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Editorial: Open Issue

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For this eighth volume of *Confero* we invited contributions that deal with issues related to the broad scope of the journal, i.e. education and social critique. In this open issue we present three interdisciplinary essays, all with a framework of social critique and with a contribution to *Confero's* encouragement of essayistic writing. Despite the variety when it comes to topic, theory, and methodology all of the essays share *Confero's* areas of interest, that is discussions on education of philosophical and political nature.

Confero has over the years profiled itself as an interdisciplinary journal with papers presenting a wide range of topics. This issue is no exception. Here, we present papers dealing with subjects such as the connection between Trump's election rhetoric and increased bullying in U.S. schools, the creation of spaces for development within agonistic theory as well as a critical reading of the works of Ayn Rand. Our anticipation with the present issue is to emphasize the interdisciplinary capacity of educational science, while at the same time presenting a non-traditional form of academic writing, essayistic writing. We hope that this encourages new lines of thought and inspires further discussions and reflections on the topics presented.

In the essay *Building Walls: Trump Election Rhetoric, Bullying and Harassment in US Schools,* Paul Horton highlights links between social practices of bullying and harassment in U.S. schools and the rhetoric of Donald Trump during the presidential election in 2016.

The study conducted is based on a plethora of news articles about U.S. schools along with communicative events from Trump during the election. Using a Critical Discourse Analytical approach, Horton applies Bandura's social learning theory to understand how bullying behaviour is influenced by role models on the societal level and Bronfenbrenner's model to understand bullying as a social-ecological phenomenon. In the light of different systems, e.g. macrosystem and exosystem (i.e. the massmedia), Horton places emphasis on inherent complexities when empirically examining discursive influences regarding the phenomenon of bullying. Moreover, Horton discusses how Trump's election rhetoric modelled and influenced certain social practices in schools, filtered through the media and e.g. parents and teachers. For example how Trump's rhetoric on building a wall influenced daily social practices in U.S. schools. Thus, Horton highlights the importance of scrutinizing discourses at different levels, when examining destructive social practices of harassment and bullying in schools.

In the second essay *Why Agonists Should Stop Discussing with Deliberative Theorists* Ásgeir Tryggvason call for agonists to open up a space for agonistic theory in educational research by ending what is described as a standstill with deliberative theorists. With the radical call to stop discussing with deliberative theorists, Tryggvason argues that 'the richness and diversity' of the agonistic theoretical tradition would be a suitable basis for agonists to engage in theory development within educational research, instead of engaging in the standstill with deliberative theorists portrayed by Tryggvason. By exploring and elaborating how agonistic theory has conceptualized the 'other', Tryggvason initiates the within-agonistic discussion while illustrating the ontological differences that arise in the ongoing discussion on emotions and identity in democratic education between deliberative and agonistic theorists.

In the third essay *'As If He Had Come into the World Like Minerva': Ayn Rand's (Anti)Educational Philosophy* Anouk Zuurmond reads Rand's two most well-known fictional works, *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), through an educational lens. They are first read as concretizations of Rand's philosophy to gauge what they can tell us about Rand's Objectivist views on education.

Through a close read of two scenes from these works "against the grain" Zuurmond argues that these scenes reveal an anti-educational stance, which is problematic for the consistency of Rand's philosophy of Objectivism. Zuurmond argues that Rand presents characters who are in educational settings but already fully formed, and that her uninterest in depicting the protagonists' gradual character formation reveals how the Objectivist educational philosophy provides a very narrow understanding of what education involves. By arguing that this flaw can be traced in current discourses on learning and education, and that Rand's narratives foreshadow the rise of an instrumental discourse on education, Zuurmond's essay contributes not only to a philosophical debate on Rand's ideas but also to a more general debate on neoliberal ideology and marketization of education.

All the contributions in *Confero's* eighth volume emphasize, with a critical gaze, the plethora of discourses spurred by ideology within a broader educational context. Indeed, tensions and influences between different arenas and issues are addressed. Thus, these contributions create a venue for further discussion on how ideals and practices in different institutional settings are intertwined with political stances and ideas. We see this issue as a contribution to the central and never-ending discussions that constitute the educational field and aspire to continue these discussions in forth-coming issues; concurrently, encouraging essayistic writing.

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Building Walls: Trump Election Rhetoric, Bullying and Harassment in US Schools

Paul Horton

In the midst of the 2016 US presidential election, reports began surfacing of bullying and harassment in schools that could be linked to the divisive rhetoric of the presidential nominee, Donald Trump. In April 2016, for example, the Southern Poverty Law Center published the findings of a survey of approximately 2,000 K-12 teachers in the US. The report was titled *Teaching the 2016 election: The Trump Effect* and suggested direct links between Trump's election rhetoric and the prevalence of school bullying and harassment in US schools (Costello, 2016a). A number of newspaper articles were published in the wake of the report that suggested that Trump was "making America meaner" by "mainstreaming hate" (Kristof, 2016) and that his rhetoric was fuelling "school bullies" across the country (Carroll, 2016). Indeed, numerous newspaper articles published in the lead up to the Presidential election suggested not only that the "Trump effect" was leading to more bullying in schools (e.g., CBS Detroit, 2016; Jones, 2016), but that Trump himself was a "bully" (e.g., Loeb, 2016; Schwartzmann & Miller, 2016; Washington Post Editorial Staff, 2016).

Following Trump's election victory, the Southern Poverty Law Center conducted an online survey of more than 10,000 school staff and found that racial targeting and harassment had "skyrocketed", and that it "was most frequently reported by educators in schools with a majority of white students" (Costello, 2016b, p.6). Likewise, in a study of more than 50,000 young people between the ages of 13 and 18, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (2017) found

that 70 percent had observed bullying, harassment or hate messages since the election began and that these were often motivated by race or immigration status. Almost two-thirds of those who had witnessed harassment said, "at least one incident was definitely because of the election" (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2017, p.6). Reports in the media likewise suggested that incidents of bullying and harassment increased in the wake of the election (e.g., Jamieson, 2016; Lanktree, 2016; McDonald, 2016; Miller, 2017). According to Huang and Cornell (2019), there were "more than 50 news reports of school bullying since the election in which students made statements linked to the newly elected president" (p.69). Highlighting the increased number of reports circulating in the media, Meyer (2016) pointed out in *Psychology Today*: "I have been researching and writing about biased harassment in schools since the early 90's and never have I seen so many documented incidents covered in the media in such a short period of time." It is unclear, however, whether the increase in reported incidents reflects an increase in bullying and harassment because of the "Trump effect." As Huang and Cornell (2019) have pointed out, it is difficult to determine whether Trump's election rhetoric influenced the prevalence of bullying in schools or whether it led to "a shift in the form of bullying rather than an increase in prevalence" (p.69).

Despite some discussion of how election rhetoric may "trickle down" to students and influence bullying in schools (e.g., Bennett, 2017; Johnson, 2017), there has been little analysis of the process through which this occurs. A few authors have suggested that Bandura's social learning theory can help us better understand how bullying practices are modelled on the behaviour of significant role models, such as presidential candidates or presidents (e.g., Huang & Cornell, 2019; Sprague, 2016). According to social learning theory, aggressive behaviour is socially learned through modelling, mediated via cognitive processes, and reinforced, either directly, vicariously, or through self-reinforcement (Bandura, 1973). In understanding aggressive behaviour, then, it is not enough to focus on the inner emotions of individuals. Rather, as Bandura (1973) suggested, it is necessary to consider how such behaviour is encouraged societally and socially, "by valuing

aggressive accomplishments, furnishing successful aggressive models, and ensuring that aggressive actions secure rewarding effects" (p.59).

One way in which to consider how bullying and harassment are encouraged societally and socially is by conceptualising bullying as a social-ecological phenomenon. While school bullying researchers have increasingly drawn upon Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) social-ecological model to conceptualise bullying (e.g., Espelage & Swearer, 2010; Hong & Espelage, 2012), studies of school bullying utilising the social-ecological model have tended to restrict themselves to the microsystem (e.g., peer relations) and, to a lesser extent, the mesosystem (e.g., family or school influences) (Bouchard & Smith, 2017; Carrera et al., 2011; Horton, 2016a; Huang & Cornell, 2019). Despite some commentary on the importance of discourse to school bullying (e.g., Horton, 2016b; Walton, 2011, 2015), there has been a lack of empirical consideration of the importance of the exosystem (e.g., the role of the mass media), the macrosystem (e.g., the influence of dominant societal norms and values), or the chronosystem (e.g., the temporal context) (Bouchard & Smith, 2017; Horton, 2016a; Huang & Cornell, 2019). Espelage and Swearer (2010) have argued that while the "social-ecological framework illustrates the intricacy of human behavior, it is more difficult to empirically examine this complexity, particularly at the macrosystem level" (p.62).

Put another way, there is a perceived difficulty in examining the ways in which interactional norms at the microsystem level, or what Goffman (1983) termed "the interaction order", are influenced by discursive norms at the macrosystem level, or what Foucault (1981) termed "the order of discourse". The concept of the order of discourse has been used in Critical Discourse Analysis to refer to "a potentially conflictual configuration of discourses within a given social field" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.72). The order of discourse influences communication by delimiting which genres and discourses are available for communication within a particular field. However, it is also subject to change, depending on how those communicating use such genres and discourses, and on whether orders of discourse from other domains are incorporated into

"communicative events" such as political speeches or election debates (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.67). Communicative events are made up of three different components: text (i.e., what is said, written and/or portrayed), discursive practice (i.e., the practice through which the text is produced and consumed), and the social practices that influence (e.g., US border politics or the presidential election), and are influenced (e.g., school bullying and harassment) by the text and mediated by the discursive practice (Fairclough, 2010; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

In this essay, I utilise Critical Discourse Analysis and draw on Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) social-ecological model in order to consider in more depth the relationship between Trump's election rhetoric about the need for a border wall and the social practices of bullying and harassment in schools across the US. In doing so, I illustrate not only the ways in which interactional norms at the microsystem level are influenced by discursive norms at the macrosystem level, but also how dominant bullying discourses shift focus away from the outer layers of the social-ecological model and reduce the problem to one of individual behaviour at the microsystem level. The communicative events that I analyse include Trump's announcement of his presidential bid on June 16, 2015, a subsequent statement issued by Trump on July 6, 2015, a Trump rally in Anaheim, California on May 25, 2016, and the second and third presidential debates in Saint Louis (October 9, 2016) and Las Vegas (October 19, 2016).

The social practices that I analyse were reported in newspaper articles published between June 16, 2015 and June 16, 2017. The newspaper articles were found via a Google news search using the key words "students build that wall." The search resulted in more than 250 newspaper articles, but I stopped considering articles after the first 100, due to repetition and a sharp decrease in relevance. Of the 100 articles, 47 were deemed relevant for the study. While this was by no means a comprehensive search and does not therefore indicate the prevalence of school bullying and harassment during the two-year period following Trump's announcement of his candidacy, it does nevertheless provide a useful snapshot of the forms of social practice that occurred in

schools during that time. In this essay, I focus particularly on the case of Royal Oak Middle School, which was the focus of more than a quarter of the articles, but also consider other social practices that occurred prior to it at other schools in order to highlight the ways in which social practice feeds back into discursive practice via media reports.

Calling for the wall to be built and positioning Mexicans as the 'other'

The idea of building a wall on the US-Mexico border was reportedly initiated as a mnemonic device by Trump's advisors, Roger Stone and Sam Nunberg, to remind Trump to talk about taking a tough stance on immigration (Anderson, 2019; Hirschfeld Davis & Baker, 2019). The first time Trump discussed the idea was at the Iowa Freedom Summit on January 24, 2015 (Anderson, 2019). Four minutes into his speech, Trump pointed to the need to "build a fence" in order to stop people walking across the US-Mexico border, and suggested that if he ran for President and was elected, he would "start by building a very, very, powerful border" (C-Span, 2015).

