Conflict, Affect and the Political:
On Disagreement as Democratic Capacity

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Introduction

Educational and political theorists have argued that education for democratic citizenship, whether at the K-12 level or in adult or higher education, should focus on fostering communicative capacities. For example, Jack Mezirow has used the work of Jürgen Habermas to emphasize the importance of fostering communicative reason in democratic and emancipatory adult education.[1] John Dryzek argues in general terms that "literacy and education facilitate deliberative capacity inasmuch as they influence the communicative competence of political actors and ordinary citizens."[2] Amy Gutmann argues that all levels and types of education—education within the family context, K-12 schooling, higher education, and adult and informal education—should "aim … to teach the skills and virtues of democratic deliberation."[3] And

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[1] Stephen Brookfield, "Learning Democratic Reason: The Adult Education Project of Jürgen Habermas," *Teachers College Record* 107, no. 6 (2005): 1127-1168.

[2] John Dryzek, "Democratization as Deliberative Capacity Building," *Comparative Political Studies* 42, no. 11 (2009): 1394. It should be noted that, for Dryzek, "deliberative capacity" is a social, not an individual, capacity.

[3] Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, revised edition 1998), xiv.

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Tomas Englund draws on a neopragmatist interpretation of John Dewey's work to argue for "the need to develop deliberative capabilities in schools."[4]

These views are based on deliberative conceptions of democracy: ideas about democracy that emphasize deliberation both in formal democratic institutions and in the public realm more generally. However, some political theorists worry that the emphasis on reasonable communication and consensus-building in many of the arguments for deliberative democracy carries risks for democracy itself. Of course, deliberation is important and even its critics would agree that deliberative democracy is to be preferred over other models that could be called democratic, such as "aggregative democracy"—in which voters' preferences are tallied in elections, but which lacks a normative theory for moderating competing interests[5]—or "delegative" democracy—in which there are "competitive elections, but winners rule without any constitutional checks, accountability, and respect for the rights of their people."[6] When concern is raised about some aspects of deliberative conceptions of democracy, therefore, the point is not that we should not deliberate at all or that we should not foster any deliberative capacities, but that certain capacities required for democratic deliberation have been overemphasized at the expense of other capacities that are also important for a healthy democracy.

One of the theorists who have been critical of deliberative conceptions of democracy is the Belgian philosopher Chantal Mouffe, who has proposed an alternative conception of democracy she calls "agonistic pluralism."[7] Another is the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, who has proposed a conception of democracy he calls "sporadic"[8] and which has also been called "episodic."[9] While there are differences between Rancière's and Mouffe's perspectives, they share an emphasis on *disagreement* as a constitutive aspect of democracy.

I wish to examine how a conception of democracy that treats disagreement as necessary and fundamental to democracy, rather than as a problem to be overcome, would change political education. Elsewhere I have done this by comparing the conceptions of democracy and politics in the work of Chantal Mouffe with the Rawlsian conceptions of democracy and politics in the work of Eamonn Callan.[10] In this paper I will focus on the role of affect in political disagreement and argue that political education ought to provide opportunities to foster affective attachments to political identities. This paper, then, is not an analysis of quantitative or qualitative data *through* a particular theoretical framework, but rather an argument *for* a particular theoretical framework.

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[4] Tomas Englund, "Rethinking Democracy and Education: Towards an Education of Deliberative Citizens," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 32, no. 2: 306.

[5] Chantal Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism," *Political Science Series* 72 (2000), 1-2.

[6] Dryzek, "Democratization as Deliberative Capacity Building," 1380.

[7] Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism."

[8] Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics* (New York: Verso, 1995), 61.

[9] Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democacy," *Constellations* 1, no. 1 (1994): 11.

[10] Claudia Ruitenberg, "Educating Political Adversaries: Chantal Mouffe and Radical Democratic Citizenship Education," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 28, no. 3 (2009), 269-281.

