A practice of concrete utopia? Informal youth support and the possibility of 'redemptive remembering' in a UK coal-mining area.

Abstract

At a moment when individualised and de-historicised notions of 'aspiration', 'resilience' and 'wellbeing' are proliferating in policy discourse shaping informal youth support practice, this article argues, instead, for a critically historical focus. Reviewing material from an intergenerational ethnographic study of young people in contact with youth support teams in a former coal-mining community, the case is made for understanding how young working class people's experience of education is situated within historical geographies of collectively transmitted affect. In the particular coal mining locality considered, these classed spatialities of feeling have been shaped through traditions of political, trade union and community resistance and mutual aid established over a two hundred year period and culminating in the locally bitterly divided national miners'strike of 1984-85. Beginning from an ethnographic field note, the article outlines how such insubordinate community histories – particularly those imagining a radical reconstitution of society – can be silenced when a collective psycho-social space once redolent with hope becomes a space of ruin as a result of politically orchestrated de-industrialisation. Noticing how this compounds young people's experience of marginalisation and leaves them at once adrift from the 'illegitimate' histories that are their legitimate 'heritage' and at the same time subject to the traumatic affective legacy of those same histories, a critical counter-practice in informal youth support is proposed. Drawing on Blochian readings of Freire, the article calls for a form of intergenerational 'redemptive remembering' – a practice of 'concrete utopia' – capable of recovering 'unspeakable' community histories for a collective remaking of resilience and aspiration beyond the received confines of the neoliberal imaginary.

Key words

Affect, erased histories, coal-mining communities, informal youth work, critical pedagogy, Ernst Bloch

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Introduction

During the period of New Labour government to 2010, policy discourse focussing on youth emphatically highlighted a supposed failure of 'aspiration' among working class young people. The idea that youth simply reproduced the 'low aspirations' of their pathologically 'workless' communities, rather neatly made them responsible for their own predicament as youth unemployment started to rise. At the time, a growing number of programmes aimed at *raising* aspirations were established and even the most informal youth support settings were performatively re-engineered to the tune of this discursive refrain (Bright, 2012a). While the language of failed aspiration quickly hardened to a vocabulary of 'ambition' as early policy on education and training emerged from the Coalition Government (DfE, 2010; DBIS, 2010) the core theme remained audible, even as the worsening economic crisis impacted on youth transitions as increasing NEET[1] figures and unprecedented graduate unemployment. Remained audible, that is, until – in the aftermath of fairly widespread and severe urban rioting in the UK in the summer of 2011 – it shifted almost imperceptibly to a different hortatory chorus as the volume lowered around aspiration while being notched up around 'resilience'. Young people, their aspirations now shattered by some kind of 'natural' economic disaster apparently falling from the sky, were positioned as suffering from a failure of resilience. Above all else, it seems, they needed to be able to 'bounce back' in such a 'period of economic downturn'[2]. Now, this simplistic discursive ensemble – employed willy-nilly in a range of iterations from Tory defence policy[3] to the 'think pieces' of the Young Foundation – is troubling enough in its own right and rightly beginning to attract a critique (Harrison, 2012). Worryingly worse, though, is the traction that such an ahistorical, apolitical and asocial explanatory repertoire is gaining in some practice contexts.

Thankfully, there are small but important voices articulating a 'practice otherwise' and I'd like to add to them by arguing, here, for a determinedly *historical* and resolutely *collective* orientation in critical community-based, informal youth work. Beginning from an ethnographic field note generated by the passing round of a photograph, I'll outline how insubordinate community histories – particularly those imagining a radical reconstitution of society – can come to be silenced and their situation rendered literally 'unspeakable' when a collective psycho-social space once redolent with hope becomes a space of ruin. In developing that point, I'll review material from my recent ethnographic study of young people 'targeted' by integrated youth support teams in a de-industrialised coal-mining community[4] and summarise the case I've made for understanding their experiences of