While Trump did not directly name Mexico or Mexicans in his Iowa Freedom Summit speech, when he later announced his Presidential bid at Trump Tower in New York City on June 16, 2015, it took him less than two minutes to begin pointing at Mexico as the origin of the "problem":

> When do we beat Mexico at the border? They're laughing at us, at our stupidity. And now they are beating us economically. They are not our friend, believe me. But they're killing us economically. The US has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems [applause]. Thank you. It's true, and these are not the best and the finest. When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you [pointing]. They're not sending you [pointing]. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with them. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. But I speak to border guards and they tell us what we're getting. And it only makes sense. They're sending us not the right people. (Washington Post Staff, 2015).

In this extract of his speech, Trump's polarising rhetoric constructs oppositional relations between the US and Mexico, between "us" and "them", with Mexico positioned as "beating" and "killing" the US economically. Relationally, Mexico is not the US's "friend" and the Mexicans being sent are "not the right people" and not "their best". They are not like the Americans in the audience. Rather, they have "lots of problems", which they are bringing with them, and are "rapists." Trump puts forward his statements as facts through the use of the relational "are". While he hedges his comments with the statement "And some, I assume, are good people", the message is clear: Mexico and Mexicans constitute a threat to the well-being of the US and Americans. Indeed, Trump follows up the comment about some being good people, by using "but" and providing the expert testimony of border guards to discredit the possibility that the Mexicans being sent are good people. The US is positioned metaphorically as a "dumping ground for everybody else's problems", suggesting that the Mexicans entering the US are human garbage.

Later in the announcement, Trump pointed to the lack of jobs in the US, to Mexico's increasingly dominant economic position, and to his intention to increase import taxes as a means to force car manufacturing companies to shift production back to the US. Towards the end of the announcement, Trump reiterated that he would "do various things very quickly" if he was elected president (Washington Post Staff, 2015). One of the issues at the top of his to-do list was to build a "great wall" on the US-Mexico border and to get Mexico to cover the costs. As Trump put it:

> I would build a great wall, and nobody builds better walls than me, believe me, and I'll build them very inexpensively, I will build a great, great wall on our southern border. And I will have Mexico pay for that wall (Washington Post Staff, 2015).

Trump was subsequently challenged in the media about his views about Mexicans (e.g., CNN, 2015). In response to what he perceived as his speech being "deliberately distorted by the media" (Walker, 2015), Trump issued a statement on July 6, 2015, wherein he clarified his views:

> What can be simpler or more accurately stated? The Mexican Government is forcing their most unwanted people into the United States. They are, in many cases, criminals, drug dealers, rapists, etc. … In other words, the worst elements in Mexico are being pushed into the United States by the Mexican government. The largest suppliers of heroin, cocaine and other illicit drugs are Mexican cartels that arrange to have Mexican immigrants trying to cross the borders and smuggle in the drugs. The Border Patrol knows this. Likewise, tremendous infectious disease is pouring across the border. (Walker, 2015).

Here, Trump again attributes negative processes to Mexico, in terms of "forcing" and pushing their "most unwanted people" and "the worst elements" into the US. Once again, the US is portrayed as the unfortunate recipient, while Mexicans are portrayed as "criminals", "drug dealers", and "rapists" with "tremendous infectious disease", which is "pouring across the border." In order to emphasise the factual status of what he is saying, Trump once again adds expert testimony in the form of the border patrol, who also "know" what Trump is saying.

At Trump rallies across the country, Trump repeatedly reiterated his intention to build a wall. At a rally in Anaheim on May 25, 2016, for example, Trump talked about how 16,500 border patrol agents had endorsed him and that he had asked "one of the top people" about the problem of illegal immigration and the importance of the wall:

> They said, "Mr Trump, you have no idea. We have the equipment, we have everything, we're told to stand back and let people just flow across like Swiss cheese", ok. I said to him, "So, I think we need the wall. How important is the wall?" To the border patrol people. They said, "Mr Trump, it's absolutely vital." And, actually, the one man said something that was interesting. He said, "It's an absolutely important tool. Maybe our most important tool to stop what's going on, Mr Trump." (Fox10 Phoenix, 2016).

By asserting that the conversation he had was with "one of the top people", Trump assures the audience that the man has the necessary information to comment on the problem and that what the man said is important. Trump then quotes the man as saying that the border patrol "have the equipment", they "have

everything", but that they are told (presumably by the Obama administration) "to stand back and let people just flow across like Swiss cheese". Even if Swiss cheese does not flow, Trump uses the metaphor to state that people (i.e., Mexicans), much like the "tremendous infectious disease" referenced in his clarificatory statement, are flowing across the border and that a border wall is thus needed to stem the tide. In contradiction to the statement that they already have the necessary equipment, that they have "everything", Trump then quotes the man as saying the wall is "absolutely vital", "an absolutely important tool", and uses this contradictory assertion to justify his plans to build a wall. Trump finished his speech by saying, "We're going to build the wall, we have no choice. We have no choice." In response, Trump supporters began chanting "Build that wall!" Trump grinned, put two thumbs up, and then joining in, chanting "Build that wall!", eight times, getting louder each time (Fox10 Phoenix, 2016).

During the second presidential debate in Saint Louis on October 9, 2016, in response to Hillary Clinton's critique of his proposed Muslim ban, Trump spoke about the threat of illegal immigrants:

> Hilary Clinton, in terms of having people come into our country, we have many criminal illegal aliens. When we want to send them back to their country, their country says we don't want them. In some cases, they're murderers, drug lords, drug problems. And they don't want them. And Hillary Clinton, when she was secretary of state, said that's OK, we can't force them into their country. Let me tell you, I'm going to force them right back into their country. They're murderers and some very bad people … we are letting people into this country that are going to cause problems and crime like you've never seen. We're also letting drugs pour through our southern border at a record clip. At a record clip. And it shouldn't be allowed to happen. (Transcript of the second debate, 2016).

Here, Trump positions himself in opposition to the supposedly open-door policy advocated by Clinton, stating that he will force the "many criminal illegal aliens" residing in the US "right back into their country". Continuing the theme from his presidential campaign announcement, Trump states that their country does not want them, and hence that they are not the right kind of people. Using the term "aliens", Trump reinforces the view that they are not

"one of us"; that they are as different from "us" as humanly possible (Mehan, 1997). He initially hedges his judgement of them by stating "in some cases", before painting them as "murderers", "drug lords", "drug problems", "very bad people", who "are going to cause problems and crime like you've never seen." By referencing the drugs pouring through the southern border, Trump also makes it clear that he is referring particularly to those illegal immigrants crossing over from Mexico to the US.

During the third, and final, presidential debate in Las Vegas on October 19, 2016, Trump again raised the issue of illegal immigrants, drugs, and the need for "strong borders":

> In the audience tonight, we have four mothers of, I mean, these are unbelievable people that I've gotten to know over a period of years whose children have been killed, brutally killed by people that came into the country illegally. You have thousands of mothers and fathers and relatives all over the country. They're coming in illegally. […] One of my first acts will be to get all of the drug lords, all of the bad ones, we have some bad, bad people in this country that have to go out. We're going to get them out; we're going to secure the border. And once the border is secured, at a later date, we'll make a determination as to the rest. But we have some bad hombres here, and we're going to get them out. (Blake, 2016).

Here, Trump engages in a form of storytelling, recounting the personal negative experiences of four mothers in the audience (Van Dijk, 1993). In doing so, he assures the audience that he has "gotten to know" them, and that he can thus judge their "unbelievable" character, before then informing the audience that the mothers' children "have been killed, brutally killed" by illegal immigrants. He then informs the audience that it is not only these mothers suffering at the hands of illegal immigrants, but that there are "thousands of mothers and fathers and relatives all over the country." Once again, he associates illegal immigrants with drugs and violence, and refers to them as "bad, bad people" who "have to go out" of the country. Trump then states that once "all of the bad ones" have been removed and the border secured, they will "make a determination as to the rest." Here, Trump makes direct connections to Mexicans, and Hispanic people more generally, through the use of the denigrating label "bad hombres"; suggesting

that a secure border would not only keep out "all of the bad ones" but potentially even "the rest".

In the above communicative events, Trump draws on a number of orders of discourse to negatively depict Mexicans, including an immigration discourse (e.g., "illegal aliens"), a trade war discourse (e.g., "killing us economically", "beating us economically"), a war on drugs discourse (e.g., "drug lords", "drug dealers", "drug problems"), a war on disease discourse (e.g., "tremendous infectious diseases", "rapists"), and a war on crime discourse (e.g., "criminals", "crooks", "murderers", "rapists"). Mexicans are thus portrayed as embodying a raft of problems and being the "wrong" kind of people. Indeed, they are portrayed as "not the right people", "not the best", "the worst elements", "bad hombres", "bad, bad people", and essentially human garbage that is being dumped into the US. By drawing on multiple discourses, Trump does not simply position Mexicans as *a* problem, but rather as *the* problem, incorporating the ills of American society (e.g., unemployment, crime, sickness, and drug abuse). He depicts an "us" vs. "them" relationship, with "them" positioned as the enemy, as "outside of society" and thus not "one of us" (Mehan, 1997, p.258).

By connecting Mexicans and Mexico-US immigration to issues such as drugs, crime, unemployment, and disease, Trump not only draws on various orders of discourse but nourishes them and promotes them as acceptable forms of communication (Mehan, 1997). In doing so, he not only speaks to an adult electorate but also models behaviour for school-aged children across the country, reinforcing social difference and vicariously reinforcing negative social practice.

Building walls and bullying the 'other'

Prior to the election, the name 'Trump' and variations of his call for the wall to be built were used to communicatively build walls at schools in states across the US. The *Los Angeles Times* reported on February 26, 2016, for example, that high school students from a high school in Des Moines, Iowa, chanted "Trump!" and "Build that

wall!" at the end of a boys' basketball match between the largely white high school and a more racially diverse high school (Schilken, 2016). Similar incidents were also reported at high schools in Indiana and Wisconsin in March and April (e.g., CBS New York, 2016; Cuevas, 2016).

The name Trump and the words "Build that wall" (or variations of that) were not only the focus of chants but were also reportedly used as the basis for graffiti. In April 2016, for example, the words "Trump 2016" and "Build that wall" were spray-painted on a "spirit rock" at a school in Connecticut (Iannetta, 2016), while in October, the words "Trump", "Trump 2016" and "Build the wall higher" were spray-painted on rubbish bins, doors and walls at a school in Windsor, California (Brinkley, 2016; Tan, 2016). In May 2016, a banner with the words "Build a Wall" was hung in the hallway of a high school in Oregon, leading to a number of student protests at schools throughout the state (Crombie, 2016; Fuller, 2016; Parks, 2016). During one such protest in Portland the following week, a student participating in the protest was reported as saying, "They tell me I'm a gang member, that I'm here to deal drugs … No, I'm here to get an education. And to be someone in life" (Parks, 2016). This student highlights the links between the "build a wall" rhetoric and the discourse about Mexicans and Latinos being gang members and drug dealers, which was also utilised by Trump during his Presidential campaign.

In June 2016, students built a wall out of boxes to block access to a common area in a school in North Carolina. A photo was shared on Instagram with the caption "We built the wall first" and other students shared the photo with the hashtags #buildthatwall and #thewallwillgoup (Donovan, 2016). In September, students at a high school in Colleyville, Texas, posed with a large poster of a wall with the words "paid for by Trinity" during a "Make Colleyville Great Again" pep rally. The poster was referencing Trinity High School, a rival school with a large number of Latino students, and Trump's claim that Mexico would pay for the wall (Latimer, 2016). Students from a high school cheer block in Warsaw, Indiana were also forced to shut down their Twitter account in September after

posting tweets with the hashtags #buildthatwall and #redwhiteandbetter[than]you (Seltzer, 2016).

The day after Trump's election victory, numerous incidents were reported in the media. For example, a chalk drawing of a wall was drawn on the ground at a school in Plano, Texas, with the words "Build that Wall", "Can't stop Trump" and "Hilary for Prison" written in chalk next to it (Mansoor, 2016). In New Braunfels, Texas, students chanted "build a wall" on a school bus (Santos, 2016). In DeWitt, Michigan, students at a junior high school formed a human wall to stop minority students from passing by and getting to their lockers (Durr, 2016), while in Royal Oak, Michigan, seventh grade (12-13-year-olds) students were video-recorded chanting "Build a wall!" in the school cafeteria of Royal Oak Middle School (Jacobo, 2016; Wallace & LaMotte, 2016). The video footage was recorded on a phone by a 12-year-old Mexican American girl, who explained in an interview with CNN:

> It was so hard because these are my friends, and I see them just saying these awful things and it was so hard to look and just watch, and not be able to do anything because I was afraid (Wallace & LaMotte, 2016).

