TWITTEROTOPIA AND THE RISE OF A TWEACHER: TOWARDS A (POST)CRITICAL ONTOLOGY OF #EDUTWITTER, THE TWEACHER SOCIETY, AND A TEACHER WHO TWEETS

by

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Abstract

I am @sputniksteve. This grammatically simple sentence carries a discursively loaded statement that has taken a number of years to formulate. Even then, the formulation of this statement remains incomplete as what constitutes @sputniksteve is fluid, dynamic, and ever-growing. This thesis sets out to explore what it means to be @sputniksteve: a teacher who uses Twitter. It does this in two parts. In the first, it employs tools from Foucault to theorise eduTwitter as a heterotopia that people 'visit' and in which they are transformed. I consider the extent to which tweets may be considered as statements that may be analysed from a Foucauldian perspective, and explore Foucault's notions of the *Author* in relation to twitter identities. In the second, I turn an analytical lens upon the birth and rise of sputniksteve through three key points of development: the first year or so of tweets; my involvement with ResearchED; and the publication of my first book.

I conclude by reflecting upon how participation in the tweacher society could be seen as an ethic of Foucauldian self-writing which could provide a potent improvement upon teacher 'continuing professional development'.

Dedication

To my wife, Mrs Sputnik, for her unfathomable patience.

To my children, for their love and understanding.

To my Twitter buddies, for their support.

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1. Introduction

1.1 I am @sputniksteve

It was in a pub in Birmingham where I first vocalised these words. A group of teachers, with whom I had previously only communicated via the online social media platform Twitter, had arranged a gathering. I entered the large pub with something approaching trepidation; I wasn't at all certain what I should expect, or how I would know which group of people would be these teachers, or how to announce my arrival. Somehow, there was something immediately recognisable in the group occupying a central space; perhaps it was their attire, perhaps it was their oxymoronic vulnerable arrogance, or perhaps it was the fact that they all held smartphones. I approached them nervously, but their warmth of welcome was instantly reassuring.

"Hi", I said; 'I'm sputniksteve'. With this grammatically simple sentence, I offered an introduction that I hoped would at least prompt some recognition from someone. In fact, it yielded a positively encouraging response from several of my new compatriots. I couldn't have known it then, but this moment marked the beginning of a journey that would bring me into encounters with a huge range of influential players within the field of education in England, and that this simple utterance of greeting was to become a significant marker of my own sense of identity and sense of self.

The clause 'I am @sputniksteve' rendered as it is here with certain graphological features, is a loaded statement. When I uttered the words in that Birmingham pub,

I did not verbally articulate the phonemes associated with the symbol /@/.[1] This symbol, whose history dates back to unknown origins, came in to popular usage with the advent of email addresses in the late twentieth century, and a little later with its use to signify an addressee within online community forums.[2] However, for those familiar with online social media platforms, particularly Twitter, the at sign /@/ is instantly recognisable as an identity marker: it is the first character in all Twitter handles. Thus, 'I am @sputniksteve' carries the association with Twitter. It is a unique twitter 'handle'.

What follows the /@/ is the unique nomenclature that I chose at sign-up: sputniksteve. There is a history behind this, one which is nowhere near as intelligent as I would have people believe. My choice of name is explored in chapter 6.

Since that peculiar meeting in the pub, the twitter handle @sputniksteve has gone on to signify a particular identity that has been constructed, defined, and redefined by my participation within the community of teachers who use Twitter.

In the same year that I joined Twitter and created the @sputniksteve identity, I began my doctoral studies. My initial intended study was around a different social media platform, namely Facebook. I was aiming to conduct a quantitative study into the potential benefit of using Facebook as a tool for extended learning outside of the classroom by setting up Facebook groups for school students to discuss topics relating to their studies in my English lessons. However, I began to see the

1 Commonly pronounced as 'at'.
2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/At_sign

potential of Twitter as a tool for continued professional development; a growing online community of practice (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018). Over the following years, I witnessed as the conversations on Twitter began to include members of the schools inspectorate Ofsted – the institution, and the individuals who worked for it. I saw how Ofsted appeared to be being influenced by the work of certain bloggers. I observed how bloggers were referred to in speeches by the secretary of state for education. These developments perhaps reflect the shifting nature of policy networks and governance within what has been seen as a broader neoliberalisation of education (Ball and Junemann, 2012; Ball, 2012a, Ball, 2012b), which will be explored further in 1.3. Furthermore, I saw the emergence of events organised via Twitter that seemed to offer school teachers[3], and others engaged in the field of schooling and education, a level of professional learning and interactional dialogue that had been previously unavailable to them, again perhaps reflecting the neoliberal turn in education.

My observations and experiences of using Twitter coincided with my reading of Michel Foucault and, as I read some of his less well-known texts, I began to see in them potential analytical tools for constructing a critical ontology of my own participation in what I term the tweacher society. For instance, in his ‘Of Other Spaces’ (Foucault, 1986), Foucault’s heterotopia offered a conception of how Twitter operates as an 'other space' that exists both within and without society, a

3 The term ‘teacher’ is a contested one in the discourses of eduTwitter. For some, a ‘teacher’ is someone is employed by a school to teach children. This excludes, for example, lecturers in initial teacher education and consultants. For others, this is unhelpfully divisive with some university lecturers in education feeling very much a part of the teaching community. Since this thesis is written from my own subjective position as a school teacher, the term ‘teacher’ is generally employed with fellow school teachers in mind. However, I do not wish to promote a divisive discourse.

space in which people are transformed. Furthermore, through the lens of heterotopia, it is possible to see Twitter not as a single space, but a space of spaces, with various discursive community spaces arising. In his 'What is an Author' (Foucault, 1991a), I saw an account of the author function that had resonance in the construction of twitter identities. His *Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, 2002) leant a conceptualisation of statements to my reading of tweets. Finally, Foucault's 'Self Writing' (Foucault, 1997a) seemed to offer a prophetic description of the act of blogging and tweeting.

My research activity shifted focus; I had become fascinated by this tweacher society and began to construct a Foucauldian framework for diagnosing its functions. I laboured under the notion that I could observe the discourse of #eduTwitter – a name that I have appropriated for what I see as a specific heterotopia (a term which I explore in chapter 3) that operates as one of many heterotopias within the broader heterotopia of Twitter – from the academic distance of a second twitter account, created for the sole purpose of watching. However, it soon became obvious that I was so immersed in #eduTwitter that any claim to distant objectivity would be a façade, or worse, a scam. As I grappled with the very nature of my doctoral research, reframing and rewording research questions, I realised that my own participation within the tweacher society was forming and re-forming my identity. My classroom practice had altered as a result of things I had learnt; my epistemological, pedagogical, and ontological foundations were shifting; and @sputniksteve was gaining a certain notoriety. Having already read Foucault's *'*Self Writing*'*, the realisation came that my own activity on Twitter was my own self writing – not writing *about* myself, but authoring

myself, writing my own code, as it were.

Through engagement with the tweacher society, I became involved with ResearchED — a network of weekend conferences for teachers interested in developing research informed approaches to teaching. Since 2017, I have spoken at a number of ResearchED (rED) events on a range of topics. Most notably, in 2019 the organiser of rEDBrum asked me to speak about how I use research in my pastoral role as Head of Years 7-9; this talk was the basis of a later blog post that I wrote. After reading that blog post, a publisher contacted me — via Twitter — to ask if I would like to write a book based on the theme of research informed pastoral leadership. My book, *Beyond Wiping Noses* was published in August 2020, and promoted heavily via Twitter.

None of this is likely to have happened without Twitter. None of this would have happened without sputniksteve — the creature to my Frankenstein; the Hyde to my Jekyll; the Batman to my Bruce Wayne. Thus, this self-writing in which I was engaged via Twitter brought an identity into being — that of sputniksteve — that whilst inevitably a digital version of my subjective self — that is Stephen — somehow exists in a space both here and not here, an identity which traverses the digital heterotopia of eduTwitter and the offline world of conferences and teachmeets, which in themselves are heterotopic in nature. When making decisions about the name under which I would publish my book, I flirted with using the sputniksteve name before settling on using my ‘real’ name, my legal name, the name by which I am known offline; my flesh name. Nonetheless, the cover design features the legend @sputniksteve printed beneath my flesh name. This is a physical manifestation of a duality of persona, perhaps. Much like the business

cards that the current school at which I am employed created for me - my name, my work email address, and @sputniksteve given in unison. However, the creation of @sputniksteve did not create some new being, separate from myself. Despite my use of the term ‘birth’ in this thesis, @sputniksteve is not my offspring. There is no dualism here – sputniksteve is me.

I am sputniksteve. But what does that mean?

1.2 Research Question

Having proclaimed that 'I am @sputniksteve”, and established this thesis as a (post)critical ontology of how such a statement could be articulated, it is unsurprising that the research question at the heart of this project is centred upon that articulation:

RQ: What does it mean to say that I am @sputniksteve?

This is a deceptively simple question that actually articulates a problematic emerging from my reading of Foucault’s expression of 'the critical ontology of ourselves' (Foucault, 1997b, p.319). Foucault describes this as 'an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them' (ibid). Thus, this research question establishes the thesis as an act of reflexive self-writing, again in the mould of Foucault (Foucault, 1997a), where the work itself reflects upon the on-going creation and re-creation of the self through enacted subjectivity and authorship (Foucault, 1991a).

In order to begin an account of what ‘a teacher who tweets’ might mean, the

research question firstly demands an account of what Twitter is; more specifically what is meant by the terms employed throughout this thesis: #eduTwitter and the tweacher society. Working towards an answer, I employ Foucault's descriptions of heterotopia as a tool for describing #eduTwitter, whilst defining the tweacher society as a particular group of actors who participate within particular fields of discourse that constitute #eduTwitter. This project explores how #eduTwitter provides the conditions for the on-going creation and re-creation of the self that is produced in practices enabled and constrained by contingent material and cultural circumstance – circumstances that I refer to as the tweacher society. These processes of self-creation are explored in this thesis by employing the tools offered by Foucault's 'Self Writing', 'What is an Author?' and technologies of the self to develop an examination of the ways in which using Twitter as a teacher has enabled me to construct – consciously or otherwise – a version of myself that now straddles the online virtual world of #eduTwitter and the offline world, interacting in ever more blurred ways between my 'work' self, my 'home' self, and my online 'self'. An understanding of the processes of creation of the self necessarily depend upon a probing of the ways in which the self is created in intersubjective processes that again take place in and through the contingent material and cultural circumstances noted above. This view of the self is one in which internal and external are blurred, agency decentred from simply the self to a set of material-discursive relations. These relations include professional peers – other classroom teachers – but also actors from across the field: school leaders, university education lecturers, consultants, government ministers and policy makers, members of the school inspectorate, as well as other interested parties.

The tweacher society can arguably be described as a heterarchy (Miura, n.d.) where authority is distributed amongst the actors and where the voice of the classroom teacher can be heard by the policy makers without the need of any proxy organisation or institution. Conversely, it might well be argued that eduTwitter promotes certain voices over others, depending upon which articulations are closer to policy priorities of those in government (Watson, 2021).

Since eduTwitter discourse is inevitably intertwined with political discourse, this thesis inevitably employs some terminology that should now be defined in relation to its usage within the discourse.

1.3 Defining Terms: Traditionalist, Progressive, Neotraditionalist and Neoliberalism

It is widely held that 'We live in the age of neoliberalism' (Saad-Filho and Johnston, 2004, p.1) which is often recognised as being established as the status quo during the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the USA and the Conservative governments of prime minister Margaret Thatcher in the UK who shared a desire to reduce government spending and promote free market ideals (Steger and Roy, 2010). However, defining neoliberalism is difficult, and claims to its ubiquitous nature are often unsupported (Flew, 2014). It is often claimed that neoliberal ideals continued to be pursued in the UK by the New Labour government of Prime Minister Tony Blair, although he sought a 'Third Way' which perhaps more closely resembled ordoliberalism (Flew, 2014; Costa Vieira, 2021). However, what Tony Blair did establish was the dominance in education and other public sectors of deliverology, which sought to make good on election promises through targets (Gewirtz et al., 2019; Nordstrum et al., 2017). It is this targetised culture which has

become symbolic of potentially oppressive neoliberalism in education (Ball, 2015, 2003), along with the marketisation and near-privatisation of schooling (Junemann and Ball, 2013; Youdell, 2006).

Alongside the rise of neoliberalism as a global political and economic force, it has been claimed that schooling had become dominated by epistemological and pedagogical positions rooted in the romanticism of Rousseau (Horn, 2009) and that sought to create child-centred, skills-based learning that wished to position the teacher as *guide on the side* rather than *sage on the stage*. These ideas were termed *progressive* and placed in contrast to *traditional* teacher-centred instructivist approaches (Peal, 2014).

Recent decades have witnessed a reaction against what has been seen as the progressive hegemony of schooling (Peal, 2014) with a rejection of practices frequently described as myths, such as learning styles, discovery learning, transferrable skills, and the passivity of teacher-led instruction (Christodoulou, 2014; Clark et al., 2012; Kirschner and Clark, 2006; De Bruyckere et al., 2015b, 2015a; Dekker et al., 2012). Advocates of teacher-led instruction, now seemingly bolstered by evidence from cognitive science, have in some cases embraced the term *neotrad*, which originally emerged in relation to eduTwitter as something of a satirical, light-hearted slur, but has now entered the education jargon (for example Bennett, 2018) as being someone who employs teacher-led instruction to deliver a ‘knowledge rich curriculum’ (Quigley, 2019), and whose pedagogy is informed by research evidence mostly derived from cognitive science.

However, the apparent turn to neotraditional pedagogy has been described by some commentators as a return to conservative, or *neoconservative* education

politics, with a reaffirmation of subject disciplinary knowledge (Neumann et al., 2019) and a perceived harder line being espoused in terms of behaviour management and classroom discipline, with Watson (2021) suggesting this reflects a ‘new right populism’ in education (Watson, 2021). Watson identifies a ‘group consisting primarily of teachers and self-identifying as “traditionalists”, “neo-traditionalists” or simply “Trads”’ as appearing on Twitter from around 2011, as well as ‘an opposing progressive group, the “Progs”’ (Watson, 2021, p.306). Watson goes on to suggest that ‘social media-based Trad micropopulists are having an impact on practice, especially in supporting recent traditionally oriented education policy reforms introduced by the Conservative former secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove’ (Watson, 2021, p.306). My work is in agreement with this, albeit from a different perspective which sees these events as representing a discursive turn whereby those at the DfE have begun to take note of what classroom teachers are saying.

In summary, the terms as used in this thesis are defined as follows:

- Neoliberalism: the perceived current political and economic paradigm, with an idealogical drive to reduce the state and to targetise performance in public services. In schooling, it has seen the rise of performance management of teachers, as well as the creation of academy schools operating outside the control of local education authorities.
- ‘Trad’: School teachers and others with an interest in schooling that espouse preference for teacher-led classroom instruction, strict discipline, and domain specific subject curriculum.

- ‘Neotrad’: School teachers and others with an interest in schooling that espouse preference for teacher-led classroom instruction informed by research findings, mostly drawn from cognitive science, and a knowledge-rich domain specific subject curriculum.
- ‘Prog’: School teachers and others with an interest in schooling that espouse more child-centred approaches to pedagogy, discovery learning, and generic skills-based curriculum.

Having presented some of the key political terminology used in this thesis, we now turn to contextualising the project.

1.4 Rise of the tweacher society – Contextualising the Project

In order to contextualise my research project, and to illustrate why teacher use of the social media platform Twitter is a phenomenon worthy of study, I shall attempt to chart the rise of teacher-bloggers for whom I use the noun tweachers; the network that they have formed which I have dubbed the tweacher society; and the discursive online space in which the network operates, #eduTwitter. Through this, I highlight how the network has brought about the beginnings of a discursive shift, where teachers interact with members of the institutions that traditionally controlled their activities – policy makers, ministers, and the inspectorate.

When I began my studies on the EdD in 2011, I was only just beginning to use Twitter, having previously preferred Facebook. Indeed, my initial proposal for a research project was to conduct an empirical study into the use of Facebook groups with classes. Some research has been done in this field, but not in relation to the secondary schooling sector (Lane, 2012).

However, as my own use of Twitter exposed me to new perspectives on pedagogy and ‘evidence-based practice’ in teaching, I began to realise that I was witnessing something interesting – and new – happening in this virtual space: the rise of the *tweacher society.* Some teachers had long been using blogs (an abbreviation of weblogs – a sort of online journal) to express their views, share teaching strategies, and to air their frustrations about teaching. The number of blogs seemed to be increasing, and it was clear that this online space was enabling teachers to find a voice that had not previously been available. Whilst the teaching unions spoke on behalf of teachers, they didn’t always talk about the issues that necessarily most concerned teachers. But, in more recent years, Twitter – often described as a microblogging service in which users compose ‘tweets’ of no more than 280 characters – was enabling the fast exchange of information, opinions and ideas, and enabling teachers to connect and make networks. These began to manifest in the offline world with *teachmeets* – meetings that often happened in pubs where teachers could meet and discuss issues that concerned or interested them.

In 2013, a 'chance discussion' on Twitter (ResearchED, n.d.) between teachers and others interested in education led to Tom Bennett (@tombennet71) launching ResearchED – a conference about research in education that was organised on Twitter by teachers, hosted by teachers and attended by teachers in their spare time. Its speakers included academics and policy makers, as well as classroom teachers and head teachers: "I didn't build researchED,' says Tom, 'it wanted to be built. It built itself. I just ran with it' (ResearchED, n.d.).

This event was so successful that there have since been a number of regional

ResearchED conferences, and some in Sydney and New York. The ResearchED national conference of 2016 was able to boast an impressive list[4] of speakers, none of whom were paid for their attendance as far as I am aware.

The rise of Twitter usage has been rapid. The platform began in 2006; by August 2019 there was a monthly average of 330 million active users (Clement, J. 2019). The rise of educationalists' use of Twitter reflects this broader growth: As at July 2015, the Twitter account of the controversial education blogger Andrew Old, @oldandrewuk, had over 10 thousand followers since joining in 2009, rising to 15.2 thousand followers in February 2017, and 19.6 thousand by September 2020. Andrew Old had gained a notoriety for his blog *Scenes From the Battleground* and for his forthright opinions and direct form of argumentation on Twitter. In 2013, his blog was praised in a speech by then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove (Gove, 2013).

This rapid rise in usage means that academic research into the phenomenon of Twitter usage remains an emerging field; there were few published papers to date in 2012 (Zappavigna, 2012) but an increasing amount of research into the platform in more recent years. Much of this research is content analysis of varying kinds. Very recent work has analysed discourse around COVID-19, particularly in how medical information is being communicated and the language of politics associated with the topic. Some grounded accounts are beginning to emerge, most notably the rather splendid account of abuse received on Twitter by autoethnographers (Campbell, 2017). I take a closer look at digital

4 http://www.researched.org.uk/event/researched-2016-national-conference/

autoethnography in Chapter 2 (2.3.1).

The ramifications for society of the growing usage and influence of Twitter should not be understated or downplayed.

It could be argued that the self-organising nature of teacher activity on Twitter and through blogs reflects a trend in civil movements via online social networks (OSN), from the Occupy movement to revolutionary action in places such as Egypt and Syria. Social actors who, without recognisable *power*, seek out and unite with others to take some form of action. This group forms what Colin Ward called an 'anarchist society' which exists beneath the surface of the general, governed, society and 'operates side by side with, and in spite of, the dominant authoritarian trends of our society' (Ward, 1973). Indeed, headteacher and blogger John Tomsett saw the potential of social media to bring about what he called an 'education spring' (Tomsett, 2013).

The Arab Spring, which began with the Tunisian Revolution of 2010, was topical when I began my explorations into the impact and power of social media. However, in the intervening years, we've seen events closer to home which have demonstrated the ability of social media, and specifically Twitter, to be utilised to galvanise those who feel unrepresented in the discourse of mainstream media and politics. The British EU membership referendum, for example, delivered what many saw as a surprise result, but reflected the ability of Twitter to convey simple political messages that may have influenced the outcome of that referendum: 'First, the main Leave camp message was much more intuitive and straightforward, which is particularly important for social media campaigning. Second, their message was also highly emotionally charged, which facilitated the

viral spread of Leave ideas' (Polonski, 2016). Emotional appeals to notions of sovereignty, freedom and an end to mass immigration won out over complex, rational economic arguments in much the same way that the US presidential election played out. Interestingly, there have been some bloggers and, more recently, academics who have attempted to associate the rise in certain tweacher voices with the rise of right-wing populism in the world of politics (Watson 2020), with some commentators claiming that those who espouse what have been termed traditionalist ideas about education are akin to UKIP, fascists and Nazis. In a now deleted series of tweets, one headteacher of an international school repeatedly accused me of fascism because I questioned his promotion of must/should/could types of differentiated classroom instruction – instruction which is planned to essentially have three levels of activity within one lesson to enable or appeal to students of low, middle or higher prior attainment within one class. Such approaches to instruction have often been described as ‘progressive’, or student-centred, in contrast to more ‘traditionalist’, or teacher-centred, approaches.

These kinds of debates on eduTwitter often seem to see discourse disperse along the poles of an age-old debate in education: the debate between *progressive* and *traditionalist* pedagogy and ideals. This reflects, perhaps, a broader politicisation of emotion, where emotions themselves can become essentially weaponised, certainly manipulated and exploited (Ahmed, 2004).

In more recent years, the power of Twitter to give voice to the already powerful has been clearly seen in the tweets of Donald Trump — the former president of the United States of America. He had positioned himself as speaking out against a sea of hostile press, labelling them fake news. Such manipulation of social media

is suggested by the revelations of Cambridge Analytica, and potential Russian involvement in the Brexit vote and US election of 2016. Furthermore, Twitter has arguably enabled the further intensifying of datafication (Southerton, 2020). Thus, Twitter is as much at risk of being used for ill as it is for good. The platform offers a tool of power through discourse, but a power which is not so much done to one group of people by another, but used, re-used and used again. Of course, towards the end of Trump's presidency, cries of censorship arose from his supporters as Twitter began flagging his tweets as untrue, before finally banning him from the platform. Twitter is, after all, a commercial entity and not, it seems, quite the wild-west of liberal freedom of speech that some had perhaps hoped for. Inevitably, the sheriffs arrived.

As a commercial platform, Twitter is of course interested in the production of content and data, both of which its users create freely. However, not all users experience Twitter in the same way, with what Clucas describes as 'vitriol' posing threats to true free speech on social media (Clucas, 2020). Furthermore, our experience of Twitter is a curated one – we choose to follow certain accounts, we may choose to block or mute others, and our accounts may be blocked or muted by others (Merten, 2020).

1.4.1 The Beginning of the Education Spring

Since the expected practice of school teachers is greatly affected by education policy and by the inspectorate, it is worth seeking to identify a tipping point in relation to that focus – namely, the rise of the tweacher society and its relationship with policy makers and the schools inspectorate.

It is possible, I believe, to locate a discursive turn; a point at which the voices speaking against a perceived hegemony of progressive pedagogical ideas were clearly heard and appeared to begin influencing education policy and the practices of the inspectorate. It began with the UK General Election of 2010, which saw the Conservative party form a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats, and the appointment of Michael Gove to the position of Secretary of State for Education. The influence of teacher-bloggers was seen in 2013, when Gove mentioned some of them in a speech he gave to the National College for Teaching and Leadership: 'I'm a great fan of Andrew Old, whose brilliant blog Scenes from the Battleground provides one of the most insightful commentaries on the current and future curriculum that I've ever read' and 'I also hugely enjoy the always provocative work of Tom Bennett, the Behaviour Guru, who champions teachers at every turn while challenging them to up their game' (Gove, 2013). Of course, it could reasonably be argued that Gove's choice of bloggers reflected his own ideological position, and that the subsequent engagement of political figures with the tweacher society is grounded in its own political agenda. Indeed, Gove did not choose to reference anyone blogging in favour of group-work, discovery learning, or any other strategies which might be deemed progressive teaching. Instead, he chose to characterise such teachers and educationalists as constituting a 'blob' and labelling them 'enemies of promise' (Gove, 2013a), clearly marking out the discursive territory he wished to traverse. Gove may well have had primarily left-wing educationalists in his sights with this comment, but it would be wrong to assume that the trad/prog dichotomy neatly aligns with right/left-wing politics. Indeed, Andrew Old was at the time a vocal Labour supporter and campaigner,

and the #leftytrad hashtag has been employed by tweachers to claim their left-wing politics but trad or neotrad pedagogy, with some tweachers writing blogs on the topic (Boxer, 2017; Theobald, 2015; Brunskill, 2016).

A possibly more significant event occurred later that year. In December 2013, the schools inspectorate, Ofsted, announced significant changes to its approach to lesson observations.

Andrew Old (@oldandrewuk), the teacher blogger so admired by Michael Gove, called this a 'Christmas miracle' (Old, 2013). Ofsted had published a new handbook and guidance for inspectors that appeared to overturn decades of prescription over how teachers should teach. The guidance document states that 'inspectors must not give the impression that Ofsted favours a particular teaching style' (Ofsted, 2014, p18). It goes on to say that inspectors 'should not criticise teacher talk for being overlong or bemoan a lack of opportunity for different activities in lessons unless there is unequivocal evidence that this is slowing learning over time (p18).

The new Ofsted handbook and guidance met with an enthusiastic but interesting response on #eduTwitter from the tweacher society. Andrew Old has written a number of blog posts about how Ofsted operates, criticising many of its inspection reports for promoting what he calls ‘progressive’ teaching methods. Old’s response to the new guidance was particularly interesting: 'This isn’t even half-hearted or ambiguous. This is exactly what I wanted to see. Thank you, OFSTED' (Old, 2013).

The publication of the new Ofsted Handbook, and various 'mythbusting'

documents released since, have continued to feature significantly in the on-going tweets from senior figures within Ofsted. This engagement is particularly illustrated in a blog post by David Didau, detailing an exchange he had with senior Ofsted figure Sean Harford (Didau, 2015).

The potential influence of a small number of teacher-bloggers was also highlighted in February 2014 when they were invited to a meeting at the offices of Ofsted, to meet with its then National Director of Schools, Mike Cladingbowl. The meeting was subsequently documented by those bloggers who attended (Bennett, 2014; Didau, 2014b; Lewington, 2014). Then, in October 2014, another meeting took place; this time nine 'Twitter teachers' were invited into the offices of Ofsted to discuss a range of points around the topic of inspection (Cazzypot, 2014). Such invitations were not open to the whole of the tweacher society, however, and certainly not open to all schoolteachers. Thus, it might well be argued that these invitations represent a very selective approach to discussions. Upon what criteria were these teacher-bloggers selected?

Both Ofsted and the Department for Education (DfE) are actively using the social media platform Twitter to engage with teachers and the public. Both organisations wish to use Twitter to communicate their policies effectively, but also as a vehicle to listen to teachers. On Twitter, there are regular discussions around key topics using hashtags [hyperlinked threads of conversation] such as #SLTchat[5], or #ukedchat. Both the DfE and Ofsted Twitter identities contribute to these discussions and respond to the contributions made by others; indeed, the DfE has

[5] SLT: Senior Leadership Team

hosted #SLTChat (a discussion of topics for school Senior Leadership Teams), and in December 2014 the then Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, hosted it.

Here, then, is evidence of dialogue between tweachers and the institutions that both prescribe what teachers should be doing and police their activities. Such dialogue could be seen as an indication that the power relationship is beginning to shift, if it hasn't already done so, or that new networks of influence have emerged – either organically or by design.

In addition, the potential of Twitter to enable teachers to take ownership of their own professional development was explored by Emma Hardy:

> 'The merits of social media are difficult to question, including the access it provides to a group of supportive teachers and worldwide learning networks, the space and freedom it gives to reflect and discuss anonymously if needed, and the opportunity it presents to share ideas by blogging and meet like-minded teachers face to face, to gain experience of presenting at TeachMeets and to have powerful and influential knowledge direct from the policy makers.'
>
> (Hardy, 2014:274-275)

The influence of what could be described as a social movement can also be seen in the recent rise the Chartered College of Teaching.[6] Not all tweachers have been enthusiastic about this emergent body, with some articulating some serious

6 https://chartered.college

reservations about it (Didau, 2016a; Old, 2016c), but there has generally been a positive reaction to the initial proposals to establish this college, and in its work since. It provides members with access to research journals, has a programme of professional development, and runs conferences. This body aims to give 'a voice to teachers, enabling them to be the very best they can be', (Hodge, n.d.).

With the rise of events and organisations such as ResearchED, the impact of the tweacher society upon policy makers, and the potential for professional development, it is clear that the growth of the tweacher has ramifications for the teaching profession despite the tweacher society representing a minority of the general teaching workforce.

1.4.2 Social Media and Professional Identity

Teachers have a choice to make when engaging with online social media platforms: to do so 'as an individual (personally), or as a teacher (professionally)' (Fox and Bird, 2017, p.648). Of course, there is overlap between these, with most teachers who use Twitter presenting both personal and professional aspects to varying degrees, with Twitter personas presenting a blend of personal and professional identity positions (Fox and Bird, 2017); Teacher identity is multifaceted and dialogic (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011), formed through various discursive encounters, to produce discursively constructed subjects (Youdell, 2006).

However, once committed to presenting a professional identity, teachers are subject to a set of expectations about what that means in terms of permissible statements. Members of other professions have faced professional misconduct

judgements following inappropriate social media output (McKinney, 2019; Hussain, 2021; Aguilar, 2021), and teachers have been known to lose their jobs following controversial or inappropriate statements (Fox and Bird, 2017). It is not unusual to see participants in #eduTwitter disagreements invoke the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2013) and threaten to contact the employer of their interlocuter.

So, whilst social media such as Twitter might afford teachers an increased sense of autonomy, they may also feel constrained by the public facing nature of such platforms, and a sense that their profiles may be monitored. School policies which often seek to dictate or limit teacher activities outside of the school – to uphold professional standards – 'likely also limit educators' expressions and agency on social media' (Carpenter et al., 2019, p.3). Such persistent visibility can inhibit free expression and interaction (Hampton, 2016). Carpenter et al (2019) found that US teachers were more likely to tweet about their family role than about their political or religious affiliations, 'and/or that their family role was relatively more acceptable to share' (p.8). However, the data they selected was limited to those teachers who identified an employing school in their Twitter biographical statement; teachers who do not do this, or who choose to tweet anonymously might not feel quite so inhibited.

School teachers are not alone in experiencing tensions between personal and professional personas on Twitter and other social media; for example, the field of marketing sees 'blurring boundaries between personal and professional social media use' (Sihi and Lawson, 2018, p.38), whilst medicine has seen increasing concerns over professional conduct online leading to specific training on

appropriate social media use (Gomes et al., 2017; O'Regan et al., 2018).

The topic of teacher identity is explored in more depth in Chapter 4.

1.5 So What?

Teacher professional identity is intertwined with professional autonomy and an expectation that teachers will participate in 'professional development' (Department for Education, 2013, p.13). However, conceptualisations of teachers' continued professional development (CPD) are not uncontested. With the perceived growth of neoliberalism into public services, teachers have been burdened with the managerialism of target culture and competitive performativity and CPD has not escaped this (Hardy, 2012; Ball, 2003; 2010).

There seems to be a general feeling within the teaching community that the quality and provision of CPD for teachers is below par. In a poll I ran on Twitter in 2018, 37% of respondents described it as unsatisfactory, whilst 35% felt the CPD they had received was satisfactory (sputniksteve, 2018b).

