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Educational archaeology and the practice of utopian pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the idea, and some elements of the (potential) practice, of utopian pedagogy. It begins by outlining the general aims of 'utopian pedagogy' and notes the shift within contemporary writings away from the metaphor of the architect (armed with a utopian 'blueprint') towards that of the archaeologist. The ontological underpinnings of educational archaeology are discussed before attention turns to a critical examination of the pedagogical process of excavation. The key questions here are (to labour the metaphor) where to dig and how to identify a utopian find. The paper argues that, without a substantive normative vision to serve as a guide, utopian archaeology is conceptually flawed and practically ineffectual, romanticising an endlessly open process of exploration. The final section suggests that the fears associated with utopian architecture (authoritarian imposition, totalising closure) are misplaced and that drawing up a 'blueprint' should be the aim and responsibility of utopian pedagogy.

KEYWORDS

Utopia; critical pedagogy; radical education; archaeology of consciousness; education of desire; radical imagination; Paulo Freire; Ernst Bloch; David Graeber

Introduction

This paper explores the idea, and some elements of the (potential) practice, of utopian pedagogy. The 'return' of utopia within educational discourse has been well documented (Lewis 2007; Papastephanou 2009; Webb 2009). Over the past decade or so, utopianism has lost many of its pejorative connotations and has been heralded as a useful (even an essential) perspective from which to approach aspects of educational theory, policy and practice (e.g., Amsler 2015; Badley 2016; Barnett 2013; Busby 2015; Cooper 2014; Coté, Day, and de Peuter 2007; Fielding and Moss 2011; Firth 2013; Halas and Kantel 2008; Halpin 2003, 2007; Horner 2013; Kraftl 2015; Moss 2014; Papastephanou 2009; Peeters 2013; Peters and Freeman-Moir 2006a; Prendergast 2011; Rambe and Nel 2015; Sawyer et al. 2007; Starkey 2012; Sutton 2015; Teodoro and Torres 2007). Once the preserve of self-proclaimed militant utopians such as Henry Giroux, utopia has now been embraced by the educational mainstream (Webb 2016). Many educators would happily associate themselves with, or consider themselves sympathetic to, utopianism. What I want to do here is ask some basic questions regarding the pedagogical practices of the 'utopian' educator. How does a committed utopist bring

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this commitment to bear on their role as an educator? What is this thing called utopian pedagogy? How can/should utopian pedagogy best operate? In addressing such questions more arise, and remain open, unanswered. It is useful to raise the questions, however, as they are relevant to theory and practice in the context of 'the educational comeback of utopia' (Papastephanou 2016, 32).

The first use of the phrase 'utopian pedagogy' comes in 1970, in Paulo Freire's *Cultural Action for Freedom*. Here he describes utopian pedagogy as a process of denunciation and annunciation; a critical interrogation of the present situation coupled with 'a utopian vision of man and the world' (Freire 1972, 40). The pedagogical process is described as 'a dialogical praxis in which the teachers and learners together, in the act of analysing a dehumanising reality, denounce it while announcing its transformation in the name of the liberation of man'. He later tells us that utopian pedagogy 'must start from a kind of *archaeology of consciousness*', excavating and unearthing what is hidden and submerged (Freire 1981, 58). This is now a common metaphor. *Archaeologies of the Future* is the title Fredric Jameson gave his monumental study of utopianism (Jameson 2005) and Ruth Levitas presents archaeology as one of the defining modes of the utopian method (Levitas 2013). Tyson Lewis describes how 'the future comes to us in ruins through which the utopian archaeologist fits together its mysterious contours' (Lewis 2006, 14). This is the role of 'educational archaeology', piecing together the 'flashes of the future' that can be glimpsed amidst flickering moments of anticipatory consciousness (13, 14).

The aim of this paper is to explore 'educational archaeology' as a form of utopian practice. It begins by outlining the general aims of 'utopian pedagogy' and notes the shift within contemporary writings away from the metaphor of the architect (armed with a utopian 'blueprint') towards that of the archaeologist. The ontological underpinnings of educational archaeology are discussed before attention turns to a critical examination of the pedagogical process of excavation. The key questions here are (to carry on the metaphor) where to dig and how to identify a utopian find. The paper argues that, without a substantive normative vision to serve as a guide, utopian archaeology is conceptually flawed and practically ineffectual, romanticising an endlessly open process of exploration. The final section suggests that the fears associated with utopian architecture (authoritarian imposition, totalising closure) are misplaced and that drawing up a 'blueprint' should be the responsibility, not just the aim, of utopian pedagogy.