In order to build this framework, I will first examine the work of Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière. Then I will examine in greater detail how Mouffe's work relies on a psychoanalytic understanding of political identity formation. The work of psychoanalyst Yannis Stavrakakis will help me explain the central role of affective attachment to political identities. In the final section of the paper, I will sketch a political education that recognizes and incorporates affect and fantasy. Through the work of Cornelius Castoriadis I will bring together affect and fantasy in a view of political education that focuses on social imaginaries. In response to one of the central questions posed for this special issue, "What skills, values, and beliefs are necessary for democratic participation, and what kind of citizenship education best develops these democratic capacities?" I will answer that citizenship education ought to focus on fostering a capacity for disagreement, and that it ought to do so in a way that recognizes that democratic disagreement is a passionate affair.

Agonistic Pluralism and Sporadic Democracy

Politics, for Mouffe, is "the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political'."[11] This dimension of "the political" is the opposition or, in Mouffe words, "antagonism that is inherent in human relations"[12] and "constitutive of human societies."[13] The reason that the political is unavoidably antagonistic is that the social order is, at any given time and in any given place, the result of a decision, in the literal sense of de-*cision* as a cut: "Properly political questions always involve decisions which require us to make a choice between conflicting alternatives."[14] Each choice for one alternative involves a choice against another alternative, and any given social order is the contingent result of decisions that antagonize the side of the alternative that was excluded. "By bringing to the fore the inescapable moment of decision—in the strong sense of having to decide in an undecidable terrain—what antagonism reveals is the very limit of rational consensus."[15]

Because the antagonisms that emerge, certainly in a society characterized by great diversity, are not politically workable, Mouffe argues that antagonistic relations must be transformed into agonistic ones:

> While antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is 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. They are 'adversaries' not enemies.[16]

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[11] Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism," 15.
[12] Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 9.
[13] Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism," 15.
[14] Mouffe, *On the Political*, 10.
[15] *Ibid.*, 12.
[16] Mouffe, *On the Political*, 20.

Like political theorists who emphasize deliberation, such as Rawls and Habermas, Mouffe acknowledges that *some* common ground is required in the political process. However, she believes this common ground consists only of the recognition of the other's right to hold an opposing view, and a commitment to the fundamental "ethico-political values of liberty and equality for all."[17] Disagreement about the interpretation of those values is at the heart of politics. Mouffe does not relegate other commitments to the private (non-political) sphere, nor does she require a particular type of rationality or reasonableness in the political process.

Mouffe's main critique of deliberative conceptions of democracy is that they do not, or not sufficiently, recognize that the relations that structure a society are relations of *power*, and that such a hegemonic order is open to contestation by those whose vision of a different way to structure society has been excluded. Moreover, such contestation will and should involve people's passions. According to Mouffe's analysis, a political landscape from which conflict has largely been removed does not produce a more successful democratic sphere but rather a deflated one, one from which citizens turn away because it does not offer them a compelling political vision and identity with which they identify.

Turning now to Rancière, he argues that the ethico-political value of equality has wrongly been held up as ideal to aspire to. Instead, he argues, equality should be assumed; it should be the premise from which we proceed:

> Equality is not a goal that governments and societies could succeed in reaching. To pose equality as a goal is to hand it over to the pedagogues of progress, who widen endlessly the distance they promise they will abolish. Equality is a presupposition, an initial axiom—or it is nothing.[18]

As I have explained in some more detail elsewhere,[19] "democracy" for Rancière is not a form of government or a state of affairs but the enactment of equality by a group of people who were not considered to be equal. Democracy, on this view, creates a break in the existing order—hence Rancière's own characterization of democracy as "sporadic" and Wolin's characterization of it as "episodic," to which I referred earlier. The "ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions" that order a society at any given moment and which Mouffe calls "politics," Rancière provocatively titles "the police."[20] Politics, for Rancière, does not happen until this police order is disrupted by a dispute about who is included in and excluded from the common sense of the dominant social relations: "Politics is primarily conflict over the existence of a common stage

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[17] *Ibid.*, 121.

[18] Jacques Rancière, "Afterword," *The Philosopher and His Poor*, trans. Andrew Parker, Corinne Oster and John Drury (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 223.

[19] Claudia Ruitenberg, "What if Democracy Really Matters?" *Journal of Educational Controversy* 3, no. 1 (2008), http://www.wce.wwu.edu/Resources/CEP/eJournal/v003n001/a005.shtml (accessed May 25, 2010).

