

On Walls, Squares, Bridges and Sqridges
A framework to think about North-South dialogues in communication
and media studies¹

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Abstract

This article analyses the workings of antagonism in academia, within a series of dimensions, such as political conflict, paradigmatic conflict (triggered by particular academic ontologies, epistemologies, axiologies and methodologies), linguistic conflict and organizational conflict (triggered by competitive cultures and market-driven logics). After a discussion of different antagonisms, grounded in the European (academic) experiences of the author, the article then turns its attention to two trajectories that have the potential to overcome these divides: the fantasy of homogeneity and the recognition that conflict can be transformed from antagonism to agonism. The problem with the first trajectory lies in the post-political ignorance of conflict and diversity, which contradicts the need to structurally acknowledge the existence of conflict at the ontological level. For this reason, the second trajectory is preferred and used to support an analysis of the thresholds that hinder dialogues in these agonistic academic spaces, and of ways to overcome them. The article concludes with a discussion of two metaphors - the bridge and the square - and their capacity to signify these agonistic academic spaces. As the argument is made to combine both metaphors, the notion of the sridge is proposed.

Introduction – Divisions in academia

Academia has a long history of division. As one of the social fields, integrated into national contexts and their political realities, academia has not escaped from these divisions. Let me start with briefly touching upon two divides that are deeply (geo-) political. During the cold war, when - to use Winston Churchill's ideological concept - an iron curtain had descended across the (European) continent, most academics found themselves disconnected from their colleagues on the 'other' side. The circulation of knowledge was obstructed by a combination of material and discursive elements, such as, for instance, the lack of mobility and ideologically-inspired distrust. Of course, some academics (and their work) overcame these limitations, as Richmond's (2003) book, with the rather telling title *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain*, shows. High-profile collaborations, such as the Nobel prize winning collaboration between the economists Koopmans and Kantorovich (see Bockman and Bernstein, 2008), and academic peace activism, such as the Pugwash movement (which also won a Nobel prize, for peace, in 1995) (Evangelista, 1999) certainly existed, but at the same time, the obstructions caused by the East-West divide played a significant role in limiting academic exchange and knowledge-sharing. To give only one example: One cannot but wonder whether the role of the Tartu–Moscow Semiotic School (see Waldstein, 2008) could not have been more influential, and the work of academics like Yuri Lotman could not

¹ Some of the discussions in this article are based on Carpentier (2010).

have circulated more, if they would not have found themselves on the ‘other’ side of the divide than French structuralism.

The second divide, between North and South Cyprus, is maybe less well-known, but has been equally disruptive. In contrast to the Cold War, this divide is still very present, as this island in the Mediterranean is characterized by a long-lasting conflict. Cyprus has been geographically and ethnically divided since 1974 when Turkey invaded the north and occupied 38% of the island, after decades of inter-communal tensions and violence between the two major communities, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. This also has consequences for Cypriot academia, as the following description of the legal status of the Northern Cypriot universities, with the strategic and continuous use of citation marks illustrates. It is the official position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus (2012):

“The ‘universities’ operating in the area of the Republic of Cyprus which remains under Turkish military occupation since 1974, are unlawfully operating ‘educational institutions’, since they are not in compliance with the relevant Laws and Regulations of the Republic of Cyprus on Higher Education. Therefore, these ‘institutions’, as well as the ‘qualifications’ they award, are not recognized by the Republic of Cyprus.”

Again, there are exceptions that show that cross-divide research is possible. The research financed and published by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) is a prime example, with the report *Media Narratives, Politics and the Cyprus Problem*, edited by Christophorou, Sahin and Pavlou (2010) as one of the many significant outputs. Also the work of the Association for Historical Dialogue & Research (AHDR)² needs to be mentioned here, as they try to reconcile the island’s different historical narratives. But again, academic collaboration across the Cypriot divide is not easy, and many thresholds remain.

These two political divides illustrate the obvious point that academia cannot escape the dynamics of antagonism, but also that academia is one of the locations where attempts are organised to overcome these divides. Secondly, these short narrations about the two political divides also illustrate that these (academic) divides are not only material, but also discursive, where both sides (can) become entrenched in opposite ideological positions, fed by distrust and the suspicion of ulterior motives. As the narrations about these two divides contain many elements that characterise antagonism in academia, they form the starting point of a reflection on the different antagonisms in academia. This, in turn, raises the question of how to overcome these academic antagonisms. After a discussion of different antagonisms, grounded in the European (academic) experiences of the author, the article then turns its attention to two trajectories that have the potential to overcome these divides: the fantasy of homogeneity and the recognition that conflict can be transformed from antagonism to agonism. The second trajectory is grounded in Mouffe’s (2005, 2013) work on agonism, which will be applied to academic conflict, and combined with a series of examples. In the conclusion, the second trajectory will also be enriched by a discussion on metaphors that try to capture dialogue and collaboration within a framework of diversity and conflict.

