing arrangements conform to a utopian model. In place of totalising blueprints deemed inimical to diversity and choice, utopian realism confines itself to 'specific workings of the radical utopian imagination' in localised contexts (Halpin, 2007, 244).

The third factor is *process.* Zygmunt Bauman's characterisation of liquid modernity is relevant here. According to Bauman, stable 'solid' modernity provided the conditions (territoriality and finality) for the construction of rationalistic utopian models. These conditions no longer hold in liquid modernity, however, as notions such as fixity, permanence and finality dissolve in an ever-shifting world of permeable borders. All that remains is the utopian impulse, 'the constantly present transgressive urge' (Bauman, 2003, 11). Russell Jacoby (2005) terms this iconoclastic utopianism, a utopianism that rejects the totalising closure associated with utopian blueprints and emphasises the possibilities opened up by the process of transgressive longing. What this means for a utopian *realism* is that 'we look to utopia not as a place we might reach but as an ongoing process of becoming' (Coté *et al*, 2007, 13). For Wright, the study of Real Utopias is conceived as 'a voyage of exploration' during which, 'rather than attempting to specify the design for the final destination, the strategy is to examine specific mechanisms which move in the right direction' and which in 'one way or another prefigure more radical emancipatory alternatives' (Wright, 2006, 105; 2010, 246; 2012, 9).

3. EDUCATIONAL REAL UTOPIAS

Various attempts have been made to envision real utopias. The Real Utopias Project, stretching over twenty years and six published volumes, is the most obvious example, and Davina Cooper's (2014) recent exploration of everyday utopias offers something similar. In each case, examples of educational real utopias are discussed; Cooper looks at Summerhill School, Fung and Wright (2003) analyse Local School Councils in Chicago, and Bowles and Gintis (1998) discuss mechanisms for realising parental choice. Elsewhere, Moss (2014) extends the Real Utopias Project to the study of early childhood education, Hudson (2003, 67-8) identifies Waldorf Schools as a practical utopia, Barnett (2013a, 2013b) proposes the ecological university as a feasible utopia, Michael Apple presents a range of 'real utopias' in his survey of 'democratic schools' (Buras and Apple, 2008; Apple

and Beane, eds, 2007), and Halpin explores various examples of utopian realism in practice, from the model headteacher to curriculum design (Halpin, 2003a).

Educational real utopias share in common the three features outlined above: they are immanent (grounded in real practices, processes, trends), partial (eschewing totalising visions in favour of localised exercises of the utopian imagination), and processive (not positing a rational blueprint to which reality must conform but operating rather to highlight prefigurative institutions and practices). Thus, the aim of the Real Utopias Project is to 'envision the contours of an alternative social world that embodies emancipatory ideals' (Wright, 2012, 9). The project is self-consciously 'partial', focusing on 'specific proposals for the fundamental redesign of basic social institutions' (Wright, 2010, 246; 1996, x). More often than not, in keeping with the emphasis placed on immanence, the specific proposals are drawn from the study of empirical cases that are said to embody the principles of social and political justice (Wright, 2010, 246).

The Real Utopias Project considers two specific proposals for the fundamental redesign of education. One of these is discussed in the context of empowered participatory governance. Fung and Wright are concerned with developing 'transformative democratic strategies' that can advance the values of egalitarian social justice and individual human flourishing (Fung and Wright, 2003, 4). In this they take inspiration from 'real-world experiments in the redesign of democratic institutions' (ibid, 5), looking for concrete examples of real utopian practices. The example they take from education is the system of Local School Councils in Chicago, which they see as 'the most formally directly democratic system of school governance in the United States' (ibid, 7). Each public school has a council comprising parents, teachers and community members. The councils are empowered to select and monitor the performance of principals, develop School Improvement Plans, monitor the implementation of these plans, and approve school budgets. The Councils are overseen by the Chicago Board of Education, which provides a School Improvement Partner to advise or, if the school is performing poorly, to intervene. Heralded as empowered participatory governance in action, Fung argues that 'schools have become more effective in educating students' according to 'the metric of school productivity' (Fung, 2003, 138).

