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Critical Pedagogy, Utopia and Political (Dis)engagement

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ABSTRACT This article offers a critique of contemporary utopian pedagogy, focusing in particular on the concept of utopia underpinning it. Utopian pedagogy presents itself as a hope-driven practice of political engagement, grounded in the everyday, but animated by a utopian longing for something more and something better. What this article argues, however, is that the way in which utopia is conceptualised within utopian pedagogy places limits on its capacity for political intervention. Taking as an analytical frame the distinction between 'utopia-as-process' and 'utopia-as-system', the article highlights, firstly, the way in which critical pedagogy now accepts, almost without reservation, the standard liberal rejection of utopia-as-system, and, secondly, the rather emaciated practice of politics that follows if one restricts one's understanding of utopia to an open-ended process of becoming. The article concludes by arguing that effective political engagement requires radical educators to abandon an uncritical adherence to liberal sensibilities and embrace both utopia-as-process and utopia-as-system.

Introduction

This article offers a critique of contemporary utopian pedagogy, focusing in particular on the concept of utopia underpinning it. The term itself was coined by Paulo Freire, although it is only relatively recently that 'utopian pedagogy' has caught on as a phrase signifying a shift within the field of radical education (Coté et al, 2007). The foregrounding of the 'utopian' provides a corrective to the anti-utopian thrust of critical pedagogy as it emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, with its emphasis on the school as a site of economic and cultural reproduction. Critics argue that social reproduction theory peddled a politics of despair that precluded any positive engagement with the education process (Carlson, 1996). Utopian pedagogy, on the other hand, seeks to develop not only a language of critique, but also a language of possibility.

Resistance to the operation of power is what animates utopian pedagogy. Stressing that 'domination is always partial' (**Giroux, 1992**, p. 218 **NOT IN REFERENCES. PLEASE SUPPLY DETAILS**), utopian pedagogy searches for 'breathing spaces in the system' (Zaslove, 2007, p. 98), openings through which new counter-hegemonic possibilities can emerge (Greene, 2003). The basic argument of this article is that it fails in its task. The article begins by outlining two concepts of utopia, 'utopia-as-process' and 'utopia-as-system', and highlights the way in which critical pedagogy has come to accept, almost without reservation, the standard liberal rejection of the latter. Focusing specifically on the work of Henry Giroux, the article then analyses utopian pedagogy as he and others understand it and draw attention to the rather emaciated practice of politics that follows if one restricts one's understanding of utopia to an open-ended process of becoming.

The article argues that the binary distinction between utopia-as-process and utopia-as-system is a false one. The idea that utopia-as-process can be separated from utopia-as-system – and that the radical theorist, activist or educator can (and should) opt for one without the other – took hold in

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the wake of the fall of actually existing socialism and reflected the weakness of the challenge mounted by the Left to the equation ‘Socialism = Stalinism = Utopia’ (Elliott, 1993). The binary distinction is still peddled today and is politically immobilising. Drawing variously on the work of Paulo Freire, Raymond Williams, William Morris and Karl Mannheim, this article offers a defence of utopia-as-system and argues that fears of totalising closure and the indignity of speaking for others are misplaced. The conclusion suggests that if resistance to the operation of power is really what animates utopian pedagogy, then this requires educationalists to abandon an uncritical adherence to liberal sensibilities and embrace both utopia-as-process and utopia-as-system.

Two Concepts of Utopia

Identifying the boundaries of the utopian is fraught with difficulty, and numerous attempts have been made to define ‘utopia’ (see Sargent, 1975, 1994, 2010). Utopian studies as a field is, indeed, in large part constituted by attempts to delimit its own object of inquiry. It is possible nonetheless to differentiate between two dominant concepts of utopia. These concepts go by various names. Jacoby (2005) terms them ‘blueprint’ and ‘iconoclastic’ utopianism; McKenna (2001) distinguishes between the ‘end-state model’ of utopia and the ‘process model’; and McLaren and Tadeu da Silva (1993) talk of ‘categorical’ and ‘provisional’ utopian thinking. Following Levitas (2007), I shall refer to the two dominant concepts of utopia as ‘utopia-as-system’ and ‘utopia-as-process’.