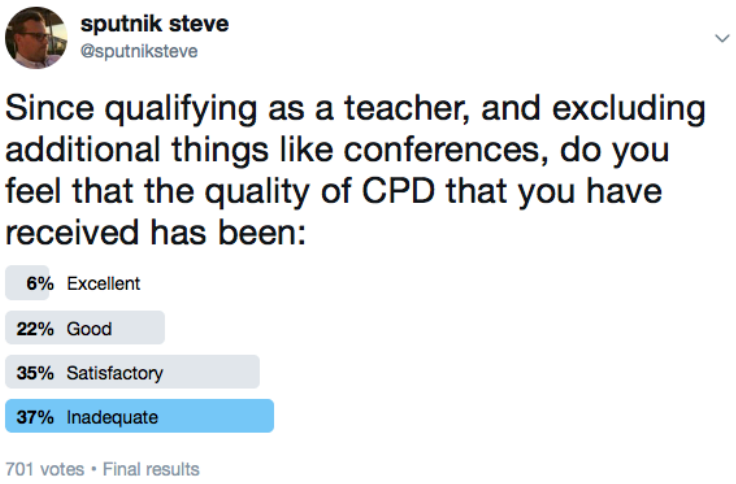


Figure 1.1: Twitter Poll Results @sputniksteve (2018b)

On reflection, the wording of this poll was probably too close to the language of Ofsted gradings, and in the field of schooling the term 'satisfactory' ultimately pejorated to mean 'not good enough' – so much so that Ofsted tellingly dropped the term in favour of 'requires improvement' (Coughlan, 2012). However, whilst limited in scope, the results of my poll perhaps reflect findings elsewhere about the variable, and often poor quality, nature of teacher CPD (Cordingley et al., 2015). This is nothing new; Hardy (2012) points to several examples in the literature of criticisms of teacher professional development in the UK, America, Australia and the Netherlands. There is a general picture that the ‘professional development currently available to teachers is woefully inadequate’ (Borko, 2004 cited in Hardy, 2012). Criticisms of teacher professional development include the nature of the content, the style of delivery, and the lack of long-term change which it brings about. Often, CPD is delivered in lecture or seminar style sessions, or group activities, from which teachers ultimately walk away and return to their classroom practice just as it was before. Ultimately, teacher CPD is seen as instrumentalist, managerial and administrative, driven by a neoliberal culture of targets (Hardy, 2014; Ball, 2010).

Concerns that the variable quality of teacher CPD might be having a detrimental effect on teacher retention, and that longer-term teacher CPD was not of good quality, were addressed through a DfE consultation in 2017 with a DfE response in 2018 (DfE, 2018). This response included plans for an extended induction period for newly qualified teachers (NQT) to two years from September 2019, creating a badge scheme for CPD providers, and offering sabbaticals for established teachers. The establishment of the Chartered College of Teaching (CCT) was

presented as a significant step in the development of teacher CPD and increasing the status of teaching as a profession. In order to qualify for fellowship of the CCT, teachers must first be nominated by a peer and then demonstrate a continuing commitment to professional development as well as having made a 'significant contribution to the teaching profession'.[7] Furthermore, the CCT offers teachers the opportunity to study for its chartered teacher status programme, earning the post-nominal CTeach. In July 2019, the DfE convened an advisory group to develop new 'National Professional Qualifications' for teachers, to be in place for 2020/2021 (DfE, 2019).

These developments are emerging following the rise of the tweacher society that has already established itself as a community of practitioners sharing their expertise and their learning through online discussions and at events such as ResearchED conferences and BrewED teachmeets. Where teacher CPD was once in the hands of local education authorities (LEAs) through such initiatives as the National Literacy Strategy, a plethora of opportunities for teacher professional development and growth has bloomed. This might be seen as the liberalisation of teacher CPD, where individual teachers choose to attend whichever events may be of interest to them, attending in their own time in the evenings or weekends and paying out of their own pocket for tickets. Of course, some schools are funding their teachers to attend such events as senior leaders recognise the potential benefits to the school of informed and engaged teachers bringing their learning into their own classroom practice. For some, this could be perceived as a

7 https://chartered.college/fellowship-eligibility

freeing-up or democratisation of the teacher CPD space – an antidote to the top-down, prescriptive authoritarianism which resulted in the prevalence of bad, ‘progressive’ pedagogy (Peal, 2014), enforced via university education departments and LEAs – 'the Blob' and 'enemies of promise' (Gove, 2013b). Alternatively, what has emerged through ResearchED and similar conferences might be seen as a neoliberal move, where teachers are generating the content for free, but the organisers are potentially profiting. Indeed, resources, ideas and other content shared freely on eduTwitter can be repackaged in books and other paid-for resources by crafty collectors of ideas. The freely available Rosenshine’s ‘Principles of Instruction’ (Rosenshine, 2012) has been repackaged by a number of writers and consultants – including myself, having been invited to write for the Chartered College of Teaching on the application of Rosenshine in the teaching of English.

The free production of resources and ideas on eduTwitter reflects the broader trend on Twitter where users generate information in what has been seen as a ‘mutation’ of neoliberalism towards ‘info-liberalism’ (Catlaw and Sandberg, 2014, 2018) where ‘Active citizenship is conceived in terms of ongoing, effective production and generation of data’ (Catlaw and Sandberg, 2018, p.7).

For some, what is emerging in the discourses of this new CPD, and also in DfE policy and in the new inspection framework of the inspectorate, is a return to an authoritarian, didactic instructionism wearing the emperor’s new clothes of cognitive load theory (CLT) and ‘knowledge rich’ curriculum, which according to BERA is 'unfit for purpose' (Manyukhina and Wyse, 2019).

The previous paragraph reflects one of the biggest on-going debates within the

tweacher society: progressive versus traditionalist teaching. For some, like Andrew Old, this is an important debate (Old, 2016). For others, the debate is stale and the teaching community needs to move on from it (see, for example, Robinson, 2013; Andrews, 2017), or even that the debate as it manifests on Twitter is 'nasty' (Bispham, 2018). There is, of course, much more to the various discourses that occur around education, schooling, teaching and so on on #eduTwitter than this paradigmatic tussle, although some might argue that any issue can be mapped onto a progressive vs traditionalist axis. And whilst this grand narrative might be precisely the type of thing that Foucault would warn against, it is nevertheless worth us – as teachers – contemplating these issues in an attempt to locate ourselves in relation to whatever ideas and claims we may encounter. Where does one stand on the great debates: phonics; ‘zero tolerance’ and ‘no excuses’; silent corridors; exclusions; Ofsted’s *Bold Beginnings* document (Ofsted, 2017) and inspection frameworks; the purposes and nature of curriculum design; direct instruction and (capital letter) Direct Instruction; research informed practice; academies and free schools; and myriad other topics? And how does one navigate the often-tempestuous seas and successfully surf the waves of these discursive waters?

Many of the ideas around teacher CPD are bound up with notions of measurability, often referred to as ‘impact’ or ‘outcomes’. Indeed, the DfE ‘Standard for teachers’ professional development’ document states as its first ‘should’ statement that 'Professional development should have a focus on improving and evaluating pupil outcomes' (DfE, 2016, p.6). This reflects a focus on ‘pupil outcomes’ as the purpose of schooling, where ‘outcomes’ essentially means

examination results. This is perhaps something of an instrumentalist view, and one which it could be argued is echoed in the ‘what works’ type rhetoric of the drive for research informed practice; indeed 'working out what works' was for a while the slogan for ResearchED. The CCT offers accreditation through its tiers of membership and its CTeach programme. There is a danger that such an instrumentalist approach to teacher CPD, measurable in student outcomes, could threaten to undermine genuine teacher autonomy and the 'frequently expressed emancipatory intent of teacher educators' (Zeichner, 2008). It could also be argued that this approach mirrors what has been described as the neoliberal move to measure impact as seen in universities (Ball, 2015). It is therefore important, in my view, to go beyond output focused teacher CPD, abandon it even, and develop an ethos of personal growth as worthy of itself, and that teacher reflection can be a powerful tool for the fostering of the self and of a teacher identity. This is different to some current conceptions of CPD which operate as managerialist, neoliberal attempts to quantify teacher practice – and to ‘improve’ it. The term ‘professional development’ will always carry with it associations of ‘performance management’. In later chapters, I give a detailed exposition of Foucault’s ‘Self Writing’ and suggest that participation in the tweacher society – by tweeting and blogging and engaging in the various discourses of eduTwitter – can be conceived of as an act of Foucauldian self-writing; that yes, it constitutes an effective vehicle for teachers to be reflective practitioners, but more than this: it constitutes an effective vehicle for teachers to perform an ongoing act of becoming and *re*becoming, meaning that new and unforeseen possibilities might emerge.

Having now been a member of the tweacher society for the best part of a decade,

and having my own epistemological, ontological, and pedagogical beliefs challenged, and ultimately shifted, I believe that #eduTwitter is a furtive space for teachers' personal growth and teacher reflection.

This research project offers forward a call for teachers to take ownership of their professional and extraprofessional growth, via engagement with the tweacher society, that utilises Foucault's technologies of the self; specifically, that tweeting about teaching is an act of Foucauldian self-writing (Foucault, 1997a). I seek to encourage teachers and school leaders to engage deliberately and knowingly with the process that I present here; to employ self writing as a tool for professional and personal growth by becoming members of the tweacher society.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

Following the introduction and methodology, this thesis operates in two main parts.

Part One gives a Foucauldian portrait of the digital landscape of #eduTwitter, presenting it as a heterotopia where actors are transformed through their encounters with, and usages of, statements within discursive fields. #eduTwitter operates as a heterotopia within which subjects are constituted through acts of self writing as statements are produced, shared, and reproduced.

Part Two forms the autoethnographic (post)critical ontology of the birth and rise of sputniksteve and the interplay between the author function of sputniksteve and the subject Stephen. I delve into the archive of statements that form sputniksteve through analysis of a number of early tweets, contemplating how they reflect changes in epistemology and ontology of the subject Stephen, reflecting upon

developments and shifts in my pedagogical, ideological, and personal positioning, views and beliefs. I explore the development of self through key encounters with #eduTwitter and the tweacher society as significant: the birth of sputniksteve as a Twitter identity; the involvement of sputniksteve with ResearchED; and the writing and publication of my first book.

1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the nature of my project as a (post)critical ontology of eduTwitter, the tweacher society, and of myself as @sputniksteve. I have presented my research question and given a contextual account of the tweacher society. I have presented what I see as being the rise of the tweacher society and its relationship with those in government and with the inspectorate, Ofsted. I have shown how this relationship could be seen as problematic if the voices gaining traction are only those which align with government ideology and how such a relationship could therefore act against the potential for the tweacher society to represent a genuine flattening of the discourse. However, I have also argued that eduTwitter allows and enables open discourse between those in power and those in the classroom.

I have argued that eduTwitter and the tweacher society offer tools for personal and professional growth that go beyond the limited offer of most school-based CPD available to schoolteachers.

An account has also been given of the key terminology employed throughout the thesis in relation to neoliberalism, and progressive and traditionalist pedagogies.

In Chapter 2, I present the methodological standpoint of this project, navigating a

course between autoethnography and critical ontology. I also reflect on the process of data collection and the ethical considerations of the project.

2. Methodology

2.1 Introduction

Having proclaimed in the title that this thesis is working towards a '(post)critical ontology of a teacher who tweets', it is worth spending some time thinking through how I have come to a working definition of what I mean by (post)critical ontology, and how in my project this intersects with the methodological positioning of autoethnography. Clearly, the term 'critical ontology' comes from Foucault (Foucault, 1997b) upon whose work I draw heavily to construct a discourse analysis of how #eduTwitter operates as a heterotopic space. The research question — What does it mean to say that I am @sputniksteve? — articulates a framing of the discursive contingencies within which sputniksteve is enacted, performed, and continually recreated through discursive practices. The tools that I employ are those of Foucauldian discourse analysis, and Part One of this thesis gives an account of my framing of #eduTwitter as a heterotopia. I argue that #eduTwitter is a heterotopic site of transformation in which participants conduct acts of self-writing through the articulation, consumption, and re-articulation of statements through tweets. I contemplate how a reading of Foucault's author function provides a lens for viewing the relationship between the enacted, performative aspect of a twitter identity and the subject behind it. This should not be seen as a dualism, but rather as the multiple identities that a subject may present in different contexts; I explore this in Chapter 4.

The thesis is a reflection of my participation in what I have termed the tweacher society, making use of the digital heterotopic space that has been dubbed

#eduTwitter. I suggest that this participation could be conceived of as an act of Foucauldian self-writing, and this thesis – which employs autoethnography – is similarly an act of self-writing (Freeman, 2015).

Part Two of the thesis gives an autoethnographic account of my participation in the tweacher society, my own subjectivisation by that encounter, and the construction of a self as enacted via #eduTwitter and how that has manifested in the offline world, culminating in the publication in 2020 of my first book which bears on its cover two names.

Some may seek to highlight the distinct differences between Foucauldian critical ontology of the self and autoethnography (see, for example, Meyer, 2011); however, with its emphasis on 'critical reflexivity' (Hughes and Pennington, 2017) and drawing upon critical autoethnography (Boylorn and Orbe, 2014a; Pennington and Brock, 2012) it is my intention to position this project at the intersection, or nexus point where these methodological positions overlap. However, I also query the potential cynicism of the critical and, following Hodgson, Vlieghe and Zamojski (Hodgson et al., 2017, 2018) look towards the hopefulness of their 'post-critical' pedagogy.

In this chapter, I give consideration to the methodological approaches adopted by this project and some of the difficulties that arise from it. I give some account of discourse, autoethnography and its relationship with critical ontology of the self, and post-critical pedagogy. I then consider issues around data collection and the ethical complications that arise.

2.2 Discourse

Discussions of ‘discourse’ often attribute the term, and the origins of discourse studies or analysis, to Foucault, to the extent that it has become an assumption within research work where no references to sources are identified (Sawyer, 2002). However, as Sawyer cautions, this is not only a false attribution – neither the term nor the concept began with Foucault – it betrays a fundamental misreading of Foucault and his project/s. Sawyer points out that many researchers make reference to the later work of Foucault as sources for their usage of ‘discourse’, when after *Archaeology of Knowledge* (AK) he moved away from ‘discourse’ to focus on 'what he [Foucault] always referred to as non-discursive practices' (Sawyer, 2002, p.440). Indeed, Sawyer comments that 'Before AK, Foucault did not use the term ‘discourse’ as an analytic concept; and after AK, Foucault’s avoidance of the term is remarkable' (Sawyer, 2002, p.436). Furthermore, it has been suggested that *Archaeology of Knowledge*, and thus any discussion within it about ‘discourse’, 'became obsolete soon after it was published' because 'as soon as Foucault resumed his substantive historical work, his new researches prompted him to rework his methods and his concepts once again, thereby rendering The Archaeology redundant' (Garland, 2014, p.366).

Sawyer goes on to contextualise Foucault’s ‘discourse’ within the French structuralist movement showing how, despite Foucault’s insistence at not being a structuralist, 'Nonetheless, his approach to the analysis of discursive practice has undeniably structuralist elements' (Sawyer, 2002, p.440). Foucault’s use of the term ‘discourse’, according to Sawyer, is often at odds with those researchers who use his tools. So, how does Foucault use it? What is Foucauldian discourse?

There is no clear and precise definition of ‘discourse’ offered by Foucault. In *Archaeology of Knowledge,* Foucault uses the terms ‘discourse’, ‘discursive practice’ and ‘discursive formation’, observing that his own use of the term ‘discourse’ has 'in fact added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general domain of statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements', before embarking on his definition and description of *statements* (Foucault, 2002, p.90). Foucault later decides that 'the term discourse can be defined as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation' (Foucault, 2002, p.121). It is the statement, then, that lies at the heart of Foucault’s discourse.

2.3 Autoethnography

According to Adams et al, autoethnography ‘uses a researcher’s personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences’ (Adams et al., 2014, p.1) and uses ‘deep and careful self-reflection – typically referred to as “reflexivity” – to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society’ (p.2). Reed-Danahay describes it at as ‘a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context’ (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p.9).

The term ‘autoethnography’ first emerged in the 1970s and the concept gained traction in the 1980s as scholars became ‘increasingly troubled by social science's ontological, epistemological, and axiological limitations’ (Ellis et al., 2011) and ‘began to consider what social sciences would become if they were closer to literature than to physics, if they proffered stories rather than theories’ (ibid).

Autoethnography seeks to place subjective experience at the centre of research, rather than seeking to deny its presence. Autoethnography is sceptical toward ‘positivist-informed “master” or “grand” narratives, which claim objectivity, authority and researcher neutrality in the study of social and cultural life’ (Grant et al., 2013, p.3). Often, such work is, 'explicitly or implicitly … in pursuit of a social justice agenda, aiming for the reduction of the oppression of individuals and groups within broader socio-political structures’ with the aim to ‘positively impact on and change the world’ (Grant et al., 2013, p.4).

Autoethnography is 'oftentimes serendipitous, occurring when we are going about our everyday lives' (Boylorn and Orbe, 2014b, p.18), and this thesis arises out of my own reflexive thinking about my usage of Twitter. It is only with this post-hoc reflection that I can make sense of the experience of becoming sputniksteve; an experience which is not (and never can be) complete, but is rather on-going and continuous.

However, autoethnography is not an uncontested methodology; it has been dismissed as a self-indulgent exercise in ‘navel-gazing’ (Freeman, 2015; Holman Jones et al., 2016), as 'mesearch' (Pickles, 2017), as 'narcissistic … substitution for research' (Delamont, 2009, p.51). Elaine Campbell reports that, having conducted a Twitter search for the term ‘autoethnography’, she found a tweet claiming that autoethnographers are ‘self-obsessed c**ts' (Campbell, 2017). These accusations of narcissism can be understood as a concern over the centring of the researcher as the subject of the research. However, this centring of the researcher is an essential element of autoethnography, which is a 'reflexive means by which the researcher-practitioner consciously embeds himself or herself amidst theory

and practice, and by way of intimate autobiographic account, explicates a phenomenon under investigation or intervention' (Mcilveen, 2008, p.13). Autoethnography can be described as 'using your own experiences to garner insights into the larger culture or subculture of which you are a part' (Patton, 2002, p.86) which 'positions the autoethnographer as a researcher who utilizes lived experience as a means to investigate a community from within the role of full-fledged membership' (Au, 2014, p.7).

This centring of the researcher is, perhaps, a recognition that the researcher is always present, and that 'the studied world can be captured only from the perspective of the researcher' (Wall, 2006, p.148). This is especially so when studying social and cultural phenomena, where the autoethnographer is working with 'insider knowledge' that give 'thick descriptions' of 'cultural experience' (Holman Jones et al., 2016, p.33). Having recognised myself as a member of the community that I initially aimed to study – the tweacher society – it is clear that I am working with insider knowledge, but that such knowledge must be mediated via my own perspective and my own experience. This inevitably could draw accusations of narcissism, given the self-focused nature of my analysis. However, it would be disingenuous to present an analysis of the tweacher society as some outside observer. Rather, it is necessary to explore how my own subjectivation occurs, how sputniksteve is a 'discursively constituted subject' (Youdell, 2006, p.41). Understanding one's own subjectivation is not narcissistic navel-gazing; it is an ontological quest to trace the limits placed upon oneself and to experiment with going beyond them (Foucault, 1997b). Further, developing an 'autoethnographic sensibility … means recognizing that clear-cut distinctions among researchers,

research subjects and the objects of research are illusory, and that what we call the research field occupies a space between these overlapping categories' (Butz and Besio, 2009).

Autoethnography also offers a potentially paradoxical counterpoint to 'traditional research [that] often adheres to hegemonically masculine traits, particularly objectivity, control, and predictability' (Holman Jones et al., 2016, p.35). I describe this as potentially paradoxical because of my association with ResearchED and my enthusiasm for research- and evidence-informed classroom practice. Such pedagogy includes practices informed by cognitive load theory (CLT), such as retrieval practice and Rosenshine's principles of instruction (Rosenshine, 2012). However, I recognise a need within the discourses of research informed practice for those 'traits, such as subjectivity, uncertainty, and emotions, [which] are often gendered as feminine and, consequently, considered inadequate, insufficient, and irrational' (Holman Jones et al., 2016, p.35) and align with those researchers who 'have eschewed the assumptions and practices of traditional qualitative approaches' (Short et al., 2013, p.4) in order to develop a personal, reflexive account of my experience. I had originally created a second twitter account, @tweachertalk, with the intention of adopting the stance of an observer. However, I soon realised that this was ultimately disingenuous; I am utterly embedded within the tweacher community and, along with eschewing the assumptions mentioned by Short et al, follow their rejection of the 'façade of objectivity, the decontextualising of research participant and the search for single truths', although as Part 1 might suggest, I struggle with rejecting 'grand theorising"! (Short et al., 2013, p.4)

2.3.1 Digital Autoethnography

The rapid increase and prevalence of online spaces such as online gaming and social media has brought about an increasing interest in digital autoethnography, or autonetnography (Kozinets 2006; Kozinets & Kedzior, 2009; Mkono et al, 2015; Villegas, 2018). As Mkono et al observe, 'The pervasiveness of Web 2.0 technologies in professional and social lives means that, to varying degrees, scholars' research activities often intersect with their online identities, behaviours, and inter-actions' (Mkono et al., 2015, p.167). Autonetnography can 'open up a critical negotiation of the researcher's positionality in online research' (ibid) and 'affords researchers the opportunity to explore the nuances of social phenomena from a suitably engaged position (p.168). Autonetnography allows an authoritative authorial voice to emerge with the benefit of being situated within the online community and culture which is the focus of the research. Furthermore, 'the auto-netnographic method allows an uninterrupted participant-observation of an alternative life, permitting a naturalistic unfolding of the flow and flux of cultural and communal play, persons, and places' (Kozinets and Kedzior, 2009).

Digital autoethnography also enables research that tells a 'specific story, within a context of many interconnected stories' (Brown, 2018, p.57). As this research project is focused upon my own online persona of sputniksteve and its participation in the online heterotopia of eduTwitter and the associated Tweacher society, there is an obvious relevance of the methodological approach of autonetnography, especially given its particular interest in reflexivity and online identity, the 'subjective and intersubjective framing of the online Self' (Mkono et al, p.167).

2.4 Autoethnography or Critical Ontology of the self

In reference to Kincheloe's call for teachers to be encouraged to 'confront why they think as they do about themselves as teachers' (Kincheloe, 2003, p.47 cited in Meyer, 2011, p.219), Meyer states that Kincheloe's 'notion of critical ontology is more deeply philosophical and political than the more commonly used terms: self-study or autoethnography' (Meyer, 2011, p.219). She goes onto to say that 'Such ontological investigations require an examination of how power intersects with the ways educators make meaning of ourselves and the contexts in which our teaching and our identities are embedded' (Ibid). However, Sparkes sees autoethnography as both a mode of knowing and a way of being, pointing to examples that set up autoethnography 'not merely as a way to know, but also as a way to critically act in the world and a way to understand the construction of the self' (Sparks, 2016, p.513), which it seems to me chimes well with Foucault's description of the critical ontology of ourselves as a philosophical life (Foucault, 1997b).

Kincheloe's delineation of critical ontology involves 'about 23 basic ideas' (Kincheloe, 2011, p.202) that seem to want to articulate how critical ontology is different from other forms of self-study, but there are two prevalent ideas. Firstly, a 'key dimension of a critical ontology involves freeing ourselves from the machine metaphors of Cartesianism' (p.203), that seeks to emphasise the situatedness of the researcher/practitioner: 'A critical ontology involves the process of reconnecting human beings on a variety of levels and in numerous ways to a living social and physical web of reality, to a living cosmos' (p.204). It also seeks to emphasise the self as 'historically situated' (p.205). Thus, we can see the call of

Foucault for critical ontology to consider the 'historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them' (Foucault, 1997b, p.319).

Secondly, as if in answer to the second part of that phrase from Foucault, Kincheloe's critical ontology seeks to 'appreciate the autopoietic (self-producing) aspect of the 'self ' in order to gain a more sophisticated capacity to reshape our lives' (Kincheloe, 2011, p.202). Thus, critically aware teachers question whose interests are being served by particular forms of pedagogy and curriculum development, and contemplate their own complicity in these interests; they are aware of the politically partial positioning of mandated practices. Such teachers 'understand that the teacher persona they create is committed to something, to the valuing of some politically inscribed educational purpose' (p.207), and develop an 'informed agency' (p.207). Ultimately, for Kincheloe, critical ontology is 'obsessed with new and better ways of being human, being with others, and the creation of environments where mutual growth of individuals is promoted and symbiotic learning relationships are cultivated' (pp.207-208).

Crucially, critical ontology is not 'a call to narcissism'; rather it is a call for educators to 'understand the oppressive forces that shape them' so that they are 'far better equipped to make conscious decisions about who they want to be' (Kincheloe, 2011, p.209). Here we return to the criticism of autoethnography – that it is essentially narcissistic. However, the critique of the situatedness of the researcher offered by autoethnography as discussed in 2.3 seems to me align with Foucault's description of critical ontology which seeks to interrogate the limits placed upon us. Perhaps it is the second part of Foucault's definition – the

experiment of going beyond those limits – that begins to delineate a distinction between autoethnography and critical ontology.

2.5 Critical Autoethnography

Perhaps this tension between autoethnography and critical ontology can be eased by the recognition of critical authoethnography and its cultural interrogation and critique (Short et al., 2013; Boylorn and Orbe, 2014a; Boylorn and Orbe, 2014b), recognising the researcher's location within a cultural context. Critical autoethnography seeks to strengthen the emphasis on storytelling with powerful theoretical narratives 'Because theory is a story. Theory tells a story—in non-ordinary language …— of how things are and helps us discover the possibilities in how things might be' (Jones, 2016, p.228). It is easy to see an echo in this of Foucault's definition of critical ontology as being an ongoing experiment in going beyond the limits that are placed upon us.

Crucially, critical autoethnography can 'contribute to our knowledge of power and social inequality' (Reed-Danahay, 2017, p.144). Often, such work gives voice to those who have seen themselves as marginalised (Short et al., 2013).

I wonder then how this might apply to my work here – am I marginalised? How so? As I reflect upon my experiences, it is certainly true to say that I have at times felt marginalised professionally, and Twitter has provided both a channel for articulating the frustrations about this and a vehicle for developing and strengthening my own position through gaining knowledge and experience beyond the confines of prescribed CPD within my own school context. Furthermore, participation in #eduTwitter and the tweacher society has opened up avenues of

personal growth – and, indeed, opportunities for financial growth! – that would otherwise have been closed, or at least difficult to pursue.

2.6 Post-Critical Ontology of Ourselves

For Hodgson et al. (2017, 2018), and Vlieghe & Piotrrzamojski (2019), critical pedagogy runs the danger of creating an endless loop of seeing only evil in the world and hoping that we will arrive at some utopian future which is in itself negated by critique: 'the stance of this master of critique is driven by a certain hate for the existing form of the world, and simultaneously by love for an imaginary world that will never come' (Hodgson et al., 2018, p.10). A post-critical educational philosophy does not mean to reject critical theory, but to grow out of it; not to dismiss critique or intellectualism, but to refocus and shift us away from 'cruel optimism to hope in the present' (Hodgson et al., 2017, p.18).

Whilst much work in critical theory often points to Foucault, the attitude that Foucault articulates is not akin to the critical pedagogy tradition; rather, the focus in post-critical pedagogy on offering an affirmative account is compatible with Foucault's conception of power (Hodgson 2020, personal communication, 31st March). Foucault's critical ontology of ourselves is concerned not only with the limits placed upon us, but with experimenting with ways to go beyond them (Foucault, 1997b). Foucault's critiques are not grounded in a view of the world as perpetually evil or destructive. Rather, Foucault's conceptualisation of power is creative and productive: 'We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes,' it 'represses', it 'censors,' it 'abstracts,' it 'masks,' it 'conceals.' In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces

domains of objects and rituals of truth' (Foucault, 1991b).

So Foucauldian critical ontology occupies a space that perhaps sits in something of a contrast to the ways in which Foucault's ideas have been represented in subsequent critiques of power and points instead to what Hodsgon et al and Vlieghe & Piotrrzamojski describe as a post-critical hope in the present. In #eduTwitter, it is easy to see the presence of this negative form of critical pedagogy, where some practitioners are trapped within oppressive and cynical cycle of cruel optimism. But the tweacher society offers a more hopeful view of the present; it claims for itself the right to be transformative albeit whilst using the commercial platform of Twitter.

And transformation is at the heart of the experience of eduTwitter for many who participate. Their experience of encountering views and opinions which contrast their own is informative and transformative. Exchanges through Twitter are Foucauldian correspondence; eduTwitter is a Foucauldian heterotopia of crisis. Here, 'crisis' is used to mean transformation as used by Foucault. This is explained in 3.3.3

2.7 Data Collection and Ethics

The ethical considerations involved in research of online activity, particularly with regard to online social networks (OSN) or social networking sites (SNS) are an emerging area, and one which is hotly debated (for example, Zimmer, n.d.; Gleibs, 2014). On one hand, there are those who argue that tweets and other posts on SNS such as Facebook are, by definition, in the public domain and are, therefore, available for study and scrutiny without any need for consent. This notion is clearly

adopted in the Twitter Privacy Policy, which states: 'Most of the information you provide us through the Twitter Services is information you are asking us to make public. Your public information includes the messages you Tweet' (Twitter, n.d.). This is the position adopted by, for example, Hardaker and McGlashan who point out that 'Twitter users are informed of the instant and broad nature of the dissemination of any public tweets' (Hardaker and McGlashan, 2016, p.86). Watson (2021) takes this approach, assuming that ‘tweets and blog posts were intended for public discourse’. He cites BERA for support: ‘Seeking consent would not normally be expected for data that have been produced expressly for public use’ (BERA, 2018, p. 10) but chooses not to directly quote the tweets of ‘less prominent actors’ (Watson, 2021) in order to avoid causing harm.

There are those who emphasise that online personas are an extension of the self and are therefore entitled to enjoy the same ethical considerations as subjects in any other study (Markham and Buchanan, 2012).

One solution to the dilemma might be to anonymise the data, as done by Cho and Jimmerson (Cho and Jimerson, 2017). Indeed, there is an appeal in anonymising all the tweets used in the study as this might chime well with a Foucauldian approach and its problematization of the ‘author’, allowing the statement to stand on its own (Foucault, 2002, 1991a). However, there remain issues even with anonymised data as its use can still lead to individuals being identifiable (Markham and Buchanan, 2012). Entering the content of a tweet into a search engine is likely to find the Twitter account that posted it. And in any case, 'anonymising accounts would contravene Twitter’s policies on displaying their data in static publications, which specify that in static and offline publications, tweets

should show the name, username, and unmodified text' (Hardaker and McGlashan, 2016, p.86).

A further issue arising from my ongoing usage of Twitter emerges around the act of blocking: users may block other users from seeing their tweets. Inevitably, there are some users who have blocked me, and those whom I have blocked. It is possible to access their tweets; for instance, one might create a second account. Having created a number of accounts for different purposes, it would be perfectly possible for me to view tweets from anyone who has blocked @sputniksteve. However, I think it probably stands to reason that to do so for data purposes would present significant ethical issues.

The university ethics board stipulated that consent must be given for any tweets used as data. One consequence of this has been a reluctance on my part to include as data any tweets from interlocuters with whom I have had challenging exchanges, or where I have received unpleasant or abusive comments. Following one particular disagreement, one interlocuter withdrew the permission that he had previously granted regarding an unrelated tweet. These decisions have limited the range of discussions that I might have been able to analyse in this thesis.

Thankfully, as the project has continued, the focus of my research has shifted away from an analysis of topics within the discourses of #eduTwitter, and wholeheartedly toward an autoethnographic account of my own use and experience of Twitter, working towards a theory of eduTwitter and how it works upon subjectivity, rather than an analysis of its data. Therefore, the analysis that follows in later chapters will be based primarily upon the tweets of sputniksteve. Since my journey as a doctoral researcher on the EdD at Birmingham coincided

with my first forays onto Twitter almost a decade previously in 2011, I decided to look back upon my earliest tweets to reflect upon how the @sputniksteve persona was born, and to what extent it was similar to, or different from, that which is now presented. I collected these tweets using Twitter's own advanced search facility[8] which enables users to specify search parameters such as who sent the tweet, to whom the tweet was addressed, when the tweet was sent and so on. I used the tool to search tweets coming from the @sputniksteve account within the specific time frame of January to December 2011 to locate the first tweets I sent from that account. In order to trace some sense of development, I then extended the search beyond 2011 into 2012. Interestingly, I was faced with a curious challenge: at some point, my ability to search my own Twitter archive became inhibited – the searches were yielding no results. In conversation with others since, I have come to the conclusion that this was an unintended consequence of temporarily 'locking' my account (a process which renders a user's tweets visible only to their followers). Despite having since unlocked my account, older tweets appeared to have become unsearchable. This turned out to be fortuitous in that it forced me to limit my data to that which had already been collected at that point – my tweets from 2011-2012.