The second example is discussed by Bowles and Gintis as part of their utopian plan for *Efficient Redistribution* (Bowles and Gintis, 1998, 3-74). Here, the animating question is how to create an efficient educational service that responds to the preferences of parents. Bowles and Gintis argue for an empowered 'parental voice', making school leadership more 'accountable' in order to maximize 'the effective implementation of the consumer's interest' (ibid, 42). They recommend a voucher system; parents are issued with a voucher worth a certain amount of state revenue to the

school, school budgets become proportional to the number of students enrolled, and parents are free to move their children (and vouchers) as they choose. This would initiate a 'program for enhanced competition among schools' and 'would give the leadership a powerful incentive to attend to the parents' and students' interests' (ibid, 43-44).

More recently, Peter Moss (2014) has extended the Real Utopias Project to the study of early childhood education. Rejecting the pursuit of 'big, systemic alternatives', Moss understands utopia as 'a constant process with no starting or ending point' (2014, 7, 10). Utopian change will be partial, piecemeal, tentative and fluid. Moss offers The Crow Project as a detailed example of real utopian practice. This Swedish project saw a class of 4-5 year olds drawing or making birds out of various materials, refining, developing and sharing their work over the course of a year. The drawings and models served as the starting point for questions and discussion, in which the children listened to and tested each other's theories. In line with the real utopian emphasis on process, 'the focus of such work is the learning process rather than the actual goal/result' and what the Crow Project created was a democratic space for experimentation, potentiality and becoming (ibid, 144). For Moss, the Crow Project tells a story about early childhood education that differs significantly from the dominant discourse of quality and high returns. The project is prefigurative of a different way of being and offers 'a real utopian early childhood education' (ibid, 205).

These are examples of educational real utopias; grounded in real world tendencies, limited to specific institutions, and prefiguratively embodying emancipatory ideas (empowered participatory governance; empowered parental voice; democratic experimentation) that help move us forward on the utopian 'voyage of exploration'. One wonders, however, whether something of the power and force of utopianism has been lost amidst the concern to remain grounded. The creative force of utopianism is captured well by David Halpin, who argues that their playful engagement with imagery opens up 'a world uncontaminated by common sense where it is possible simultaneously to imagine and anticipate radical alternatives to the status quo' (Halpin, 2003b). Through their capacity to defamiliarise the existing order of things, utopias render the present mutable and point to 'possibilities for change that normally would be either ruled out automatically or never thought about' (Halpin, 2003a, 35). The future-oriented anticipatory dimension of utopian thought serves to generate 'new patterns of desire', conjuring visions 'to stir the imagination of great numbers of people' and thus act as 'a catalyst for change' (Halpin, 2003c; 2001b, 313).

The real utopia of empowered participatory governance presented by Fung and Wright, however, boils down to little more than having a board of school governors with responsibilities familiar to anyone involved in school governance in Britain. It is hardly a world uncontaminated by common

sense. Bowles and Gintis, meanwhile, actively embrace the language of the market (enhancing competition, market efficiency, consumer choice) and seek mechanisms for realising these goals. A vision very much grounded in, and reproducing, *existing* patterns of desire. The Crow Project presents a fascinating study of individual and group learning processes, but can it really be considered a utopian project offering possibilities for change that would never normally be thought about? And while Halpin highlights powerfully the transformative functions of utopia, the examples of utopian realism he offers can scarcely be considered radical alternatives to the status quo (Levitas, 2004; Webb, 2009). A case study of a dynamic 'can do' headteacher, for example, is presented as 'a utopian thought experiment about school leadership' (Halpin, 2003a, 77) and the idea of secondary schools pooling resources and staff within a collegiate framework is heralded as a militant utopian vision akin to Thomas More's *Utopia* (Halpin, 2003c).

It could be argued that these examples of 'utopian realism' are, in fact, signifiers of '*capitalist* realism'. Mark Fisher defines this as 'the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only *viable* political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible to even *imagine* a coherent alternative to it' (Fisher, 2009, 2). Visions of anything beyond the market are dismissed as 'naïve utopianism', fantasies lacking a grip on reality. The utopian imagination focuses its attention on the institutions of capitalism and how best to shape these. Wright makes it explicit that 'utopian realism' is accepting of the basic economic framework of capitalism and that Real Utopias 'need to be compatible with well-functioning market institutions' (Wright, 2006, 92). Considering the examples discussed above, Panitch and Gindin can be excused for suggesting that 'the attempt to 'get real' involves incorporating so much capitalist rationality that the result, while perhaps 'feasible', seems anything but utopian' (Panitch and Gindin, 2000, 9).