Utopia-as-system is:

- ¥ Representational: an alternative state or society is depicted in detail and given representational form and content; a vision of a better world is represented in words, sounds and images. Utopia is not a fuzzy, hazy kind of a concept – it is a detailed talking picture.
- ¥ Totalistic: the representation of a better world, of a better way of being, is not partial or fragmented. Utopia-as-system presents a holistic vision of an entire functioning imaginary society and depicts how and in what ways the various institutions, processes and practices are related and interrelated.
- ¥ Normative: utopia-as-system’ is not scared of making strong normative judgements. The imaginary state or society that is represented holistically in a totalising vision is not just different to society as it is presently structured – it is *better*.
- ¥ Prescriptive: the better society depicted in all its totalising glory is presented as something that we should be striving to realise. It is something we need, something we should have. Utopia-as-system is utopia as prescription.
- ¥ Instrumental: the utopian system represented in words, images and sounds is itself an instrument in its own material realisation. The vision of a better world functions as a goal to inspire and mobilise transformative political action.

Utopia-as-process is:

- ¥ Open-ended: utopia is conceptualised as an open-ended process of becoming rather than a static representation of a single state of affairs. Utopia is best seen as a force, an impulse or an inchoate yearning rather than a detailed picture.
- ¥ Fluid and partial: as an open-ended process, the shape of utopia is shifting and elusive. Utopia resists totalising closure and is always open, provisional and undecidable. Occasionally in life, one catches glimpses of utopia – fleeting, tantalising foretastes of a new way of being – but nothing like a totalising vision is possible. The most we can say, paraphrasing Ernst Bloch (1986), is that utopia is on the tip of our tongue even if we do not know what it tastes like.
- ¥ Exploratory: utopia conceived as a process of becoming can also be conceived as a process of exploration, a process of exploring new possibilities. There is no blueprint to serve as a guide here – utopia is an ongoing, heuristic process of exploratory encounters conducted in a spirit of indeterminacy and uncertainty.
- ¥ Playful: utopia-as-process does not reject the utopian imagination, but to the extent that the utopian conjures images and explores the possibility of new possibilities, these are playful expressions of desire rather than strong normative pronouncements.
- ¥ Critical: although utopia is conceived as a process hedged everywhere with uncertainty, provisionality and undecidability, this does not mean that it lacks a political function. The function of utopia, however, is not to mobilise transformative action in the name of an

inspirational vision or goal. The key function of utopia becomes critical demystification – uncovering, unveiling, unmasking the operation of power so that new open, partial, fluid, spaces of possibility can emerge. The playful expressions of desire, the tentative explorations of new possibilities, engender something that is variously termed cognitive estrangement, fruitful bewilderment or defamiliarisation (Roemer, 2003, pp. 63-64). **ARE BULLET POINTS OK HERE, OR IS THIS A COMPLETE QUOTATION THAT SHOULD BE INDENTED?**

Utopia-as-system has been the subject of long-standing critique. This has traditionally been the concern of liberals, and found its strongest expression in the works of Karl Popper and Isaiah Berlin. Each offered extensive critiques of the theory and practice of utopia, which they considered inimical to human plurality, difference and freedom. For Berlin and Popper, the 'utopian engineer' constructs a vision of a better world, the realisation of which is assumed to be in the interests of all. The utopian not only fails to acknowledge the plurality of human goals, but in seeking to 'mould' individuals to fit the shape of their vision, they also suppress difference, freedom and dissent (Popper, 1957; Berlin, 2003). Berlin was wont to quote a line from Kant – 'out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made' – to support his claim that the politics of utopia 'is likely to lead to suffering, disillusionment and failure' (Berlin, 2003, p. 48). For Popper, utopianism was considered pernicious and dangerous, leading inevitably to violence and tyranny (Popper, 1963, pp. 358-361).

