University of Reading

Narrated Rand: HUAC, engraved invitations, and the real of sexual difference

Book or Report Section

Accepted Version

Cocks, N. (2020) Narrated Rand: HUAC, engraved invitations, and the real of sexual difference. In: Cocks, N. (ed.) Questioning Ayn Rand: Subjectjvity, Political Economy, and the Arts. Palgrave Studies in Literature, Culture and Economics. Palgrave. ISBN 9783030530723 Available at https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/89866/

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See Guidance on citing.

Publisher: Palgrave

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the End User Agreement.

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

University of Reading

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

Chapter 4

Neil Cocks

Narrated Rand: HUAC, engraved invitations, and the real of sexual difference

i) Rand with HUAC

I will begin with an extraordinary exchange between Ayn Rand and John Stephens Wood, Democratic Congressman for Georgia, during the former's 1947 testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee [HUAC]. Rand was called as a friendly witness for the prosecution of this standing committee, tasked with identifying extremist activists working in and against America, and asked for her opinion on *Song of Russia*, an American film understood by her to be pro-Communist propaganda. Although Wood does not doubt that the film is propaganda, he suggests the possibility that its aim was not to overthrow the state, but to convince American citizens of the power and nobility of a newly acquired ally against Germany:

> Mr Wood: Do you think, then, that it was to our advantage or to our disadvantage to keep Russia in this war, at the time this picture was made?
>
> Miss Rand: That has nothing to do with what we are discussing.
>
> Mr Wood: Well –
>
> Miss Rand: But if you want me to answer, I can answer, but it will take me a long time to say what I think, as to whether we should or should not have had Russia on our side in the war. I can, but how much time will you give me?
>
> Mr Wood: Well, do you say that it would have prolonged the war, so far as we were concerned, if they had been knocked out of it at that time?
>
> Miss Rand: I can't answer that yes or no, unless you give me time for a long speech on it.
>
> Mr. Wood: Well, there is a pretty strong possibility that we wouldn't have won at all, isn't there?

Miss Rand: I don't know, because on the other hand I think we could have used the lend-lease supplies that we sent there to much better advantage ourselves.

Mr Wood: Well, at that time –

Miss Rand: I don't know. It is a question. (Rand, [1947], 378 - 379) [i]

Why extraordinary? Because despite Rand's testimony before HUAC constructing a divided world of us and them, her formulations above repeat the very moves the Committee is set up to condemn. In replying to Wood, Rand questions the questions asked of her, and refuses to give a yes or no answer. Within the committee hearings, such questions and refusals elsewhere are met with severe censure. Indeed, it can be argued that evasions of this kind are what HUAC was, in part, designed to elicit from those brought before it: such a response is usually met with a charge of contempt, and it is this that lands those accused of Communist Party or Screen Writers Guild membership in jail. In Rand's case, however, there is no call for court security to remove her. She is free to continue her account of the film, her words flowing so freely that the stenographers struggle to keep up: 'Am I speaking too fast?' asks Rand at one point. Compare this to chief prosecutor Robert E. Stripling's reaction to the testimony of screenwriter Herbert Biberman:

Mr. Stripling: Mr. Biberman, are you a member of the Screen Writers' Guild or have you ever been a member of the Screen Writers' Guild?

Mr. Biberman: Mr. Stripling, I would like to reply to this very quietly — Mr. Chairman, also. If I will not be interrupted, I will attempt to give you a full answer to this question. It has become very clear to me that the real purpose of this investigation

The Chairman: (pounding gavel). That is not an answer to the question

Mr. Biberman: Is to drive a wedge

The Chairman: (pounding gavel). That is not the question. (Pounding gavel.)

Mr. Biberman: Into the component parts

The Chairman: (pounding gavel). Not the question

Mr. Biberman: Of the motion-picture industry.