Utopian pedagogy and the education of desire

The education of desire is a phrase familiar to anyone with an interest in utopian studies. The phrase became common currency when E. P. Thompson translated a few lines from Miguel Abensour's thesis on William Morris. According to Abensour, Morris' utopianism sought to 'teach desire to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire in a different way' (Thompson 1977, 791). The (re)education of desire is one of the fundamental aims of utopian pedagogy (Amsler 2015; Firth 2013; Levitas 2013; Papastephanou 2009). Some of the seminal texts in the field of utopian studies define utopia in terms of desire – the 'desire for a better life' or 'the desire for a better way of being' (Moylan 1986; Levitas 1990) – and the role of the utopian becomes one of 'stimulating' such desire and teaching desire to desire more (Moylan 1986, 35). Beyond this, utopian pedagogy is concerned with 'the formation of subjectivities' (Jameson 2005, 166). Not content with merely stimulating the desire for a new society, utopian pedagogy is concerned with developing subjects equipped to *create*

and *inhabit* this new world. The overall aim is nothing less than ‘human emancipation’ (Shantz 2012, 134) through ‘a transformation in the ways in which subjectivities are created [and] desires are produced’ (Giroux 2014, 81).

Utopian pedagogy is a counter-hegemonic project that strives to shatter contemporary common sense through practices which ‘propagate an awareness of the existence and possibilities of the radical outside’ (Coté et al. 2007a, 332). It is concerned with creating space for the exploration of desires, longings and hopes, and for drawing out utopian possibilities within concrete experience. It is a pedagogy aimed at liberating the imagination as to the possibilities for systemic change. Utopian pedagogy is well placed to do this because ‘utopia serves both a cognitive (critique of the present through the imaginative reconstruction of the future) and affective (opening up the possibility for hope, for desiring differently) function’ (Lewis 2010, 234). It is commonly held that ‘only when we envisage a better social order do we find the present one unendurable’ (Greene 2009, 141). Imagining alternatives requires a critical *detachment*, a critical *distance*, from one’s context (Mayo 2007; Ronald and Roskelly 2001). Utopian pedagogy provides this as it defamiliarises the familiar and familiarises the strange through a process of ‘cognitive estrangement’ (Roemer 2003, 63, 64).

Few, I think, would take issue with the preceding outline of the aims of utopian pedagogy. Disagreement arises, however, when it comes to how the concept of ‘utopia’ itself is understood. It is common here to distinguish between two forms of utopianism. These are variously termed ‘end-state’ and ‘process’ utopianism (McKenna 2001), ‘blueprint’ and ‘iconoclastic’ utopianism (Jacoby 2005), or utopia-as-system and utopia-as-process (Levitas 2007). Firth is typical in contrasting ‘totalitarian, hierarchical utopian blueprints and critical, transgressive, processual utopian theory and experiments’ (2013, 258). The former strives for a unifying utopian vision and goal whereas the latter embraces a fluid, small-scale, open-ended process of becoming. In each case, the pedagogical operation of utopia is directed toward the same end – reformed human subjectivity and social transformation. While ‘blueprint’ utopianism is said to do this through authoritarian imposition, ‘critical’ utopianism strives for transformation through immanent practice (Firth 2013, 264).

Firth, like many other recent writers, distances herself from the architectural aspects of the process described by Paulo Freire when he first coined the phrase ‘utopian pedagogy’. Contemporary understandings *reject* the suggestion that it might involve announcing a utopian vision (a ‘blueprint’) of humanity and the world. Instead, utopian pedagogy is concerned with creating experimental spaces and with embarking on an open-ended journey (Halas and Kantel 2008; Prendergast 2011). As Coté et al. remark, the *utopian* in utopian pedagogy is concerned more with the ‘point of departure’ than with the ‘point of arrival’ (2007b, 14). In Jameson’s terms, the focus has shifted away from the ‘utopian form’ and towards the ‘utopian wish’. The ‘utopian’ is no longer concerned with constructing systems and programmes but seeks instead to uncover the diffuse, varied and ambiguous utopian impulse to be found in subjective human experience (Jameson 2005, 1–9). In Levitas’ terms, ‘utopia as architecture’ has been abandoned in favour of ‘utopia as (ontological) archaeology’ (Levitas 2013).

Archaeology and the ontology of not-yet-being

The metaphor of the archaeologist often takes as its starting point an ontology of not-yet-being. Ernst Bloch was keen to emphasise that ‘human beings as such are still undefined’

(Bloch 1995, 931). Convinced that 'We have in us what we could become', Bloch maintained that we are forever travelling 'the path to ourselves' (Bloch 1995, 927, 934). The ontological sense of unfinishedness, that we are as yet incomplete, that – as Bloch put it – 'something's missing', finds expression as an inchoate yearning for something more, a longing for human fullness. This longing is the defining characteristic of the utopian impulse. Utopianism is 'a reaction to felt absences' and 'a desire to make these good' (Halpin 2007, 246). Rooted in our ontological unfinishedness, the utopian 'urge to transcend' is presented as a 'constitutive feature of humanity' (Bauman 2003, 11).

