Utopian Promise or Burdensome Responsibility? A Critical Analysis of the UK Government's Building Schools for the Future Policy

Author:	Dr Peter Kraftl (corresponding author)
Affiliation:	Senior Lecturer in Human Geography, University of Leicester, UK
Address:	Department of Geography, University of Leicester, University Road, Leicester, LE1 7RH, UK
E-Mail:	pk123@le.ac.uk

Utopian Promise or Burdensome Responsibility? A Critical Analysis of the UK Government's *Building Schools for the Future* Policy

Abstract

This paper critically analyses a nationwide school-building programme in England: *Building Schools for the Future [BSF]*. It is argued that, between 2003-2010, the UK Government's policy guidance for BSF represented a (re)turn to utopian discourse in governmental policy-making, mobilised in order to justify a massive programme of new school building in the UK. In doing so, BSF *connected* with the promise of three further discourses: school(-children), community and architectural practice. It anticipated that new school buildings would instil transformative change – modernising English schooling, combating social exclusion and leaving an architectural 'legacy'. However, it is argued that BSF constituted an *allegorical* utopia: whilst suggesting a 'radical' vision for schooling and society, its ultimate effect was to preserve a conventional (neo-liberal) model of schooling. The paper highlights the critical role that notions of utopia might have in negotiating – and challenging – promise-laden mega-building policies like BSF. In doing so, it develops recent geographical research on utopia, education and architecture.

Utopian Promise or Burdensome Responsibility? A Critical Analysis of the UK Government's
***Building Schools for the Future* Policy**

Introduction

Building Schools for the Future (BSF) was launched by the British New Labour[i]

Government in 2003, and ran until its eventual cancellation by the new Conservative-Liberal

Democrat Government in 2010. The programme promised the reconstruction or

refurbishment of every mainstream secondary school in England by 2020 (DfES 2003a: 3).

The scheme was to operate in a series of 15 'waves' across different parts of the country,

ultimately ensuring the refurbishment of 3,500 schools. By September 2010, around 500

schools were at or nearing completion, with the future of a further 1,100 schools as yet

unclear (see the *Epilogue* to this paper). During New Labour's tenure, school buildings were

positioned as crucial to educational reform in England, where "capital investment is vital to

the quality of learning" (DfES 2003a: 4). Indeed, one of the contentions of this paper is that

the UK Government relied upon the material and symbolic presence of 'new' school

buildings in order to substantiate its approach to educational policy-making.

The precise process for refurbishment in schools was, however, not fully determined

by national guidance. During the research project upon which this paper is based[ii], it was

observed that the nature of refurbishment varied substantially – from redecoration of a

dining-hall, to a complete re-build. Individual schools were also compelled to produce

strategic 'visions' which would translate into material spaces in the eventual design (see

'vignette', Box 1). Their plans accounted for their curricular specialisms, the needs of their

local community and their educational aims (DCSF/4ps/PfS[iii] 2008: 16). The involvement of

stakeholders – including teachers, parents and pupils – was purportedly central to this process

of visioning (DfES 2004a: 6). In this way, devolution of responsibility to local (school)

communities was central to the achievement of BSF's lofty aims: "[t]he extra money now available presents a historic opportunity for local people to agree [an] innovative vision for secondary schooling, and then set out to achieve it with help from central Government" (DfES 2003a: 4).

Vignette of BSF 'in action': School A

School A is a secondary school (for 11-18 year-olds) located in a post-industrial city in the British Midlands. It is located in an area of high socio-economic deprivation; 22% of its pupils have special educational requirements relating to learning and behavioural difficulties. The school was built in 1966, but a recent report by the English inspection service OFSTED reported that many of its buildings were in a poor state. According to teachers, learning and daily life in the school were significantly restricted by several problems: bottle-necks in corridors; lack of social spaces for pupils; inadequate stairways; and vandalism. It was one of the first schools in the then Local Educational Authority to receive funding for redesign under the BSF programme.

The school held a number of events to encourage the participation of children in the BSF design process. These included a 'Design Your School in a Day' event; questionnaires to all families attending the school; work with the student council (pupil representatives from each year group); and formal teaching sessions about the design of the school.

The school was ear-marked for a complete rebuild. The school management committee and architects sought to translate a number of learning 'visions' into a series of material spaces that would differ radically from those in the 'old' school; for instance:

- Vision 1: *personalized learning supported through technology*. All zones (note, again, not 'classrooms') to have an independent learning area, likely to be central, able to be re-configured, with some traditional-sized learning spaces. Instant online access – some fixed technology points but mostly through hand-held devices with wireless connectivity. Enables mobile learning and movement between different-themed zones and resource areas. Also enables swift transition from individual to group learning.
- Vision 2: *whole-school identity and 'flagship' space*. School Hall becomes a large central area (specifically recalling images of a Greek *agora* or, more prosaically, a shopping centre with covered streets). Atrium to be at heart of school, highly visible, with an extended facility that has multiple functions: e.g. social area, community space, eating, 'business-like' reception area, services for non-school members of local community (e.g. health, nursery) to be located off central area.

At the time of acceptance of this paper, the building phase for the school had not yet commenced: see the Epilogue to this paper for a full explanation.

Box 1: School A – a vignette illustrating one example of how BSF was manifested in individual schools.

The latter quotation embodies many of the tensions within BSF that this paper seeks to articulate. New Labour purported to offer a kind of philanthropic gesture – the gifting of a radical opportunity to 'local people' and the financial means to conceive an educational 'vision'. Repeatedly, BSF was figured as an 'historic opportunity' or a radical 'step change' (DfES 2003: 6) that, set against the accomplishments of previous school-building programmes, would constitute a 'transformative' moment for the nation and for local communities (DCSF/4ps/PfS 2008: 5).

Drawing upon these terms, this paper argues that BSF policy-making can be read critically as a *utopian* text. Or, rather, that in the two principal documents cited above (DfES 2003; DCSF/4ps/PfS 2008), it is worthwhile to distinguish certain utopian promises that enabled New labour to justify its policy focus upon new school *buildings*. I want to suggest that one can read liberal-democratic governmental stances to education and architectural practice (like BSF) as a significant variety of the utopian imagination (Jameson 2005), worthy of critical attention. This move enables a critique of the many fields of social action often *connected* – in a relatively superficial sense – to architectural renewal via policy discourses like BSF. In the next section of the paper, I expand on the possibilities that the concept of utopia presents for a critique of BSF policy-making. Then, I contextualise the paper in light of other school-building programmes within and outside the UK, and recent geographical research on schools. In subsequent sections, I critically chart some of the connections with and between three spatial discourses: schools (and, more pointedly, school-*children*); community; architectural practice and technology. I argue that these three discourses are enrolled – via the deployment of utopian terminologies – in order for New Labour to justify such an enormous programme of new school building. Whilst teasing out the (re)turn of utopia in contemporary governmental policy-making, the paper also contributes to geographical work around schools, children, community and architecture.

5

Utopia and National Government Policy-Making

Utopia describes the good place that is no place. Utopias range from daydreaming to ideal city plans, and from fictional texts to fantastical architectural designs (Harvey 2000; Pinder 2005). Utopias can be considered in terms of their form, function and content (Levitas 1990) and, have, for centuries, been considered indispensible tools for both critiquing contemporary social formations and the production of viable alternatives (Harvey 2000; Kumar 2003). Ruth Levitas (1990: 1) defines utopia as "about how we would live and what kind of a world we would live in". But utopia differs from other plans for a better life because it represents "the capacity to imagine a future that departs significantly from […] the present (Friedmann 2000: 462). Utopia is thus associated with a fundamental challenge – whether to the economic mode of production (Harvey, 2000), or to established and assumed ways of organising everyday lives (Gardiner 2004).

