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The dark side of the MOOC - A critical inquiry on their claims and realities

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> And then the one day you find
>
> Ten years have got behind you
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> No one told you when to run
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> You missed the starting gun
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> // PINK FLOYD "Time" (1973) //

Unlike other digital innovation in recent years, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) hit the educational landscape with such a profound impact. Originally started as an attempt to deliberately augment traditional academic courses, it soon became a brand of its own. Given the huge interest in the MOOC "Introduction to Artificial Intelligence" (160,000 students from over 190 countries) (Stacey, 2013) it seemed logical that Sebastian Thrun and Peter Norvig left Stanford University to found the for-profit start-up Udacity. Suddenly the old humanistic vision of "education for all" which was at the heart of the Enlightenment, but did not pass the "reality check" (Biesta, 2002), has risen from the dead and has ignited unparalleled media coverage. Both media and commercial MOOC providers helped towards constructing the "education is broken" narrative which states that (1) traditional universities are no longer able to equip learners with that kind of skills that are needed to master the challenges of our digital society and (2) technological innovations are now available that will revolutionize education, i.e. provide world class education in a cheap and effective way to every person on the planet. This means that the philosophical prospects of education are reformulated in terms of the proliferation of the Internet thus reducing the complex activities of humans (e.g. self-reflection) to technological conditions (e.g. availability of broadband Internet).

Taking a closer look at the claims that are attached to MOOCs it becomes apparent that they seem to follow a certain logic such as the use of dramatic pictures "The Campus Tsunami" (Brooks, 2012) or the portraying of individuals

(Sebastian Thrun, Daphne Koller) as leading pioneers. However, up to now little attention has been paid to the strategies of utilizing rhetorical figures for making claims or constructing arguments. Such a perspective is important as the use of language is not just reflecting social and psychological life but rather constructing social realities. In this regard, discourse analysis provides an account of the social and functional use of language to investigate the versions of social realities that are created collectively. Moreover, discourse analysis is interested in the social implications of constructing certain aspects of the social world in a particular way. Building on the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault, this paper utilises a critical discourse analysis with respect to mass media coverage of MOOCs, in particular news articles that appeared in the New York Times between 2012 and 2013.

INTRODUCTION: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND ITS BACKGROUND

Discourse analysis is commonly conceived as an umbrella term and far from being a standardized methodological approach. Therefore, there are various forms which have emerged in socio-linguistic, critical of cultural studies (van Dijk, 1993). As a sub-form, critical discourse analysis takes an explicit socio-political stance that goes beyond traditional methods of inquiry, i.e. researchers "(...) spell out their point of view, perspective, principles and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large. Although not in each stage of theory formation and analysis, their work is admittedly and ultimately political. Their hope, if occasionally illusory, is change through critical understanding. Their perspective, if possible, is that of those who suffer most from dominance and inequality." (van Dijk, 1993, p. 252).

While this definition puts forward a repressive notion of power (dominance), which can be traced to the influence of the Frankfurt School ("Critical Theory"), French philosopher Michel Foucault argues in favour of a more ambivalent thus differentiated understanding. For him, a discourse is what constraints or enables writing, speaking and thinking (Ball, 2013) or a kind of subconscious knowledge:

> "discourse is secretly based on an 'already said'; and that this 'already said' is not merely a phrase that has been already spoken, or a text that has been written, but a 'never said', an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as a breath, a writing that is merely the hollow of its own mark" (Foucault, 1974, p. 25)

More specifically, discourses are a "(...) set of conditions with which a practice is exercised, in accordance with which that practice gives rise to partially or totally new statements, and in accordance with which it can be modified" (ibid, p. 208f.). In this view, discourses shape the validity of knowledge, i.e. it depends on cultural, historical, political, economical and social relations at a given time.

Knowledge is thus contested as embedded in power relations. Consequently, there is no human nature that is fixed once and for all (essential nature) but "(...) only human beings that have been historically constituted as subjects in different ways at different times" (Peters, 2012, p. 74). Against this background, Foucault attempted to analyse the historical production and reproduction of subjectivity as an object of discourses that are constituted at the intersection of truth and power, i.e. "genealogical narratives of the self replace questions of ontology" (Lazaroiu, 2013, p. 822). Discourse analysis is thus engaged with the discovery of "(...) rules which 'govern' bodies of texts and utterances" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 123).

As discourses form and enable reality, they are also closely related to power which in Foucault's view takes an ubiquitous form as he stated in an interview:

> "Power should not be understood as an oppressive system bearing down on individuals from above, smiting them with prohibitions of this or that. Power is a set of relations." (Bess, 1988, p. 11).

Power in this perspective is constituted through discourses which represent different ways of structuring knowledge and social practices of modernity (Lazaroiu, 2013). Foucault's History of Sexuality is a striking example for the understanding that power does have a productive side as it was demonstrated that "(...) while certain direct expressions about sex were indeed repressed, the amount of discourse, indeed the number of distinct discourses, about sex increased continuously" (Kelly, 2013, p. 31).