For Freire, 'it is in our incompleteness, of which we are aware, that education as a permanent process is grounded' (Freire 1998, 58). Our very educability stems from our unfinishedness and the concomitant curious, inquisitive yearning for something more (Webb 2010). In this context, Greene describes the role of the teacher thus: 'If teaching is to be thought of as an address to others' consciousness, it may be a summons on the part of one incomplete person to other incomplete persons to reach for wholeness' (1995, 26). The role of education is 'to enable us to become more fully human' (Fielding and Moss 2011, 43) and the key question is 'how to bring individuals to the realisation that they are not complete, and insert them in this process of searching' (Dubin and Prins 2011, 32). Our incompleteness, then, not only makes education possible; it makes it central to the process of human becoming. It is precisely because 'humans are unfinished' that 'education offers us utopian possibilities' (Sutton 2015, 40).

Bloch's statement that 'We have in us what we could become' is crucial to understanding the role of the utopian archaeologist. It captures the notion that what we could become is in some sense already present; that the utopian urge 'to become more fully human' is the urge 'to become more of what, in some sense, we already are' (Lankshear 1993, 95). This goes a little way toward addressing the Marxist critique of utopian imaginings offered by Jameson and Eagleton – that because all depictions of a better, future, other world can only be expressed in the language of the present, utopia merely hammers home the full extent of our incapacity to think outside the here and now (Eagleton 2000, 31; Jameson 2005, xiii). Sargisson refers to this as 'the limit and the tragedy of utopianism' (2012, 39). But if human fullness is in some sense already present, then this offers a possible escape from ideological imprisonment. A possible (full) future is 'something latent in the present, something immanently future-bearing that can be grasped in the flickering moment of anticipatory consciousness' (Giroux and McLaren 1997, 147, 148). Utopia then becomes 'an attempt to figure (and figure out) the absent presence' (Levitas 2013, 197).

This is no easy task. For the possible fullness of the future, the forward pull of what is missing is obscured and buried beneath the material conditions of life and the ideological forces which depict the future as an endless repetition of the present. It is commonly argued that critical and anticipatory forms of consciousness have been eroded, and that the capacity and desire to imagine alternative ways of being have been lost. From the realities of daily struggle and the material conditions of everyday life, which render the imaginative study of alternatives meaningless to most people (Amsler 2008; Kelley 2002), to the ways in which the 'crisis' trope creates a worldview in which we need to adjust our sights and make do with less (Evans and Giroux 2015; Haiven and Khasnabish 2014), the imagination is impaired by social, economic and political conditions that create the illusion that there is no alternative (Dubin and Prins 2011). Giroux uses the term 'disimagination machine' to describe a set of cultural apparatuses and a public pedagogy that collapse the future into the present and

'deface any viable vision of a good society' (Giroux 2014, 186). In Jameson's (now infamous) words, 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism' (2003, 76).

Domination, however, is always partial and 'leaky' (Giroux 2000, 144). There are 'gaps' and 'cracks' in the structural and ideological edifice of neoliberal capitalism through which glimpses of human fullness can still be found (Gibson-Graham 2006). Teaching is positioned as a process of 'finding the gaps' (Sutton 2015, 45) and 'examining the cracks' (Wright 2010, 27) in order to create openings which can operate as 'spaces of possibility' and sites of utopian becoming (Amsler 2015, 48). Thus the idea of utopian pedagogy as an archaeology of the future: the future is immanent in the present, though the process of its becoming is blocked and negated by the material and ideological forces of the disimagination machine; foretastes of human fullness/glimpses of utopia are nonetheless still to be found in the gaps, cracks and fissures of the here and now; the role of utopian pedagogy becomes one of locating these cracks and excavating what lies hidden beneath in order to keep the future open and illuminate the path humanity treads along the ontological journey toward becoming more fully itself.

The pedagogical process of excavation

Utopian pedagogy is a process variously described as excavating, mining, uncovering, revealing, unearthing, tapping hidden, submerged, repressed, suppressed, buried, subjugated, untapped desires, longings, memories, histories, knowledge, dreams, possibilities. In a classic statement of this kind, Giroux and McLaren (1991, 174–180) talk of the need 'to tap the hidden utopian desire' found in students' experiences; to 'uncover the submerged longings' inherent within social and cultural practices; to engage in 'the task of excavating historical consciousness and 'repressed' knowledge'; and to commit to the project of 'redirecting the paths of human desire'. Gibson-Graham suggest that 'reading for absences excavates what has been actively suppressed' and enables us 'to glimpse potential openings for a process of becoming' (2006, xxxii, 25). This kind of language is commonplace today (e.g., Amsler 2015; Borio, Pozzi, and Roggero 2007; Van Heertum 2006), with the notion of excavating hidden, submerged or repressed *histories* particularly prevalent (Darder 2009, 160; Motta 2012, 157; Selbin 2010, 48; Shantz 2012, 131; Shukaitis 2009, 170; Shukaitis and Graeber 2007).