The liberal critique of utopianism is seldom questioned today. Utopia-as-system is almost universally rejected, and few would suggest that utopia conceived as a totalising normative prescriptive blueprint offers a fruitful and constructive guide for the contemporary educator. The association between utopian blueprint and the totalitarian suppression of difference was hammered home with great ideological force following the fall of actually existing socialism. As Singer noted at the time, utopia became 'a dirty word ... a nightmarish adjective soaked with all the blood of the *gulag*' (1993, p. 249). The debasement of utopia was made all the easier by the lack of any serious, concerted attempt to challenge it (Elliott, 1993).

Assuming the role of 'a kind of profoundly pessimistic self-flagellant chorus', many on the Left conceded the association between prescriptive utopian visions and totalitarian politics (Thompson, 1991, p. 107). Some actively welcomed the demise of utopianism (Enzensberger, 1991), while those wanting to hold on to utopia as a concept sought to distance themselves from totalising prescriptive visions (Therborn, 1991; Singer, 1993). Ideologically tarnished, utopia-as-system became increasingly ostracised from radical discourse. Keen to free it of its pejorative connotations, utopia was more and more presented as a flexible, provisional, open-ended process (e.g. Sargisson, 1996).

Over recent years it has become possible to talk of the 'rejuvenation' of utopia (Hayden & el-Ojeili, 2009). An engagement with utopianism is seen as necessary in order to challenge the transformations associated with globalisation – globalised power relations, increasing polarisation of wealth, cultural and military imperialism, and a growing sense of agentic impotence (Torres & Teodoro, 2007; Hayden & el-Ojeili, 2009). Related to this is dissatisfaction with post-empiricist deconstructive social science. Concerned primarily with dismantling and demystifying truth-claims and value commitments, deconstructive social science – of the kind associated with the work of Michel Foucault, for example – is seen to have generated an enfeebling 'vocabulary of deficit' within which the concept of future possibilities is absent (Ludema et al, 1997). Deemed inadequate in the face of the injustices of globalisation, what is called for instead is a socially enabling future-oriented utopian 'vocabulary of hope'. In the words of Tom Moylan, the dystopian realities of the present demand as a response 'a courageous embrace of the utopian project' (2007, p. 215).

In the field of education, it is increasingly recognised that utopia offers a potentially energising perspective (see Webb, 2009). Papastephanou even refers to 'the educational comeback of utopia' (2008, p. 91). However, the identification of utopian systems with totalitarian politics is now as much a part of the common sense of the radical pedagogue as it is the liberal ideologue. As a consequence, the comeback of utopia has been a cautious one, accompanied everywhere by warnings against 'unrealistic' visions and prescriptive 'blueprints' (Halpin, 2009). When Jacoby highlights the significance of utopian thought, he does so as 'a utopian who distrust[s] utopian plans' (2005, p. 97). Lewis argues for a utopian pedagogy of 'radical uncertainty' – a pedagogy that is open, partial, provisional and takes us on 'an educational quest for liberation without recourse to a set road' (2010, pp. 209-210). In answer to the question 'what is utopian pedagogy?', Coté et al answer that 'we look to utopia not as a place we might reach but as an ongoing process of becoming' (2007, p. 13). For Giroux, the discourse of freedom, plurality and difference precludes totalising visions and discredits utopian 'blueprints' and utopian 'engineering' (1997, pp. 191-196, 2003a, pp. 478-479).

While, therefore, it is right and important to highlight the recent 'revitalisation' of utopia as a concept (Jameson, 2005, p. xii), it is also important to note that utopia-as-system has been 'abandoned' in favour of utopia-as-process (Vieira, 2010, p. 22). The liberal critique of utopia-as-system is accepted not only by postmodernist theory, but also by radical educators critical of the kind of conservative liberalism offered by Berlin and Popper and hostile to contemporary neo-liberalism. In one of the more extreme formulations, Hall distinguishes explicitly between 'good' (open-ended process) utopianism and 'bad' (blueprint) utopianism, and argues that a future-oriented pedagogy of hope needs to embrace the former while avoiding the latter (Hall, 2007).