> The Chairman: (pounding gavel). Ask him the next question.
>
> Mr. Biberman: And by defending my constitutional rights here I am defending
>
> The Chairman: (pounding gavel): Go ahead and ask him the next question.
>
> Mr. Biberman: The right not only of ourselves
>
> Mr. Stripling: Are you a member…
>
> Mr. Biberman: But of the producers and of the American people…
>
> Mr. Stripling: Of the Communist Party?
>
> The Chairman: Are you a member of the Communist Party or have you ever been?
>
> Mr. Stripling: Are you a member…
>
> Mr. Biberman: What is the question now?
>
> Mr. Stripling: Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party? […] [ii]

This continues for another minute before the Chairman, J. Parnell Thomas, declares 'All right, you are excused. Take him away', and Biberman is escorted from his seat. Biberman here is later understood by Rand to 'howl' in protest, yet, it would seem, there are instances where the yes or no formula that he rejects can only be engaged if one is given time and allowed a 'long speech on it'. (Rand, 1947, 383) In such a case, fidelity to the binary is possible only through supplementation, not compliance with the demand to limit oneself to one of two options. [iii]

Rand's testimony can be further contrasted to her subsequent commentary upon it. Rand is concerned that it might be argued that HUAC has infringed the free speech and personal liberty of those it has accused, an argument taken to be invalid because:

> The Thomas Committee was inquiring, not into a question of opinion, but into a question of fact, the fact of being membership of the Communist Party. The Thomas Committee did not ask anyone whether he believed in Communism, but only whether he had joined the Communist Party. (Rand, 1947b, 382)

HUAC cannot be seen to engage ideas or beliefs, as this would not only counter Rand's claim that 'the citizen has a right to hold and advocate his own ideas, even when they are unpopular, and that no legal penalty (no restraint by force) will be imposed on him for it', but also because HUAC must limit itself to 'fact'. (384) Focusing on membership is understood to ensure certainty, bypassing the challenge of interpretation as much as the realm of individual belief that must be free from institutional intrusion. Membership allows the committee to limit its inquiry to a seemingly stable space, exterior to the self. In this, however, a double move can be read. In one sense, the self is externalized, with any questions pertaining to its responsibility resolved only through the 'fact' of its action. With this notion of a performative self, however, comes the idea of an inner, sacred self that is being protected from the reach of the law. This can result in a condemnation of those to be judged, in so far as the move to keep the individual self untouched opens up also the possibility of the self's disappearance, the notion of an identity that exists only at the level of display. A comparable move can be read in Rand's novels, where the enemies of Randian individualism are figured as 'masses', with individuality available only to those whose actions and thoughts qualify them for it. The enemy are those who preach collectivity, and their fate, within the philosophy of individuality, is to be understood as a collective. For HUAC, in other words, the subject judged by his external actions is one who, through signing a membership card, has left himself open to judgment through such actions, and can be condemned as an externalized subject, rather than praised as one whose actions speak to something other than them, a private self, unavailable to the world.

At this point a further difficulty arises, as Rand does not sustain her construction of the communist as a purely performative subject, nor does she limit the role of HUAC to investigating externalized matters:

> It is not the right of Congress to inquire into anyone's ideas – but neither is it the duty of Congress to protect deceit by withholding from the public any information which may involve someone's ideas. If, in the course of an inquiry into criminal and treasonable activities,

> Congress reveals the nature of the political beliefs of certain men – their freedom of speech has not been infringed in any matter. (384 – 5) [iv]

This is, of course, how HUAC operated: by placing material obtained through dubious means on the record, the committee could open up fresh lines of inquiry. There can be no investigation into individual beliefs, only the fact of party membership, but if asking a question about membership 'reveals' the nature of beliefs, then that is perfectly acceptable, and is even to be encouraged.[v] Within this formulation, the individual subject has not been asked about beliefs, and she has not necessarily spoken about them. How is it then that they have been 'revealed'? The answer, I would suggest, is that belief is not bound to articulation in Rand's formulation. The conclusion to be drawn is that the nature of certain political beliefs are not changed in being 'revealed'. What is revealed is the general 'nature' of the beliefs in question, not any specific formulation. My belief can be abstracted from my utterance, and still be my belief, it would seem. Here we might return to the resistance on the part of HUAC to Lieberman's 'attempt to give […] a full answer to the question'. Such an attempt is not taken to aid an understanding of the accused's beliefs.