Given the outstanding importance of power in Foucault's work, the reception in disciplines like education that are fundamentally based on the notion of an autonomous and self-determined subject was conflicting (Wain, 1996). In a similar vein, Dussel (2010, p. 27) describes his thoughts as a "(...) bitter pill to swallow for educators, as it shakes most of the grounds on which modern schooling has been built: truth, knowledge, vocation, enlightenment, or salvation". On the other hand it has also been shown that a more balanced and substantial account of Foucault offers a conception of a "pedagogy without humanism" (Biesta, 1998), i.e. an understanding of education that is between overestimation and underestimation of intersubjectivity. Moreover, as Besley (2005) stresses that Foucault's late work which has focussed on notions of the self or rather the care of the self "(...) has strong and obvious relevance for schools in general and for school counselling as well as general counselling theories" (p. 86). Although advocates have faced the problem that working with Foucault's toolbox has become "(...) the victim of their own efficacy", i.e. "(...) the massive extent of power, as unveiled by Foucault, appears completely to overwhelm any possibility of agency and freedom (and even to render such notions 'humanist illusions', or worse)" (Leask, 2012, p. 57f.), it is not the intent of this contribution to portray Foucault's philosophy as an approach that ultimately will lead to an impasse of all-embracing power structures but to argue for its value as a methodology that is

aimed to examine and better understand aporias of subject-centred views (cf. Webb, Gulson, & Pitton, 2012).

WHY A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE MOOC MOVEMENT?

In this article, discourse analysis is proposed as a valuable tool that allows us to understand MOOCs as historically constituted and socially constructed "events" and to investigate the hidden layers that are often masked by rhetoric slogans . This is the case, for instance, when Siemens (2013) aligns MOOCs with the merits of distance learning by emphasizing its "(...) long history of increasing access to education, dating back to 1833" (p. 5). Similarly, Boven (2013) examines "(...) several historical moments in education to develop an understanding of MOOCs and their future" (p.1) implying that there is something like an ahistorical and transcultural essence waiting to be discovered and utilized for future improvements.

The assumption of an overall continuity bears the danger of overlooking and neglecting the particularities of a MOOC because the idea implied by such an understanding is that history (e.g. the history of online distance education) is one of progress and of liberation (from economical, social, pedagogical and political bonds). Against this essentialist view, Foucault demonstrated with his studies on madness and "Discipline and Punishment" that humanistic progression is just a superficial interpretation; however, on a deeper layer the regime of power altered from repression towards discipline and control. Therefore, punishment in fact changed over time towards a less cruel form but only because it became clear that "(...) it was more efficient and profitable in terms of the economy of power to place people under surveillance than to subject them to some exemplary penalty" (Foucault, 1980, p. 38).

The following analysis follows the Foucauldian conception of discourse as "practices that systematically form the objects of what they speak" (Foucault, 1974, p. 52). Educational research drawing on this conception has investigated, for instance, policy discourses in school texts, in particular the utilization of visual representations as instruments for the production of the "good student" (Maguire, Hoskins, Ball, & Braun, 2011) or bullying as a narration of subjectivity which is "(...) perpetuated by the educational discourses and training of schooling itself" (Jacobson, 2010, p. 256).

The overall goal of a discourse analysis following the ideas of Foucault is to unmask totalising concepts such as democratisation of education regarding the complex and dynamics interplay of power and knowledge, i.e. "(...) to think and see otherwise, to be able to imagine things being other than what they are, and to understand the abstract and concrete links that make them so" (L. J. Graham,

2011, p. 667). More specifically, it is to be scrutinized (…) "why it is that certain statements emerged to the exclusion of all others and what function they serve" (ibid, p. 668).

As has been already stated, discourse analysis is a flexible term depending on the epistemological framework which is being drawn upon. For a discourse analysis inspired by Foucault, some authors refuse to declare their methodological approach which might be attributed to a fear of being prescriptive (L. J. Graham, 2011).

In contrast to that, Jäger and Maier (2010) outline a practical methodological approach that follows a logical order of steps which will be utilized for the present analysis.

THE MOOC DISCOURSE 2012-2013 –
AN EXEMPLARY ACCOUNT

The present article employs a critical discourse analysis inspired by the work of Foucault to investigate the discursive formation of the MOOC discourse between 2012 and 2013. It will look into the line of arguing and rhetorical figures that are brought forward. The following steps have been applied in facilitating the discourse analysis (Jäger & Maier, 2010). First the subject matter has to be chosen which in this case pertains to the way MOOCs have been received by mainstream media during 2012-2013, i.e. the structure of the general MOOC discourse. *The New York Times* has been chosen as an influential player in public debates which has been described in prior research as "(...) an excellent source for tracking how an issue is framed by and for elites" (Lawrence, 2004, p. 60). A Google search has been performed to determine articles tagged with the keyword "MOOC" published between January 2012 and December 2013.

Articles appeared in the New York Times		
	2012	2013
January		Measuring the Success of Online Education Students Rush to Web Classes, but Profits May Be Much Later California to Give Web Courses a Big Trial Public Universities to Offer Free Online Classes for Credit Online Courses: Possibilities and Pitfalls Sit In on College Courses,