Those two words, feasible and utopian, are precisely how Ronald Barnett describes his vision of the transformed university. Like other proponents of utopian realism, Barnett positions himself against the totalising rationalistic blueprints of 'traditional' utopianism. His vision eschews the constraints imposed by 'the specificity and the precision of blueprint utopias' and focuses instead on outlining utopia's 'underlying principles and values' (Barnett, 2013b, 111). Emphasising immanence, Barnett argues that a utopia is feasible if 'there are grounds – both empirical and theoretical – for believing that the utopia in question could actually be realised', adding that 'there may even be embryonic micro-examples of such a utopia already to be glimpsed' (ibid, 110). And what is this utopia? It is a vision of 'the university as a site of transcendent human values and aspirations'; a university 'that is oriented towards maximising well-being in the world', 'putting its knowledges to work' to 'aid processes of enlightenment, reason and even emancipation' (ibid, 43, 138).

Barnett offers a prime example of utopian partialism, where the utopian imagination seeks to reconstitute, not the social totality, but rather a specific institution within it. Reluctant to offer a blueprint containing concrete specificities, Barnett suggests 'the general shape' and orientation that the ecological university might take (ibid, 111). He imagines 'a university-for-the-other', engaged in understanding humanity's place in the universe and using this understanding to help develop civic society, enhance social well-being and promote human flourishing (ibid, 137). In fact, what Barnett offers is a re-imagined university presented as both a (partial) utopian vision in its own right and also the utopian *agent* of wider social transformation. With its universalistic mission restored, Barnett argues, 'a responsibility surely befalls the university to play its part in bringing about a new world order' (ibid, 39).

This may strike some as a rather exalted claim. Exalted claims made on behalf of re-imagined institutions are commonplace within the literature on utopian realism. The Real Utopias Project, for example, claims to focus on institutions that envision and prefigure 'the contours of an alternative social world' and 'neutralize the power imbalances of capitalism' (Wright, 2012, 9; 2006, 99). But is that really what local school councils do? Does a school voucher system really prefigure a new way of being? Can proposal for a family of schools really be compared, in all seriousness, to More's *Utopia*? Does a pre-school drawing project really presage 'transformative change' (Moss, 2014, 7)? And can the University, re-imagined such that the universalising mission it once purportedly had has been restored, really be expected to open up 'possibilities that are revolutionary, not only for universities as such but even for the world' (Barnett, 2013b, 65)?

4. EXALTED CLAIMS AND A LACK OF VISION

Exalted claims are symptomatic of a broader problem with utopian partialism. For education cannot be abstracted from the social, economic and political relations in which it is embedded and of which it is expressive. Educational real utopias attempt to imaginatively reconstitute a single institution, without engaging with the other institutions, processes and power relations within which it is nested. On the one hand, educational real utopias are designed to better enable young people to flourish in society as currently structured. On the other hand, they are presented as prefigurations of an alternative world or as agents of social transformation. In the first instance, society as currently structured is taken as a given, and the utopian imagination is set to work on devising ways of modifying the techniques (school leadership, school organisation) of its reproduction. In the second instance, exalted claims are made regarding the extent to which the educational utopia *really* prefigures an alternative way of being (local school councils) or can *really* drive social change (the ecological university).

Stuck between a rock (having to prepare young people for the world they are likely to inhabit) and a hard place (the limited effects that reforming a single institution can have), Ahlberg and Brighouse claim that 'devising a real utopian educational design is impossible' (2014, 52). Like others (Olssen, 2006; Papastephanou, 2009; Ruccio, 2011), they argue that any utopian vision for education needs to be embedded within a wider vision of the social totality. As Albert puts it, 'if we ultimately want really worthy education – like really worthy health care, or art, or sports, or production, or consumption – we will need a new economy with a new logic and structure' (Albert, 2007, 324). However, it is precisely such a vision of a reconstituted social and economic totality that utopian realism rejects. The emphasis on partiality and process means that utopia 'has nothing to do with' totalising visions but focuses instead on 'attempts to carve out spaces for becoming' in self-limiting 'sphere specific' arenas (Cote *et al*, 2007, 3; Alexander, 2001, 581).