Proponents of utopian pedagogy are keen to emphasise, however, that accepting the liberal critique of utopian engineering does not mean accepting the liberal alternative – Popper's 'piecemeal engineering', or, as Berlin put it, lots of messy localised ad hoc ambiguous compromises (Popper, 1957; Berlin, 2003). Rejecting utopia-as-system does not mean rejecting utopia full stop. By embracing utopia-as-process, we are told, critical pedagogy can avoid, on the one hand, 'the indignity of speaking for others' associated with messianic blueprint utopianism, and, on the other, seeing the level of critical engagement reduced to nothing more than the kind of messy localised compromises that leave power structures untroubled (Coté et al, 2007). What, then, does a critical pedagogy underpinned by the concept of utopia-as-process look like?

Critical Pedagogy and Utopia-as-Process

I shall focus here on the work of Henry Giroux. Giroux is credited with 'the first textbook use of the term *critical pedagogy*' in the early 1980s (Darder et al, 2003, p. 2), and for the past 30 years has been consistently calling on educators to embrace the spirit of utopia. He characterises his own critical pedagogy as a project striving to articulate 'the language of hope and possibility' (Giroux, 2011, p. 5), explicitly drawing inspiration from Ernst Bloch and his twin concepts of 'educated hope' and 'concrete utopia' (Giroux, 2007). Like Bloch, Giroux interprets hope as a 'longing' born of the sense that 'something's missing' (Giroux, 2001, 2004). For both, this inchoate longing needs to be transformed into a concrete 'utopian longing' (Giroux, 2003b, p. 158); hope needs to be educated so that it is capable of reaching out towards concrete utopia. Giroux is at pains to point out that 'the language of possibility ... eschews the formulation of a grandiose blueprint for change' (Giroux & McLaren, 1991, p. 180). Utopian pedagogy rejects 'a reified form of utopianism' (Giroux, 1997, p. 223). For Giroux, utopian thinking 'is neither a blueprint for the future nor a form of social engineering, but a belief that different futures are possible' (Giroux, 2006, p. 55).

Education is presented as a public sphere that is currently atrophied but capable of revitalisation. It is both a site of cultural reproduction and a 'site of utopian possibility' (Giroux, 2002, p. 96). The task of utopian pedagogy is to create citizens who understand the relationship between power and knowledge, are capable of questioning the basic assumptions that govern political life, recognise the limitations of contemporary institutions, possess the courage required to take risks and challenge power, and are equipped with the skills and confidence needed to transform existing social and political institutions rather than simply adapt to them (Giroux, 1997, 2002, 2006, 2011). Utopia is understood here as a collective human process. Human beings animated by utopian thinking and educated hope refuse to accept the completeness of the present, believe that different forms of human association are possible, possess a profound confidence in their capacities as political agents, and strive to shape their own future. The role of education is to provide the cognitive conditions – the knowledge, skills, capacities and experiences – that underpin the utopian process.

Like all critical pedagogues, Giroux insists on the need to ground learning in the everyday lives of students and to adopt 'an approach that allows students to speak from their own histories and collective memories' (Giroux, 1997, pp. 157-158). Rather than glorifying the 'student voice', however, utopian pedagogy seeks to problematise it. In order to explore the constraints and possibilities inherent in each concrete situation, student experiences are analysed and interrogated in a way that is both critical and affirmative (Giroux & McLaren, 1991). This then provides a platform for linking individual experiences with ‘a progressive sense of social destiny’ (Giroux, 2002, p. 102). Giroux talks of the need ‘to tap the hidden utopian desire’ located in the experiences, discourses and relations within which students are embedded and of the need to ‘uncover the submerged longings’ that can be found within all social and cultural practices (Giroux & McLaren, 1991, pp. 174, 178). The educator is thus engaged in a process of ‘excavating’ – by means of a critical interrogation of the student voice – these hidden and submerged desires and longings (Giroux & McLaren, 1991, p. 179).