		Without the Visit Davos Forum Considers Learning's Next Wave
February		Universities Abroad Join Partnerships on the Web We Are the Mighty, Mighty MOOCs Europeans Take a More Cautious Approach Toward Online Courses
March	Instruction for Masses Knocks Down Campus Walls	The Professors' Big Stage Beware of the High Cost of 'Free' Online Courses Keeping an Eye on Online Test-Takers Colleges Assess Cost of Free Online-Only Courses Harvard Asks Graduates to Donate Time to Free Online Humanities Class California Bill Seeks Campus Credit for Online Study
April		Brown University Creates Online Course for High School Students Colleges Adapt Online Courses to Ease Burden The Practical University Adapting to Blended Courses, and Finding Early Benefits State Lines May Ease for Classes Held Online
May	Come the Revolution Harvard and M.I.T. Team Up to Offer Free Online Courses The Campus Tsunami	Georgia Tech Will Offer a Master's Degree Online Professors at San Jose State Criticize Online Courses
June		Online Classes Fuel a Campus Debate
July	Universities Reshaping Education on the Web Top Universities Test the Online Appeal of Free Berkeley to Join the Free Online Learning Partnership EdX Open Education for a Global Economy The Trouble With Online Education	
August	Free Online Course Will Rely on Multiple	Master's Degree Is New Frontier

	Sites	of Study Online Advice for Middle-Age Seekers of MOOCs (or Other Courses) To Catch a Cheat
September	Colorado State to Offer Credits for Online Class Online Mentors to Guide Women Into the Sciences Education Site Expands Slate of Universities and Courses	A Surge in Growth for a New Kind of Online Course The Boy Genius of Ulan Bator Online Lessons in Dementia Management European Universities Catch the Online Wave The Rise of MOOCs Course Provider Joins Google to Start Learning Platform
October		U.S. Teams Up With Operator of Online Courses to Plan a Global Network Turning Education Upside Down
November	The Year of the MOOC College Credit Eyed for Online Courses College of Future Could Be Come One, Come All Should MOOCs Be Eligible for College Credit? University Consortium to Offer Small Online Courses for Credit	Innovation Imperative: Change Everything Online Courses Attract Degree Holders, Survey Finds
December		After Setbacks, Online Courses Are Rethought Online Courses: High Hopes, Trimmed Professors in Deal to Design Online Lessons for A.P. Classes

Typically a discourse analysis encompasses an extended period of time as in Clark's (2006) study on the emergence and development of academic charisma. In contrast to that, the present analysis will focus on a two-year period as it is the time where mainstream media finally took notice of the MOOC phenomenon. It seem fair to assume that it was also the time when many strategic questions (e.g. accreditation) have come to the top of the agenda which from now on will inform subsequent debates in different areas (e.g. educational policies). Thus, it the time frame in which the discourse formation has constituted itself resulting in distinctive positions.

The next step entails a structural analysis, i.e. a rough overview of the characteristics of the articles as an empirical base for the analysis of the discursive formation. This led to a data set of 58 articles (18 appeared in 2012) that have

been published in the New York Times and tagged with "MOOC".

It starts with "Instruction for Masses Knocks Down Campus Walls" (Lewin, 2012a) published on March 4 which welcomes the reader to "The Brave New World" a.k.a. MOOCs as "a tool for democratizing higher education". It portrays this form of free online courses as the realisation of a long-cherished dream because "in the past few months hundreds of thousands of motivated students around the world who lack access to elite universities have been embracing them as a path toward sophisticated skills and high-paying jobs, without paying tuition or collecting a college degree". And indeed, according to empirical evidence, there seems to be a huge demand for MOOCs as 190,000 participants from 190 countries took part in the online course, while there was a decrease from 200 to 30 registered students on campus. For one of the protagonists, Sebastian Thrun, this was the signal to quit his tenured position at Stanford University. He argued that "I feel like there's a red pill and a blue pill, and you can take the blue pill and go back to your classroom and lecture your 20 students. But I've taken the red pill, and I've seen Wonderland." Given the large numbers of participants, there is some kind of a natural reflex to capitalize on that. But the articles stressed that "For many of the early partisans, the professed goal is more about changing the world than about making money." The article goes on to cover earlier attempts to provide online education for a large audience around the globe in the form of so-called cMOOCs. George Siemens is introduced as a pioneer who offered the first MOOCs five years ago. At the end of the article two MOOCs participants are mentioned as anecdotes for the special "nature" of the MOOC. Portrayed in this way, MOOCs build their reputation by empirical evidence and by referring to recognised experts in the field of online education.   X

Three articles have appeared in May 2012, two of which written by guest commentators Thomas Friedman (2012) "Come the Revolution" and David Brooks (2012) "The Campus Tsunami". Both articles have received considerable attention in terms of directs comments (370 for "Come the Revolution", 330 for "The Campus Tsunami") and are characteristic for their usage of rhetorical figures. Whereas Friedman argues in an overly optimistic tone ("welcome to the college education revolution", "In five years this will be a huge industry", "let the revolution begin"), Brooks takes up a more balanced position by raising questions like "Will online learning diminish the face-to-face community that is the heart of college experience" or "How are they going to blend online information with face-to-face discussion, tutoring, debate, coaching, writing and projects?". The third article in May, "Harvard and M.I.T. Team Up to Offer Free Online Courses" (Lewin, 2012b), resonate concerns and potentials formulated by Friedman and Brooks. As in one of the previous articles, George Siemens is quoted as a "MOOC pioneer".

In July (no article was issued in June) 2012 five items were issued by the

New York Times including the article "The Trouble With Online Education" written by Mark Edmundson who is a professor of English at the University of Virginia (Edmundson, 2012). He uses the statement "AH, you're a professor. You must learn so much from your students" as a starting point for engaging in a fundamental discussion on what it means to be a "good" teacher. Edmundson concluded that teaching is "(...) something tantamount to artistry" – an idea which is then positioned against the proliferation of online education as a "(...) one-size-fits-all endeavor". In spite of the huge potential of Internet courses, there is an insurmountable gap between the two "worlds" - for now and the future that is yet to come.