It could well be argued that genre specific features of the Twitter platform, such as likes and retweets, form part of the discourse of the platform. Indeed, I have seen tweachers take umbrage at others for liking certain tweets and the pattern of liking can sometimes be seen as supporting the members of one's own echo chamber

8 https://twitter.com/search-advanced

or ideological standpoint. Such actions as liking or retweeting can certainly be described as aspects of Twitter discourse, just as non-linguistic features can be described as aspects of wider offline discourses, such as 'images or gestures – pictures drawn on pencil cases, raising a hand in a classroom' (Youdell, 2006, p.35). Non-linguistic features of Twitter also include the posting of images, videos and GIFs.[9] However, in this project I have chosen not include such Twitter gestures – likes, retweets and so on – for my data analysis. The reasons for this are threefold. Firstly, it is necessary to find ways to limit the amount of data one is working with. Secondly, the logistics of locating ten-year-old likes and retweets rendered this task beyond the scope of the current project. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, I was interested in what sputniksteve had said – the statements made. Having acknowledged that non-linguistic features can, and do, contribute to flows and patterns of discourse, the focus of this project was on the content of the tweets that had been tweeted. Future research could well be usefully focused on how online identity is formed and performed via non-linguistic features of Twitter use.

Where I have used tweets from others, consent has been gained. This is either through direct request with regard to particular tweets, or explicitly assumed as in the case of replies to my polls where I have stated that replies may be used as data. Certain members of the tweacher society have been named in this thesis; these are regarded as high profile influencers with large follower numbers. Nevertheless, as a matter of courtesy, they have been informed and consent

9 GIF: Graphics Interchange Format. These are short animations that are often used to indicate an emotional response, for example.

gained through direct message.

At times in this thesis I refer to the results self-generated Twitter polls. Whilst such polls have been used to gauge public opinion in, for example, medicine and public health (Rosenkrantz and Hawkins, 2017; Vidal-Alaball et al., 2019), such polls are not considered validated survey techniques (Caycedo-Marulanda et al., 2021). My use of Twitter polls in this thesis is not intended to generate statistically relevant, large-scale results but rather to provide a sample of opinion within my own Twitter followship and its wider network through retweets. It must be understood that such poll results can only give a small snapshot of opinion amongst what is a self-selecting sample of users. Any claims made here in response to such polls must be viewed in this light. The same should also be said of the key word search of the Times Educational Supplement (TES) teaching vacancy website referred to in Chapter 4.

2.7.1 Presentation of Data

In Part One of this thesis, tweets are cited as texts which can be found in the reference list, as are blog posts. In Part Two, Chapter 6, tweets from the specified data set of tweets from @sputniksteve are listed in the appendices. Where I discuss these tweets, they are referenced with the relevant appendix. They are acknowledged in the body of the text in brackets where (1:1) would denote appendix 1, tweet 1.

Tweets sent by others are referenced as citations. Twitter search result URLs are footnoted.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have given an account of the methodological position taken by this project, describing it as a (post)critical ontology that employs autoethnography. I have given an account of the theoretical discussions around critical ontology and its relationship with autoethnography to show how this thesis can employ the latter in order to work towards the former. I have also described post-critical ontology as offering a hopeful and positive development of Foucauldian critical ontology inspired by Hodgson et al. (2017, 2018), and Vlieghe & Piotrrzamojski (2019),

I have given a brief outline of the term ‘discourse’ and its use in a Foucauldian sense where Foucault ultimately defined discourse as ‘the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation' (Foucault, 2002, p.121).

Some of the complications around the ethical collection and use of tweets as data have been explored and an explanation given of the data collection process employed in this project.

In the next chapter, I move onto the exploration of the theoretical frameworks employed in the project to establish eduTwitter as a Foucauldian heterotopia in which tweets serve as discursive formulations that act upon the subjectivity of the user as a form of Foucauldian self writing.

PART ONE: Twitteretopia and the Tweacher Society

3. What the Foucault

3.1 Introduction

The title of this thesis describes the project as a (post)critical ontology, after Foucault's use of the term 'the critical ontology of ourselves' as outlined in chapter 2 above. The work is positioned within a Foucauldian analytic, drawing upon what I see as relevant tools in charting the rise of myself as sputniksteve. As explained in the introduction, my increasing use of Twitter coincided with my reading of Foucault for my EdD studies, where I saw in some of his lesser known works a model emerging for a critical ontology of eduTwitter, the tweacher society, and of myself as a tweacher. These perspectives were shaped in particular by 'Self Writing' (Foucault, 1997a), 'Des Espace Autres - Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias' (Foucault, 1986), 'What is an Author?' (Foucault, 1991a), and Foucault's exploration of the statement in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, 2002).

In what follows, I use these tools to theorise the discursive field in which sputniksteve emerges, positioning #eduTwitter as providing a heterotopic space of crisis which, after Foucault, I use to mean a state of transformation or condition of transition (Foucault, 1986). To enter this digital heterotopia, the subject creates a digital persona or avatar which serves the purpose of the author function; this avatar then enables teachers to engage in an on-going process of Foucauldian self-writing through the collection of fragments and the process of

correspondence, articulating and responding to statements.

I present a tour of Foucault's heterotopia, showing how this provides a conceptual language for describing eduTwitter as an 'other space' which operates as a site of transformation for the subjects who use it. I then go on to consider Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse, with specific reference to his comments about the statement and formulations, again using these descriptions as tools to diagnose the nature of discourse as it operates within the heterotopia of eduTwitter. I use Foucault's discussion of the nature of the author to reflect upon the membrane between the subject behind the twitter account, and the persona that is presented by the subject via the twitter handle.

To begin, I consider alternative popular theories that could be employed to provide an analytical framework to discuss the operations of social media, and explain why these have not been chosen for this thesis.

3.2 Alternative Theories of Social Media

Before embarking upon an exploration of the tools from Foucault that are employed in this thesis, it might be prudent to reflect briefly upon some other theoretical tools that could have been employed. For instance, one could look to network theory and the work of Castells to position Twitter, and eduTwitter in particular, as manifestations of the network society. Indeed, the title 'Rise of the Network Society' (Castells, 2010a) was the inspiration for the naming of my own 'rise of the tweacher society'.

Similarly, given that eduTwitter has been described by some as an online community of practice, the work of Wenger (1998) could have been called upon as

a primary theoretical source.

3.2.1 The Network Society

Castell's work on the network society might seem like an obvious place to look for conceptual tools for building a theory of Twitter, especially if eduTwitter is to be seen as a kind of social movement. Castells charts the rise of the network society as emerging during the Information Age, beginning in the 1970s with the advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Castells, 2010a; 2010b; 2012). In Castell's analysis, the network society brings about a flattening of societal structures away from vertical ones to horizontal ones. In recent times, Castells points to events such as the Arab Spring as revealing the potential of the network society to bring seismic shifts in geopolitical status quos. Furthermore, the Information Age has heralded a shift in economics, with what Castells calls informational capitalism bringing changes to notions of wealth, poverty and what constitutes labour. It could be argued that this is reflected in the tweacher society, where teachers create content both online and in the offline world through conference events such as ResearchED.

However, what Castells sees as a radical epochal shift, Webster (1997) questions as merely being a further development of traditional capitalism. Meanwhile, Fuchs (2012) questions the actual extent to which OSN and social media were instrumental in various social movements, pointing to several studies which indicate otherwise.

For me, the work of Castells maintains a focus on information that lacks the more direct focus on discourse that is to be found in Foucault, and even then his

“information age” hinges on tenuous definitions of information itself’ (Webster, 1997, p.83).

Where Castells perhaps offers a more interesting conceptualisation is in his space of flows and timeless time, which are ‘are the material foundations of a new culture that transcends and includes the diversity of historically transmitted systems of representation: the culture of real virtuality where make-believe is the belief in making’ (Castells, 2010a, p.406). However, Castells conceptualisation is, for me, too rooted in economics, and this is true in general of Castell’s work on the network society. His concerns are those of production and labour, rather than those of discourse and the self, whereas the concerns and emphasis of this project are discourse and the self, rather than production and labour.

3.2.2 Communities of Practice

It is perfectly feasible to see teachers’ use of Twitter to share resources, expertise and ideas as forming professional learning networks (PLN) that can develop into communities of practice (CoP) (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018). Online social media sites, and Twitter in particular, have been identified by a number of authors as potential sites for CoP both within the field of teaching (for instance, Goodyear et al., 2019, 2014) and beyond it, such as human resources (Evans, 2019) and the media industry (Komorowski et al., 2018).

Communities of practice are ‘formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour’ (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p.1). Whilst this may seem rather all-encompassing, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner are keen to clarify that ‘not everything called

a community is a community of practice' (p.2), outlining three crucial characteristics: the domain, the community, and the practice. The current project does not adhere to these crucial characteristics: the descriptions that I offer of #eduTwitter as heterotopia or of the tweacher society are not specifically about any one domain of practice, although CoP may well arise within the tweacher society. Furthermore, the formation of @sputniksteve was not aligned with any particular field of practice within the tweacher society; if anything, sputniksteve traverses various CoP as he moves between specific discourses around teaching English, being a pastoral leader, discussions about specific pedagogies, general education discussions, and wider discussions not related at all to education. This is, of course, true of all participants in the tweacher society. Thus, whilst CoP may offer analysis within particular discursive fields, it does not feel a good fit for what is a (post)critical ontology of teacher who tweets.

Whilst Castells's Network Society and CoP offer useful insights that can be used to develop analyses of the ways that online social media operate or are used to develop professional learning networks, neither offer the quite the scope for building an ontological analysis of eduTwitter that this thesis hopes to present. It is in the work of Foucault, I argue, that we find tools for diagnosing the operation of eduTwitter as a discursive space of transformation that acts upon those who participate within it. The first such tool for consideration is Foucault's heterotopia.

3.3 Heterotopia

> *'We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.'*

(Foucault, 1986, p.22)

In his first mention of heterotopia, in his preface to *The Order of Things*, Foucault refers to 'textual spaces' (Johnson, 2006, p. 75) and contrasts heterotopias with utopias, where the latter 'afford consolation', but the former 'are disturbing' (Foucault, 2005, p. xix). And while utopias 'permit fables and discourse', heterotopias 'desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences' (ibid). This brief introduction to the concept of heterotopia seems hostile towards it, contrasting with his more detailed description later in ‘Des Espace Autres – Of Other Spaces’ (‘Other Spaces’) (Foucault, 1986).

In ‘Other Spaces’, Foucault describes heterotopia as spaces that are ‘absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about’ (Foucault, 1986, p.24). By way of exemplification, Foucault presents the mirror as a heterotopia because ‘it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there’ (Foucault, 1986, p.24). Heterotopias provide a ‘simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live’ (Foucault, 1986, p.24), and represent an ‘alternative configuration of space' (Knight, 2017, p. 147).

‘Other Spaces’ goes on to present six principles of heterotopia that I will explore more fully in this chapter but they are summarised here as follows.

1. First principle: All human societies have had heterotopias, but they have

been so varied that ‘no one absolutely universal form of heterotopia would be found’ (Foucault, 1986, p.24).

2. Second Principle: A society can make ‘an existing heterotopia function in a different fashion’ (p.25).
3. Third principle: ‘The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible’ (p.25).
4. Fourth principle: ‘Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time-which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies’ (p.25).
5. Fifth principle: ‘Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable’ (p.26).
6. Sixth principle: Heterotopias ‘have a function in relation to all the space that remain’ (p.27).

The apparent contradictions between Foucault’s initial outline of heterotopias in *The Order of Things* and the more detailed descriptions found in ‘Other Spaces’ have not dented the appeal of the concept to researchers working in a range of fields. As Johnson puts it, 'Although it is widely acknowledged that Foucault’s accounts of the concept of heterotopia remain briefly sketched and somewhat confusing, the notion has provoked many interpretations and applications across a range of disciplines' (Johnson, 2006, p. 75).

Equally, there has been criticism of Foucault’s use of heterotopia. Some present the concept as having been 'abandoned by Foucault after just a few mentions'

(Knight, 2017, p. 141), whilst others suggest that Foucault himself disliked his own theory on the topic: 'I am not surprised that he left the essay unpublished' (Harvey, 2000a, p. 538). Other complaints include the critique that his descriptions are so vague, and his examples so varied that almost anywhere or anything could be described as a heterotopia. Such criticisms (Harvey, 2000b, 2007, 2009, 2000a; Saldanha, 2008) are described, and rebuked by Johnson who points out that many of these criticisms rest upon misinterpretations or quotations taken out of context, but that, ultimately, they 'take Foucault's provisional ideas on heterotopia too seriously' (Johnson, 2013, p. 795). He suggests that 'Foucault is proposing heterotopian thinking as a form of archaeology, a method that, rather than revealing and explaining, meticulously shows and describes' (Johnson, 2013, p. 795).

Some of the criticism of Foucault's conceptualisation also stems from an apparent presentation of heterotopias as being completely separate from the 'rest of space' (Saldanha, 2008). As Johnson points out, some of Foucault's 'uncharacteristic absolutist terminology' may be unhelpful, but Saldanha 'does not recognise the difficulties with the translations**'** and uses 'misleading quotations' (Johnson, 2013, p. 794). Johnson's retort clarifies the fundamental relational connection between heterotopias and other spaces: 'Heterotopias are not separate from society; they are distinct emplacements that are 'embedded' in all cultures and mirror, distort and react to the remaining space. Rather than being static, Foucault's account seems to celebrate the discontinuity and changeability of existence' (Johnson, 2013, p. 794).

Knight seeks to resolve some of the issues surrounding the vagueness and

apparently contradictory nature of Foucault's descriptions of heterotopia, and the ways in which the concept has been put to work in the various disciplines, by returning Foucault's concept of heterotopia to 'its literary origins' (Knight, 2017, p. 141). He highlights the seldom referenced radio talk given by Foucault, 'Les Hétérotopies' which remains unpublished in English. Knight points out that the frequent assumption that this is identical to Foucault's later lecture 'Des Espace Autres' is made in error and that there are important differences; specifically, whilst the lecture is 'entirely devoid of any literary significance', the earlier radio lecture 'contains references to a number of works of fiction' (Knight, 2017, p. 145). He goes on to argue that Foucault's concept of heterotopia 'was never intended as a tool for the study of real urban space' but rather 'it seems to hold the promise of a conception of the heterotopia that sees it signifying a set of literary motifs used by writers to present an alternative configuration of space' (Knight, 2017, p. 147). The notion of writers presenting an alternative configuration of space seems as good a description of Twitter as any!

3.3.1 Twitterotopia – eduTwitter as heterotopia

Seeing heterotopia as a literary function affords us a vital perspective on #eduTwitter as heterotopia. Foucault's presentation of heterotopias as being placeless place seems oxymoronic, but the juxtaposition enables the mirroring of the *real*. As Knight summarises:

'The use of the word 'contestation' both here, and in Foucault's definition of the heterotopia as a 'simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live' (Foucault, 1986, p.24), does not appear to be coincidental. In fact,

this is a term that Foucault borrows from Blanchot, who describes the power of literature as essentially ‘the power of contestation: contestation of established authority, contestation of that which is (and the fact of being), contestation of language and the forms of literary language, lastly contestation of itself as power’ (Knight, 2017, p. 153).

Knight is keen to emphasis the 'semi-mythical' nature of heterotopic sites: 'a whole new mythology springs up around these sites, which blur the line between fiction and reality' (Knight, 2017, p. 156).

The literary and semi-mythical aspects of heterotopia concord with Foucault’s assertion that he has only ever 'written fictions' (Foucault, cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983, p.204). And, as Jansson points out, heterotopia can also be described as 'a mental and representational category, describing how individuals and groups gain moral and cultural confirmation in relation to the (re)articulation of myths and images' (Jansson, 2009, p. 306). Again, this articulation shows how the concept can be applied to online spaces such as Twitter, and subsections within it such as #eduTwitter, where such (re)articulation is commonplace, as is 'moral and cultural confirmation'. #eduTwitter is precisely such a site that both exists and does not exist, that is semi-mythical, and in which individuals and groups rearticulate myths and images. Even the notions of *evidence* and *truth* that permeate through some of the discourse of #eduTwitter, it could be argued, are re-articulations of myths: myths of truth, myths of evidence. These are, perhaps, fictions; narratives that are told and retold, recycled and retold again, representing a certain kind of thinking (Peim, 2010, 2009; Flint and Peim, 2011).

3.3.2 Foucault's Mirror

It could be argued that with his notion of heterotopias, Foucault was being prophetic. He could not have foreseen the coming social media revolution, but the image he presents of experience as a 'network that connects points and intersects with its own skein' seems ideally placed to describe the ways in which social media are connecting us, and as Rymarczuk begins to explore in relation to Facebook, how they are providing spaces for identity formation (Rymarczuk, 2015; Rymarczuk and Derksen, 2014). Such spaces represent a 'heterotopic cyberfrontier' (Marlin-Bennett and Thornton, 2012, p. 493). Johnson (Johnson, 2006) gives a detailed account of Foucault's use of terminology around the ideas of space, pointing out the difficulties that arise in translation from French to English, and emphasising the relational aspect of Foucault's use of the term emplacement which is 'defined by relations of proximity between points or elements' (Foucault, 1986, p. 23). But Foucault's concept of space, can be easily applied not only to physical, geographical locations – as has been done in a range of work utilising his descriptions of heterotopia, from geography to architecture – but also to the online world of websites and cyberspace.

The word 'skein' is an interesting choice, with one definition being thread, whilst another being tangle. The connections between users on Twitter in general, and of the tweacher society in particular are not linear or tidy, but grow exponentially the more one uses the platform and interacts with others. Certainly, there are algorithms running in the software of Twitter that monitor a user's activity and suggest which other users might be of interest to follow, but a user will only choose to follow if the tweets are of interest for one reason or another.

Twitter can be described as a kind of Foucault's Mirror, which offers a utopia, a 'placeless place', an 'unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface' where we see ourselves where we are not; but that, in fact, operates as a heterotopia in that it 'does exist in reality where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy' (Foucault, 1986, p.24). Indeed, as Marlin-Bennett and Thornton put it, 'the term heterotopia captures the ambiguous duality of websites: they are both real and virtual' (Marlin-Bennett and Thornton, 2012, p. 493). They go on to illustrate that websites exist in the real world of computer servers and electronic components, housed in real buildings on real streets with locatable addresses, but that exist also in the created virtual world. Marlin-Bennett and Thornton also point out that the very word used to refer to such spaces borrows from the discourse of geography: web*site*.

The tangles and threads of the tweacher society, its skein, exist in multiple spaces – some 'real' and some 'virtual'. They exist within the 'real' space of the classroom, where pedagogy and praxis reflect ideologies and discursive patterns, but which can themselves be described as heterotopic spaces that exist outside of society but entirely within the scope and boundaries of it. They also exist within the discursive practices of policies and official communications from government departments and official standards regulators such as Ofsted. But they exist in that other space of the Internet, wherein we find Twitter and wherein we find #eduTwitter – a heterotopia within a heterotopia; a pocket universe that exists within and without; a mirror that 'makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it

has to pass through this virtual point which is over there' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24).

In ‘Of Other Spaces’, Foucault presents us with six principles for how heterotopias can be described. What follows is an exploration of those principles in relation to the function and use of #eduTwitter by the tweacher society. In this, I move toward a Foucauldian framing of #eduTwitter as a heterotopic space.

3.3.3 The First Principle

Here, Foucault offers two categories of heterotopia, both of which could apply to Twitter in general and to the #eduTwitter in particular. Firstly, as 'crisis heterotopia'. The term *crisis* tends now to refer to some personal, economic or political negative turn, particularly one that is unexpected.[10]

Tweets and the blogs to which they often point, are sometimes cries of crisis – teachers who are using the social media platform to articulate views of frustration at the system, to protest against policies or initiatives, or bemoan the pay and conditions.

However, this use of the term *crisis* seems to me a rather tabloid misappropriation, rather like *tragedy,* used hyperbolically to elicit emotional response in the audience (Ahmed, 2004). The examples of crisis given by Foucault do not accord with this usage.

The OED offers definitions of *crisis* around 'intense difficulty or danger', 'A time when a difficult or important decision must be made', or 'The turning point of a disease when an important change takes place, indicating either recovery or

10 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis

death'.[11] It also gives the etymology of *crisis* as being of Greek origin meaning *decision*. As noted by Janet Roitman, the term *crisis* was used by Barack Obama in 2009 'to characterize a moment in history so as to mark off a new age, or a "journey"'. Roitman identifies *crisis* as signifying 'a diagnostic of the present' and that 'Evoking crisis entails reference to a norm because it requires a comparative state for judgment: crisis compared to what?' (Roitman, n.d.). Any of these notions of *crisis* might be appropriately applied to aspects of the discourse found on #eduTwitter, and even #eduTwitter itself might be described as marking off a 'new age'.

But Foucault's use of the term *crisis* determines a less obvious meaning: 'crisis heterotopias, i.e., there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc.' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). Foucault's use of the term *crisis* in relation to heterotopias implies a temporary condition – a momentary variance from the norm, biological in nature. These, then, are spaces of ritual or rites of passage, such as the 'nowhere' space of the honeymoon hotel room where 'the deflowering' of the young woman could take place (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). Of course, the momentary condition of these spaces of crisis, however temporary, do not leave the subject permanently unchanged: discursively speaking, the young woman will never be a virgin again, the adolescent will never be a child again, the elderly will never be returned to youth.

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11 https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/crisis

#eduTwitter offers a virtual space which one can attend briefly, like a hotel room, but come away forever changed, altered by the experience. The engagement with that space brings about fundamental changes in being; it serves as a technology of the self. Frequent visits to the virtual space of eduTwitter may work on the user in small incremental ways, or an individual visit can have a lasting impact. A frequent cinema goer may be changed incrementally by each visit, or may undergo a more obviously profound transformation from one particular film.

Foucault states his view that heterotopias of crisis are giving way and being replaced by 'heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed' (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). Foucault's phrasing here is interesting: the passive voice implies an absence of choice for those subjects who find themselves in such places. Few people, I suppose, would voluntarily enter 'rest homes and psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons' (ibid). Some teachers may feel compelled to engage with #eduTwitter for professional development purposes or because, perhaps, their employers urge them too. Even within that space there are those whose voices can be perceived as being *outside* of the ideological mainstream. Indeed, Twitter and other blogging sites held an appeal for those who found their views to be at odds with the prevailing orthodoxy. The use of anonymity in such cases is evidence of an awareness that their opinions might be *deviant*. However, it can also be seen that as figures like Andrew Old have gained a kind of dominance, new voices have risen in opposition to what is often described as the neo-trad orthodoxy of education bloggers and writers such as Andrew Old, Tom Bennett, David Didau, and the bogeymen of political authority as symbolised by the figures

of Michael Gove and, more recently, schools minister Nick Gibb.

In a blog piece titled 'Can You Be Too Independent?', Didau (@daviddidau) has written about his ironic dismissal from Independent Thinking Ltd, an education consultant agency, for being out of line with their 'direction of travel' in terms of the messages he was giving in training sessions and online (Didau, 2014a). Indeed, one of the comments on Didau's blog piece uses the term *mindset* to denote an established and unquestionable ideological framework – or paradigm – in which this company is operating, and which is, notably, not particularly independent of the mainstream ideas within education.

3.3.4 The Second Principle

Foucault's second principle of heterotopias is that 'a society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion; for each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society and the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another' (Foucault, 1986, p. 25).

Twitter, in general, was initially conceived 'as an SMS-based communications platform. Groups of friends could keep tabs on what each other were doing based on their status updates. Like texting, but not' (MacArthur, 2014, *Early Twitter* section, para. 1). From the first tweet sent by Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey in 2006, Twitter has grown to over 300 million monthly active users (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). In this time, it has been a platform of celebrity tiffs, breaking news and massive social change such as the Arab Spring. In January 2009, an aeroplane was forced to make an emergency landing on the Hudson River in New

York. A picture taken at the scene was tweeted before the traditional news outlets were aware of the event (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.) hinting at the changing nature of news gathering and reporting. Now, all the major news publishers have Twitter accounts which post links to their online versions. In February 2016, *The Independent* announced that it would cease printed copies to become an online only news provider.

Within the tweacher community, Twitter has been continually repurposed from the promotion of blogs, to the organisation of events such as teachmeets and the ResearchED conferences (ResearchED, n.d.). It is a platform for sharing teaching resources, but also for discussing the philosophy and theory of education, and for seeking advice on troublesome issues or career advice. Meanwhile, it has also been repositioned in, perhaps, a reversal of Foucault's cemeteries – the tweacher society is both growing, and moving from the outskirts of the 'real' space of society to the centre of the discursive cities in education. It has become a place where some teachers can interact with DfE figures and Ofsted officials; it is often the first source of information about policy announcements, clarification documents and other resources (Lane, 2016b). Teachers in schools are implementing ideas and resources that they have found on Twitter, whilst the drive for research-based or evidence-informed practice is growing.

A further example of how the heterotopia of #eduTwitter has been repurposed might be its growing use by official bodies and their representatives, moving twitter from a space of hidden protest or deviance – the bike sheds of the virtual playground – to the apparently democratised space of productive discourse between practitioners, government, and inspectors.

3.3.5 Third Principle

In his third principle for heterotopias, Foucault tells us that 'The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible' (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). He exemplifies this juxtaposition with three examples: the theatre, the cinema, and the garden. In each of these spaces we see brought together aspects of different spaces, foreign lands, or, in the case of the cinema with its two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional world, objects which transcend dimensional conventions – like crossing the threshold of Doctor Who's TARDIS. Foucault reminds us that for the Persians the garden was a 'sacred space' and goes on to describe the garden as a 'microcosm', and a 'sort of happy, universalising heterotopia' (ibid).

Twitter could also be described in these terms, offering a theatrical stage on which is played out scenes from a 'series of places that are foreign to one another'. But here, these foreign places are not just geographical, but ideological. On Twitter we see the monologues and dialogues of characters born of different pedagogical traditions and epistemological positions. And, like the garden, we can see variety blooming; but we might also see dominant ideas proliferating - spreading and self-seeding like aquilegias.

Twitter also transcends traditional dimensional conventions, like the cinema, transporting us to different ways of perceiving and knowing.

3.3.6 Fourth Principle

Foucault now draws a connection between heterotopias and 'slices in time' that he terms *heterochronies* (Foucault, 1986, p. 26). He offers the example of cemeteries

as offering a 'quasi-eternity' of 'dissolution and disappearance'. But he also offers up to contemplation that nature of museums and libraries as 'heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time', places that are outside of time and 'inaccessible to its ravages' (ibid).

Twitter also offers an archive which is impermeable to time, as neatly demonstrated by the continued existence of the first ever tweet (Dorsey, 2006; Ritschel, 2019). Users may delete tweets, but on the whole this rarely happens, meaning that tweets live on as *statements* in the archive, perhaps transgressing the oeuvre of the tweep[12] who composed it. The use of #hashtags to create searchable threads of statement, routes through the *skein*, help to navigate and organise the archive. However, where tweets are deleted, but replies are not, what remains are fragmentary statements.

Once tweeted, a tweet becomes part of the wider flow of discourse, contributing to a 'series of enunciated events that must have already occurred' (Foucault, 2004, 106). Of course, this means that tweets which misrepresent, misquote or take quotations out of context can lead to the perpetuation of errors, such as Gove's much referenced 'people in this country have had enough of experts' which, having been taken out of context is now used to construct a potent straw man argument against him.[13] In a similar way, we can observe a proliferation of memes which incorrectly assert that Einstein said you can't judge a fish by its ability to ride a bicycle.

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12 'someone who uses the social media service Twitter'
https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/tweep
13 https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Michael_Gove

Twitter can also be described in terms of Foucault's other heterochrony – 'time in the mode of the festival' (Foucault, 1986, p. 26). Just as carnivals flourish for a short time, and disappear for a while before re-emerging, so too discursive objects emerge on Twitter: particular topics that burn brightly for a limited time, before fading again; or perennial debates such as that between so-called 'progressives' and 'traditionalists' amongst the tweacher society which occasionally flare, but never really disappear.

3.3.7 Fifth Principle

In his fifth principle of Heterotopias, Foucault describes the 'system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable' (Foucault, 1986). Entry to Twitter is not 'compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison' but to enter the virtual space of Twitter one must 'submit to rites and purifications' (Foucault, 1986, p. 26). In the first stages, in order to participate, one must open an account with Twitter; this involves the registration of an email address, which must be verified before access to the space is allowed – 'To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures' (ibid). Registration with Twitter involves the choosing of a username, or handle. This, in itself, is a curious process of identity formation that is almost unique to online spaces: Do I use my real name? Do I maintain anonymity? What label do I perceive as appropriate? What notions of myself do I wish to put forward?

In the offline world, names are usually conferred upon us – by fluke of our family name, names chosen by our parents, names given to us by our peers or friends in the form of nicknames, titles conferred through academic attainment or career,

through marriage. The vast majority of us do not choose the names by which we are known. In the *virtual* world of the Internet, of social media, and on Twitter particularly, we must select a name at the threshold.

On each subsequent visit, the username that one has created for oneself must be given, along with a password, before entry is granted. Of course, with our mobile devices and desktop computers, algorithms allow this to be an automated process – my iPad will remember my passwords on my behalf. Indeed, the entire registration process is performed via computerised algorithm; the gatekeeper is not human but automated. And to cross the threshold, to pass into the virtuality, one inhabits a digitised version of oneself.

3.3.8 The Sixth Principle

In what Foucault calls the last trait of heterotopias, he presents the notion of function, identifying heterotopias as a space of 'illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory' (Foucault, 1986, p. 27) and heterotopias of 'compensation', the latter being highly regulated. Foucault presents these as 'two extreme poles' with contrasting roles. However, it could be argued that Twitter can serve as either or both. Or, rather, that Twitter is best not seen as a single, unified space, but rather as a space of spaces, within which can be found different kinds of space – different kinds of heterotopia.

The illusory aspect of #eduTwitter, as with all divisions within Twitter, is that it can, indeed does, expose 'real space' as illusory by challenging established orthodoxies and shibboleths of educational discourse and praxis. Members of the

tweacher society who have published books in recent years have questioned aspects of existing paradigms (Peal, 2014), probed 'myths' (Christodoulou, 2014), or challenged us to question everything we know about teaching (Didau, 2016b), with many bloggers doing similar work.

With regard to compensation, it could be argued that Twitter was established with regulations in the forms of convention – profile, @ symbol, and so on. It could also be argued that Twitter offers an illusion of freedom, where one can say whatever one chooses. But from this emerges a kind of self-appointed Twitter police force – tweeps who feel offended with an increasing politicisation of offence as emotion (Ahmed, 2004), where the articulation of statements that might offend can be claimed as acts of violence which cause hurt. The energy with which this offence is articulated can be quite fierce. It has been argued that eduTwitter has ‘become a site for fractious conversation’ (Thomson & Riddle, 2019) in which a particular right-wing ‘teacher populism’ has gained a dominant voice strengthened by those in government (Watson, 2021). These fractious conversations on eduTwitter can often reveal, or default to, long-standing divides in pedagogical, epistemological and ontological arguments about what constitutes the figure of the teacher and the various identities associated with it. Ideas about teacher identity and how it is constituted are discussed in chapter 4.

3.4 The Network of Statements

For Foucault, 'discourse can be defined as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation' (Foucault, 2002, p. 121). It is the statement, then, that lies at the heart of Foucault’s discourse.

Is it an adequate analogy to draw between the statement and the tweet? The tweet exists, ascribed to an author, but aligning to a *strategy*. The tweet serves an enunciative function. Each tweet belongs to, or emerges from, a corresponding 'associated field' which in turn 'forms a complex web' (Foucault, 2002, p. 110). Foucault insists that a statement 'always belongs to a series or a whole, always plays a role among other statements, deriving support from them and distinguishing itself from them: it is always part of a ***network of statements***, in which it has a role, however minimal it may be, to play' (my emphasis). What else is Twitter – what else is the tweacher society – if not a network of statements? Some individual tweets may convey more or less discursive relevance than others. Some individual tweets may be about the mundane, or the banal, and may seem to be unconnected to any particular theme, strand or strategy. But I would argue that even these apparently empty tweets are statements serving an enunciative function – that of identity formation: an on-going attempt to present the self as a conscious, freely acting subject, albeit a potentially crafted or performed identity as explored in Chapter 4. Such tweets fit within a different field of association which is about the presentation of a social self, a subject with interests beyond the educational field and a discursive practice beyond the delimited boundaries of the *education* strategy. It might reflect what Cho and Jimerson point to as 'research suggesting that one way to gain traction among followers is to inject back-stage, me-the-person moments into tweets' (Cho and Jimerson, 2017, p. 896). Thus, examples on non-education related tweets may be perceived as an attempt to present a more ‘human’ self beyond the reputation often associated with this user, thus reflecting Foucault’s emphasises on the interconnected nature

of the statement: 'there is no statement that is not surrounded by a field of coexistences' (Foucault, 2002, p. 112).