This paper adopts a relatively broad definition of utopia, as is the case with much contemporary writing on the term (especially Sargisson 2000). However, I concentrate on three usages of the term. First, I identify with a longstanding deployment of the term in relation to styles of architectural practice, where the design of utopian *spaces* is central to the production of a utopian vision (on which more below; Fishman 1999; Harvey 2000; Jacobs 2006). Second, in analysing BSF's treatment of childhood, I draw upon the use of utopia to denote an affective or emotional state of *hope*. Recent work by Anderson (2006) has shown how hope is a disposition that is marked by a brief hint at 'something better'. The very act of 'hoping-for' a determinate goal can be a profoundly and powerfully positive emotional state that is arguably universal (Webb 2007). Third, and significantly for this paper, is the deployment of the term to designate the *function* of a utopian vision. Often, this is a *challenge*: to provoke estrangement; to institute opposition to the *status quo*; or to spark a

creative impulse for radical social change, perhaps via collective action or resistance (Sargisson 2000). As I demonstrate later, BSF's function was purportedly *transformative*, in a particular way. Thus, BSF does not appeal to a compensatory notion of utopia as 'good place' (Kraftl 2007) but, rather, in promising widespread forms of transformation, to Mannheim's notion of utopias that "tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time" (Mannheim 1960: 173).

However, this claim needs to be considered more carefully in light of contemporary theorisations of utopia. For, a key function of utopias is their particular constitution of *critique*, not simply a desire for 'transformation'. Moylan (1986) suggests utopias are critical in two ways: first, in terms of providing radical challenges to the *status quo* that question the political, economic and social foundations of an established socio-spatial ordering (Hetherington 1997); and second, "critical in the nuclear sense of the *critical mass* required to make the necessary explosive reaction" (Moylan 1986: 10, original emphasis). Upon reading BSF policy discourse, one may discern both of these critical impulses. BSF purports both to enact unprecedented change in schools provision, whilst constituting new, local affiliations of stakeholders (or 'communities') who will be enabled to set out a novel educational vision.

Yet, radical scholars would be profoundly uncomfortable with this brand of utopianism-as-critique as the programme relies – for all its polemic about 'transformation' – upon a relatively conservative model of neo-liberal education that invokes today's generation of children as a locus for 'social investment' (Lister 2006). Nor, as I detail later in the paper, would the instrumental notion of 'community', imagined via public-private partnership, be to the taste of those seeking what Moylan (1986) terms a 'critical mass' for meaningful social change, or what Connolly (2008: xi) terms 'interim visions' that foster unprecedented affiliations of social groupings towards a better world.

Bearing in mind this discomfort, I suggest that it is incumbent to consider in greater depth how utopian ideals, images and designs are becoming discursive tools, called upon to make particular kinds of *connections*. Specifically, I consider the effect of the mobilization of utopian terminologies by a national government upon three 'spaces' for which BSF policy guidance claims transformative change: school(-children), community, architectural practice. What would be the contributions of doing so?

The first contribution is to observe a surprising move in policy formulations of neo-liberal Governments that had previously derided *as* utopian, communist and non-western political/religious visions (Jacques 2002). This paper maps a subsequent move quite evident in BSF policy discourse. That is, to (return to) *directly* employ utopian languages (words like 'dream' and 'vision') in substantiating the significance of a political programme. As I chart some of these usages later, two examples will suffice. First, Jacques (2002) argues that the very act of defining non-western political or religious visions *as* utopian, is a utopian move itself. Coining the term 'crypto-utopia', he suggests that neo-liberal capitalism is situated – in contrast to those other visions – as a 'hard reality', as a political-economic system for which there is no alternative (Jacques 2002: 29). Re-reading President George W. Bush's polemical attacks on Muslim culture as part of the 'war of terror', Jacques suggests that the notion of crypto-utopia encapsulates a mode of envisioning the future reliant upon a distinct mode of utopian dreaming: one which erodes all other alternatives until that one vision is left remaining (almost a default utopia, then). Second, consider contemporary work by geographers that has critically evaluated how contemporary governments anticipate future scenarios in a world characterised by risk. Whilst not necessarily deploying utopian terminologies, Anderson (forthcoming) suggests that to future-thinking is at the heart of policy and professional practice in many liberal democratic forms of governance. For instance, Evans (2010) highlights how interventions into children's health in the UK – *here*

and *now* – have been explicitly designed to anticipate, diffuse and ultimately avoid a potential obesity 'time-bomb' in the next twenty years. Elsewhere, Anderson (forthcoming) demonstrates how the deployment of processes of *imagination* is key to disaster-planning scenarios in which governmental agencies are involved, planning (re)action in the face of dystopian threats such as extreme climate events and terrorist attacks.

BSF was situated within these kinds of future-thinking and imagination; in particular, by anticipating the disastrous social and economic effects of *not* building new schools, and by continuing to contain English education within dilapidated buildings. It was, however, a mode of future-thinking that was *also* purportedly transformative – rather than simply anticipatory or reactive. Thus BSF extends the notion of 'imagining' futures to incorporate what Frederic Jameson (2005) terms *utopian languages* are apparent in "liberal reforms and commercial pipedreams [that posit] deceptive yet tempting swindles of the here and now" (Jameson 2005: 3). For Jameson, these are broader 'varieties' of the utopian that warrant critique. Jameson's critique is most pertinent to BSF where he describes utopias found in "piecemeal social democratic and "liberal" reforms, when they are merely allegorical of a wholesale transformation of the social totality" (Jameson 2005: 3-4). In Jameson's terms, BSF can certainly be read as a utopian allegory of 'wholesale transformation', resonating with recent work by educational theorists on educational policy in North America and Europe; as Lewis (2006: 6) argues "[a]lthough recent history might suggest that [a] utopian kernel has disappeared from educational discourse [it] has simply become covert, secretly animating school reform on both the [political] right and the left". For Lewis (2006:6), "[k]ey here is that utopia must be taken into account in hegemonic and counter-hegemonic visions of educational renewal". Using BSF, this paper maps some of these overt utopian allegories, specifically interrogating the purportedly transformative claims made on behalf of school(-children), community and architectural practice.

Significantly, Jameson also argues that "perhaps we should make a place for the individual building as a space of Utopian investment, that monumental part which cannot be the whole and yet attempts to express it" (Jameson 2005: 4). I argue that, echoing Jameson's formulation, BSF relied heavily on the utopian investment of architecture. This is a move acknowledged in, for instance, modernist visions of ideal buildings that embodied health, democracy and the ushering-in of a new age of technological promise (see, amongst many excellent studies, Fishman 1999; Harvey 2000). As Jacobs (2006: 3-4) argues for the high-rise, "modernist buildings have been variously drawn up into a range of indisputably big stories and organizational events: utopian visions for living, stellar architectural careers like that of Le Corbusier, bureaucratic machineries of mass housing provision, national projects of modernization [etcetera]". Indeed, the associations between utopia and diverse forms of place-making are, Pinder (2005: 6-7) argues, "particularly significant, with fantastic urban visions running through social and artistic imaginaries and often being part of dreams of social transformation" (also Eaton, 2002). But, in a way most resonant of Jacobs' analysis of the global high-rise, BSF's most significant move was to up-scale from individual buildings (Jameson 2005) to a national building programme whose enormity purported to render the programme still-more transformative.

BSF's doubly allegorical promise was that architectural transformation would beget educational *and* social transformation. I argue that the programme relied – in part – upon allegorical utopian formulations in order to make the requisite justification for new schools. To flesh out this claim, I pursue a little further the *connections* between BSF policy discourses and a range of other spatial discourses, each of which, significantly, has its own extensive, and often problematic relationship with utopia. First, though, I contextualise BSF in light of selected school-building programmes, and amongst nascent geographical research on education.

10

School-Building Programmes As/And Utopia

This section situates BSF within a number of contexts. First, it highlights that – with the above discussion of utopia in mind – BSF has not been the first large-scale school-building programme to associate with utopian ideals. Second, it situates BSF in wider policy-making for education and young people in England. Third, it briefly situates the paper in the context of emergent but disparate strands of geographical research on education and schools.

BSF was far from unique in being a large- or national-scale school-building programme; moreover, the contemporary English context is not the only one in which school-building has been articulated in utopian terms. As Burke and Grosvenor (2008) show, there have been previous 'waves' of school-building in several countries, each containing implicit discursive associations with utopia. For instance, the Board Schools of Victorian London were termed 'Beacons of the Future' by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; in late nineteenth-century Spain, schools were equated with the 'wisdom of progress'; in both the USA and UK in the 1930s, schools were viewed as symbols of revivified nationhood, sources of social inspiration and harbingers of a modern(ist) utopia (Burke and Grosvenor 2008).