On the "Opinion Page" David Bornstein (2012), working as a journalist and author specialised in social entrepreneurship, published "Open Education for a Global Economy" in which he paralleled MOOCs with a company called "Advanced Learning Interactive Systems Online (ALISON) which offers "Free, Certified Courses from the World's Top Publishers[1]". Given the growing unemployment rate worldwide and the masses of people who "lack rudimentary workplace skills", Bornstein claims that open online education can help to "(...) close this gap, but only if it's intentionally directed to the people around the world who most need it". This statement deploys a different rhetorical device as it is part of the Opinion Page. More specifically, the decision to have an author like David Bornstein write that piece is in line with the overall approach the New York Times takes towards MOOCS. Moreover, Bornstein uses inspiring metaphors (e.g. "good news for everybody") to construct a humanistic argument.

The article "Universities Reshaping Education on the Web" (Lewin, 2012c) reiterates the overall story of the MOOC and some of its current problems (cheating, grading, accreditation) but also potential such as the evolution of "flipped classroom", i.e. using video lectures from a MOOC as a precondition for local students. Whether for-profit MOOC providers might eventually replace traditional universities is also discussed and Coursera co-founder Daphne Koller is quoted with "We're not planning to become a higher-education institution that offers degrees but we are interested in what can be done with these informal types of certification". A News Analysis entitled "Top Universities Test the Online Appeal of Free" (Perez-Pena, 2012) discusses the latest developments of elite universities joining forces with Coursera and what consequences this might imply for mediocre colleges. As indicated by the decision of the University of Virginia to oust their president because there was fear of being left behind online, panic has emerged caused by the MOOC hype. It is also mentioned that technological issue do not fully explain the enormous appeal of MOOCs; rather it is the fact that top colleges "are jumping in with free courses", i.e. they are "throwing open the

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[1] http://alison.com/

doors digitally". Whether elite universities are forerunners for digital online education is still questionable. However, moral judgements are brought forward as Anya Kamentz states "The people who should be worried about this are the large tier of American universities – especially the expansive private schools – that are not elite and don't have the same reputation". Finally, a short notice concerning "Berkeley to Join the Free Online Learning Partnership EdX" (Lewin, 2012d) is published as an illustrative example of the ongoing "scramble to stake out the leadership role in the world of online education".

One article has been issued in August, "Free Online Course Will Rely on Multiple Sites" (Lewin, 2012e) that covers the "Mechanical MOOC" – a computer-programming language that builds on existing resources from open-learning sites conducted without a traditional instructor. This course is envisioned, according to Philipp Schmidt (co-founder of the Peer2Peer University), as an "attempt to leverage the power of the open Web". Moreover, it is stated that everything needed of education (content, community, assessment) already exists on the Internet. Although the Mechanical MOOC is portrayed as an alternative to the highly structured xMOOCs on commercial platforms, it is exposed to similar high drop out rates. While there is a strong belief in the power of technology to foster democratisation of education, there is also a reflex to evaluate technology-driven courses with traditional means. This indicates that expectations for the benefits of MOOCs are blinded by a mind set that needs to be upgraded in order to grasp MOOCs as a unique way of online learning.

In September of 2012, three MOOC related articles appeared in the New York Times. In "Colorado State to Offer Credits for Online Class" (Lewin, 2012f), two big questions are investigated: "whether universities will begin to offer credit for such courses, and what might be done to prevent cheating". It is then reported that Colorado State University's Global Campus would be the first American institution to offer credit for a MOOC (in this case provided by Udacity). In order to facilitate the verification of students' identities, edX has undergone a collaboration with Pearson VUE who maintains 450 testing centers in more than 110 countries. Regarding cheating, it is mentioned that Coursera is thinking about "automatic plagiarism detection programs". MOOCs as an instrument to encourage women to start a career in STEM fields in the topic of "Online Mentors to Guide Women Into the Sciences" (Lewin, 2012g). With the help of prominent women working in STEM fields, a MOOC is planned that is aligned to cMOOCs with the goal of "connecting young students with accomplished women working in STEM fields". Stephen Downes is referred to as a "pioneer of the early MOOCs" and points out the special nature of this form of online collaboration. The rapid expansion of Coursera is covered in the article "Education Site Expands Slate of Universities and Courses" (Lewin, 2012h) which also mentions a report warning that "the growing popularity of free online courses could be a problem

for small local colleges and for-profit institutions". With the emergence of Class2Go (developed at Stanford University) there is a considerable and growing diversification in the MOOC market.