A whole series of questions present themselves here. Firstly, what does utopian pedagogy look like if the idea of *homo viator* – life as a quest in search of completeness – is seen less as a universal ontological state and more as a normative and contingent ethico-political construct (Glass 2001)? What if Bloch and Friere were wrong when they talked of the future calling to the present and what if there is no ontological vocation to become more fully human? Utopian pedagogy would become less about *uncovering* future-bearing desires and longings that are currently repressed or distorted and more about *creating* these desires and longings, with all the fears of utopian engineering that would accompany such an endeavour (Amsler 2008; Jameson 2005). Secondly, what if the utopian pedagogue discovered that the longings and yearnings of the marginalised and disadvantaged (for whom utopian pedagogy claims to serve) are for normalcy? It cannot simply be assumed that the desires unearthed through utopian pedagogy will point to a future beyond capitalism (Eagleton 2015; Greene 2009). As Lauren Berlant powerfully illustrates, for those whose lives

are truly desperate, imagination and desire can become attached to living a *normal* life within capitalism as the route to the good life (Berlant 2011, 162–171). Thirdly, does the focus on subjective experience as a site of struggle steer utopian pedagogy toward the celebration of small everyday forms of resistance and away from an engaged commitment to systemic change (Cho 2010; Lissovoy 2009)? It is claimed that ‘utopian’ reforms within schooling can serve as ‘a catalyst for social change’ (Halpin 2003, 55). But does not this overstate the utopian potency of classroom interactions and exaggerate the role of education in effecting systemic transformation (Ahlberg and Brighouse 2014; Albert 2007)?

The remainder of the paper focuses on two further questions: How does one identify the ‘utopian longings’ that lie submerged within student experience, and what does one do with the desires and longings and histories one has unearthed? Elaborating on the first of these questions, we can ask: How does one know when one has found a gap or a crack through which can be glimpsed a foreshadowing of the not-yet? How does one know where to dig and how does one identify an archaeological find? These are important questions because not all experiences, desires and histories contain utopian potential or untapped possibilities (Shor 2009). Some lack any meaning to be mined (hooks 1994, 186) while others are shot through with sediments of domination and need uncovering critically to reveal their weaknesses (Giroux and McLaren 1999). Utopian pedagogy may be positioned as ‘an education in becoming’ (Amsler 2015, 178) but this is also an education in *un*-becoming, *un*-desiring and *un*-learning (Shantz 2012, 135). It requires ‘unlearn[ing] hegemonic common sense’ and ‘learning to feel’ the utopian future (Amsler 2015, 144, 112).

All of which begs the question of how one distinguishes and differentiates. On what basis does a teacher judge one set of experiences or desires to be full of possibility and another set not? The kind of examples given tend to be very generalised. Giroux and McLaren, for example, highlight ‘racist and sexist stereotyping’ as forms of student experience and behaviour that should not be affirmed (Giroux 2013; Giroux and McLaren 1999, 323; McLaren 2015, 178). Freire, meanwhile, talked about the need to challenge students when ‘their dreams are bad, reactionary or capitalist or authoritarian’ (Freire and Shor 1987, 157). Racism and sexism, then, are not ripe with untapped utopian possibility, and sometimes people’s dreams are bad. These are important points to stress, but what about more complex and subtle examples? How might the educational archaeologist dig through students’ wants, desires, feelings, likes, longings and yearnings, distinguishing between those that need feeding and nurturing and those that require unlearning?

Excavating repressed histories and unearthing submerged longings

A closer look at Ernst Bloch might be helpful here. Like Freire, Bloch emphasised the need for directive education when confronted with dreams that are ‘bad’ or ‘reactionary’. For Bloch, dreams are ‘easily led astray, without contact with the real forward tendency into what is better’ (Bloch 1995, 144, 145). The project of educated hope becomes one of ‘teaching’ these dreams and of ‘keeping them trained unerringly, usefully, on what is right’ (3). In *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch mines the depths of our cultural heritage in order to differentiate between *abstract* utopian desires and longings – those dreams that are bad, reactionary or, at best, mere escapist fancy – and expressions of *concrete* utopian longing that point to the ‘Utopian All’ and can be used to guide, direct and educate our present hopes. Bloch was very explicit in distinguishing between abstract and concrete utopia. Jazz music, for example, was nothing

more than 'howling', offering a 'dead joy', and jazz dance was 'imbecility gone wild' (397, 908). Baroque music, on the other hand, was a signifier of human authenticity, and Russian folk dance said 'Here I am human' (395).