[20] Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 28.

and over the existence and status if those present on it."[21] Rancière calls this conflict *dissensus*, which illustrates that his views of politics are directly opposed to those aiming for consensus.

Mouffe's conception of democracy, in allowing for democratic change to happen within and through the institutions and discourses of politics, is not quite as radical as Rancière's, which rejects this possibility and insists that the political can occur only in the act of redrawing the boundaries of politics.[22] Paulina Tambakaki, a colleague of Mouffe at the Centre for the Study for Democracy at the University of Westminster, argues that "by entangling democracy's refoundation with an episodic politics, Rancière cuts off, or at least does not explore, the channels available to reinvesting in a democratic politics."[23] In other words, Rancière's perspective, in turning away from the channels of existing political processes and institutions, is not only more radical but, arguably, more pessimistic than Mouffe's. Rancière's work can preserve this radical perspective by focusing on accounts of historical political change and refraining from any recommendations or prescriptions for the present or future, but this leaves educators somewhat empty-handed. Mouffe and Rancière agree that disagreement is constitutive of politics but if we are to take this idea seriously, Tambakaki argues,

> we need some idea, or at least indication, of where we might start off. … For what exactly would dissensus and disagreement, if acknowledged, do for politics (today), if we start from the presupposition [of] and in effect acquiesce to its rarity?[24]

I do not want to acquiesce to the rarity of disagreement, even the kind of disagreement that calls into question the fundamental premises of the social order. For this reason I will, in the final section of this paper, in which I discuss the educational implications of the theoretical framework I have outlined, focus more on Mouffe's than on Rancière's perspective.

In spite of their differences Mouffe and Rancière agree that the currently dominant framework of deliberative democracy does not sufficiently recognize the constitutive nature of disagreement. The deliberative conception of democracy and democratic citizenship emphasizes rational deliberation leading to political consensus. For Mouffe and Rancière, however, "consensus does not mean simply the erasure of conflicts for the benefit of common interests. Consensus means erasing the contestatory, conflictual nature of the very givens of common life."[25] In addition, both Mouffe and Rancière recognize the affective nature of political engagement. While most explicitly articulated in Mouffe's work, it is also evident in Rancière's work that disagreement is not a detached exchange of rational arguments but rather a dispute that has emotional force because a fundamental value is being violated. As I stated previously, for Rancière this fundamental value is the equality of everybody and a political disagreement arises when this equality is denied. The American political philosopher Todd May translates this affective investment in Rancière's axiom of equality very well when he writes:

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[21] *Ibid.*, 26-27.

[22] I am indebted to Gert Biesta on this point.

[23] Paulina Tambakaki, "When Does Politics Happen?" *Parallax* 15, no. 3 (2009): 109.

[24] *Ibid.*, 108.

[25] Jacques Rancière, "Introducing Disagreement," trans. Steven Corcoran, *Angelaki* 9, no. 3 (2004): 7.

In political action, the … weaving together of cognitive and affective elements around the presupposition of equality has a name, although that name is rarely reflected upon. It is solidarity. Political solidarity is nothing other than the operation of the presupposition of equality internal to the collective subject of political action.[26]

I now turn to a more in-depth analysis of this affective nature of the political.

The Affective Nature of the Political

Mouffe argues that individuals need to feel affectively attached to collectivities, and both parts of this argument are significant: the identification with collectivities and the affective nature of that identification. I will address these separately, beginning with the need for identification with collectivities. In spite of the emphasis on individual autonomy that has shaped ideas about human flourishing since the Enlightenment, philosophers from Plato to Derrida have agreed that human beings do not thrive as atomistic individuals: they need each other, hence live together in groups. But Mouffe's claim is more specific than that: human beings are not merely dependent on collectivities such as family or nation for their general security and well-being, but they need to be able to *identify* with collectivities (based, for example, on nationality or political ideology) for a sense of self and a motivating sense of direction. Writes Mouffe: "the need for collective identifications will never disappear since it is constitutive of the mode of existence of human beings."[27]