Whereas no article was published in October 2012, four items appeared in November 2012. As a summary of 2012, "The Year of the MOOC", written by the inaugural writer-in residence at the Wellesley Centers for Women Laura Pappano (2012), recapitulates a development that according to Anant Agarwal (president of edX) can be called "The Year of Disruption". MOOCs are defined in contrast to the OpenCourse Ware (OCW) format that "make you feel as if you're spying on a class from the back of the room", the MOOC is a "full course made with you in mind". This is indicated by the claim of Coursera as being a "hub" for learning and networking. In keeping with the notion of disruption, Udacity's policy of prioritizing teaching excellence over academic merits is described as a striking example as it is edX with its "intentionality to sequencing video". "College Credit Eyed for Online Education" (Lewin, 2012i) covers the attempt of Coursera to join forces with the American Council on Education to determine "whether some free online courses are similar enough to traditional college courses that they should be eligible for credit". This is seen only as first step towards "broaden[ing] access to higher education and bring[ing] down costs". The third article in November, "College of Future Could Be Come One, Come All" (Lewin, 2012j), depicts Mitchell Duneier (professor of sociology at Princeton) and his attempts to transfer traditional lectures into online video recordings. Following this, the evolution of MOOCs that has led to a huge interest and some urging questions (e.g. cheating) is mentioned as well as the fear of lower-tier colleges to be left behind. The article goes on to state that MOOCs are the tipping point of online education with elite universities take the function of a role model. The last item, "University Consortium to Offer Small Online Courses for Credit" (Seligson, 2012), introduces "Semester Online" a consortium that will offer 30 online courses with credit. They are portrayed in opposite to MOOCs: "there is no sneaking in late and unnoticed, and there is not back row".

In January 2013, seven articles appeared indicating a still growing interest in MOOCs. Among them is the piece "Measuring the Success of Online Education" (Markoff, 2013) published on "The Business of Technology" Blog section which discusses recent attempts to explore success factors in online education. It has been revealed that high interactivity and personalised feedback are two key variables. Financial aspects are the topic of "Students Rush to Web Classes, but Profits May Be Much Later" (Lewin, 2013a). On the one hand it is emphasized that investors do not (yet) rush for solid revenue streams and more for the distribution of high-quality content. But on the other hand, the actual costs are mentioned as well as different strategies to capitalize on the massive amount of user generated data.

The political dimension of MOOCs is dealt with in "California to Give Web Courses a Big Trial" (Lewin & Markoff, 2013) namely the pilot of San Jose State University and Udacity to deliver three MOOCs (remedial algebra, college-level algebra, introductory statistics) to a group of 300 students (half from SJSU and half from local community colleges and high schools). The cooperation was initiated by California Governor Jerry Brown "who has been pushing state universities to move more aggressively into online education". In addition to going online, it is about the crisis that "more than 50 percent of entering students cannot meet basic requirements". The perception of that crisis has led to a rush to experiment with MOOCs without negotiating with relevant actors such as the California Faculty Association. In a similar vein, Lewin (2013b) reports on the MOOC2Degree program that is issued by Academic Partnership to help universities move their courses online (i.e. that they offer credit). The potentials of MOOCs for prospective students is stressed in the blog post "Sit In on College Courses, Without the Visit" (Wilner, 2013a) and supported by Coursera co-founder Andrew Ng who "sees opportunity for growth in the high school market for just that reason" as well as in the report "Davos Forum Considers Learning's Next Wave" (Smale, 2013). The 12 year old Khadija Niazi is portrayed as a case study for the ability of MOOCs to provide access to high-quality content so that ambitions from an early stage of development might be transformed in a career.

In February 2013, three articles were published. In "Europeans Take a More Cautious Approach Toward Online Courses" (Guttenplan, 2013) which also appeared in The International Herald Tribune, a European position is formulated that is characterised by scepticism as regards the goal of widening access to education. Concern is raised that this ambition is undermined by business-driven considerations, in particular finding a solid business model. Lewin (2013c) describes in "Universities Abroad Join Partnerships on the Web" how commercial MOOC providers work on reaching an increasing part of the world's population. The consequences of the "MOOCisation" on academic careers is discussed on the blog posting "We Are the Mighty, Mighty MOOCs" (Abrams, 2013) especially the development of CV that is based on MOOCs instead of traditional college courses. Ted Fiske, former editor at The Times is quoted with an adapted version of the original lyrics to Cornell University's alma mater.   X

Six articles appeared in March, starting with "The Professors' Big Stage" by op-ed columnist Friedman (2013) in which he argues for the shift of the educational systems towards competency-based "blended model combining online lectures with a teacher-led classroom experience". Furthermore, the unique value of face-to-face interaction can and should be blended with technology "to improve education outcomes in measurable ways at lower costs". Economic questions that have arisen from the MOOC hype are discussed in the blog post "Beware of the High cost of "Free" Online Courses" (Lohr, 2013) especially those

concerning offering "free" courses which in fact might lead to "few large, well-off survivors and a wasteland of casualties". There are some lessons learned from the open-source software movement that can inform the current MOOC debate. Yet, some observer predict the same developments, i.e. there is a great danger for second- and third-tier universities. With the rise of MOOCs bearing credit, the problem of online cheating becomes bigger as stressed in the article "Keeping an Eye on Online Test-Takers" (Eisenberg, 2013). Two different solutions are discussed: Regional test centres that demand students to travel, and digital technologies which are given much promise through the article. Companies like ProctorU offer a full-service package based on in-depth knowledge of "ingenious tactics used to dodge testing rules". Whether MOOCs benefit or harm traditional colleges is discussed in the article "Colleges Assess Cost of Free Online-Only Courses" (Wallis, 2013). Given that MOOCs are typically free of costs and in some cases offer the possibility to transfer credit, they "threaten to poach paying students". Yet without a solid business model it (still) seems unclear who is actually making money out of it. Perez-Pena (2013) reports in "Harvard Asks Graduates to Donate Time to Free Online Humanities Class" on the attempt to recruit volunteers for online mentoring. Based on prior experience when students "tend to run off the rails" it is hoped that alumni can prevent that from happening. Finally, "California Bill Seeks Campus Credit for Online Study" (Lewin, 2013d) is an article outlining the attempt of the California Senate to "give credit for faculty-approved online courses taken by students unable to register for oversubscribed classes on campus" which would be "the first time that state legislators have instructed public universities to grant credit for courses that were not their own – including those taught by a private vendor, not by a college or university".

