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***Retrodictive Curriculum Reform, or,
Imagination is Silly; It makes you go
'round willy nilly¹***

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We hope that education can help us out of this mess, and
worry that education is this mess.
– Deborah Britzman (1999, p. ix)

Imagine we all wake up tomorrow and education is very different from what it is today. In fact, what is happening in and out of schools is pretty much what we would hope for, for our own children and the children of others. Many of us who once found the purpose of our professional life as critics of common practices, cajolers of innovation, advocates of “best practices,” “critical pedagogies,” “accountability,” “border pedagogies,” “equity,” “excellence,” “social justice,” “exceeding standards,” and so on, now find our work welcomed and embraced as facilitating and supporting a highly valued and respected amalgam of social institutions.

Retrodiction and utopia.

Well then, like geologists and archaeologists, we would be plunged into retrodiction, as opposed to prognostication or prediction: past events of an imagined future would have to be inferred. Retrodiction, sometimes also called postdiction, involves working backwards, and, by using generally accepted principles (for example, the geological understanding that sedimentary layers occurring below others were laid down first and are therefore older, or the chronological expectation that people amass patterns and categories through experience), inferring past events and sequences of events from observable data. Retrodictive history is an exciting challenge. It's about time that curriculum studies developed the skills of this craft, because it seems we will otherwise be caught in the never-ending quagmire of hopelessness: our dreams are never realized because we don't yet have the history of their realization. Without examples of the paths to actuality, before this dream-like fantasy of value and respect, we used to be constrained in endless cycles of fads and policies.

How did we get to this utopian heaven, where education is an

emancipatory force at once for social justice, excellence, meaningful and satisfying lives in democracy and peace for all? We might try one of three initial approaches that incorporate a model of what we have in mind, in the spirit of the architect, scientist or artist, as explicated by Josiah McElheny (2007). We would then interrogate how our models enlist metaphors that represent our assumptions, values, fears, desires, structures of discourse, and so on. Like an architect with a small scale model of a building, curriculum theorists, developers and evaluators often present a model of an educational encounter. An architect uses his or her model in order to convey information so as to garner ideological, financial, political, or institutional support - that is, the model is a kind of advertisement or marketing tool that is supposed to convince other people to build what it is modeling. It is rarer but also possible that we use our models in a different manner, like a typical scientist, to pose new systems of understanding. Just as a chemist might devise a new model of subatomic forces, we might use a visual or symbolic model to facilitate analysis and interpretation, in order to better understand the ways that elements of the model interact as part of a system. Far more unusual is the use of a model in the way that sculptor Josiah McElheny thinks of artistic models: Since an artist can exist outside of the practical realities and necessities of an architect, and since he or she does not need to represent a system of related elements in the same way as a hard scientist, he or she can depict something not intended to be built; in this sense, the artist can create imaginary new worlds, imaginary spaces of learning. Instead of monolithic visions imposed upon an audience, we might use models as proposals, as invitations to imagine new worlds. McElheny understands the possibility of working in the world, as an artist, of asking real questions in real applications of craftsmanship. His thoughts as a sculptor can help us think about how models can be more than things that reproduce and manipulate: they are, as works of art, “provocations.” Surely this sort of analysis of the modeling has its limits; there are many scientists whose work is as much art as stereotypical ‘hard science’, just as there are many artists whose work is more like the stereotypical scientist than the caricatured ‘artist’ in McElheny’s framework. Nevertheless, the comparisons reveal interesting variations in how we use our models. Models in McElheny’s ‘artistic’ sense provoke questions and conversation; confusion and fascination; contemplation, new philosophic inquiries, imaginations, fantasies, and repulsions. His primary example is Isamu Noguchi, whose proposals for modernist playgrounds mostly remained in the realm of fantasy and enchantment, rather than as constructs in ‘the real world’.

Yet that last point is a little tricky isn’t it? Noguchi at one time did intend for his playgrounds to be built, and one was actually built in Atlanta (Noguchi Museum. Undated). His goal was to make sculpture a useful part of everyday life. One commission for the United Nations was directly prevented by the powerful Robert Moses. Noguchi’s frustrations in being thwarted by Robert Moses and others were redirected into exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art and elsewhere, where the models were recontextualized as protest:

The playground was killed by ukase from a municipal official who is supposed to run the parks in New York, and who somehow is the city's self-appointed guardian against any art forms except banker's special neo-Georgian. The fact that he had no legal or moral right to dictate the UN's aesthetics was of concern only to the many distinguished educators, child welfare specialists

and civic groups who had seen the model and had hailed it as the only creative step made in the field in decades...A jungle gym is transformed into an enormous basket that encourages the most complex ascents and all but obviates falls. In other words, the playground, instead of telling the child what to do (swing here, climb there) becomes a place for endless exploration, of endless opportunity for changing play. And it is a thing of beauty as the modern artist has found beauty in the modern world. Perhaps this is why it was so venomously attacked ('a hillside rabbit-warren') by the Cheops of toll bridges. -- *Art News*, April, 1952

McElheny, Noguchi and models as protest came to my mind recently while reading Kieran Egan's evocative *The Future of Education* (2008). Egan has written a series of books throughout his career that individually and collectively offer an alternative vision of schools, learning and teaching. Teaching as Storytelling (Egan 1989), the use of imagination in early adolescence (Egan 1992), and learning in depth (Egan 2010) among other ideas, have become well-known by many curriculum theorists and teacher educators, but less well-known by teachers and administrators, despite translation into a number of languages around the world. Why the resistance by the mainstream to this veteran theorist, who even tests out his ideas with willing educators who testify to their effectiveness? Egan has provided a series of models that work in possibly all three realms of McElheny's typography. Now we have before us his waking dream, *The Future of Education*, which lays out a straight forward explanation for why whole-scale educational reform has so far eluded us, along with a fantasy, retrodictive tale of how education has finally been transformed in a potential, mythical future. ²

Britzman (1999) reminds us of Freud's conclusion that we dream of what cannot be; our dreams are more than mere fantasies of power or desire, they are instantiations of what must become reality for us if we are to work through the resistance to change that is sometimes named learning. If we and Egan are to write the retrodictive stories of utopian futures, we need our dreams as much as our skills and policies. But more than this, we need, as McElheny suggests, our artists who provoke with utopian models. Yet, is Egan's fantasy for educational reconceptualization as hopeless globally, as a model to be adopted by others around the world, as any direct program he has already developed locally is to be emulated in a scale-up reform process through provincial, state, or national reform projects? McElheny's artists don't get messy with the real world; they provoke, under the assumption or acceptance that their work is not going to be realized in concrete and stone. Is Egan's book destined to be exhibited in the 'philosophy of education museum', just as Noguchi's U.N. playground is little more than an installation piece visited by gawking postmodern art historians? McElheny's own exhibits of the infinity of utopia - incorporating exquisite mirrored glass-blowing in vistas of eternal reflection - moved me to action as they helped me better understand the ways that our modernist conceptions of the self and society function as infinite reflection in the gaze of others. His lectures on Noguchi helped me see the potential of such reconceptualized playgrounds to transform play and community if they were only constructed in the 'real world'. Does this mean that the final test of Egan's provocations is in their potential to move me in some analogous way?

Stripping down to cognitive tools.

In *Jardin d'Épicure* Anatole France reduces the saying "The spirit blows where it will" to its elementary signification. He "deflates" the puffed up metaphors that, unwittingly, would have free play in this saying. He goes from the false prestige of language to the atoms of experience. As it happens, they are the atoms of Democritus and Epicurus, Anatole France tries to return from the glare produced by their agglomeration and get back to the dreary rain of atoms that go through spaces and strike the senses. (Levinas, 2003, p. 10)

Egan likes to simplify. He strips philosophy of education bare, reducing all of the complexities to three schools of thought, each of which obscure, in his mind, the most likely successful definition of education, that of developing cognitive tools. In Egan's fable, three contentious tribes fight over the turf of schooling: the tribe of socialization, which believes in schooling as the formation of community; the tribe of academics, which believes in the perpetuation of the legacies of cultural products; and the tribe of development, which believes in the need for personal and individual actualization and growth. They each carry a standard: socialization warriors march under the banner of the hunter-gatherers of yesteryear, unable to see the inadequacies of their vision for a more contemporary society. Academics, holding fast to their posters of Plato, seem to miss Plato's own point that the enlightenment such a form of education promises does not actually teach us how to climb out of the dark cave of ignorance and enter the world of justice, objectivity and truth. Flying their flags of Rousseau, the romantic developmentalists fail time and again to seize power because of their inability to find a true human nature, and because their very theories create the barriers of dichotomous distinctions between self and society, inner mind and external knowledge. In Egan's fable, schools try to include all constituencies in the politics of curriculum, and this is the heart of total failure: each constituency actually has goals that directly conflict with the other two, making it impossible to please all three at once. Three groups are seated at the policy table, constantly working to undermine each others' aims. The moral of the story turns out to be the nightmare of most pre-service teachers writing their requisite 'philosophy of education' statements semester after semester: despite the attraction of taking a little of this and a little of that, mixing it up, and calling it an inclusive educational philosophy, this approach simply cannot work. We need to make a commitment, take a stand, define our beliefs, and declare that we can only work with those who believe otherwise in ways that do not compromise our own values and beliefs. When it comes down to it, even though each of the three schools of thought sounds initially appealing, curricula based on one always fundamentally undermine the other two. If we accept Egan's typography of educational philosophies and his arguments about their incompatibility, we can't help but pay attention to his suggestion that there is 'another way', independent of these three philosophies, upon which we can base our work.