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[1] NEET – Not in Employment, Education or Training.
[2] Young Foundation. 'In a recession, does wellbeing matter?'
 http://www.youngfoundation.org/blog/welbeing-and-resilience/in-a-recession-does-wellbeing-matter. Downloaded 26/07/12. Notice how the language constructs political economy as beyond the realm of choice.
[3] *A Resilient Nation*. Published by the Conservative Party in 2010
[4] Overall, my research looks at various continuities and disjunctions between the resistant history of an area of the British coalfield and the structures of meaning shaping young people's responses to education. Unusually, for an educational ethnography, the study is *intergenerational*. It focuses on two groups: young people currently on the margins of education in these now de-industrialised communities and adults from similar backgrounds who now work with the young people in various capacities and experienced education in the same locality at a time when the coal industry was thriving. The fieldwork element of the research was carried out in four former

education as situated within historical and spatial circulations of affect (see Bright, 2011a; 2012a). Noticing how the sometimes incomplete nature of such affective transmissions can leave young people both adrift from 'illegitimate' histories that are their legitimate 'heritage' and , at the same time, subject to the traumatic affective legacy of those same histories, I'll go on to canvas for a co-constituted, intergenerational counter-practice in informal work with youth. Drawing on some Blochian readings of Freire, I'll reiterate the call made there for a pedagogy of 'redemptive remembering' rooted in Ernst Bloch's (1995)account of utopia, suggesting that such an approach is not only relevant but also timely given the development of new social movements drawing on similar ideas. Basically, I'll argue the importance of community youth support being equipped to help speak 'unspeakable' community histories, thus making them available for a re-envisioning of aspiration, resilience and wellbeing in a way that challenges the received confines of the neoliberal imaginary. Mindful of some controversies around terminology (Levitas, 1997) I'll nevertheless follow Bloch in *The Principle of Hope*, and call the practice I'm proposing a 'practice of concrete utopia' (Bloch, 1995, 17). But first, let's have a look at the photograph and the field note.

An iconography of collective utopian longing

coal-mining villages– Beldover, Coalbrook, Cragwell and Longthorne – in Derbyshire, England during 2006-2011. The villages were chosen because of their front line position in the 1984-85 miners' strike[4] and a variety of settings were studied: formal but out-of-school youth education projects, informal education and youth work venues, youth clubs, a community youth house, private homes, a miners' welfare club and the street. In the main, though, sustained contact with two sites generated the bulk of the data. In one case, a link was maintained over a two year period with staff and learners at a community based 'pre Entry to Employment'[4] programme called *Go 4 it!* In the second case, a year-long participant observation took place with staff and young people involved in local authority 'detached' and club-based youth work provision in the four communities. The *Cavs Lasses Group* – a girls-only, after-school group on the Cavendish estate, Beldover – and *Bus Stop* – a mobile youth support service – are examples.

Field note, *The Spot*, Beldover[5], October, 2011

The girls – Heartbreaker, Jimjam, Milly, Samantha – and a couple of the lads – Cocker and Big Matt –
do their polite best to concentrate as a photo is passed round the group of teenagers gathered in the
sparsely furnished front room of *The Spot*, a community support house on the Cavs[6], the old pit estate,
in Beldover.
–   What do you reckon this is? What do you think's goin' on in this picture? I ask.
–   Fuck knows! Is it a party, or summat? *I* don't know, says Nicky.
Milly challenges:
–   *I* think it's a *fair*, in't it? Like on o' them fairs they use to 'ave. What they call'em? Like a festival,
     or summat?
–   Hey! shouts Cocker, recognising the background to the shot – It's in fuckin' Belder![7] It's up at top
     o' village! Look, there's White Horse! [a pub]
There's a rapid flurry as they jostle each other to get a look at the photo that now, suddenly, has
something to do with them. It was taken in their village, after all, so it *must* be to do with them. Then,
just as quickly, their interest evaporates. They want to move, talk about something else. They are
starting to shuffle, reaching for mobiles, rushing to share a smoke outside the door. In an instant,
almost, they've gone. Samantha, however, hangs back. She's a funny, quick-witted girl who's recently
been subject to a "managed move" from Beldover school for "feightin' wi' a teacher". She takes my
"research" very seriously, wants me to write about her, and, as usual, tries to tell me something
"sensible" before she breaks off into her usual role of clown to the "Cavs lasses". She looks at the
photo again with studied scrutiny:
–   Is it, like, some kind o' *protest*, Geoff? she asks quietly.