Similarly, BSF was by no means the only national-scale school-building project taking place in the new millennium. There are many examples – of different scope and ambition – outside the UK, but two suffice. Perhaps the most notable programme is Australia's 'Building the Education Revolution': a $16.2 billion scheme to build 8,000 primary schools (under the 'Primary Schools for the 21st Century' plan) and deliver science and language centres for secondary schools that will "provide economic stimulus by supporting employment" (DEEWR 2010: unpaginated). The resonance with BSF in name is clear – as is a corresponding ambition to tie educational reform into workforce and economic reform. Meanwhile, in Portugal, the 'Secondary School Modernisation Programme' will

11

initially see the modernisation of 332 secondary schools, aiming to "make Portugese education an international benchmark" by "refurbish[ing] physical infrastructure, open[ing] schools up to the community […and] foster[ing] well-being" (OECD 2009: 1). The Portuguese example does not directly evoke utopian imagery; but it resonates with parts of BSF discourse that do – notably, in terms of the significance of high-quality design, inspiration and 'legacy' to future generations.

BSF was also situated in a complex, often contradictory series of education policies – especially *Education Acts* – published by successive UK Governments. In this varied terrain, four key policy trends stand out. First, that successive Governments' ideological positions have witnessed dramatic changes to education policy over the last thirty years. Jones (2003) highlights how the Conservative Government (of 1979-1997) preferred aggressive, top-down modes of education delivery (most evidently in the introduction of a *National Curriculum* in 1992). Thereafter, New Labour (1997-2010) asserted more 'bottom-up' approaches that devolved power to Local Authorities and communities (including in the delivery of BSF). Second, the period of New Labour's power was marked by a series of high-profile commitments to young people's rights, to their safeguarding, and to providing better-organised health, education and leisure services for them. Two key documents – *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003b) and *Youth Matters* (DfES 2005b) – provided a framework under which local councils were compelled to exercise joint delivery (e.g. involving health, education and the police in single-location facilities) in their service provision for young people. Third, following the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child in 1989, children's participation in decision-making has become increasingly important to successive *Education Acts* and, indeed, a central component of policy discourse about BSF itself (James and James 2004). Fourth, the years since 1997 saw New Labour commit to a variety of ambitious, large-scale programmes for *capital investment* in Education. Increasingly, school

buildings were perceived as central to children's learning; BSF was actually one of three programmes of capital investment instituted by New Labour[iv].

Despite the centrality of school buildings to UK education and beyond, research about school-building programmes like BSF remains relatively under-developed. Geographers are well-placed to offer critical analyses of these programmes. But, whilst historians of education have studied the socio-technical 'assemblages' Peim (2005) that constitute school, there have been few geographical studies that mirror the richness with which Burke and Grosvenor (2008) link together the details of school building design with macro-political demands of large-scale school-building programmes. This paper far from fully addresses this omission, but it does open out an important area of research for nascent but rather disparate geographical work on education (Collins and Coleman 2008; Thiem 2009; Holloway et al. forthcoming). For, Collins and Coleman (2008) suggest that social geographies of education tend to fall into two camps. First, studies focusing upon the micro-practices that constitute learning, teaching and social interaction within a school, albeit with a critical awareness of broader curricular and political processes. Examples include Ploszajska's (1996) historical analysis of haptic teaching practices in English schools, Holloway et al.'s (2000) seminal study of gendered Information Technology usage in classrooms, and Pike's (2008) Foucauldian analysis of power relations in school dining halls. Second, Collins and Coleman (2008) consider research that is – broadly speaking – concerned with the location of schools in their broad social or political contexts, and especially their local community. Examples include Witten et al.'s (2003) critical analysis of the impact of educational restructuring in New Zealand, and a series of recent papers on school location and choice (Butler and van Zanten 2006; Johnston et al. 2008).

Whilst remaining a disparate and rather disconnected field, I hope that this paper will develop geographical work on education in two ways. First, it opens out further lines of

empirical and conceptual enquiry – namely through sustained critical policy analysis of a single education policy, and through its focus upon a national-scale school-building project. Second, it cuts *across* the multiple spatial scales that remain (implicitly) divided above – exploring how BSF is operationalised, via deliberate acts of scale jumping that connect an entire nation of school children with what Jacobs (2006) terms the 'big things' of buildings, with micro-technical details *matter* if BSF is to be a success at a (inter)national scale. The paper now turns to these concerns.

Justifying BSF School Buildings: Connecting School(-Children), Community and Architectural Practice

The remainder of this paper examines selected policy documents concerning *Building Schools for the Future*. It concentrates on four sources: *Building Schools for the Future: Consultation on a New Approach to Capital Investment* (DfES 2003a); *Transforming Schools: An Inspirational Guide to Remodelling Secondary Schools* (DfES 2004a); *Classrooms of the Future: Innovative Designs for Schools* (DfES 2004b); and, *An Introduction to Building Schools for the Future* (DCSF/4ps/PfS 2008). Between them, these documents deal with the vision, implementation and design details of BSF. Moreover, as consultation documents and guides, they represent the 'public' face of BSF for Local Authorities, schools, architects and other local stakeholders. The following sections illustrate how BSF sought to connect with, activate and rely upon three spatial discourses: school(-children), community and architectural practice. Therein, I chart the (sometimes rather superficial) ways in which the programme evokes allegorical utopian languages in order to forge the material and discursive spaces that were to see at least 500 (in the first place 3,500) refurbished schools built in England before 2020.

School and School-Children

In the UK context, the ambition to overhaul the nation's school building stock is far from a new one. From the outset, however, BSF was *contrasted* with previous phases of school building (and hence, schooling) through two claims (DfES 2003: 5). First, that whilst the phase of school building in the Victorian era succeeded in producing a more-or-less national network of schools, these were no longer 'fit' for a twenty-first century education. Specifically, "[f]or the *first time* since the Victorian era, a Government has committed itself to […] significant investment in buildings", such that BSF will "ensure secondary pupils in *every part of England* learn in 21st-century facilities" (DfES 2004a: 2; emphases added). The second claim was that previous schemes had employed a 'patch and mend' approach (DfES 2003a: 5). In other words, the scheme's 'ambition' rested not only in its imagination of a *national* landscape of defunct schools, but in a financial commitment that promised a more fundamental, more technically-sound refurbishment of school buildings. I explore some of the technical detail later; here, I simply note that it was the 'scale' of the programme that mattered. For, the term 'scale' is one of three key words that were employed to contrast BSF with all previous school-building programmes (the others being 'ambition' and 'complexity') (DCSF/4ps/PfS 2008: 5-6). 'Scale', therefore, referred to both the geographical extent *and* the material scope – the sheer density and detail of architectural change – that would both be necessary for BSF to represent a 'step change', in school provision, in New Labour's own words (DfES 2003a: 6).

Herein, the *language* of BSF policy-making was perhaps surprisingly utopian in tone. Echoing the function of utopia as a radical juncture or turning point (Sargisson 2000), the programme was vaunted as an 'historic opportunity' (DfES 2003: 4); meanwhile, it was claimed that all children 'deserve' to learn in 21st century facilities but that, "[until now], this has been just a *dream* for most schools. But it is now within our grasp" (DfES 2003: 4,

15

emphasis added). The latter was a significant, yet persuasive, move. It (re)deployed the kind of language ('dream') about which neo-liberal Governments have become so dismissive; yet, at the same time, seemed to suggest that the time is *now* (i.e. from 2000 onwards) right to begin to mobilize modes of social dreaming in England (DCSF/4ps/PfS 2008). BSF was vaunted as the critical moment at which dreaming about the future became politically acceptable. The introduction of *buildings* within this political moment was an attempt to literally and figuratively concretise the promise of national-scale dreams of transformation. This was, in part, because of an insistence upon the reliable materiality of bricks and mortar to embody the programme's vision – a utopian impulse I return to later in the paper. But New Labour was careful to claim (although not persuasively) that the programme was not simply a scheme for new buildings: "BSF is not just about bricks and mortar: it is about people. It is about transforming the face of education for generations to come, providing learning environments in which every young person can unlock their talents and achieve their very best[v]".