The rejection of the need for a totalising vision places severe limits on utopian realism. As Howe argues, 'sketches of utopia' are needed 'to avoid the provincialism of the immediate' (Howe, 2004, 250). Even Giddens, in giving new life to the concept of utopian realism, stressed that 'it must create models of the good society which are limited neither to the sphere of the nation-state nor to only one of the institutional dimensions of modernity' (Giddens, 1990b, 156). What a *real* utopianism needs is a vision of a reconstituted society within which a re-visioned education sits. Warding off fears of totalitarianism, Morrison argues that a politics of utopia suggests not 'the imposition on society of some total blueprint, but to partial modifications of society *in the light of* the alternative blueprint' (Morrison, 1984, 148). A blueprint is needed, even if 'the function of the blueprint may only be to suggest directions for partial change' (ibid).

A utopian vision of the social totality provides *direction*. This is what is missing from a realist utopianism that emphasises process. Defending the concept of utopian realism in the sphere of politics, Booth says: 'It is not a 'revolutionary' agenda in which the end justifies the means, but rather an approach to politics in which in a real sense the means *are* the ends' (1991, 537). The means are the ends and the process is the goal. There is a real danger here. As Papastephanou explains, 'the metaphor of the endless sea journey….in the dual sense of a journey that has no destination and a journey that lasts indefinitely, damages political utopianism and turns it into escapism' (2009, 52). Lacking a guiding vision to frame and drive determinate action, the emphasis on process actually – and ironically – leads to stasis.

It is useful here to consider Chomsky's distinction between vision and tactical goals. For Chomsky, short-term tactical goals may sometimes seem at odds with the long-term vision (in his case, of a decentralised society based around relationships of co-operation, solidarity and mutual aid). Some

of the goals may, indeed, seem very modest and ameliorative. The vision, however, is what prevents the hypostatisation of the goals, providing utopian direction and momentum (Chomsky, 1996, 75; Suissa, 2001, 642). A key problem with educational real utopias – local school councils, a school voucher system, dynamic headteachers, a collegiate family of schools, a pre-school drawing project, Universities recapturing a sense of mission, etc. – is that they are tactics lacking a vision. Without a motivating vision, ameliorative tactics become hypostatised as ends, prefigurative of nothing beyond themselves.

5. THE DOMESTICATION OF UTOPIA

Within the literature on utopian realism, the history of previous utopian thought tends to be characterised as a genre of wild dreams. Wright states bluntly that 'Utopias are fantasies' (Wright, 1995, ix) while Barnett describes utopianism as 'fantastical, castles-in-the-air thinking', its value lying in the poetry of its fancy (Barnett, 2013a, 39). Characterising previous utopianism as fantastical allows a distinction to be made between this and a new, robust, responsible, realist utopianism. Almost every writer highlights 'the difference between a realist-utopian and a utopian-utopian practice' (Hall, 2007, 121), distancing themselves from the utopian-utopian and typically heralding the realist-utopian as a new form of thought and practice.

All of which suggests that little attention has been paid to the immense body of scholarship that comprises the field of utopian studies. The history of utopian thought is, in fact, characterised more by sobriety than by fancy. Utopian realism – utopia as groundedness in the real – is as old as utopian literature itself. As Eliav-Feldon says of Renaissance utopias: 'Genuine utopists do not indulge in fantasies about unattainable Gardens of Eden, but propose practical, though sometimes very drastic remedies for the defects of their societies' (Eliav-Feldon, 1982, 2). These remedies are 'completely grounded in actuality', drawing on processes already taking place (ibid, 28). Commentators on the utopias of the seventeenth century almost universally point to their realism, practicality and groundedness in contemporary circumstances (e.g. Appelbaum, 2002; Eurich, 1967; Holstun, 1987). So too Cooperman's study of modern American utopian literature, offering possible visions that 'develop from existing American society' (1963, 465). Cooperman uses the term 'utopian realism' to describe the modern utopia, just as Eliav-Feldon uses the term 'realistic utopias' to describe the very first instances of the genre. As Kumar rightly indicates, fantastic dreams and impossible yearnings belong to tradition of Cockagyne and Shangri-la. Utopia, by contrast, 'is never simple dreaming. It always has one foot in reality' (Kumar, 1991, 2).