What Giroux is trying to present here is a bottom-up process of utopian engagement. Students’ lived experiences are used as a starting point for exploring the constraints and limitations of the present, for highlighting its possibilities, and for grounding alternatives that are real and concrete. Because the sense of utopian possibility is emergent rather than imposed, Giroux dissociates himself from the ‘messianic’ tradition of blueprint utopianism (Giroux, 2004, p. 38). At the same time, through their role as excavators, educationalists are responsible for nothing less than ‘redirecting the paths of human desire’ (Giroux & McLaren, 1991, p. 180). In this notion of ‘excavation’, Giroux’s debt to Bloch becomes evident. Bloch’s project – presented in his epic *The Principle of Hope*, the text which largely defines the contemporary reading of utopia-as-process – consisted of mining the depths of our cultural heritage in order to excavate those practices, experiences and artefacts (in literature, art, music, architecture, film, dance) that contain utopian dimensions that point to a better future and which can be used to guide, direct and educate our present hopes.

However, the framework of educated hope developed by Bloch is not without its problems. The crucial question is *how* one identifies the cultural ‘**utopica**’ **UTOPIA?** that can educate and direct our hopes. For Giroux, the process of pedagogical excavation involves distinguishing between those cultural practices that ‘open up’ human possibilities and those that ‘diminish’ them (Giroux & Simon, 1992). But on what basis does one make this distinction? Bloch himself encountered no problem at all in differentiating between concrete anticipations of human flourishing and what he regarded as abstract dross. Jazz, for example, was dismissed as reactionary ‘vomit’, while all things Baroque were heralded as signifiers of human authenticity (Bloch, 1986, p. 394); Hollywood was ‘a poison factory’, while Russian folk dance said ‘Here I am human’ (Bloch, 1986, pp. 395, 410). Bloch was thus more than able to outline 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’. They will gain a glimpse of what it is to be fully human, will gain real insight into the possibilities of the present, and will consequently reach out to the future and engage in the process of its becoming.

Bloch, however, possessed in his utopian armoury something that contemporary utopian pedagogy lacks, namely, a confident willingness to make explicit prescriptive value judgements. It is precisely such evaluative, prescriptive judgements that contemporary utopian pedagogy seeks to avoid. For the utopian pedagogue, evaluation, specification and judgement are associated with ‘the indignity of speaking for others’. Thus, Giroux criticises Bloch for his tendency to pre-specify the content of utopia and seeks to utilise Bloch’s method while abandoning its evaluative content (Giroux & McLaren, 1997, p. 156). Without such content, however, a concrete utopian approach to education is unable to distinguish between practices that ‘open up’ and practices that ‘diminish’ human possibility and is thus unable to provide a sense of direction. For Bloch, dreams are ‘easily led astray, without contact with the real forward tendency into what is better’ (Bloch, 1986, pp. 144-145). The project of educated hope becomes one of ‘teaching’ these dreams and of ‘keeping them trained unerringly, usefully, on what is right’ (p. 3). Without an explicit, value-based sense of ‘what is right’, the utopian educator’s capacity to teach, guide, direct and redirect is fatally compromised.

In *Picture Imperfect: utopian thought for an anti-utopian age*, Russell Jacoby offers one of the most sustained defences of utopia-as-process. Like many others, he accepts the liberal critique of utopia-as-system, but argues that there is another tradition that offers utopian possibilities without the totalising closure associated with utopian blueprints. What does utopia without a utopian vision look like, he asks? An ‘imageless longing’ and a sense of hope, he answers (2005, p. 135). In a similar vein, Coté et al (2007) present utopian pedagogy as a process of posing questions without the pretence of giving answers; an 'objectless' process of critical questioning; a process of creating spaces of discourse, dialogue and debate. There are real problems here, however, as utopian pedagogy is reduced to a method which takes the *process* of questioning, participation and dialogue as an end in itself. Without a utopian vision from which to develop an educational project, utopia is reduced to a series of specific, partial, and transient educational projects, and struggles to distinguish itself from the kind of piecemeal ad hoc engineering advocated by Karl Popper and Isaiah Berlin. A utopian pedagogue, such as Giroux, strives to direct and redirect the paths of human desire, linking individual longings to a progressive sense of social destiny. He wants to move beyond an endless, directionless romanticisation of the student voice. Without a vision, however, directionless romanticism is all one is left with.