Mouffe's claim about the constitutive nature of identification is a psychoanalytic one. Mouffe's point is not that identifying with collectivities is a good idea because it contributes to a more fully flourishing life, but rather that human beings *need* to identify with collectivities simply because, as human beings, they lack identity in and of themselves. Political theorist Ernesto Laclau explains, "One needs to identify with something because there is an originary and insurmountable lack of identity."[28] Paradoxical as it may sound, what Laclau is getting at is that one needs others in order to "be oneself," in the sense of having an identity. Without being able here to provide a full introduction to psychoanalysis, I should point out that Mouffe's and Laclau's insistence on the centrality of identification is based on the fundamental psychoanalytic insight of the "split subject": a subject that is divided into Ego and Unconscious and that seeks to overcome the gap or lack this leaves:

The idea of the subject as lack cannot be separated from the subject's attempts to cover over this constitutive lack at the level of representation by affirming its positive (symbolic-

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[26] Todd May, "Jacques Rancière and the Ethics of Equality," *SubStance* 36, no. 2 (2007), 33.

[27] Mouffe, *On the Political*, 28.

[28] Ernesto Laclau, "Introduction," in *The Making of Political Identities*, ed. Ernesto Laclau (London: Verso, 1994), 3, cited in Yannis Stavrakakis, "Laclau with Lacan: Comments on the Relation between Discourse Theory and Lacanian Psychoanalysis," in *Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory, Vol. 3: Society Politics, Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Routledge, 2003), 318.

imaginary) identity or, when this fails, through continuous identificatory acts aiming to re-institute an identity.[29]

Lacanian psychoanalysis does not attribute a particular substance or essence to human subjectivity, but rather considers lack "the defining mark of subjectivity."[30] The subject, confronted with its intrinsic lack, constantly seeks "traits of identification" outside of itself with which it can identify and, thus, construct its identity.[31]

Mouffe observes that in many postindustrial societies, and in line with Anthony Giddens' suggestion of "third way" politics, the boundaries between political parties and concomitant "left" and "right" identities have blurred considerably.[32] Both Tony Blair's "New Labour" in the UK and the "purple coalitions" between social democrats and liberals in The Netherlands have been examples of such blurred boundaries. The result has not been a greater engagement of citizens with a more unified political field but rather a disengagement of citizens who no longer discern clear political ideals and imaginaries with which they can identify. The problem is that when politics does not offer opportunities for collective identification, people will seek such identification elsewhere, for example in ethnic, religious, or populist groups. As Mouffe argues, "the lack of 'agonistic channels' for the expression of grievances tends to create the conditions for the emergence of ethnic, religious, and other antagonisms which, as recent events indicate, can take extreme forms and have disastrous consequences."[33] Rancière expresses a similar concern, cautioning that the reduction of political spaces "means opening up another battlefield, it means witnessing the resurgence of a new, radicalized figure of the power of birth and kinship."[34]

Human relations are inherently antagonistic as their collective identifications require the definition of a "we" that, by definition, presupposes a "they" in the sense that one cannot define with whom or what one identifies without defining with whom or what one does *not* identify. Moreover, this collective identification has *affective force*. Since Mouffe uses the concept of "affect" in the way in which it has been developed in psychoanalytic theory, I should explain briefly that affect is *feeling*, but feeling that "arises from within"[35] and is bound up with basic human drives and desires, such as the need for collective identifications that both Mouffe and Laclau identify. Affect, then, can be understood as "the primary sensory modality through which

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[29] Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis, "Lacan and Political Subjectivity: Fantasy and Enjoyment in Psychoanalysis and Political Theory," Conference Proceedings of the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Political Studies Association, http://www.psa.ac.uk/journals/pdf/5/2008/Glynos1.pdf (accessed May 25, 2010), 6-7.

[30] Stavrakakis, "Laclau with Lacan," 317.

[31] *Ibid.*, 7.

[32] See, for example, Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994) and *The Third Way* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998).

[33] Chantal Mouffe, "The Limits of John Rawls's Pluralism," *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 4, no. 2 (2005): 230.

[34] Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Verso, 2006), 95.