In *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch outlined a utopian pedagogy. By holding up as 'guiding images' all those cultural practices and artefacts that prefigure the realm of freedom, the students' hopes will become 'educated' and trained to focus on 'what is right'. They will experience a glimpse of what it is to be fully human, they will feel the pull of the utopian future as it calls to the present, and they will reach out to this future and engage in the process of its becoming. If Bloch were a teacher, bringing his utopian commitment to bear on his practice, and he were talking with a student passionate about 1940s jazz music, he may well try to persuade the student that jazz holds out an empty future and contains no promise of human fullness. Bloch would, perhaps, offer the student alternative guiding panels and would proffer alternative forms of music in which concrete utopia is prefigured. He may, for example, suggest that the student immerse themselves in the glories of the Baroque.

Bloch was able to distinguish between abstract and concrete utopia because he was not afraid to make explicit value judgements about everything from detective stories to seaside holidays, theatre, dance, architecture and music. Others, of course, would differ in their judgements. In his study of Duke Ellington, for example, Graham Lock discusses the way in which his music fuses a utopian impulse with the impulse to bear witness, resulting in 'a "politics of transfiguration," in which accepted notions of language, history, the real, and the possible are thrown open to question and found wanting' (Lock 1999, 2). Ellington, Lock suggests, offers 'a utopia tinged with the blues, an African American visionary future stained with memories' (3). Though inscribed with a remembering of slavery and suffering, Ellington nonetheless creates imagined spaces which 'keep the hope of utopia alive' (211). Were Lock engaging with a student passionate about 1940s jazz, he might advise them to ignore Bloch and suggest instead that they dwell in its sound, its rewriting of black history and the 'alternative universes' conjured by its musics (212).

Lock's study is interesting in its emphasis on the fusion of the utopian impulse and the impulse to remember, the latter bearing witness to the obscenity of slavery and the former looking forward to a future promised land. This sits neatly with the endeavour of the utopian archaeologist, who, in seeking to unearth glimpses of the future, digs amongst hidden, repressed and submerged histories. Marcuse long ago claimed that 'the authentic utopia is grounded in recollection' (Marcuse 1979, 73), and McLaren in particular has always stressed the power of redemptive remembering in the utopian project of critical pedagogy. Striving to reclaim the collective histories of the marginalised and immiserated, which can operate both as a form of critique and a form of popular vision, McLaren declares that 'redemptive remembering is also *always already* a form of Utopian dreaming' (McLaren and da Silva 1993, 77).

There are some good studies of redemptive remembering as a form of utopian pedagogy. Ellsworth (2005) offers a utopian reading of Shimon Attie's project, *Between Dreams and History*. Based in New York's Lower East Side, Attie projected onto tenement exteriors photographs and film footage capturing the cultural history and residents' memories and dreams of their neighbourhood. Attie described his work as 'peeling back the wallpaper of today and revealing the histories buried underneath' (Ellsworth 2005, 65, 66). For Ellsworth, the juxtaposition of contemporary and archival images with the urban buildings, spaces and ruins of a once-vibrant neighbourhood served as 'a pedagogical pivot' around which past

and future, individual and collective, memory and dream, folded into proximity, the overall effect of which was to create a sense of the area unfolding 'so that its future might remain open' (66). Simon (2002) uses the testimonies of the Sayisi Dene to demonstrate the pedagogical power of 're-memory', or the public retelling of suppressed histories that call on us to bear witness. The role of the educator is to create spaces for the telling of forgotten histories, and to demand that they be listened to responsibly. To bear witness and listen responsibly is to open ourselves to tales of historical trauma that will unsettle and disrupt the central narratives that order our lives, forcing us to reconsider the terms on which we live (Simon 2002, 73, 74). Levitas (2013) highlights the utopian power of anagnorisis (memory traces reactivated in the present) in political demonstrations and in works of art such as Jeremy Deller's re-enactment of the Battle of Orgreave. For Levitas, what happens in such events is 'a utopian transformation of identity' as we are thrust into the midst of myriad histories, memories and traditions which come together to 'open up possibilities for a common future' (2013, 191).