If, as critical pedagogy has always maintained, education *is* politics, then the political practice of a pedagogy underpinned by utopia-as-process is an emaciated one. It is a pedagogy that valorises an imageless longing; a pedagogy that fetishises spaces of discourse and processes of dialogue; a pedagogy that resists normative judgement and refuses the task of constructing a political vision. It is a pedagogy of the partial and the provisional; a pedagogy of the ad hoc and the piecemeal. It is precisely the kind of 'utopian pedagogy' that, in posing no systemic threat to presently constituted structures of power, would have left Popper and Berlin unruffled. While this seems to lead us to an impasse – stuck between the dangers of oppressive totalising discourse on the one hand and directionless romanticism on the other – the following section suggests that radical pedagogy has too easily and too uncritically accepted the liberal rejection of 'blueprint' utopianism.

Critical Pedagogy and Utopia-as-System

Paulo Freire defines 'utopia' as 'the dialectical process of denouncing and announcing – denouncing the oppressing structure and announcing the humanizing structure' (1976, p. 225). In stressing the need for utopian annunciation, Freire argues 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 (1996, p. 187). He argues repeatedly that human beings are unfinished and that we are ontological wayfarers travelling the path to ourselves. Rather than stopping there, however, with the notion of utopia as an open-ended process of becoming, he argues that in order to travel the path to ourselves we need a clear 'design' or 'blueprint' depicting the form and shape that a more fully human future will take. Two reasons are given for this. The first is that, for Freire, human beings are purposive creatures. Just as the artisan cannot operate with an open-ended, undecided, indeterminate understanding of what they are about to execute, so too the human following their ontological calling to become more fully themselves (Freire, 1994, p. 78). The second is that a substantive utopian vision is required to counter the conservative drive to domesticate the future and render it merely 'a repetition of the present' (Freire, 1972, p. 72). When so much ideological weight is placed behind the proclamation that 'there is no alternative', utopian pedagogy needs to depict such an alternative to rouse *homo viator* from a state of ontological paralysis. For Freire, liberatory pedagogies 'cannot exist without being driven by fundamental visions of a utopian society' (Freire & Rossatto, 2005, p. 17). The role of the educator becomes that of engaging the learner in their curious, hopeful ontological journey by presenting to them a detailed vision of that towards which they are striving.

Despite often drawing on the work of Freire, contemporary utopian pedagogy balks at the prospect of presenting detailed utopian visions for fear of totalising closure, paternalistic elitism and the indignity of speaking for others. This fear is misplaced, however. As Raymond Williams rightly points out, by virtue of its very totalisation, the blueprint utopia 'can envisage, in general structure but also in detail, a different and practical way of life' and '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' (1983, p. 13). Unlike Berlin and Popper, Williams had taken the time to familiarise himself with the genre of utopian literature and was more than aware that the normative prescriptive depictions of a better way of being did not, as a whole, present visions of a uniform repressive hell. In the best examples of the genre, Williams argues, '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, p. 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.

As far as Freire himself was concerned, rather than signalling a descent into messianism, the pedagogical value of utopian visions is that they help create the conditions through which learners themselves emerge as dreamers of utopia. This was recognised long ago by William Morris. In *News from Nowhere* Morris offers us one of the great utopian systems – a vision of society reconstituted in its totality and a vision full of detailed and normative content. Yet Morris himself was critical of utopian 'prophets' and fully maintained that the humanised future would be shaped by those who live in it (Morris, 1973, pp. 106-107, 188-189). Morris' project is commonly referred to now as 'the education of desire', while Freire described his own as 'a pedagogy of desire' and 'the education of longing' (2007a, p. 5, 2007b, p. 25). For Morris, the crucial role of utopian visions in the education of desire was that 'these dreams for the future, make many man a socialist whom sober reason deduced from science and political economy ... would not move at all' (Morris, 1973, p. 189). Like Morris, Freire believed that the key task of the educator is to generate political dreams, political yearnings, and political desires. And like Morris, Freire believed that utopian visions were needed to guide purposive creatures – moved more by annunciations of the future goal than by denunciations of the dehumanising present – along their ontological journey toward a more fully human future. Utopian visions liberate the imagination as to the possibilities for change and help to both generate and shape dreams, yearnings and desires.