As one reads through Foucault's discussion of the statement in *Archaeology of Knowledge*, it is tempting to substitute the word *statement* for the word *tweet*. Thus, 'far from being the principle of individualization of groups of 'signifiers' (the meaningful 'atom', the minimum on the basis of which there is meaning), the [*tweet*] is that which situates these meaningful units in a space in which they breed and multiply' (ibid). A tweet carries a 'spatiotemporal individuality' (p. 114) but is locked also into a '*field of stabilization*' (p. 116) which helps to define a 'threshold' (p. 116). It 'belongs to a series or a whole' (p. 111) in which it plays a role among other statements/tweets 'deriving support from them and distinguishing itself from them'.

But Foucault does not present the threshold as a fixing of limits upon the statement. Rather, the enunciative function 'places them in a domain of coordination and coexistence'. Tweets exist within a domain, particularly those tweets that emerge in the tweacher society, but even those beyond it. Such domains may be as broad as celebrity or politics. Within the tweacher society, these domains may revolve around long-standing topics – such as the apparently ubiquitous progressive/traditionalist debate – or responses to policy – such as the plan for all schools to become academies.

Foucault also tells us 'Instead of determining their identity, it places them in a space in which they are used and repeated'. This use and repetition of statements is reflected in the use of retweets on Twitter, where a tweeter perhaps likes a particular sentiment and wishes to share it, or perhaps to share an opinion which

one wishes to highlight or even mock; as some tweeps are keen to point out in the bios, retweets do not always equal endorsements.

Or is a tweet more properly what Foucault calls a *formulation*? Foucault defines this as 'an event that can always be located by its spatio-temporal coordinates which can always be related to an author, and which may constitute in itself a specific act' (Foucault, 2002, p. 120). Statements, in Foucault's usage, are not narrowed to specific units, and to describe a statement is not 'a matter of isolating and characterizing a horizontal segment"; a statement is 'more than a passing event or an inert object, but rather a repeatable materiality' (p. 122). Tweets are, by their very nature, limited to 280 characters and could thus be described as the very unit of a 'horizontal segment', much like a sentence or other grammatical construct – objects which Foucault is at great pains to show are not in themselves statements. However, tweets are often constructed to take advantage of the character limit – a concise, crafted enunciation can carry considerable weight, but only in relation to the domains and fields of coexistence in which it resides.

3.4.1 The Archaeology of Tweets

Foucault tells us that the 'analysis of statements, then, is a historical analysis, one that avoids all interpretation: it does not question things said as what they are hiding, what they were 'really' saying, in spite of themselves … but on the contrary, it questions them as to their mode of existence, what it means to them to have come into existence, to have left traces, and perhaps to remain there, awaiting the moment when they might be of use once more' (Foucault, 2002, p. 123). What then is the mode of existence by which any particular tweet has come into being?

In order for us to comprehend the statement or potential statements within it, without interpretation, it might be useful to see it in relation to the sequence of tweets from that user's to learn how it is a response to tweets and wider publications by another user.

Tweets within a thread – or twitter conversation – might form 'discursive formations' which are 'linked at the statement level' (Foucault, 2002, p. 129). In this way it might be possible to treat tweets – either individual tweets or a sequence – as Foucauldian statements and conduct upon them an 'enunciative analysis' (Foucault, 2002, p. 127), and to 'define the general set of rules that govern the different modes of enunciation, the possible distribution of the subjective positions' (Foucault, 2002, p. 129).

Foucault also talks of the rules by which statements gain a particular status, and are re-used or 'become objects of appropriation' (p. 129). Sometimes the statements that emerge in twitter discourse are appropriated and re-used; the most obvious way that this happens is through the re-tweet – a method on Twitter of reposting a tweet on to your own timeline and to your set of followers. Often, retweets are used to show agreement or endorsement of the sentiment contained within it. However, many tweeters include within their biog statement a disclaimer along the lines 'RT[14] do not mean endorsement or agreement'. Some tweeters use retweets to provide examples of what they perceive as bad arguments. A newer feature on Twitter is the inclusion of the 'Quote Tweet' – a form of RT that allows you to comment on the tweet that you are quoting.

[14] RT: Retweet.

3.4.2 Tweets as Formulations

Foucault defines discourse as 'a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation', and goes on to say that 'it is, from beginning to end, historical – a fragment of history' that follows itself own rules of formation that reflect the 'conditions of operation' in which it sits (Foucault, 2002, p. 131).

It is possible to formulate a perspective of tweets as being *discursive formulations* through which *statements* emerge, revealing subjective positions to which individual tweeters – tweachers – align. The statements – often in the form of individual tweets – take on a life of their own, being ignored, being scrolled past, being read, responded to or retweeted dependent upon their perceived interest, relevance, importance, or even stupidity. I suspect this might be dependent, too, upon the time of day in which they are initially sent in relation to what time of day most tweachers are active. A Foucauldian exploration of teachers' use of Twitter might look to consider the conditions of operation in which the discursive formulations exist.

Foucault's explanation of the rarity of statements almost reads as a very definition of Twitter:

> "This rarity of statements, the incomplete, fragmented form of the enunciative field, the fact that few things, in all, can be said, explain that statements are not, like the air we breathe, an infinite transparency; but things that are transmitted and preserved, that have value, and which one tries to appropriate; that are repeated, reproduced, and transformed; to which pre-established networks are adapted, and to which a status is given

> in the institution; things that are duplicated not only by copy or translation, but by exegesis, commentary, and the internal proliferation of meaning. Because statements are rare, they are collected in unifying totalities, and the meanings to be found in them are multiplied.' (Foucault, 2002, p. 135)

Within the tweacher society, the statements that emerge in the discursive formations across tweets reflect all of these aspects. Despite what might seem to be an endless plethora of tweets being generated every hour across the social media platform – what might be described as *noise* – there can never be the time when everything that *could* be said ever will be, following Foucault's principle that '*everything* is never said', even on Twitter (Foucault, 2002, p. 134). The exegesis and commentary that Foucault identifies, along with the duplication and appropriation, are fundamental aspects of the tweacher discourse, and that of the wider Twitter community.

Foucault tells us that to analyse a discursive formation is to 'weigh the 'value' of statements' where this *value* is not about the *truth* of the statement, but one which, ultimately, 'poses the problem of power; an asset that is, by nature, the object of a struggle, a political struggle' (Foucault, 2002, p. 136). Thomson and Riddle (2019) describe social media as a 'Hobbesian space' where 'teachers, education researchers, policy makers, and other interested "educationalists" virtually assemble in disagreement on almost every conceivable education-related topic' (Thomson and Riddle, 2019, p.1). Thus topics in the discourses of eduTwitter become objects of a political struggle where the value of a statement rests not only in its perceived *truth* but in the potency of its capacity for maintaining the dominant status of ideas, or individuals.

Twitter generally, and certain sections within it such as the tweacher society, is a collection of tweets – Foucault's *network of statements* – forming *enunciative homogeneities*, or discursive topics where 'every statement belongs to a certain regularity' (Foucault, 2002, p. 163). Within this network, statements are enabled 'both to survive and to undergo regular modification' (Foucault, 2002, p. 146). Twitter, and the tweacher society, is a network of discursive practices with its own rules which define it as a '*system of enunciability*' (ibid), and one in which the statements remain in an endless and limitless *chronotopia* (Foucault, 1986) – a collection of enunciations which form what very much resembles what Foucault might define as an *archive* (Foucault, 2002, p. 145). Thus, an exploration of the tweacher discourse might be coined an *archaeology* – a 'systematic description of a discourse-object' (Foucault, 2002, p. 156), which 'does not treat [tweacher] discourse as *document*' but is 'concerned with [tweacher] discourse as a *monument*' (Foucault, 2002, p. 155). In line with Foucault, such an exploration would not seek to interpret what has been said, or to decode, discern or divine some alternative meaning: 'it refuses to be 'allegorical'' (Foucault, 2002, p. 155).

Foucault also breaks from traditional notions as represented by the history of ideas. Where the history of ideas seeks to find similarities and establish teleological, linear progression, Foucauldian archaeology seeks out contradiction, which 'functions throughout discourse as the principle of its historicity'. Indeed, for Foucault, 'discourse is the path from one contradiction to another' (Foucault, 2002, p. 168). The task of archaeology is not to find conciliation between these contradictions, but to discern the 'locus in which it takes place', to 'reveal where the two branches of the alternative join', and to determine the extent and form of

the gap that separates them' (Foucault, 2002, p. 170). The history of ideas might attempt to smooth over these gaps, or to hide or bridge them, according to Foucault. Conversely, 'archaeology describes the different spaces of dissension' (ibid).

There is a challenge, however, with Foucault's archaeology. He tells us that it is 'not possible for us to describe our own archive' (Foucault, 2002, p. 146). The implication is clear: we need distance between ourselves and the object of our scrutiny because we are part of the rules that create our own archive. The description of the archive rests upon 'the basis of the very discourses that have just ceased to be ours' and 'it begins with the outside of our language' (Foucault, 2002, p. 147).

However, work which claims to use Foucauldian archaeology often seems to take little heed of this insistence for distance (for example, Bourke et al., 2013), using Foucault's tools for the purposes of analysing concurrent discourse. In Part 2 of this thesis, I look back at the archive of sputniksteve's earliest tweets, composed almost a decade ago. This provides some sense of the distance that Foucault calls for. Even so, it is necessary to acknowledge the embedded nature of my position within that discourse.

3.5 What is a Tweeter? Applying Foucault's 'What is an Author'

Having challenged traditional notions such as the oeuvre, the book, and the sentence, Foucault does away with the traditional notion of authorship, claiming that 'Statements should no longer be situated in relation to a sovereign subjectivity' (Foucault, 2002, p. 137).

If 'The analysis of statements operates therefore without reference to a cogito' (p. 138), what can we say about the desire of many critical commentators to find links between various players and, for example, government ministers (for example, Watson, 2021)? What can we say about anonymous or pseudonymous accounts? The issue of anonymity is an important one within the discourse itself – why would professionals choose to remain anonymous? What can we say about agent provocateurs? Is it such figures themselves whose identity, or persona, yields emotive responses? Or is it what they say that is so unpalatable? If those exact same statements were made someone else, would they receive the same kind of response? Does the profile name itself constitute part, or the whole, of a statement? Is a twitter name that of an author or that of a *statement*? Sometimes, the author function is a useful vehicle through which critics can articulate their own ethical superiority – to ‘virtue signal’, making political use of emotion (Ahmed, 2004).

It is worth noting, of course, that Foucault’s 'reduction of subjectivity to a function of discourse, was something he later came to regret and moved to correct' (Yates and Hiles, 2010, p. 53). But Foucault’s problematisation of the author should not be easily dismissed by recourse to his later corrections. Rather, it is perhaps more useful to think of the author function as an aspect of the statement: that, certainly in terms of Twitter, the names of the twitter accounts – or twitter handles – with which one interacts are themselves constructions, or perhaps to use a more Foucauldian term, fictions.

Foucault problematizes the notion of the author in two ways. Firstly, by deconstructing the idea of an author’s *work*, Foucault questions what is meant by

this term. At what point does a subject become an author whose writing is considered to be *work*: 'When Sade was not considered an author, what was the status of his papers?' (Foucault, 1991a, p. 103). Foucault challenges the delimiting boundaries of what defines a *work* too. Does an author's work constitute only that which he has written for publication? Or does everything that is written by that subject constitute his *work*? There is certainly a market for the publication of letters and other artefacts composed by authors (and other celebrities), which perhaps were not initially intended for such publication. But, to what extent can this line of logic be followed? As Foucault puts it:

> 'When undertaking the publication of Nietzsche' s works, for example, where should one stop? Surely everything must be published, but what is 'everything"? Everything that Nietzsche himself published, certainly. And what about the rough drafts for his works? Obviously. The plans for his aphorisms? Yes. The deleted passages and the notes at the bottom of the page? Yes. What if, within a workbook filled with aphorisms, one finds a reference, the notation of a meeting or of an address, or a laundry list: Is it a work, or not? Why not? And so on, ad infinitum. **How can one define a work amid the millions of traces left by someone after his death?'**
>
> (Foucault, 1991a, p. 104) (My emphasis).

In the online heterotopia of Twitter, any attempts to define what constitutes a *work* are inevitably made more difficult as published writers, teaching practitioners, members of education authority bodies such as the DfE and Ofsted, all interact in that other space with varying degrees of formality. In addition, teacher bloggers

will use tweets to promote their blog posts by providing hyperlinks, whilst government ministers might use tweets to give hyperlinks to transcripts of their conference speeches. Indeed, subjects may tweet links to blog posts or other texts written by other subjects – I might post a link to a speech, a newspaper article, or to a blog post; do such tweets constitute a *work* or oeuvre? Whose *work* is it?

Foucault goes on to problematize our current notion of *writing*, by suggesting that it 'seems to transpose the empirical characteristics of the author into a transcendental anonymity' (Foucault, 1991a, p. 104). When I write a blog post, and then tweet a link to it this is clearly *my* work. But when that tweet gets retweeted, and the retweets get retweeted by people who do not directly follow me, can this still be said to be *my* work? When a video or meme goes ‘viral’, to what extent can that be attributed to an originating subject? Indeed, such memes often contain quotations which are falsely attributed to great thinkers like Einstein or Aristotle. At some point, the originating subject has receded and only the meme, video, or tweet remains.

Foucault’s deconstruction of the author continues with a discussion around the author’s name: a 'proper name' which carries with it associations and connotations, giving Aristotle as his example:

‘When one says 'Aristotle,' one employs a word that is the equivalent of one, or a series, of definite descriptions, such as 'the author of the Analytics,' 'the founder of ontology,' and Truth and Method so forth.’ (Foucault, 1991a, p. 105).

Such associations can certainly be seen at play in the tweacher society, with

certain Twitter identities carrying certain reputations.

Foucault then separates out the different aspects of the author's name in terms of biographical details of the subject, and the accreditation of work to that author's name. For example, should we discover that Shakespeare was not born in the house with which he is associated, it might alter our understanding of the life of the man, but it would not change the nature of our relationship with the text of *Hamlet*. 'But if we proved that Shakespeare did not write those sonnets which pass for his, that would constitute a significant change and affect the manner in which the author's name functions' (Foucault, 1991a, p. 106). A third type of modification which Foucault identifies as affecting the author function is if we were to learn that Shakespeare had actually written a work which we had previously ascribed to a different author.

Foucault further problematizes the notion of the author with a consideration of those cases in which either a subject uses a pseudonym, and those in which 'several people were mixed together under one name' or 'the true author had none of the traits traditionally ascribed to the personae of Homer or Hermes' (ibid). Clearly, in such cases, the author itself becomes an act of statement, an essential feature of the discourse: 'an author' s name is not simply an element in a discourse (capable of being either subject or object, of being replaced by a pronoun, and the like); it performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function' (Foucault, 1991a, p. 107).

Foucault is keen to present *name* as a performative function of author, carrying an essential function of its own within the discourse: 'It would seem that the author's name, unlike other proper names, does not pass from the interior of a discourse to

the real and exterior individual who produced it; instead, the name seems always to be present, marking off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterizing, its mode of being' (p. 107)

But how does this apply to twitter? Are tweets correspondent to any of these examples? Is a tweet more like an anonymous text posted on a wall? Or, is it the necessary use of a twitter handle taking these beyond anonymous utterances – even writing under pseudonym is not really being anonymous: it is a deliberate act of identity creation.

Foucault then outlines four different characteristics of the author function. Firstly, 'discourses are objects of appropriation' (108). Discourses have moved from being an act, to being a 'product, a thing, a kind of goods' with the rise of the figure of author and concepts of authorship, author’s rights which emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century (108). Interestingly, there has been a trend within the tweacher society for bloggers to write books, or to write for national publications – essentially to write commercial products. Thus, their twitter posts are often advertorial, and tweeters can often be seen showing enthusiasm or excitement for having ordered or received a copy of the latest book by such and such a blogger. On the other hand, some non-schoolteacher members of the tweacher community – academics often who have university positions – use twitter to share and disseminate their research, findings or theoretical propositions, posting links to papers and the like. Whilst these latter tweachers may not have an obvious commercial product to sell, it might be argued that such activity on Twitter may help contribute to their professional targets and Research Excellence Framework (REF) standing, particularly in a neoliberal climate (Ball, 2015).

The second characteristic of the author function is that the way it affects discourse is not constant or consistent. Here, Foucault shows the difference between what we might call literary texts and those that we might call scientific ones. The former were accepted regardless of their anonymity because 'their ancientness, whether real or imagined, was regarded as a sufficient guarantee of their status' (Foucault, 1991a, p. 109). Conversely, scientific texts in the middle ages were only accepted if accompanied by a name which served as a marker of 'demonstrated truth' (p. 109). Foucault points to a reversal in this situation during the seventeenth or eighteenth century. In scientific writing 'the author function faded away, and the inventor's name served only to christen a theorem, proposition, particular effect, property, body, group of elements, or pathological syndrome' (p. 109). Meanwhile, 'literary discourses came to be accepted only when endowed with the author function' (p. 109). In contemporary literary study, biographical details are often considered to be fundamental in developing an understanding of the text under scrutiny, even when this can lead to erroneous conclusions about the meaning of a text. Anecdotally, I can remember teaching the Auden poem *'Funeral Blues'* to an A Level class and discussing how an understanding of Auden's own sexuality enables us to see that poem as a brave and powerful proclamation of homosexual love in the context of a British society where such love was illegal. It was only much later that I discovered the true origins of *'Funeral Blues'* as a comic, satirical song in a play.

Foucault's third characteristic of the author function is that it does 'not develop spontaneously as the attribution of a discourse to an individual' (p. 110). Rather, it is the 'result of a complex operation which constructs a certain rational being that

we call 'author"' (p. 110). Foucault identifies that some might try to ascribe to this being a 'realistic status', as a creator or designer, but he says that such attributes are a 'projection' (p. 110). Thus, the author is a construct. Furthermore, our culture constructs different types of author in different ways. For example, a 'philosophical author' is not constructed in the same way that a 'poet' might be constructed (p. 110), and 'in the eighteenth century, one did not construct a novelist as we do today' (p. 110). Foucault then employs Saint Jerome's four criteria for attributing works to an author:

"(1) if among several books attributed to an author one is inferior to the others, it must be withdrawn from the list of the author's works (the author is therefore defined as a constant level of value); (2) the same should be done if certain texts contradict the doctrine expounded in the author's other works (the author is thus defined as a field of conceptual or theoretical coherence); (3) one must also exclude works that are written in a different style, containing words and expressions not ordinarily found in the writer's production (the author is here conceived as a stylistic unity); (4) finally, passages quoting statements that were made or mentioning events that occurred after the author's death must be regarded as interpolated texts (the author is here seen as a historical figure at the crossroads of certain number of events)."

However, as Foucault's fourth characteristic of the author function now illustrates, the author function 'does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects—positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals' (Foucault, 1991a, p. 113). Whilst a text will always include signs which point to an author, Foucault

challenges one such sign – that of the personal pronoun 'I'. He notes that the first-person pronoun leads to a 'plurality of self' (p. 112). In a first-person narrative, the 'I' is not necessarily the writer of the text, but 'an alter ego whose distance from the author varies, often changing in the course of the work' (p. 112). One might look here at the genre of the modern novel, where writers such as Vonnegut, deliberately manipulate our understanding and expectations of the author/narrator distinction such that Vonnegut claims to have met Billy Pilgrim, who is a fictional representation of his own self (as is Kilgore Trout). Foucault shows how this applies not only to 'novelistic or poetic discourse' but that 'all discourses endowed with the author function do possess this plurality of self' (p. 112). So, an author can be seen as a dispersed self in addition to a construct.

Finally, Foucault wishes us to see the author function at play in disciplines beyond discourse, and that even within the field of discourse, 'one can be the author of much more than a book - one can be the author of a theory, tradition, or discipline in which other books and authors will in their turn find a place' (p. 113). He labels such authors as 'transdiscursive', those who operate in different genres and forms of discourse. We can identify such transdiscursive authors within the tweacher society – those subjects who operate within different genres of writing (blogs, articles, speeches and so on). We can also see how the subjects of the tweacher society are transdiscursive in the ways they participate in different aspects of educational discourse – sometimes pedagogy, sometimes the politics of education, sometimes ontological and epistemological discussions. Foucault then identifies a further group of authors: 'the founders of discursivity' (p. 114). Such authors are 'unique in that they are not just the authors of their own works. They

have produced something else: the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts' (p. 114). I would posit that such authors can be found within the tweacher society, in so far as there are those subjects who have brought about, or at least signalled, a shift in what is considered to be ‘good practice’ in schools, and what is considered to be reasonable ideological standpoints in relation to pedagogy. Such individuals include those who have informed government policy through their discursive activity online (Gibb, 2015). This might not, yet, be seen as groundbreaking as the examples given by Foucault – Freud, Marx, and Ann Radcliffe. Such tweachers might not have brought about a new literary genre, political theory, or theory of the mind. But it could be argued that they have brought about a shift in the way that pedagogy and educational theory is discussed. It may even be that we have seen the emergence of a new educational episteme or theory – one that claims to be informed by *evidence* and that is confident in its celebration of *knowledge* and its rhetorical emphasis on *teachers teaching* (Gibb, 2015). Such a movement has been labelled, somewhat derogatorily, within the tweacher discourse as *neotrad*. It is possible that these tweachers 'have created a possibility for something other than their discourse, yet something belonging to what they founded' (Foucault, 1991a, p. 114). Such a movement within the tweacher society might reflect the wider trends in policy with regards to education within the current paradigm of neoliberalism (Ball, 2015), and indeed, the high profile enjoyed by certain tweacher bloggers might be suggestive of their use by neoliberal politicians claiming that they are representative of the wider teaching community. In this sense, we might be able to answer Foucault’s question, 'What difference does it make who is speaking?”

In a culture like ours (meaning 21st Century Western culture), where celebrity is often perceived as desirable, and celebrities sometimes seem akin to figures of worship, it is tempting to see in the figure of the *celebrity* a figure not unlike Foucault's author, twisted and contorted into a product for consumption. Images of celebrities adorn traditional print media such as billboard posters, television commercials and magazine covers, but they are also to be found on social media platforms such as Twitter. Here, celebrities have thousands of followers. Marwick and boyd illustrate how *celebrity* personas on Twitter balance, on the one hand, the need for a sense of intimacy between celebrity, or celeb-dom, and fandom, whilst simultaneously generating massive revenue and marketing streams (Marwick and boyd, 2011a). These celebrity figures are constructs, almost artificial *fictions*, Disney-esque characters. Twitter has also been seen as giving rise to 'professional rent-a-gobs', to use a tabloid phrase. A particular example of this is Katie Hopkins (@kthopkins); a former contestant on The Apprentice, since joining Twitter in February 2009, she has gained 678,000 followers (as of February 2017). She has made a name for herself by airing controversial views ranging from the names parents give their children, to seemingly cheering on gunship attacks on refugees. Her popularity has led to her hosting her own show on LBC Radio. It might reasonably be argued that Twitter can at times seem like an on-going pantomime, with its celebrity princes and princess, its melodramatic villains, and its comic dames.

3.6 Self Writing and the Ethic of Reflexivity

In his later years, Foucault began to explore the ethic of self-development and self-improvement, and 'It is well known that Foucault wrote in order to transform

himself' (Rayner, 2006, p. 27). One such exploration has particular relevance to the tweacher society and its use of Twitter, blogging and other social media (Weisgerber and Butler, 2015).

In his essay *'Self Writing'* (1997), Foucault begins by placing the act of self writing within an historical framework, firstly with Athanasius but then showing how Athanasius reflects ideas already present in the work of Seneca, Plutarch and Marcus Aurelius, 'but with very different values and following altogether different procedures' (Foucault, 1997a). For Athanasius, self writing is a tool against 'sinning and entertaining sinful thoughts altogether' (Athanasius, quoted in Foucault, 1997, p. 207). By writing down our actions and our very thoughts, we expose ourselves to scrutiny and this will ultimately impact upon our actions; 'Molding ourselves in this way, we shall be able to bring our body into subjection, to please the Lord and to trample under foot the machinations of the Enemy' (Athanasius, in Foucault, 1997, p. 207). Foucault summarises this idea thus: '[writing] offers what one has done or thought to a possible gaze; the fact of obliging oneself to write plays the role of a companion by giving rise to the fear of disapproval and to shame' (Foucault, 1997a). Neither Athanasius, nor Foucault, could have foreseen the world of social media that was to come, but it is easy to see how Twitter and blogging might fulfil this role. The 'possible gaze' of someone discovering our notebook has become the certain gaze of our followers, of the wider public. We are willingly offering up ourselves to the 'fear of disapproval and to shame'. As Weisgerber and Butler suggest, the act of tweeting may indeed help us construct our offline identities, by reflecting upon our own thoughts and behaviour and to mould ourselves.

Foucault highlights the focus not just on actions, but on thought, on 'all the inner impulses of the soul' and that such writing appears as a 'weapon in spiritual combat' (Foucault, 1997, p. 208). self writing, then, is an act of self-control, self-formation and self-cleansing, which Foucault correlates with the ancient Greek ideas of *askesis* which is defined as 'strict self-discipline or self-control, as for religious or meditative purposes'.[15] Foucault tells us that the 'art of living' is akin to a technique of professional skill which must be practised through exercise, a 'training of the self by oneself' (Foucault, 1997, p. 208). Foucault draws out from the Greco-Roman texts the association between writing and meditation, 'that exercise of thought on itself that reactivates what it knows, calls to mind a principle, a rule, or an example, reflects on them, assimilates them, and in this manner prepares itself to face reality' (Foucault, 1997, p. 209). Writing is a meditative process through which a subject can create or recreate himself in an on-going quest for self-improvement. Writing is an act which bridges the void between thought and action; 'writing constitutes an essential stage in the process to which the whole askesis leads: namely, the fashioning of accepted discourses, recognized as true, into rational principles of action' (Foucault, 1997, p. 209). This notion of 'accepted discourses' has particular relevance to the online world of the tweacher society, where ideas and opinions are presented and offered up for discussion and argument. There are some ideas and opinions which might be outside of the mainstream view, but which over time might come to be seen as dominant; there may be certain ideas which might be considered taboo, or even

15 http://www.dictionary.com/browse/askesis

morally unacceptable. For the former, we need look no further than the idea that institutions of authority – LEAs, Ofsted, the DfE – were promoting a progressive ideology of teaching, and that such strategies were ineffective and damaging. To begin with, these sorts of comments were deemed untenable, but over time have come to be commonplace in the tweacher discourse, no doubt boosted by the 2013 Gove speech which I see as being symbolic of the epistemic shift in the influence of the tweacher society and the subsequent *research* enriched discourse. The blogging of @oldandrewuk to highlight the progressive ideology within a plethora of Ofsted reports along with the publication of a number of books such as Robert Peal's *Progressively Worse* (Peal, 2014) and Daisy Christodoulou *Seven Myths in About Education* (Christodoulou, 2014), and the work of Professor Rob Coe are all indicative of how the 'accepted discourses' have shifted, let alone the significant changes made by Ofsted in its modus operandi (Ofsted, 2013). But even with these shifts, it would still be deemed inappropriate to suggest, for example, that we should restore teachers' ability to make use of corporal punishment. The suggestion that grammar schools could return might be seen as a test of the limits of what is accepted discourse in the current paradigm.

For Foucault, borrowing a term from Plutarch, writing has an '*ethopoietic* function: it is an agent of the transformation of truth into *ethos*' (Foucault, 1997, p. 209). The term *ethopoietic* here can be seen as meaning the creation or making (*poiesis*) of character (*ethos*). Writing, then, is an act of character formation not just in the sense of one's own character, but in the formation of the character of the community or communities in which we participate. The character of the tweacher society is formed by the writing activities of its participants, shaping and shifting

the accepted discourses that in turn shape the tweacher society.

Foucault proceeds to see this ethopoietic writing as having 'lodged itself outside of two forms that were already well known and used for other purposes: the *hupomnemata* and the *correspondence*' (Foucault, 1997, p. 209). The hupomnemata is 'a material record of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering them up as a kind of accumulated treasure for subsequent rereading and meditation' (Foucault, 1997, p. 210), whilst the correspondence are letters written to others which act upon the writer just as they do upon the recipients.

3.6.1 The Tweacher Society and Self Writing

As Foucault's self writing has lodged itself outside of hupomnemata and correspondence, so too has Twitter, serving both the purpose of (1) a notebook in which one collects disparate thoughts, ideas and arguments, and unites them within oneself, sketching one's own burgeoning ideas (hupomnemata), and (2) offering oneself up for public gaze, participating in an on-going conversation with multiple others (correspondence).

The echo of the hupomnemata in the tweacher society is obvious: 'the hupomnemata of the Greco-Roman era are not unlike some of the processes we engage with in contemporary social media sites, considering that these sites provide the technology to create digital records of the things we read, hear, or think' (Weisgerber and Butler, 2015, p. 1341).

These hupomnemata become something akin to a school exercise book, or to use Foucault's own term, a 'notebook' for 'exercises to be carried out frequently' so that the ideas and notes can be 'near at hand' in terms of being easily recalled to

consciousness and easily called into action. The intention is to create 'an equipment of helpful discourses' that are 'deeply lodged in the soul', for 'the soul must make them not merely its own but itself' (Foucault, 1997, p. 210). The notes recorded in the hupomnemata are rehearsed so that they become internalised, helping to construct the very subject who rehearses them: 'to capture the already-said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self' (Foucault, 1997, p. 210).

Weisgerber and Butler see social media and blogging as performing the same function, quoting Park: 'Recording fragments of texts for the purpose of helping him understand and construct a sense of self. It is as if a writer, in picking up little pebbles from the stream of other discourses, discovers a sense of self in the process of making the language his or her own.' (Weisgerber and Butler, 2015, p. 138)

It is easy to see how engagement with the tweacher society on Twitter can serve a similar, if not identical function; that would certainly be my personal experience of it.

Foucault refers to Seneca to stress the importance of combining reading with writing, as 'in reading too many books is a distraction' (Seneca, in Foucault, 1997, p. 212). The deliberate act of reflecting upon one’s reading, and using writing as a means to 'collect one’s thoughts about it', is an act which 'is an exercise of reason that counters the great deficiency of *stultitia*, which endless reading may favour' (p. 212). Foucault defines *stultitia* as being characterized by 'mental agitation, distraction, change of opinions and wishes, and consequently weakness in the

face of all the events that may occur' (Foucault, 1997, p. 212), and that the writing of hupomnemata helps one to resist being distracted by novel ideas by 'fixing acquired elements' (p. 212), as if to anchor one's mind and opinions with 'an acquired truth' (p. 212).

The writing of hupomnemata requires the collection of disparate, 'heterogeneous elements', without necessarily having to understand fully what these elements are trying to say or 'whether one is able to reconstruct their whole argument' (p. 212):

The ideas and arguments found within the collected items must be internalised and put to cognitive use, into action in order for them to become a truth of one's own; 'It becomes a principle of rational action in the writer himself' (p. 213). Through this process, 'the writer constitutes his own identity through this recollection of things said' (p. 213). However, Foucault gives us a warning from Seneca, that one should not merely repeat, re-present, or reuse these ideas as if merely copying them or regurgitating them. Rather, 'one should be able to form an identity through which a whole spiritual genealogy can be read' (p. 214).

Twitter also acts as correspondence which 'constitutes a certain way of manifesting oneself to oneself and to others. The letter makes the writer 'present' to the one to whom he addresses it' (p. 215), but Twitter makes the writer present to multiple addressees. Through the letter, the writer gazes upon the addressee but also offers himself up to the gaze of the addressee. This offering up is perfectly epitomised in the tweacher society where subjects offer themselves up to gaze by countless others, mostly unknown.

Foucault also highlights the usefulness of reviewing one's day: an exercise in

committing the events to memory, but also as an 'inspector of oneself' (p. 219). Whilst this need not be a written activity, Foucault points to examples of letters which include this feature, a deliberate narrative account of 'what occurs in the body and in the soul' (p. 219).