Perhaps a revolutionary thinker can enter the room to sway the negotiators at the table, and initiate a serious transformation of curriculum. Egan's hero proposes a focus on 'cognitive tools'.

Education is a process in which something good is done to the mind. When we regret what has been done to someone's mind as a result of what they have learned

we call it miseducation, indoctrination, or something less polite. Our problems about how to educate people have been tied up our being unsure of what the mind is and, consequently, how to do the best for it. (Egan 2008, p. 38)

Egan does place the mind in the larger cultural context, but even so, given his dismissal of Rousseau and developmentalism, it is strange that he reduces education to a reconstruction of a learner-knowledge, mind-body, person-culture constellation. We might just as well have chosen to write a similar book where we take the Platonic academic approach or the Deweyan socialization/democracy approach, and write our own retrodictive history of its broad acceptance in professional work. It seems to me that it is not altogether obvious that centering schools on cognitive tools avoids any of the pitfalls of the current squabbling among three philosophical tribes. I worry that a new school of cognitive tools would end up reproducing the same conflicts and arguments, now couched in Egan-ese but hardly different in the end. This was, after all, Rousseau's complaint about Plato: the fabrication of a world of ideal forms seemed to him to do nothing more than move the same questions onto new turf. On the other hand, if we were to compose our own retrodictive histories within our tribes, we might at least reconstruct educational studies as a serious discipline of social reform, where the same conflicts arise, but we become more sophisticated in our discourses of reform and institutional change. Perhaps this is one of Egan's goals? To encourage us to do such work? Once we have collections of retrodictive folk histories, we might develop a science of long-term educational transformation based on the data of mind experiments.

"Stories not only deal with fictional material but can also be used to shape factual material." (Egan, 2008, p. 53) The second half of Egan's book, a dream of how education has finally adopted all of his wonderful ideas by the year 2060, does more than share a fiction; it creates an emotionally clear form of argument that emphasizes what is dramatically important about this kind of transformation. Certain key things have to happen for such a massive reconceptualization to occur. "The struggles to find the emotional meaning of topics we are to teach, and the use of various cognitive tools to engage students' imaginations, probing a topic till the right facts and ideas come to the fore, could have been described more prosaically as work currently being done by many teachers ... today around the world." (Egan 2008, p. 181) But such reports have until now rarely impacted in any massive or global way on the daily educational practices of education around this same world. So what are we to do?

IE, Egan's 'Imaginative Education' movement, is the newly emerging fad at the heart of his tale, what we might call a new and improved, and marketable educational product. It seemed early on to offer something for everyone: "IE seemed to offer a fresh alternative, even though many who supported its adoption were not at all clear about its underlying foundations. Some people just liked its practices, and its general successes, and others liked its insistence on students' mastering of a wide array of knowledge." (p. 137) Egan's *IE* seems to reinscribe within the retrodictive history of educational reform Maxine Greene's notion of slogans, those unsystematic, popular ways of talking about education, that is, "phrases repeated warmly or reassuringly rather than pondered gravely" (Greene 1973, p. 70). Any slogan that can be accepted by anyone regardless of philosophical