Antagonistic conflict in academia

² <http://www.ahdr.info/home.php>

Underneath a layer of academic civility, often fierce struggles take place, whose objective can be described by making use of Tuchman's (1972) concept of symbolic annihilation, and its three structuring aspects (omission, trivialisation and condemnation). The ruptures (or frontlines, to use a military metaphor) in academia often take the form of antagonistic divides, where particular academic ontologies, epistemologies, axiologies, methodologies, but also other (academic) practices are defined as strange to academia, and become constructed as its constitutive outside³. These antagonisms also impact on academic identities, where propagators of particular knowledges are positioned using the friend/foe distinction. Inspired by Mouffe (2005), we can return to the work of Schmitt (1996) on this matter, and his definition of the enemy as whoever is "in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible." (Schmitt, 1996: 27) Sometimes, these antagonisms are organised on a spatial base, pitching different regions against each other, or time-based, when ideas of different eras (and generations) conflict, but in many other cases these antagonisms characterise (and disrupt) particular academic communities within the same space and time zones.

Obviously, these antagonistic divides only very rarely result in violence⁴, but this does not mean that their intensity is limited. Despite common beliefs⁵, there is much at stake, as antagonistic positions all have very strong claims towards understanding social reality, and the resulting power struggles are located at every possible level of academia. These micro-physics of power are played out in publications (and the reviewing processes that allow texts to be published or not), at conferences, in appointment and promotion committees, and in departmental meetings, with the objective to omit particular approaches, and to trivialise and condemn particular knowledges. At the same time, the intensity of these struggles is cloaked by academic politeness, professional group solidarity and collective interest, a lack of academic self-reflexivity and a lack of dialogue between the sociology (and philosophy) of knowledge and other academic fields and disciplines. Although academic analyses of academic struggle and antagonism exist, such as, for instance, *Scandalous Knowledge* by Hernnstein Smith (2006), the dark sides of these conflicts are often exposed in more literary works, such as, for instance, Hermans' (1975) critique on a Dutch university in *Onder Professoren* [*Amongst Professors*].

One area where academic antagonism has manifested itself is in the so-called paradigm wars. Paradigms are significant, because they, as academic ideologies, structure academic knowledge production. In Ritzer's (1980: 7) words, "a paradigm is a fundamental image of the subject matter within a science," and as such they combine three basic dimensions (ontology, epistemology and axiology⁶). Focussing on sociology as a "multiple paradigm science", Ritzer (1980: 158) explicitly points to the existence of struggles between fields and disciplines, where "each of its paradigms is competing for hegemony within the discipline as a whole as well as within virtually every sub-area within sociology." Before Ritzer, Kuhn (1962), using a more mono-paradigmatic approach and in a rather depersonalised way, described the struggle between paradigms and the scientific revolutions that lead to the replacement of one paradigm by another (which can be translated as their symbolic

³ As Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argued, we should not forget that antagonisms have both negative and positive aspects, as they attempt to destabilise the "other" identity but at the same time desperately need that "other" as a constitutive outside stabilising their own identity.

⁴ As always, there are notable exceptions, such as the Unabomber (Chase, 2003).

⁵ This implies my disagreement with Sayre's law, which states: "In any dispute the intensity of feeling is inversely proportional to the value of the issues at stake issue—that is why academic politics are so bitter." (quoted in Issawi, 1973: 178)

⁶ Sometimes also methodology is mentioned as a component of paradigms.

annihilation). But we should not forget that these paradigmatic wars impact on academics and their institutions. Gage (1989: 6) describes the consequences of the victory of qualitative research over the quantitative in the research of teaching:

“Faculty members, graduate students, and research workers were convinced of the futility of the old way of studying teaching. In schools of education, enrollment declined in courses in tests and measurements, statistics, experimental design, and survey research. [...] Research grants and contracts from foundations and governmental sources became virtually unobtainable for objective-quantitative researchers. The Division of Educational Psychology of the American Psychological Association saw its membership shrink to about a fourth of what it had been during the 1980s. [...] The journals that published research on teaching contained almost no articles reporting tests of statistical significance, correlation coefficients, effect sizes, or meta-analyses. Instead, they were filled with reports on ethnographic studies of classroom phenomena and by sociopolitical and economic analyses of the ways in which teachers, curricula, and schools perpetuated the unjust social order.”