[35] Mark Solms, "What is affect?" in *Unconscious Mental Life and Reality*, ed. Richard Ekins (London: J. Karnac Books, 2002), 54.

we perceive the internal (subjective) world of psychic reality… just as vision, hearing, somatic sensation, taste, and smell are primary sensory modalities through which we perceive the external (objective) world of material reality."[36]

The identification with a collectivity is not a decision based on purely rational considerations; people need to feel moved, inspired, affectively compelled by a political identity. In this view, Mouffe aligns herself with sociologists Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper and Francesca Polletta, who write that it is "difficult to imagine … an identity that is purely cognitive yet strongly held. The 'strength' of an identity, even a cognitively vague one, comes from its emotional side."[37]

Mouffe draws on the work of Lacanian psychoanalyst Yannis Stavrakakis to support the idea that identification with a collectivity is affective. Stavrakakis writes that "the problematic of enjoyment helps us answer in a concrete way [that] what is at stake in socio-political identification and identity formation … is not only symbolic coherence and discursive closure but also enjoyment, the jouissance animating human desire."[38] *Jouissance* is the term Lacan uses to refer to the powerful, bodily enjoyment that drives human desire; an obvious example is sexual orgasm, but *jouissance* refers also to the excessive and transgressive joy that can be seen in, for example, the wild celebrations of sports fans after their team's win, or the frenzy of music fans crying and screaming at the sight of their idol.

Everyday, socialized life presents few opportunities for such *jouissance* but, as Stavrakakis writes,
> the fact … that this enjoyment is excised during the process of socialization does not mean that it stops affecting the politics of subjectivity and identification. On the contrary. … [I]t is the imaginary promise of recapturing our lost/impossible enjoyment which provides the fantasy support for many of our political projects and choices.[39]

Slavoj Žižek argues that theorists who seek explanations of political identification and cohesion in purely rational and discursive processes of deliberation and symbolic representation miss the point that cohesion and identification cannot be explained without reference to enjoyment: "The element which holds together a given community cannot be reduced to the point of symbolic identification: the bond linking together its members always implies a shared relationship toward a Thing, toward Enjoyment incarnated."[40] Moreover, ignoring this affective dimension means that the emergence of ethnic, nationalist and xenophobic groups is misunderstood, for one's identification with a group that shares a particular kind of enjoyment—or, at least, the fantasy of

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[36] *Ibid.*, 56.

[37] Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper and Francesca Polletta, *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 9.

[38] Yannis Stavrakakis, "Passions of Identification: Discourse, Enjoyment, and European Identity," in *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance*, eds. David Howarth and Jacob Torfing (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 72.

[39] *Ibid*., 73.

[40] Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 201.

that enjoyment—is, at the same time, the rejection of another group that shares another kind of enjoyment or its fantasy. Provocatively, Žižek asks,

> What are fantasies about the Other's special, excessive enjoyment—about the black's superior sexual potency and appetite, about the Jew's or Japanese's special relationship toward money and work—if not precisely so many ways, for us, to organize our own enjoyment?[41]

The central role of *jouissance* in identification explains why political identities that are constructed rationally and dispassionately lose when alternative identities that do appeal to this dimension of enjoyment and emotional investment are available. In order to identify with a political program or group, that identification must have affective force and provide a motivating enthusiasm. That motivating enthusiasm is generally not galvanized by the democratic procedures that have been emphasized in the deliberative approach to democracy. The denial of the centrality of affect in politics literally leads to dis-affected citizens: "Too much emphasis on consensus and the refusal of confrontation lead to apathy and disaffection with political participation."[42] Passions are mobilized when the fundamental values and commitments that shape the practices, discourses and institutions of a society are at stake. For that reason, Stavrakakis argues that,

> in order to account in a coherent and effective way for identification it is necessary to redirect our attention from the formal to the substantive/affective dimension, from discourse to enjoyment, from a drier to a stickier conception of the politics of subjectivity.[43]

Such a redirection of attention to the "stickier" side of collective identification is important especially because a denial of this "stickiness" does not eliminate but only displaces it. In other words, when an identity in which we are emotionally invested is repressed, for example through a cognitive understanding of the undesirability of this identity, the force of the emotional investment remains. "It implies that the more we repress the affective dimension of political subjectivity and identification …, the more this dimension will seek expression through substitute political formations ('social symptoms')."[44]