In deploying these utopian languages, BSF evoked some quite familiar – but in some senses no-less-utopian – discourses about schooling and childhood. I begin by asserting that BSF may be understood as the zenith of New Labour's decade-long focus upon a 'social investment' approach to both education and young people. They suggested that '21st century' buildings will support their 21st century 'educational vision' (DfES 2003a: 2) – a familiar vision of flexibility, personalised learning and technological literacy critiqued repeatedly elsewhere (Mizen 2003; Lister 2006; Pykett 2009). Precisely this impulse was outlined by New Labour in an early consultation document:

"[Previous school spending was] very different from matching the quality of school buildings with *educational need*. For example, there is a growing need for technology

16

facilities and science laboratories, for flexible spaces…and for modern and well-equipped social spaces to encourage *good behaviour and attendance*. […] And the secondary education each pupil receives should be motivating and demanding, and prepare them for *higher education and work*" (DfES 2003: 6-7, emphases added)

Like the current Australian school-building programme ('Building the Education Revolution'), BSF documentation directed the nuts-and-bolts of 21st-Century schooling *towards* the loftier goals of future economic stability and global economic competitiveness,. Simultaneously, educational renewal was conceived as central to reducing social exclusion (implied by encouraging 'good behaviour and attendance'). Education was viewed as the springboard for pathways into paid work; participation in paid work considered the main mechanism for 'lifting' people out of social exclusion; and, social exclusion understood as a fundamental barrier to economic growth. This link was perhaps most evident in another UK Government policy document, its 2005 '14-19 Skills White Paper', where education and skills reform were compelled both to engage 'disaffected' youth, and help UK society take "the next steps towards a more prosperous and fairer society" (DfES 2005a: 8).

Lister (2006) terms this a 'social investment' approach to education, concerned not with the present learning needs or well-being of children, but with schooling as a kind of instrumental, future-orientated fund which will – at some indeterminate point in the future – pay dividends for society (also Anderson, forthcoming). Mizen (2003) outlines the twin goals of this vision: "[t]hrough investment in human capital and the equipping of young workers […] New Labour hopes to reconcile the quest for competitive efficiency and economic progress with their commitment to social justice" (Mizen 2003: 455). In terms of the reduction of social exclusion, several commentators have noted that New Labour's represents a "market-like" approach to a "series of risk reduction or insurance based strategies in which the burden of managing risk is held by individuals themselves" (Muncie 2006: 773). This

renders social inclusion – understood as participation in education, paid work, and non-participation in anti-social or illegal behaviours – as a devolved choice or pathway that individuals can choose (Scanlon and Adlam 2008). Cameron (2006) suggests that certain attempts to literally map social exclusion – those places and regions 'not included' – reinforce this approach. He argues that these "compelling visual images" of social exclusion simply reinforce widely-held beliefs that exclusion is a "local and/or personal problem" and that, therefore, any solutions must take place at a similar scale (Cameron 2006: 398; also Mohan 2000: 295).

Critiques of social exclusion (and inclusion) policies in the UK are diverse, but I focus on four key arguments in relation to BSF and its attendant promises for the future of English childhood. First, as Muncie (2006) argues, New Labour's notion of social inclusion – in which BSF is firmly rooted – was caught, like those of other neo-liberal governmental policies, between two poles. On the one hand, New Labour privileged personal/local 'responsibilisation' for becoming socially-included; on the other hand, they emphasised a 'managerialist' approach which sought to intervene in identifiable geographical communities who may be unable to 'take responsibility'– through locally-based state-sponsored services like BSF, and evident elsewhere in pre-school enrichment programmes and parent classes in the USA and Canada (Muncie 2006: 777).

Second, as Levitas (1998) argues, the concept of social exclusion has been a complex and slippery one – such that the notion of social *inclusion* has become an assumed, unquestioned opposite that simply denotes those places/people *not* experiencing social exclusion (Cameron 2006). This has the unfortunate effect that social inclusion is defined negatively so that processes and experiences of what it means to be *included* remain undefined. This was a particular problem for BSF: the stakes were raised by connecting the concept of social inclusion to an ambitious architectural programme with utopian intent. That

is, a vision of the nation's future was sketched; but, despite suggesting *that* BSF that will enable this vision to become reality, the complex exigencies that would lead to an inclusive nation remain obscured. There is a gap, then, between programmes like BSF and any certainty about the ways in which social justice may be achieved twenty-five years into the future. Ironically, this is a utopian vision in More's traditional sense of the term (Pinder 2005), precisely because of this gap between a 'here' (the present) and a 'there' (the future), meaning that the latter is in effect un-localisable in time and space (hence, no-where) because there is no way of knowing how programmes like BSF would have led to social justice. Moreover, the vision was an allegorical utopia because it did not figure a radically different form of social justice under an alternative ordering of society. Rather, it invoked the trope of 'transformative' change as a form of spatio-temporal deferral: for a better, more secure (i.e. socially-inclusive) version of a neo-liberal ordering than that that presently obtained; but doing so merely in order to connect social inclusion to (and in justification of) BSF. This is in a sense a circular manoeuvre well-summarised by Mohan (2000: 296): "the imprecision attached to it [social exclusion] produces and eclecticism which is attractive to politicians, who can sign up to parts of the whole depending from which constituency they are seeking support".

Third, I want to develop an argument that, via schooling, BSF policy-making also made implicit, almost unspoken utopian claims for the figure of *childhood* and a generation of school-children. Specifically, New Labour articulated forms of *hoping*-for a generation of children that were also a significant *burden* for them. The twin hope/burden upon young people was initially evident in the UK Government's claim that BSF "presents a historic opportunity for local people to agree [an] innovative vision for secondary schooling", (DfES 2003a: 4). Young people, it was claimed, were central:

"That is why we stress that the starting point for the renewal of the secondary

school estate is an educational vision, which will meet the diverse needs and

aspirations of pupils for many years to come. That vision must be founded on

local knowledge of the needs of local young people" (DfES 2003a: 17)

 Yet the 'visioning' process was a distended, disjointed and, in some cases,

dysfunctional one. Research has shown that whilst young people were, along with other

stakeholders, accorded responsibility for 'participating' in school design, they rarely did so in

meaningful ways; still more rarely were they made aware of the parameters (and the grand,

far-reaching ambitions) that the scheme had on their behalf (den Besten et al. 2008). In other

words, notions like economic competitiveness, social inclusion and educational

transformation remain a facet of policy discourse about BSF – but were visions that were the

realm of central policy-makers alone. In the vast majority of cases, those visions were of a

different register from 'pupil participation' because those latter activities were centered

around *design* visioning – which was often small-scale, piecemeal, disappointing and centred

upon particular facets of the school, such as toilets and social areas (den Besten et al. 2008). I

am not saying that there was *a priori* anything less authentic, or even utopian about the kinds

of visioning done in individual schools by children. But I am claiming that pupils will share

the *burden of responsibility* whether BSF succeeds in increasing social inclusion or not,

precisely because their 'participation' was written-into the fabric of BSF policy, and because

this is how social inclusion is supposed to work (via local, personal responsibilisation). Yet,

young people were simply not empowered to comment on or critique the loftier ambitions of

BSF and it is *there* – as evidenced by the epilogue to this paper – that the scheme will

ultimately be judged. It is perhaps an open question as to whether that burden – as an

extension of the corollary of hope to translate into bitter disappointment – will once more turn into a process of *blaming* young people for society's failings (Cobb 2007).

Finally, whilst BSF can also be understood as the latest in a long line of discourses that actively construct 'childhood' (James and James 2004), the programme also relied upon a powerful undercurrent of *hoping* that often goes unremarked by childhood theorists. In a formulation resonant with the 'social investment' thesis, the next generation of children were viewed in a broader, cultural sense as the 'solution' to future social or economic problems – what Katz (2008) terms the aesthetic production of the child as 'accumulation strategy'. This is a longstanding form of anticipatory logic that invests childhood with a kind of utopian hope that in terms of BSF's wide-ranging goals can almost never be realised: at its most fundamental level, it relies on a (bio)logical formulation that a generation of children will, simply by being the next generation, solve a suite of problems in the near-future, especially if they are educated in revitalised school buildings. Thus, that seemingly universal human need – to hope *for* children – is one that can be mobilised to all sorts of ends. Clearly, this observation exceeds the boundaries of the 'national' scale as BSF resonates with broader neo-liberal aspirations for *globally* competitive educational systems, global citizenship and discourses of universal human rights (Kraftl 2008). In closing this section, then, I want to suggest that the programme relied in an unspoken sense upon this 'trump-card' of childhood-hope to affectively promulgate broader assent for such a massive scheme, as much as it did upon the location of BSF within policies for social inclusion and the improvement of teaching and learning in schools.