One of the areas where the paradigmatic struggles have been at their worst is the struggle between constructivism and realism. Smith (2006) for instance refers to Mohanty's (1992) work on literary theory, who (in Smith's reading) uses the “common dismissal of relativism as transparently absurd” in his argument that “contemporary literary/cultural theory is beset by a debilitating scepticism about the possibility of rational argument and objective knowledge that would be relieved by better acquaintance with the accounts of knowledge and language developed some years back [...]” (Smith, 2006: 34) Another example is the Sokal hoax, in which a physics professor at New York University managed to get a fake article published in *Social Text* (which at the time was not using peer review). Later, in the book *Intellectual Impostures*, co-authored with Bricmont, Sokal (1998) thoroughly critiqued the use of science jargon in postmodern theory; a critique which was problematically conflated with a much less well-argued critique on the ontology of postmodern theory itself.

A second area of paradigmatic struggle is between critical and administrative research (see e.g. Melody & Mansell, 1983; Smythe & Van Dinh, 1983; Nordenstreng, 2009). Here, the confrontation is mostly located at the axiological level, between academic positions and identities that defend a “confrontation with unnecessary and illegitimate constraints on human equality, community and freedom” (Carpentier & Dahlgren, 2013: 304) versus the belief in an academia that can (and has to) be value-free. Related to this we can find (mainly, but not exclusively, with critical researchers) a concern for the instrumentalisation of research, and “the need to *sometimes* privilege non-functionality (not unlike in the Arts), or to maintain control on which type of relevance to privilege.” (Carpentier, 2010: 131 – my translation) This opens up another realm of fierce academic struggle, namely between academia and policy-makers.

This can be illustrated by an earlier analysis (Carpentier, 2010) of EU documents in relation to research and teaching. Through this analysis, the grounds for concern about the instrumentalisation of research became visible. Apart from the slightly vague references to societal relevance, the strong emphasis on the economic functionality of research and education was particularly evident in these documents. This was first of all translated into a strong emphasis on technology and the sciences. Nordenstreng (2009: 261) has called this fashionable dominance of technology the “Nokia-syndrome”. These material choices are moreover embedded in discourses of competitiveness and (technological) innovation,

articulating academic research and education as important contributions to enhancing Europe's competitive (economic) position. One document where we can find this discursive emphasis is the 2007 *Council Resolution on Modernising Universities for Europe's Competitiveness in a Global Knowledge Economy*. In this resolution, the Council of the European Union (2007: 4) reaffirms: "The role of universities, through education, research and innovation, in the transfer of knowledge to the economy and society as a main contribution to Europe's competitiveness and the need for closer cooperation between academia and the world of enterprise." In the same document we also find another reference to the functionality approach of European academia, as the university's educational programmes are also considered key instruments in the labour market policies. The modernisation discourse is used to legitimise this instrumentalisation of academic pedagogies. For this reason, the member states are invited "to strengthen [the universities'] capacity to modernise their curricula to meet labour market and learner needs more effectively." (Council of the European Union, 2007: 5)

Another significant area of antagonism is related to the development of English as an academic lingua franca, which is one of the most visible effects of the westernisation of academia. The introduction of a lingua franca has benefitted communication and exchange within academia, particularly in Europe. To use McQuail's (2008) words: "The wide use of English as a lingua franca has, somewhat paradoxically, been itself a vehicle for convergence and for the emergence of something like a European identity for the field." Yet there are a considerable number of negative consequences linked to the domination of a lingua franca, and this has provoked resistance from academic communities in other parts of the world, often located in the global South, but also in European countries like France. We should not forget that language is for many people more than *just* a communicational tool. It is an argument well-captured by De Cillia (2002: 8) when he says that "languages are far more than just media of communication [...] the mother tongue is the central symbol of individual and collective identity, a symbol which represents belonging to a certain ethnic group, to a certain language community." It is also argued - and I tend to subscribe to that argument - that the domination of one language might reduce conceptual diversity and impoverish our academic language(s) and writing styles. Livingstone's (2005 - see also Meinhof, 2005) mapping of the signifiers audience and public, shows how different words in different languages allow emphasising different aspects of the meanings of these crucial signifiers. In other words, social-communicative processes are not easily captured by one specific concept, and linguistic diversity does play a significant role.

As academics are (in most cases) embedded within universities, with their particular structures of departments, faculties and schools, these organisational structures become the prime locations of these antagonisms, as academics enter into competition with their colleagues over scarce material and symbolic resources. These struggles are intermingled and strengthened by interpersonal conflicts triggered by, for instance, clashing personalities. One illustration of these departmental wars comes from a blog posting by Tallmadge (2010), describing the conflicts a colleague found himself lodged in:

"As we traded stories, it became clear that he had actually fought in many battles, from which he still bore scars. He had nurtured junior colleagues only to see them denied tenure; his scholarship had been publicly attacked by ideologues; he had arm-wrestled with deans for the resources needed to sustain a nascent environmental studies program that is now regarded as one of the best in the nation; he had been

tempted by offers of high-ranking administrative positions that would have given him power at the expense of family, community, and teaching.”