The photograph that I had passed around[8] on this occasion dates from sometime in the early
1970s – the period of two national miners' strikes in the UK – and was taken in the market
place at Beldover, the large coal-mining village in Derbyshire where ***The Spot*** is now
situated. It shows a small group of people gathered around the large, wheel-mounted banner
of Beldover branch of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The banner depicts
"vesting day" on January the 1st 1947 – for which it had been commissioned – when the
British coal industry was taken into public ownership[9]. In the classic style of a British trade
union banner, it carries the name of the branch in a heraldic scroll above an oval pictorial
window showing a significant event, underneath which there's a smaller scroll carrying a
motto. In this instance, the oval frame captures a powerfully symbolic exchange. Shown to
one side in the valley below Beldover's hill-top castle, is a figure representing the coal
owners – a plume-capped, moustachioed aristocrat, dressed as a 17th century Royalist
"cavalier". At the other side, below the overshadowed pit near to the Colliery Model Village,
is a helmeted, shirt-sleeved collier who has something of the English civil war
Parliamentarian about him. Both, looking each other square in the eye, reach to the lower
centre of the image and execute this long overdue transaction – coveted by one partner,
dreaded by the other – with a cool, formal handshake. Framing this historic transfer of a
fundamental means of production, a light-giving miner's lamp hangs in each of the tasselled

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[5] All names of people and places (at sub county level) have been changed.
[6] The Cavendish estate, shortened always to 'The Cavs".
[7] The local name for Beldover
[8] I'm indebted to the former secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers at Beldover for kindly giving me a
copy of the photo (and permission to use it) as well as a postcard of the 'old' Beldover branch banner. The
banner was "lost" after the 1984-85 strike when the Nottinghamshire NUM offices came under the control of the
non-striking Union of Democratic Miners (UDM). "They probably burned it" my contact told me.
[9] The demand for nationalisation in coal mining trade union politics – and therefore community life – was of
enormous significance, promising not only an end to chaotic and exploitative private ownership but, by virtue of
that, also safeguarding life and limb in a dangerous industry.

drapes of acanthus that tumble either side of the witnessing oval. The motto below reads: "Our Heritage".

Now, there are a number of reasons why one might argue the potential importance of such an image as this to the young people hanging around at *The Spot*. At the simplest level, they may well have relatives pictured here. At another level, though, the image presented – of a trade union banner surrounded by its attendants – is central to an iconography of collective utopian longing that has framed the broadly anti-capitalist 'aspirations' of coal-mining communities such as Beldover for well over a hundred years (see Gorman, 1973). It is therefore a key text in the young people's own class history. However, despite their conjectures, Samantha, Cocker and the others struggle to read it – something which is remarkable in a coal-mining culture characterised by 'a very clear sense of the past as struggle [which] constitutes a memory that goes back at least a century' and that has the strikes of 1926, 1972, 1974 and 1984-5 as a 'common touchstone' and 'the imagery of the strike as defiance of the state [as]…a constant one' (Fentress and Wickham, 1992, 115-6).

In terms of critical education practice, moments like this potentially problematise notions of aspiration, heritage, wellbeing and resilience in ways that can be richly productive. Indeed, a set of crucially important issues are enfolded here. They touch on identity and belonging in a globalised world; on the meaning of class and family in contemporary lives; on gender; on how community has been imagined and might be re-imagined; on the erasures of unofficial histories; on values, dreams and remembrance. So, how – in a culture of memory – has this hiatus come to exist between the contemporary lives of a group of teenagers from coal-mining families and their own recent collective past? Does it simply indicate that the past is no longer relevant in liquid modernity? Or is there something else going on?

Historical geographies of collectively transmitted affect

In recent publications, I have been working with a number of ideas to explore the ways in which a conflicted past might become unspeakable and how that might impact on the educational experiences of young people in various ways. Drawing fairly eclectically on work by Brennan, (2004) Reay (2009) and Walkerdine (2010, 2012), I have suggested that *collective* transmissions of affect are significant in this process. In developing this view, Diane Reay's idea that disengagement from school is related to aspects of historical class experience has been a rich starting point. Employing the geological metaphor of 'sedimentation', Reay has drawn our attention to how a general "sense of powerlessness and educational worthlessness" is transmitted *intergenerationally* as "children negotiate schooling not only directly through their own experiences but also through the *sedimented* experiences of parents or even grandparents" (Reay, 2009, 27, my emphasis). She has argued, further and vigorously that this is a *classed* process. As a "result of a century of class domination" she identifies a ''historical legacy of working class children being the inferior 'other' that resonates in the present" (Reay 2009, p. 24). What is more, this legacy is "infused with [a] sense of the righteous indignation that once underpinned a strong working class politics". It is classed and historical, therefore, but it is also laden with *affect.*