Rand's testimony before HUAC might be understood in terms of hypocrisy, as she does not afford her enemies the rights she enjoys: practicing what the committee she praises rails against; failing to maintain a commitment to individuality; defending the institutional exposure of that which should remain wholly private. This, I think, will not quite do, as hypocrisy requires an original belief that is betrayed. My suggestion instead is that Rand's testimony, like her philosophy, is inevitably touched by the other it moves to expel, and in a crucial sense very much opposes. As I discussed in the Introduction to this book, Objectivism, the philosophical movement that Rand founded, is based on the notion of non-contradiction, that 'A = A'. [vi] Rand's testimony works against such an understanding, caught up as it is in an uncanny repetition of that which it is set against. [vii]

ii) the alienated individual

I would like to begin to question what I take to be this always compromised Randian purity of identity through engaging Rand's constructions of individuality, externalization, and privacy in a little more detail. As such, I will turn now to one of Rand's own accounts of ideal individuality. Here is a description of Howard Roark, the single-minded hero of Rand's novel *The Fountainhead*:

> Nothing can really touch him. He is concerned only with what he does. Not how he feels. How he feels is entirely a matter of his own, which cannot be influenced by anything and anyone on the outside. His feeling is a steady, unruffled flame, deep and hidden, a profound joy of living and of knowing his power, a joy that is not even conscious of being joy, because it is so steady, natural and unchangeable. If outside life brings him disappointment – well, it is merely a detail of the battle. He will have to struggle harder – that is all. The world becomes merely a place to act in. But not to feel in. The feeling – the whole [realm] of emotions – is in his power alone. He is a reason unto himself. He can't feel differently. He was born that way. (Rand (1936), 93 – 94)

At this point, a warning: to really work through what I take to be at stake in this quotation, I'm afraid I am going to have to slow things right down, and read in detail. It is, I will argue, through such detailed reading that I can best dislodge the certainties of Rand's philosophy. To begin this process, let us think about the claim that it is Roark's limited concern with 'what he does' that makes him untouchable, with 'what he does' understood as pure externality. As Roark's 'concern' is necessarily something other than 'what he does', such action is left scrupulously clean of any mark of privacy or reflection. There is a difficulty here, however: 'what he does' is not simply held within itself, as it calls upon a concerned subject, a 'he' that exceeds the untouchability of pure, externalized action, and this, it might be assumed, is the same 'he' who engages in externalized action. One might conclude either that 'he' is strangely doubled, thus troubling Rand's law of non-contradiction, or that there is but one 'he', with this opening up the possibility of a 'he' who transcends 'what he does'. In this last, in other words, it is the doing that is out there, not the 'he'.

Against what I take to be the compromised externality of act, Rand sets up ‘feeling’. Feeling is understood not to occur in the world, being ‘entirely a matter of his own’. It follows from this that to be ‘his own’, a thing must escape ‘his’ concern: complete ownership is of no concern to the subject. This situation becomes more problematic still, as ‘his feeling’ is also ‘his knowledge’ and a joy ‘that is not even conscious of being a joy’. This is a joy that is private because it is hidden, but such is the extent of this privacy that the subject is prevented from accessing the truth of his joy. Instead, the hidden nature of the owned feeling is wholly framed by another: it is the narrator who knows ‘his’ feeling to be a joy, and this to be knowledge of ‘his’ power, and knows that ‘he’ does not know the truth of what this joy is. As I read it, there is an advantage to Roark’s own lack of awareness of his knowledge of his own qualities: the Randian hero can be understood to be free from division, liberated from a divided consciousness. Just as the ‘feeling’ is unchangeable, so Roark has an all-of – a-pieceness, and this can be understood to inform both his external existence as pure action, and the internal unawareness that keeps him free from destabilizing difference.

As Kristina West argues in her Chapter on Rand and Emerson that opens the following section of this book, it is such a ‘natural’, unchanging identity that results in a problematic account of childhood in Rand’s writing. The singularity of the ideal individual, and its resistance to influence, means that education is always going to be a difficulty for Rand’s philosophy of Objectivism, with accounts of learning that are sympathetic to this philosophy consistently seeing a return of the very divisions they seek to expel. And it is precisely such divisions that are addressed above by Ian Parker, when working through what he takes to be those ‘contradictions at the level of subjectivity that are a necessary correlate of the kind of apparently rational unitary subject that Rand herself promoted’. One difficulty with Rand’s account of Roark above, then, is simply that it is through self-division that he is liberated from division. Roark must, in the words of Judith Wilt, be ‘streamline[d] […] to irreducible essence, pure line/movement always embodied, never fractured, manifested as immoveable object’, yet through this he is caught between concern, feeling, and knowledge, defined by a joy from which he is always separate. (Wilt, 1999, 178) Such contradictions are necessary for the unitary subject to be known. Even the minimal recognition of a subject that resists being known, either through its

availability as pure action, or in being an occult mystery to itself, requires the return of what was repressed, hence both the 'contradictions at the level of subjectivity' and the problem of a radically independent essence that is narrated by a third.