Weber, in *Science as a Vocation* (2004[1918]), formulated a more disturbing perspective on academia, when discussing what to say to young scholars that came to seek advice about the habilitation, they (as long as they are not Jewish, according to Weber⁷) must be asked this question: “Do you believe that you can bear to see one mediocrity after another being promoted over your head year after year, without becoming embittered and warped?” Needless to say, you always receive the same answer: of course, I live only for my ‘vocation’ – but I, at least, have found only a handful of people who have survived this process without injury to their personality.” (Weber, 2004[1918]: 7)

An even stronger formulation of a critique on the narrow-mindedness and shallowness of academics in dealing with colleagues (and thus the internal antagonisms) can be found in the above-mentioned Dutch book *Onder Professoren* [*Amongst Professors*], published by Hermans’ (1975). The author of this fictional account was a geographer at the Dutch State University of Groningen from 1952 until 1973. After resigning from his position, Hermans wrote a vile critique of academic life, centred around the main character of chemistry professor Rufus Dingelam, who in this story wins the Nobel prize for a discovery done 20 years earlier. This award-winning substance (Alicodrin) is a whitener that can be used for washing, but derivatives were also used as a medicine against epilepsy and to increase potency. After the news is announced, Dingelam is confronted with his colleagues’ jealousy and hostility, self-interest and hypocrisy. Together with a student occupation of his laboratory, this eventually forces him to flee to Monaco.

The internal struggles and the competition for scarce material or discursive resources are further enhanced by existing cultures of competition within academia and by the increasing role of market-driven logics. An academic competitive culture is based on vertical hierarchies which are grounded in quality criteria. Refined categorisation systems (often created by academics) are used to produce these hierarchies, which are fed by the idea that it is possible to rank its objects, align them on a particular scale and determine the existence of a very best. Examples can be found in the awarding of prizes (the Nobel prize is one example that has been referred to in this article), but also in the ranking of universities⁸, the categorisation of academic journals or of candidates for academic positions. An academic competitive culture is structurally different than a culture of excellence, which is not grounded in a ranking system, but in a threshold system that defines criteria for excellence but does not encounter the need to discriminate within the category of the excellent, and that is equally interested in developing support strategies to achieve excellence for those who have not achieved this status. For instance, in relation to journal reviewing, a culture of excellence stimulates journals editors and reviewers to work with authors to improve their texts, while (the worst excesses of) an academic competitive culture, or what Gill (2009: 239) calls “the peculiarly toxic conditions of neoliberal academia” results in reviews⁹ such as the following:

⁷ Disturbingly, for Jewish students the advice is different: “lasciate ogni speranza” (Weber, 2004[1918]: 7), which translates as: “Abandon all hope.”

⁸ For an analysis of the universities’ “competition to become prestigious” (Breault & Callejo Parez, 2013: 2), see Breault’s and Callejo Parez’s (2013) book *The Red Light in the Ivory Tower*.

⁹ Another review that Gill quotes is this one: “I heard yesterday that my article for x journal was turned down. (Oh no!) You know, the one I worked on for ages and ages. I poured so much of myself into that piece (I know). And one of the referee’s comments was vile – it said something like ‘my first year undergraduates have a better understanding of the field than this author does -- why are they wasting all of our time.’” (a conversation between “a female friend” and the author, quoted in Gill, 2009: 228)

“This paper will be of no interest to readers of x (journal name). Discourse analysis is little more than journalism and I fail to see what contribution it can make to understanding the political process. It is self evident to everyone except this author that politics is about much more than ‘discourse’. What’s more, in choosing to look at the speeches of Margaret Thatcher, the author shows his or her complete parochialism. If you are going to do this kind of so-called ‘analysis’ at least look at the discourse of George Bush.” (Gill, 2009: 238)

Secondly, also the increasing role of market-driven logics enhances antagonism. One area where these market-driven logics have had severe impact, is academic publishing. The dominance of commercial publishers has had a problematic impact on the accessibility of academic writing¹⁰, has removed the (textual) ownership from academics, and has excessively used free (academic) labour. In a recent interview, Brenner (2014), professor of Genetic medicine at the University of Cambridge and yet another Nobel prize winner (in Physiology/Medicine in 2002), harshly critiques these exploitative publishing models, and the antagonism embedded in them:

“[...] the journals insist they will not publish your paper unless you sign that copyright over. It is never stated in the invitation, but that’s what you sell in order to publish. And everybody works for these journals for nothing. There’s no compensation. There’s nothing. They get everything free. They just have to employ a lot of failed scientists, editors who are just like the people at Homeland Security, little power grabbers in their own sphere. If you send a PDF of your own paper to a friend, then you are committing an infringement. Of course they can’t police it, and many of my colleagues just slap all their papers online. I think you’re only allowed to make a few copies for your own purposes. It seems to me to be absolutely criminal.”