standpoint has a chance of catching on as the latest buzzword in education. Egan's history of the future recognizes this as the only chance we have of genuine reform, to create the new faddish product, and let it spread like a virus. But he had meant in this book to argue for something very different from slogans and fads: note the difference between saying that education is about cognition and that education is about cognitive tools. "Typically a tool is something easily taken up that gets the job done efficiently, with minimal personal involvement. The kind of tools to deployed in IE do share that sense of making something otherwise difficult relatively easy, but the tools are tied into our emotions and deep understanding. Nothing casual there and, in the end, no fast cheap route to implementation." (p. 182) He ends his tale with a curious call for hope in hopelessness, begging us all to do *something about it all*: "Given that the future is unlikely to show the good taste to conform to my narrative guide ... what can now be done about education? ... Something can be done – why not help to do it?" (p.182) We can imagine his frustration, having spent years developing good ideas that really do help teachers and students to embed imagination and meaning in their lives, and learn a lot of things in the process. Like most of us in curriculum studies, he has convinced some people to try these things out, and when they do, remarkable things happen. But beyond these limited settings, we are left crying out, "please, oh please listen to me! Please, oh please, try this, and *really* try it before dismissing it – because it works!" But of course, many conflicting pedagogical approaches "work" if one works to make them "work". It is a circular argument to say, "My ideas work better at accomplishing X, Y or Z," when of course they were designed to accomplish X, Y or Z, and were pursued until they did. Any educational reform project seems to set itself up for dismissal by any skeptic in this very way. We end up shouting at each other in an *educational agora*, where there are only sellers and no one to buy our wares.

Hopelessness

I believe that, like many of us, Egan is losing hope. This fable is his latest effort to demonstrate the power of his ideas. He organized what he has to offer in story form, dramatizing the critical issues of education reform for all of us to learn from. In a sense, this is the ultimate test of his early work on teaching as storytelling from 1989. It may be said, as was shared at the 2009 meeting of the Curriculum & Pedagogy Group, that hope is the last thing Egan must give up if he is to see a greater impact of his work, for hope may be the greatest evil of them all: We are referring here, of course, to Pandora's box, which unleashed, according to the myth, all of the evils upon the world. The standard reading is that hope was the last thing to leave the box, the one tool with which we could face all of these evils. Perhaps hope was in fact the last and most egregious evil; we remain lost in hope when we might otherwise take action. To continue to hope that our ideas can lead to educational transformation is as useless as the slaves' persistent hopes for freedom in nineteenth century America. Until hope was abandoned in favor of a different sort of action, hope was useless and kept people docile. Likewise, our continued hope that our stories of amazing educational success can lead to emulation and duplication are hopelessly keeping us spinning in place, making little difference beyond our local projects. Hope is a form of resistance to learning, in the psychoanalytic sense. ³

Sometimes we turn to the occult when we have lost a sense of hope or agency. We read horoscopes, click on the FaceBook *tarot* app. Egan's interest in stories can feel like this. "Making good fictional stories isn't easy, but the results can be magical." (p. 101). At

other times we become cynical in the face of hypocrisy. “The Salernoists hit a nerve by accusing educators of massive hypocrisy, using rhetoric to disguise from themselves that they were sustaining a Platonic class system.” (p.109) A popular approach to clashing ideologies is to seek a “third way” that tries to coexist with opposing camps, sharing those aspects of each that are good, but also existing independent of them so as to leave the lesser aspects behind. The slogans in third-way movements are not used in arguments or debates, but instead to capture something important about the movement that also promotes greater awareness of the ideas embodied. (pp.143-44) In Egan’s utopian retrodiction, slogans for *IE* managed to take on this role, not in the empty sense of Maxine Greene’s meaningless buzzwords, but as phrases that “distill an idea or feeling that people may be ready to be persuaded by.” (p. 144) “... educational administrators started using the language of the new “third way.” It presented them with a strategy for distancing themselves from the perceived failures of the school system in the past, and it allowed them to see themselves as offering a new approach and a new direction.” (p.144) This is what needs to happen. Egan is insightful in the way he weaves into his story fundamental concepts of educational reform, once again proving his point that storytelling is an effective way to emotionally capture essential features of learning, and an excellent structure for dramatizing key concepts to be learned. In this case we are learning about educational reform. Yet, the tenses in his story reveal a passive wish for what could or should happen, rather than an analysis of the mechanisms of social change: “something about the times meant that the educational world was ready ... it worked ... politicians were persuaded that a solution had been found ... money was released for retraining teachers, for equipping schools with ...materials ...” Our dreams are what we cannot live. The unwritten story here is the hopelessness of our dreams - our fears that, when it comes down to it, we do not know the *why* or the *how* of effecting these social transformations.