Freire was keen to point out here that: 'What is implied is not the transmission to the people of a knowledge previously elaborated, a process that ignores what they already know, but the act of returning to them, in an organized form, what they themselves offered in a disorganized form' (1978, pp. 24-25). This key point is phrased differently at different times – teaching better what the people already know or transforming knowledge based on feelings into knowledge based on critical understanding (1994, p. 273). With regards to the design for a new way of being that illuminates the path toward a better future, this, for Freire, emerges from the learners' reality in confused form and at the affective level. The role of the educator is to work with learners to provide the design with a deeper cognitive foundation and a sharper, more precise shape.

Borrowing a concept from Karl Mannheim, it is possible to interpret Freirean pedagogy as 'an active utopia'. According to Mannheim, 'it is a very essential feature of modern history that in the gradual organization for collective action social classes become effective in transforming historical reality only when their aspirations are embodied in utopias appropriate to the changing situation' (1940, p. 187). The role of the educator is crucial here in giving clear utopian form to popular aspirations. For Mannheim, the utopian conceptions of the educator seize on currents present in society, give expression to them, flow back into the outlook of a social group and are translated by this group into action. Rather than corresponding directly to a concrete body of articulated needs, the active utopia 'transmits' and 'articulates' the amorphous 'collective impulse' of a group (pp. 185-186). While Freire's utopian pedagogy starts from and is grounded in the experiences of the students, seizing and reflecting their 'collective impulse', it is also an active and constructive pedagogy giving positive utopian expression – positive annunciation – to this collective impulse.

Conclusion

Critical utopian pedagogy is a pedagogy of resistance and a pedagogy of possibility. Confronting a world of inequality, deficiency and unfulfilment, utopian pedagogy rejects utopian blueprints while working with students to excavate utopian 'traces' that can guide us on towards what might be and what is not yet (Greene, 2003). Conceptualising utopia as an open-ended process of becoming, utopian pedagogy strives to reconfigure relations of power and to create counter-hegemonic spaces of possibility. Utopian pedagogy seeks to resist the closure of critical space within the education system, while also striving to develop a vocabulary of hope to guide a transformative response to globalisation.

What I have tried to argue in this article is that utopian pedagogy as currently understood is not up to the task. The emphasis on creating spaces of dialogue and points of departure misses the point that dialogue 'is not a "free space" where you say what you want. Dialogue takes place inside some program and content' (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 102). Without content and vision utopian spaces run the risk of remaining empty and barren. As Harvey eloquently argues, utopia conceived as process has 'the habit of getting lost in the romanticism of endlessly open projects that never have to come to a point of closure'. Without closure in the form of a vision and a goal, utopia remains 'a pure signifier of hope destined never to acquire a material referent' (Harvey, 2000, pp. 189, 174). In one of the rare contemporary defences of 'utopian models', Olssen argues that the retreat from totalising visions presages a retreat of the imagination from the terrain of social life, the end result of which is 'political paralysis' (Olssen, 2006, p. 116).

In defending utopia-as-system, the article has not sought to reproduce the binary separation between it and utopia-as-process. This is not a question of either/or. The aim of the article has rather been to bring utopian system/programme/content back into discussions concerning the theory and practice of critical pedagogy. The rejection of utopian blueprints by radical educators has been too severe, too absolute. The practice of depicting holistic normative visions is too often dismissed out of hand as being 'dystopian', with Popper still being cited as the reference point for such an evaluation (Halpin, 2009). We are still living in the shadow of the enfeebled retreat from utopia – and the construction of a false binary – that followed in the wake of 1989. The uncritical acceptance of the liberal critique has paved the way for the domestication and ideological recuperation of the concept of utopia. The idea of presenting a detailed normative picture of an *alternative* state or society is so far removed from contemporary common sense that the boundaries of the utopian have increasingly become confined to the here and now. One group of educators, for example, claim without any sense of paradox to be working towards 'a vision of utopia which has the possibility of achievement in *present* socio-economic conditions' (Sawyer et al, 2007, p. 228).