This mechanism of repression and displacement explains the surge in Europe of fierce ethnic and nationalist attachments in the face of the "dry," formal and institutionally oriented alternative of a "European identity." As Stavrakakis analyzes, the "European identity" as it has been constructed in the past decades has focused on the common market for a freer flow of people and goods, the streamlining of industry standards, policies and laws, and the convenience of a common currency. Not surprisingly, this identity has failed to generate a real sense of commitment and passion because, as Stavrakakis puts it, "the substance behind the projected image of Europe is missing" and "this lack of substance can clearly be associated with the

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[41] *Ibid.*, 206.
[42] Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism," 16.
[43] Stavrakakis, "Passions of Identification," 75.
[44] *Ibid.*, 79.

libidinal/affective dimension of identification."[45] In the US, a parallel can be seen in the appeal of "Focus on the Family" and other evangelical groups who offer an affective collective identity, the *jouissance* of a celebration of the traditional family, that is for many more compelling than the "drier," more rational appeals to abstract ideas such as tolerance, equality, and civil rights made by groups arguing for the permission of same-sex marriage.

Fostering Democratic Capacity

Based on the preceding analysis, I propose that disagreement ought to be fostered as a democratic capacity, not neutralized or suppressed. In fact, I would consider it a failure of democratic political education if young people learn to avoid conflict or regard it as a breakdown of democracy, as I agree with Mouffe that "a well-functioning democracy calls for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions."[46] So how does one go about fostering such a capacity for disagreement?

In "Educating Political Adversaries" I argued for the development of political literacy, in the sense of the ability to read the political landscape both in its contemporary configuration and its historical genesis.[47] Such literacy also involves a historical understanding of party politics in various contexts and the changing nature of the political left and right. The shifts that have occurred in the meaning of "left" and "right" offer an instructive glimpse into the different social imaginaries that have driven political struggle: from the inception of the terms "left" and "right" in the French revolution and their association with republican (left) and monarchist (right) politics in France, to the more general association of the left with socially progressive and the right with socially conservative policies, to contemporary confusing blends of socially progressive advocates of small government, and socially conservative advocates of "green" politics.

I should explain what I mean by the "social imaginaries" that I just spoke of as driving political struggle. This concept was most famously elaborated by Cornelius Castoriadis[48] as "an enabling but not fully explicable symbolic matrix within which a people imagine and act as world-making collective agents."[49] It is the set of collective meanings and desires that allows a group of people to forge a social order from random togetherness. As both Mouffe and Castoriadis observe, the political order of practices, discourses and institutions is a contingent order, that is to say, it has been wrought by people, and people can change this order in smaller or bigger ways. Castoriadis, who was not only a political theorist and economist but also a psychoanalyst, understands the importance of the affective commitments and attachments involved in social imaginaries. The desire for political change involves an affective engagement with both the current and an alternative social imaginary. This means that the social imaginary

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[45] *Ibid.*, 82.

[46] Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), 104.

[47] Ruitenberg, "Educating Political Adversaries," 278-279.

[48] Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

[49] Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 1.

that shapes the existing social order must be recognized, that a disagreement with this existing social imaginary is perceived, and that an alternative social imaginary can be created. This is a challenge, especially in contemporary postindustrial societies, because citizens have grown used to political attention being paid to democratic *procedures* rather than to the substantive social *values and desires* that inform them. Castoriadis' assessment is that,

> whatever the philosophical window dressing, a purely procedural conception of "democracy" itself originates in the crisis of the imaginary significations that concern the ultimate goals [*finalités*] of collective life and aims at covering over this crisis by dissociating all discussion relative to these goals from the political "form of the regime," and, ultimately, even by eliminating the very idea of such goals.[50]

Castoriadis thus agrees with Mouffe that the desire to eliminate debate and disagreement about what a just society looks like and how a society's defining practices and institutions should be organized, is detrimental to democracy itself.