The girl said this was not the first time that she had experienced racism at the school and that she had reported earlier incidents to school staff but felt that no-one had listened to her, so she decided to record the chanting to have some evidence, "so it wouldn't be my word against theirs" (Wallace & LaMotte, 2016). She also texted the video to her mother, who then sent the video to some other parents, one of whom then shared the video on Facebook (Wallace & LaMotte, 2016). The mother who posted the video on Facebook captioned it with the words:

> This happened today at Royal Oak Middle School in Royal Oak, Michigan. It is so sad. Latino children were crying. The taunts, the "Build that Wall" with such bullying power and hate from children to children. Just Horrifying! (Stafford, 2016).

This caption reflects not only the ways in which incidents of harassment may be conflated with bullying, but also how bullying

behaviour is commonly reduced to the supposedly hateful behaviour of individuals or groups of individuals. This focus on the negative behaviour of individuals and calls for disciplinary sanctions was also illustrated by a Facebook user, who wrote, "All those kids need to be disciplined. I would be so disappointed if I found out my daughter was part of that group" (Stafford, 2016). However, highlighting that "hateful" behaviour is something that is socially learned another Facebook user wrote:

> This is not the result of the election!!! Hate is not born with us, it is taught in our homes and communities!!! These kids didn't just learn to bully others and put them down in one day!!! They learned from their parents and their teachers (Stafford, 2016).

What is notable in the above comment is that while this user points to behaviour being socially learned, they also state that it is not the result of the election.

The school principal posted a video message to students, wherein he referred to the cafeteria "incident", which he said caused classmates and members of the Royal Oak community to "feel alienated and unwelcome" (Jacobo, 2016). He stated that because "this incident, brief though it may have been, made people feel unsafe, it was an incident that requires an unequivocal response from all of us" (Jacobo, 2016). In doing so, he reduced the issue of racial harassment to a singular, "brief" "incident", and subsequently suggested that it did not reflect the character of students at Royal Oak Middle School (ROMS). As he put it, "ROMS, this is not who we are" (Jacobo, 2016). He called on teachers and staff to go to lunch that day and "sit down, grab a bite with kids, and talk to them. Engage in meaningful dialogue", because as he put it, "Our students are awesome, and I want you to see that they're awesome all day long" (Jacobo, 2016). Here the focus is on the character of the students, who made a "brief" mistake, but are otherwise "awesome all day long" (Jacobo, 2016).

The Superintendent of Royal Oak Schools also made a statement that day about a "small group of students" involved in an "incident" in the cafeteria. He stated that the school "addressed this incident

when it occurred" and that they are working with their students "to help them understand the impact of their words and actions on others in their school community" (Stafford, 2016). Once again, the social practice was reduced to a brief "incident" involving a "small group of students", with the emphasis on teaching students to "understand the impact of their words and actions".

The following week, a noose was found hanging in a boys' bathroom of the same school (Wallace & LaMotte, 2016). The police were called to the school, because as the superintendent stated, "an incident of that magnitude goes beyond just school discipline". The student responsible was subsequently expelled and a school assembly was held (Wallace & LaMotte, 2016). While the noose "incident" was swiftly dealt with, there appears to have been little or no discussion of how the noose was connected to the cafeteria "incident", to the election rhetoric of Trump, whereby he repeatedly referred to Mexicans as "criminals", "crooks", and "rapists", or to anti-Clinton chants of "hang the bitch" at Trump rallies (e.g., Crowley, 2016). Such links were alluded to when the girl who filmed the chanting spoke about the fear she felt when the noose was found. As she put it, "I was terrified. I was so scared that they were going to hurt me or [my friend]" (Wallace & LaMotte, 2016).

Rather than focusing on the discursive practice being drawn upon in the social practices, some parents instead reportedly blamed the girl for causing the ensuing controversy around the issue and called for her to be suspended or expelled for filming the incident involving their children (Herman, 2016; Wallace & LaMotte, 2016). As the girl's friend said in the interview with CNN, "They're saying that it's [her] fault for taking the video, that this never would have happened if she didn't take it" (Wallace & LaMotte, 2016). The friend's mother, who worked at the school, explained that "People were pointing the finger and saying she should be expelled, and she should be prosecuted for endangering children" (Wallace & LaMotte, 2016). The girl subsequently moved to a private school because of her experiences. As she explained:

> I was tired of how they were treating me. I couldn't take it any longer. They would glare at me. People would see me in the hallways and turn around and walk the other way … I felt like an animal (Wallace & LaMotte, 2016).

Here, the girl highlights the ways in which an "incident" of racial harassment in the school cafeteria developed into a bullying situation, whereby she was blamed for recording the harassment, glared at and excluded by her peers, and subjected to a form of dehumanisation, to the extent that she "felt like an animal."

The importance of discourse to destructive social practices

At the macrosystem level, discourses related to anti-immigration, international trade, and wars on drugs, disease and crime provided the referential backdrop for Trump's speeches about Mexicans, Mexico-US immigration, and the need for a wall. Since Trump first announced he was running for president on June 16, 2015, he repeatedly associated Mexicans and other immigrant groups with negative processes and referred to them in terms of illegality and badness (as in "bad, bad people" and "bad hombres"). He positioned them as "not the right people" and referred to them as drug dealers, gang members, criminals, rapists, murderers, and the carriers of "tremendous infectious disease". In doing so, he drew upon supposed expert testimony and personal experiences to strengthen the perceived truthfulness of his assertions.

Trump did not invent these discourses about Mexicans but rather engaged in a discursive practice based on stereotypical depictions of Mexicans in his pursuit of political power. When politicians speak negatively about minority groups, they do not necessarily do so in order to simply speak their mind, but rather do so with the aim of manipulating public opinion (Van Dijk, 1993). As McLeod (1999, p.360) has pointed out, presidential elections can be understood as "sociodramas" involving "symbolic manipulation by design, playing on deeply held beliefs in the electorate." Put another way, Trump's rhetoric provided a "smoke screen" to hide the political ends being forwarded (Johnson, 2010, p.987).

While it is unclear to what extent Trump's rhetoric directly influenced the prevalence of racial harassment and bullying in schools across the US (Huang & Cornell, 2019), Trump nonetheless modelled negative behaviour by reinforcing racialised social difference. This is evident through the use of the words "Trump", "Trump 2016", and variations on the phrase "build that wall". However, as Huang and Cornell (2019) have pointed out, it is unlikely that large numbers of school-aged children were closely following Trump's statements. Rather, these statements were filtered through the news media and social media in the exosystem, and the views expressed by parents, teachers, siblings and peers in the mesosystem and microsystem. The ways in which this was done will have provided signals about the appropriateness of Trump's rhetoric and influenced the likelihood of this rhetoric being reproduced in the microsystem of the school.

The social practices discussed in this essay demonstrate not only the ways in which Trump's divisive rhetoric influenced the content of the social practice, but also how these social practices fed into the order of discourse and perpetuated the use of such divisive rhetoric. Not only did Trump's name come to signify anti-Mexican and anti-immigrant sentiment, but his calls for a wall to be built found their way into daily discourse in varying forms. The reporting of social practices of bullying and harassment in the media most likely also served to perpetuate the pro-wall discourse which was referenced in the chanting that took place in the cafeteria of Royal Oak Middle School. Such connections highlight the importance of the macrosystem and suggest that rather than focusing on race and ethnicity as individual level predictors of bullying behaviour (e.g., Hong & Espelage, 2012), it is necessary to consider the importance of discourse and the ways in which racial harassment and bullying are contextually and historically situated at the macrosystem and chronosystem levels.

The statements of the principal and the superintendent highlight how the dominant bullying discourse places focus on the behaviour and character of individuals rather than a more extensive consideration of the ways in which social practices are influenced

by discursive practices (Horton, 2016b; Walton, 2011, 2015). The statements also illustrate how bullying and harassment are often treated in terms of individual incidents that need to be dealt with, rather than as part of broader power relations. The girl's recording of the chanting, her sharing of the video with her mother, her mother's sharing of the video with other parents, the sharing of the video on Facebook, the hangman's noose, the calls for the girl to be expelled, and her bullying by her peers, highlight the ways in which the social-ecological systems are interconnected and how, rather than bullying simply trickling down from the macrosystem to the microsystem, what happens at the microsystem level can also influence what happens at the mesosystem, exosystem, and potentially even the macrosystem level.

The girl's experiences of harassment and bullying highlight Walton's (2011, p.140) argument that school safety issues are often dealt with in terms of individual behavioural issues, rather than in relation to the "collective social, cultural, and political anxieties" they reflect. As Walton (2011, p.140) notes, "Bullying often reflects larger social and political battles, moral panics, and collective anxieties", and it is thus important to critically address the ways in which norms and values at the macrosystem level are reinforced through the discursive and social practices of presidents, politicians, parents, teachers, siblings, peers and others. Indeed, it is necessary to consider the importance of discourse to destructive social practices of harassment and bullying in schools. The walls that were rhetorically constructed through chanting in the cafeteria of Royal Oak Middle School were built on a foundation of anti-immigrant sentiment and commissioned by a presidential candidate who himself chanted "build that wall" and used the discourse of the wall in his pursuit of presidential office.

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Why Agonists Should Stop Discussing With Deliberative Theorists

Ásgeir Tryggvason

Some discussions carry the embryo of genuine and mutual understanding, while others do not. In educational research there has been an ongoing discussion between agonists and deliberative theorists about democratic education; one that I have been engaged in on "the agonistic side" of the fence. This discussion has revolved around normative questions, such as: What role should emotions and identities have in classroom discussions, and what should the aim of the classroom discussions be? Deliberative theorists have argued that teachers should focus on the rational argument - the issue itself - and try to leave emotions and identities on the sidelines. Deliberative theorists argue that a key aim for discussions is that they should aim towards a consensus on political issues (Englund, 2016; Samuelsson, 2018). Agonists, on the other hand, have emphasised that emotions and identities are unavoidably intertwined with political issues and conflicts. Wanting something to be changed in society, such as the end of police brutality, cannot be detached from the affective investment of *wanting*. Agonists argue that a commitment to democracy, equality and justice cannot be detached from the emotional aspect that comes with it (Tryggvason, 2017).

From my agonistic standpoint, these discussions have been defensive and non-productive for agonistic theory development. When presenting papers at conferences on agonism, a common question from the audience is: "Why do you need to separate agonism from deliberative theory – why don't you try to combine them instead?" Questions like these are kind, genuine and explorative, but this ongoing discussion about the relation to

deliberation does something to agonistic thought and theory development in educational research. A lot of time is spent explaining agonism and how it differs from deliberative theory. For agonists, this has primarily been a pedagogical rather than a theoretical task. It seems as though agonistic theory development in educational research is on the losing end of this stalemate situation with deliberative theorists.

The aim of this essay is to open up a discussion about theory development in agonistic educational research. In order to directly address the unproductiveness of the agonism-deliberation discussion, this essay turns inwards toward the richness and diversity of agonistic thought. As I see it, there are two reasons why agonists should stop discussing with deliberative theorists. The first, is that the discussion is unproductive and at a stalemate, both of which hamper agonistic theory development. The second reason is that agonists do not need the discussion with deliberative theorists to develop agonistic theory in educational research.

One explanation as to why the discussion is at a stalemate is perhaps due to the ontological differences undergirding agonism and deliberative theory. As I have outlined elsewhere, agonism - and particularly Mouffe's agonistic theory - is based on an ontological understanding that is incompatible with deliberative theory (Tryggvason, 2018a, 2019). Thus, in a strict sense, agonists and deliberative theorists do not disagree about the roles that emotions and identities should have in education because they have fundamentally different understandings of what emotions and identities are in the first place, and how they relate to political life. Withdrawing from such a discussion is therefore not about stopping talking to or with someone who disagrees with you. It is rather about leaving a discussion with someone who is talking about a completely different issue than you are.