The unchanging, 'natural' quality of feelings might, however, suggest a reason for the external narration of the self not being taken to impinge upon its radical individuality. For Rand, the true individual is above all rational, and rationality is 'truth to the facts of the outside world'. (Rand, [1943], 251) Although the individual's feelings are 'in his power alone', and this because he is 'reason to himself', this is so in strict fidelity to the truth of the external world, despite the world not being the site of such feelings. In other words, the hero's feelings are his own because they remain unaffected by the demands and delusions of society, being faithful instead to unalterable, rational truth, yet this means that such feelings inevitably coincide with any rational understanding. One implication of this is that there is nothing particularly individual about an individual point of view. And this means that those accused by HUAC are not alone in being deprived of their testimony in Rand's philosophy. The feelings and beliefs of the pure Randian subject, too, can be constituted from a position other than his own, this the condition of their being genuinely 'his'.

iii) 'rape by engraved invitation'

What I take to be the urgency of the problem of Randian purity can perhaps be best read through an engagement with the most debated episode in any of Rand's fictions, the rape of Dominique Francon by Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead*. Rand's erstwhile friend and colleague Nathanial Branden famously recounted how the scene was described to him by its author as 'rape by engraved invitation'. (Branden, 1999 , 230) [viii] This has led certain critics of an Objectivist persuasion to claim that what occurs between Roark and Francon is not rape. [ix] I would suggest the fact of their being an 'engraved invitation' *to a rape* confirms rather than alters the status of the event. If one were to argue that that 'invitation' modifies the rape, however, there remains a further 'modifier' to be addressed: the 'engraved' status of the invitation**.** If there is deliberation and purpose to be read in this, it is

constructed through an appeal to physicality. It is the material condition of the invitation, rather than its wording, that is significant. This understanding is confirmed if we turn to what I suppose to be the description of this invitation in *The Fountainhead*: 'The delivery truck had not left the grounds, when she [Francon] was at her desk, writing a note on a piece of exquisite stationery. She wrote: "The marble is here. I want it set tonight."' (Rand [1943b], 2017) Francon has used the marble as an excuse to engineer a meeting with Roark, yet, in my reading, the physical quality of the invitation, as it is described to Branden, suggests a permanence and certainty that Francon's words do not have. 'The marble is here. I want it set tonight' does not, after all, simply and certainly mean 'could you rape me?' The invitation, as it is narrated by Rand to Branden, is free from linguistic content, and it can be understood to bypass the need to engage the uncertainty of meaning. In one sense, the engraving can be taken to repeat the 'fact' of Communist Party membership, as both resolve issues of belief or consent through exteriorization and materiality. Both can also be understood to set such exteriorization against a more genuine or sacred truth. Here I am thinking about the 'exquisite' quality of the invitation: Francon's house is understood to share in this quality, but it fails to have the desired effect on Roark when he visits, as he does not register such external markers of success, and recognizes instead something far more intimate and true in his female counterpart. [x] Oddly enough, then, the invitation does not simply deliver certainty, the exteriorization it offers having both the stability of non-linguist materiality and a kind of borrowed, inauthentic sophistication.

In its opposition to the more authentic self that Roark perceives in Francon, the invitation differs from Rand's reading of externality in HUAC, as there the fact of membership promises, at one stage, to be a defence against those who would trespass on the purity of the self. In *The Fountainhead,* I would contend, the self radically fails to escape the intrusion of others:

> He [Howard Roark] stopped.
>
> They said nothing. They looked at each other. She [Dominique Francon] thought that every silent instant passing was a betrayal; this wordless encounter was too eloquent, this recognition that no greeting was necessary.

She asked, her voice flat:

'Why didn't you come to set the marble?'

'I didn't think it would make any difference to you who came. Or did it, Miss Francon?'