The Problematic Pedagogical Stance

The core of educational reform, of transforming educational institutions, is an unwritten pedagogical stance that stems from enlightenment ideologies. We know; those who need to change things do not know. Our efforts are hopeless demands that others listen to our wisdom. Rancière (2009) describes such acts as “proposals” that we place in front of others in the hope that the experience of our work will lead them to take action of some sort. We create such proposals, according to Rancière, because we work within a framework that assumes our audience is ignorant, while we are not⁴. He suggests an alternative, the “ignorant schoolmaster” who refuses the third way and in this refusal affirms a communitarian essence of public art and action. The ignorant schoolmaster does not try to transform his or her audience into actors, nor to transform ignoramuses into scholars. Instead, he or she recognizes the knowledge at work in the ignoramus and the activity peculiar to the audience; every member of the artist’s audience is already an actor in her own story, and every actor, every person of action, is the spectator in the same story (Rancière, p. 17).

We might read Egan’s book in this light. We either praise his work as one that is neither Brechtian, i.e., a series of stories that make people conscious of the social situation that gives rise to it and desirous of acting in order to transform it, nor Artaudian, i.e., stories that makes people abandon their position as spectators through participation in the collective, performative experiences. Or, we criticize Egan’s work as falling into one of these two, or yet another, trap. What the readers of Egan would be presumed to lack, according

to conventions of academic educational publications, is knowledge of their own ignorance, indeed knowledge of the actual distance separating knowledge from ignorance. It might be that it Egan harbors no illusions of power – it has been some years of writing, publishing, and working with educators to reconceptualize and transform schooling. This loss possibly increases the pressure on his readers: he leaves us in the end to figure out what is really to be done, content with the dream that his written performance has drawn them out of their passive attitude and transformed them into active participants in a shared world. If Egan is an “ignorant schoolmaster”, then we would say he does this on purpose. He does not teach his readers his knowledge of how to transform the shared world of educational institutions, but instead “orders them to venture out into the forest of things and signs, to say what they have seen and what they think of what they have seen, to verify it and have it verified” (Rancière, p. 11).

The pedagogical stance is a response to the poetic labor of translation at the heart of all learning, whether in primary school or in the trenches of real life. The ignorant schoolmaster does not know the stupefying distance that might only be bridged, we say in our common language, by an “expert”. Egan is already presumed by his readers to be offering expertise required for the ignorant to learn from his writing. The next level of translation in this ideology that readers bring to his work is the requirement to learn from the expert how one transforms education in society within a certain number of decades. If read that way, as Brechtian theater, than the book reconstructs the pedagogical stance, and is likely to be dismissed as mostly silly or useless, since it does not provide the recipe for change. If read as the proposal of the ignorant schoolmaster, we might learn from it and use it to good effect.

I believe educational studies is fundamentally defined in terms of the pedagogical stance, and thus has little opportunity to offer, as performative proposals, anything other than a recreation of this pedagogical stance. When we attempt to move out of that framework into another mode of production, we are read as if we simply did not do a good job at the pedagogical stance that we were avoiding in the first place. Egan proposes a new version of text for transformers of educational practice. It is not a leadership cookbook, nor is it a canonical textbook on educational philosophy or instructional method. What this book might be is a form of sculptural curriculum studies, which we could ‘read’ as a model in the same way that McElheny reads the work of contemporary artists. Instead of a monolithic vision imposed upon its audience, we might use Egan’s model of retrodictive history as a different sort of proposal, as an invitation to imagine new worlds. The book is our new playground, within which the jungle gym of educational reform is transformed into an enormous basket that encourages the most complex ascents and all but obviates falls. In other words, our playground, instead of telling us what to do (swing here, climb there), becomes a place for endless exploration, of endless opportunity for changing play. And it is a thing of beauty, in a scholarly spirit analogous to admirers of Noguchi’s work.

As we read Egan’s stories, decade by decade, his fictional recreation of our future-history, we participate in the performance by refashioning it in our own way in order to make it a pure image, and we associate this image with a story that we have already read or dreamed, experienced or invented (Rancière, p. 13). We are at once distanced spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle we are