In April 2013, there have been five items published, starting with "The Practical University" by Op-Ed columnist Brooks (2013) in which he characterises the university as distributing two types of knowledge, namely technological and practical knowledge. Yet, there is an imbalance as technological knowledge is the dominating form in lectures. With the rise of online education, there seems to be a new possibility for the dissemination of practical knowledge, especially with seminars that are enhanced with technology: "Seminars could be recorded with video cameras, and exchanges could be reviewed and analyzed to pick apart how a disagreement was handled and how a debate was conducted". In "State Lines May Ease for Classes Held Online" (Lewin, 2013e) attempts are reported to "simplify the system" of online and distance education because the current system "was designed for courses taught in brick-and-mortar classrooms (…) and universities generally must register their programs in every state where they are offered". With the advents of MOOCs things become trickier and political regulations are faced with new facts (e.g.

Minnesota tried to banish Coursera because they had not yet been registered with the state). The "(...) first major effort by a university to tailor a massive open online course, or MOOC, specifically to high school students" is described in the blog post "Brown University Creates Online Courses for High School Students" (Wilner, 2013b). The offering is targeted at STEM education to bridge "the gap between college and high school". At the end of the month, Lewin (2013f) publishes two pieces. In "Adapting to Blended Courses, and Finding Early Benefits" she stresses the problems of transferring face-to-face instruction to online education. Blended learning is then provided as a fruitful solution as Anant Agarwal describes: "You can blend espresso, or you can blend coffee water. You can add as much or as little classroom time as is best for your school. And professors can add their own assignments, their own readings". The second article, "Colleges Adapt Online Courses to Ease Burden" (Lewin, 2013g), is about "the gritty task of harnessing online materials to meet the toughest challenges in American higher education: giving more students access to college, and helping them graduate on time". San Jose State University is used as a case study as they have partnered with Udacity resulting in a change of the pedagogical approach: "break things into very small segments, then ask students to figure things out, before you've told them the answer". The pilot was implemented very quickly without the traditional processes of academic self-administration and was thus not welcomed by educators. In their opinion, "the state (…) should restore state financing for public universities, rather than turning to unaccredited private vendors".

In May, there have been two articles, one of which is the National Briefing Education "Georgia Tech Will Offer a Master's Degree Online" (Lewin, 2013i). The course will be offered entirely through MOOCs and be free for the public (students seeking credit have to pay less than $7,000). The second article focusses on the San Jose State University and its pilot with Udacity (Lewin, 2013h) which have resulted in an Open Letter by the philosophy department "(...) asserting that such courses, designed by elite universities and widely licensed by others, would compromise the quality of education, stifle diverse viewpoints and lead to the dismantling of public universities". It seems that the administration and the faculty have become entrenched in their positions.

One item on MOOC was then published in June, "Online Classes Fuel a Campus Debate" (Lewin, 2013j), which is about MOOCs becoming "higher education mainstream". A main questions is now whether universities should either work with external providers or develop their own online course. The president of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, Peter McPherson, is quoted with "The question now is how long it's going to take for faculty members to stop saying they can use the same textbooks as others at other institutions, but they can't use the same lectures".

After a short pause in July, three articles have been published in August starting with the piece "To Catch a Cheat" that does not refer to a specific author (New York Times, 2013a). It is stated that "cheating frequency hasn't changed much over the decades" but the problem is getting bigger thanks to companies that "have taken the essay mill to the next level". In the second article, "Master's Degree is New Frontier of Study Online" (Lewin, 2013k), the plan to offer a master's degree completely via MOOC is discussed. First in economic terms (i.e. there is a huge saving for the online course compared to the on-campus class), then in terms of sustainability. Finally, DeSmet (2013) highlights the utility of MOOCs for middle-aged persons.

In September 2013, it starts with "Course Provider Joins Google to Start Learning Platform" (Lewin, 2013l) as brief about the start of the new open-source learning platform MOOC.org. "Online Lessons in Dementia Management", is a blog posting (J. Graham, 2013) to report the start of a MOOC about Alzheimer's disease. Another blog posting, "The Rise of MOOCs" (Pappano, 2013b) is used to emphasize the global distribution of MOOCs, even in Mongolia. A distinct European perspective is then offered by Schuetze (2013) by portraying the online education concept of Jörn Loviscach. Yet, this is one the rare examples as European universities have had a slower uptake on MOOCs compared to the US (European University Association, 2014).

The article "A Surge in Growth for a New Kind of Online Courses" (Finder, 2013) tries to connect the emergence of MOOCs with older attempts of online education to conclude that "MOOCs have exploded in that short time, redefining who can enrol in college courses, as well as where, when, and even why people take online classes. Finally, the "Boy Genius of Ulan Bator" (Pappano, 2013a) is about the question "How does a student from a country in which a third of the population is nomadic, living in round white felt tents called gers on the vast steppe, ace an M.I.T. course even though nothing like this is typically taught in Mongolian schools? The answer does not lie only in the boy's extraordinary abilities but also in the ability of the technology to open and direct interest on a global scale.