Foucault draws out the contrasts between the hupomnemata, as a 'matter of constituting oneself as a subject of rational action through the appropriation, the unification, and the subjectivation of a fragmentary and selected already-said' (p. 219), and correspondence as 'a matter of bringing into congruence the gaze of the other and that gaze which one aims at oneself when one measures one's everyday actions according to the rules of a technique of living' (p. 219).

For some, the correspondence function is the key feature of social media. For example, Mark Zuckerberg, when introducing the new Facebook Timeline described it as '"a new way to express who you are' and to 'share the story of your life"' (Schulman, 2011, para. 1 in Weisgerber and Butler, 2015 p. 1353). However, Wiesgerber and Butler disagree with Zuckerberg's analysis: 'This conventional understanding of identity mistakenly assumes that a social networking site is solely a place for users to project their offline identity. The offline identity is seen as existing a priori and new digital technologies are viewed as narrative tools designed to help express that identity' (Weisgerber and Butler, 2015, p. 1353). For Weisgerber and Butler, the act of using these social media is more symbiotic than that; it is an on-going process of self-creation: 'one of becoming oneself through self-care' (p. 1353), a theme also explored by Rayner: 'I tweet therefore I am' (Rayner, 2012c, 2012b, 2012a). Thus, the participation in online activity of this kind is identity forming; as one creates one's online author persona, co-

constructed by the online society in which it is received, so too one constructs one's own self through the introspective act of defining, refining, presenting and representing ideas, opinions, discursive artefacts and *truths*. This is even more pronounced, perhaps, in those online communities which coalesce around professional interests, such as the tweacher society, where one's identity formation is, at least in part, informed by one's job or professional role. Thus, one's identity as a teacher is formed by our response to, and opinion of, such things as policy, professional standards, the inspectorate, and emergent entities such as the College of Teachers.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered alternative theoretical perspectives that might usefully be employed to construct an analysis of schoolteachers' use of Twitter – specifically communities of practice and Castell's network society – before explaining why I have chosen certain tools from Foucault. I have then described the key elements of the Foucauldian tools employed in this project. I have given a discussion of Foucault's description of heterotopia and how that can be used to describe eduTwitter. I have provided an analysis of Foucault's exploration of statements and formulations and related these to the flows of discourse on eduTwitter, and I have considered how Foucault's work on the author might illuminate our understanding of how twitter personas operate as an author function. I then explored how participating in the tweacher society through tweeting and retweeting resembles Foucault's ideas about self writing.

Overall in this chapter, I show how eduTwitter acts as a heterotopia where

members of the tweacher society engage in the exchange of statements in an ongoing act of transformative self-writing, including how the personas that are presented might be regarded as serving the author function (Foucault 1991a).

In Chapter 4, I give some consideration to ideas of identity, particularly in relation to teacher identities and how they might be informed.

4. Identity

4.1 Introduction

As members of a professional community, teachers are subject to expectations about what kind of people they are supposed to be. There is a set of professional standards that teachers are expected to uphold, and this is often seen to apply to their online behaviour in addition to their behaviour in school. Therefore, a sense of teacher identity emerges which is, to some extent at least, mandated. In this chapter, I briefly touch upon some ideas around teacher identity and how they might relate to the tweacher society.

4.2 Teacher Identity

Teacher identity is a rich area of work in the literature and could in itself constitute a doctoral research project; and, as Gee highlights, the 'term *identity* has taken on a great many different meanings in the literature' (Gee, 2000, p.99). It is not my intention to embark on such a project here; however, an acknowledgement that the literature exists is in order and would be wise to employ it where particularly pertinent. For example, for Gee, 'Being recognized as a certain 'kind of person,' in a given context, is what I mean here by 'identity.' In this sense of the term, all people have multiple identities connected not to their 'internal states' but to their performances in society' (p.99). This definition of *identity* chimes with my own intended usage, and I believe with Foucault's sense in relation to identify formation in 'Self Writing'. It is also developed by Youdell (2006) who shows how identity is often projected upon us through powerful discourses such that our subjectivity is discursively constituted, and how it is alters across different

contexts.

Gee outlines four categories of identity which, rather than being independent, constitute different perspectives which 'interrelate in complex and important ways' (p.101).

Process		Power	Source of power
1. Nature-identity: a state	developed from	forces	in nature
2. Institution-identity: a position	authorized by	authorities	within institutions
3. Discourse-identity: an individual trait	recognized in	the discourse/ dialogue	of/with "rational" individuals
4. Affinity-identity: experiences	shared in	the practice	of "affinity groups"

Figure 4.1: Table Showing Four Ways to View Identity (Gee, 2000, p.100).

One's identity as *teacher* can be seen, at least in part, as an I-identity as Gee would call it – or item 2 in the Table in Figure 4.1. The nature of that identity will inevitably be determined by what kind of behaviours are sanctioned or mandated by the educational institution in which one works, and the policy driven behaviours enforced or expected by, for example, the DfE and Ofsted. In the UK, in order to qualify as a teacher, one must show evidence of competence against a set of 'teacher standards' [16]. Schools employ these standards as part of their ongoing *performance management* of teachers – a phrase which could warrant a Foucauldian analysis of its own!

16 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards

However, teacher *identity* is also formed by discourse and shared practice, meaning that it can simultaneously be described by Gee's Discourse (D)-identity (item 3 in the table) and Affinity (A)-identity (item 4 in the table). For Gee *discourse* – or rather *Discourse* – is a term which he employs to cover the range of senses of *discourse* that have been used by others:

> 'The term Discourse is meant to cover important aspects of what others have called, by different names (though these are not, of course, all synonymous terms), discourses (Foucault, 1973, 1977, 1980), communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), cultural communities (Clark, 1996), discourse communities (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995), distributed knowledge or distributed systems (Hutchins, 1995), thought collectives (Fleck, 1979), practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Bourdieu, 1998; Heidegger, 1962), activity systems (Engestrom, 1990; Leont'ev, 1978), actor-actant networks (Callon & Latour, 1992; Latour, 1987), and (one interpretation of) 'forms of life' (Wittgenstein, 1958).'
>
> (Gee, 2000, p. 110)

Gee offers an exploration of the shifting nature of identity, via modernism and the liberating effect of the enlightenment, away from I-identities of pre-modern civilisation such that an individual can no longer 'count on institutions or traditional authority to underwrite [his] identity' and that 'recognition becomes a particular problem for 'modern' people' (Gee, 2000, p.112). I recognise in this account, even though it predates the emergence of Twitter, a potential account for the rise of social media – along with a whole host of 21st Century phenomena which could be

said to represent a turn to mass narcissism manifest in the ubiquitous *selfie* (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2014). Or it could be said that the selfie itself constitutes an important act of Foucauldian self-writing, as argued by Hall who presents the case for a certain kind of selfie – the cue-card selfie – as a form of confessional and considers 'what the persistent and widespread use of the cue card confession in social media suggests about the present and future of self-writing' (Hall, 2016, p.230).

Participation in the tweacher society then – the active posting of statements in the heterotopic space of #eduTwitter – might help to answer, or at least be symbolic of, what Gee identifies as 'the modern need for recognition' which 'places a particular importance on discourse and dialogue' (Gee, 2000, p.112) using a language which one must learn or acquire in 'interchange with other speakers'. This is an act of construction of the D-identity that can only occur in dialogue, or perhaps as Foucault would have it, through *correspondence*. It is a negotiated identity, whose recognition must be won through 'exchange with others, and such an attempt can fail' (Gee, 2000, p.113).

Gee charts the rise of what he calls 'the new capitalism' in post-modern society, which focuses on 'the creation and nurturing of what [he has] called ‘sanctioned A-Identities' (Gee, 2000, p.115). He exemplifies by saying that 'Businesses today create new needs by helping or encouraging people to take on new identities in terms of which those needs arise'.

Gee goes on to apply his analytic to classroom-based interactions in the US in which he shows the various negotiations of D-identities taking place, and he articulates the relevance of this kind of study in education research in terms of the

impact of ideas of all aspects of identity, including race and perceived medical conditions such as ADHD. However, it is also pertinent to consider Gee's perceptions of identity in relation to teachers and their interactions with those who operate in positions of authority over them – whether that be senior leaders, inspectors, or policy makers. During a *performance management* review, where a teacher's 'performance' is measured against the Teacher Standards, or/and targets based upon the examination results of pupils, we are very much in the realm of I-identity. When teachers work together in training or shared planning, there is the perspective of D-identity and also that of A-identity; however, since these activities are institutional, and there is always a clear expectation of how they should operate, I would argue that they are still in operation mostly around I-identify formation and, more specifically, of clarifying I-identify expectations.

Buchanan reveals that the 'new discourse of accountability is pervasive in educational policy texts and contemporary media representations of teachers' (Buchanan, 2015, p.700) in the US, and I would argue that this is also true in the UK, both in schools and in higher education (Ball, 2012, 2015). However, Buchanan is keen to point out that teachers 'confront the policies and professional discourses they encounter not as tabulae rasae, but rather actively use their own preexisting identities to interpret, learn from, evaluate, and appropriate the new conditions of their work in schools and classrooms' (Buchanan, 2015, p.701). Crucially, Buchanan goes on to say that 'their identities are reformed and remade – and professional agency is carved out' (p.701). This notion of reformation, and the carving out of professional agency is an important aspect of participation in the tweacher society.

Participation in #eduTwitter discourses offers the potential for more D-identify level dialogue and certainly around A-identity dialogue. Indeed, much of the discourse in my twitter feed is about teachers aligning with certain pedagogical beliefs or ideological preferences. The ubiquitous trad/prog divide is an obvious example, but I shall deal with others later in this chapter.

There is a clear phenomenon within online discourse whereby the opinion or belief of a contributor is very much seen as being part of their very identity. To challenge an opinion, or a belief, can often be perceived as a personal attack: 'Thus folks tend to get very upset when their opinions are challenged, because the assumption is that their opinions are not all that are at stake in a debate; their identities, their selfhood, are' (Allen, 2010, p.366). This can often cause interlocutors to respond with ad hominem, or blatant insult. The hotbed of aggressive debate on Twitter has certainly been noted by commentators, and the abusive and threatening nature of some exchanges on wider, non-tweacher, Twitter has been explored elsewhere (Hardaker and McGlashan, 2016). This is, as some may label it, the dark side of Twitter, but encountering these kinds of discourses are in themselves formative – how do I define myself in relation to such hostilities? How do I respond in my own identity carving to accusations of fascism?

4.2.1 Imposed Identity

During 2017-2018, I developed a growing fascination with the discourse of teaching job adverts, and what they suggest about the kinds of identity that teachers are supposed, expected, or required to present. This fascination has been a feature of my ResearchED talks and has formed part of my ontological

persona. For instance, a tweet[17] I posted in March 2018 shows the results of a search I had conducted of the job vacancy section of the *Times Educational Supplement* (TES) website.[18]

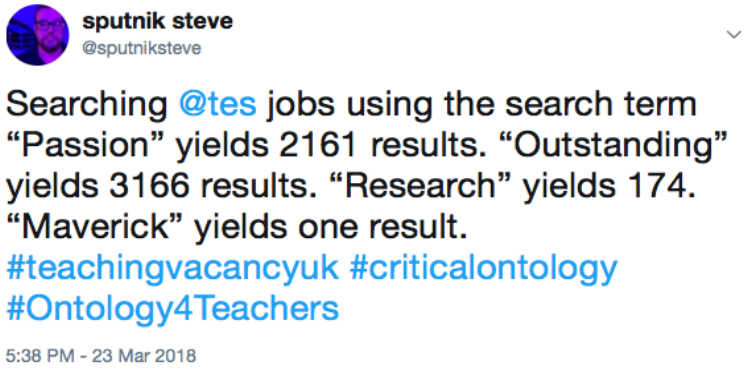


Figure 4.2: Tweet @sputniksteve (2018b)

It should be noted here that this was not intended to be an academically robust data collection exercise, but rather to serve my own curiosity and to inform my talks at ResearchED. The terms selected for the search came from my own observations of such advertisements where I was growing frustrated at the prevalence of them; specifically the terms *passion* and *outstanding*. As a point of contrast, I chose to compare them with the terms *research* and *maverick*; the former due to the apparently growing calls for teaching to become a more research informed profession, and the latter as a result of the call for more mavericks in the profession by a previous Chief Inspector of School, Michael Wilshaw (Wilshaw, 2016; Ward, 2016). The results from the search activity, as presented in this tweet, are reflective I think of the current episteme in the status

17 https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/977343860757053441
18 https://www.tes.com/jobs/

of teacher identity. There is still a clear expectation of *outstanding* in terms of either teacher performance or in terms of outcomes, however these may be defined or measured. This is despite the cessation of lesson grading by Ofsted (OfSTED, 2014) and the continued discussion of this cessation within the tweacher society. The term *outstanding* continues to dominate the discourse of teaching vacancy adverts revealing both a reluctance for school leadership to abandon the term, and a persistence in the flawed notion that *outstanding* can constitute some kind of minimum expectation.

In the UK, however, the usage of the term *outstanding* has, to some extent, shifted away from such explicit reference to outstanding teachers. Rather, the opportunity to join an *outstanding team* may be offered, or schools are looking for *exceptional teachers* to help them to attain *outstanding outcomes* or to secure *outstanding provision*. The underlying concept, however, remains solidly with the Ofsted-inspired terminology and the conceptualised ideal of teacher identity that it connotes.

Another term which yields high returns in searches is *passion*. Schools are looking for teachers who are *passionate* about their subject, or *passionate* about education. This term has come to mean a version of *enthusiasm*, or as the Oxford Dictionaries Online has it: 'An intense desire or enthusiasm for something'.[19] But this definition is given as a subset of the primary definition, which is: 'Strong and barely controllable emotion'. Furthermore, the word's origin dates back to the second definition given by Oxford Dictionaries Online: 'The suffering and death of

19 https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/passion

Jesus'. One wonders quite what it is that schools want from their teachers!

By contemplating these definitions and etymologies, we can begin to interrogate what, precisely, such adverts are saying about the expectations of what teachers are and what they do. It may suggest that a teacher is expected to continually stand out in their practice, and to suffer for their subject. In the very least, perhaps, teachers are expected to show strong and barely controllable emotion for their subject or their pupils.

Such expectations are, I would suggest, unrealistic and yet these terms permeate the discourse of teaching vacancies and, by extension, projected idealisations of The Teacher.

Such idealisations are also projected through the promotion for courses in initial teacher training (ITT) or initial teacher education (ITE). Ironically, given my assertion that the tweacher society provides an opportunity for a Foucauldian 'experiment with the possibility of going beyond' the limits imposed upon us, such projections of idealised teacher identity can be found within the discourse of #eduTwitter. For example, looking at tweets advertising ITE courses reveals both *passion*[20] and *outstanding*[21] continue to feature.

Interestingly, 'maverick' does not appear to be a quality much desired by schools! When I conducted my search of TES adverts using the key term 'maverick', only one result was returned. This particular advert included the phrase: 'we want a positive, proactive person with character and passion and someone who is not

20 https://twitter.com/Newman_College/status/978210157380427776
21 https://twitter.com/bathspa_ife/status/976828088070950913

afraid to be a bit maverick with ideas that will excite and engage our children'.[22]

That 'maverick' does not appear to be a desired quality is particularly interesting, given the calls of a previous Chief Inspector for more of them: '… today I want to make the case for difference, for maverick teachers and school leaders. Why? Because we desperately need more mavericks in the classroom and in the headteacher's office' (Wilshaw, 2016).

Clearly, passionate and outstanding teachers remain a dominant idealised conception within the discourse of vacancy advertisements. But idealised conceptions of teacher identity also exist beyond such advertisements. There is a current discursive thread, for example, around the combined themes of 'Zero Tolerance' and 'No Excuses' behaviour policies. The discourse around this, inevitably, could be described as dispersing along the poles of the trad/prog dichotomy, with some (trads) claiming that such policies create a space where children and adults feel safe and are enabled to learn effectively, whilst others (progs) describe such policies as authoritarian, fascist, cruel and inhuman. Of course, it could be argued that the labels here are unnecessary.

Clearly then, within the tweacher society itself, there are certain identity traits that are presented as a kind of minimum expectation. Such traits include compassion, love and humanity. And, whilst some within the tweacher society agree with my personal frustration with the term *passion*, there are others who inevitably see this as an important trait for teachers to possess – not least those who write teaching

22 https://web.archive.org/web/20180414104114/https://www.tes.com/jobs/vacancy/class-teacher-plumstead-london-1052099

vacancy advertisements.

These examples may also reflect what Cho and Jimerson describe as a 'panoptic quality' (Cho and Jimerson, 2017, p.885) upon those engaged in online discourse, creating two potentially contradicting aspects of a subject's identity: 'The substantive self is anchored in one's self-defining beliefs and core values, whereas the situational self is anchored in context—who we are when facing the expectations of others. Sometimes these selves can be in conflict' (p.886).

A further aspect of imposed teacher identity can be found in ideas about *professionalism*, where tweacher activity online is expected to maintain a professional tone, and where 'professional' is defined through the representation of teachers and teaching through, for example, teaching vacancy advertisements. An interesting development on eduTwitter has been the rise of suggestions that certain comments made by teachers in tweets might somehow contravene The Seven Principles of Public Life (commonly referred to as the Nolan Principles)[23] which demand that anyone who works as a public office-holder demonstrates: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership. Such suggestions have often tagged twitter accounts of teachers' employing schools, local education authorities (LEAs) or multi-academy trusts (MATs) in an apparent attempt to alert employers to breaches in proper conduct. In some cases, employers have been contacted with complaints about tweets from their employees, despite no reference being made to the employer in the tweets.

23 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2

Here, then, we see how the figure of the teacher is a socio-political construct – a certain kind of subject who is expected, by some at least, to uphold some kind of ideal standard in the discourses of social media spaces.

In addition, tweachers or certain ideas may become associated with emotively charged terms which can become hard to shake – such a term becomes a 'sticky sign' (Ahmed, 2004, p.92). These terms become representative of positions that evoke disgust and that can therefore be hated (Ahmed, 2004). Such terms may originate in labels denoting pedagogical positions, such as traditional or progressive which take on negative connotations and become slurs, particularly in their shortened forms of 'trad' and 'prog' with ever more emotive adaptations arising such as 'extreme trad' or 'neotrad'. Just as in other fields of discourse, we might see individuals claiming such terms as self-identifying labels such that one might claim to be a proud neotrad. Often, they are used to position those with views different from one's own as somehow harmful to children. There is often a sense of disgust, or outrage articulated in response to tweachers stating certain views which might be seen as unpalatable. It is possible, I think, to suggest that in such debates the trad/prog dichotomy operates as a hierarchical binary (Youdell, 2006; Derrida, 1978) where individuals on one side of the debate attempt to other their opponents through claiming a moral authority.

Identity is also performatively constituted (Youdell, 2006; Butler, 1993): 'we call a girl 'girl' and she is a girl' (Youdell, 2006, p.43) where the term 'girl' carries meaning which is 'derived from existing knowledges, or discourses' (ibid). Similarly, we call a teacher a teacher and she is a teacher, where 'teacher' carries meaning derived from existing knowledges or discourses. We call a tweacher a

‘trad’ and he is a ‘trad’ where ‘trad’ carries meanings derived from existing knowledges of discourses.

4.2.2 Enacted Identity

Since 'Identity is at once the kind of person we think we are, as well as the kind of person we feel we ought to be' (Cho and Jimerson, 2017, p.886), it is reasonable to suppose that identity is, at least in part, an enacted fiction (Hardaker and McGlashan, 2016). Foucault gives the cinema as one example of a heterotopia (Foucault, 1986) and it’s interesting to note that in that space we watch a fictional world inhabited by actors pretending to be other people. As an audience, we buy into this fiction, perhaps forgetting that we too play our part. As Shakespeare tells us, 'All the world's a stage,/ And all the men and women merely players'.[24] But Twitter in general, and #eduTwitter in particular for the purposes of this study, offers a digital world, a digital stage (De Kosnik, 2019) upon which we can dance our digital selves: 'Users can invent and explore identities that they would struggle to enact convincingly, if at all, offline' (Hardaker and McGlashan, 2016, p.82). Tweeters can be seen ‘as actors using masks not to ‘cover or hide reality’, but to ‘generate realities’ (De Kosnik, 2019, p. 29). This invented self is created, at least in part, with a view to the perceived audience, or '*imagined audience*' (Marwick and Boyd, 2011b, p.115). This latter point is particularly relevant for the tweacher society because the potential audience is an unknown and users therefore resort to a 'cognitively constructed' audience (p.116), but 'a tweet’s actual readers differ from its producer’s imagined audience' (p.117). Marwick and Boyd also point to an

24 As You Like It

interesting element of Twitter usage in the perceived authenticity, which seems to run contrary to notions of *branding*: 'In other words, consciously speaking to an audience is perceived as inauthentic' (Marwick and Boyd, 2011b, p.119). This enacted self is also discursively constituted (Youdell, 2006) and, in the information driven neoliberalism of Twitter, identity is also an act of self-formation into the 'entrepreneurial man' (Dardot and Laval, 2013, p.281) who must always win and surpass himself, in an ongoing process of 'ultra-subjectivation' (p.284). In the tweacher society we have witnessed the rise of edu-celebs and a proliferation of books written by teachers and publicised on Twitter. On Twitter, a user might become obsessed with gaining followers or likes for particular tweets which could be seen as markers of entrepreneurial success.

Identity is also performatively constituted (Youdell, 2006; Butler, 1993)

Teachers operating in the digital heterotopia of eduTwitter may be doing so with different intentions – some to learn and to develop their own practice; some to articulate perspectives upon political, pedagogical, epistemological or ontological concerns; some to promote their brand; many tweachers may mix any combination of these.

4.2.3 Online Identify

In recent years, there has been a growing body of research into how identity operates and is created in online spaces. The growth of online spaces that invite users to create online personas has brought with it a growth in interest in how these personas operate, such that in 2015 a new journal was launched with a specific focus on persona studies (Marshall and Barbour, 2015). Most recently,

work into the dynamic relationship between subject and persona has confirmed how a dialectic emerges between subject and persona that 'enables the avatar-persona to express a certain degree of influence over the user in some circumstances' (Procter, 2021). This is a contrast to the view that an online persona, or avatar, is a passive 'placeholder' which 'becomes an object upon which the user gazes' (Proctor, 2021, p.53). Instead, such personas are 'sites of self-making in their own right' (Boellstorff 2008, p.149).

The productive nature of this dialectic between the subject and the online persona has obvious relevance for the current project which sees participation in the online heterotopia of eduTwitter as a potentially transformative act of self writing. The tweacher engages via an online representation of the subjective Self which to a lesser or greater extent expresses a degree of influence over them and which becomes a site of self-making in its own right.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered different theoretical conceptions of teacher identity and how this might relate to online presentations of identity. I have explored how identities may be imposed upon schoolteachers by performance management processes, the expectations found in job descriptions and vacancy advertisements and by peers and those working in related education fields. I have discussed how identities can be constructed and how they are performative.

Ultimately, schoolteachers – like any users of social media – may present different aspects of identity online, the growth and development of which is contingent upon encounters with discourses. Schoolteachers, like members of certain other

professions, are subject to a range of expectations about what constitutes acceptable and appropriate online behaviour, and these expectations contribute to a set of discursive relations that constitute teacher identity.

In participating in online discussions via eduTwitter and engaging in the tweacher society, schoolteachers make choices about the kinds of persona they wish to present to that community and these personas may be deliberately crafted or may be performed in a less deliberate manner. Such choices may be reflected in whether individuals choose to use a pseudonym or their legal name, the extent to which they wish to discuss their own work setting and professional experiences, and the nature of the topics in which they participate.

In the next section, I give an overall conclusion to Part One.

5. Conclusion to Part One

In this part of the thesis, I have employed tools from Foucault to put forward a theory of #eduTwitter as a digital heterotopic space in which subjects participate in acts of transformative self-writing through their engagement with, and deployment of, statements. Tweets, and for some subjects blogs, act as both hupomnemata and correspondence that open the subject to ongoing formative exchanges. Through these interactions, not only are the subjects transformed but so too is the community – the tweacher society itself – as policy makers and the inspectorate engage with classroom practitioners and school leaders. Hence, the traditional hierarchies of power may appear to be dismantled, or at least, diminished and power can be seen flowing through the discursive practices in productive ways, causing change to occur. EduTwitter, therefore, is a site of crisis – meaning transformation – where the participants are changed, and these changes are enacted in the real space of classroom and school practice. The very nature of participants is altered such that they cannot help but enact them. Whilst certain kinds of identity may be expected of teachers, participation in #eduTwitter and membership of the tweacher society allows us to challenge some of these expectations, experimenting with going beyond the traditional limits placed upon us.

PART TWO: A Teacher Who Tweets

6: sputniksteve

NB. As noted in Chapter 2.7.1, in this part, tweets sent from @sputniksteve can be found in the appendices. They are acknowledged in the text in brackets where (1:1) would denote appendix 1, tweet 1.

Tweets sent by others are referenced as citations. Twitter search result URLs are footnoted.

6.1 Introduction

It is August 2020. Sputniksteve tweets a picture of a man holding a copy of a book titled *Beyond Wiping Noses*. The picture is a selfie. The cover design for the book is emblazoned with two names: the first is 'Stephen Lane' under which the lexeme '@sputniksteve' is printed in a different font. The picture is accompanied by words exclaiming a sense of disbelief that the books has made it to publication: 'It exists!', tweets sputniksteve.

This tweet marks a moment in the development of both the author (in a Foucauldian sense) sputniksteve, and the subject Stephen. The one is, of course, a facet of the other. Or is it the other way around?

In this tweet, sputniksteve confirms — not for the first time — that he is a digital apparition of the subject Stephen. For some time now, sputniksteve has used the image of Stephen's face as his profile picture. For some months, sputniksteve has been promoting this book, written by Stephen Lane. By now, Stephen has spoken at a number of ResearchED (rED) events, BrewED events and a few teachmeets,

all associating the sputniksteve identity with the subject Stephen. In his bag, Stephen carries business cards, produced by his employer, that contain Stephen's work email address, his mobile phone number, and the @sputniksteve twitter handle. The confluence of identities means that, despite criticisms in the past over his attempts at anonymity, sputniksteve is comfortable, confident, perhaps, to associate himself with Stephen. This is not Bruce Wayne and Batman; this is Tony Stark proudly announcing at a press conference: 'I am Iron Man!'

Am I really going to do that? Am I really going to compare sputniksteve to a superhero? Am I really going to debate whether sputniksteve is more akin to Batman — the dark knight — or Iron Man? Both Bruce Wayne and Tony Stark are rich flamboyant showoffs. Is Stephen like that? Hardly. At least, he is not rich. The relevance of superheroes is that there are masks involved. Batman dons a mask to become the dark knight, but Bruce Wayne is the fiction — the flamboyant, carefree gad is a performance intended to throw people off the scent. Tony Stark's flamboyance hides a deep-seated insecurity. Superman, on the other hand, shows his real face, whilst Clarke Kent is a disguise — both in appearance, and in characteristics. All of these men are rather self-absorbed narcissists. This is definitely true of Stephen.

Stephen tells his students that superheroes are the modern reinvention of Jekyll and Hyde. Stephen also points out that Jekyll enjoys being Hyde and, initially at least, chooses to be him. Hyde is, perhaps, Jekyll's true self, whilst the dignified Victorian gent is the mask. In the end, Hyde grows in strength, becoming the dominant persona, and Jekyll is in danger of being consumed by him and disappearing. Both characters, perhaps, are aspects of the subject behind the

author Stevenson. The creation of grotesque characters who are ultimately merely representations, or projections, of the subject's self is made even more explicit by Mary Shelley who has her protagonist giving life to a re-animated corpse. Frankenstein's first action in his new role of zombie dad is to reject his creation, who is then propelled into a world that finds him repulsive and frightening — the only kindness he receives coming from a man who cannot see his face. Ultimately, Frankenstein and his creature become embroiled in a bitter fight to the death. For Stevenson, this fight is internal: 'it was the curse of mankind that these incongruous faggots were thus bound together - that in the agonised womb of consciousness these polar twins should be continuously struggling' (Stevenson, 1886/1979, p. 82).

Is this what I want to do? Am I keen to suggest that sputniksteve is a monster, created by Stephen for some nefarious purpose? Or was sputniksteve born out of necessity? Frustration, perhaps. Perhaps sputniksteve was a tool for Stephen to experiment with going beyond the professional limits placed upon him as a teacher (Foucault, 1997), although he would not have been able to articulate it as such at the time.

The comparisons with Jekyll and Hyde, and Frankenstein and his creature, run the risk of painting the relationship between Stephen and sputniksteve as a negative one — one of conflict. But this is not really the case. Sputniksteve has enabled Stephen to pursue an avenue of growth that would not otherwise have been open to him. Sputniksteve has been an avatar for Stephen to wear whilst perusing the heterotopic garden of eduTwitter. Sputniksteve is Stephen+ — brave to speak, to question, to contradict. By tweeting about Stephen Lane's book, sputniksteve is

confidently jumping between the offline world, and the online heterotopic other space of Twitter. But unlike Tony Stark proclaiming that he is indeed Iron Man, sputniksteve is announcing ‘I am Stephen’.

This interplay between names and identities might seem trivial. After all, many other people have used their offline names as their Twitter handles. But the relationship between the author and the subject remains. The Twitter version of the self is still a constructed one, even if not consciously deliberate (De Kosnik, 2019).

The journey from the birth of sputniksteve on Twitter to this moment of becoming a published book writer has taken almost a decade. En route, the subject Stephen has taken a journey of professional and personal growth culminating in being regarded, I hope, as a relatively competent and respected member of staff in his workplace — something that has not always been the case! At least, Stephen’s self-perception has perhaps shifted. In any case, Stephen’s participation in the tweacher society as sputniksteve has enabled him to cultivate a persona that, through an ongoing feedback loop, has informed not only that cultivated persona online but his practice, views, opinions, belief — perhaps even his very being — in ways which clearly constitute a technology of the self.

In this chapter, I — that is the Stephen who here is a doctoral researcher — reflect on some key stages in the emergence and growth of sputniksteve as a member of the tweacher society: his ‘birth’ on eduTwitter, and his involvement with ResearchED.

There is something surreal about looking back at tweets from almost a decade

ago. It generates a sense of almost objective detachment which, perhaps, echoes Foucault's own assertion that one cannot critique the archive from within it, although I am clearly still related to this history – they are my tweets; they are statements that I made. That the earliest tweets have been divorced from any threads in the Twitter search results also renders them curious statements existing without obvious context. Thus, they exist as fragments of a self that, in the first months, appears to be scrabbling around, desperate for some purchase, rather like Frankenstein's creature.

6.2 Birth

It is February 2011. Stephen is in a job that he hates and in clinical depression. Unknown to him, his body is busily building up a platoon of plaque in his blood stream. His kidneys don't work properly. His blood pressure is building. The daily breakfasts from Burger King probably aren't helping.

Stephen still wants to do a good job. He wants to be innovative. He likes to embrace technology. He wonders if social media might be able to enhance his teaching and, more importantly, students' learning. He creates a Twitter account. He creates two. He tests out the platform by tweeting between his accounts.

'Nah,' he thinks. 'Facebook is better'.

Like all online spaces of its ilk, Twitter requires an initial process of registration. I daresay Foucault would have much to say on this in itself — the act of presenting oneself for clerical administration, to register one's existence on the digital plane, to be authorised. However, the era of social media — the era of Twitter — has negated Foucault's forecast that the 'author function will disappear' (Foucault,

1991a, p. 119) in two ways. First, in much twitter discourse the *whosaid* frequently trumps the *whatsaid*. This is nothing new, of course — the ad hom has been a cornerstone of political debate for a long time; I'm reminded of the 'Vote Blair, Get Brown' rhetoric of the early 2000s, but this is just one example. However, Twitter seems to have amplified this kind of discourse such that the message is submerged in the waves of personal invective (Ahmed, 2004; Polak and Trottier, 2020; Clucas, 2020). The second rebuttal from social media of Foucault's proclamation of the death of the author is evident in the registration process: This process involves the choosing of a name.