When we as agonists in educational research are too busy pushing back against the dominant consensus-oriented theories, there is little energy left for a theory development of our own. The rich history of agonism, which has been thoroughly explored in political science, is seldom present in educational research. This is hardly

surprising, given that agonism, and specifically Mouffe's (2005) agonistic theory, has historically been developed in relation to deliberative theory. Thus, when these theoretical positions are transposed into educational research, a discussion between them follows (Englund, 2016; Leiviskä & Pyy, 2020; Samuelsson, 2018; Tryggvason, 2018a; Zembylas, 2018). But the rich and diverse history of agonistic theory has also been developed apart from deliberative theory. This history consists of a palette of agonistic ideas, concepts and traditions that in turn stem from disparate theoretical sources. Honig (1993) draws on Arendt, while Arendt draws on the ancient Greeks. Connolly (1993) is inspired by Nietzsche, while Mouffe (1999a) draws on Carl Schmitt in an attempt to "use Schmitt against Schmitt" (Mouffe, 1999a; p. 52; see also Glover, 2012; Schaap, 2007; Tryggvason, 2018b).

The richness and diversity of this heritage has not yet been included in educational research (Koutsouris et al., 2021). Instead, agonists in educational research tend to pick one agonistic line of thought and stick to it. Most of us pick Mouffe, while others pick Arendt (ibid.). But any fruitful and vivid discussion between them is hard to find in educational research.[1]

Against this background, the essay is intended as a call to other agonists in educational research that it is time to attend our own theoretical tradition and leave the stalemate discussion with deliberative theorists behind. I will try to initiate this internal discussion by exploring and elaborating on how agonistic theory has conceptualised the *Other*. The ambition is to draw on the richness of agonistic thought and highlight how agonistic theory itself is a sufficient and fertile theoretical ground for educational research.

[1] An exception here is the work of Carsten Ljunggren, who already in 1996 elaborated on a radical democratic conception of democratic education by drawing on the tensions between different agonistic traditions (see Ljunggren, 1996, 2007). Another exception is the work of Lovisa Bergdahl (2010).

But the idea of agonistic theory is not meaningful without a constitutive "outside", just as our identity as "agonists" is not a meaningful subject position in educational research without the Other. Thus, our identity as "agonists" cannot function as a meaningful subject position in educational research without the Other. In acknowledging this, I will use deliberative theory as our constitutive outside. This is not an attempt to engage in a discussion with deliberative theorists, which would be contradictory to the aim of this essay. Rather, it is an attempt to methodologically use deliberative theory as an otherness that can deepen and develop the internal discussion about agonistic theory in educational research.

In the following sections I outline two conceptualisations of the Other that have affected the agonistic project in different ways. The first is the deliberative idea of inter-subjectivity (see Erman, 2009) and the second is the intra-subjectivity found in the work of Carl Schmitt (1932/2007). Against the background of these two conceptualisations, I elaborate on how agonistic theory, and particularly the work of Arendt, moves to an understanding in which the Other is the immediate and contingent relation between otherness and our own signification (Ljunggren, 1999a). I argue that this agonistic understanding of the Other is not only qualitatively distinct from the deliberative notion of the Other, but more importantly, is absolutely distinct from the deliberative theorists' projection of what agonism is.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

In her article *What is wrong with agonistic pluralism?* the political theorist Erman (2009) criticises Mouffe's agonistic theory from the vantage point of deliberative theory. Without going into this particular debate, I want to highlight some of Erman's critical questions because they clearly illustrate how the inter-subjective conception of the Other undergirds deliberative theory. For Erman, a main problem with agonistic theory is the idea of antagonism. The problem is that the agonistic theory cannot explain how someone can identify the Other as an antagonist if they do not share a

common symbolic space (Erman, 2009). Erman focuses on the preconditions for antagonism and enmity within Mouffe's agonistic theory. Mouffe (1999b, 2000) defines antagonism as relations between identities that do not share a common symbolic space. In my reading of Erman, I understand her question to be this: How can I recognise someone as my enemy if we do not share a common symbolic space? From Erman's perspective, it would be impossible to distinguish the friend from the foe if there was no shared symbolic space. In other words, there has to be some kind of common understanding between me and my enemy in order for us to have an antagonistic relation. Erman writes:

> The distinction between subject and object (and between particular and general) can only be meaningfully understood within an available conceptual and thus symbolic space, which presupposes a common understanding. This means that the actors involved can only identify an antagonistic conflict as such through some common presumptions about each other as subjects. Unfortunately, following Schmitt, Mouffe would never attribute to antagonism such a dimension of common understanding, since the point with the distinction between friend and enemy is precisely that there is no common understanding at all. (Erman, 2009, pp. 1046-1047)

At first glance, Erman's argument seems problematic for Mouffe's agonistic theory. However, what is not made explicit in this line of reasoning is that the argument is based on a static understanding of the relation between subjects, i.e., *inter*-subjectivity. In this idea of inter-subjectivity, the Other is seen a stable object that exists prior to and independent of our encounter. The inter-subjectivity is in this sense an encounter between two stable entities: us and them, subject and object.

From an agonistic perspective, Ljunggren (1999a) has criticised this static notion of identity and inter-subjectivity and pointed to how this notion is related to an idea of cultures as fixed entities:

> Only if you allow yourself to locate the Other as something possible to refer to as an object, an historically permanent one and something separated from yourself as a subject, only then do diversity and difference make sense as a basis for understanding culture and identities as fixed entities. (Ljunggren, 1999a, p. 53)

In his critique of this idea of stable inter-subjectivity, Ljunggren highlights how it turns the question of the Other into a question of knowledge: "Cultural diversity signifies that in the society there (a) are diverse cultural positions which (b) can be located (c) by *us*" (Ljunggren, 1999a, p. 49, emphasis in original). The idea of stable inter-subjectivity is therefore an idea in which the identities of both "us" and "them" are already fixed prior to every encounter. From such a perspective, the main question always becomes: what is the Other? (Ljunggren, 1999b).

A similar critique of the inter-subjective perspective can be found in the work of Honig (1993). Honig points to how the idea of the Other's stable identity becomes an inquiry into whether the Other is one of "us" or not. It is in answering this question that the Other becomes exclusively a question of knowledge. Honig's argument becomes clear in her critique of the communitarian theory represented by Sandel. Honig writes: "For Sandel, the problem posed by the other is a problem of knowledge or recognition: can 'we' discern traces of ourselves in the other?" (Honig, 1993, p. 12; cf. Glover, 2012; Ljunggren, 2010). As we know, this search for knowledge is not curious and innocent, but a search for knowledge that can be used to establish order and define stable boundaries between "us" and "them". As Honig (1993) formulates it, it is a "*need* to fit unruly others into neat categories of sameness and difference, friendship and enmity 'Halt! Who goes there?'" (p. 12, emphasis in original). What we are seeing here is a stable inter-subjectivity that undergirds both the deliberative and the communitarian understanding of the Other.

Before I elaborate on the agonistic understanding of the Other, the *intra*-subjective perspective needs to be discerned, as it plays a crucial role for agonistic thought. Let us turn to Carl Schmitt.

Halt! Who are we?

If the deliberative and communitarian theories promote a particular form of inter-subjectivity, then we find Carl Schmitt at the other end of the spectrum representing a radical *intra*-

subjectivity. We could say that when the inter-subjective perspective thrives for knowledge about the Other, the intra-subjective perspective instead pursues knowledge about "us". Thus, instead of asking the inter-subjective question "what is the Other?" the intra-subjective questioning turns inwards to: "who are we"? This idea becomes evident when Schmitt describes how to recognise the enemy. We could say that the question that Erman posed in 2009 (about how to recognise the antagonist/enemy) was answered by Schmitt in 1932:

> Who may I finally recognize as my enemy? Manifestly, he alone who can put me in question. Insofar as I recognize him as my enemy, I recognize that he can put me in question. And who can effectively put me in question? Only myself. Or my brother. That's it. The other is my brother. The other is revealed as my enemy [...] The enemy is our own question as figure. (Schmitt quoted in Marder 2010, p. 87)

What Schmitt does here is to locate the enemy as one's own question as figure. The enemy, or the antagonistic Other, is not located as a concrete Other but as *the figure* who "puts me in question". How can we then locate this figure? As Schmitt writes, the figure is our own question. Here we see the contours of what could be described as a radical intra-subjectivity. The enemy, as Schmitt sees it, stems from my own questioning, where the Other is always a question about who "we" are.

This radical intra-subjectivity is grounded in the observation that the Other does not have to exist in order for "us" to exist.[2] It would be excessive to demand that every collective formation of an "us" is dependent on a concrete existence of the Other. For Schmitt, this is why "humanity" cannot be a political entity, "because it has no enemy, at least not on this planet" (Schmitt, 1932/2007, p. 54). What is needed, however, is a figure that can function as the Other. For instance, for a group of neo-Nazis to become a collective identity they need a figure of the Other. Whether the Other exists or not is not a necessity. What is important is the signification and articulation of the Other as a figure that puts them into question

[2] For a critical reading of Schmitt in this issue, see Abizadeh (2005).

(Marder, 2010; cf. Laclau, 2007). In the case of neo-Nazis, their main figure, the Zionist Occupation Government, is non-existent yet still functions as the Other that constitutes them as a collective identity.[3]

Returning to Schmitt, his notion of intra-subjectivity can be seen as an anti-thesis to the inter-subjectivity that is put forward by deliberative (liberal) and communitarian theories. From an intra-subjective perspective, the search for knowledge is always a search that turns inwards: Halt! Who are we?

Agonistic otherness

Let us now turn to the main issue of this essay, namely the agonistic understanding of the Other. In short, we could say that agonism dwells in the interplay between inter- and intra-subjectivity, and it is against the background of the two passages above that the contours and specificity of agonism can be outlined.

First of all, agonism is not a theory that combines inter-subjectivity and intra-subjectivity. In that sense, it is not a theory that combines two parts but is a synthetisation that qualitatively differs from inter- and intra-subjectivity. What is in focus is therefore not "what is the Other?" and "who are we?", but the relation that emerges between these subjectivities. In order outline how agonism is the interplay between *inter* and *intra*, I will start with Arendt's (1958) conceptualisation of the public sphere and, more precisely, in the discussion about what threatens the public sphere. It is in this discussion that we find the keys to understand the agonistic conceptualisation of the Other.

[3] Here it is important to highlight that the violence and hate of neo-Nazis is directed toward concrete persons and organisations, even if the neo-Nazis' *figure* is not concrete.

What threatens the public sphere?

According to Arendt (1958), the constitution of a "we" takes place through its own manifestation. In this sense, a "we" is constituted in and by its own action – there is no doer behind the action and there is no "we" that exists prior to the constituting act itself. Such an act, as Arendt reminds us, is always an act in the public sphere, and in a stronger sense, it is *only* in the public sphere that it is possible to act (Bergdahl, 2010). A clear example of this is found in the American Constitution and the performative act in declaring "We, the people". From Arendt's perspective, this "we" is born into the world in the act of declaring itself in a public sphere (Arendt, 1958).

This way of conceptualising the relation between actions and the public sphere has certain consequences. If the public sphere is threatened, or loses its role in society, it follows that the possibility to act will also be threatened. What Arendt highlights is that the private sphere has a tendency to occupy the public sphere with the consequence that our ability to act is weakened. This understanding stems from Arendt's distinction between the private and the public, and the distinction between the social and the public. For Arendt, there is a qualitative distinction between social issues and public issues, where social issues are nothing but the aggregation of issues belonging to the private sphere. In other words, a social issue is the aggregation of private issues. When the private sphere occupies the public sphere, it does so in terms of social issues. Thus, private issues become aggregated into social issues and push what is truly public out of the public sphere (Pitkin, 1998). But how should this threat to the public sphere be understood – who is threatening it?