This idea is a powerful one. It provides a way of contextualising the anger evident in many working-class young people's responses to education and moves beyond the limiting framework that positions school disaffection as primarily a matter of individual pathology. Furthermore, it also links disengagement positively to unfinished 'aspirations' that open up

questions of property, power, representation, democracy and education. Working with and extending this notion of sedimentation, I've argued that it is *generally* the case that much of what is labelled as disaffection can only be properly understood as situated in locally specific historical, cultural and class contexts. However, the idea needs supplementing in the case of particular settings – such as the coalfield – where post-conflict "affects of trauma" (Hardt, 2007, vii) are a complicating factor. In earlier work of mine (Bright, 2010) I tried to bring this out by focussing on the way that unacknowledged social, political and labour histories have shaped local attitudes to education through class memory. More recently, I've responded to the 'affective turn' in social theory (Clough, 2007) by examining *historical geographies of collectively transmitted affect*. That is, I've been inquiring into the way that the embodied *feelings* rooted in those social, political and labour histories continue to circulate through something like 'structures of feeling' (Williams, 1975; 1977), 'spatialities of feeling' (Thrift, 2008) or 'ordinary affects' (Stewart, 2007) *even though* the traditional intergenerational narrative transmission has been stalled by a series of silencing practices that have come to operate.

In making sense of those silencing practices, I've been following a lead from Valerie Walkerdine's recent work (Walkerdine, 2010, Walkerdine and Jiminez, 2012) and thinking about how the collective psycho-social impact of de-industrialisation – transmitted collectively via some kind of atmospheric process (Anderson, 2009) – can impact on community in ways that link to disengagement from school. Walkerdine, arguing that sociological approaches to community thus far show a "poor handling of relational and affective aspects" (Walkerdine, 2010, 93), examines the place of affect in community relations and how it relates to trauma in a working-class community following the closure of a steelworks in the South Wales valleys in 2002. She works from approaches that stress the importance of the skin as "bodily container" and "psychic envelope" in individual infancy and extends that idea to the *community* 'body', investigating "how a sense of a containing skin provides a feeling of ontological security for a community beset by uncertainty and insecurity" (ibid.). This skin – created and maintained through a range of affective relations and practices – can be punctured in the event of a community trauma such as the closure of a works (or pit) in such a way as "to cause a lack of safety *and fear of death* within the inhabitants". The survival practices that Walkerdine identifies include practices of "speaking" and – very significantly for my own work – "*silence*" (ibid., my emphasis).

I've also incorporated Tim Edensor's notion of postindustrial ruins as "places from which counter-memories can be articulated" (Edensor, 2005: 164). As a cultural geographer interested in the aesthetic and material implications of industrial ruin, Edensor has conjured a space where

> Hidden in ruins are forgotten forms of collectivity and solidarity, lost skills, ways of behaving and feeling, traces of arcane language, and neglected historical and contemporary forms of social enterprise. (Edensor, 2005, 166-167)

Postindustrial locations by this account are sites "in which the visible and the invisible, the material and the immaterial, intersect", where "ghosts often barely present in the traces they left, stimulate the construction and transmission of stories which are not merely inarticulate but are suffused with affect" (Edensor, 2005, 163). In such places, traces remain of "things [that] *might be otherwise*...elements of the past [that] *might have conspired to forge an alternative present*" (Edensor, 2005, 141, my emphasis). They are haunted, that is, by what Bloch called *spuren* [traces] of hope (Bloch, 1969).

The deindustrialised coalfield: a resistant site of ruin.

So how do these theoretical accounts taken together play out empirically in the Derbyshire coalfield? In answering that question, it's necessary to get a feel for how this particular site of industrial ruin is constituted socio-economically, culturally and affectively. That the coal-mining industry still casts a shadow in social and economic terms is obvious from a few basic statistics. Coalbrook, Cragwell and Beldover all saw their pits close within a couple of years of each other in the early 1990s. Twenty years or so later, the wards around the sites of the former collieries still exhibit levels of deprivation that remain among the 1% most deprived nationally and, generally, more than a third of the working age population are still 'inactive' due to illness, disability or caring responsibilities. Unemployment is currently increasing rapidly, particularly among young people, and more than 50% of the population still possess no qualifications. Basically, deprivation in these essentially rural localities reaches the very worst urban levels (for accounts of coalfield decline see Beatty et al. 2005, Bennett et al. 2000, Gore et al. 2007, Murray et al. 2005)