The 'realism' of Utopia, then, is nothing new. What *is* new is the positioning of Utopia within the ideological landscape. Karl Mannheim long ago argued that the dominant class in society will always

dismiss as 'utopian' ideas and plans which threaten to destabilise and transcend the present order (1940, 173). Ideological work is undertaken to control 'situationally transcendent ideas' and render them politically impotent. The epithet 'utopian' performs the task of relegating radical ideas 'to a world beyond history and society' (ibid, 173). For Herbert Marcuse, too, an essential element of ideology is 'the relegation of real possibilities to the no-man's land of utopia' (1969, 125). 'Utopia' becomes a pejorative term deployed to neutralise the political force of real possibilities which point beyond the established social order (Marcuse, 1968, 143).

The situation today is very different. Utopia is losing its pejorative connotations and piecemeal reforms are being paraded as situationally transcendent ideas. The political and ideological use to which the term is being put has changed. No longer a pejorative term used to put down radical plans, 'utopian' is now used positively to describe ameliorative reforms. Without any sense of irony or paradox, a team researching teacher education policy can claim to be developing 'a vision of utopia which has the possibility of achievement in present socio-economic conditions' (Sawyer et al, 2007, 228). Where once we saw visions pointing beyond the present order being derided as utopian, we now see proposals that *can* be realised within the established order being *heralded* as utopian.

What we are witnessing is the domestication and recuperation of Utopia. The subversive, counter-hegemonic thrust of utopia has been tamed and rendered fit for domestic life within the established order. A great deal of theoretical labour has been expended in the field of educational studies trying to persuade us that 'pure' utopianism is naïve and dangerous and that what we need is a utopian realism that confines itself to modifying techniques of governance within specific institutional parameters. Levitas warns that some ostensibly positive discussions of utopia 'place severe limits on utopia's alterity that are anti-utopian in effect' and that 'any qualification of utopia as feasible, achievable or realistic needs to be scrutinized for this anti-utopian tendency' (2013, 127, 136). Especially interesting in this regard are the similarities between the discourses of utopian realism and Foucauldian anti-utopianism. For the Foucauldian, attempts to transform the world in accordance with a totalising utopian vision inevitably turn out badly as what is achieved is not what is intended (Clark, 2012, 57-60; Foucault, 1984; Kelly, 2014). Like the utopian realists, Foucault expressed a preference for 'specific' and 'partial' transformations (Foucault, 1984, 46-7). This was Popper's preference too. Arguing passionately against the utopian approach to politics and social change, Popper's 'piecemeal engineering' rejected totalising visions and was characterised instead by uncertainty, openness to the future and sensitivity to obstacles and limits (Popper, 1961, 66-7). Like utopian realism, piecemeal engineering was grounded, partial and fluid.

Popper and Foucault are, of course, well known for their anti-utopianism. It is surely of some significance, then, that their anti-utopian positions are now being packaged under the name 'utopian realism'; that the process of redefining utopia, noted in the Introduction to this paper, has gone so far as to render contemporary notions of utopia consistent with classic statements of *anti*-utopianism; that the politics of utopia is now nothing more than classic liberal reformism and 'a politics of small steps' (Clark, 2012, 67). Utopia has been so totally redefined that local school councils, a voucher system, and a description of an exceptional headteacher can all be presented as 'utopian visions'. Utopia has been thoroughly tamed and domesticated.

6. REVISIONING UTOPIA

I want to defend the expansive and holistic concept of utopia that utopian realism rejects. This takes Utopia to be 'a non-existent society described in considerable detail' which is presented by the author as better than the society in which they and their readers live (Sargent, 2010, 6). Important here is the characterisation of utopia as a *society* described in considerable detail. As Eliav-Feldon explains:

> Unlike other proposals for reform, a utopia depicts an entire and functioning society, and thus it becomes a prism through which is visible the entire spectrum of the author's feelings about the society that surrounds him with its institutions, laws, customs, and idiosyncrasies (1982, 1).