Honig (1993) presents two ways of interpreting Arendt on this point. The first interpretation is as a threat coming from a particular group of people. It could be a social group in society that threatens the public sphere from within, such as a social class. It could also be a group that does not belong to society but threatens it from the outside, i.e., "the barbarians". As I see it, this way of

formulating the threat as coming from a particular group is an *inter*-subjective understanding of the threat.

The second interpretation of what threatens the public sphere is the intra-subjective understanding of the Other. This means that the threat should not be "identified with particular classes of people, or bodies, or women in particular. But as 'particular *attitude[s]* against which the public realm must be guarded'" (Honig, 1993, p. 82, citing Pitkin, 1998, emphasis in original). Specifically, it is the attitudes that the private realm brings with it (through work and labour) that threaten the public sphere. From this intra-subjective position, the threat should not be understood as something that resides outside the public sphere itself, but as something that comes from within. It is when the public sphere takes on the attitudes from work and labour, rather than actions, that it loses its self-understanding as a public sphere (cf. Dewey, 1927). It is in this loss of self-understanding that it becomes a sphere for social issues and not a realm for action.

What this agonistic understanding of the public sphere teaches us is that there must be a public sphere in order to act, and that it is by acting in this public sphere that a "we" can constitute itself. This should not be misunderstood. Even when the people declare itself as "we, the people" in a public sphere, it is never an all-encompassing intra-subjectivity because such an act is constituted by contingency.

Contingent subjectivity

To further elaborate on the agonistic conception of subjectivity as contingent, I will use the communitarian perspective as a stepping-stone. From a communitarian perspective, the constitution of my own identity depends on the community to which I belong. To be who I am is never a solo act but is always dependent on the community (Sandel, 2006; see also Honig, 1993). This means that I am in debt to my community for the constitution of my own identity. But, as Honig asks, why should we believe that our debt stops at the community borders? If the constitution of "us" is

established by "the others who we are not" – this would mean that "we" are in debt to "them" as well. Honig writes:

> After all, figures who frighten and repel us play a part in our constitution as a "we", a "we" that is what it is (partly) insofar as it is not "them". Blackness plays a part in the constitution of whiteness, masculinity in femininity, master in slave, terrorist in state, and overman in herd. Perhaps the logic of indebtedness extends across the line of opposition that marks each of these pairs. (1993, p. 171)

From Honig's agonistic perspective, the Other is the one who disrupts the lines between friend and enemy by resisting the binary categorisation. In this, the Other is the one who also disrupts "us" as a stable identity with fixed borders. At the same time, the Other is the one who "we" are in debt to for constituting "us". As Honig (1993) puts it: "The other disrupts. And for this the *virtú* theorist is indebted to the other, the enemy who is also a friend" (p. 194, emphasis in original). What we have here is neither a stable inter-subjectivity nor an intra-subjectivity, but rather a theory that underlines the contingent interplay between subject and object.

How, then, should the interplay itself be understood? Here, Ljunggren's (1999a) concept of identity/difference can help us to specify the interplay between *inter* and *intra*. This concept highlights how the constitution of "us" and "them" is an inseparable process of inter-subjective and intra-subjective action.

> […] culture and identity must be understood as a contingent process of becoming where the identity is signified in confrontation with heterogeneous others - and with a heterogeneous self. This is to say that there is no essentialism in a given culture or cultural identity. This, in turn, means that *cultures are constituted only in relation to that otherness internal to their own signifying* and (symbol-forming) communicating processes which make 'culture' decentred structures… (Ljunggren, 1999a, pp. 53-54, emphasis added)

It is important to highlight that it is not identity *and* difference, which would be an inter-subjective understanding based on stable identity and stable difference. Instead, what we have is *identity/difference* as a compound concept, where identity and difference are already interwoven and constitutive of each other

(cf. Bergdahl, 2010). Thus, the constitution of a "we" is a dual process that is about a confrontation with others and about the internal signification. The confrontation with the Other, as Ljunggren (1999a) highlights, is not one between two stable and pre-fixed identities but is rather a confrontation where both "we" and the Other are heterogenous (cf. Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 125).

From this perspective, a collective identity is a question of a relation between otherness and internal signification. What matters is therefore not only the Other, or only the internal signification, but the *relation* between otherness and the internal signification. By seeing the interplay in terms of identity/difference points us to how agonism is a true synthetisation of inter and intra that qualitatively differs from simple combination. What is important to keep in mind is that this interplay is always characterised by its contingency (Ljunggren, 1999a). The contingency that undergirds the relation between inter and intra is not a temporary uncertainty, or pure chance, but is rather an ontological contingency that stems from communication itself as being contingent. Recognising the Other is in this sense not an epistemic endeavour, but a process of re-thinking and re-cognising oneself and the Other in contingent encounters (Ljunggren, 2010; Bergdahl, 2010).

Two answers

Let me return to the initial question posed by Erman (2009): "[H]ow is it possible for antagonism proper to be a conflict between us and them (or me and the Other) without any 'common symbolic space', to use Mouffe's words?" (p. 1046). What Erman presupposes is that this common symbolic space exists *before* the very confrontation between "us" and "them". What agonistic theory points to is that this space should be understood as a communicative realm that comes into existence in the very moment of action (Arendt, 1958, p. 199). As Arendt formulates it: "the organization of a people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and *its true space lies between people* living together for

this purpose, no matter where they happen to be" (Arendt, 1958, p. 198, my emphasis).

With this way of formulating the public sphere we now have two different answers to Erman's question. The first answer, which I described above, can be found in Schmitt's idea of the Other as "our own question as figure". The second way of answering the question is to follow Arendt and point to how the question itself rests on a problematic understanding of both the public sphere and the Other. In this way, agonism does not only provide us with an answer, but also opens up for a different way of re-thinking the relation between "us" and "them" as well as the public sphere (Bergdahl, 2010).

Two conclusions

This essay starts out with the aim of initiating a discussion about agonistic theory development in educational research by elaborating on the agonistic notion of the Other. With deliberative theory as a backdrop, the essay outlines how agonism conceptualises the Other in terms of a contingent interplay between inter- and intra-subjectivity. As shown above, this interplay can be understood as identity/difference, where identity and difference are always already intertwined with each other.

Given this agonistic understanding of the Other, we could ask what this means when it comes to antagonism and enmity. As I see it, two important points need to be highlighted. First, by seeing the constitution of "us" and "them" as a contingent interplay between inter-subjectivity and intra-subjectivity, it follows that every transformation of this boundary must involve both inter-subjectivity and intra-subjectivity. Second, a crucial implication is then that every attempt to transform enemies into adversaries needs to be understood as a process that is both about "us" and about "them". More specifically, it needs to be understood as a transformation of an otherness that is internal to our own signification, "where the identity is signified in confrontation with

heterogeneous others - and with a heterogeneous self" (Ljunggren, 1999a, p. 53).

The agonistic conceptualisation of the Other provides us with theoretical tools and ways of thinking that we do not get from the ongoing discussion with deliberative theorists. By making use of the richness and diversity that agonistic theory offers, it becomes possible to unfold a more nuanced and multi-layered understanding of key concepts within agonistic theory, such as antagonists and adversaries. This unfolding becomes possible if we attend to the theoretical tasks that need to be dealt with in agonistic theory and turn away from the time-consuming pedagogical task of explaining and debating agonism with deliberative theorists.

The table we sit at – a concluding call

As mentioned in the introduction, I see two reasons why agonists should stop discussing with deliberative theorists. The first is that the agonism-deliberation discussion has reached an unproductive stalemate, which perhaps relates to the underlying ontological differences between the two theoretical traditions. What is clear is that agonistic theory development in educational research is at the losing end of this stalemate situation. The second reason is that agonists do not need the discussion with deliberative theorists to further develop agonism as an educational theory. Agonism, with its rich theoretical history, constitutes a sufficient theoretical milieu for developing agonism as an educational theory. Given this, I want the essay to be a call to other agonists in educational research that it is time to open up a common symbolic space between us.

But what would characterise such a common symbolic space? Drawing on Mouffe's (2000) notion of this concept (p. 13), it would be a common symbolic space in the sense that it is focused on a shared task to further develop and explore agonism as an educational theory. Even if such a space always contained differences and conflicts, they would revolve around the common task of further developing and exploring agonism. This means that

the common symbolic space would both relate and separate us as agonists, just as a table relates and separates those who sit around it, to borrow a metaphor from Arendt (1958, p. 52).

At present it is difficult to determine whether agonists share any common symbolic space in educational research. There is, for example, no shared space where the different lines of agonistic thought can confront each other or clash. It would appear that we are sitting at the wrong table and have been doing so for a long time. Therefore, I think that the time has come for us to find another place to sit at.

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‘As If He Had Come into the World Like Minerva’: Ayn Rand’s (Anti)Educational Philosophy

Anouk Zuurmond

> *Once, an elderly professor of literature…saw them on top of a pile in a junk yard, dismantling the carcass of an automobile. He stopped, shook his head and said to Francisco, ‘A young man of your position ought to spend his time in libraries, absorbing the culture of the world.’ ‘What do you think I’m doing?’ asked Francisco*.
>
> Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (2007a, p. 95)

In 2017, venture capitalist and co-founder of PayPal Peter Thiel created a fellowship for students under the age of twenty-three to give them the opportunity to drop out of college and pursue ideas of “radical innovation” outside universities that are “overpriced relics” holding back true creativity (Clynes, 2017). Whilst this initiative raised some eyebrows, Thiel’s argument, pitting old-fashioned educational institutes against innovate businesses, is not surprising. Indeed, this line of reasoning is part of a larger neoliberal discourse on education, in which market-ideology, business-models, and competition are all-pervasive (Burch, 2009). In this essay, I present a reading of two literary works by a philosopher who is often perceived as one of the most radical defenders of this market-ideology: Ayn Rand. Indeed, the famous Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek once even argued that unlike communism, capitalism does not have a specific manifesto—but the fictional works by Rand seem to be as close as one can get to a capitalist version of a manifesto (Žižek, 2009). With her famous novels *The Fountainhead*

(1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), Ayn Rand painted a bleak picture of what the United States would look like if the idea of capitalism gave way to socialism. Rand intended her novels to be more than just fiction: she wrote them as a literary presentation of her philosophy of 'Objectivism', which can be summarized as a political philosophy of laissez-faire capitalism and a moral philosophy of rational self-interest. Despite the length of her novels, featuring characters mostly serving as mouthpieces for Rand's philosophy, both books are still selling hundreds of thousands of copies in the US[1]; a survey conducted in the 1990's by the Library of Congress even proclaimed *Atlas Shrugged* as the most influential book in the US, after the Bible (Geoghegan, 2012). In 2009, sales spiked as the economic crisis raised questions on government interference in the markets (Burns, 2009).

Rand published extensively on education during the mass student protests at universities in the sixties. Her ideas on education boil down to "minimizing government interference, maximizing market forces, and re-affirming the primary role of parents in determining what kind of schooling their children receive" (Reid, 2013, p. 76). As the historian Jason Reid (2013) rightly argues, these ideas "would animate neoliberal critiques of the American educational system well into the 21st century" (p. 76).

Discussing Ayn Rand in an academic setting is, however, contentious. During her life, Rand looked down on academic philosophy - and the feeling was, and still is for many, mutual. Rand enjoyed discarding the whole of Western philosophy since Kant, and her "shock tactics" (Nighan, 1974, p. 125) and attack on "the cult of moral grayness" (Rand, 1964, p. 75), alienated many nuanced thinkers, both in and outside academia. Furthermore,

[1] However, some have argued that the immense popularity of Rand's novels should be attributed to the fact that the Ayn Rand Institute distributes free copies of her work in secondary education (Trubek, 2010). For a critical discussion on how this Institute is involved in college curricula as well in the US, see Jones (2010) and Beets (2015).

while she might have taken a progressive stance on some issues, such as abortion, her novels were understandably frowned upon by many feminists, for example for the following description of the female protagonist in *Atlas Shrugged*: "… the diamond band on the wrist of her naked arm gave her the most feminine of all aspects: the look of being chained" (Rand, 2007a, p. 136). As Susan Love Brown argues in her essay on Rand and feminism: "Although Rand's expressed attitudes support the equality of women, the undercurrents of her fiction and her explicit statements [such as her statement that she would not want a woman president, AZ] often belie this position" (Love Brown, 1999, p. 275).