In October, two articles have been published: "Turning Education Upside Down" (Rosenberg, 2013) which is not directly covering MOOCs but the "flipped classroom" as a "strategy that nearly everyone agrees on" and "U.S Teams up with Operator of Online Courses to Plan a Global Network" (Lewin, 2013m). This network is understood as a "new stage in the evolution of MOOCs" as it addresses two issues: "the lack of reliable Internet access in some countries, and the growing conviction that students do better if they can discuss course materials, and meet at least occasionally with a teacher of facilitator".

A brief on "Online Courses Attract Degree Holder, Survey Finds" (Lewin, 2013n) which is about data revealing that most MOOC participants already have a

bachelor's degree and the article "Innovation Imperative: Change Everything" (Christensen & Horn, 2013) are published in November. Christensen and Horn argue for the concept of "disruptive innovation" which they have discovered numerous times over the course of history (e.g. the demise of sail ships in the early 19th century). They conclude that "like steam, online education is a disruptive innovation – one that introduces more convenient and affordable products of services that over time transform sectors." MOOCs and similar forms of cheap online education can thus endanger traditional colleges.

During the last month to be considered here, three articles were published starting with "Professors in Deal to Design Online Classes for A.P. classes (Lewin, 2013m) which discusses the potentials of MOOCs for "preparing modules on the trickiest concepts in each subjects". The goal is then, according to Carol Quillen (president of Davidson College in North Carolina) to give students "interactive online units that teachers could use to help teach the hardest ideas". A more critical perspective is followed in the article "After Setbacks, Online Courses Are Rethought" (Lewin, 2013o). Based on a study released by the University of Pennsylvania (also in December 2013), it was found that "on average, only about half of those who registered for a course ever viewed a lecture, and only about 4 percent completed the courses". In addition to that, another study by the University of Pennsylvania revealed that about 80% of MOOC participants already had a college degree of some kind. This rather disappointing results have caused some overhauls such as the move from Udacity away from college education to vocational training which has been portrayed as the next step in the refinement of a big innovation. The last item "Online Courses: High Hopes, Trimmed" published on The Opinion Pages (New York Times, 2013b) provides a short clarification of the notion of educating thousands or hundreds of thousands.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCURSIVE FORMATION

The close inspection of MOOC-related articles published in *The New York Times* between January 2012 and December 2013 can now be analysed in terms of distinctive discourse strands, i.e. certain (sub-) topics are summarized into groups (Jäger & Maier, 2010).

THE MOOC SPACESHIP HAS LANDED

This refers to the synchronic dimension of the discourse strands as MOOCs have started to occur at a specific point in time and have miraculously hit the educational landscape as if there are no precursors or signs that predicted its arrival. It came virtually out of the blue. A major part for the construction of this picture is the specific role of technology: On the one hand it is conceived of as

highly sophisticated and demanding (that is also to explain the emergence of for-profit MOOC providers outsourced from information science departments of prestigious universities), on the other hand, technology is easy to use for everybody making it a valid instrument to liberate the masses from economical and societal constraints. MOOCs are thus described in an ahistorical manner (with only rare references to previous attempts of online learning) to construct their uniqueness.

In a way the high-speed development of MOOCs which "(...) has caught all of us by surprise" – a statement made by Udacity's co-founder David Stavens (Pappano, 2012) – is used in a rather strategic way to set the message of "the year of disruption", articulated by an influential figure, edX president Anant Agarwal. Yet it would be a misleading overinterpretation to argue that there has been some sort of a plan behind the "MOOC spaceship" such as to conquer the old-fashioned university. What has happened, though, can be understood as a Silicon Valley driven approach that follow very different rules compared to traditional academia. This can be illustrated by the self-portrayal of Coursera as a "hub for learning and networking" in order to help universities to meet the challenges of online education.

DIGITAL (R)EVOLUTION

Online education appears as diachronic discourse strands because it is embedded in a historical process of digital evolution that ultimately transforms most of the parts of our society. MOOCs are then portrayed as a catalyzer (as depicted in "Colleges Adapt Online Courses to Ease Burden) because of their ability to scale the modes of instruction. The consequences are ambiguous: On the one hand there is an enormous potential to increase access (typically described as increasing access to Ivy-League colleges) and to widen participation (reported for instance in "Brown University Creates Online Course for High School Students"). Yet on the other hand the educational system seems not quite ready for the digital take off as indicated by several fears. First, teachers are frightened of becoming downgraded to teaching assistants, and indeed there are statements constructing a new social reality which is about "(...) to get beyond the current system of information and delivery – the professorial 'sage on the stage' and students taking notes, followed by a superficial assessment, to one in which students are asked and empowered to master more basic material online at their own pace, and the classroom becomes a place where the application of that knowledge can be honed through lab experiments and discussions with the professor" (Friedman, 2013).

Second, there is fear of cheating which becomes a new dimension given that now millions of students have signed up for MOOCs. How can identities be verified in those environments? What appears to be a considerable challenge from a pedagogical perspective is solvable from an ed-tech view: "The developing

technology for remote proctoring may end up being as good – or even better – than the live proctoring at brick-and-mortar universities" (Eisenberg, 2013). This statement represents an example for a discursive knot, i.e. the entanglement of two discursive strands: *Digital (R)evolution* and *Neoliberal Framing* (see below). This means that online proctoring is constructed both as a logical step of the digital (r)evolution and as a necessary development in the process of outsourcing expensive and time-consuming pedagogical tasks (controlling students at tests) to venture capitalists because they can provide more efficient and more productive solutions.