Castoriadis emphasizes that we *imagine* a form of collective life that seems desirable to us or, conversely, a form of collective life that seems undesirable to us, and that these "imaginary significations" then guide our participation in the political struggles to bring about or prevent that form of collective life. This underscores the role of *fantasy* that Žižek described and I quoted earlier: "What are fantasies about the Other's special, excessive enjoyment … if not precisely so many ways, for us, to organize our own enjoyment?"[51] Glynos and Stavrakakis argue that, while the concept of fantasy has played some role in political theory in the form of utopian thinking, it has generally been undervalued. They argue that fantasy is what links the subject affectively to socio-political reality, and "can serve as a way of trying to give content to the obstacles to and/or direction of political contestation and mobilization."[52] I will return shortly to the role fantasy can play in political education.

Castoriadis argues that "there can be no democratic society without democratic *paideia*."[53] This might be taken as a general statement that there can be no democratic society without democratic education, but it is important here to look at the particular conception of education Castoriadis puts forward with the concept of *paideia*. While the Greek noun *paideia* is generally translated as "education" or "childrearing," Castoriadis uses it to refer specifically to the democratic education that prepares all for an active role in the polity. It

> is not primarily a matter of books and academic credits. First and foremost, it involves becoming conscious that the *polis* is also oneself and that its fate also depends upon one's mind, behaviour, and decisions; in other words, it is participation in political life.[54]

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[50] Cornelius Castoriadis, "Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime," *Constellations* 4, no.1 (1997): 1.

[51] Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative,* 206.

[52] Glynos and Stavrakakis, "Lacan and Political Subjectivity," 10.

[53] Castoriadis, "Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime, 10.

[54] Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy," in *The Castoriadis Reader*, ed. David Ames Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 281.

In other words, the ability to engage with alternative social imaginaries as a way of seeking political change requires not only that one recognize the social imaginary that shapes the existing social order, but also that one become aware of one's own implication in this existing social order, and of this social order in oneself. Furthermore, *paideia* is not limited to schooling but includes all social institutions through which individuals are formed.[55] As a psychoanalyst Castoriadis understands that *paideia* inevitably provokes a tension between the constraints imposed by the social order, and the desires of the individual. As philosopher of education Sharon Todd explains, "What it means to learn, for Castoriadis, is to learn to become an ego, and it is in this process of learning where the subject is both shaped by and yet resists the forces of social circumstance."[56]

Castoriadis' work on the social imaginary and *paideia* suggest a political education that balances an understanding of the constraints of socio-political reality with room for fantasy and desire. Students should gain an understanding of the institutions and discourses of the social order in which they live, but they should also be encouraged to *imagine* other, more desirable forms of collective life. An explicit engagement with students' fantasmatic desires is, of course, an engagement with their current fears and frustrations. For example, a student whose home life is shaped by a parent who is unhappy with her or his job may well imagine a society in which nobody has to do a job they don't like; a student whose reality is dominated by fears of the deportation of a parent without legal immigrant status may well imagine a society in which there are no national borders and therefore no question of the legality of immigration. Asking students to imagine the society in which they would like to live can lead them to be disappointed with or angry at the current order, but this disappointment and anger are signs of affective engagement with an alternative social imaginary, and should not be feared or ruled out of bounds.

In a previous discussion of the education of political emotions I focused on political anger, as I agree with Simon Critchley that "it is often anger that moves the subject to action."[57] I argued that students should "learn to distinguish between emotions on behalf of themselves and emotions on behalf of a political collective, i.e., on behalf of views for the social order" and that "educating the political emotions thus requires the development of a sense of solidarity."[58] Solidarity, as May points out and I quoted earlier in this paper, cannot be based only on a rational decision; it involves affective elements. Based on my psychoanalytic explanation in this paper of the importance of affect in political identification, let me elaborate here on affect in political education.

It is an educational challenge to overcome the discomfort many feel when discussing their substantive commitments with anyone other than close friends and family; discussions will get "heated"—an apt expression that highlights the motivational energy of affective investment—

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[55] David Wallace, "The Otherness of Castoriadis," *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* no. 3 (2000): 112.

[56] Sharon Todd, "'Bringing More than I Contain': Ethics, Curriculum and the Pedagogical Demand for altered Egos," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 33, no. 4 (2001): 432.

[57] Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 130.