Community

In this section, I move away from an analysis of schooling and childhood because it is in the expansive nature of the connections BSF policy discourse makes with other spaces of

contemporary political concern that its utopian ambition can be further scrutinised. In this section, I focus upon the specific ways in which BSF (re)imagined the community around a school and made claims that would position *new* BSF schools at the centre of those communities. In a New Zealand context, geographers have shown that neo-liberal restructuring of education reframes in particular ways the socio-spatial networks that constitute 'community' (Witten et al. 2003). This is a familiar refrain: neo-liberal provision of education entails the 'responsibilisation' of both individuals and communities, such that the latter, once defined by Government, are encouraged to regulate themselves and the behaviours of their members (Cobb 2007). The term is, especially, used in the context of 'deprived' communities (as it is repeatedly in BSF policy) – but, very often, neo-liberal attempts to mobilise notions of community serve to obscure the wider political-economic factors that create and perpetuate deprivation (Craig 2007). In many senses, BSF policy making reiterated these imperatives; but, BSF also called upon the concept of community to do work in two further ways: as a mode of delivery; and, in neighbourhood regeneration.

First, a key feature of BSF has arguably been the operationalising of *community as a mode of delivery.* Here, the concept of 'stakeholder participation' enjoined not only pupils but all 'local' stakeholders to contribute to the design of a new school – but this occurred via a rather complex process. Responsibility for the implementation of BSF was (before 2009) devolved to Local Education Authorities (LEAs), operating essentially at a sub-regional (county) level in England. Hence, LEAs set out a 'BSF strategy' that demonstrated steps for improving pupil attainment and engagement in learning (DCSF/4ps/PfS 2008: 15). LEAs constituted a Local Education Partnership (LEP) that controlled "procurement, delivery and integration of all services required" to (re)build schools (DCSF/4ps/PfS 2008: 65). An LEP was a public-private partnership comprising an LEA, private sector partners and school communities (teachers, pupils, parents and school governors) (DCSF/4ps/PfS 2008: 9-10).

It is my contention that – amongst, various other deployments of the term – the notion

of 'community' was used interchangeably with the instrumental notion of 'partnership'

outlined above. As early guidance states: "[e]very *community* – parents, teachers, employers

and local authorities – should play a full part in agreeing the capital strategy, locality by

locality (DfES 2003a: 11, emphasis added). Hence, the notion of 'community' was, in part,

defined through BSF as a *mode of delivery*: in essence, a vastly enlarged public-private

partnership. A school community was not simply served by or responsible for a school, but

was an instrumental socio-spatial mechanism positioned in and *as* the very process of its

renovation. This move – to reimagine community as a mode of service delivery – both

reinforces the responsibility of local communities to ensure the successful implementation of

BSF *and* diverts still further from what research has shown are alternative, or (without

romanticising them) 'organic' understandings of community life (Witten et al. 2003).

In an organisational sense, 'community' was viewed as the key vehicle through which

BSF's grand vision would be achieved. Equally, the promise of BSF was such that the

scheme would (in a philanthropic gesture) provide the financial and conceptual means

through which communities could produce their own, local visions. Thus this instrumental

rendering of community was, arguably, *central* to BSF's doubly-scaled (national and local)

process of *visioning*. However, it is important to acknowledge several significant concerns

over this instrumental rendering of community. A key concern was the association with local

business and especially an aspiration to part-fund schools via Private Finance Initiatives (PFI)

provided by local companies. As Farnsworth (2006) indicates, this remains a frustrated

dream, in part because local businesses are themselves unsure of the risks, benefits and

returns of becoming financial partners (Kakabadse et al. 2007), and in part because of

longstanding concerns about the long lock-in periods, poor quality and (in)efficiencies that

have troubled post-occupancy maintenance of PFI schools and hospitals in the UK. In this

part of its vision, then, BSF policy discourse forged an organisational space for a new school via an expanded, more complex and more instrumental notion of community (and partnership); yet the value of this highly instrumental vision was unproven and it may well be in part as a facet of this model that BSF remains a frustrated utopian dream (see the Epilogue to this paper). Given the new UK Government's likely emphasis on 'local partnerships' – and given widespread academic interest in local participation in policy-making – the above critiques and lessons to be learned from this instrumental approach to community require further consideration. This is particularly pertinent if, as suggested in the previous section, local communities *also* remain a key social space at and through which Governments attempt to combat social exclusion.

A second key feature of BSF has been the *(re)positioning of new schools within regenerated communities and neighbourhoods.* Indeed, the *expansive* nature of BSF's ambition figures most prominently in the purported impact that a new BSF school was to have upon neighbourhood regeneration. BSF was a component of broader strategies to transform the relationships, ambitions and places that constitute communities – and especially deprived communities (Craig 2007). It was hoped that "BSF offers a great opportunity to integrate schools into wider regeneration projects, repositioning our schools at the heart of communities" (DCSF/4ps/PfS 2008: 5). Significantly, and problematically, this promise was unsubstantiated by BSF policy discourse. Apart from one further, brief appearance (DCSF/4ps/PfS 2008: 7), the detail of how BSF schools might precisely stimulate community regeneration was missing. One was left to assume that regeneration was somehow a 'natural' or functional outcome *of* educational reform, of better attendance and co-located service provision that should, in New Labour's terms, follow architectural renovation – although the evidence for this is not yet forthcoming (Woolner et al 2007).

Alternatively, one was left to turn to more localised, anticipatory, and explicitly hopeful declarations, as a quotation from a press release about BSF from one West Midlands LEA illustrates. "The [refurbished school] will be a *flagship building* in the heart of a *revitalised part of the city centre* [..]. The new [building] will help create a learning quarter for Coventry as a key part of the Council's… *regeneration scheme*" (Coventry City Council press release 2007[vi]). An LEA in South-West England makes similar claims: "BSF aims to position schools as hubs in their communities, energising and revitalising local areas" (Devon County Council 2009: 1), whilst in Northern England, "Every school [in Leeds] has unique characteristics to meet the needs of its young people, staff and local community, raising aspirations and acting as a catalyst for lifelong learning and regeneration" (Leeds Council BSF website[vii]).

These are lofty aims indeed and, if not utopian, demonstrate the considerable euphoria that accompanied the rolling out of BSF amongst local policy-makers. Mirroring its discursive treatment of a generation of school-children, the *expansive* logic of BSF was such that individual buildings were being charged with ever-growing, ever-more-diverse and, frankly, ever-more unrealisable objectives. In terms of the community alone, it was promised that schools *will* reflect the aspirations of local communities, *will* engage with wider communities of users, *will* provide a physical and symbolic locus for urban and community regeneration.

The intensity of both national policy discourse about BSF and its local reception was such that the advent of a BSF school had to be formulated as a high-profile, community-changing event in order for its transformative logic to be realised. This move was a considerable burden for schools, for those who work within them, and for the community partnerships left with the burden of fulfilling such diverse ambitions – especially in light of

the instrumental framework of community discussed above. Individual schools and Local Authorities already feel that they cannot help but disappoint some of the lofty, almost unattainable ambitions of the scheme (den Besten et al. 2008) whilst they are, at present, unable to challenge those ambitions in any comprehensive way. This exposes the duality at the heart of the utopian impulses within BSF: the programme promises so much, yet also promises to disappoint, as utopias always do (Levitas 1990).