Another aspect of the *Digital (R)evolution* strand pertains to the construction of the flipped classroom as a new digital pedagogy following a linear order. Without the emergence of video recorded lectures there would be no possibility to flip the classroom and have learners watch videos independently and discuss with peers around the world.

Yet, MOOCs are also constructed as a revolution equivalent to the revolution in the newspaper and magazine business (Brooks, 2012). The argument goes that although there is no clear empirical evidence supporting the advantage of online education and given the fact that the brain is not a computer with "blank hard drives waiting to be filled with data" it will be possible "for the most committed schools and students to be better than ever". In a similar vein, the idea of "disruptive innovation" is used to convey a kind of revolutionary process that has occurred in the past to the shipping industry (Christensen & Horn, 2013). Traditional colleges are then described in a rather simple analogy as being currently on their hybrid voyage across the ocean and alerted to learn the historical lessons: "Yet many bricks-and-mortar colleges are making the same mistakes as the once-dominant tall ships: they offer online courses but are not changing the existing model".

NEOLIBERAL FRAMING

Part of the work of Foucault has been devoted to understanding neoliberalism as a new belief system "(...) in which the market become more than just a specific institution or practice to the point where it has become the basis for a reinterpretation and thus a critique of state power" (Read, 2009, p. 27). This means that the state has begun to back out of traditional responsibilities through "(...) twin strategies of a greater individualisation of society and the responsibilisation of individuals and families" (Peters, 2001, p. 59). In terms of education there are claims demanding that investment in human skills are needed as a response to the transformation of the global economy (globalisation). Thus, the goal and function of education has shifted from a means for itself – education as the goal for an enlightened human being as in the tradition of the German concept *Bildung* (cf. Deimann, 2013) – to an instrument to realise economic

goals.

The coverage of MOOCs by *The New York Times* is to a large degree framed by such kind of neoliberal thinking. A striking example is presented in "California to Give Web Courses a Big Trial" as it entails the typical ingredients of the neoliberal argument: The state (represented by Governor Jerry Brown) forms a coalition with a private company to overcome "a vexing challenge for the state" (Lewin & Markoff, 2013), i.e. 50% of entering students cannot meet basic requirements. Instead of investing in the public educational system, the state animates a Public-Private-Partnership which is perceived as more responsive and more efficient. Moreover, it is reported that there is a continued growth of universities willing to join private MOOC providers which appear to hold on to the humanistic vision of making education affordable to all – "And even their venture backers say profits can wait" (Lewin, 2013a).

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

This chapter proposes discourse analysis as a valuable tool to take up a critical stance at the emergence of MOOCs. More specifically, the analysis has attempted to contrast claims articulated by MOOC advocates (e.g. "Campus Tsunami") that begin to exert a dominating influence in the educational system with discursive strands emerging within the MOOC coverage of *The New York Times*. By doing so, the assumption that language (i.e. written texts about a certain topic) reflects social reality is rejected in favour of an understanding that sees language use as constructing social worlds.

Three different versions of such social worlds that are collectively created have been identified: First, MOOCs are portrayed as something totally innovative and novel which leads to a collective feeling of enthusiasm because for the first time in history we are able to educate huge masses of people around the world at an affordable price. The possibilities associated with MOOCs seem to be boundless (at least for the moment), although a lot of questions remain to be answered. The functional character of this discursive strand can be illustrated with regard to the suppression of distance education which could be conceived of as the "right candidate" to consult for problems around learning and teaching at a distance. This means that the neglect of distance education is a result of knowledge-power-relations, i.e. the strand *The MOOC spaceship has landed* exercises power in the form of regulating the ways of talking, thinking and acting about online education.

The second version constructs the picture of MOOCs as embedded in an evolutionary process of online education. Yet, MOOCs are also connected to a more revolutionary understanding most notably in the "disruptive innovation" narrative that attempts to "persuade" traditional universities to change their model (power) given the lessons from the past (knowledge). In this ongoing

transformation of classical educational roles it is interesting to observe what strategies are applied, for instance to draw a "defence line" (Open Letter reported in May 2013) which then leads to different responses.

The third version refers to the moral regulation or rather the responsibilisation of the self, which is framed by neoliberal arguments to construct the vision of a "self-responsible" learner who is in charge of his/her learning process. MOOCs provide unlimited sources for such personal self-education and are thus heavily endorsed by national governments. Yet, at the same time public investments in education have been reduced and resulted in an increase of poor performing students (e.g. at San Jose State University) (Lewin, 2013o). Yet, the re-definition of education towards economic criteria is problematic because it neglects cultural and social values as well as individual preconditions. As has become apparent in various studies (reported in December 2013), MOOCs entail special affordances such as digital competences that are not yet taught in schools and universities.

In closing, it is hoped that the Foucauldian inspired problematisation of MOOCs contributes to a deeper understanding which is beyond a pedagogical or economical perspective but based on the net of power-knowledge-relation It is moreover hoped that discourse analysis continues to be an important tool for critical investigations of educational technology.

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