The pedagogical intent behind the excavation of repressed histories is to keep the future open (Amsler 2015, 120, 121, 147, 148). This is of upmost importance, given the ideological closure of the present and the operation of the disimagination machine. What is missing, however, is a sense of the recovered histories serving to *guide* or *direct* the ontological wayfarer. This is because contemporary proponents of utopian pedagogy reject both the possibility of, and the need for, a utopian vision to serve as a goal and a guide to action (Lissovoy 2009). Giving content and direction to the future would be to fall foul of the kind of normative arrogance displayed by Bloch. The emphasis is placed instead on 'open exploration' (Peters and Freeman-Moir 2006b, 4) and 'attempts to carve out spaces for becoming' (Coté et al. 2007b, 3) that are 'unfinished, in process' (Graeber 2009a, 528), 'always-to-be' (Fielding and Moss 2011, 139). The purpose behind uncovering suppressed histories and submerged memories is to unsettle dominant narratives that seek to close the future and to keep alive the sense of human becoming as a shifting, fluid, open, unfolding process.

Osterweil and Chesters (2007) distinguish between 'utopian worlds' and 'utopian spaces'. To build a utopian world is to strive to create a new social reality guided by a vision imbued with normative content. This they see as rigid and doctrinaire, subordinating desire and spontaneity to a predetermined schema. To create utopian spaces, however, is seen as a far more creative and dynamic process. Thus they reject a guiding vision in favour of proliferating spaces for open-ended encounter and discussion. This is, indeed, the dominant contemporary understanding of what a responsible utopian pedagogy entails. Normative utopian visions are associated with 'the indignity of speaking for others' (Coté et al. 2007a, 325). Rather than building 'utopian worlds', the role of the utopian educator is 'to create a space for experiments' (Firth 2013, 261). Utopian pedagogy is defined as 'opening intentional spaces that enable unintended possibilities' (Fenwick 2006, 19), and is more concerned with *creating* pedagogical spaces than with what takes place within them (Borio, Pozzi, and Roggero 2007; Neary and Amsler 2012). Creating spaces alone is enough, and the pedagogical process becomes one of 'embarking on a journey of mystery, with no discernible path or trajectory' (Toews and Harris-Martin 2007, 274).

How does this fit with the practice of educational archaeology? The archaeologist seeks to dig beneath the ideological and material conditions within which student experiences are embedded and to 'unearth' the desires, longings, memories and histories that are buried beneath. But if the pedagogical process consists merely of opening up spaces to serve as a

point of departure for a journey characterised by ‘radical openness’ (Featherstone 2012, 246), then how does this help one differentiate between abstract and concrete utopia, between the desires and longings that point to the Utopian All and those that are escapist or reactionary or ‘bad’? On the one hand, there is an explicit desire – an ‘injunction’ indeed (Coté et al. 2007a, 325) – to move away from the normative prescriptiveness of Bloch and his pre-specification of the content of the future (Webb 2000). On the other hand, all one seems to be left with is the practice of creating spaces devoid of content (‘radically open’) and lacking direction (‘always in process’). What actually happens in these spaces?

The limits of dialogue and the need for an architect

A great deal of weight is placed on the shoulders of *dialogue* here. Dialogue is, indeed, imbued with almost magical powers. It exemplifies ‘how one should be’ as an educator (Mayo 2007) and releases ‘a mode of utopian thinking: thinking that refuses mere compliance, that looks down roads not yet taken to the shapes of a more fulfilling social order, to more vibrant ways of being in the world’ (Greene 1995, 5). Dialogue is a pedagogical process in which ‘the elements for a model of an alternative society’ are inscribed (Mayo 1995, 364); a democratic society structured around respectful, participatory interaction that enables the construction of new meanings and understandings and promotes communication across difference (Burbules 2002, 251).

Within Freirean utopian pedagogy – demanding the annunciation of a utopian vision of humanity and the world – dialogue is aimed at shaping uncoerced consensus and a shared vision (Webb 2012). Contemporary utopian pedagogy rejects such a reading of dialogue for two reasons. Firstly because utopian visions are viewed with suspicion as totalising blueprints that suppress difference and dissent (Fielding and Moss 2011, 138, 139; Halpin 2009); secondly because dialogue itself, conceived as a mechanism for constructing consensus, has been critiqued for the surreptitious ways in which it silences, excludes, coerces and co-opts (Burbules 2002, 2005). So dialogue is no longer understood in relation to developing a shared vision. Rather: ‘The precarious adventure that is dialogic pedagogy is in the end a quest ... Dialogue is an educational quest for liberation without recourse to a set road (Lewis 2010, 245).