She felt the words not as sounds, but as a blow flat against her mouth. The branch she held went up and slashed across his face. (218) [xi]

Wordlessness is eloquence, but it is so from a point of view that is other to, yet constitute of, Francon's own. There is recognition, this remains unsaid, and what is recognized is the fact that no greeting is necessary, yet all this is understood not simply by Francon, but a textual perspective that knows that she knows what is and is not necessary for both Roark and herself. All this is to say that in *The Fountainhead* the exteriorization of consent is established in at least two ways. It is secured through the external materiality of the engraving, this echoing Roark's feelings as read in the section above, remaining certain and unchanging because seemingly unreadable, whilst also promising the material certainty that defines Roark's active engagement in the world. Consent is, however, also established through a constitutive perspective on the self and its other that stands outside both, and, as we have read, the understanding this guarantees is taken to oppose and invalidate the 'exquisite' quality of the invitation.

Here we might turn to the narration of the rape scene itself: '[t]hen she [Francon] felt him shaking with the agony of a pleasure unbearable even to him, she knew that she had given that to him, that it came from her, from her body, and she bit her lips and she knew what he had wanted her to know.' (220) Francon will later think to herself 'I have been raped by some redheaded hoodlum from a stone quarry', yet this is an event that is initially framed by a narration that can guarantee the truth of what she knows about what Roark wanted her to know. (223) There have been numerous exacting and politically astute readings of the rape scene, and the critical debate that surrounds it, yet, as we shall read, the question of narration is never understood to problematise the terms of discussion. In my understanding, however, it is this external authority that compromises whatever edgy sexual politics Rand might be understood to be offering. The rape occurs in a world of seemingly sacred privacy, but

it is also one in which there is an unproblematic access to the truth of the other, a truth constituted as such by a perspective on that other. For a faithful Objectivist such as Wendy McElroy, the discursive frame simply is not a problem: in her account of 'hidden consent' in *The Fountainhead* she claims that '[i]n every one of Rand's sex scenes, a clear indication of consent is present either in the revealed thoughts of their characters or in their behaviour'. (McElroy, 1999, 161) Revelation is taken only to confirm the truth of the independent self. For Objectivists, the fundamental truth of their philosophy is indeed 'A = A', with any mechanics of revelation understood to fall outside this self-confirming equation: purity wants no supplement. Counter to this, my suggestion is that the supplement stages a disruptive return, with the necessary and constitutive frame of revelation invalidating the non-contradiction it is tasked with upholding.

iv) Žižek with Rand

As I noted in the Introduction to this book, the chapters within it cannot claim to be the first to counter Randian purity. There have been a number of significant critics who have managed to see her work not as a Dickensian 'horrible wonder apart', but as strangely and disturbingly familiar. (Dickens [1870], 176) [xii] This approach is certainly an advance on those critiques that simply oppose Rand, and thus feed into her narrative of purity. I am interested, however, in questioning the most celebrated of these more nuanced readings, Slavoj Žižek's 'The Actuality of Ayn Rand'. As Ian Parker and Jan de Vos have argued, this work is more bound up with Objectivist discourse than it acknowledges. Indeed, it seems to me there is something altogether uncanny about its own uncanny approach: in this most disarming disruption of Randian purity, purity stages a disruptive return.

For Žižek, Howard Roark should not be understood simply as a figure of liberal individuality, one at odds with more left-leaning and questioning accounts of the subject. Instead, in her 'excessive identification' with the 'ruling ideological edifice' of capitalism, Rand is understood to have created a hero who is 'properly subversive'. (Žižek, 2002, 215) In this, Žižek's argument rests on a distinction between the psychoanalytic terms 'drive' and 'desire'. The former is taken up by a subject who has a

'perfect indifference to the Other', the latter defining one captured within 'the desire of the Other'. [xiii] Whilst the subject of desire finds itself 'always already gazed at by the Other', that is, by the empty position of authority that vouchsafes identity and possessions in the normal run of things, the subject of drive is 'no longer bothered by the Other's gaze'. (218; 219) To be free in this way is to be 'desubjectivised', liberated from the various social fantasies and 'entanglements' that are understood to alienate us from the fundamental 'kernel' of our being. (225) Put simply, the 'desubjectivised' subject is one who has ceased wasting its time obsessing over what is wanted of it, and has instead kept to its own path. In doing so, it has become unrecognizable, as it works outside of the network of societal differences that structure - and defer - identity. For Žižek it follows that:

> far from signalling the 'end of subjectivity,' [the] act of assuming existential indifference is, perhaps, the very gesture of absolute negativity that gives birth to the subject. What Lacan calls 'subjective destitution' is thus, paradoxically, another name for the subject itself, i.e., for the void beyond the theatre of hysterical substitutions. This subject beyond subjectivisation is free in the most radical sense of the word. (222)

The Randian subject and the kind of 'Lacanian saint' promoted by Žižek are thus 'uncannily close': 'only an invisible line of separation distinguishes them'. (217) And this means that a character such as Howard Roark should not be thought of as simply reactionary. Untouched by the demands of the world, and seeking no validation from it, he is not tied to the replication of existing social structures. Instead, Roark can be regarded as potentially revolutionary:

> The pure being of drive that emerges after the subject undergoes 'subjective destitution,' is not a kind of subjectless loop of the repetitive movement of drive, but, on the contrary, the subject at its purest, one is almost tempted to say: the subject 'as such'. Saying 'Yes!' to the drive, i. e., precisely to that which can never be subjectivized, freely assuming the inevitable, i. e., the drive's radical closure, is the highest gesture of subjectivity. (226)

Here, a difficulty in Žižek's account of the birth of the subject can be read. It is claimed that subjectivity at its purest is non-hysterical: it does not sit within any symbolic structure, and opposes subjectivisation. At some stage, however, '"Yes!"' has been said to the drive, and this is taken to be a gesture of subjectivity. Certainly, there is a sense in which this gesture might be understood as that of the subject undergoing 'subjective destitution', rather than the 'pure being of drive' that emerges from this. It is also the case, however, that the pure being is also the subject '"as such"', and thus 'the highest gesture of subjectivity' must be its own. This gesture, I would contend, cannot keep within the 'drive's radical closure', in so far as saying '"Yes!"' to the drive' is a linguistic and externalized 'gesture'. The subject is known through a gesture, yet it is unclear to me how this can be safely secured as other to the hysteria of 'the theatre'. The subject is known, moreover, from a seemingly authoritative position in language. How is the boundary between language or theatre and their beyond to be policed, if the one is framed by the other? [xiv]

To think through the problem of the 'being of pure drive' a little further, we might turn to the passage from *The Fountainhead* with which Žižek introduces Howard Roark as its exemplar. At this stage in the novel, Roark has been arrested after blowing up a building he designed, this because he feels it has been compromised by the inept intervention of another architect. Roark decides to conduct his own defence:

> It is [the] ethical stance of inner freedom that accounts for the authenticity clearly discernible in Rand's description of the momentary impact Howard Roark makes on the members of the audience in the courtroom where he stands trial:
>
> 'Roark stood before them as each man stands in the innocence of his own mind. But Roark stood like that before a hostile crowd – and they knew suddenly that no hatred was possible for him. For the flash of an instant, they grasped the manner of his consciousness. Each asked himself: do I need anyone's approval? – does it matter? – am I tied? And for that instant, each man was free – free enough to feel benevolence for every other man in the room. It was only a

moment; the moment of silence when Roark was about to speak'. (Žižek quoting Rand, 2002, 224 – 5) [xv]

For Žižek, this is indicative of a subject who has 'suspend[ed] the intersubjective game of mutual (mis)recognition', yet rather than constructing Roark as a subjectless subject, delivered from substitution, I read instead a subject constructed by otherness. Roark stands as all men stand, after all. There is a difference, to be sure, as wherever he finds himself, Roark can stand as all men stand in the innocence of their own minds, but this means that his standing is nonetheless defined by the standing of others: he stands precisely *as* others stand. Furthermore, the claim is that all men, at certain points in their life, stand in the same way. In this, these men are not simply constituted against symbolic structures of deferral and opposition, as they are also understood to be other to their minds. There is a division in the subject, and that which is pure within it is not a phantasmatic core liberated from hysteric structures, but instead a quality of the property it dwells within: whilst Žižek begins his essay by stating that it is Roark, as 'the prime mover', who is himself 'innocent', 'innocence' is for *The Fountainhead* that of an 'own mind'.