[58] Ruitenberg, "Educating Political Adversaries," 276-277.

and the differences between the "us" with whom one agrees and "them" with whom one does not will become more pronounced. One of the beliefs necessary for democratic participation as I have outlined it is, therefore, the belief that political disagreement contributes to, rather than detracts from, a healthy democracy. Those who are averse to, perhaps even fearful of, disagreement and who have a strong desire to preserve or restore harmony and congeniality should learn that disagreement between political adversaries is not a breakdown of social relations but, quite on the contrary, their enactment. Young people should be given opportunities to experience this kind of disagreement and the affective commitments that drive it.

When trying to engage people in something as abstract as a "social imaginary," I would like to propose here an *inductive* approach, based on Simon Critchley's description of "situated universality." We respond, explains Critchley, to concrete situations in which we perceive an injustice, such as a labour strike, an act of police brutality, or the discriminatory treatment of migrant workers.[59] The educational challenge is coming to see that the demand for justice that arises in a particular situation exceeds the particularity of that situation because it violates a more general substantive commitment. An inductive political education, then, would begin not with political theories or the abstract request to "imagine a desirable society" but with discussions of concrete perceptions of injustice.

For example, it was a tragedy that, in December 2008, a 47-year old woman burnt to death when she lit candles in her makeshift shelter under a shopping cart on Davie Street in Vancouver, Canada. It was also a stark reminder of the injustice faced by homeless people whose only choice seems to be the cold street, where they can stay with their few belongings, or a shelter in which their shopping cart is not welcome. To take this tragic event as the point of departure for a discussion of social imaginaries would involve a discussion of broad political values and commitments—to individual liberty, social equality, and individual and collective responsibilities for mental health care and housing. Different from approaches that might focus on the procedural or policy aspects, the emotional responses to this event would be an explicit part of the discussion.

Of course these emotional responses are what make some educators nervous to discuss "charged" events such as the one I described above. When students are asked to respond to a concrete situation of injustice and to imagine a society in which such a situation would not occur, this is not an "innocent" education. "There is," as Todd recognizes, "something profoundly at risk in coming to know, involving renunciations and sacrifices sometimes too great to bear."[60] Students may want to turn away from such situations, because they perceive them as too upsetting, but the educational moment, from the perspective I have outlined, is the discussion about what, in their turning *away* from the injustices in society, they turn *toward*. If identification with a collective is, as Mouffe argues and I endorse, not optional but rather constitutive of human beings, then the identifications that students choose—for example with sports teams, rock bands, ethnic organizations or religious groups—are telling about the *jouissance* they seek. In political education worthy of the name, we have to engage students in these difficult discussions. They

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[59] Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 42-43.
[60] Todd, "'Bringing More Than I Contain,'" 433.

may well reveal how apparently apolitical identifications have, at their core, a desire or fantasy that can also be channeled in political ways.

One important question that remains to be answered is *where* the kind of political education that I have advocated could take place. Although above I have used the term "student," thus suggesting a more or less formal educational context, elsewhere I have expressed my misgivings about institutionalized schooling as an appropriate place for truly democratic education, especially if "democracy" is taken in the disruptive sense that Rancière proposes.[61] Schooling as social institution is part of what Rancière calls "the police," a social order based on assumptions of inequality, and democracy, in the way in which Rancière conceives it, can only be an interruption of that order. I retain misgivings about the formal education offered in schools as a suitable venue to foster the democratic capacity for disagreement. However, and as I stated earlier, I am cautious about accepting Rancière's premise of democracy's sporadic nature, and believe that, in addition to democratic disagreement that breaks into and disrupts the existing order, there is a need for democratic disagreement that makes use of existing institutional channels.

Furthermore, the physical spaces of schools also offer non-formal (extra-curricular) and informal education. There, as well as in community-based organizations, including student unions and nonpartisan political organizations such as the League of Women Voters in the US, opportunities should be created for youth to engage passionately with existing and alternative social imaginaries. While the formal curriculum can include basic knowledge of political processes and institutions, and while a belief in the value of disagreement and the ability to perceive and imagine political imaginaries can be fostered both within and outside of formal education, the key will be to offer youth spaces where they can experience the enjoyment and excitement of political identification. Such opportunities for affective investment will be the linchpin for active political engagement.

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[61] Ruitenberg, "What if Democracy Really Matters?"

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