offered. Here is the crucial point of the pedagogical stance and its fundamental quagmire: the writer wants us to feel this, see that, understand some particular thing and draw some particular conclusion. Despite the fact that Egan is very good at allowing us to do this for ourselves through the storytelling format, in the end we still have a work of what Rancière calls the stultifying pedagogue. Just like direct instruction lessons that are masked as discovery learning, i.e., guided inquiry, the clever storytelling form that dramatizes key aspects of wholesale educational reconceptualization in *The Future of Education* might be understood as ultimately grounded in the logic of direct transmission. What the reader must learn is what the writer must teach. Such a version of emancipation and learning through this sort of text ends up being nothing more than a treatise in cause and effect, which Rancière claims is at the heart of stultifying logic. In contrast to this approach, the reader of the ignorant schoolmaster learns something that the schoolmaster herself or himself does not know. The learning is an *effect* of the learner's own searching, questioning, verifying, and so on, and not a bunch of knowledge transmitted from the schoolmaster to the learner. Similarly, artists typically do not want to instruct their spectators. A common desire of the artist is to create a form of consciousness, an intensity of feeling, or energy for action. (Rancière, p. 14) Yet even in this situation, we find the pedagogic stance, because such artists may still be assuming that the sorts of things that are felt, experienced, or acted upon are perhaps the same as what they themselves have put into their work, or at least caused by their work. Hence, there is always this distancing between the work and the experience of the audience. In the future of education, we may worry that we have further amplified the caverns and gulfs between passivity and action, awareness and knowledge. It does no good to note how much we know already about the potentials of alternatives; it does no good to subtly condemn those who have not acted up this knowledge as yet to learn.

What we hope for in retrodiction is the blurring of the boundaries between such separations. A possibility for this sort of action is through a *mélange* of genres that replaces the substitution of representation with presence and passivity into action. Egan does this by mixing polemic, analytic philosophy, and history; he combines a straightforward lecture in the first part of the book with a broad retrodictive fiction later on. Indeed, this strategy has much in common with recent versions of hyper-theater that work to “restore it to an equal footing with the telling of a story, the reading of a book, or the gaze focused on an image” (Rancière, p. 22). Such work in theaters and in this book by Egan creates environments where the creators' skills are evident, and yet, these very skills are put into situations where their audience must question them at the same time. It seems to take much courage, since the outcomes of such enterprises are difficult to predict: it must be the case that the participant spectators are writing the story themselves as part of how they consume the work.

... artists construct stages where the manifestation and effect of their skills are exhibited, rendered uncertain in the terms of the new idiom that conveys a new intellectual adventure. The effect of this idiom cannot be anticipated. It requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the 'story' and make it their own story. An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators. (Rancière, p.

The Reverend Billy Talen recently posted a *FaceBook* note (Talen, 2010) in which he described the film *Avatar* in ways that embody some of what is being discussed here.

We need to urgently ask the question – how is it that American colonial wars that have nothing to do with “freedom” or “democracy” rage on for years? ... The old story structures that persuade us to be violent need to be upended, and Cameron has done that. But - we’ve had great movies before. Think of *Dr. Strangelove* and the cold war. Think of *The Truman Story* and consumerism. The fact is that *Avatar* is not enough. A movie theater is not a commons. Power cannot shift there ... as the credits rolled and the lights came on, I noticed that we movie-goers could barely move. Wrung out by the special effects, we drifted out to the freezing sidewalk. That is *Avatar*’s contradiction, the content competes with the affect. It’s a problem that we need to solve. ... We can’t just spend \$14, consume the picture and say “Wow - Great film!” Our earth, our neighborhoods and our families are invaded by corporate expansion and war. So let’s remember how the natives in *Avatar* gathered their power - in public space. They intimately knew their natural world. They circle-danced and sang, speechified and prayed and stood up to bulldozers and bullets. Their revolution, in other words, was out of the playbook of most successful uprisings in history – it came from the commons. Their commons is under a gigantic tree. Our protective umbrella is the First Amendment, and we go to public space with its rights. Then the thriller called citizenship begins.

Talen’s public space is Rancière’s community. It is Egan’s imagined fantasy of a readership. Readers of *The Future of Education* are likely to invoke their own fantasies, their own dreams and fears, their own desires and yearnings for a similar or different version of retrodictive history. Right now we are still caught up in what Schwab called a moribund state of impotent dreams. We call forth the stories of our own local successes. We tell our stories, grounded in new discourses and practices. And we sit bewildered that the stories themselves – whether of meaningful or transformative or otherwise powerful pedagogies - are not enough to spark serious educational reform. We remain ignorant of the distance these stories conjure up between what we know and of what others seem ignorant. But other people are not always ignorant of our stories and successes. They simply do not act as we want. Stultification and ignorance remain the prevailing winds of the day. The state of education is already a community, perhaps, a community of actors and activity, and the perpetual and repetitive conflicts and disagreements over what is ‘the one best system’ (Tyack 1974), or over ‘what knowledge is of most worth’ (Schubert 1986, Schubert et al. 2002), or over ‘who should decide’ remains forever unsettled. We live the misadventures of critical thought: “to reconfigure the landscape of what can be seen and what can be thought is to alter the field of the possible and the distribution of capacities and incapacities” (Rancière 2009, p. 49). That is, dissensus, the reigning plight of curriculum, both brings back to us the obviousness of what can be perceived, thought and done, and does the work of hegemony; it alters the shared world in

shattering ways while simultaneously holding us hostage in a sea of debilitating dissensus. We are always apart from the community of education and at the same time embedded within this larger community, so that our every action both disrupts the assumptions and expectations of this community and also works in unpredictable ways to perpetuate the dominant forces of power and knowledge that define our cultural and historical moment.