When Stephen first entered the heterotopic online space of Twitter he created two accounts:

1. @englishmrlane which was intended for professional use as a pedagogical tool in his teaching, and which lasted a few months until he abandoned it. In fact, I'd forgotten all about this account until doing this search.
2. @sputniksteve which began around the same time as the attempted professional account. This, inevitably, became the main account from which I continue to tweet and which has now grown to over 7,000 followers (2,286 as at 2nd June, 2017; 6538 as at 29th February, 2020, and 7,051 follows by 29th August, 2020).

@sputniksteve is not the first, or indeed only, online name that Stephen has used. Email accounts, Ebay accounts, chat room accounts, have all afforded the opportunity, and indeed what often seemed like the necessity, to adopt a pseudonym. Perhaps this is a sense of protecting one's real identity from potential

fraud, or potential exposure. Often, it seemed to be a creative act – this naming of the self-thing, the creating of an online persona, like writing into being a fictional character. I'm reminded in this of a short story published in an anthology published under the title *Peter Davison's Book of Science Fiction* that has always somewhat haunted me since I first read it in childhood. The story - Edmond Hamilton's *Exile* - tells the tale of a writer who realises that he has brought an actual world into being through his writing, and then writes himself being transported to that world. One evening, the protagonist tells this yarn to his friends. When asked how he got home, he replies that he never did: 'I'm still here' (Hamilton, 1983). Perhaps there is something about online spaces where we are given permission to create characters for ourselves to inhabit, control, and manipulate, like those Dungeons & Dragons games of my adolescence. It's no surprise that one of the words used to describe these digital versions of ourselves is 'avatar'. So we become the author*s* of ourselves, where the digital facade that we present is itself a creation, a Foucauldian author *function*. The naming of the digital self is a creative act, through which we articulate a vision of the self. Like the naming of a character, or the naming of a band. Pseudonyms are, of course, nothing new. Writers and artists have frequently employed them for various reasons - to disguise one's gender in order to avoid negative stereotypes as in the case of George Elliot, or distance one's new work from the oeuvre of the past, as in the case of Robert Galbraith, or as a nickname for easy identification, as in the case of Charles Dickens's pseudonym, Boz.

In a number of conversations that I've had over the years, people have occasionally asked about my choice of the name sputniksteve. Inevitably, what I

always offer in response is a post-hoc rationalisation of my chosen nomenclature. Perhaps it is an acknowledgement of the significance of the Russian satellite, launched in the 1950s, which essentially launched the space race and all the technological developments that have come in its wake. Perhaps it is because I am interested in space — as a fan of popular science fiction; as an amateur astronomer (albeit one who is afraid of the dark); as one who is interested in space travel. Perhaps it is a nod to the American education programme which ran following the launch of the Sputnik satellite in a bid to catch up with the USSR. Perhaps it is a reflection of the new communication age heralded by the launch of Sputnik, with social media and Twitter in particular as the ultimate expression of that age of communication. Or perhaps it was a spur of the moment nickname given to me by my wife one day when I came home from the hairdresser with slightly spiked hair and she greeted me with 'Hello Sputnik!'

There is something in the choosing of an online name which, for me at least, has always carried weighty consideration. What does such a name say about me? What do I *want* it to say about me? There needs to be something *unique* about it; my flesh name is hardly novel. There needs to be something quirky about it too, perhaps.

Was Stephen's use of the sputniksteve name on Twitter an attempt to be anonymous? Certainly, I seem to recall an attempt to seek some sense of anonymity so that I might be able to speak freely, particularly about school related matters. Having moved school in 2011, Stephen was initially happy but became increasingly less so, frustrated by what he saw as poor, unsupportive management. Perhaps Twitter and the cloak of anonymity might give Stephen

freedom and licence to articulate his views and vent his frustrations. In hindsight, there is something ironic about this. What was fuelling Stephen's frustrations? His learning from the professional community of the tweacher society, and his observations of what Ofsted were saying on Twitter in 2013, caused Stephen to question the management decisions of the school leadership team. He began to comment on other teachers' use of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic (VAK) learning styles. He challenged leaders on their use of Ofsted style gradings in lesson observations, despite Ofsted having abandoned the practice. His activities as sputniksteve were causing him to question the professional limits placed upon him as Stephen. And this did not go down well with his superiors.

Stephen was enacting a form of self-writing without realising it. He was not only writing his identity as the author sputniksteve, but writing the code of his subjective self in the offline world. EduTwitter had become a heterotopia of crisis, a site of change. Stephen was being fundamentally altered by his excursions into that other space.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

It is February 2011. Stephen is experimenting with Twitter. He tweets between his two accounts to see how the @ function works (1:1-2). 'Nah,' he thinks. 'Facebook is better'.

In June and July of that year, he tries again. He has a brief exchange with his brother (1:3). There is, perhaps, a sense of welcoming here from a friendly face; a connection with the offline world; a bridge between dimensions. It might be worth noting that my brother joined Twitter almost two years before I did, and there may

be a supportive, brotherly motive at play here, metaphorically holding my hand as I might once have held his as a child.

6.3 ‘Hello’

It is July 2011. Stephen is approaching the end of his final term at his current school. It has been a difficult period. He logs on to Twitter. Sputniksteve tweets ‘Hello’ (14). Perhaps this is another technological test in the pattern of tweets 1-2. But looking at the dataset now, tweet 4 seems to be serving more than just a practical, utilitarian function. The choice of a salutation might be indicative of a calling out, a plea perhaps for attention or recognition. It could be a declarative, stating 'look, I am here, or it could be an interrogative 'hello, is there anyone there?’. Perhaps this tweet reflects that most human of needs — the need for connection, the need to not be alone. Houghton et al. (2020), using Maslow, found that SNS — in particular, Facebook — ‘can fulfil basic and advanced human needs’ and, perhaps even more interestingly, can create a sense of self-actualisation. Later in the dataset in appendix 1, we see sputniksteve reaching out to make contact with others — often celebrities (1:11, 17, 18, 38) and occasionally those in education who seemed to be high profile or influential at the time (1:14, 29). But these early tweets, particularly tweets 1 - 8 show none of this conscious appeal to particular others.

Tweet 9 ‘should I be a full time twitterer?’ seems to me now to signal a significant shift. Prior to that, the tweets are testing out the platform. Tweets 6 - 8 were

employing a software programme by the name of PollEverywhere [25] which displays responses on a host PC — a tool which enables student responses to questions to be displayed on a projector in the classroom. These reflect Stephen's flirtation with using bring your own device (BYOD)[26] methods in the classroom, making use of the mobile phones that students brought to school. Aside from these test tweets, between February and October of 2011, tweets 1 - 8, there is not much activity at all. But tweet 9 is a discursive marker, anchoring the point at which the sputniksteve persona begins to emerge as a deliberate, conscious tweeter, with November and December of 2011 showing a markedly increased number of tweets. Tweet 9 is the moment at which Stephen clearly chooses to actively engage with the platform as a tool of expression. The open interrogative — to which no-one replies — is perhaps an appeal to the super-addressee of Bakhtin (1981) and Wegerif (2007), or the more elegantly expressed Infinite Other of later Wegerif (2013). It signals clear awareness of a potential *other*. It is the beginning of correspondence, the initiation of self-writing (Foucault, 1997a).

Perhaps the *other* is merely a projected *me* – a mirror-self as in Foucault's heterotopia (Foucault, 1986). This projected other, or super addressee might, in Foucault's terms, 'play the role of a companion' and enable us to open ourselves to the 'possible gaze' (Foucault, 1997a) of this projected mirror-self. For Wegerif, the super-addressee is 'always to some extent socially constructed' (Wegerif, 2016), by a community of experts within a particular field. To learn new science

25 https://www.polleverywhere.com/

[26] BYOD: Bring your own device – In some schools and colleges, BYOD has been adopted as a means of enabling students to use their own devices in the classroom rather than the school purchasing computer devices.

concepts, asserts Wegerif, 'children need to learn how to take on the point of view of science' (2016). Through the early tweets of sputniksteve in 2011, there is not yet an obvious connection with any such a community but a clear awareness of a potential audience that tweet 9 reflects. In other tweets which are clearly about *something* — that enunciate a statement relating to a field of practice, namely education — there is a sense of a professional community as being 'out there'.

If the individual is 'determined by structures' (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, p.17), it is no surprise that this early twitter version of *me* seems without definition, having yet to interact with the *formations* of the tweacher society. There is, as yet, no actual other with whom sputniksteve was in *correspondence*, but the ever-pregnant potential of reply and engagement.

Tweet 10 is a comment upon a tool with potential applications in the classroom — it generates a Star Wars style text scroll that could be used to present text through a projector. Again, there is no sense of specific audience here. Such tweets, which we could call articulations into the void, constitute a large proportion of the tweet output from sputniksteve during November and December of 2011. Some of them are clearly about *something*, as in the case of Tweet 10, whilst the meaning of others is lost to me now, such as tweet 22 'Could I grill #dampsquib and serve it with chips?' and tweet 23 'Privacy is for Speedos'. Whilst I cannot recall the semantic motivation behind these tweets, it may be possible to see in them a discursive motivation — that of identity formation, presenting a construct of irreverence through attempted humour.

This kind of tweet — articulations into the void — probably continue to be the staple of tweeting output from sputniksteve. What differentiates the tweets of

today from these earlier tweets is that, due to larger follower numbers and a sense of reputation that I think sputniksteve has acquired, such articulations into the void are more likely to be seen and responded to. There has been a growth in willing correspondents. Along with this comes a more conscious sense of the audience — the fact that there is an audience at all. The sputniksteve account has followers, and the author sputniksteve has garnered a reputation for saying things — for having things to say. Not every tweet gains a response, and there is an interesting potential follow-up study of what kinds of tweets gain responses and which do not.

6.4 Tweet 14 - A Discursive Turn

In Tweet 14, sputniksteve exclaims '@alatalite National Secular Society misses the point while Gove desires return to 'Victorian earnestness"' (1:14). Sadly, the tweet to which this was a reply is no longer available; thus, this statement hangs in the ether without an obvious context to explore. However, its content is significant in two distinct ways.

Firstly, tweet 14 is a reply to the account of a consultant who had at some point delivered a day's training in the school in which I worked at that time. Tweet 14 makes no mention of that school; looking back, this is hardly surprising as I rarely, if ever, mentioned my place of work. In later years, my tweets were rather negative about, for example, the leadership of that school, although I think I was always careful to imply these were criticisms of previous schools I had worked in and never named the school directly in negative comments. However, I do have a vague memory of sending a tweet to this particular person about the training he had delivered, naming the school. I must have deleted that tweet at some point,

either hoping to maintain some sense of anonymity or, indeed, precisely because anonymity was not, perhaps, as important to me as perhaps I had imagined. Rather, a professional identity perhaps begins to emerge even as early as this in 2011. Indeed, one of the mutual follow accounts of @sputniksteve (an account that both follows and is followed by @sputniksteve) was — and indeed remains — an assistant headteacher of that school. There is no way amongst the various search tools to identify precisely when I began following that assistant head teacher account, or indeed any other. However, I am given to understand that twitter lists followers/following in reverse chronological order (most recent first). Thus it is easy to see that this mutual following did not begin immediately. Using the analytics tool Twitonomy[27], I discover that the assistant head teacher's account is in position 29 — the 29th account that I followed. It is in position 33 of my followers — the 33rd account to follow @sputniksteve. For various reasons, these data may not be entirely reliable — I have followed and unfollowed accounts, and probably re-followed accounts that I had unfollowed and so on, resulting in shifting follow positions — but these positions help to give an indication of how the network connections of @sputniksteve grew. In any case, the mutual followship between myself and an assistant head teacher in the school in which I worked indicates an important aspect of the sputniksteve account — the edges of the heterotopic field were not solid or impenetrable; there was a blurring between the virtual sputniksteve and the flesh, offline Stephen where I was happy for my colleagues, my managers, to know what I was tweeting. Further,

27 https://www.twitonomy.com/

throughout 2012 to 2015 I was increasingly trying to apply my learning from Twitter to my own classroom practice, somewhat arrogantly stating claims I had read via Twitter about the lack of validity about, for example, VAK learning styles, and from 2013 onwards, there were growing tensions between me and the school management as I became aware of the changes to Ofsted framework that I felt were being contravened by leadership decisions.

Secondly, tweet 14 marks a turn in the discursive output of sputniksteve. The statement is grammatically declarative, almost reading as a tabloid headline. The tweet is an expression of a point of view — the enunciation of a subjective position (Foucault, 2002). There is a distinct sense of voice emerging here, a critical one — critical in the vernacular sense and, perhaps, in the sense of critical theory in that it seeks to peer beneath the surface. This tweet was posted before I had developed any awareness of critical theory, and certainly before I had encountered Foucault. Nonetheless, there is a hint here of an attempt to lift the surface layer of the statement in order to see the mechanisms at play.

The mention of Gove in this tweet clearly links it to a discursive formation, where a subjective position is enunciated (Foucault, 2002). What are the rules that govern this enunciation? What are the conditions of operation that give rise to a statement about Gove? At the time of this tweet, Michael Gove was Secretary of State for Education, having come to that position in the Conservative / Liberal Democrat coalition government formed in 2010. It is clear from tweet 14 that, in November 2011, sputniksteve was enunciating a critical perspective, echoing a view that Gove's approach to education policy was 'Victorian' — a view of Gove's time in office at the DfE which can still be seen in criticisms today: that Gove's ideology

for education was grounded in a romanticised nostalgia for the past, or rather for a fictitious version of the past. In tweet 14 we see the emergence of sputniksteve using the platform of Twitter to enunciate a subjective position that might otherwise be denied, other than via the proxy of, say, a teaching union that might presume to speak on behalf of all teachers. Here we begin to see the potential of #eduTwitter as a tool of liberalisation, of free speech. Here we see sputniksteve beginning to analyse the limits imposed upon him as a teacher, and to experiment with the possibility of going beyond them (Foucault 1997b). Here we see #eduTwitter as a heterotopic site of crisis (Foucault, 1986). Here we see sputniksteve beginning to participate in what might be seen as the beginning of an 'education spring' (Tomsett, 2013). Here we see sputniksteve being negative about the secretary of state for education. This could be seen as sputniksteve conforming to a dominant discourse of the time, subconsciously submitting to a normalised position — an expectation, perhaps, that teachers (good teachers, at least) *should* be opposed to this Tory with his outdated, archaic even, nostalgia for a non-existent past glory of British schooling. Gove, in all his shiny blue conservatism has become a totem of hatred for many teacher voices; after all, teachers are surely all left wing by default aren't they?

In years to come, I would find myself defending Gove against what I saw as false criticisms. Most notably, I would on more than one occasion point out that the infamous quotation of Gove suggesting that the British public had had enough of experts during the Brexit debates had, in fact, been taken out of context; that during the interview in question, the interviewer had interjected before Gove had been able to complete his utterance, and that what Gove was actually saying was

that the British public had had enough of experts 'from organizations with acronyms saying that they know what is best and getting it consistently wrong'.[28] I would find myself perhaps agreeing with Gove on his comments about coursework at GCSE; the fallout of this would inevitably cause mayhem for school English departments, but I would find myself essentially blaming school leaders for their handling of it rather than Gove or the DfE. Of course, Gove — or more specifically, his naming of specific bloggers in a speech in 2013 — represents one of the shifts identified earlier in this thesis.

Tweet 14, then, marks a point at which we might be able to identify the birth of sputniksteve as a critically motivated author, composing statements which seek to interrogate the limits that he sees being imposed upon him, as the raptors of Jurassic Park test the fences that hold them in. But at that point, there is no response, no correspondence. Sputniksteve is offering up his statements, but there is no feedback.

6.5 sputniksteve the Doctoral Researcher

Whilst tweet 14 represents a discursive turn, tweet 12 'A rather smashing day, making my brain buzz though' (1:12) marks a significant step in sputniksteve's — and Stephen's — subjective positioning as a doctoral researcher. This tweet seems to refer to the day on which I attended one of the taught sessions for the EdD program of which this project is the culmination. My course began in September 2011. Looking back at my notes from November, it seems that tweet

28 https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Michael_Gove

12 was sent during a busy day on campus, concluding with a discussion panel featuring a range of lecturers on the topic of the purpose of social science. Tweet 12 articulates a feeling of intellectual challenge which I — Stephen — obviously enjoyed. A few months later, I described beginning a research degree as being 'like coming over the summit of a mountain range on the border of some newly discovered country: you look down into a new land of possibility, discussions, ideas … stuff. It's exhilarating. And a bit frightening too' (Lane, 2012b).

At this point, I had no idea that the focus of my research would in fact turn out to be my own tweets and that this tweet — tweet 12 — would come to feature as a significant discursive artefact — there is something rather meta about this I suppose. I had also yet to encounter Foucault. My original proposal for a research project was to test the utility of Facebook groups as tools for expanding student learning beyond the classroom. My first supervisor suggested the work of Wegerif, looking at dialogic space (Wegerif 2007), and I begin to see this as a useful theoretical frame for my proposed research project. The research modules of the EdD had me thinking in terms of conducting a trial of some sort, using parallel groups and employing pre- and post-condition tests — the sort of project that perhaps Gorard might have encouraged in his lectures and later in his book (Gorard, 2013). I proceeded through the first few modules of the EdD with the focus upon student use of Facebook as my intended research focus, but that shifted through 2013 in response to the discursive phenomena I was observing on Twitter — Gove referring to bloggers, Ofsted's shift, and the rise of ResearchED — and began to contemplate the rising significance of the tweacher society as a lever of influence over government and the inspectorate, as well as the potential

that this influence was being driven by actual teachers as opposed to their traditional representatives. But even that idea ebbed away over time as I realised more recently that the more pertinent focus of my research was in fact sputniksteve — the projected author of my subjective self. None of this is present of course in tweet 12 from 2011, but that tweet marks the beginning of that journey into an ontological analytic.

The fact of my studying quickly served to be grounds of identity construction through the tweeting of sputniksteve, even as a source of humour as seen in tweet 33 '@captain_worm Hello!! I'm thinking of doing some research on the names that people give themselves online…' (1:33). The twitter account to which sputniksteve is replying here belongs, in fact, to a relative. This was intended as a throwaway remark, to which my relative replied with good humour. This is the first extended exchange I shared with anyone on Twitter, following the structure of initiation, response, feedback that can be found in conversation analysis. The joke contained within the tweet centres on the notion of analysing everything. The irony now, as I look back on this tweet, is that 'the names that people give themselves online' has become an important element of my discussion of sputniksteve.

My doctoral research has, in of itself, been an important element of the sputniksteve author function. For instance, there have been a number of tweets where I used the hashtag #EdD or simply use the term 'EdD' to comment on my research or to ask questions in the search for data. For example, in 2019, as I was thinking about the impact of being a member of the tweacher society upon the practice, beliefs and very identity of teachers, sputniksteve asked 'Question for #EdD data (by replying, permission to use your tweets is assumed) How has using

#eduTwitter changed you?' (2:1). Most answers to this question articulated the view that using Twitter has helped people to develop their practice, that they have been exposed to ideas and concepts that they otherwise would know nothing about, and that they have had their views and biases challenged. Some respondents said that Twitter had opened up financial and career avenues that had not been open otherwise: Laura McInerney for example who said 'A decade ago I was a classroom teacher merrily bopping along in my 4th year. Then, I joined twitter. Not sure I can adequately explain how much I owe to this brilliantly weird little corner of the world'. Meanwhile, Mark Enser simply replied 'It turned me into a writer'. In some replies, correspondents made comments about their classroom practice being transformed as a result of their engagement with #eduTwitter. Others suggested that eduTwitter has exposed them to a range of ideas that have informed and shaped their own thinking. Others still claimed that eduTwitter has given them a voice.

As Stephen encountered and began to explore the work of Foucault, sputniksteve began to tweet and write about these encounters, sometimes bringing an attempted Foucauldian discourse analysis to bear upon things I read on Twitter, often holding a critical lens over what I saw as statements which themselves seemed to be coming from a critical theory perspective. My earliest talks at ResearchED were titled 'What the Foucault?' and aimed to position critical ontology and self-writing as a valid, if not vital, activity for teachers. In later ResearchED talks, I employed a Foucauldian critical ontology to problematise the discursive trends of UK teaching vacancy adverts which prioritised such terms as outstanding, dynamic and passionate as required traits for teachers. The first term

there, of course, relates to Ofsted gradings — a concept just begging to be Foucaulted!

Conducting a specific Twitter search on the terms ‘sputniksteve’ + ‘Foucault’ shows a long list of tweeting output from sputniksteve that includes the term Foucault[29], with increasing engagement from others and a clearly growing sense of reputation for being the resident Foucault enthusiast amongst the tweacher society — a reputation which has indeed being the source of some gentle mockery.

6.6 The Beginning of Correspondence

December 2011 sees another significant first step in the birth of sputniksteve in tweets 44-46 (1:44-46) — the beginning of correspondence, with interactions between sputniksteve and other players in the discursive field of education; here, sputniksteve is crossing more confidently into the specific heterotopia of #eduTwitter, and testing the discursive boundaries.

44	26-Dec-11	@LeeDonaghy @teachitso Have we fallen out with multiple intelligences now? How long until we abondon Bloom too?	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/1513914597429821 44?s=20
45	26-Dec-11	@teachitso @LeeDonaghy And neither are of any real consequence when it comes to actual learning.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/1513958515064340 48?s=20

29 https://twitter.com/search?q=sputniksteve%20foucault&src=typed_query&f=live

46	26-Dec-11	@teachitso @LeeDonaghy Thanks for that. been looking for something like this for ages.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/1514206823145840 64?s=20

What's of particular interest in these tweets now, looking back, is the pedagogical positioning of sputniksteve at the time — questioning criticisms of multiple intelligences theories and Bloom's taxonomy. The way the Twitter search returns results here hides the tweets from my interlocutors. However, navigating to the URL[30] for tweet 46 shows the tweet in context and reveals that the gratitude being expressed is in response to my interlocutor who had shared a link to review of Bloom, including criticisms.[31] Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956) has been a mainstay of much school based teacher development discourse and training (Agarwal, 2019), with teachers being encouraged to ask questions and set pupil tasks to target the 'higher order' skills at the top of the pyramid, rather than the 'lower order' skills at the bottom of the pyramid. At the base of this — and thus the lowest order — we find *knowledge*. Hence, questions and activities which aim to convey knowledge or to test the knowledge that students have learnt, or 'closed questions' are, we were told by our employers, to be avoided, whilst more 'open ended' questions and tasks which target the higher tiers should be encouraged. Lesson observations could yield unfavourable results for teachers who were perceived to employ only lower order questions.

In similar ways, ideas around multiple intelligences and learning styles were very

[30] URL: Uniform Resource Locator. This is essentially the full web address for any given webpage.
31 http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/best/bloom.html

much in vogue, even by 2011. I recall staff training in one school where we were asked to complete questionnaires that would reveal our dominant intelligence, and similar surveys which would reveal our preferred learning styles. In another school, our lesson plans had to include identified activities that were specifically targeting visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learners. Such practices were embraced by teachers keen to do the right thing for the students, but never were we encouraged to appraise them critically, to query their veracity or origin. In some instances, the pedagogical practices were mandated to such an extent that teachers' performance management reviews might be negatively impacted if their lessons did not include them. And these practices became an unquestionable orthodoxy.

In December 2011, sputniksteve begins to encounter challenges to these orthodoxies — a key element of participation in the tweacher society, where #eduTwitter is a heterotopia of crisis, an other place where change is enacted in the views, beliefs and practices of those who engage with it; where, through correspondence, the subject is defined and redefined; where the self is written. However, as shown in tweet 16 from 26th November 2011, I was already questioning the orthodoxy that insisted upon the use of Bloom: 'Is Bloom's taxonomy still relevant? Was it ever relevant? #education'. Perhaps what tweets 44-46 (1:44-46) show is sputniksteve seeking confirmation bias, testing out the discursive space of #eduTwitter by making statements in the hope of seeking confirmatory responses. Perhaps tweet 44, rather than challenging a statement through reply, is posted with a sense of knowing irony. Perhaps sputniksteve is claiming that he already knew that multiple intelligences were flimsy, and that

Bloom's taxonomy should join them in the drawer marked *nonsense*.

Using the twitter search tool on the terms sputniksteve + *bloom* returns a large number of tweets[32] in which sputniksteve is disparaging about Bloom's taxonomy, and SOLO[33] taxonomy too. However, a more recent turn sees a re-evaluation of Bloom, suggesting that the taxonomy in fact asserts the importance of knowledge as a base — an argument which supports the position put forward by those who promote a knowledge-rich curriculum. In June 2018, sputniksteve tweets the following: 'There's an interesting twist to all this. For so long, we've had Bloom's Taxonomy thrown at us, and told to ask questions from the 'higher' strata of the pyramid, but Bloom made clear that knowledge is foundational. Now we are using Bloom properly, we're being told it's rightwing' (2:2). This view of Bloom's taxonomy is one shared by Doug Lemov, author of *Teach Like a Champion*, in a blog post of 2017 with supportive comments from Dylan William. This is, perhaps, a repurposing of Bloom — long regarded as a tool of progressivism — by the neotrads of #eduTwitter; the co-opting of a shibboleth.

What's most interesting here, though, is that despite these various pronouncements about Bloom's taxonomy, the subject behind sputniksteve, Stephen, has never actually read either the original text (Bloom et al., 1956) or the revised version (Krathwohl, 2002). A recent twitter poll suggests that I am far from alone! (2:3). Upon what, then, can sputniksteve base any opinion of the taxonomy? One can posit that the articulation is based upon a formation, a

32 https://twitter.com/search?q=sputniksteve%20bloom&src=typed_query&f=live
33 Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes. Original text now out of print, but summary can be found here: https://www.johnbiggs.com.au/academic/solo-taxonomy/

synthesis of personal opinion, experience, and encounters with correspondence through the discourses of #eduTwitter. Perhaps these statements are deliberately provocative ones, in search of some counter. Is this sputniksteve yearning for the dialectic encounters inherent in Foucault's self-writing? Or are these statements made in search of confirmation, building what might be described as an echo-chamber? Tweet 46, '@teachitso @LeeDonaghy Thanks for that. been looking for something like this for ages' (1:46), expresses gratitude to an interlocutor for sharing a webpage which explores and critiques Bloom's taxonomy.[34] The fact that sputniksteve has been 'looking for something like this for ages' might indicate confirmation bias as much as it might indicate a search for personal development.

If memory serves, the school in which Stephen was working at the time was encouraging teachers to make use of Bloom's taxonomy. A colleague who had the reputation for excellent classroom practice and who, at some point, became an advanced skills teacher (AST) (when such a thing still existed) produced a question stem card for each of us to have on our desks in the classroom. These were laminated sheets of perhaps size A7 with question openers using the verbs from Bloom's taxonomy. The intention was to prompt teachers to ask a range of questions during each lesson which targeted the different levels of the taxonomy. It occurred to me at the time that this adoption of Bloom had simply been accepted without any criticality, in much the same way that VAK learning styles and multiple intelligence theories had been accepted in schools in which I had worked previously. Indeed, in this same school, the special educational needs co-ordinator

34 http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/best/bloom.html

(SENCO) was running ‘learning to learn’ lessons with a group of year 9 boys who had been deemed in need of intervention. Her sessions with them involved teaching them about their individual learning styles — ‘some of you may be kinaesthetic learners’ — and getting them to put their arms out in front of them and move them in circles to activate their left and right brain hemispheres — ‘Now move them anticlockwise; do you know what anticlockwise means …?’.

As Stephen pondered these dubious practices, and the various advice and instructions that he had been given over the years, sputniksteve was turning to the tweacher society for confirmation of his suspicions that such practices were indeed spurious.

Or have I got the narrative wrong? Did Stephen’s distaste for VAK, Bloom, Brain Gym, and so on emerge as a product of his engagement with the tweacher society?

6.7 2012 - Correspondence

Having somewhat spluttered on to Twitter in 2011, sputniksteve’s tweeting output saw a considerable increase during 2012. As the year progresses, there is much more interaction between sputniksteve and others — far more correspondence as statements are articulated and engaged with. In February, sputniksteve begins writing a blog on Wordpress,[35] using Twitter as a channel for promotion of this blog. Whilst the first few blog posts gain little traction, they none-the-less represent the correspondence aspect of being a tweacher, although tweets to promote the

[35] https://sputniksteve.wordpress.com/

first blog posts gain no attention at all! (2:4)

The interesting thing about the tweets of 2012 is the extent to which they reveal epistemological and ontological positions and the subsequent shifts in these. For instance, there are several exchanges with @oldandrewuk which I will explore later in this chapter that show the initial apparently opposing positions between sputniksteve and oldandrewuk. Elsewhere in this year, sputniksteve tweets a link to the now famous TED talk by Ken Robinson, describing it as ‘ace’ (2:5) — a perspective that Stephen later came to regard as erroneous before, more recently, coming to terms with and perhaps even re-embracing. Indeed, as I sit here in 2020 reflecting on the tweacher journey of sputniksteve, I am aware of some returning swings of the pendulum in terms of my opinions.

sputniksteve’s 2012 begins with a tweet sharing a blog post from Michael Rosen in which Rosen opines about ‘New Labour's attempts to micro-manage school curricula in England’ (Rosen, 2012) via its implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (DfES, 2001) and associated ‘Literacy Hour’, which was then dropped by the same government around a decade later. Rosen presents a critique which, with added references to Foucault, would not be out of place in a critical discourse paper. It is not surprising that sputniksteve saw a resonance in this blog post with his own views about New Labour’s approach to implementing measures for ‘accountability’. Similarly, as I re-read the post now, I — that is, Stephen — see similar resonances with my own views about the New Labour government, particularly following Tony Blair’s establishment of the Prime Ministers Delivery Unit and the subsequent rise of deliverology as an approach to improving public services. The approach is lauded by some (for example, Nordstrom et al., 2017)

whilst ‘A wealth of research conducted in diverse national contexts where this approach has been influential has suggested that the unintended harms it generates – including a widening of inequalities, a test-driven pedagogic culture and a narrowing of the curriculum – may be outweighing its benefits’ (Gewirtz et al., 2019, p.1). Over the years, sputniksteve has tweeted statements of disdain for deliverology that might chime well with Rosen’s critique of the New Labour approach to literacy. Furthermore, Rosen has made statements about the nature of the English language with which Stephen might have agreed. However, as sputniksteve continued to engage with the tweacher society, he would increasingly find his position at odds with that of Rosen’s twitter persona @MichaelRosenyes, to the extent that for a few years the latter blocked @sputniksteve. I struggle to recall the reason for this, or the particular exchange that prompted it. By February 2020, @MichaelRosenyes had unblocked @sputniksteve and they were engaging in a discussion about retrieval practice.

The pattern of blocking and unblocking is a significant feature of using Twitter, and there is an interesting sense of etiquette — or netiquette, or twittiquette — that has emerged around it. For some, blocking is a useful tool for curating one’s feed; for others it is a necessary tool for protecting oneself against abuse; for others it is a vehicle for stifling debate, creating an echo chamber, and avoiding criticism. Over the course of the decade, sputniksteve has been blocked, unblocked, reblocked by a number of accounts and has blocked, unblocked and re-blocked a number of accounts. An entirely different research project could fruitfully investigate the reasons for subjects choosing whom to block and whom not and the legal implications of when public officials choose to block individuals (Wheatley and

Vatnoey, 2020; Morris and Sarapin, 2020; Merten, 2020). Some people express feelings of sadness or remorse at being blocked; others sometimes express feelings of annoyance; others still will gloat about being blocked, listing in their bio the names of famous people who have blocked them.

In January 2012, sputniksteve engages in a discussion with someone by whom he is now blocked, and I can only presume it is the result of the tone of sputniksteve's final tweet in that exchange: 'Wrong twice. On the first, re-read your Bing results' (2:6). The topic of this exchange was the proposed high speed rail 2 project (HS2) which will cut across Stephen's home location and which sputniksteve has often tweeted about in negative terms. Over the years, there are several tweets from sputniksteve about the HS2 project making clear the view that the project is unnecessary at best.[36] Amusingly, these statements also include some about being blocked by Lord Andrew Adonis following a quip about HS2. The attitude presented by sputniksteve here may well be perceived as arrogant and aggressive. The first sentence, 'Wrong twice.' connotes a sense of authority and abruptness in its short, punchy grammatical construction consisting as it does of just two monosyllabic words. The opening lexeme 'wrong' portrays a sense of judgement against the interlocutor's position that implies an air of superiority on the behalf of the author. The assertion of a double error could be perceived as a comment not only upon the validity of the interlocutor's statement, but upon the condition of the interlocutor himself — that sputniksteve is calling into question the intellectual capacity of his interlocutor. This is then amplified in the follow up

36 https://twitter.com/search?q=HS2%20(from%3Asputniksteve)&src=typed_query&f=live.

sentence advising the interlocutor to ‘re-read your Bing results’. This is intended, perhaps, as something of a slur — that the interlocutor is not only in error, but that he has misread or misunderstands something that he has read as the result of an Internet search, implying that the interlocutor is not speaking from a position of established knowledge. The slur is developed through reference to Bing as, perhaps, an inferior search engine. I’m not surprised that sputniksteve was blocked.