Dialogic pedagogy is positioned as an open-ended quest through which suppressed utopian desires, longings, yearnings and dreams are unearthed and point us toward a more fulfilling social order. But how? Coleman answers by claiming that ‘ideas of the possible can come forward from what *is* when what is missing is illuminated by an open process with no certain conclusion’ (2013, 360). But how does this work? How does an open process with no conclusion help to illuminate anything? There are plenty of examples from educational research and social movement studies that point to the *failure* of a pedagogy of creating open spaces of dialogue. Rather than helping to draw out latent possibilities, or uncover submerged longings, or tap into hidden utopian desires, a pedagogy of ‘opening spaces’ can lead to endless circuitous discussion (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014, 78–84), the individualisation of social issues (Srivastava 2007), a persistent lack of analysis and vision (Shantz 2012), strategic paralysis (Ross 2003), and – because of all this – a process of conflict, silencing and domination (Motta 2012). The emphasis on creating spaces of dialogue misses the point that, as Freire once put it:

dialogue is not a 'free space' where you say what you want. Dialogue takes place inside some program and content. To achieve the goals of transformation, dialogue implies responsibility, directiveness, determination, discipline, objectives. (Freire and Shor 1987, 102)

Contemporary readings of utopian pedagogy reduce it to a method which takes the *process* of questioning, participation and dialogue as an end in itself (Webb 2013a). Excavating repressed histories does not in and of itself, however, help to illuminate the path toward the utopian future; creating open spaces of dialogue does not in and of itself help to unearth submerged utopian longings. It is not enough for Amsler to assert that 'what happens' in these spaces of dialogue 'remains undetermined' (Amsler 2015, 173). One needs utopian content, or, in Bloch's terms, guiding panels, to illuminate the ontological journey. Utopian architecture is required. As Malott and Ford put it, educators have become 'fixated ... on the process of "becoming," and are not concerned with what this becoming will become' (2015, 109). Without content and vision, utopian pedagogy runs the risk of becoming an empty and endless project that romanticises the process while losing sight of the goal (Harvey 2000, 174).

Contemporary theorisations are suspicious of traditional utopianism because of the associated elitism, closure and suppression of difference. Few today would uncritically endorse Freire's assertion that 'the teacher's role is more than simply opening up a way. It is necessary, at times, that the educators have the courage to take responsibility for the job of showing the way' (Freire 2007, 37). And few would agree that a 'blueprint' of the world in which we would like to live is needed in order to 'propel' us along the path toward a better future (Freire 1996, 187). Contemporary utopian pedagogy is all about 'opening up a way', staying well clear of blueprints and disavowing any pretension to showing the way. But does utopian architecture, a utopian blueprint, necessarily imply closure, the indignity of speaking for others and the suppression of difference, based (as in Bloch, say) on subjective value judgements?

Convocation, extrapolation and story-making

Utopia is intrinsically normative and representational. As Levitas remarks:

The utopian method posits a new matrix of needs, satisfactions and symbolic meanings. The education of desire implies such a transformation ... Utopia as method requires that we posit this new matrix from both an individual and an institutional point of view – an unequivocally normative move. (Levitas 2013, 179)

The utopian posits a new matrix of needs and a new matrix of institutional structures designed to satisfy those needs. This is the kind of utopianism that raises hackles among contemporary educators. There is nothing inherently totalitarian or repressive about the activities of the utopian architect, however. Two things seem incredible here. The first is that Karl Popper is regularly used a reference point by those highlighting the dangers of 'blueprint' utopianism, as if cold war anti-communist rhetoric – written by a man lacking any familiarity with the history of utopian literature or movements – still holds relevance today (e.g., Halpin 2009; Jacoby 2005; McKenna 2001 and see Olssen 2006 for an excellent critique). The second is a misunderstanding of how architectural blueprints are drawn up. Blueprints do not arrive as an authoritarian imposition from above – they are the outcome of a long iterative process of consultation and collaboration. There is a role for the utopian pedagogue in guiding and directing this iterative process.

It is often suggested that the academic-intellectual should acknowledge the partiality of their knowledge, disavow their privileged position and become a decentred participant in a dialogue among incomplete persons always in the process of becoming (Amsler 2015; Firth 2013; Greene 1995; Lissovoy 2009). While it may be the case that ‘utopianist education should be universal in the sense of assuming no privileged subject’ (Papastephanou 2009, 119), it has to recognise that some subjects *do* enjoy privilege. As Bourdieu once said:

We are dealing with opponents who are armed with theories, and I think they need to be fought with intellectual and cultural weapons. In pursuing that struggle, because of the division of labour some are better armed than others, because it is their job. (Bourdieu 2001, 53)

At the same time as educational theorists relinquish the role of pursuing particular social programmes, industrial, political and media elites – having no such reservations – continue to push through their own neoliberal vision (Kilgore 1999). For Chomsky, therefore, the advantages enjoyed by the academic-intellectual – the training, resources, facilities and opportunities to speak and act – confer a *responsibility*. Rather than disavowing their privilege, it is incumbent on them to put it to use (Chomsky 2010). Haiven and Khasnabish talk of the need ‘to occupy and mobilise the weird space of academic privilege *to produce something new*’ (2014, 251, emphasis added). How might this work?