In some cases, the market-driven approach of academic publishers has provoked stronger resistance, as in the case when in 2006 the entire editorial board of the mathematics journal *Topology* resigned, to protest against Elsevier’s pricing policies. In their letter of resignation¹¹, they argue that this pricing policy “has had a significant and damaging effect on *Topology*’s reputation in the mathematical research community.” At the end of 2013, Schekman (2013) – yes, yet again a Nobel prize winner – announced his boycott of what he called “luxury journals”: “chiefly Nature, Cell and Science.”

But also the university itself has not been spared from the market-driven logics. Stabile (2007: 3) argues that from the earliest days of the university, advocates “of employing a competitive market approach to academia by stressing monetary gain as an incentive” have existed, and interestingly links the non-market driven approach to virtue, and the market driven approach to sophism. More recently, universities, and their employees, have been exposed to what Gill (2009: 230) calls the “increasing corporatisation and privatisation of the University”, which produce new and more intense antagonisms:

¹⁰ Commercial publishers have resorted to using an semi-open access model, in which authors (or their funders) now pay very considerable amounts of money to provide readers with unrestricted access to their work.

¹¹ math.ucr.edu/home/baez/topology-letter.pdf. See also Shapiro (2006).

“These include the importing of corporate models of management into University life; the reformulation of the very nature of education in instrumental terms connected to business and the economy; the transformation of students into ‘consumers’; and the degradation of pay and working conditions for academics, as well as the increasing casualisation of employment, yet with little organized resistance from trade unions or other bodies.” (Gill, 2009: 230-231)

For instance at the level of university governance and project management, market-driven management use discourses of modernisation, responsabilisation, rationalisation, cost-reduction and efficiency. The struggle is still ongoing and some universities have maintained their decentralised decision-making structures that aim to guarantee internal (organisational) democracy and autonomy, for instance through the rotation of positions of power. Moreover, in these more traditional models, these universities are governed by academics that take on administrative-managerial tasks, and not by managers that remain detached from the academic activity as such. The increased entry of market-driven managers into the university’s decision-making structures leads to a different managerial culture, fundamentally alters the power balance within the universities and produces antagonistic relations within the university, often to the detriment of academics.

One anecdotal illustration of the consequences of the introduction of a market-driven managerial culture (and the antagonism it provokes) can be found in Frank Furedi’s (2004) introduction of *Where Have All the Intellectuals Gone? Confronting 21st Century Philistinism*. In this introduction he explains the rationale for writing his book, directly referring to the reaction of a “senior university manager” (Furedi, 2004: 1) to an earlier article Furedi wrote (entitled *What is the University For Now?*) in which he pointed out that “students could spend an entire year at university without reading a whole book.” (Furedi, 2004: 1) The response of that “senior university manager” critiqued Furedi for assuming that “books should have a privileged status in higher education. ‘The tone of the article was to suggest that you can dismiss as undemanding any programme in which students do not read “whole books”’; he [the senior university manager] complained.” (Furedi, 2004: 1-2)

Trajectories of overcoming antagonistic conflict

These antagonisms are widespread, but not omnipresent. Academia is also characterised by many forms of co-existence, recognition of diversity and collaboration. But at the same time, conflict remains very much part of academia itself. Following the discourse-theoretical position (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), which is very much influenced by a sociology of conflict, conflict is seen as an ontological condition which structures the social, which necessarily also impacts on academia. But at the same time, antagonistic conflict is only one way to articulate conflict - based on a dichotomised friend/foe structure - and other ways are possible to overcome the antagonistic articulation of conflict without ignoring the existence of conflict itself. The re-articulation of antagonism into agonism is one trajectory that will be discussed here (in part 3.2), but before going there we need to discuss one other trajectory that deals with antagonistic conflict, and that is its ignorance by reverting to the fantasy of homogeneity.