Interestingly, in his very first book, Giroux challenges such a reading of utopia. For Giroux, 'radical pedagogy needs a vision – one that celebrates not what is but what could be, that looks beyond the immediate to the future and links struggle to a new set of human possibilities' (1983, p. 242). He goes on, too, to criticise those who fetishise pedagogical process, arguing that: 'A pedagogy that simply promotes a culture of questioning says nothing about what kind of future is or should be implied by how and what educators teach' (2003a, p. 482). Although a passionate and persistent critic of utopia-as-system, he concedes that 'without a vision for the future – without asking "Empowerment for what?" – critical pedagogy becomes reduced to a method for participation that takes democracy as an end, not a means' (Giroux & McLaren, 1991, p. 158). However, Giroux's uncritical acceptance of the liberal critique of utopian blueprints prevents him from presenting the kind of normative vision of a better world that he (sometimes at least) acknowledges to be necessary.

Without a vision, utopian pedagogy runs the risk of becoming an empty and endless project that romanticises the process while losing sight of the goal. Utopian pedagogy cannot, therefore, confine itself to creating spaces of critical dialogue and communities of learning. Nor is it enough to interrogate the student voice in order to uncover submerged longings and desires. As Mannheim rightly highlighted, unless the longings, desires and 'collective impulse' of a group are seized upon and articulated as a utopian system by the visionary educator, then this collective impulse remains just an impulse – an objectless process – because it lacks the 'situationally transcendent ideas' that alone can guide and direct transformative action (1940, p. 185). Without a positively annunciated utopian goal to motivate and guide the praxis of purposive human actors, social hope will take the form of a directionless passionate longing and the process utopianism that emerges from and feeds back into this hope will run the risk of getting lost in the romanticism of endlessly open projects.

The strong utopian thrust of Freirean pedagogy has been tamed and domesticated over recent years. Freire is presented as an educator who rejects utopia-as-system and proposes instead a utopian practice and a utopian politics that is provisional, open-ended and indeterminate (Giroux & McLaren, 1997; Lewis, 2010). He is thus positioned comfortably within the contemporary move towards a 'pragmatic utopianism' (Vieira, 2010, p. 22) – a future-oriented critical thinking which refuses to focus on a utopian goal and abandons the quest for systemic transformation. Power has little to fear from utopia so understood. Mainstream Christian philosophy, for example, stands at odds with 'descriptively full' normative utopian systems, but is perfectly at ease with 'the idea of a changing progressive and processive developing utopia' (Sutherland, 1989, p. 204). So too, conservative voices, such as Berlin and Popper, erstwhile critics who would find little to object to in the ideologically recuperated reading of utopia as a piecemeal pragmatic process.

Freire, however, always insisted on the need for utopian annunciation. It was annunciation, indeed, that gave utopia its force. Philip Wegner (2002) suggests that utopia performs two pedagogical operations – deterritorialisation (the critical dismantling of existing social norms and institutions) and reterritorialisation (the construction of new forms and institutions through a pedagogy of desire and the education of longing). For Freire, deterritorialisation alone was insufficient. What defined a utopian pedagogy, and differentiated it from mere critical pedagogy, was the act of annunciating a new reality (Webb, 2012). For Freire, only a utopian pedagogy of annunciation could effectively counter what Žižek (2009) and Badiou (2010) describe as the ideology of late modernity – the resigned acceptance that there is no alternative, that everything has been worked out, that the future will be a mere repetition of the present. Indeed, 'the struggle for the restoration of utopia' is presented as the key animating imperative of political and educational practice (Freire, 1998, p. 103). The role of the active utopian educator becomes one of unmasking reality, of radicalising hope, of illuminating the path toward a better future and, crucially, of directing purposive action towards the realisation of a utopian vision, system and goal.

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