In keeping with the readings introduced thus far, all of this is, of course, known from a perspective other than that of the parties involved. It is the narrating third that constructs a collective 'they', a 'hostile crowd'. It is this perspective that knows that 'they' 'knew suddenly'; 'grasping' 'the manner of his consciousness' in 'the flash of an instant'. There is an added difficulty with the Randian interiority of the self, however, in that consciousness is understood to have a 'manner', graspable for the audience because Roark has stood before them. In so far as this 'manner' is concerned with outward bearing, I read a disturbance of the tight distinction between an external world of act and an inner being crucial to Rand's previous description of Roark. We have moved on from this description in another sense, as here consciousness is not opposed to the most private aspect of the self, but is instead a necessary part of it. And this outward yet private consciousness is available to all who witness Roark taking the stand, a fact that is guaranteed by the external authority of the narration, and through this is, for Žižek, more generally 'discernible'.

v) ‘the real of sexual difference’

My argument, then, is that the ‘shift’ from desire to drive in the courthouse scene is necessarily narrated, and cannot wholly circumvent the symbolic. Against this, as I read it, Žižek offers precisely a philosophy of the ‘discernible’. It is his claim, after all, that ‘Roark displays the perfect indifference towards the Other characteristic of drive’. (Žižek, 2002, 217) Display carries much the same weight in Žižek‘s analysis as ‘revelation’ in that offered by Wendy McElroy. Display and revelation are not understood to impact upon their objects. They are supplements of the safest variety. In this final section, I would like to think through the political implications of the rejection of perspective, in a way that will allow me to return to the question of rape as introduced above. [xvi]

Part of what makes Žižek understand his engagement with Rand as ‘properly subversive’ is the contention that there is a feminist angle to his celebration of the Randian hero and the ‘Lacanian saint’. He argues that ‘[t]he true conflict in the universe of Rand’s two novels [is between] the prime mover, the being of pure drive, and his hysterical partner, the potential prime mover who remains caught in the deadly self-destructive dialectic.’ (Žižek, 2002, 221) In *The Fountainhead,* for example, Roark goes his own way with no interest in anyone else, whilst Francon attempts to follow her own path, but is still caught up in the world of others. This is why she spends so much of the time attempting to destroy what she loves, Roark included. At one stage, for example, she throws a statue down a stairwell, because she thinks it is beautiful, and cannot abide the thought of the ignorant gazing upon it. What she must learn is not to combat such a gaze, but to be indifferent to it. Only when she does not care in the least about the other can she accept her drive. And that means she can only be with Roark when her desire for him will no longer be bothered by the Other’s gaze, that is, when her desire is, in the strictest terms, *selfish*.

Žižek argues that it would be wrong to conclude from this that the novel is about a women learning the trick of sublime indifference from a man, as this would be to understand Roark as ‘phallocratic’.

Counter to this, and '[p]aradoxical as it may sound, the being of pure drive who emerges once the subject "goes through the fantasy" and assumes the attitude of indifference towards the enigma of the Other's desire, is a feminine figure'. (225) This is because:

> What Rand was not aware of was that the uptight, uncompromising masculine figures with a will of steel with whom she was so fascinated, are effectively figures of the feminine subject liberated from the deadlocks of hysteria […] Rand's ridiculously exaggerated adoration of strong male figures betrays the underlying disavowed lesbian economy, i.e., the fact that Dominique and Roark, or Dagny and Galt [in *Atlas Shrugged*], are effectively lesbian couples. (Ibid.)

For Žižek, the figure, in opposing the difference of the symbolic, is ironically something other than itself: the being of pure drive. A being is a figure, in other words. This figure is taken to be other than the masculine figures that fascinated Rand, a fascination that constructs such figures in terms of desire. [xvii] It is not stated for whom a feminine figure 'emerges', presumably because this figure now transcends such hysteric questions. What these figures are 'effectively' is what they are free from 'fascination'. The effective knows no audience. Here I think a tension can be read in the account of what I might term 'revelation'. [xviii] The feminine figure 'emerges' when hysteria is gone and done, yet the 'disavowed lesbian economy' is 'betray[ed]' by 'Rand's ridiculously exaggerated' - that is hysteric - adoration of 'strong male figures'. The effective is both underlying and emergent, accessed through hysteria, and through hysteria's end. A comparable difficulty can be read in Žižek's splitting of hysteria and drive through the difference between two figures, as this require 'figure' to transcend the divide. Figure has a consistency that problematises the necessary opposition it secures. One could say, therefore, that in its *insistence*, in its inability to be located on one side of the binary of drive and desire, 'figure' is a figure of drive, and drive thus does not keep to its proper place.