Whilst this exchange about HS2 is not related to sputniksteve’s activity within the tweacher society — it is not about education — it is perhaps reflective of the author function that was being developed by the subject behind it. There is here potential evidence of an attempt to construct an assertive author persona, grounded in an authority of claim but one which is ultimately grounded in polemic personal opinion. There is no obvious sign here of an attempt to engage with different views in order necessarily to learn from them; there is no obvious attempt at correspondence to develop the self unless that correspondence was intended via confrontation.

Of course, at this stage, there is no obvious intent at all behind sputniksteve’s tweeting activities; there is no stated objective one makes when beginning on Twitter. One might choose to use the bio description to serve this function, or to have a pinned tweet — a tweet which appears at the top of one’s feed. Unfortunately, Twitter keeps no record of these and so, as one changes them, previous bio statements are erased. The identity constructions can therefore only be observed through the statements in the existent tweets. In January of 2012, sputniksteve appears to be performing in a confrontational way, creating —

consciously or otherwise — a forthright persona.

This is, of course, performative. De Kosnik (2019) draws upon Goffman (1956) and McLuhan (1974) to ask ‘Is Twitter a Stage?’ (De Kosnik, 2019), framing participants in twitter exchanges as actors using masks not to ‘cover or hide reality’, but to ‘generate realities’ (p. 29). As Markham points out: ‘selfhood remains highly deliberative and interactive’ (Markham, 2013, p. 284). But, ‘to recognize our own existence in any meaningful way, we must be responded to’ (p. 284) and so engaging in confrontational exchanges is one way in which we might ensure that we are responded. Of course, such exchanges can result in one being blocked, but this itself is a form of response.

Aside from arguing about HS2, January 2012 sees sputniksteve conversing about computer technology from the 1980s and other non-education related topics. However, there is a significant encounter towards the end of that month that warrants some discussion as it marks a challenge to sputniksteve’s position and which could be perceived as the first instance of transformative correspondence.

6.8 Ken Robinson

On 29th January 2012, sputniksteve tweets: ’You all have probably seen this, but I think it's ace: Ken Robinson, Changing Paradigms http://youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U' (2:7). Whilst it is not possible to see the threads formed by replies to this tweet — a problem caused I think by the age of the tweet — it is possible to see that a conversation emerged in response to this tweet because the next tweet is a reply to oldandrewuk. By copying the link to this tweet into a new browser tab, it is possible to see the tweet from oldandrewuk

who gives links to various sources criticising the Robinson video, which oldandrewuk describes as ‘nonsense’ (Old, 2012). The links provided by oldandrewuk each deconstruct the arguments made by Robinson in the now famous animated RSA talk *Changing Education Paradigms* (Bennett, 2011; Old, 2011; Sanger, 2011). At this point, sputniksteve is presented with ideas which challenge those in his own statement. There is no extended conversation about this at the time, but hindsight certainly suggests that Stephen’s views about Robinson’s ideas were caused to shift following this correspondence.

In order to explore this further, I conducted a Twitter search on the terms ‘sputniksteve’ + ‘robinson’ which revealed a rather rapid transition from a pro-Robinson stance to an anti-Robinson one.[37] From the initial expression of the *Changing Paradigms* video being ‘ace’ in January 2012, by July 2013 sputniksteve declares his boredom of Robinson: ‘Ken Robinson? Getting rather bored of him’ (2:8). By October 2013, sputniksteve is sharing a blogpost that critiques Robinson’s position (2:9). That blog post mounts what looks like a very credible deconstruction of the Robinson video, citing various scholars and sources to address the various points that Robinson makes (Kirby, 2013).

In December 2016, sputniksteve tweets ‘Do any of you know the name of the chap who gave a @TEDTalks talk opposing Ken Robinson?’ (2:10). This interrogative is clearly intended to garner a response and isn’t merely rhetorical. Rather, sputniksteve is seeking to consolidate a partial memory that Stephen had of seeing a TED talk which critiqued the ideas of Ken Robinson. A correspondent

37 https://twitter.com/search?q=sputniksteve%20robinson&src=typed_query&f=live

provides the answer Tim Leunig; and indeed, Leunig gives a strong argument that creativity requires knowledge (TEDx, 2016) — an argument that sputniksteve would later articulate for himself in several tweets. In a 2018 blog post, sputniksteve argues that creativity can be found across the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities, concluding that ‘To suggest that schools do not promote creativity is a lie’ (sputniksteve, 2018). Such forthright comments are, of course, partially performative, intended to provoke response. But in this case, it asserts a particular position in defence of schooling in its current form. There is a statement here that stands in opposition to the argument that schools are based upon a factory model that kills creativity.

By 2018 it is clear to see that sputniksteve’s position on Robinson has shifted quite considerably — from considering Robinson’s ideas as ‘ace’ to declaring them a ‘lie’. What has informed and influenced this movement is the reading of various tweets, blogs and other resources by other commentators. The formation of this discursive position is the result of the statements and re-statements that have contributed to the hupomnemata of sputniksteve’s twitter feed, where things said by others have been internalised and become the things said by sputniksteve, where tweets and retweets ultimately aim ’to capture the already-said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self’ (Foucault, 1997a, p.211). This is where the digital self-writing of Twitter is formed by the interplay of the hupomnemata and correspondence, where statements are formed from the already-said and where they are restated, repurposed and tested again in correspondence, where ‘the writer constitutes his own identity through his recollection of things said’ (Foucault,

2002, p. 213).

But there is a question which must arise here. The opinion that sputniksteve has internalised and now presents in statements of his own about Robinson has been formed through this correspondence with other members of the tweacher society, where a dominant view has emerged. But is sputniksteve's opinion formed from a fully *informed* perspective? Has he — indeed, have I — even read Robinson beyond the TED talks and infamous RSA Animate video? Well, the answer is no. A natural follow-up question to this then becomes, do I need to? Is it necessary to have engaged with the oeuvre of an academic figure in order to construct a critique of, or even to hold an opinion about, particular statements made by that academic? From a Foucauldian perspective, is the statement affected by the nature of the author with whom it is associated? Or should the statements articulated by Robinson in the particular TED talks under scrutiny be held on their own terms, critiqued on their own merits and analysed without recourse to the broader work of the subject behind the author Sir Ken Robinson? Would Foucault concern himself with the fact of Robinson's published works were he to conduct an archaeology of Robinson's TED talks? Or would a more Foucauldian approach be to interrogate the statements made in those talks to expose the material contingencies upon which they depend? From the perspective of Foucauldian self-writing, the statements surrounding Robinson's statements — the tweets, blog posts, articles and TED talks about Robinson's TED talks — become objects of appropriation (Foucault, 2002) that inform subjective positions (Foucault, 2002) and serve an ethopoietic function (Foucault, 1997a, p. 209).

Sir Ken Robinson has become a somewhat totemic figure representing the

‘progressive’ side of educational discourse and as such has been a target of critique by the ‘traditionalist’ side. It is reasonable to conclude that sputniksteve began as aligning himself somewhat with the progressive camp, but quickly began moving to the traditionalist one as a result of the nature of the correspondence he encountered. The tweets from sputniksteve about Ken Robinson over time reflect this shift.

6.9 The Trad/Prog Thing

I was once cautioned in feedback on an assignment for the EdD course about writing too much about the trad/prog debate, where my reviewer commented that the topic is tired and has no place in the 21st century and, besides, what would Foucault make of such a binary? However, as a very recent paper in British Educational Research Journal illustrates (Watson, 2021), the discourse on #eduTwitter frequently seems to disperse along this binary line, where the two camps dig their trenches in the discursive battleground and lob offensive discursive grenades at each other. According to Watson, traditionalists represent what he calls the New Right 2.0 that employs ‘micropopulist’ language and supports the academisation of schools, teacher authority in the classroom, and ‘zero tolerance’ behaviour management cultures. The article resorts to ad hom criticism of Tom Bennett and ResearchED and fails to take account of what might be termed popular[38] progressive language from other quarters of eduTwitter such

38 Here I use the term ‘popular’ to avoid misuse of the contested term ‘populist’, but do wish to set these perspectives in contrast.

as the provocative language used on the #BanTheBooths[39] hashtag. Such language seeks to categorise practices such as internal school isolation and fixed-term exclusion as monstrous, making outrageous claims about the impact of such practices upon students (for example, Perraudin, 2019, 2018; Weale, 2020; Staufenberg, 2019). The argument that Watson puts forward is not new; there has been an increasing attempt by some members of the tweacher society to position ‘traditionalists’ as right wing — even describing Nick Gibb as an example of ‘far right 'traditional' politicians' — and using terminology such as ‘extreme trad’ to demonise such teachers.

After a few years engaging in the #eduTwitter debates and sensing my cautious shift from a progressive to traditionalist outlook, I took time to reflect upon my position in relation to the traditionalist / progressive spectrum and wrote a blog post outlining my stance as being a potentially ‘contradictory position’ (sputniksteve, 2014). In the years since, sputniksteve has been cast as an ‘extreme trad’ by one interlocutor, and is probably viewed as a ‘neotrad’ by several others.

For my own amusement, sputniksteve recently ran a poll on Twitter to gauge whether his followers mostly thought he was ‘trad’, ‘prog’ or ‘other (2:11). The results show 49.8% of 317 respondents viewed sputniksteve as ‘trad’, whilst 36.6% went with ‘other’. In a short exchange following the poll, @oldandrewuk claimed to have voted ‘prog’. Of course, such a poll holds little value as a

39 The #BanTheBooths campaign emerged in around 2018 raising concerns about the use of so-called ‘deep confinement booths’ as a sanction in schools, with a petition to parliament in 2019 and a conference in 2020. See https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/233644

statistical tool; it is a piece of whimsy. But it does reflect a general consensus, I think, that sputniksteve is viewed as one of eduTwitter's trads.

However, Stephen would view himself as a pragmatist, articulating a call for teachers to adopt a pragmatic praxis, especially in their pastoral work (Lane, 2020). He positions himself in contrast with those 'trads' who dismiss out of hand such things as attachment theory, and questions the status of what he sees as a computational model of learning as represented by CLT and the infamous quote that learning is a change in long-term memory (Kirschner and Clark, 2006). The very recent death of Sir Ken Robinson has caused Stephen to re-evaluate his thinking in relation to Robinson's ideas. The process of writing *Beyond Wiping Noses* has resulted in sputniksteve proclaiming that the primary purpose of schooling should be pastoral.

6.10 sputniksteve and oldandrewuk

Much of the discussion on #eduTwitter about progressives has been driven by @oldandrewuk whose blog title —*Scenes from the Battleground* — refers to what he sees as the ideological battleground in English schools. In initial exchanges between oldandrewuk and sputniksteve on Twitter, it is clear to see that sputniksteve positions himself initially in opposition to oldandrewuk's stance on different topics. On February 26th 2012, sputniksteve tweets 'An OA post that I actually agree with (in general)' (2:12). With this tweet, sputniksteve is feigning a sense of ironic surprise, as evidenced in the adverbial 'actually' and the parenthetical caveat. The blog post in question was not specifically about the perceived ideological battleground between progressives and traditionalists, but

as a totem of the traditionalist camp, oldandrewuk represents a useful yardstick against which to measure sputniksteve's positional statements.

Stephen first encountered Old Andrew (as he styled himself at that time) on an online *Doctor Who* forum which was structured with different areas for different topics of discussion. There were, of course, various topics related to the *Doctor Who* television programme, but there was also a non-*Doctor Who* related area for discussion of politics, current affairs and so on. Within that was an on-going education thread which, being a teacher, I was drawn to and where I first saw comments from the Old Andrew identity, with links to a blog titled *Scenes from the Battleground*. I took an instant dislike to this person, who represented to me all that I thought was wrong with a certain kind of teacher. He seemed old-fashioned, uncaring and obstinate. In my first engagements with Andrew Old, I used ad hominem and insulting language, in much the same way that I see people responding to him now on Twitter. Sadly – or thankfully, I suppose – that forum closed in 2009 and is no longer accessible for me to find those early engagements.

When I joined Twitter in 2011, it was not surprising that Andrew Old was one of the first people I followed on that platform. Whilst I still didn't always agree with his statements, I found myself over time moving to a position of understanding and, ultimately, agreement with much of what he was saying. As an *identity* or author, then, @oldandrewuk serves as something of a benchmark for me; he's a kind of totem of *traditionalist* teaching against which I can judge my own position, and that of others with whom I debate. He also represents a kind of certainty that emerges from a particular empirical, positivist way of thinking which asserts an objective

truth. This, of course, means that we are not entirely aligned philosophically, coming as I do from a Foucauldian way of thinking about truth. This serves as a good, on-going test, for my own views and epistemological positioning.

In the interim years, I have met Andrew Old in real life – quite a surreal experience initially, and it still seems strange when we meet. Here is made manifest the distinction between *subject* and *author* (see Chapter Two).

Another point to consider with regard to Andrew Old is his influence – real or perceived – upon policy makers and the inspectorate. I would argue that this is a real influence, especially in terms of Ofsted. Of course, it could be argued that Andrew Old has become a useful flag for politicians and inspectors to wave as an apparent voice of the teacher, but that he has been co-opted as he says what they want to be said. There are certainly many other members of the tweacher society, many voices on eduTwitter, that articulate statements of frustration, despair and anger about @oldandrewuk and the ways in which he engages with others on the platform.

On 10th May 2012, sputniksteve appears to interrogate oldandrewuk on a range of issues primarily revolving around the use of smartphones in the classroom.[40] At the time, I — that is, Stephen — was a supporter of the idea of students being allowed to use these devices in the classroom; indeed I wrote an assignment for the EdD in which I criticised schools which sought to ban them, suggesting that these devices were a way for students to break out of the panopticon (Lane,

40 https://twitter.com/search?q=(from%3Asputniksteve)%20(to%3Aoldandrewuk)%20until%3A2012-05-11%20since%3A2012-05-10&src=typed_query&f=live

2013). This position is clear in the tweets of sputniksteve on 10th May 2012, but there is also an increasing sense of frustration emerging as the conversation continues where sputniksteve feels that his interlocutor is beginning to engage in ad hominem responses and judge his teaching (2:13) and he also tweets what is essentially an ad hominem comment: ‘Wow. You've turned into a parody of the sort of people you criticise in debates’ (2:14).

Also of note is that many of the tweets of 10-11th May 2012 take the form of interrogatives. Is this sputniksteve adopting a mode of Socratic questioning? Is it a deliberate attempt at argumentation through logical progression? Is it intended to explore the issue, digging the layers of meaning and interrogating the discursive contingencies that have enabled such statements to be made? Are these questions intended to develop a fuller understanding of the different perspective offered by oldandrewuk? Or, are these questions intended to serve some other purpose, and if so, what might that purpose be? Perhaps sputniksteve is employing the interrogative form to position himself as the wiser of the interlocutors — an attempt to gain a discursive foothold on some perceived higher ground. Perhaps there is a motive in these questions to lay a trap for the interlocutor, to somehow catch him out.

Most of the exchanges with oldandrewuk seem reasonably jovial and it is possible to read something of a tongue-in-cheek flavour to the tone of the questions. It would be fair to conclude that there is something of a mode of admiration in sputniksteve’s tweets to oldandrewuk, even in the disagreements. These early exchanges often caused Stephen to look up the meaning of various logical fallacies as they were identified by oldandrewuk in these intellectual sparring

matches. These caused Stephen to reflect upon the nature of his debating tactics. Indeed, sputniksteve can often be seen invoking claims of logical fallacies in his exchanges with other interlocutors — such that most recently he can be seen using the terminology in self-parody (2:15).

Later in 2012, we see continued interactions with oldandrewuk and an increasing number of other players. Sputniksteve can be seen engaging in longer threads with multiple interlocutors, such as a discussion in October 2012 around the nature of education research and teachers' access to it. During the conversation, sputniksteve opines that 'Teachers don't have access to research. Schools should subscribe to journal databases' (2:16). This conversation included oldandrewuk and also the Twitter account of Tom Bennett — @tombennett71. This perhaps marks a further significant moment for sputniksteve; whilst there had been tweets sent from sputniksteve to @tombennett71 before, it is later 2012 that we see exchanges in which they are both active participants. I do not know how many followers Bennett's account had at this stage, but it is interesting to see how sputniksteve had by the end of 2012 become active in discourses with a range of actors. It is quite reasonable to suggest it is through his exchanges with oldandrewuk that sputniksteve made these connections.

Over the years, it is possible to see a developing rapport between sputniksteve and oldandrewuk, such that the former has been accused of 'channeling' the latter and even being a sock account![41] However, more recent exchanges between

41 A 'sock account' is an additional account operated by a user using a pseudonym to disguise their identity. The phrase originates from the notion of a sock puppet. Such accounts can be used to circumvent blocks to view another user's tweets. They are also sometimes use for deliberate trolling, or to give the appearance of wider agreement with one's own argument.

sputniksteve and oldandrewuk reveal continuing disagreements over certain topics. Most notably, they have sparred over the topic of the Chartered College of Teaching and most recently the language around white privilege. There are continuing discussions between the two accounts over the nature of 'truth'. However, these disagreements have, I believe, served to cement a sense of mutual respect as reflected in the use of humorous banter between them. Furthermore, the subject Stephen was encouraged and comforted when sputniksteve received support from oldandrewuk over being insulted by an interlocutor who had repeatedly called him a fascist over the period of days. Thus, the rapport between sputniksteve and oldandrewuk is such that the subject positions may not always be totally aligned, but there is mutual respect to enable reasoned and frank discussions between them.

6.11 sputniksteve and ResearchED

It is January 2017. Stephen logs in to Twitter. There is a direct message waiting for him from Jude Hunton (@judehunton), organiser of ResearchEDRugby, inviting him to speak at that year's Rugby event.

> 'Hi there - I wasn't sure which of you to message! I am organising Research ED Rugby at Ashlawn School on July 1st this year. I would like to invite you to speak at it on a topic you prefer. Or the other you. Or both if that is the deal. Last year we had over 150 people here and trended at the top of twitter so it was a great platform for influence and meeting people. It would be great to have you here.' (Hunton, J., personal correspondence, 10th January, 2017).

With his humorous comment about identities here, Hunton is referring to the existence of another twitter account that Stephen created as an academic profile. The intention was to use @tweachertalk to interact with others on Twitter with a clearly identified research motivation. It would be this account that would ask tweeters for permission to use their tweets as data, and it would be this account that would tweet about research findings. As noted elsewhere in the thesis, the original idea was to research the discourse of eduTwitter, as if from an objective position. Inevitably, Stephen realised that this was impossible, and he later realised that sputniksteve was both the subject and object of the research. Hunton's reference to multiple identities highlights the potential for different personas to be performed through different twitter handles. One of the curiosities about Twitter is the accusation of running 'sock accounts' — multiple accounts being run by one subject as if they are different people, often to bypass blocks or to enable trolling. Indeed, subjects may run one respectable, professional account, perhaps using their real name, whilst simultaneously running sock accounts to troll or harass others, being abusive or even threatening. This could in itself be the basis of an interesting doctoral research project! But I digress.

Hunton's invitation to speak at rEDRugby began a long standing relationship between sputniksteve and researchED, with Tom Bennett offering an invitation to speak at the national event later that same year. In 2020, I was scheduled to speak at the ResearchED events in Birmingham, Telford, Salisbury and Rugby and most likely the national event too; of course, the Covid-19 pandemic saw these events cancelled. In 2019, my talk at the ResearchEDBrum event was about developing a research informed approach to pastoral leadership and I later wrote

a blog post based on this talk. This blog post caught the attention of Crown House Publishing who contacted me in the summer of 2019 inviting me to write a book on the topic. Thus, the involvement of sputniksteve with ResearchED, via eduTwitter and the tweacher society, has culminated in Stephen Lane becoming a published author.

It is fair to say that ResearchED has not gone uncontested. Recent accusations that it reflects the emergence of a New Right populism (Watson, 2021) echo concerns raised on eduTwitter and elsewhere about the perceived right-wing politics of rED. As the movement became global, with rED conferences occurring in different countries, resistance to its arrival in Canada culminated in the celebration by some of the discontinuation of a relationship between rED and a Canadian funding body (Mitchell and Farhadi, 2020). It was claimed that the end of the partnership between rED and the funding body was the result of rED promoting essentially racist pedagogies and giving a platform to essentially racist voices, as well as being openly hostile to progressive pedagogies and ideologies. By contrast, the Canadian wing of rED tweeted out a statement that the relationship between it and the funding body was ending as the result of changing priorities for the funding body in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic.[42]

Many of the criticisms that I have seen of rED single out specific individuals, chief among them being rED founder Tom Bennett whose alleged connections with Michael Gove and the Conservative UK government are a constant source of problematisation. Whilst other concerns around the nature of some of the

42 https://twitter.com/researchEDCan/status/1277657438720872448?s=20

statements made by other contributors may well carry weight — I'm thinking in particular of topics around IQ and race — the criticisms fail in my mind to recognise the plurality of views held by those who attend the conferences and those who speak at them.

Of course, it is hard to deny that rED has gained the support of members of the Conservative government. The growth, and the influence of ResearchED, was commented upon by the Conservative Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, in his speech to the ResearchED National Conference in 2017. He said, 'ResearchED is a grassroots, teacher-led revolt against the old order in education, a challenge to received wisdom and a rejection of the status quo. You are the small group of thoughtful, committed teachers who are changing the world of education' (Gibb, 2015), clearly wishing to position ResearchED as a revolutionary phenomenon – one which he and his government support. This statement has echoes of Gove's battle cry against 'the Blob' and 'soft bigotry of low expectations' from 2013 (Gove, 2013a), and could be cited as a neoliberal co-opting of this *grassroots* movement. Or, we could follow the principle of charity and take at face value Gibb's praise for ResearchED and his claim that 'This movement … will improve the education and life chances of millions of children' (Gibb, 2015).

Gibb also comments that, 'These conferences are changing the relationship between teachers and education research' (Gibb, 2015), quoting Tom Bennett from Bennett's blog: 'In one room you might have a government minister taking questions of the evidence base of their latest policy, and next door there might be a teaching assistant discussing how she launched journal clubs at her school. I love that sense of levelling, of democratic representation that it embodies'

(Bennett, 2017c). This sense of 'levelling' and 'democratic representation' feeds into the rhetoric of the *grassroots* nature of ResearchED.

Inevitably, the timing of the rise of ResearchED happens to coincide with a Conservative government, but does this mean that rED is itself a conservative, or right-wing, enterprise? Could such an organisation have arisen under a left-wing, Labour government? Would it have been needed? During the New Labour government of 1997-2010, increases in school funding resulted in artefacts such as the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) and Assessing Pupil Progress (APP). Stephen's experience of these leaves me ambivalent about them: on the one hand, these concerted efforts to improve standards for all children were admirable; on the other hand, the prescriptive nature of these initiatives resulted in a lack of autonomy for teachers, an increase in tools for SLT to bludgeon their staff with, and little actual improvement for students. APP, for example, provided a large bank of assessment criteria for reading and for writing with the intention that twice or thrice a year, teachers would assess a range of each pupil's work against the criteria and determine what level the pupil had reached (such as Level 5). However, the accountability measures imposed upon schools — particularly under New Labour — meant that SLT teams were keen to develop data tracking systems in the mistaken belief that this would help to raise standards. Thus it came to be that every half term, teachers in many schools were expected to use APP grids in order to enter a sub-level (For example, 5a, 5b, or 5c) for each student. What had been an aspirational target for the average student to reach level 5 by the end of key stage 3, became a minimum expectation for students to reach in Year 7.

In terms of professional development, as head of department for English, I

attended half-termly meetings at the LEA where three consultants for English would go through glossily prepared resources on how to get students to Level 5 by using PEE paragraphs, or other such exam focused topics. In the autumn term, there would be a detailed analysis of the results from that summer's KS3 SATs exams.

Thus, my memory of teaching under New Labour is of glossy prescriptivism and the smiling assassin of deliverology. This latter persisted in many schools beyond the change of government in 2010, but the coalition government of 2010 and later Conservative governments inevitably cut funding to various bodies that were describes as quangos, and LEAs were essentially stripped back. The English consultants I worked with all left the LEA and went back to classroom teaching as far as I know. The acceleration of academies and free schools was accompanied with the rhetoric of increased freedoms for schools. My experience working in a state school at the time did not lead me to believe that these freedoms were filtering down to teachers.

At the school Stephen worked in between 2011 and 2015, teachers were held accountable by means of performance management. Three targets would be set at the beginning of the year, with one being a compulsory pupil attainment target, such as a certain percentage of your Year 11 students attaining their target grade. These target grades were themselves formed from datasets based upon statistical averages. If you did not achieve your performance management targets, you risked a decrease in your salary. But even if you passed all three performance management targets successfully, there was still the demon of the lesson observation where a non-negotiable minimum standard was a grade 2 across

three observations. In practice, this meant that three times a year, a lesson would be observed by a member of SLT who would judge that lesson using the terminology of Ofsted - a grade 2 meant ‘good’, a grade 1 meant ‘outstanding and a grade 3 meant death by firing squad. At least, it could mean a decrease in pay regardless of the outcomes against the three performance management targets. This meant that an individual member of SLT with a different view of what constitutes good classroom practice of your own could grade your lesson as 3 without any recourse or standardisation, leading to a detrimental impact upon your salary, even if your students’ examination results were the best in the school. The impact of this upon staff morale and wellbeing was predictably damaging. It is worth noting, of course, that New Labour was in government in a mostly pre-Twitter era: Twitter launched in 2006, and just four years later, New Labour gave way to the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition of 2010. More pertinently, Stephen did not join Twitter until 2011, so he was oblivious to any educational discourse happening on the platform in its early years.

But having joined Twitter in 2011, and through eduTwitter, the tweacher society, and ResearchED, Stephen could see what Thomsett described as an education spring (Thomsett, 2013). The circumstances and material contingencies that enabled rED to emerge may well have relied upon the presence of a Conservative government that had both made cuts to funding and enacted what they described as creating freedoms for schools. However, it was obvious in 2010 that all the major parties were preparing for austerity following the global banking crisis, with the New Labour chancellor promising to make cuts that would be tougher and deeper than any under Thatcher (Elliott, 2010). It would, of course, be foolish

speculation to imagine what a Brown-led Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition might have looked in 2010 or the consequences of this for schools. Would the academies programme have been accelerated? Would LEAs have lost their funding and their influence?

Perhaps rED could be seen as symbolic of a continuing neoliberalisation of teaching. It seems that the neoliberal nature of things is now taken as read. That we live in neoliberal times appears to be a truth universally accepted. Ball (2012) contends that the New Labour government of 1997-2010 was 'post-new-liberal', following the 'neo-liberal' nature of the preceding Conservative government, but that this 'second liberalism' reflects a state that is both 'reluctant and assertive' (p. 102) — the increased marketisation of education has not seen a decrease in centralised control, but rather the opposite. Ball charts the growth of what he calls a second liberalism from Thatcher through to Blair and sees signs that the coalition government seemed keen to build on the reforms. Indeed, this is precisely what we witnessed under Gove. However, there is one aspect of this version of neoliberalism that seems fundamental to it — that of targetisation. As Ball points out, performance related pay is a central element of the neoliberal reforms to education, and we experience a 'life enabled by and lived against measurement' (Ball, 2015, p. 259). Here, it seems to me, is one crucial way in which rED bucks the trend. There are no targets and no measurements of success. There is no performance management at rED. Teachers attend if they want to. There is no obligation.

This is both a huge strength of rED and at the same time a potential target for criticism. It offers weekend CPD for teachers that they pay for themselves. With

tickets generally going for £30, it is not expensive, certainly when compared with academic conferences and CPD days from established providers, where one day's training could cost around £300, paid for by schools. Furthermore, if you speak at a rED event, you get free entry into that event. But a valid concern may emerge that teachers must sacrifice their weekend time to attend, that CPD for their job should come on paid time. This concern has certainly been raised on Twitter. But for sputniksteve, rED provides a liberalisation of professional development that exists outside of the hierarchical, targetised performance management of the workplace. It is not mandated. It is not measured. Thus, rED is a physical manifestation of the liberal promise of the tweacher society where discourse is free to participants. The tweacher society does not deal in measurable targets. It does not mandate. It does not classify or judge performance in order to determine financial renumeration or ascertain economic worth.

An interesting facet of rED is that most speakers at events are not paid to speak and are not required to purchase a ticket for that event. For me, this allows a fair exchange of labour and democratises the discourses. There may be an element of gatekeeping of course — speakers are either invited or selected through a submission process. The line-ups are generally reasonably varied, although criticism has been made that the same high-profile voices continue to dominate. Nonetheless, rED continues to give a space for teachers to meet, learn, and engage with discourses on their own terms, free from the shackles of dictated. Thus, rED is a manifestation in physical space of the digital heteretopia of eduTwitter, a site of crisis where teachers are gradually — or sometimes suddenly

— transformed either in their professional practices or in their extraprofessional experiences and activities. What I mean by this is that individual subjects have opened to them opportunities for work-related personal growth outside of the confines of their paid employment. For teachers, this might mean simply attending weekend education events for their own enjoyment or fulfillment; certainly, Stephen would consider education as work, vocation and interest. It might also mean developing personal revenue streams beyond the confines of a salary — particularly a salary reliant upon hierarchical targets — such as paid speaking and writing opportunities. In this sense, a market is opened but not a neoliberal one, fettered by deliverology targets; rather it is a liberal one. For sputniksteve and, more importantly perhaps, for Stephen, speaking at ResearchED is a participatory act in the physical, offline world, that represents a physical manifestation of the tweacher society as acted out in the digital heterotopia of eduTwitter. The interplay between the offline and the online spaces reflects Foucault's description of heterotopias existing both within and without society. The rED conferences are heterotopias in their own right, it seems to me. It is true that most teachers do not use Twitter for professional discourse purposes; such activity is itself extraprofessional in that using Twitter to discuss education topics is not mandated by employers. It reflects an extended interest in education beyond the confines of the school gate and the piles of marking.

But ResearchED is not only liberal in the sense of markets, it is liberating in the sense of providing a shared space. At a rED conference, classroom teachers mingle with school leaders, university professors, government ministers, and inspectorate officials.

Of course, this presentation of rED as a manifestation of the liberal promise of the tweacher society should not go uncontested. Indeed, for each single rED event, there will be questions on Twitter about speaker line-ups in terms of representation of gender and race, along with questions about the networks of players involved behind the scenes. For instance, Watson (2021) relies heavily upon an anonymous blog post which seeks to highlight connections between rED's founder and members of the Conservative government.

Another question that might reasonably be levelled at rED is the prominent position of certain voices – particular individuals who occupy a certain position on the progressive/traditionalist divide. Equally, it might be argued that rED showcases only one particular kind of research – one is unlikely to see a talk on autoethnography!

In addition, the claim that rED offers a democratisation of teacher discourse could be problematised by the observation that not all teachers know about it; indeed, not all teachers use Twitter and certainly not all teachers are members of the tweacher society.

ResearchED as a movement has also been problematised by some with a concern over the prominence of particular voices who are accused of promoting right-wing and racist pedagogies and ideologies (Mitchell and Farhadi, 2020).

6.12 Ofsted

It is September 2018 and sputniksteve tweets 'It was great to see @amanda_spielman turn up for my session. I mean, it was only because another session got cancelled. But it made me happy none-the-less' (2:17). The talk that I

had given was at the ResearchED National Conference for that year. Titled *What the Foucault: Outstanding Critical Ontology for Teachers'*, it was about, in part, how the language of Ofsted had negatively twisted discourses around teaching, with teacher job descriptions asking for 'outstanding' teachers, or stating that the school had 'outstanding' students. As I was mid-tirade about the dreadfulness of 'outstanding', I saw Amanda Spielman — Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for Schools (HMCI) and head of Ofsted — enter the room and join my audience. As I made a comment about the fact that Ofsted no longer graded individual teachers during inspections, Spielman politely interjected by raising her hand to point out that, in fact, Ofsted had never had — rather that they had graded lessons, which was now a thing of the past.