Architectural practice and Technology

I suggested earlier that buildings were central to the transformative logic of BSF. Similarly, I have indicated that architecture and utopia are frequently implicated, and that previous phases of school-building in the UK and elsewhere have contained utopian impulses. BSF also relied upon these assumptions: upon the power of architecture to constitute the new, to symbolize change and, through the very (expensive, disruptive) achievement of a refurbished school building, to embody the enormity of what BSF stood for. It was as if the very material presence – the obvious there-ness of a big public building – would be the clincher that persuaded local communities that New Labour's educational vision was actually enacting transformation. Indeed, this impulse could not be clearer in BSF policy-making: "[t]he Victorians bequeathed a visible inheritance of their commitment to education. It is now time […] for us to start the systematic renewal of all schools, so that our legacy to future generations is at least as great" (DfES 2003: 5). Two things are clear. First, that, in comparing BSF with the last, 'great' period of school-building in the UK, New Labour were knowingly situating BSF within histories of architectural 'master-planning'. Implicitly at least, BSF should be considered commensurate with the very Modern, utopian, *architectural* projects that defined the UK's built environment in the twentieth century

(Fishman 1999). Second, that, for all the thorough-going rhetoric that "BSF is not simply a building programme" (DCSF/4ps/PfS 2008: 5), it is the fact that BSF *was* (and is) a building programme that somewhat arrogantly pre-empts its significance – the legacy is, after all, to be a 'visual' one.

BSF policy documentation was adamant that school buildings mattered – both individually and collectively. Thus, the programme situated school buildings at multiple spatial scales via an attention to the socio-technical, material *details* of school building (compare Jacobs 2006, on the high-rise; also Jenkins 2002). Specifically, it did so in two ways. First, BSF policy-making insisted, in moving away from a previous 'patching and mending' approach (DfES 2003a: 5), on *getting the details right, this time* (den Besten et al. forthcoming). These details were varied – from procurement processes to financing, from health and safety standards to building regulations that govern the minutiae of windows, insulation, wiring and desk height[viii]. Such details were presented in various ways. In some instances, the mistakes of the past were superficially compared with the 'new' approach from 2005 onwards (DfES 2003a: 8). In others, the kinds of material changes that constitute 'minor remodelling' and 'major remodelling' were comprehensively listed (DfES 2004a: 5)[ix]. Thus it is at the scale of the *individual* building – and even each component part – that the promise of BSF was also constituted. I do not want to discuss those component parts at further length, however, because, on the basis of BSF policy documents, I would be hesitant to assert that these material and organisational details are, in and of themselves, utopian. Rather, I want to suggest that it is when *scaled-up* – when taken together as part of the overall effect that 'better-designed buildings' will have at the local and national scales – that these *micro-scale* details were indispensable to the proper functioning of BSF.

Second, the kinds of details listed above were also fundamental to the more explicitly utopian parameters of what a successful BSF school-building should *do*. The language used in exemplar design documents evoked the forward-looking utopianism of previous phases of school-building and especially the inter-war period of architectural modernism in the UK. From the choice of title for those documents ('*Schools for the Future*' – DfES 2004b) to the 'key words' chosen ('beautiful', 'inspirational', 'inclusive', 'delightful', 'fresh'), to the imperatives for flexibility, light and airiness in building design, the similarities are striking (Burke and Grosvenor 2008). Hence, the proper implementation of seemingly mundane architectural details, *this time*, was critical to the achievement of schools that appeal to these kinds of key words.

None of BSF's key words was more important than 'inspiration' – a term that received extensive use in BSF policy documentation. It was here that the discrete boundaries of the school 'building' were more permeable. For, the term 'inspiration' was used to describe the effect of a successful school building on its pupils and the local community: "inspiring buildings can, of themselves, increase motivation" (DfES 2003a: 16-17). This imperative for inspiration has manifested itself in exemplar schools as the inclusion of 'flagship spaces' (including in School A: see Box 1). Those spaces (usually atria or multi-use dance/sports halls) make a symbolic architectural statement – whether through the use of light, their sheer volume, or their external visibility – both to those inside *and* outside the school (DfES 2003a, 2004a; den Besten et al. forthcoming). Thus, the link with BSF's imagining of school communities is made. The notion of inspiration was framed as an affective architectural technique that was directed at enabling schools to become catalysts for the regeneration of particularly disadvantaged or socially-excluded communities. Geographers have begun to show how architectural affects are intentionally manipulated to challenge the feelings and mobilities of those inhabiting them (Kraftl and Adey 2008; Adey

2008). Yet, in the case of the BSF school, the effects and affects engendered by a school should also *exceed* the internal volumes of the building itself and, even, those living in local communities surrounding the school. Thus, the emphasis upon the *detail* of this scheme was translated across all scales – from the micro-technological, through 'set-piece' volumes like atria, through school communities, to the nation. Every school, and every 'radical' pedagogical change enacted by that school, was to be *part* of a national-scale transformation of school building stock that was supposed to inspire and engender a radical transformation in English attitudes to schooling that works as much on an affective register as a representable, curricular one.

However, there was a disjuncture between the *organizational* details of BSF and the *architectural* details. Significantly, the precise look and feel of a BSF school should have been unique – a unique combination appropriate to a local community, procured via an LEP. That uniqueness was both central to the 'legacy' and 'inspiration' of BSF, and was a key mechanism for how the affective import of BSF was scaled-up. But, any successful school design had to (and still must) negotiate two imperatives. On the one hand, it must emerge from the dense, billowy regulatory contexts for contemporary school buildings, such as health & safety and building standards. Significantly, those regulatory contexts are constituted via, and have encouraged, the *standardization* of technologies (insulation, wiring), whose production has become practically the sole preserve of large, often national (if not multi-national) contractors. Whilst not of necessity leading to similar building designs, the massive complexity of building regulations must intersect with the very particular ways in which those standardised technologies can be installed. Hence, this can only lead to a constricted series of ways in which the standardised bits and pieces that constitute a school can be combined. On the other hand, the stark reality of the procurement and LEP model under BSF was such that architects who successfully tendered for buildings had often to submit their

29

design *before* the community consultation stage – and therefore tended to use 'set designs' (of atria, for instance) – often for dozens of buildings (den Besten et al. 2008).

One upshot of these imperatives is that the relatively homogeneous 'BSF school' is likely to replace the relatively homogeneous '1960s prefabricated, concrete build' (the result of the last phase of school-building in England), at least in the case of the 500 schools completed by September 2010. A second upshot is that there are, therefore, some relatively straightforward technological and organisational constraints that hamper the freedom of both architects and a school community to produce a unique school that will meet the UK Government's demands for 'legacy' and 'inspiration'. BSF policy discourse was striking because it relied on the utopian power of architecture to *have an effect (and to produce affects)*, and because it made a series of utopian claims *on behalf* of architectural practice. Most significant was that that utopian discourse tied together the socio-technical details of a building with the ambition of a scheme that purported national and even global importance. However, architectural practices and practitioners were charged with the same responsibility – and burden – as a generation of school-children and the communities/partnerships surrounding schools.

Conclusions

BSF was not a utopia. Nor can BSF policy documents be understood as fully utopian texts. Yet, amidst a resurgence of interest in utopia in the social sciences, the fundamental argument of this paper is that a contemporary piece of policy-making can be considered in utopian terms. In a move that runs against the grain of anti-utopianism in previous neo-liberal political discourse (Jacques 2002), BSF policy guidance relied, to an extent, upon the aesthetic and affective power of particular utopian tenets to justify new BSF school buildings.

Thus, it made claims on behalf of schooling and school-children, community and architectural practice, ostensibly *connecting* three spatial discourses which, it was promised, would be profoundly altered via this visionary mission. I argue that those three particular discourses were selected precisely because they can be (and have in the past been) aligned with utopian visions – childhood with nostalgic and future-orientated forms of hoping, architecture with formal utopian blueprints, and so on. Indeed, BSF works so well as an allegory of a utopian vision because it *collates* those three discourses and channels them into an affectively compelling programme for school-building (cf. Thrift 2004).