Trajectory 1: The fantasy of homogeneity

The fantasy of the universality and homogeneity of academic spaces is based on what Stavrakakis (1999: 96) calls “an ethics of harmony”, a desire for reality to be coherent and harmonious. This fantasy defines the (a) social as a whole, whose components are all equal

and similar. As a fantasy, it is of course not restricted to academia, and we can find many of its variations in other spheres of the social. For instance, in the nationalist variation of this fantasy, there is a national community which is an inseparable whole; while in the populist variation, the people are seen as the whole. In the academic variation, the fantasy of homogeneity consists in the desire for a consensus at the paradigmatic level (and its sublevels of ontology, epistemology and axiology), for full understanding despite linguistic differences, for the transcendence of political and cultural conflict, for frictionless collegialities and interdisciplinary dialogues, for the perfect collaboration with other segments of the social and for the final and ultimate resolution of difference.

One illustration of this fantasy can be found in the fragmentation / cohesion debate in the field of communication and media studies, as it is rendered in Craig's (2008) summary of the successive special issues of the *Journal of Communication* on *The Future of the Field: Between Fragmentation and Cohesion* from 1993. There Craig writes: "Some saw the continuing fragmentation of the field as a problem; others celebrated fragmentation as an invaluable source of adaptive strength. Some called urgently for efforts to define the intellectual focus of the discipline; others just as urgently insisted that any such effort to define a theoretical core would be not only useless but counter-productive." Particularly on the cohesion side of the debate, there is a strong belief that such a cohesion-generating consensus can (and has to) be achieved, effectively defining the core of the discipline, and using the problematising label of fragmentation to describe academic (paradigmatic) diversity.

It is important to stress that the notion of fantasy is used here in a non-orthodox Lacanian meaning. Common sense meanings of this concept tend to be almost exclusively negative, but in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, fantasy is conceptualised as having (among others) a protective role (Lacan, 1979: 41), and remains connected to drive and desire, which also shows fantasy's generative capacities. In relation to academia, this implies that the fantasy of homogeneity is a driving force for academic collaboration and exchange, grounded in the belief that mutual (and full) understanding can be achieved, and that all conflicts can eventually be resolved.

At the same time the academic fantasy of homogeneity becomes frustrated by a number of contingencies and dislocations, which make diversity reappear. Not unlike Lefort's (1988) reflection on the empty place of power in contemporary democracies, we can say that the heart of academia, and its disciplines, is empty, but at the same time filled by a continuous stream of practices at the level of research, pedagogy, representation and (public) intervention. Different paradigms, pedagogical ideologies, individuals and organisations struggle for control of the empty heart of academia, in order to position themselves on one of the thrones of knowledge, only to be dethroned soon after or to have the phantasm disrupted by the presence of other academic discourses or institutions with similar claims.

There is also a dark side to the academic fantasy of homogeneity, as it can feed hegemonising strategies that make antagonism reappear by excluding what (or who) is defined as outside. After all, if the Other is seen to threaten a community's enjoyment, we can then turn against "the Other who stole it from us." (Žižek, 1998: 209) Of course, as Mouffe (2005: 15; emphasis in original) remarks, not every we/they turns into an antagonistic friend/enemy relationship, but we should "acknowledge that, in certain conditions, there is always the possibility that this we/they can become antagonistic, that is, can turn into a relation of friend/enemy." To use nationalism as an example: Žižek (1993: 201) points to the enjoyment this sense of belonging generates. He writes: "The element which holds together a particular

community cannot be reduced to the point of symbolic identification: the bond linking together its members always implies a shared relation toward a Thing, toward Enjoyment incarnated.” A similar process of othering can occur in academia, when a particular paradigm, approach, group, ... has achieved a hegemonic (power) position that can enable them, in a very post-political way, to declare the fantasy of homogeneity realised, at the expense of a series of others.

Trajectory 2: Agonism and academia

The problem with the first trajectory lies in the post-political ignorance of conflict and diversity, which contradicts the need to structurally acknowledge the existence of conflict at the ontological level. This means that we should avoid articulating the notion of conflict as intrinsically problematic, or as avoidable, but find ways to reconcile conflict and diversity with the (democratic) principles of academia. Consequently, the issue is not to suppress conflict, but to encapsulate it in a democratic-academic order.

To provide a theoretical basis for this second trajectory, we can make use of Mouffe's (2005) reinterpretation of the work of Schmitt (1996) (and his friend/foe distinction) in order to theorise the need to shift from an antagonistic enemy model to an agonistic adversary model. Agonism is seen to transform the antagonistic relationship into a “we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents.” (Mouffe, 2005: 20) In other words, an agonistic relationship does not hide the differences in position and interest between the involved parties; they are “in conflict” but “share a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes places.” (Mouffe, 2005: 20, see also Mouffe, 2013: 7).