As I reflect on this vignette, two things occur to me. Firstly, that this reflects the potentially (Ofsted, 2017) shared dialogic space of the tweacher society. Here was the chief inspector for schools joining an audience for a talk being given by a teacher, sitting on a desk at the back of a room because all the chairs were taken. There is something delectable in the use of a raised hand to signal a polite interjection. Following on from this, the second thing that occurs to me is the nature of the discourse as it flowed between me and Spielman. In the real time nature of the physical space of a school classroom hosting a talk as part of a weekend conference for teachers, there is clarification of a point of detail. Those present in the room, and certainly Stephen, would have been altered — however slightly — by this exchange; a piece of knowledge that has stayed with Stephen from that moment until this, and that Stephen has shared in various conversations with various people. A fragment of something said that has been internalised

through re-use.

This was the not the first or last time that Stephen would find himself engaged in conversations with Spielman, with various encounters taking place on Twitter and in the offline world. That such exchanges have become even possible seems to me now a radical transformation of the nature of the relationship between the inspectorate and teachers.

Of course, Ofsted continues to stir deep feelings in teachers, and this is often seen in the Twitter discourse. The ‘Bold Beginnings’ (Ofsted, 2017) report, for example, courted much controversy from teachers in the primary sector and from those in teacher training, as a perusal of the #BoldBeginnings hashtag reveals. Much of the ire seemed to revolve around the perceived suggestion in the report that younger children could sit at desks. On a separate occasion, Spielman caused ructions when she suggested that ‘there are actually quite a few heads in the system who write blogs that spin up levels of anxiety’ (Whittaker, 2017). In each of these examples, sputniksteve could be seen tweeting statements in defence of Ofsted. That sputniksteve should be defending Ofsted might seem strange, given Stephen’s subjective position as a teacher who was reading Foucault – surely, he should disapprove of Ofsted as an example of one of Foucault’s ‘formidable disciplinary regimes’ (Foucault, 1980, p.58), that pervades the work of schools and teachers with panoptic threat (Perryman, 2006; Perryman et al., 2017). At the time of both of the incidents mentioned here, Stephen was already working in an independent school and not directly affected by Ofsted, although they do have oversight of the work of the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). Perhaps there was a sense that occupying a position outside of

the state enabled Stephen to view Ofsted from a more objective standpoint, able to see the criticisms as being unfair, emotional, or unfounded. Perhaps sputniksteve was being sycophantic.

Between 2011 and 2015, Stephen found himself increasingly at odds with the leadership of the state school in which he worked as he challenged, amongst other things, their use of graded lesson observations as part of the performance management policy despite Ofsted having ceased the practice. He shared the mythbusting document (Ofsted, 2015) with them, only to be told that it was 'bullshit'. With hindsight, I realise that the various management decisions being taken were largely driven by fear – the school's GCSE results were not strong which risked a low league table ranking and a poor Ofsted report that could be career ending for senior leaders. This reflects the wider target-drive, neoliberal culture in which school leadership teams were operating. During my time at that school, I saw a disconnect between school leadership and the inspectorate that seemed almost wilful on the part of school leaders, whilst Ofsted itself seemed to be engaging in a process of change. I knew that change was being driven by members of the tweacher society and it strikes me even now that, had they been active participants in it, the leaders of that school might have embraced the changes a little more, or at least to have known about them.

It seems ironic to me now that in the years since leaving that school, and thanks to my participation in the tweacher society, I have formed such close network connections with the inspectorate. Stephen's subjectivity as a teacher in the independent sector has perhaps given sputniksteve the confidence to enunciate statements that he may have been reluctant to if Stephen were still working in the

state sector. Perhaps it is the ‘independent’ aspect of Stephen’s professional subjectivity that has enabled sputniksteve to enunciate statements that sometimes run counter to what might seem as dominant views and attitudes of some on #eduTwitter. This might also indicate a potential inequality of access to the dialogic space of the tweacher society where teachers employed by the state might feel more inhibited to articulate potentially critical statements.

6.13 sputniksteve the Pastoral Expert

It is 2nd March, 2019. A man is giving a talk at ResearchEDBrum (#rEDBrum) titled ‘Towards Pastorality’. There is a reasonable sized audience in the room. A few people tweet about the talk, including photographs taken of the man tagging in @sputniksteve with the #rEDBrum hashtag. In the programme, the speaker is identified as Sputnik Steve; on the website he is Stephen Lane.

This topic was not one that Stephen would have chosen to speak on. Previously, he has spoken about the language of teaching vacancy advertisements, Foucault’s critical ontology as a worthwhile activity for teachers, and Foucauldian self writing as a tool for CPD. His role as a head of year in school was not something that Stephen had regarded as being one of interest – to others, or perhaps himself. The organiser of #rEDBrum had suggested that it would be good to hear about how Stephen used research in his pastoral role. Stephen had enthusiastically agreed before realising, somewhat embarrassingly, that he in fact did not use research in his pastoral role. His work as head of year tended to be ad hoc and reactionary, dealing with pastoral issues as they arose; and this had been his experience of the pastoral throughout his career. And so, Stephen began to

consider the ways in which research informed practice might be applied to pastoral leadership roles in schools. Thus, a merging began to materialise between the materially situated subject Stephen – situated within the context of a particular role within a particular context – and the author sputniksteve. There had been increasing overlap between these two elements of identity, with sputniksteve being instrumental in the organisation of the #CharacterED2018 conference being held at Stephen's school, and the #CurriculumED2019 event to be hosted there too. In a sense, these were both examples of sputniksteve bringing the world of the tweacher society into his professional domain – speakers from #eduTwitter speaking in the knave of Lichfield Cathedral and the buildings of Lichfield Cathedral School. But now, Stephen began to actively embrace his role as a pastoral leader and to use that as a basis for his activity in the tweacher society. Furthermore, as he sourced and engaged with relevant literature to inform this talk, Stephen began to see ways in which he could develop his practice as head of year. Thus, the interplay between Stephen and sputniksteve became more fruitful as they continued to write the self of each other.

Having given the talk, which was repeated at other events, sputniksteve began to be described by other tweachers on #eduTwitter as an authority on pastoral matters. One commentator described sputniksteve as 'one of our most insightful pastoral voices' (KLMorgan_2, 2020).

For Stephen, this was something of a surprise, but in hindsight it probably shouldn't have been for pastoral leadership was, after all, his job. Nonetheless, to be regarded as an expert in anything is still something that Stephen finds uncomfortable – a sense of imposter syndrome, perhaps.

Following the success of his talk about research informed pastoral leadership, sputniksteve composed a blog post based upon it (sputniksteve, 2019). Like the talk, the blog post outlined Stephen's exploratory journey towards developing a more research and evidence informed approach to pastoral leadership, identifying where useful resources can be found and what kinds of evidence might be of use. The blog post gained 310 views in its first month, rising to a meagre 630 hits overall. This compares with well over 4,000 views for the most successful sputniksteve blogposts. Perhaps, thinks Stephen, this reflects the lack of focus on the pastoral aspects of schooling in the 'what works' discourses of research-informed education.

6.14 The Book

It is July 2019. Stephen logs in to Twitter and finds a most unexpected message in his direct messages. From the Twitter account for Crown House Publishing (@CrownHousePub) it reads:

> 'Hi Steve, just come across your blog post on pastoral care and how it links to the academic curriculum. It struck me that there doesn't seem to be much out there on this and wondered if you'd thought about writing a book about it (or anything else for that matter). If so, we'd be very interested in publishing it. Best wishes, David Bowman. P.S. Like your Twitter profile pic! Saundersfoot is just down the road from us!'
>
> (David Bowman, via @CrownHousePub, in private communication, July 2019).

Somewhat startled, Stephen reflects for a brief moment before replying enthusiastically in the affirmative. It had never occurred to him that he might write a book about education, let alone one about pastoral care. After a few more digital exchanges, the twitterotopia of #eduTwitter became once again manifest in the 'real world' as Stephen made a telephone call to David Bowman, managing director of Crown House Publishing. Details were discussed, and a tentative deadline suggested of December 2019. Later that summer, Stephen and his family took a holiday in Saundersfoot, not far from the offices of the publisher. Stephen arranged to visit the premises and meet the staff. Again, the world of #eduTwitter peeped through the membrane between the digital heterotopia and the world of the real as Stephen was shown the room that housed copies of titles by various authors whose names he recognised from eduTwitter – hundreds of copies, piled neatly on metal shelving racks. The idea that his name might one day appear alongside them was a dizzingly surreal one.

It is September 2019, Stephen begins typing …

6.14.1 Challenging Biases and Questioning the Subjective Hegemony

The process of writing the book caused Stephen to confront a number of subjective positions that sputniksteve had enunciated in various tweets over the years. For example, one aspect of the trad/prog dichotomous discourses has revolved around the best ways to respond to student misbehaviour. On the one hand, there are proponents of zero tolerance, no excuses approaches to discipline; on the other, there are those who advocate a response grounded in restorative justice. The former have been criticised as highly authoritarian, carceral

approaches grounded in what is portrayed as outdated behaviourism, which was apparently ‘discredited as a pedagogy decades ago’ (Titcombe, 2019) . The latter have been criticised for undermining teachers, leading to increases in disruptive, even dangerous behaviour (Roberts, 2018). These two positions became associated respectively with Tom Bennett (Bennett, 2017) and Paul Dix (Dix, 2017), with the discourses being typified in conversations around the #BanTheBooths campaign, for example.

In reality, of course, most people’s views on discipline and behaviour management fall somewhere between the extreme polls of this dichotomy. As Stephen read around the topic, he began to see that the supposed differences in approach were largely semantic, with many commonalities such as the need for calm consistency and fairness. Stephen began to develop a call for a more pragmatic view of discipline, amongst other things.

Similarly, Stephen’s reading caused him to re-evaluate his view on attachment theory. For some, this theory is essential in understanding behaviour as communication; for others, its usefulness is limited to rare circumstances of infant trauma and it has no practical application for classroom teachers (Rose, 2019). For Stephen, theories of attachment offer a potentially useful tool for understanding the various relational threads that flow between children and adults, where the latter also have attachment needs (Riley, 2011).

Whilst championing the movement for research informed practices in teaching, and being a vocal advocate of ResearchED, Stephen had also questioned what he saw as a dominant paradigm in the discourses of research informed teaching – namely, the ‘what works’ discourses with which rED had become synonymous, but

that Stephen sought to problematise as being a limiting view of what research could be and what it could do (Biesta, 2007). This problematisation could be seen in sputniksteve's previous talks for rED in which he positioned Foucauldian tools of self writing as useful and potentially fruitful pursuits, building an ethic of a philosophical life – the critical ontology of ourselves.

In various tweets, sputniksteve has sometimes challenged the subjective hegemonies that had been built up through the #eduTwitter discourses of the tweacher society. He has not been alone in this, of course, but sputniksteve has, perhaps, become associated with a particular paradigmatic subjective position as a 'trad' which has created for him what is often described as an echo chamber (De Kosnik and Feldmen, 2019; Thomson and Riddle, 2019; Watson, 2021; Gilbert, 2016).

6.14.2 Pastoral Purpose

By challenging some of the shibboleths associated with the 'trad' camp, sputniksteve is perhaps attempting to set himself as outside of it, and beyond the dichotomy altogether. In an early chapter of his book, Stephen asks 'what research?', problematising the dominance of quantitative research questions and methodologies, and attempting to open up the range of research types that could be considered as 'valid' (Lane, 2020). In so doing, Stephen is claiming a subjective position outside of the trad/prog dichotomy in his call for a pragmatic pastoral praxis.

Once the book's publication had been announced, sputniksteve and the publisher's account @CrownHousePub began tweeting about it, employing a

hashtag that sputniksteve had already begun to use, #BeyondWipingNoses, as well as other hashtags associated with pastoral care. The pastoral aspect of teaching and schooling have not been vocally lauded by the 'trad' camp on #eduTwitter, and sputniksteve provocatively began to suggest that the primary purpose of schooling should be pastoral (as opposed to academic) (sputniksteve, 2020). Here, again, sputniksteve was experimenting with going beyond the – discursive – limits placed upon him by the hegemonic dominance of academic focussed goals of education, or, as Biesta calls it, qualification (Biesta, 2016). This hegemonic dominance of the academic materialises in the condition that examination is seen as an end-point for education, where the results of examination provide gateways into the next stage of life and where these results are assembled into league tables by which judgements about the effectiveness of schools can be made.

6.14.3 Authoring

The proclamations from sputniksteve that the primary purpose of schooling should be pastoral, and that the academic performs in service to it, are deliberately provocative but ultimately reflect Stephen's subjective position – a position informed both by his professional role as a pastoral leader, by his encounters with enunciative formulations both on #eduTwitter and in the wider tweacher society, and in his composition of *Beyond Wiping Noses*. The book itself is a product of sputniksteve – itself an enunciative statement subject to formulations that flow through the discourses of #eduTwitter. Without his participation in #eduTwitter and the tweacher society, Stephen would not have written the book, and the book would not have written Stephen.

It is spring 2020, and Stephen is contemplating what name should go on the front of his book.

6.15 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have given a narrative account of the creation of my Twitter alter-ego, sputniksteve, and my emergence into key aspects of the tweacher society. I have closely analysed some of the first tweets that I sent from my @sputniksteve account, considered how these indicate my initial ontological positions, and how these positions may have shifted over time. I have charted the rise of sputniksteve from those initial tweets in 2011 into a recognised member of the tweacher society associated with particular expertise and finally a published book writer as a result of my activity within the tweacher society. Through this, I have also contemplated the performative nature of this activity and the development of sputniksteve as a performed, enacted aspect of my sense of self, whilst also acknowledging how this has shaped my deeper sense of subjectivity.

It must be clarified that through my presentation of sputniksteve as a created persona I do not mean to suggest a kind of dualism between the subject and the author, as if they are separate and distinct identities. Clearly sputniksteve is a performed identity and part of my formation as a subject. Such performances are not necessarily conscious – it was not necessarily a deliberate motivation when I joined Twitter to create a fictive representation of myself. The initial goal of anonymity may have given me a sense of confidence to say things about the conditions of my identity as a schoolteacher but, as I point out in the chapter, the drive for anonymity was clearly not as strong as I had perhaps falsely recalled

given my following of a senior leader of the school in which I worked and my tweeting at a consultant who had visited the school.

Perhaps I became more aware of the performative nature of twitter usage as time went on and perhaps I began to cultivate sputniksteve as someone with expertise in certain areas. As noted, though, I would not necessarily have chosen pastoral leadership to have been such an area of expertise to become associated with; rather, this was the result of someone asking me to speak about the topic at a ResearchED event. Thus, we can see how even performed identities are enacted in relation to others and are discursively constructed (Youdell, 2006), and not necessarily in ways we may intend.

In the final chapter, I give my conclusions about this project and its implications for teacher professional growth.

7. Conclusion

7.1 The Start of the Conclusion

It is September 2020. Stephen reflects on his research question: What does it mean to say that I am @sputniksteve? After almost a decade of activity on Twitter, sputniksteve has gained over 7,000 followers. This is small in comparison with many on #eduTwitter, some of whom have six figure follower counts; @oldandrewuk has almost 20,000 followers. There was a time, not so very long ago, when Stephen was keen, desperate, to build a large following as sputniksteve. Perhaps this is part of the appeal of social media – gaining followers, likes and retweets can give us a sense of comfort – especially those of us with narcissistic tendencies -- that can lead to addictive behaviours (Brailovskaia and Teichert, 2020). Or perhaps, it reflects Stephen's need for acceptance, belonging and esteem, fulfilling Maslow's hierarchy. I suspect (I hope) that Stephen is not alone in this. But now Stephen realises that follower numbers are not really what it is about.

For Stephen, eduTwitter, and the tweacher society have opened up two main avenues of personal and professional development that were previously closed to him: professional and extraprofessional. The first refers to those developments that Stephen has undergone within his salary earning work; his job. Through sputniksteve's activity on Twitter, Stephen has encountered ideas that have informed his classroom practice. Stephen has most notably embraced ideas around pedagogy grounded in Rosenshine's *Principles of Instruction* (2012) which has also greatly influenced his work with trainee teachers. Stephen employs

retrieval practice and other tools inspired by cognitive load theory (CLT). Stephen's first encounters with eduTwitter opened him up to new ways of thinking and new ways of being that brought him into tension with the leadership of the school in which he worked at the time. Ultimately, Stephen left that school — and indeed the state sector — taking up a position at an independent school. Since then, sputniksteve has tweeted about the advantages of working in the independent sector, highlighting its very independence as the key demarcation between it and the state schools in which Stephen has previously worked, a state sector which is potentially still in thrall to the deliverology of the neoliberal zeitgeist. In his current role of pastoral leadership, Stephen has embraced the emerging movement of research-informed practice, looking to develop more informed approaches to his pastoral work (Lane, 2020).

It is in the realm of the extraprofessional, which takes place beyond or outside of the normal duties of the job, where Stephen has experienced his most radical transformations, which then provide a feedback loop back into his practice. His involvement with ResearchED has opened up opportunities for achievements and growth that would not have been otherwise open to him. Specifically, the suggestion that of a talk on research informed approaches to pastoral leadership led to a blog post which ultimately led to the publication of a book. This extraprofessional journey has ultimately fed back into practice in school, where the results of my various readings in preparation for the book have influenced and informed my approach to pastoral issues in school. Here is writ large the potential of self writing in the Foucauldian mould: through the hupomnemata and correspondence of eduTwitter and the tweacher society, where sputniksteve was

tweeting about pastoral matters as Stephen engaged in reading around the topics, Stephen's own subjectivity was being written. The nature of engaging in the discourses caused him to question some of the taken as read discursive certainties of the 'trad' side of the ever-present trad/prog dichotomy. In his book, Stephen calls for a 'pragmatic pastoral praxis', which is a clear articulation of a subjective position between, or outside, the trad/prog binaries: that of pragmatism.

7.2 Personal Growth Contra CPD

As noted in the introductory chapters, teacher continuing professional development (CPD) is generally regarded as unsatisfactory, even woeful, by many teachers (Cordingley et al., 2015; Hardy, 2012). In most cases, what constitutes 'training' at school INSET is really administrative communication, or reaffirmation of managerial expectations. It represents the institutional governmentality of the employing school; an accountancy of learning. CPD is an instrumentalist, administrative phenomenon; it is an artefact of carceral managerialism, often yoked to mandated conceptions of teacher professionalism.

The Chartered College of Teaching offers to its members recognised qualification through examination in the form of the CTeach course, and its membership model includes a higher tier dubbed Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching (FCCT) – which Stephen holds. But, again, whilst these are very welcome, they do represent a version of professional development which is necessarily instrumentalist. We must have our certificates and post-nominals.

What the tweacher society offers, through its various manifestations on eduTwitter and in conferences, teachmeets and other manifestations in the offline world, is

the potential for an ethic of growth that cannot necessarily be measured or quantified. Rather, it is the philosophical life that Foucault urges us to pursue as the critical ontology of ourselves; self writing through the articulation, consumption and rearticulation of statements. But it is also post-critical, offering the chance to develop a love of the world rather than a cynical hope for an ever-unreachable future. We can act in the world now. EduTwitter and the tweacher society is the enactment of change at the level of the individual but also at the level of the community itself. Through engagement in the tweacher society, schoolteachers can become ‘far better equipped to make conscious decisions about who they want to be’ (Kincheloe, 2011, p.209). Of course, eduTwitter and the tweacher society also offer the potential for careerism too, for individuals to present a version of themselves as highly successful classroom practitioners free from any burden of proof; or to develop a career as a writer, consultant or adviser.

But for teachers wishing to engage in professional development, there is plenty on offer on #eduTwitter: there are hundreds of shared resources, active subject domain subgroups and hashtag threads; there are myriad discussions around pedagogy, curriculum and the science of learning and cognitive psychology; there are hours of videos, interviews and podcasts; there are links to blogs, articles and books. The tweacher society brings us conferences, teachmeets, webinars, and other events such that one’s calendar could easily be filled.

But #eduTwitter and the tweacher society offer so much more than this – more fundamental. The digital heterotopia of #eduTwitter is a cite of crisis, a site of transformation, that works on the very subjectivity of those who participate in it. Once visited, one is forever changed. Repeated visits work on that subjectivity,

writing and re-writing the self. This is so very much more than CPD, with its managerial hierarchies, and its neoliberal agenda through which it ties itself in administrative knots of deliverology as it yokes ‘professional development’ with ‘performance management’.

This is self writing.

7.3 Reflections on the Project

It is September 2020. Stephen has been pursuing the EdD since 2011, just as sputniksteve has been tweeting since 2011. In his professional life, Stephen has undergone a transformation. In his personal life, Stephen survived a myocardial infarction aged 36, and almost two years later a cardiac arrest. This, no doubt, had a huge impact on Stephen’s professional life, influencing his decisions but also rewriting aspects of his very personality. All that time, sputniksteve was working upon Stephen, and Stephen was working upon sputniksteve. And perhaps that has been the project all along.

What began as a proposed study into the potential of social media as a learning tool for students beyond the classroom has become a project in the use of social media to work upon the self. And it has been a project of critical ontology of itself too, for there were limitations placed upon it: the ethical requirement to seek consent to use tweets as data rendered it difficult to collect a range of data to analyse the different sides of discursive threads and topics being discussed; the realisation that creating a second ‘academic’ account as an attempt at objectivity was ultimately disingenuous; the fact that the advanced Twitter search function became disabled in the final month of writing the thesis. However, the project

realigned itself as an autoethnographic account – what is this self that I am writing? The limitations gave new focus as I swung the analytic lens back upon myself. In August 2020, as I was approaching the end of my maximum period of registration on the EdD, I lost the ability to perform advanced Twitter searches, rendering my archive inaccessible, or at least more difficult to unearth. The loss of ability to search my own archive meant that I was limited to the data that I had gained prior to this loss, resulting in a focus on the earliest tweets of sputniksteve. This, it turned out, enabled a more objective position in relation to myself as a subject – so far as such a thing is possible. Through this lens, I saw the two aspects of my identity – sputniksteve and Stephen – as almost distinct, but obviously interwoven. The former was performing an author function, as I saw it.

7.4 What Does It Mean to Say That I Am @sputniksteve?

The articulation that 'I am @sputniksteve' is imbued with the material contingencies of the digital heterotopia of Twitter, and specifically #eduTwitter, and those teachers who use Twitter to form a community of discursive practices associated with their work and vocation as teachers – the tweacher society. #EduTwitter is a digital other place where participants undergo transformations, it is a site of crisis where one is changed. The tweacher society also operates outside of #eduTwitter, in the offline world but often in temporary heterotopias, or heterochronies – conferences, teachmeets, BrewEd events, and so on – but always via #eduTwitter. When at a conference, or meeting at a pub, a tweacher will tweet about the event, the meeting, the conversation. Fragments are captured, pulled from the ephemeral, and repurposed into articulations, formulations, and statements. Tweets are retweeted. Photographs are shared. Hashtags are

employed. #eduTwitter serves as both hupomnemata and correspondence, and the tweacher society is a vibrant discursive community that writes itself and whose participants write themselves.

By joining #eduTwitter and participating in the tweacher society, individual teachers are engaging in an ongoing process of self writing. The tweacher society is full of individuals enacting an ethos, a philosophical life in which they interrogate the limits placed upon them and experiment with going beyond those limits – a continual, constant experiment.

‘I am @sputniksteve’ is a claim to subjectivity – a subjectivity which exists beyond the confines of the job of teaching, beyond the professional limits placed upon Stephen as a teacher, and beyond even the limits placed upon sputniksteve as a tweeter. ‘I am @sputniksteve’ is proclamation of the pursuit of Foucault’s ethos of a philosophical life, the critical ontology of the self through self writing, and self tweeting.

It is September 2020, and Stephen submits his thesis.

I am sputniksteve.

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Appendix 1: Tweets from sputniksteve 2011

	Date	Tweet	URL
1	23-Feb-11	@englishmrlaneHello there 1	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/40506837077991424?s=20
2	23-Feb-11	@englishmrlane Hello there 2	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/40506898113495040?s=20
3	30-Jun-11	@robertlanemusic good den	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/86563886131720192?s=20
4	01-Jul-11	Hello	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/86698665640595456?s=20
5	01-Jul-11	This is kinda interesting: http://guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jun/17/francis-maude-rhodium-plated-pensions	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/86767144016166912?s=20
6	28-Sep-11	@poll 293208 laney test	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/119048009077100544?s=20
7	28-Sep-11	@poll293208 laney test 2	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/119048293656428544?s=20
8	28-Sep-11	@poll 293208 laney 4	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/119049547572981760?s=20
9	12-Nov-11	should i be a full time twitterer?	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/135485602878595072?s=20
10	25-Nov-11	This is amazing http://starwars.com/play/online-activities/crawl-creator/	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/140217859237359616?s=20
11	26-Nov-11	@charltonbrooker If it's half as good as Dead Set it will be ace. I bet it will be even better. I'm almost starting to like you ;-)	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/140218389397381120?s=20
12	26-Nov-11	A rather smashing day, making my brain buzz though.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/140221166374752257?s=20

13	26-Nov-11	HST at Lichfield!? Cross Country service to Plymouth. Didn't even know you get to Plymouth from here.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/140349143066484736?s=20
14	26-Nov-11	@alatalite National Secular Society misses the point while Gove desires return to ‘Victorian earnestness’.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/140476421633081344?s=20
15	26-Nov-11	What is ‘Learning"? #education	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/140561390225207296?s=20
16	26-Nov-11	Is Bloom's taxonomy still relevant? Was it ever relevant? #education	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/140565861986603009?s=20
17	26-Nov-11	@charltonbrooker @RobinThomasUK How did we ever survive the 90s?	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/140572348733595649?s=20
18	28-Nov-11	@achrisevans Congratulations! Is Noah fully prepared for his Big Bro duties?	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/141254116516167680?s=20
19	29-Nov-11	I am certain that my day of (in)action tomorrow will convine Mr #gove to change his mind.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/141650634108715010?s=20
20	29-Nov-11	But I wish we would take action over the fact that the system is not fit for purpose rather than about our money ...	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/141651448504131584?s=20
21	29-Nov-11	Interesting, but would like to see the evidence http://goo.gl/htUcA	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/141666538410344448?s=20
22	30-Nov-11	Could I grill #dampsquib and serve it with chips?	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/141946697793273856?s=20
23	30-Nov-11	Privacy is for Speedos	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/141967637717594113?s=20
24	30-Nov-11	Any teachers in English schools doing the #igcse in English?	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/141999581582991360?s=20
25	01-Dec-11	Is anyone doing the igcse in English? #ukedchat	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/142366485447315456?s=20
26	01-Dec-11	Bloom's taxonmy = 50 years old; the National Curriculum and the GCSE = 30 years old. At least we're up-to-date #ukeduchat	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/142366813257351168?s=20

27	03-Dec-11	Ofsted chief: ‘if ... ‘staff morale is at an all-time low’ you will know you are doing something right.’ http://ow.ly/7M6Db"	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/142960438425026561?s=20
28	05-Dec-11	Yippee! ‘@timesed: Mr Osborne's eve-of-strike announcement is a 'recipe for disaster' - http://ow.ly/7M6Dw"	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/143752623567273984?s=20
29	05-Dec-11	@warwickmansell Gove doesn't know what grammar is. Nor education.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/143762337306918913?s=20
30	07-Dec-11	"a better shape to your triangle’ #kirstie	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/144511309910786048?s=20
31	07-Dec-11	@teachitso Wordsearches can be a great tool	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/144512061941104641?s=20
32	10-Dec-11	Previous x factor winner sings Nine Inch Nails song on x factor final. #odd	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/145617334923563008?s=20
33	11-Dec-11	@captain_worm Hello!! I'm thinking of doing some research on the names that people give themselves online...	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/145965154511765504?s=20
34	11-Dec-11	#littlemix YAY!!	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/145976674301915139?s=20
35	11-Dec-11	#littlemix to win. That's my feeling on the matter. OK?	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/145971632022880256?s=20
36	11-Dec-11	#blackmirror ep2 was much better than ep1. And I enjoyed ep1. But ep2 was much better. I liked ep2.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/145998349676462080?s=20
37	11-Dec-11	hello fg	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/145999845352677376?s=20
38	11-Dec-11	@stephenfry They had all their balls on the table. Terribly poor manners. Oh wait, that was Come Dine With Me...	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/146010035498123266?s=20
39	13-Dec-11	@Samfr @oldandrewuk Interesting use of the word 'best'.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/146646311167475714?s=20
40	14-Dec-11	Anyone using Prezi as a tool for writing Schemes of work? #education	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/146752053388120064?s=20

41	20-Dec-11	@serafinowicz The most wonderful, beautiful nonsense. Proper kids' TV	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/149253038123659264?s=20
42	21-Dec-11	@stephenfry with T-Mobile that could be anywhere...	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/149631906093338626?s=20
43	21-Dec-11	Is having a tv crush on #kirstie wrong? Even when she's talking about logs?	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/149632470608916480?s=20
44	26-Dec-11	@LeeDonaghy @teachitso Have we fallen out with multiple intelligences now? How long until we abondon Bloom too?	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/151391459742982144?s=20
45	26-Dec-11	@teachitso @LeeDonaghy And neither are of any real consequence when it comes to actual learning.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/151395851506434048?s=20
46	26-Dec-11	@teachitso @LeeDonaghy Thanks for that. been looking for something like this for ages.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/151420682314584064?s=20

Appendix 2: Tweets from @sputniksteve after 2011

	Date	Tweet	URL
1	07-Aug-19	Question for #EdD data (by replying, permission to use your tweets is assumed) How has using #EduTwitter changed you?	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/1159029874172080128?s=20
2	08-Jun-18	There's an interesting twist to all this. For so long, we've had Bloom's Taxonomy thrown at us, and told to ask questions from the 'higher' strata of the pyramid, but Bloom made clear that knowledge is foundational. Now we are using Bloom properly, we're being told it's rightwing	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/1005111198650597376?s=20
3	14-Jul-20	Have you actually read Bloom's original taxonomy, or the revised version? Question for EdD research. Feel free to comment; replies may be used as data. Thanks.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/1283057305106481153?s=20
4	5-Feb-12	New blog. First post. http://wp.me/p28lGM-5	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/166292274106466305?s=20
5	29-Jan-12	You all have probably seen this, but I think it's ace: Ken Robinson, Changing Paradigms http://youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/163723462257557505?s=20
6	07-Jan-12	@(redacted) Wrong twice. On the first, re-read your Bing results	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/155798226333745152?s=20
7	29-Jan-12	You all have probably seen this, but I think it's ace: Ken Robinson, Changing Paradigms http://youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/163723462257557505?s=20
8	01-Jul-13	@(redacted) Ken Robinson? Getting rather bored of him	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/351770944420843521?s=20
9	12-Oct-13	What Ken Robinson got wrong http://pragmaticreform.wordpress.com/2013/10/12/what-sir-ken-got-wrong/	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/388946213732884480?s=20
10	12-Dec-16	Do any of you know the name of the chap who gave a @TEDTalks talk opposing Ken Robinson?	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/808459390504304640?s=20

11	26-Aug-20	Do you regard me as: [Trad] [Prog] [Other]	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/1298576658782445569?s=20
12	26-Feb-12	@oldandrewuk An OA post that I actually agree with (in general)	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/173708098727460864?s=20
13	10-May-12	@oldandrewuk You are not making a judgement of my lessons based on this exchange? I thought better of you.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/200708198452305921?s=20
14	10-May-12	@oldandrewuk Wow. You've turned into a parody of the sort of people you criticise in debates.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/200708344267292672?s=20
15	23-Jul-20	Straw man. Ad hom. Something.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/1286388301159694336?s=20
16	28-Oct-12	@oldandrewuk @tombennett71 @cherrylkd Teachers don't have access to research. Schools should subscribe to journal databases.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/262666977221423105?s=20
17	08-Sep-18	It was great to see @amanda_spielman turn up for my session. I mean, it was only because another session got cancelled. But it made me happy none-the-less.	https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/1038547289516593152?s=20