The Reader's Obligation

It is as if anything we write can be condemned as trapped by the pedagogical stance, destined to establish yet again, with each reading, a distance between the ignorant reader and the knowledgeable author. In the first, we compose collaboratively with our audience. This might take the form of an interactive website, wiki or blog, where the retrodictive text no longer needs to fulfill the dream through histories of the future. Instead, we write together our evolving story of educational transformation. In such a space, all are welcome and nobody is an ignoramus. In the second alternative, readers simply seize the opportunity offered by each text to explore its playground, as *bricoleurs* who fashion new tools of their own form out of the raw materials of the texts. The first alternative might be understood as a communal form of sculpture or architecture undertaken by a community of craftsmen and engineers. They create new spaces of research and learning; participants bring expertise and resources from elsewhere to the shared project. The second might be understood as a communal form of gardening, where texts work as compost containing both seeds of future growth and nutrients that nurture the growth of new ideas introduced from outside. Participants do the hard labor of working the soil in order to reap what is saved by everyone together.

In either alternative, the reader's obligation is to pursue texts, refuse the more common, self-demeaning approach of an ignorant reader, and play with the words, meanings, allusions, desires and fears evoked in the text. Sadly, we yet again see the fatal trap of the pedagogical stance, even in these new alternatives, further recreating in our efforts to avoid it the ever-present dichotomy between an active and a passive audience. What if we began with the premise that all readers and nonreaders alike are always already active? We presume the impossibility of the passive consumer. In this mode, all people are always creating and recreating their world in action. Passivity becomes a synonym for activity that we do not ourselves like, activity that seems from our perspectives to be re-establishing less-worthy forms of educational theory and practice.

So Egan sparks an invitation with an introductory summary of educational philosophy, and *proposes* an 'Imaginative Education' that we can enter and explore. We read its retrodictive history and are left with the obligation to play retrodiction ourselves. At first glance, the work is a book, and therefore hopeless in the face of eternal dismissal. Its ideas are perhaps unrealizable, irrelevant, or idealistic. Never mind that each of its examples has been documented as successful over time. Its placement in a text of authority condemns it to the desert of educational policy. However, if *we* refuse the pedagogical stance and play instead, we leave transformed by the encounter. Rather than using the text to reaffirm our beliefs, we engage with each jungle gym, comfortable that the baskets below will catch us when we fall. One version of play that can never be ignored, however, is with the play itself: play is not a meaningless game, but always carries with it the obligation to ask, "Who is playing? Who has the opportunity to play, and who does not?" Such 'play' speaks to the

issue of power in utopia: Whose utopia? Who defines utopia? In other words, who has access to the playground in which they define utopia, and with whom do they get to play?

I had a similar experience engaging with McElheny's *Infinite Reflection of Utopia*. Mirrored, masterful artifacts of blown glass arranged to evoke representations of modernity, his stylized 'buildings' are placed on and surrounded by mirrored planes. This creates what might be the utopian goals of a self-based society. Every object is reflected over and over again in every other, like the modern self, no longer unitary and defined, but instead only able to be seen in its many external reflections. The utopia, however, is only visible, even in the gaze of its audience, through a further mediation by the observers, whose reflections are always part of the piece, infinitely reflected, whenever we turn our gaze upon some small component of it. Nobody sees the same utopia; there is *no* one utopia being communicated by the artist, who has intentionally abdicated his supposed requirement to communicate his own experience. His skills as a glassblower and as a conceptual artist are always present. But they are not the message of his piece.

While I may have 'learned' a great deal in this experience about modernity and the culture of the self, it was not because McElheny 'taught' me these things. What I learned was an outgrowth of my interaction with his work, including my own ruminations and questions as contributions to the encounter. At one level, I saw myself within the sculpture, refracted into infinitely many selves forever bouncing around each and every component of his composed world. At another more profound level, that self was transformed, carrying the piece into a future where I will always value a sculpture's model as potentially provoking a newly-emerging self. Similarly, Egan's stories are sculptures of educational theory, and I take with me into the future the propensity to read and write retrodictive histories as a mode of curriculum theorizing. McElheny's craftsmanship takes the form of exquisite glassblowing amplified by his superb technique with mirroring the glass. Egan's analogous craft involves the analysis of educational philosophy, amplified by superb techniques of policy and social theory. McElheny's small worlds are analogous to Egan's small stories of educational debates and social transformation.