Culturally, the ruination of the coalfield has been filtered through a set of increasingly negative and neglectful representations. Conventionally, the picture of coal-mining communities oscillated between two view points. They were seen, alternatively, as either the home of heroic Stakhanovite labour or as the seed bed of the 'enemy within'. In the period of de-industrialisation, however, the dominant representation has become one of disdain, even disgust. The residents of the pit estates in places like Beldover, Coalbrook, Cragwell and Longthorne have finally been abandoned to an amorphous and dangerous 'white working class' left behind at the dystopian – and, in the case of coal, polluted – end of history. Once loved, but now loathed as fallen occupants of a contemporary grotesquerie, (See Hudson, 1995, and the review of Hudson by Samuel, 1998) pit families have disappeared from the social account and are largely forgotten. Mining villages are places, now, where only the "mad" would work[10] and, presumably, where only the hapless or hopeless might find themselves a habitation.

The affective legacy is obvious in many ways too, but difficult to specify. In my ethnographic work it is clear that the situation I've just described has affected the *self*-representations of both of the groups – the young people *and* the adults who work with them – on which my study has focussed (See the discussions of 'resistant aspiration' 'refusal' and 'performativity' in Bright 2011a, 2011b and 2012a, respectively). In the Beldover area of Derbyshire, where the resistance history (see Page Arnot, 1961, Griffin, 1962, Williams, 1962) has been more fraught and conflicted (Richards, 1996) than in other coalfield areas, the affective residue of the bitterly divided 1984-85 miners' strike and the subsequent pit closure programme is still highly significant, though not straightforwardly discernible. It remains, in fact, hidden, cloaked in silence, unspeakable. Nobody talks, but everyone *knows* – as Frank, a former coal miner and now community worker, illustrates:

> I know that we're the lowest nationally…Go out somewhere in the area and ask anybody in the street, and we're the lowest. They'll be able to tell you: the normal community worker in the village, your normal worker, your Joe Bloggs, Joe public. They'd be able to tell you that we're the lowest of the lowest nationally [...] Yeah, I mean, what's the big secret? It's obvious, you know. I did a survey in the village. I think there's a thousand people in Longthorne, something like that. I think I put out a thousand questionnaires, like you do when you're doing research […] I think I got eight back, out of a thousand. But that actually *told* me something […] I think they just distrust everything, you know, to

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[10] "If I see somebody, an' they say, oh, where do you work? I says, I work at Coalbrook. I tell 'em wor I do. They'll say: are you *mad*?" Police Community Support Officer, Chris Stevens.

do with paperwork or anything like that. It's like an electric bill, put it at the back of the clock and forget about it […] Never *say* you've come to the bottom! That's the worst thing you can *say*, because you end up falling even further then, don't you?

Beyond this generalised fear of worse to come, there are common ethnographic references to "things"' always "going back to the miners' strike" even "though people don't know it" and "nobody says owt [anything] ". Frequently, too, there are narratives of a 'kind of haunting going on'.

A kind of haunting going on

Combining Reay's original insight with Brennan's contribution on the collective transmission of affect, Walkerdine's work on community trauma and the notion of "ruin" evoked by Edensor, it becomes possible to mobilise an idea of how sedimentation works in traumatic postindustrial situations. Here, a knowledge that "is not empiricist, didactic or intellectual but empathetic and sensual, understood at an intuitive and affective level" (Edensor, 2005: 164) leaks from the psycho-social ruins that hide it and continues to have an affective impact. Now, this idea helps make sense of fieldwork material I have that shows young people apparently acting out the traumatic past of their communities – in internecine territorial conflicts and resistance to outsiders, for example – even though they have no *conscious* knowledge of that past. It also throws light on the way that locally originating practitioners position themselves as exclusively privy to febrile circuits of affect that the young people embody.

Stephanie, herself a child of the 1984-85 strike, now a mature trainee youth worker, articulates this here:

> There's a kind of haunting that's going on. Yes, that's a good way of putting it. I think that's the right way to explain it. I don't know if you can [lay ghosts]. I don't know if you can. It's the past. It happened. It's part of...it's part of who we are for those that was involved and those that was affected...*and* for those I guess that wasn't [...] Like I said, I've had conversations about do you think the miners' strike has an affect on young people today? How do you make that out, they say. So I've had this chat. For those that *wasn't* affected [the idea is] a *load of crap*! For those that *was* affected, *they* agree: 'yeah, I *really* do!' [...] You *do* know what's a matter with [the young people]. That's the whole point.