Utopia depicts an entire functioning society. Utopian visions 'are explicitly holistic, imaginary, critical, normative, prescriptive' (Levitas, 2013, 84). For Raymond Williams, this was the very virtue of Utopia. Precisely because it depicts an entire functioning society, utopia 'can envisage, in general structure but also in detail, a different and practical way of life' (Williams, 1983, 13). Crucially, 'the value of the systematic utopia is to lift our eyes beyond the short-term adjustments and changes which are the ordinary material of politics' (ibid). Unlike many of the utopian realists, Williams had taken time to familiarise himself with the genre of utopian literature and was more than aware that these normative depictions of a better way of being were not fanciful castles in the air lacking a grounding in the exigencies of the real. In the best examples of the genre:

> there is evidence both of deliberate and sustained thought about possible futures and then, probably preceding and succeeding this, the discovery of a structure of feeling which, within the parameters of that thought, is in its turn a form of recognition (Williams, 1991, 266).

A newly discovered structure of feeling, experienced as a form of recognition, is precisely what the holistic utopia can offer. And it is this dual process of discovery and recognition that enables the utopia to produce its most potent pedagogical effects: those of defamiliarising the familiar,

familiarising the strange, liberating the imagination from the constraints of common sense, throwing up new solutions to pressing contemporary problems, generating new patterns of desire, and catalysing change.

In the process of its domestication, the holistic and representational aspects of utopia—utopia as a detailed talking picture of an alternative society—have been lost. Or rather have been consciously and explicitly dispensed with. Utopian realism has redefined utopia away. Utopia as understood within the discourse of utopian realism is no longer recognisable. It has been collapsed into, and is no longer distinguishable from, Popper's piecemeal tinkering. As Levitas rightly highlights in her critique of Wright and the Real Utopias project, the refusal to engage in what she terms 'speculative holism' – the imaginary reconstitution of *society*, with specific institutional forms being reimagined as part of a wider whole – 'rules out, in relation to the future, one of the great virtues of the utopian approach, namely the ability to explore how different spheres interact at the institutional level' (Levitas, 2013, 144). More than this, the argument that speculative thinking cannot and should not stretch beyond specific, localised institutions actually 'becomes an argument against utopia' (ibid, 147).

Utopian realists would, of course, point to the dangers associated with the 'holistic' utopia – the dangers of totalising closure, of paternalistic elitism, of the suppression of difference and the indignity of speaking for others (Halpin, 2009). And would point also to the ways in which the shifting sands of liquid modernity render any and all utopian visions unstable and prone to collapse (Clarke, 2011). It is misleading, however, to equate holistic utopian visions with closed, monistic blueprints that suppress difference and proscribe dissent. Olssen (2006) argues persuasively that the liberal critique of utopianism erects a straw man, or at least mistakes one specific moment in Utopia's history (the Renaissance utopia) for the utopian genre as a whole. Utopia as the imaginary reconstitution of society leaves 'plenty of space for variations in custom, habits, identities, memories and diverse lifestyles and choices' and plenty of scope for its members politically to contest its structure (Papastephanou ,2009, 165). Anyone reading the utopian writings of Charles Fourier, William Morris or Ursula Le Guin will agree with Olssen that 'the good can accommodate difference' (2006, 108). Raymond Williams certainly recognised this. Challenging the association between utopianism and totalitarian politics, Olssen goes as far as to argue that:

> Utopian models offer us a bulwark against totalitarianism in that they enable values such as freedom, equality, justice and security to be re-theorized in the context of an 'imagined' community rather than considered atomistically as a series of analytical relations (2006, 115).

Utopian visions are easily – and sometimes deliberately – misread. So too utopia as a project is easily – and often unfairly – maligned. The possibility of developing a guiding vision, in light of which educational reforms can be debated, is dismissed out of hand as utopian realism joins hands with Foucauldian anti-utopianism. But the process of utopian *annunciation* is central and fundamental to utopian practice. As Paulo Freire never tired of saying, Utopia is 'the dialectical process of denouncing *and announcing* – denouncing the oppressing structure and announcing the humanizing structure' (1976, 225). In stressing the need for utopian annunciation, Freire (like Chomsky) argued that a vision of the world in which we would like to live is needed in order to 'propel' us along the path toward a better future (1996, 187). Rather than signalling a descent into totalitarianism, however, Freire understood the project of utopia as an iterative dialectical process (Webb, 2010; 2012). Interestingly, Freire's characterisation of the utopian educator is remarkably similar to Polly Toynbee's characterisation of the role of the politician. Toynbee suggests that

> It is the job of politicians to articulate people's strong if inchoate emotions, to crystallise ideas and paint a comprehensible picture of society as it is – and as it could be (2010, 12).