Yet, in times of marketization, privatization and the discourse of neo-liberalism, Rand's philosophical novels provide an insight into a laissez-faire capitalist point of view on education, and the values associated with this ideology. Furthermore, whilst it has been observed that Rand and the followers of Objectivism have had strong convictions on educational-philosophical issues (Carson, 2005; Reid, 2013), recent publications hardly refer to the novels *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, despite the fact that they are key sources for understanding Rand's ideas. Finally, one can also argue that her novels are of value in understanding Rand's ideas on teaching and schooling, because these works were intended to have an educational value themselves as well. As the official heir to Objectivism, Leonard Peikoff, explained in his work on Rand's educational ideas: her literature forms a concretization of her philosophy and is therefore highly useful in the teaching practice (Peikoff, 2014).

In this essay, I will therefore read the two most well-known fictional works by Rand through an educational lens, which allows me to discuss the main values that come to the fore in Objectivists' understanding of teaching and schooling. My reading strategy is inspired by a deconstructivist approach to "close reading", which entails paying "attention to what seems ancillary" and "to the implication of figurality" (Culler, 1985, pp. 242–243). Drawing on two specific scenes from both novels, I will at first treat these scenes indeed, following Peikoff's suggestion, as concretizations of Rand's philosophy, working from the assumption that there is a

strong coherence between Rand's essays and fictional narratives. I will then read these scenes "against the grain" (p. 214): by paying close attention to imagery and apparently marginal details, I will critique Rand's ideas by arguing that these fragments also reveal a fundamental 'anti-educational' stance, which does not correspond to the ideals of teaching and schooling professed by Rand. This deconstructivist reading draws on an established methodology in literary studies; however, my aim in this essay is not to provide a comprehensive literary analysis of both novels by Rand. By close reading two scenes, I wish to contribute to the philosophical debate on Rand's ideas about teaching and schooling and her system of thought in general; my argument works towards the conclusion that the anti-educational stance revealed in these fragments is not only problematic for the consistency of Rand's thinking, but for the philosophy of Objectivism as a whole.

Objectivism

Rand was once asked, during a press event following the appearance of her novel *Atlas Shrugged*, if she could explain her philosophy of Objectivism standing on one foot. She did so, by summarizing her philosophy in four 'slogans': its metaphysics understand the world as an objective reality, its epistemology is concerned with reason, its ethics is the theory of rational self-interest, and its politics a defense of capitalism (Rand, n.d.). To understand Rand's role in the history of philosophy, it should first be underlined that her ideas are indebted to Aristotelianism. From a metaphysical point of view, she is radically against any form of Platonism, arguing that philosophy that gives room to a reality that is outside our world is not philosophy but mysticism. Reality exists as an absolute, and facts are facts, as she posits. Epistemologically, reason alone provides one's access to reality, defined by Rand as the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by one's senses. Reason is therefore one's only source of knowledge, and one's only guide to action. As stated above, the notion of self-interest is crucial to her ethics. In short, one can say that this implies that every man is an end in himself, and not the means to

an end for others. A human being must exist for his or her own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others, nor sacrificing others to himself. In the field of ethics, Rand's ideas have been labelled 'ethical egoism' (Torbjörn, 2013), or the idea that each person ought to pursue his or her own self-interest - a theory that is crucially different from psychological egoism, as the latter is a descriptive theory. Ethical egoism, however, is a prescriptive theory - it tells you that you should choose in your own self-interest, or in the words of Rand from her famous essay *The Virtue of Selfishness*:

> The Objectivist ethics holds that the actor must always be the beneficiary of his action and that man must act for his own *rational* self-interest. But his right to do so is derived from his nature as man and from the function of moral values in human life—and, therefore, is applicable *only* in the context of a rational, objectively demonstrated and validated code of moral principles which define and determine his actual self-interest. It is not a license "to do as he pleases"…(Rand, 1964, p. x, emphasis in original)

Just as Rand's adversary in metaphysics is Plato, her adversary in ethics is Christianity, or more broadly speaking: the philosophy of "altruism". Any moral theory that claims that one should first and foremost take the other into account, that praises the practice of self-sacrifice, or that glorifies suffering in the hands of others, is, according to Rand, not a philosophy of life, but a cult of death (Rand, 1964). According to Objectivism, the pursuit of one's own rational self-interest and happiness is the highest moral purpose of one's life. The only political-economic system that provides the opportunity for individuals to work towards this purpose is laissez-faire capitalism ("pure, uncontrolled and unregulated", p. 33) - a system, according to Rand, in which individuals can interact not as victims and executioners, nor as masters and slaves, but as traders: by free, voluntary exchange to mutual benefit (Rand, n.d.). These individuals should be able to interact without too much interference of the government - an institution that Rand understands as merely there to protect the individual's property and a country's wealth, which means that justice, the police, and armed forces are the only branches necessary, subsidized by a form of voluntary taxes. Long before the eighties when politicians as

Margaret Thatcher welcomed the idea of society as a sum total of individuals, Rand already stated that "there is no such entity as 'society', since society is only a number of individual men" (Rand, 1964, pp. 14-15). As "only individual men have the right to decide when or whether they wish to help others" and "society – as an organized political system – has no rights in the matter at all" (p. 80), systems such as social welfare and health care, are thus better off as private enterprises. Even though Rand did not perceive the United States as having achieved this level of laissez-faire capitalism - she argued that the US was still a "mixed economy", with capitalist and socialist elements (Rand, 1971a) - Rand became a champion of, in her eyes, the land of the free, where one can be in pursuit of one's own happiness.

Of course, the obvious adversary in this political perspective is communism - a system with which Ayn Rand was more than familiar. Born as Alisa Rosenbaum in 1905 in Russia, she grew up in a bourgeois Jewish family under the reign of Czar Nicholas the second. In 1918, the Red Guard pounded on the door of her father's chemistry shop, signaling it had been seized in the name of the people (Burns, 2009). The Bolshevik Revolution caused her family to flee St. Petersburg to the south, where they lived in distressed circumstances. After her studies, Alisa managed to escape to the United States, where she hoped to make a living as a screenplay writer. She re-invented herself with a pseudonym and made a name for herself as a philosopher. The publication of *The Fountainhead* in 1943 was an immense success, and turned her into a cult-figure in the US. She gathered a group of loyal followers, who called themselves 'the class of '43', or also – a bit more tongue-in-cheek – 'the collective'. She died in 1982 in New York, and at her funeral a six-foot floral arrangement in the shape of a dollar sign was placed beside her coffin.

As indicated earlier, this essay will focus on the educational aspects of Objectivism. Rand began to publish more extensively on education during the mass student protests at universities in the sixties - a phenomenon she perceived as the result of the rise of progressive education in the United States. Her collection of essays

entitled *The New Left: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* from 1971 is a result of her critique of the revolutionary sentiment in American academia at that time. A critical analysis of this crisis in education was also the topic of some lectures she delivered at the Ford Hall Forum, where she had been invited to speak in 1961 and often returned to for speeches on current educational issues with alarming titles such as 'The Intellectual Bankruptcy of Our Age', 'The Moratorium on Brains', and 'The Age of Mediocrity'.[2] In 1984, Leonard Peikoff gave a series of lectures on a philosophy of education based on the ideas of Ayn Rand, later published under the title *Teaching Johnny to Think* (Peikoff, 2014). Here, he argues that thinking about education from Rand's perspective is necessarily interrelated with the Objectivists' ideas on epistemology (rationality) and ethics (self-interest). He summarizes Rand's ideas on education as follows: "Education is the systematic process of training the minds of the young, both in essential content and proper method" (p. 13). By teaching subjects (or content), the values of Objectivism – namely integrity, honesty, productiveness, justice, independence, and pride – should be conveyed to the child. Children should thus become "cognitively self-sufficient" (p. 14) through the process of education, which gives them the capacity for individual judgment, so needed in "today's climate of skepticism, agnosticism, and relativism" (p. 40). Perhaps Rand's interest in education was not only the result of the sixties student protests; in some interviews, she disclosed how unhappy she had been as a young schoolgirl. In 1979, for example, she was interviewed by Tom Snyder for *The Tomorrow Show*, during which she revealed some of her personal experiences as a gifted child that was educated at Russian, and after the Bolshevik Revolution, Soviet schools. She considered the time she spent in the classroom to be very tedious, as the pace was just too slow for a "top student". She would always try to sit in the back of the room with a book in front of her, which allowed her to hide the fact that behind that book, she, already at the age of ten, was writing novels. Just by reading ahead, she knew what the teacher would say, and

[2] See https://courses.aynrand.org/campus-courses/ayn-rand-at-the-ford-hall-forum/ for these and other lectures in this series.

writing was the only way to escape the boredom she experienced. In this interview, she argues that school had a very negative effect on her working discipline: "it was too easy, and too boring. I never had to make an effort" ("Ayn Rand interview with Tom Snyder," 1979). Yet another negative personal experience in school is described by Anne Heller in her biography of Rand. For one of her school assignments, "the girls were asked to write a few paragraphs about why being a child is such a joyous thing. Rand didn't agree that it *was* joyous and shocked her classmates with 'a scathing denunciation of childhood'". Her point was that "children couldn't think as clearly as they would be able to once they had grown up" (Heller, 2009, p. 19). Heller states,

> This memory formed the basis for a revealing flashback in her third novel, *The Fountainhead* (1943); there, a brilliant and exuberant little boy named Johnny Stokes humiliates the book's archvillain, Elsworth Toohey, by composing a masterly, rebellious grade-school essay on hating school, while Ellsworth sucks up to the teacher by pretending to love school. (p. 19)

It is these personal experiences of boredom and frustration in school that might have inspired this and other educational scenes in *The Fountainhead*, but also in the other extensive work of fiction that Rand published, namely *Atlas Shrugged*. The next paragraphs turn to analyze both novels as a source for a more thorough understanding of Rand's educational philosophy.

Selflessness and collectivism: *The Fountainhead* as an educational dystopia

The Fountainhead was published in 1943 and meant a break-through for Rand: it was well-received and allowed her to set forth the fundamentals of Objectivism to a large audience. The novel tells the story of the top architect Howard Roark, who finds himself surrounded by mediocre colleagues aiming to ruin his works of genius out of envy. Rand herself characterized her book in the introduction to an edition from the late sixties, marking the twenty-fifth year of this title in print, as a work on the "essential division"

between two camps in humanity: "those dedicated to the *exaltation* of man's self-esteem and the *sacredness* of his happiness on earth- and those determined not to allow either to become possible" (Rand, 2007b, p. xii, emphasis in original).

The original title for *The Fountainhead* was actually *Second-Hand-Lives*. Rand was fascinated by the, in her view appalling, idea that most people live their lives based on values derived from other people; they do not seem to have a personal "sense of life", but are more copycats of ideas and ideals upheld by other people - they live their lives, according to Rand, as 'selfless', that is to say in Rand's idiosyncratic use of the word, without a 'self'. This attitude, Rand concluded, is brought about by the so-called "collectivist motivation": "the drive to seek the meaning of one's life outside oneself" (Heller, 2009, p. 110), which results in people leading 'second-hand-lives'. It is precisely this attitude of selflessness and collectivism that is examined in *The Fountainhead*. My analysis of the excerpt below, the opening scene depicting the highly talented protagonist Howard Roark in conversation with the dean of the Architectural School of the Stanton Institute of Technology, will therefore be structured around these two concepts of 'selflessness' and 'collectivism'. In many ways, a dystopian picture of education is painted by Rand in this scene between teacher and student, as collectivism and selflessness obviously form the precise opposite of a Randian interpretation of a good education.