Significantly, among the group of adults I've observed – including youth support managers, classroom support assistants, youth workers, a police community support officer (PCSO), community tutors and a miscellaneous group of sessional youth workers – almost all had a family background in coal-mining and were involved one way or another in the miners' strike of 1984-85, the campaign against pit closures or trade union and labour politics. Consequently, the key events of that time continue to provide an implicit context for the strong relational content of their work. PCSO Chris Stevens, formerly a striking miner at Coalbrook colliery, sees himself as "a *dad* to kids in Coalbrook" (my emphasis) who can bring the "tenderness" of coal face "snap times"[11] to his role. In a similar vein, National Union of Mineworkers full time officer, Gary Charlesworth, views aspects of local lived culture, such as the protective and educative role once carried out by the union, as almost parental in nature: "the pit and the union were like their *mother*, that's what I used to say to

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[11] The refreshment break taken underground

'em" (my emphasis). Furthermore, this affective residue is inscribed in the very environment as the following filed note shows:

Field note, Coalbrook

> Coalbrook Miners' Welfare. At the bottom of the Model Village opposite the police station that got ransacked during the strike. There are adverts for the usual pub tribute bands: 'Beef Loaf' and, we are assured, the 'original' Fourmost. There's a "cage fight day" to come soon, too. In the Welfare there are two sparsely decorated concert rooms. One is huge. A formidable gig, no doubt. In the smaller room there's a framed photo of AJ Cook (the miners' leader in the Twenties) above Idris Davies' General Strike poem: 'From the Angry Summer'. The caption reads "Presented by Danford NUT, Bethnal Green, in March 1985 on the anniversary of the heroic struggle to defend jobs and communities". I'm in the office. Today is the NUM surgery for the local ex-mining community. In this room is a framed version of another of Idris Davies' poems 'Do you remember 1926?' Visiting the men's toilets before leave the club later, I notice that someone has scrawled 'National Union of Mineworkers, 2006' in felt tip alongside 'Man Utd' on the bare plaster wall above the urinal – but the pit shut in 1993 and there's no longer a single mineworker in Derbyshire.

This materially embedded, affective counter-knowledge – transmitted atmospherically to the local young people and available as a consciously lived framework of meaning for the group of professional and para-professional workers – constitutes a shared spatiality of feeling in which practice occurs. As such, the bonds between young people and workers are remarkably strong. Only occasionally, though, do moments of co-constituted criticality or significant policy activism occur (see Bright, 2012b). Inevitably, one wants to ask how such productive experience might be recovered and put fully to work in an explicit interrogation of the flimsy but nevertheless hegemonic discourses that currently surround contemporary youth practice. Such a question takes us, first, into the terrain of critical pedagogy and then, by that route, via Freire back to Bloch.

Critical pedagogy and historicised knowledge

Now, I don't want to get tangled in long standing debates that have preoccupied critical pedagogy about the legacy of Freire, or the role that Marxism or liberation theology plays in that legacy. Nor do I want to get tied up in vexed questions about the constitution of any critical pedagogic canon. Contributions to the field in recent years have thankfully tended more towards inclusivity than sectarianism (See McLaren's foreword to Allman, 2010). They have also united in resisting critical pedagogy's domestication to mere *method*, arguing that it must remain in McLaren's words a "challeng[e to] imperial capital and [a] struggle for critical consciousness" (ibid. xvii). For the purposes of this discussion, I am happy enough to settle for a 'philosophically heterogeneous' critical pedagogy (see Darder *et al*, 2003). That is, one that sees "...all pedagogical practices [as] constituted within regimes of truth, privileging norms, and ruling social arrangements" (McLaren, and Tadeu de Silva, 1993, 53), and that identifies "school knowledge as *historically* and socially rooted and interest bound [as] the product of agreement or consent between individuals who live out particular social relations (e.g. of class, race, and gender) and who live *in particular junctures of time*" (McLaren, 2003, 72, my emphasis).