To paint a picture of society as it could be. This is the role of the utopian. And to do so by articulating people's strong if inchoate emotions, crystallising them and presenting them back in the form of a vision. This is precisely how Freire understood the role of the utopian educator (1). A similar process is described by those working with social movements. It has been referred to as 'utopian extrapolation' or 'convoking the radical imagination' (Graeber, 2009; Haiven and Khasnabish, 2014). For David Graeber this is a process in which the educator(s) work in, with and for communities to 'teas[e] out the tacit logic or principles underlying certain forms of radical practice, and then, not only offer the analyses back to those communities, but us[e] them to formulate new visions' (Graeber, 2009, 112). Far from representing an impossible totalitarian practice, I would suggest that such a process constitutes a genuinely grounded utopian realism.

7. CONCLUSION

The educational real utopias discussed in this paper are symptomatic of what Fred Inglis terms the stunting of the utopian imagination (2004, 4). When discussing their plans for enhanced parental choice, Bowles and Gintis position children and parents as consumers demanding an efficient educational service, comparable to diners at a restaurant (Bowles and Gintis, 1998, 41). How did it happen that this became termed (consciously, explicitly, positively) utopian? When Burras and Apple describe a failed campaign for a new school building in Chicago, they present this as a 'real utopia' (Burras and Apple, 2008, 299). A student-led campaign for a new school building can be commended

for many reasons, but how can it be presented (seriously) as a 'utopian vision' (Burras and Apple, 2008, 301)?

Utopia as method and practice has become thoroughly domesticated. When we talk about utopian visions that anticipate radical alternatives to the status quo, that liberate the imagination and catalyse change, what we are actually talking about is local school councils, a school voucher system to enhance market efficiency, an outstanding headteacher to lead school improvement, an unsuccessful campaign for a new school building, a pre-school drawing project, a plan for schools to pool resources, a university with a renewed sense of mission. These are all presented as grounded, feasible real *utopias*.

Utopian realism is testimony to how deeply ingrained within contemporary common sense capitalist realism has become. No alternatives to the present can be imagined. All the utopian imagination can do is propose modifications to specific techniques of governance. The utopian is collapsed into the present and fixes its gaze on partial amelioristic reforms that anticipate or prefigure nothing beyond themselves. We are told that nothing more than this is possible; that holistic visions are impossible, dangerous, totalitarian. The utopian realist accepts and reproduces the liberal and Foucauldian critiques of utopian visions.

As Raymond Williams recognised, however, it is in the visionary annunciation of an alternative society that the critical, imaginative and catalysing power of utopia lies. Thankfully, and contrary to the proclamations of the utopian realists, holistic visions do not necessarily suppress difference or neutralise dissent, nor does the politics of 'traditional' utopianism inevitably lead to the *gulag*. The good can accommodate difference and a vision of the good can emerge through the dialectic of utopian extrapolation. This is not to underestimate the profound difficulties and challenges involved in such a process. It is, however, to suggest that here is where *real* utopian practice lies.

8. NOTES

(1) There are affinities here between Freire and the work of Ernst Bloch (see Webb, 2010). In his epic three volume study *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch suggested that hidden utopian longings can be found in all manner of cultural artefacts and dimensions of everyday life; in detective stories, seaside holidays, music, song, dance and theatre. While some expressions of hope are mere escapist fancy – frivolous daydreams all too easily exploited and commodified – in others, he argues, we catch a glimpse of a concrete, authentic utopian All. Left to itself, hope is 'easily led astray' (Bloch, 1995, 144). Education is therefore required in order to prevent hope from becoming 'meaningless' or 'fraudulent' and to keep it focused on the forward pull of the utopian novum (Bloch, 1995, 144-5).

By means of utopian guiding images, crystallised visions drawn from peoples' myriad inchoate expressions of hope, hope itself can be educated and consciously directed towards the realisation of the All.

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