Policy discourses about BSF do not, of course, solely rely on utopian promises, and there would be many other ways to analyse the multiple claims BSF makes. However, I have suggested that BSF was an *allegory* of utopia (Jameson 2005), for several reasons. First, BSF presented an alluring, affective image of wholesale educational and, hence, social transformation; yet the goals of its vision (and especially its advocating an education to employment model of schooling towards national economic competitiveness) simply reinforced well-critiqued, neo-liberal premises. It promised a school system fit for the 21st century, revolutionised after decades of tinkering at the edges. Yet, in so doing, it also provided room for *other*, increasingly controversial processes – not least the funding of public building work via private business finance (PFI). It was vaunted as an unprecedented opportunity in the history of hoping *for* children – yet was, rather more instrumentally, also an investment in this and future generations of children which it was hoped will pay-off for the country later down the line: the ultimate goal of global economic competitiveness accompanied by and garnered via social inclusion. And, as I have demonstrated, BSF promised transformation beyond the school walls, especially in effecting neighbourhood renewal. But BSF also reimagined local communities in an instrumental sense – in essence as

vastly-enlarged public private partnerships or LEPs wherein communities became tools of delivery in the service of the (neo-liberal) aims of the programme.

Second, in order to justify new school buildings, BSF also relied – as per Jameson's formulation – upon the power of architectural practice as a utopian investment that could not constitute wholesale change to contemporary social orderings but attempts to express such change. Jameson's depiction is confined to the scale of an individual building. But I argue that BSF worked along two multi-scalar premises to present a more compelling – but nonetheless still allegorical – vision: around the social-technical *details* that, once discursively scaled-up would be the very foundations upon which the future legacy and transformative vision of BSF was built; and around the affective promise of *building the new* – that, in a move at least implicit to many previous architectural utopias, the material process of sweeping physical renewal would beget a reinvigoration that resonates at the very depths of contemporary socio-spatial orderings.

However, early indications are that new school buildings stimulate neither the thoroughgoing educational, nor social, change that New Labour predicted (Beckett, 2007; Woolner et al. 2007). Indeed, some scholars argue that in terms of their *Academies* programme (incorporated under BSF in 2009) many local communities saw the building of a new school as a signification of failure and have actively campaigned against them (Hatcher and Jones 2006). Moreover, as I argued in the final section of the paper, the signs are that two of the key building blocks *for* BSF's transformative vision (good, unique school designs and community engagement) are, simultaneously, working *against* that vision because of their very complexity and obduracy. Indeed, the mundane, socio-technical parameters and micro-geographies of architectural practice may risk community *dis*-engagement and an architectural legacy of more-or-less standardised school buildings.

Finally, and as a facet of those complex organisational and technological processes, BSF was allegorical of utopian transformation because of the way it devolved responsibility *for* visioning, and *for* a successful programme to local communities, to the much-vaunted promise of architectural practice, and even to a generation of young people. But, significantly, New Labour seldom provided the opportunity for critical reflection amongst those groups of actors upon the lofty utopian ambition of the scheme. Nor, whilst bestowing upon young people a discourse of responsibility, did they provide them the practical and financial means with which to carry through that role (Mizen 2003). Ultimately, then, in my view, the claims of BSF were allegorical of utopian transformation because they were dual in effect: their promises were powerfully affecting; yet, they are likely to become (indeed are already becoming) *burdensome* upon the very groups whose lives they should be changing for the better – especially in light of the dim future of the programme (see the Epilogue, below).

As I suggested earlier in the paper, it is my hope that the analysis of *Building Schools for the Future* presented in this paper will extend relatively nascent geographies of education, and especially encourage other geographers to critically consider contemporary large-scale (school-)building programmes in other contexts. By arguing for the significance of BSF as an allegorical utopia that collated multiple discourses (especially about school[children], community and architectural practice) I have also sought to demonstrate one way in which geographies of education might resonate with broader recent work in social and cultural geography, especially disparate work on childhood and architecture. Finally, I would argue that much further work is necessary to fully understand the geographies of BSF and programmes like it: in particular, to critically consider how schools and school-children, local communities and construction professionals negotiate the complex demands of large-scale policies and their accompanying, sometimes utopian, promises.

EPILOGUE

After a General Election on May 5th, 2010, New Labour's Government was replaced by a Conservative-Liberal Democrat alliance. Citing the global economic recession and New Labour's focus upon ambitious, transformatory policies, the new administration embarked upon a series of sweeping cuts to public service expenditure, culminating in a comprehensive spending review in October 2010. In July 2010, the new Government announced that it would scrap Building Schools for the Future, except where schools had reached financial closure (where contractors were legally-bound to commence building work). This means that up to 1,000 further schools *may* still be built although the details remained sketchy at the time this paper was published. However, School A (Box 1) – to the disappointment and anger of its community – had not reached the requisite stage and thus despite years of planning and consultation, is highly unlikely to be rebuilt. The new Secretary of State for Education – Michael Gove – was particularly stinging in his criticism of BSF's ambition, stating as he announced the end of the scheme:

> "Good quality education does not necessarily need sparkling, architect-
> designed buildings… Throughout its life [BSF] has been characterised by
> massive overspends, tragic delays, botched construction projects and needless
> bureaucracy" (Gove 2010[x])

The cancellation of BSF is symbolic of a new affective regime of governance: one focused less on promise, hope, ambition and grand programmes for social transformation, and more on austerity, efficiency and 'making do'. Gove's words signalled a dramatic change in the terminologies used by Government; certainly, they are far from utopian. Yet, as the new Government's policies for education remain yet to be announced, a question remains: will a return to the ridicule of previous, 'sparkly' utopian projects and to the 'hard facts' of life in

34

post-crisis capitalism also signal a return to Jacques' (2002) crypto-utopian mindset, or will this new era require new varieties of the utopian both within and beyond the bounds of national Government policy-making?

Acknowledgments

References

Adey P (2008) Airports, mobility, and the calculative architecture of affective control. *Geoforum* 39:438-451.

Anderson B (2006) Becoming and being hopeful: towards a theory of affect. *Environment and Planning D: Society & Space* 24:733-752.

Anderson B (forthcoming) Preemption, precaution, preparedness: anticipatory action and future geographies. *Progress in Human Geography*.

Barker B (2008) School reform policy in England since 1988: relentless pursuit of the unattainable. *Journal of Education Policy* 23:669-683.

Beckett F (2007) *The Great City Academy Fraud*. London: Continuum.

Butler T and Van Zanten A (2006) School Choice: A European Perspective. *Journal of Education Policy* 22: 1-5.

Burke C and Grosvenor I (2008) *School*. London: Reaktion.

Cameron A (2006) Geographies of welfare and exclusion: social inclusion and exception. *Progress in Human Geography* 30:396-404.

Cobb N (2007) Governance through publicity: Anti-social behaviour orders, young people, and the problematization of the right to anonymity. *Journal of Law and Society* 34:342-373.

Collins D and Coleman T (2008) Social geographies of education: looking within, and beyond, school boundaries. *Geography Compass* 2:281-299.

Connolly W (2008) *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style*. Durham, USA: Duke University Press.

Craig G (2007) Community Capacity-building: Something Old, Something New…? *Critical Social Policy* 27:335-359.

DCSF [Department for Children, Schools and Families] (2007) *Extended Schools: Building on Experience.* London: DCSF.

DCSF/4ps/PfS [Department for Children, Schools and Familes/Public Private Partnerships Programme/Partnerships for Schools] (2008) *An Introduction to Building Schools for the Future*. London: 4ps.

Den Besten O, Horton J and Kraftl P (2008) Pupil involvement in school (re)design: participation in policy and practice. *Co-Design* 4:197-210.

Den Besten O, Horton J, Adey P and Kraftl P (forthcoming) Claiming events of school (re)design: materialising the promise of *Building Schools for the Future*. *Social and Cultural Geography*.

DEEWR [Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations]

(2010) 'Building the Education Revolution: Overview'. Accessed online via DEEWR

website at:

http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/BuildingTheEducationRevolution/Pages/default.

aspx, last accessed 15/4/2010.

Devon County Council (2009) What is BSF? *BSF Newsletter* 1: 1-3. Available at

http://www.devon.gov.uk/bsf-newsletterissue1.pdf, last accessed 16th April 2010.

DfES [UK Department for Education and Skills] (2003a) *Building Schools for the Future:*

Consultation on a new approach to capital investment. London: DfES.

DfES [UK Department for Education and Skills] (2003b) *Every Child Matters Green Paper*.