In this account, knowledge is always multiple and always *contested.* Some knowledge circuits appropriate more power and legitimacy than others, and they do this in significant part by colonising knowledge by means of *history*. Consequently, some knowledges are constantly remembered while others are forgotten, even erased. As McLaren goes on to

argue, "critical pedagogy asks how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated while others clearly are not" (ibid). As critical pedagogy has emphasised – from Freire's (1974) foundational work through Giroux (1983) and McLaren's (1995) key contributions, to the most recent input of, say, Smyth (2011) – the recovery of sedimented counter-knowledge is essential to the cultivation of a " *[c]ritical [h]ope* that aims to counter 'the crippling fatalism of neoliberalism'" (Smyth, 2011, 1. Original emphasis). This point takes us straight back to Bloch.

Redemptive remembering and back to Bloch's 'not yet'

So, I'd now like to look at some material from the reconsideration of Bloch's "neither outdated nor out of place" version "of 'warm' utopian Marxist critique" (Daniel and Moylan, 1997, viii) which began in the 1990s and caught the eye of critical pedagogy theorists because of its "important impetus in radical cultural work" (Zipes, 1997, 3). In general, Bloch's dense and difficult work "develops a philosophy of hope and the future, a dreaming forward"(Kellner, 1997, 81) by offering

> ...a dialectical analysis of the past which illuminates the *present* and can direct us to a better *future*. The past – what has been – contains both the sufferings, tragedies, and failures of humanity – what to avoid and redeem – and its unrealised hopes and potentials – which could have been and can yet be. For Bloch, history is a repository of possibilities that are living options for future action; therefore what could have been can still be. The present moment is thus constituted in part by *latancy* and *tendency*: the unrealised potentials that are latent in the present.

For Bloch, as Anderson has noted relatively recently, "utopic processes are immanent to a world that *contains* 'something that has not yet realized itself'" (Anderson 2006, 691, citing Bloch 1986:193). Noting Bloch's re-definition of the "utopian as a type of process", Anderson argues to an "immanent utopianism that follows from a dynamic, open, conception of utopia" (Anderson , 2006,691). Interestingly, this Blochian conception of utopia as an immanent but always incomplete *not yet* rather than an as ultimate goal or *telos,* is currently feeding into radical social and political theory in a variety of ways. Variously, it influences work presenting geography as concerned with spatialities of the possible (Anderson, 2006; Anderson and Fenton, 2008); critiques of capitalism that mobilise 'anti-power' (Holloway, 2002 and 2010); elaborations of postwork imaginaries harnessing hope as both cognitive faculty and affect (Weeks, 2011) and 'post-anarchist' (Rouselle and Evren, 2011) considerations of utopia as practice rather than an end that are informing contemporary anti-capitalist social movements.

Two articles from the initial reappraisal of Bloch's work remain, however, particularly relevant to my purpose here. Both of these (McLaren and Tadeu da Silva, 1993; Giroux and McLaren, 1997) mobilise a Blochian reading of Freire and an engagement with aspects of poststructuralism and both, in my view, still deserve attention. In *Paulo Freire, postmodernism, and the utopian imagination: a Blochian reading,* Giroux and McLaren cite Freire and Bloch as equally important "dialecticians of the concrete" and consider specifically how the neglected utopian imagination in Freire can be developed through Bloch's 'formally developed philosophy' in conjunction with a politicised 'resistance postmodernism' anchored in 'critical utopianism'(Giroux and McLaren, 1997, 138). Working with Bloch's "ontology of the 'not yet' or 'anagnorisis' [whereby] one can ascertain figural traces of the future in the remnants of the past." (ibid. 146) they focus on the term "concrete

utopia" as referring to "the real, material conditions necessary to make utopia possible" and propose a practice that develops the faculty of "hope" as "a form of cognitive intentionality, of ontological assertion, and of anticipatory consciousness" (ibid.146)

In the earlier article – *Decentring Pedagogy - Critical Literacy, resistance and the politics of memory* – McLaren and Tadeu de Silva had already developed "a poststructuralist and postcolonialist reading of Freire" (McLaren and Tadeu da Silva, 1993, 48) and had embraced Freire's "provisional" utopian thinking, working with it in relation to what they call "redemptive remembering". To that end, they contrast *provisional* utopian thinking – which "invites a constant promotion of alternatives to present asymmetrical distributions of power" (ibid) – with "categorical" utopian thinking. This latter freezes process into teleology, "locks one's vision of the future in blue-print" (ibid.) and is best eschewed as framing exhausted modernist notions of progress. In the notion of provisional utopian thinking, there is a link being made from Freire to Bloch. For McLaren and Tadeau da Silva, "Freire's notion of *critical reflection can be compared to a form of redemptive remembrance and social dreaming*" (ibid, 69. Original emphasis). It is an actively *present* way of "reading the world critically" in Allman's phrase (Allman, 2010, 3) and is:

> *always* already a form of Utopian dreaming. It not only demystifies the present by allowing us to recognise ourselves from a critical/historical perspective as, disproportionately, oppressors and oppressed, but it also carries traces of future possibility in its reconstruction of the present moment. It is...a passing into the *not yet.* (McLaren and Tadeu da Silva, 69, original emphasis)

Redemptive remembering, then, is a form of "counter memory", an "emancipatory mode" of remembering through which "history is engaged as a *lived discourse*" in "*a dialogue with the past*". It is a critical space where remembering "*in a critical mode*" means "confronting the social amnesia of generations in flight from their own collective histories – the subjugated knowledges of the marginalised" (McLaren and Tadeu da Silva, 75. Original emphasis).

Conclusion: for a practice of concrete utopia

It is this idea of working the utopic element of experience – the already present, dynamically critical, hopeful, always *active* process of *not-yet* – that I want to propose as a model of future practice in settings that are similar to the UK coalfield. In moving now towards a conclusion, let me recap the argument that I've presented. First, I noted how disciplinary discourses around youth support depend on the promiscuous use of a hortatory vocabulary of terms from which all historical meaning has been evacuated. I suggested, further, that such discourse is gaining purchase in practice settings – a fact that calls for a resolutely historical and collectively co-constituted counter practice if the received limits of the neoliberal imaginary are ever to be effectively challenged. Starting from an empirical example, I tentatively theorised how stalled affects of trauma still circulate in post-conflict settings such as the 'ruin' of the Derbyshire coalfield, impacting on young people and locally originating practitioners alike as their insubordinate histories are made unspeakable through complex practices of silence. I then sketched the re-reading of Bloch – and its potential application in critical pedagogic practice – that we've just considered.

Where does this leave us? Well, redemptive remembering certainly seems a useful way to approach the task of making the unspeakable speakable. We have already noted how insubordinate histories implicitly inform the work of the Derbyshire youth practitioners, so the basis is there. But I want to make a plea for a 'practice otherwise' that goes further than

that. One that might interrogate policy notions such as aspiration and resilience through the *explicit* recovery of sidelined, but still hopeful, 'knowledges otherwise'. As we know in the light of Bloch's account, such a counter-heritage can point straight to the 'not yet' of economic, social and educational possibility that remains immanent as the past's trace in the present. The simple question of "ownership" of the means of production raised by the Beldover banner is starting point enough for that. For the young people from the Cavs estate, acquaintance with that banner, even as a circulated photograph, potentially carries what Bloch would call the past's "utopian excess" into the present. It does so, moreover, in a way that might frame those young people's sense of themselves – and their aspirations – afresh.

So how do we work with that "utopian excess"? Presently, there are an increasing number of intergenerational projects taking place that will inevitably open up multiple histories if they are carried out critically. Such developments should be seized upon as a laboratory for the kind of work I'm envisaging here. Suffice it to say that it is vital to develop *criticality* in memory-based work with marginal groups. Such work, if uncritical, potentially perpetuates division and dominance, leaving received notions of the 'given' world unassailable. Working in critical dialogue with the past for redemptive recall opens up the utopian content that lodges in the present, and it is in that opening, as Anderson reminds us, that "new possibilities or potentialities are named" (Anderson, 2006, 704). Understanding the process whereby sedimented meaning is both transmitted and stalled in excluded communities is vital. Co-constituted networks of critical intergenerational inquiry – mobile beyond the boundaries of conventional educational institutions – are key to showing how *situated* forms of 'aspiration', 'wellbeing' and 'resilience' can challenge inequalities that appear to be perpetual.

Heartbreaker, Jimjam, Milly, Samantha, Cocker and Big Matt certainly need new possibilities to be named, and they need to be equal parties to their naming. We need to start working out in dialogue with *them* just what a "practice of concrete utopia" might look like as it emerges from unspeakable histories latent in artefacts like the Beldover photograph. In Bloch's elaboration, utopia is a process not a blue-print destination, anyway – so the details will have to follow. They can't be programmatically set. The first step is to *begin* – wherever and whenever we hear the vacuous constructions of neoliberalism's exclusionary discourse. Just begin, first, by going back. For, as Bloch counsels: "those who would help must absolutely go back, yet be there anew" (Bloch, 2000. 233).

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