One need not subscribe to the notion of an ontological vocation to suggest that, in and through the process of social life (the process of creating and sustaining families, friendships, communities, commitments and forms of co-operation), imaginary landscapes take shape (Graeber 2009a, 526). These landscapes comprise complex, fluid and often contradictory patterns of desires, needs, fears, hostilities, dreams, ethical norms, symbolic meanings, etc., and the landscapes emerge through a collective process of engagement and shared learning. Kelley refers to this as ‘poetic knowledge’, collective efforts to see and map the future that circulate at the level of poetic evocation (2002, 9, 10). Within the imaginaries of social groups and movements, one may talk of utopian desire and a utopian horizon, ‘even if movement actors can’t fully or completely articulate what it might look like’ (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014, 126).

In this context, a possible role for the activist-educationalist (the utopian pedagogue) becomes one of ‘convoking’ the radical imagination, animating, enlivening, drawing together, and building on the inchoate utopian imaginings of community or movement members. To ‘convoke’ is ‘to call something which is not yet fully present into being’ (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014, 61). Graeber refers to this as ‘utopian extrapolation’:

a matter of teasing out the tacit logic or principles underlying certain forms of radical practice, and then, not only offering the analysis back to those communities, but using them to formulate new visions. These visions would have to be offered as potential gifts, not definitive analyses or impositions. (Graeber 2009b, 112)

Utopian pedagogy should be understood as a *responsibility* to convoke and extrapolate. There is a responsibility to piece together a vision from the fragmented, disparate and inchoate yearnings of community members; a responsibility to put historical, theoretical and social understandings to work in developing an articulated alternative. This is a responsibility to something more than educational archaeology. Rather than excavating repressed memories, the role of utopian pedagogy may better be conceived as *memory-making*. Memory is not a pure set of experiences, an archive to be tapped. It is a fallible, selective, self-serving reconstructive process, shot through with elements of fantasy (Geoghegan 1989; Selbin 2010, 58). Memory-making entails constructing, out of the tales and myths and symbolism of past

oppressions, struggles and conflicts, a new collective memory which resonates with existing conditions and captures what people feel (Selbin 2010, 63–65). The issue is not simply to exhume what has been buried – it is how to take dreams, desires, hopes and fears and tie them together to construct a narrative that resonates, motivates and guides. This might be described as a process of utopian bricolage, constructing new meanings and drafting new visions from disparate sources, fashioning and refashioning how we perceive past and present, shaping our attitude to the future and its possibilities (Selbin 2010, 41).

The role of story-making in radical pedagogy has been stressed many times before. Not only personal narratives but also community art, music and theatre have been positioned as ways of knowing which enable and encourage a process of utopianizing (Chappell 2010; Kelley 2002, 32–35; Prendergast 2011). Selbin even suggests that stories may be ‘the primary form of socio-political struggle’ (2010, 46). Utopian story-making involves – to use Freire’s terms – both the denunciation of the existing order of things and the announcement of a utopian alternative. The ‘utopian’ here refers, not to an open-ended process of becoming, but to ‘an affirmative vision of an alternative reality’ (Van Heertum 2006, 49). As Papastephanou rightly remarks, ‘if utopia is to have any motivational force’ then it needs a ‘vivid image’ of the good and the new to inspire and guide purposive human action (2009, 164, 133). Let us call this vivid image a blueprint and let us say that the role of utopian pedagogy is to guide and direct a collective and collaborative process of memory- and story-making, pulling together – through a process of convocation and extrapolation – disparate inchoate dreams and yearnings in order to produce something new; a substantive utopian vision.

Conclusion

Contemporary understandings of utopian pedagogy present it as a practice of opening spaces for becoming, creating points of departure, open-ended and always-in-process, with little concern for delineating a direction of travel or point of arrival. Utopia as architecture has been abandoned in favour of ontological archaeology; creating spaces for uncovering submerged longings, repressed histories and hidden desires. This paper has argued that *utopian* pedagogy cannot limit itself merely to creating spaces – it is fundamentally concerned with what takes place within these spaces. And what takes place has to be something more than a series of radically open, always-unfinished exploratory encounters. *Utopian* pedagogy concerns itself with constructing visions of alternative ways of being, recognising that substantive programmatic visions of the future (blueprints) are needed in order to inspire and guide transformative hope and action (Webb 2009, 2013a, 2013b). Fears of totalising closure and the indignity of speaking for others are misplaced. Rather than denying the potential value of their contribution, heralding the partiality of all knowledge and disavowing all claims to authority, the utopian pedagogue has a responsibility to exploit their own privilege and work with students, communities and movements to help develop positively-announced visions.

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