London: DfES.

DfES [UK Department for Education and Skills] (2004a) *Transforming Schools: an*

inspirational guide to remodelling secondary schools. London: DfES.

DfES [UK Department for Education and Skills] (2004b) *Classrooms of the Future:*

Innovative designs for schools. London: DfES.

DfES [UK Department for Education and Skills] (2005a) *14-19 Education and Skills White*

Paper. London: DfES.

DfES [UK Department for Education and Skills] (2005b) *Youth Matters White Paper*.

London: DfES.

DfES [UK Department for Education and Skills] (2007) *400 Academies: Prospectus for*

Sponsors and Other Partners. London: DfES.

Eaton R (2002) *Ideal cities*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Evans B (2010) Anticipating fatness: childhood, affect and the pre-emptive 'war on obesity'.

Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 35:21-38.

Farnsworth K (2006) Capital to the rescue? UK Government's business solutions to old

    welfare problems. *Critical Social Policy* 26:817-842.

Fishman R (1999) *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd*

    Wright, Le Corbusier. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Friedmann J (2000) The good city: in defense of utopian thinking. *International Journal of*

    Urban and Regional Research 24:460-472.

Gardiner M (2004) Everyday utopianism: Lefebvre and his critics. *Cultural Studies* 18:228-

    254.

Harvey D (2000) *Spaces of Hope*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Hatcher R and Jones K (2006) Researching resistance: campaigns against academies in

    England. *British Journal of Education Studies* 54: 329-351.

Hetherington K (1997) *The Badlands Of Modernity: Heterotopia And Social Ordering*.

    London: Routledge.

Holloway S, Valentine G and Bingham N (2000) Institutionalising technologies:

    masculinities, femininities and the heterosexual economy of the IT classroom.

    Environment and Planning A 32:617-633.

Holloway S, Hubbard P, Joens H and Pimlott-Wilson H. (forthcoming) Geographies of

    education and the significance of children, youth and families. *Progress in Human*

    Geography.

Jacques R (2002) What is a crypto-utopia and why does it matter? In Parker M (ed) *Utopia*

    and organization (pp 24-39). Oxford: Blackwell.

James A and James A (2004) *Constructing Childhood: Theory, Policy and Practice*.

    Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jameson F (2005) *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science*

    Fictions. London: Verso.

Jenkins L (2002) Geography and architecture: 11, Rue de Conservatoire and the permeability of buildings. *Space and Culture* 5:222-236.

Johnston R, Burgess S, Harris R and Wilson D (2008) 'Sleep-walking towards segregation'? The changing ethnic composition of English schools, 1997–2003: an entry cohort analysis. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 33:73-90.

Jones K (2003) *Education in Britain: 1944 to the present*. Cambridge: Polity.

Kakabadse N, Kakabadse A and Summers N (2007) Effectiveness of Private Finance Initiatives (PFI): study private financing for the provision of capital assets for schools. *Public Administration and Development* 27:49-61.

Katz C (2008) Cultural Geographies lecture: Childhood as spectacle: relays of anxiety and the reconfiguration of the child. *Cultural Geographies* 15:5-17.

Kraftl P (2007) Utopia, performativity and the unhomely. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25:120-143.

Kraftl P (2008) Young people, hope and childhood-hope. *Space and Culture* 11:81-92.

Kraftl P and Adey P (2008) Architecture/affect/inhabitation: Geographies of being-in buildings. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 98:213-231.

Kumar K (1991) *Utopianism*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Kumar K (2003) Aspects of the western utopian tradition. *History of the Human Sciences* 16:63-77.

Levitas R (1990) *Concept of Utopia*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Lewis T (2006) Utopia and education in critical theory. *Policy Futures in Education* 4:6-17.

Lister R (2006) Children (but not women) first: UK Government, child welfare and gender. *Critical Social Policy* 26:315-335.

Mannheim K (1960[1936]) *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.

Mizen P (2003) The best days of your life? Youth, policy and Blair's UK Government. *Critical Social Policy* 23:453-476.

Moylan T (1986) *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. London: Methuen.

Muncie J (2006) Governing young people: coherence and contradiction in contemporary youth justice. *Critical Social Policy* 26:770-793.

OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] (2009) 'Portugal's secondary school modernization programme', *CELE Exchange* 66:1-9.

Peim N (2005) Towards a social ecology of the modern school: reflections on histories of the governmental environment of schooling. *Pedagogica Historica* 41:627-639.

Pike J (2008) Foucault, space and primary school dining rooms. *Children's Geographies* 6: 413-422.

Pinder D (2005) *Visions of the City*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Ploszajska T (1996) Constructing the Subject: geographical models in English schools, 1870-1944 *Journal of Historical Geography* 22:388-398.

Pykett J (2009) Personalization and de-schooling: Uncommon trajectories in contemporary education policy. *Critical Social Policy* 29:374-397.

Sargisson L (2000) *Utopian Bodies and the Politics of Transgression*. London: Routledge.

Scanlon C and Adlam J (2008) Refusal, social exclusion and the cycle of rejection: a cynical analysis? *Critical Social Policy* 28:529-549.

Taylor P (1982) A materialist framework for political geography. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 7:15-34.

Thiem C (2009) Thinking through education: the geographies of contemporary educational restructuring. *Progress in Human Geography* 33:154-173.

Thrift N (2004) Intensities of feeling: Towards a spatial politics of affect. *Geografiska Annaler Series B* 86:57-78.

Webb D (2007) Modes of hoping. *History of the Human Sciences* 20:65-83.

Witten K, Kearns R, Lewis N, Coster H and McCreanor T (2003) Educational restructuring from a community viewpoint: A case study of school closure from Invercargill, New Zealand. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 21:203-223.

Woolner P, Hall E, Higgins S, McCaughey C and Wall K (2007) A sound foundation? What we know about the impact of environments on learning and the implications for Building Schools for the Future. *Oxford Review of Education* 22:47-70.

Endnotes

[i] Henceforth, the party responsible for BSF is referred to as 'New Labour', to differentiate from the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government.

[ii] The author was part of a multidisciplinary team exploring pupil participation in school design. The project involved in-depth, ethnographic research in ten schools, including interviews with teachers, pupils, architects and Local Authority officers.

[iii] The Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) is the UK Central Government Department charged with responsibility for children's services, education for 0-18 year-olds and the provision of family support. Partnerships for Schools (PfS) is a non-Departmental agency responsible for managing and delivering BSF at a national level. 4ps (now Local Partnerships) are a national agency working at a local level to improve procurement of skills, project management and capacity for major projects – including new schools and hospitals.

[iv] The other two programmes were: the *Primary Capital Programme*, which aimed to rebuild at least half of all primary schools (for 4-11 year-olds) by 2020; and the *Academy Schools* Programme, which sought to procure private investment in schools in socio-economically deprived areas in order to improve learning.

[v] Taken from Department for Children, Schools and Families website 2010 press release:

http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/news/index.cfm?event=news.item&id=headteachers_say_building_schools_for_the_fut
ure_programme_is_transforming_learning_in_schools, last accessed 23rd April 2010.

[vi] Source: www.coventry.gov.uk; last accessed 20/10/2010.

[vii] Accessed at http://www.educationleeds.co.uk/BSF/bsfinleeds.html, last accessed 16th April 2010.

[viii] See, for instance, guidance on toilets in schools: DfES (2007) *Standard Specifications, Layouts and Dimensions 3: toilets in schools*. London: DfES. Also related guidance specifically for schools on doorsets, internal stairways, lighting, partitions, roof coverings and sprinklers (available at http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/, last accessed 16th April 2010).

[ix] Further details as follows: "**Minor remodelling** will range from simple redecoration – repair and maintenance of existing rooms and infrastructure – to adding ICI cabling and outlets, new floor coverings and loose furniture and equipment". And "**Major remodelling** will also include […] completely new wiring and electrical outlets, heating systems, ceilings and windows or cladding, and fixed furniture and equipment (for instance in science laboratories) (DfES, 2004: 5)

[x] Cited at http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/culture/harrymount/100044720/schools-dont-need-grand-buildings-just-intelligent-teachers-and-streaming/, published 6/7/2010; last accessed 20/10/2010.