The reason for the meeting between the dean and the young Roark in the opening scene of *The Fountainhead* is that the latter has just been expelled from the Architectural Institute. Even though Roark does excellent work on courses that involve engineering, he refuses to spend time on great architectural styles and famous predecessors. Exercises in historical styles – "a Tudor chapel, or a French opera house to design" (Rand, 2007b, p. 10) – are either not submitted or ridiculed by Roark. The dean attempts to reason with Roark by underlining the importance of collectivity in the creative process as follows:

> The voice of the past is the voice of the people. Nothing has ever been invented by one man in architecture. The proper creative process is a slow, gradual, anonymous, collective one, in which each man collaborates with all the others and subordinates himself to the standards of the majority. (p. 13)

The fact that the Architectural Institute emphasizes a traditional approach in its curriculum is already apparent from the description by Rand of the stifling building: it is compared to a medieval fortress, and includes a Gothic cathedral (p. 8). In line with this historic surrounding, the dean thus argues: "there is a treasure mine in every style of the past. We can only choose from the great masters. Who are we to improve upon them? We can only attempt, respectfully, to repeat" (p. 11). Collectivity, collaboration and subordination to the majority and historic predecessors are thus key concepts in this educational approach. The twenty-two year old Roark defends a Randian perspective in response, underlining the concept of the individual genius as opposed to the collectivism propagated by the dean: "But the best is a matter of standards - and I set my own standards. I inherit nothing. I stand at the end of no tradition. I may, perhaps, stand at the beginning of one" (p. 13). This last line indicates an important feature of Rand's critique on teaching and learning in those days. Where it is understood that students need help on more practical, or technical topics such as engineering, there is in other courses no room for individual creativity, or the formation of the 'self', as 'collectivism' is the basic tenet of the curriculum and more general, the educational philosophy. It is only repetition and collaboration that are forced upon students, and this is why Roark concludes that he has "nothing further to learn here" (p. 10).

The ones who do fit in, the ones who 'excel' in schools, are students of mediocre talent, willing to subordinate themselves to the collective - of teachers, of examples from the past, and whims of their clients. Peter Keating, top student from Roark's class, is the epitome of a Randian form of 'selflessness' in this novel: a character that is not guided by his own dreams and ambitions, but by the expectations of family and peers - both in his professional and private life. With his unexceptional talent, Keating is only able to

succeed in the architectural business by leaning on the creativity of Roark and stealing his ideas; a dependence that proves to be fatal as Roark demolishes Keating's prestigious housing project since the latter has failed to fulfill Roark's explicit wish to construct the project exactly as he had (secretly) designed it for Keating. Towards the end of the novel, Roark looks back on the discussion with his dean in the opening scene, thinking about "the principle behind the dean who fired me", and Roark comes to the following conclusion: "It's what I couldn't understand about people for a long time. They have no self. They live within others. They live second-hand" (p. 633). With this insight of Roark, referring to the original title Rand had in mind for her novel, the core of Rand's critique of the school system becomes apparent as well. Educational institutes are depicted as places where one is forced into a mold, risking the loss of a 'self' and individual creativity. In schools there is no room for true genius, is the message, as the talented Roark was forced to find work without his diploma.[3]

Rand's thoughts on selflessness and collectivism are obviously recognizable in many current critiques of our school systems - even though such ideas are not explicitly formulated in these Objectivist terms. The before-mentioned fellowship instigated by Peter Thiel to drop out of college and pursue truly innovative ideas outside universities is one example, but Rand's discourse on individual talents and the stifling uniformity of the school system also resonates in less radical proposals and analyses of current educational issues, both in the US and the EU - ranging from the much-viewed TED talk by Ken Robinson on how schools ruin the creativity of children ("Do schools kill creativity? Sir Ken Robinson," 2007) to the many calls for a more personalized approach in education to let individual talents flourish.

[3] These educational ideas in *The Fountainhead* were aptly summarized by the makers of *The Simpsons*, the famous cartoon series from the US, in which the talented baby Maggie finds herself in a daycare that does not understand or accept her genius (episode 20, season 20, "Four Great Women and a Manicure").

Rand's critique on the educational system voiced in *The Fountainhead* can also be found in her later essays on progressive education and American academia. Especially her essays in *The New Left: The Anti-Industrial Revolution*, published in 1971, take up many ideas already indicated in the dystopian depiction of schooling in *The Fountainhead*. Rand argues here that the student protests on campuses are the result of poor education in primary and secondary progressive schools - institutes working with students only "to adjust him to society":

> The primary goal of a Progressive nursery school is "social adjustment"; this is to be achieved by means of group activities, in which a child is expected to develop both 'self-expression' (in the form of anything he might feel like doing) and conformity to the group. (Rand, 1971b, p. 155)

Rand describes the disastrous effects such a system has in her view on talented children:

> The 'socializing' aspects of school, the pressure to conform to the pack, are, for him, a special kind of torture. A thinking child cannot conform—thought does not bow to authority…. When, on top of it, the outsider is penalized or reprimanded for his inability to 'get along with people', the rule of mediocrity is elevated into a system. ('Mediocrity' does not mean average intelligence; it means an average intelligence that resents and envies its betters.) Progressive education has institutionalized an Establishment of Envy. (p. 178)

This observation comes as no surprise for the readers of *The Fountainhead*, which indeed depicts the genius Roark confronted with the "Establishment of Envy", both in the Architectural Institute and in the outside world. And as Roark managed to survive as outcast and non-conformist, Rand argues in her later essays that "it is the little 'misfits' who have the best chance to recover" (p. 169), those children and young adults who have in common "*the inability to fit in*, i.e., to accept the *intellectual* authority of the pack" (p. 170, emphasis in the original). The idea that progressive education ruined generations of American students takes the form of a more personal attack in *Atlas Shrugged*, which features the main culprit in Rand's eyes: the educational philosopher John Dewey. The next

section will focus on Rand's critique of Dewey in light of the more general depiction of educational values in this latter novel.

Rationalism and individual liberty: *Atlas Shrugged* as an educational utopia

In 1957, the highly anticipated novel *Atlas Shrugged* was published, which tells the story of a group of very successful industrialists, artists, and scientists who go on strike in the United States. The narrative depicts the elite of society, or the 'Atlasses', led by the enigmatic steel industrialist John Galt, secretly leaving their businesses one by one, frustrated by the socialist policies of the government. Žižek rightly emphasizes the importance of this departure by the Atlasses:

> The ideological gain of this operation resides in the reversal of roles with regard to our everyday experience of strikes: it is not workers but the capitalists who go on strike, thus proving that they are the truly productive members of society who do not need others to survive. (Žižek, 2002, pp. 216–217)

Galt has created a secret, new society which is named after him, 'Galt's Gulch', characterized by Rand as "the utopia of greed" (Rand, 2007a, p. 752). This hide-out forms a blueprint for Rand's philosophy in practice:

> …a small town in which unbridled market relations reign, in which the very word 'help' is prohibited, in which every service has to be reimbursed with true (gold-backed) money, in which there is no need for pity and self-sacrifice for others. (Žižek, 2002, p. 217)

When the United States, worn down by socialism, is on the point of total collapse, the Atlasses return to save the day; their return is marked by the famous speech by John Galt, who takes over radio and television to explain to the citizens of the US the departure of Atlasses and to provide an analysis of all the wrongs in society. This seventy-page lecture, on which Rand had worked for two years, is often perceived as the best introduction to her philosophy of

Objectivism.[4] The novel was not well-received in the world of professional reviewers and academia – the misanthropic tone, Manichaean worldview and unrealistic storyline led to some harsh criticism – but the work made Rand a hero for many businesspeople and executives, even to the point that some owners of corporations asked Rand permission to reprint Galt's speech for internal distribution, thrilled as they were by a novel that acknowledged their importance in society (Burns, 2009).

The scene we will zoom in on is in many ways the exact opposite of the one in *The Fountainhead*. Instead of a parting between student and teacher, it features a reunion between three former students (all highly talented men, one of which is the main protagonist John Galt) and their former philosophy teacher, Dr. Akston, set in this utopian society instigated by Galt and populated with gifted industrials, artists, and scientists who have all turned their back on a society with increasingly socialist policies. The scenes from both novels thus mirror each other, and provide crucial information on the educational ideas in Objectivism. In my analysis of this utopian educational setting with Dr. Akston as the embodiment of the ideal teacher, I would like to start with the precise opposite character in *Atlas Shrugged*, namely Dr. Simon Pritchett, because it is, in my view, the best way to understand the character of Dr. Akston - and in a broader sense, Rand's ideas on education.

Dr. Simon Pritchett is Dr. Akston's successor as the Head of the Department of Philosophy, one of the best-known philosophers in the 'socialist' United States depicted by Rand, and often invited as a guest at social events. Rand portrays Pritchett as one of the root causes of the demise of philosophy and education in society, as he

[4] It has been pointed out that Alan Greenspan, former Chair of the Federal Reserve of the United States and part of the inner circle around Rand, was probably involved in the creation of Galt's speech. Greenspan, who then owned a successful economic consulting business, had done research into the steel industry and provided Rand with crucial information for this speech and the novel in general (Achterhuis, 2011; Burns, 2009).

lightens up parties with statements such as "the purpose of philosophy is not to seek knowledge, but to prove that knowledge is impossible" (Rand, 2007a, p. 133) and that man's metaphysical pretensions are "preposterous", as man is "just a collection of chemicals with the delusion of grandeur" (p. 131). In short, Pritchett provides the philosophical justification for a world where "genius is a superstition", "a man's brain is a social product" and "all thought is theft" (p. 540). This character is, according to one of Rand's biographers, modelled after a real-life and well-known educational philosopher, namely John Dewey (Heller, 2009). Rand blamed Dewey for the – in her eyes – many faults in progressive education, and some have argued that the term 'Objectivism' was chosen by Rand to oppose herself to the epistemological 'subjectivism' propagated by Dewey and his followers (p. 278).[5] In her view, Dewey's emphasis on the social construction of knowledge denied the fact that learning is individual, and that knowledge is the result of the use of one's reason; a line of thought she later elaborated in the above-mentioned essay-collection *The New Left* on the crisis of education:

> John Dewey, the father of modern education (including the Progressive nursery schools), opposed the teaching of theoretical (i.e., conceptual) knowledge, and demanded that it be replaced by concrete, "practical" action, in the form of "class projects" which would develop the students' social spirit….
>
> Look at the writings of Kant, Dewey, Marcuse and their followers to see pure hatred—hatred of reason and of everything it implies: of intelligence, of ability, of achievement, of success, of self-confidence, of self-esteem, of every bright, happy benevolent aspect of man. (Rand, 1971b, pp. 172, 194)

Dewey's influence led to progressive schools with only one goal: "social adjustment" (p. 154), understood by Rand as indoctrination with a "mob spirit", or "pack" mentality (p. 175), leaving no privacy for individual children to learn to think, caught as they are in

[5] Indeed, Leonard Peikoff, later the official spokesperson for the legacy of Rand, was initially banished for two years from the group around Rand for expressing sympathy for the ideas of John Dewey (Heller, 2009).

useless rounds of discussions and "learning by doing" that will result in "painful boredom" (Peikoff, 2014, p. xx).