In the context of academia this position first of all implies the acknowledgement of conflict within academia, and of the conflicts of academia with other fields of the social (e.g., commercial publishing, academic policies, ...). From this perspective, conflict, and the diversity that lies behind it, is unavoidable and should not be ignored (as the fantasy of homogeneity does), or erased and (symbolically) annihilated (as antagonism does). The agonistic position leads to a multi-perspectivist, contextualised and dialogical approach to academia that stimulates communication between different academic positions, but also accepts that they are sometimes irreconcilable and that enforced reconciliations are more weakening academia than they are strengthening it.

Agonistic approaches to academia recognise that there are different pathways to theorise and research social phenomena and that the combination (whether the elements are articulated or not) enrich a particular field of study. These approaches also take into account the contexts of the different academic positions, in order to understand and appreciate their different histories, geographies, politics, sociologies and philosophies. Equally important is an emphatic and self-reflexive openness that facilitates dialogues between these different conflicting positions, avoiding ultimate truth-claims and zero-sum game debates. These encounters have the potential to generate academic alliances and to produce new, dialogically-established, knowledges without artificially enforcing consensus, supported by the acknowledgment of the importance of structural irreconcilability within academia.

Crucial to the establishment of these agonistic academic spaces is the removal of a series of thresholds that hinder these dialogues. One significant threshold is language, an issue that, for

instance, has been discussed extensively within IAMCR,¹² as this academic organisation has three official languages (English, Spanish and French) but English has become the dominant working (conference) language here as well. There is a need for more linguistic creativity to deal with language diversity, using translations,¹³ but also moving beyond translations by using multi-linguistic strategies. A second and even more structural threshold is created by sources of antagonistic conflict. Particularly important here is the need to decrease the impact of academic competitive cultures and of market-driven logics within academia, as they tend to lead to the incorporation of antagonistic conflicts, and work against the creation of agonistic communicative academic spaces. But also the violations of the human and labour rights of academics¹⁴ by university management or government actors are significant problems that require more attention. As I, together with Dahlgren, argued elsewhere (Carpentier & Dahlgren, 2013: 304), this implies better securing academia as a semi-autonomous field, engaging “in joint knowledge production and dialogue, e.g. in civil society, to engender participatory knowledge construction”, but resisting attempts at incorporation and protecting academia’s independence.

At the same time we should also acknowledge that many academics are already (implicitly or explicitly) committed to the creation of these agonistic communicative academic spaces, at the level of every day academic practices, or in specific projects. A first example is the European Cost Action *Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies* (TATS),¹⁵ which ran from 1 March 2010 until 28 February 2014. With its 321 members from more than 30 different countries – mostly academics from European countries – the Action has (among many other outputs and activities) produced four edited books, 23 special issues in scholarly journals and six scientific reports, and it has organised nine open conferences or workshops and 15 panels in external conferences. Important for the argument made in this article is that, within the TATS Action, diversity within audience studies was explicitly acknowledged and protected, at the paradigmatic and methodological level but also in relation to region, gender and age. Secondly, the TATS Action explicitly organised a dialogical “building bridges” project to discuss the relevance of audience studies with non-academic stakeholders (Murru & Carpentier, 2013; Patriarce et al., 2014). In retrospect, one could argue that Cost Actions like the TATS Action show that there is also a need for similar theme-based and long-term networks at a more global level.

A second example is the work of the ALAIC/ECREA Task Force. Several panels were organised at major communication and media studies conferences (ECREA, Istanbul, 2012, ALAIC, Montevideo, 2012, and IAMCR, Istanbul, 2011, Durban, 2012, Dublin, 2013). These contributions were explicitly aimed at contributing to an interregional dialogue by emphasising the regional specificity and contextual embeddedness of theories, methodologies and research traditions in Latin-America and Europe, critically comparing the strengths and weaknesses, the abundances and gaps, and then articulating these differences as opportunities for the intellectual enrichment of both academic communities. In May 2012, ECREA and ALAIC also signed an agreement in which both organisations emphasised

¹² See, for instance, <http://iamcr.org/lang-use-trans>, <http://iamcr.org/201103-lang-policy>, and <http://iamcr.org/langdebate>.

¹³ For its book series at Palgrave, established in 2014, IAMCR will include one English translation of a non-English publication per year.

¹⁴ See <http://iamcr.org/resources/latest-news/1209-turkey>, for a recent IAMCR statement regarding academic labour rights and free speech in Turkey.

¹⁵ <http://www.cost-transforming-audiences.eu/>.