Glass Worlds

I have been thinking about my encounters with McElheny and Egan. At first, I asked why these works of art provoked such a response. Then I began to understand that the question is not so much how to provoke a response but rather what prevents this sort of response at times when I might benefit and learn from others, yet do not. One such situation is, ironically, when I approach a person or text as if I am ignorant and need to learn. In contrast, when I play with the playground of a text, I leave transformed. Too many educational encounters, and far too many texts of curriculum studies, are more difficult to enter as a playground for exploration because they construct caverns of distance between the knowing author and the ignorant reader. I do not mean such petty things as, for example, pedantic or esoteric language. Such new discourses often bring forth playful and new worlds to explore. Common critiques of obscure and convoluted language have no place in this discussion. What is crucial is the positioning of the reader by the text, parallel to the positioning of the student by the teacher. As I suggested above, a reader can overcome the pedagogical stance through his or her own personal dispositions. Yet the 'textbook-y' texts of curriculum theory leave too few transformed, and are highly unlikely to provoke fundamental

changes in our educational institutions.

But it was through writing this essay that I came to another realization. Taking that next step that Egan urges on his last page, to try out *IE* and make it happen, I understand something a bit more sanguine. If the analogy of McElheny and Egan is apt, it also takes us into a less than optimistic dreamland. McElheny's sculpture is beautiful and powerful yet forbidding; it is impenetrable and formidable world, resistant to change and apparently permanent in its rigidity. Is this also the case with educational institutions? Or at least with those in Egan's new (utopian) world? When we enter the model of education, are we forever destined to see infinite reflections of ourselves, always on the surface?⁵ Are we condemned to see them from outside? Might we walk around in these worlds, yet never change them, even as they are always perceived as they are made real by our presence? the only option is to understand that they are made of glass! They are fragile, shattered by the simplest hammer. I provoke *you*: don't just try to work for change. Find your hammer and shatter the glass.

Endnotes

¹Many thanks to the Arcadia Education Writing Group for their support, in particular: Foram Bhukhanwala, Jodie Bornstein, Erica Dávila, Kim Dean, and Julia Plummer.

²There is a potential concern with claiming curriculum theory should be understood as sculpture: Edgar Degas was known to say that he pursued sculpture as an alternative to other modes in which he worked because, with sculpture, it is possible to no longer consider the background; the artist can concentrate on the figure, its positions, etc., from all views, that is, one can work toward accuracy off posture from every angle. The analogy would imply, perhaps, the very worrisome idea that one can explore curriculum without taking into account the background context of educational encounters, in order to create a kind of 'accuracy of representation' that seems to make little sense as an endeavor. This is *not* my intention.

³ This paragraph generated more discussion among our Arcadia writing group than any other in this essay. We struggled (in hope for scholarship?) with how I could express this point in a way that is not glib and naïve. Surely the work for abolition, emancipation, and civil rights over the last centuries have demonstrated the power of hope in struggle, and the ability of those who act for social change to steward hope for others as much as for themselves. To say that hope is akin to passivity does not fully capture the potential of hope, when combined with other aspects of agency, to spark generative critical race practices. To juxtapose institutional inertia with institutional slavery is both provocative and problematic. In the end, I submit this footnote as an invitation to dialogue on the very questions this raises. 'Hope' for me is Washington's approach, "In all things purely social we can be as separate as the fingers ... yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress ..." Far more was needed to generate a civil rights movement; far more is yet needed to realize a more meaningful critical multiculturalism. The same might be said of our educational institutions and their contributions to entrenched social inequities (Winfield 2007).

⁴A similar argument was made about art by Edgar Degas: "Art is not what you see ... it's what you make others see." (Quote on the

umbrella for sale in the Herakleidon, Athens, Greece, during its exhibit of Degas' complete sculptures, November 27th, 2009 - April 25th, 2010.)

⁵To continue our side discussion of Degas on sculpture, we should note that his early work involved very smooth surfaces. Later, he avoided smooth shiny, reflective surfaces, incorporating textures to create movement. Similarly, we might explore models where the surfaces are not mirrored like McElheny's utopia, but instead incorporated variegated and rough materials calling forth movement and change.

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