Obviously, such representations of Dewey and the didactics of progressive schools are not very fair—and not even accurate, as it has been argued by others. Heller (2009) underlines the fact that Rand's representation of Dewey does not take into account the historical setting of Dewey's ideas, whilst Raymond A. Nighan (1974) states in his dissertation on Rand's concept of an educated man that she actually critiques the excesses of progressive education, and not so much Dewey himself, as the latter also "criticized Progressive educational excesses, including its failure to come to grips with subject matter" (p. 138). Reid (2013), furthermore, convincingly showed that "the various attempts by Rand and her peers to characterize Dewey as a rabid collectivist oftentimes ignored his healthy respect for self-interest and individual initiative in bringing about positive educational outcomes. Dewey was no socialist" (p. 78).[6]

Yet, the misrepresentation of Dewey is not the point I wish to make here; I want to analyze the Deweyan character of Dr. Simon Pritchett in *Atlas Shrugged* because it provides a framework for understanding Rand's educational philosophy in this novel. Pritchett is the reason, as Rand aims to convince her readers, that a philosophical change in our culture is necessary to turn schools once again into bastions of knowledge. This philosophical change is promoted in *Atlas Shrugged* by Rand's portrayal of the precise opposite of Pritchett, in the figure of another philosopher and teacher: Dr. Akston, the great proponent of rationalism and indeed the last defender of reason. Each year, three of his most talented pupils organize a reunion with their former teacher. During their

[6] Reid (2013) argues that one of the reasons that Dewey is turned into a scapegoat by Rand, is just the fact that he was the most recognizable figure in progressive education during the postwar years, and he continues: "It is worth noting, however, that Rand and her followers seemed to have conflated Dewey's ideas on education with those of his star pupil, William Heard Kilpatrick" (p. 81).

reunion in Galt's Gulch, Akston tells the female protagonist, Dagny Taggart, about his experience in teaching these former students. His success in having taught three of the greatest talents of their time, Akston underlines, is solely based on the fact that he allowed them to stay untouched by the "brain-destroying influences of the world's doctrines" and to "remain human", which meant: to remain rational (p. 786). As soon as these three young students entered his classroom during a lecture series for advanced studies in philosophy, he realized they were special. After class, he talked with them for hours, and as they were majoring in two subjects – physics and philosophy – Akston…

> suspended all rules and restrictions for these three students, we spared them all the routine, unessential courses, we loaded them with nothing but the hardest tasks, and we cleared their way to major in our two subjects within their four years. They *worked* for it. (p. 787, emphasis in original)

The gifted students are thus offered a personalized approach to education: an individual path is set out for them. This sense of individualism is a crucial feature of the educational ideas of Rand and Objectivism: thinking presupposes a sense of privacy, and learning is an individual, 'selfish' process. This is exactly the reason why Rand and her followers were such avid defenders of the approach to education by Maria Montessori: she is perceived as one of the few educational philosophers that leaves room for young people to be alone during their time in school and therefore "a hopeful movement" (Rand, 1971a) in education. What attracted Rand to the Montessori method of teaching, Nighan (1974) argues, was the fact that this method was founded on the liberty of the individual child, the importance to recognize and respect the distinct personality of students, and the didactical materials geared towards conceptual thinking (pp. 182 – 86). In short, according to Reid, it was the importance of "reason, reality, and the rights of the individual" in Montessori's thoughts that "seemed to complement the basic tenets of Objectivism" (Reid, 2013, p. 83).

Again, one can argue that this representation of Montessori does not do justice to all of her educational ideas, as Reid (2013) for

example has done.[7] However, the main issue at hand here is that "the establishment of the Dewey–Montessori binary" (Reid, 2013, p. 84), translated into fiction by Rand in the shape of the 'Dr. Pritchett–Dr. Akston' binary, allows her to create an educational dystopia in stark contrast to an educational utopia. Nuanced references to educational philosophers might blur or problematize this dichotomy. Whereas Dr. Pritchett from *Atlas Shrugged* appears on a par with the dystopian schooling system depicted in *The Fountainhead* and its curriculum designed to further collectivism and selflessness, in the educational utopia personified by Dr. Akston in *Atlas Shrugged*, rationality prevails, individual talents are recognized, and personal liberty is created in a curriculum to let these talents flourish and reach their goals. Between both novels, Rand fleshed out her ideas on education by endorsing Montessori and damning Dewey, mostly in publications on the state of universities and the emerging student protests. Yet, despite this Randian black-and-white opposition in the fictional depiction of education, an interesting parallel between both scenes from *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* can be drawn. It is precisely the similarity in both scenes that indicates a crucial problem in the ways in which Rand understands issues of education.

Eternal superheroes en perpetual students

The previous sections aimed to understand the educational values of Objectivism by reading the most important works of fiction by

[7] Reid (2013) argues a misunderstanding of Montessori by Objectivists on two crucial issues - that of 'thinking and working alone'("Objectivists have proven themselves incredibly reluctant to discuss Montessori's belief that intellectual development depended, in large part, on emulation, in allowing children to copy each other and share insights with each other", p. 85) and the supposed rationalism propagated by Montessori ("Though some of Montessori's basic ideas on education may have seemed sufficiently rational to Objectivists, it is hard to conclude that Montessori herself was in any way a proponent of rationalism. After all, Montessori was a devout Roman Catholic who often peppered her works with biblical quotes and calls for divine guidance", p. 87).

Ayn Rand through an educational lens and zooming in on two scenes that mirror each other. *The Fountainhead* features the farewell between student and teacher, and summarizes the negative aspects of education – collectivism and 'selflessness' – whereas *Atlas Shrugged* presents a utopian picture of education, during a discussion at a reunion with a former teacher and his students, which is built upon rationality and individual liberty. Yet, reading both novels through this educational lens, a parallel between both works presents itself, which prompts the start of my reading of both scenes now *against* the grain instead of with the grain. Close reading both scenes – paying attention to imaginary and apparently marginal details – allows me to tease out an inconsistency in Rand's educational ideas.

A striking similarity in details can be observed in the ways in which the two main characters of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* are perceived by their respective teachers in the scenes analyzed in the previous sections: both deny that Howard Roark and John Galt have ever been children, or that they have ever been part of a family-structure. Howard Roark appears to have had no family whatsoever, as the dean contemplates during their final dialogue in *The Fountainhead*:

> He thought of what he had heard about Roark's past. Roark's father had been a steel puddler somewhere in Ohio and had died long ago. The boy's entrance papers showed no record of nearest relatives. When asked about it, Roark had said indifferently: "I don't think I have any relatives. I may have. I don't know." He had seemed astonished that he should be expected to have any interest in the matter. (p. 14)

John Galt is characterized in a similar manner by Dr. Akston in *Atlas Shrugged*:

> …John, the self-made man, self-made in every sense, out of nowhere, penniless, parentless, tie-less. Actually, he was the son of a gas-station mechanic at some forsaken crossroads in Ohio, and he had left home at the age of twelve to make his own way—but I've always thought of him as if he had come into the world like Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, who sprang forth from Jupiter's head, fully grown and fully armed…. (p. 786)

These descriptions by their former teachers imply (besides Rand's apparent dislike of the state of Ohio) that the main characters did not undergo a process of coming-of-age, of emerging adultness, growing insight, or evolving personalities. Indeed, a deconstructive approach reveals how it is precisely figurative speech (Culler, 1985) that undermines this scene: the analogy of Minerva subverts *any* ideal of an educational process. Just as Minerva sprang fully formed from her father's head, Howard Roark and John Galt were fully formed in their morality, rationality, and eagerness to turn their goals into reality.

This observation has repercussions, I argue, for the way we should look at Rand's educational philosophy, and its weaknesses. The imagery of Minerva and seemingly minor details in characterization from both scenes reveal that Rand apparently has no interest in showing her audience the *Bildung* of her main protagonists, understood as the gradual formation of personality and mind in a process of trial and error, and her novels give no evidence of pedagogical interest as such. Roark and Galt are put in settings with teachers, and they indeed 'learn' - but we would not understand them as going through a process of 'education'. Roark and Galt have learned what they needed to become successful in life, but they never made mistakes, nor suffered from lack of self-confidence, and were not forced to work with people wholly different from themselves. Thus, instead of educationally more interesting round characters, finding their way in life's challenges, Rand's readers are confronted with flat characters, navigating unrealistically clear-cut dilemma's as superheroes. And even though Rand has avidly defended her use of characters as static, moral exemplars [8], the similarity between both scenes in *The*

[8] Rand has always propagated 'Romantic literature', which features characters as concretizations of a moral ideal (as opposed to 'Naturalistic literature' with real-life characters), as she stated in her essay 'The Goal of My Writing': "The motive and purpose of my writing is the projection of an ideal man. The portrayal of a moral ideal, as my ultimate literary goal, as an end in itself" (Rand, 1963). Thus, the suggestion that Howard Roark and John Galt had gone through a process of education would diminish their status as moral heroes.

Fountainhead and *Atlas Shrugged* reveals, I think, a profound flaw in her educational philosophy that can also be traced in current discourses on learning as individual trajectories, the development of personal talents and the cultivation of the qualities of each single student: it provides only a very narrow understanding of what education actually involves. As such, Rand's narratives foreshadow the rise of an instrumental discourse on education that the Dutch educational philosopher Gert Biesta characterizes as the 'language of learning', where the student becomes a consumer working towards individual self-improvement and schooling a commodity to obtain that goal; a discourse that goes hand in hand with a neoliberal ideology and marketization of education. We therefore need to return to the notion of 'education' instead of 'learning', according to Biesta, to recognize the inherent risk in education, the importance of educational relations and the exposure of students to otherness of difference (Biesta, 2013).

I would like to take one step further in drawing conclusions from my analysis of both scenes, and especially from the apparent lack of a pedagogical dimension. In the similarity between Rand's two main protagonists, we can not only observe the emergence of a discourse on education as the individual self-improvement by learning - we can also understand something about the educational effect Rand intended to exert with her novels. As I indicated earlier, Peikoff (2014) has emphasized the importance of Rand's fiction in teaching her philosophy: "Philosophy is the theory, the abstractions; art is the model builder, the engineer. The difference is contained in the difference between an abstract lecture on rationality and independence and reading *The Fountainhead* and getting the image of Roark" (pp. 54-55). One can thus argue that with *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand aimed to teach her readers by means of narratives of superheroes for adults, as concretizations of moral ideals in the shape of her main protagonists Howard Roark and John Galt, to hold up to her

readers.[9] Both novels also contain prolonged speeches, during which readers are almost literally 'lectured'. This is the reason why Rand used these works during most courses she taught on Objectivism. Given Rand's educational utopia depicted in *Atlas Shrugged*, based on the values of individualism and rationalism, one would expect her to have engaged her students in frank discussions, stimulating critical thinking, and exploring individual perspectives. Yet, it can be gathered from biographical information that her educational utopia is a far cry from her own teaching practice and how she intended to educate her audience with her works of fiction. Rand never accepted her students of Objectivism to become full-fledged 'Objectivists', as both of her biographers remarked. Burns (2009) refers to a quote by Rand as follows: "She emphasized that students of Objectivism 'cannot be and must not attempt to be theoreticians of the subject they are studying'" (p. 252). This attitude leads, according to her other biographer Anne Heller (2009), to the following situation: "As a result, she [Rand] decreed that only she, Nathaniel, and Barbara could call themselves 'Objectivists'. Everyone else had to refer to himself as a 'student of Objectivism'". Enrollees to courses in Objectivism had to "declare their agreement with the major tenets of John Galt's speech" and "Rand was likely to explode in anger if questions suggested doubt or disagreement" (p. 302). Rand's teaching practice thus shows remarkable resemblances with how she portrayed the characteristics of progressive education: there was a pressure to conform to the pack. Where Peikoff (2014) argued the importance of training the capacity for individual judgment in education, he does not take into account the, in Rand's own words, obvious "mob spirit" (Rand, 1971b, p. 175) in the teaching practice of Objectivism. My point here is that this teaching practice, so far from the educational ideals professed by Rand and her followers, might not have been surprising to the readers of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas*

[9] Indeed, Rand stated that "many readers of *The Fountainhead* have told me that the character of Howard Roark helped them to make a decision when they faced a moral dilemma. They asked themselves: 'What would Roark do in this situation?'" (Rand, 1965).

Shrugged. Despite the fact that Rand aims to educate her readers, it is precisely these works of fiction that reveal her fundamental anti-educational attitude: Rand not only has no interest in depicting the protagonist's 'education' as a gradual character formation (and therefore displays an instrumental, narrow understanding of education in terms of 'the language of learning') - she also prevents her readers to evolve or grow with them; by erasing childhood from her fictional characters and portraying them as unattainable 'ideals', Rand leaves her audience in a state of permanent immaturity. Both the readers of Rand's novels and the students of Objectivism are therefore placed in a position where individuality, non-conformity, critical thinking and rationality – i.e., the educational values propagated by Rand and her followers – are not appreciated. The fact that the educational value *of* Rand's novels does not correspond to the educational values propagated *in* these novels, is not only problematic for its inconsistency. Perpetual 'students of Objectivism' do not have the opportunity to evolve into teachers or theoreticians; this educational issue might explain as well why Ayn Rand not only stood at the beginning of the tradition of Objectivism - she also stood at the end of it.

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