“that regional diversity is a significant asset to our field, but at the same time we believe that we should, through the organisation of creative dialogues and exchanges, avoid counter-productive processes of intellectual isolationism or hierarchization” (ALAIC & ECREA Joint Montevideo Declaration, 2012 – see appendix)

The final example, more oriented towards the removal of thresholds that stimulate antagonism, is the so-called slow science movement. The concept of slow science is often attributed to Alleva's (2006) letter published in *Nature*, with the title *Taking Time to Savour the Rewards of Slow Science*. Although there are different groups that use the label of slow science, and different articulations of the project exist, the following statement from the *Slow Science Manifesto* captures their main position quite nicely:

“Society should give scientists the time they need, but more importantly, scientists must take their time. We do need time to think. We do need time to digest. We do need time to misunderstand each other, especially when fostering lost dialogue between humanities and natural sciences. We cannot continuously tell you what our science means; what it will be good for; because we simply don't know yet. Science needs time.” (The slow science academy, 2010)

Leung, de Kloet and Chow (2010) elaborate a series of strategies (politics of whining; bringing an ethics of slowness to our profession; more stress on collaborative work; promotion of new publication strategies) which are easily reconcilable with an agonistic approach to academia.

Conclusion

In my conclusion, I want to briefly reflect on two metaphors, and their capacity to signify agonistic academic spaces. The first metaphor is the bridge, which can be seen as a metaphor for respectful academic exchange. In its reference to the absent space – the space that needs to be spanned by the bridge - it brings in the notions of distance, difference and conflict, and the intense effort and investment it takes to build a connector. The fragility and locatedness of the bridges also signifies the complexity of these dialogical endeavours. Also, the bridge metaphor shows that the construction of academic connectors is possible, even when it is difficult. But, at the same time, there are problems with the bridge metaphor, as it connecting-two-shores structure grounds itself in a logics of dichotomisation. It also sets up the ideas that once the bridge has been constructed, it is easy to cross (Hall & Minnix, 2012: 67), and that a particular artefact (a bridge, and thus a theory, a method, ...) can play this connecting role (Repko, 2012: 27).

The second metaphor is the square, which serves as metaphor for the opportunities of interchange, (re)presentation and debate (see for instance Iveson's (2007: 3) definition of public space). Squares are accessible meeting places, that can be approached and entered from different sides. They are often the nerve centres of cities, where main buildings (town halls, churches, commercial headquarters, ...) are located. They are also places of celebration, protest and surveillance (Yesil, 2006). As a metaphor for academic encounters, it signifies the existence and accessibility of multiple common spaces, but also the possibility to easily leave these space (and return to the home). But again, this metaphor has its problems, as it

downplays the efforts the engagement in agonistic practices require and moreover tends to (over)emphasise either the unity and homogeneity of the visitors, or the antagonism of the occupants (in whoever they are protesting against).

But the combination of these two metaphors, into what I propose to call the *sqridge*¹⁶, serves my purpose of signifying the agonistic academic spaces quite well. The *sqridge* metaphor incorporates the notion of diversity and conflict, which should not be erased but recognised, acknowledging that there are different positions (or river banks) in academia, that are structurally irreconcilable, but that can be connected. At the same time we should move away from a polarised way of thinking, keeping for instance Haraway's (1985: 96) critique on binary oppositions in mind (captured in the following sentence of the *Cyborg Manifesto*: "One is too few, but two are too many"). Here, we need the symbolic strength of the square and its reference to the easily accessible meeting grounds that will allow for more communication, collaboration and contestation, without barricades but with agnostic respect for diversity.

In short: Academia needs more *sqridges*.

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Arguably, Jože Plečnik's triple bridge, called the Tromostovje, over the river Ljubljanica in Ljubljana, Slovenia's capital, comes close to the *sqridge*.

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Appendix: ALAIC & ECREA Joint Montevideo Declaration

ALAIC, the *Latin American Communication Researchers Association* and ECREA, the *European Communication Research and Education Association*, recognize the need to intensify the collaboration between both organizations. ALAIC and ECREA emphasize that regional diversity is a significant asset to our field, but at the same time we believe that we should, through the organisation of creative dialogues and exchanges, avoid counter-productive processes of intellectual isolationism or hierarchization.

ALAIC and ECREA will contribute to this dialogue by emphasising the regional specificity and contextual embeddedness of theories, methodologies and research traditions in Latin-America and Europe, critically comparing the strengths and weaknesses, the abundances and gaps, and then articulating these differences as opportunities for the intellectual enrichment of both academic communities.

The dialogue will be materialized through the organization of joint panels at international conferences, the translation and publication of academic work which is not sufficiently accessible in the Latin American or European region for linguistic reasons, and the publication of academic work which explicitly aims at reflexively comparing the different academic traditions in the Latin American or European Communication and Media Studies (sub)fields.

Signed in Montevideo, 11 May 2012

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