What I am reading here is a compromised theory of the a-hysteric, one in which, to recall Ian Parker's previous formulation, the commitment to a 'sublime' figure has, as its correlate,

contradictions at the level of the symbolic. Such hysteric disturbance cannot be tolerated. Instead, for Žižek, the lesbian couple is the *answer* to the hysteric uncertainty of Francon and Roark. The effective truth that Roark is a lesbian is not taken to be a disturbance in and of meaning. [xix] Instead, the effective seemingly does away with the excess through which it is constituted: *that* does not matter, it is only *this* that really counts. Again, and in short, the claim is that there can be an answer to hysteria's endless questioning: Roark and Francon are neither themselves, nor anything else, only figures.

I realize, of course, that Žižek is arguing for 'the real of sexual difference'. [xx] The idea is that the kind of textual encounter I am setting up in this chapter cannot hope to do anything other than get caught up in the endless cycle of the symbolic. In trying to work through the complexity of identity constructed in Rand's novels, the kind of reading I am offering will betray what I would term *différance*, finding itself instead wedded to the idea of the 'sexual relation'. [xxi] Put simply, those that would accuse Žižek of avoiding the frame of his own debate will find themselves committed to the idea that there are already existing hard-impacted identities that have complex relations to each other. Žižek opts for what he takes to be the more radical option, of the zero-point of identity necessary to identity as such, the unthinkable difference that must be in place for any cultural difference to be debated, for the symbolic to be engaged in general. My issue with this is that Žižek's account of the 'effective' conforms to the logic of the empiricist, according to Louis Althusser:

> *Knowledge*: its sole function is to separate, in the object, the two parts which exist in it, the essential and the inessential – by special procedures whose aim is to *eliminate the inessential real* (*by* a whole series of sortings, sievings, scrapings and rubbings), and to leave the knowing subject only the second part of the real which is its essence, itself real. Which gives us a second result: the abstraction operation and all its scouring procedures are merely procedures to purge and eliminate *one part of the real in order to isolate the other*. [xxii]

The effective seemingly isolates what really matters – even if that turns out to be a void - but the process itself compromises the result, with what falls outside never truly eclipsed. The practice of isolation is not interested in this unforeseen effect, however, and holds out instead the hope that reading Rand is not necessary to understanding her work, just as the messy discourse of life is not required when accessing the effective truth of gender.

It follows from this, of course, that there can be no textual reading of the rape in *The Fountainhead*. It is Žižek's contention that 'the crucial scene' in the novel is that discussed above, in which Francon meets Roark by chance upon a road, and attacks him with a branch in response to his perceived, silent insolence. For Žižek, although she is a '[m]aster confronting a slave', 'her whipping is an act of despair, an awareness of his hold over her, of her inability to resist him - as such, it's already an invitation to a brutal rape'. (Žižek, 2002, 220) [xxiii] My argument is not that Rand's text at this stage has a secure meaning that Žižek is betraying, but rather that any engagement with the beyond of meaning cannot simply bypass the text to fix instead on meaning that is 'effective'. [xxiv] We should be aware of the difficulty of maintaining a sure divide, however 'thin' or 'invisible' this might be, between such an analytic approach and the appeals to the unreadable that allow Objectivist hot-takes on sexual assault the preposterous security of 'hidden consent', or those crucial to, yet compromised within, Rand's own account of the good of the House Un-American Activities Committee. (Žižek, 2002, 225)

Bibliography

Althusser, Louis and Balibar, Étienne. 2009 [1986]. *Reading Capital*. Trans. Ben Brewer). London, New York: Verso.

Branden, Barbara. 1986. *The passion of Ayn Rand*. New York: Doubleday.

Branden, Nathaniel. 1999. Was Ayn Rand a feminist? In *Feminist interpretations of Ayn Rand*, ed. Mimi Reisel Gladstein and Chris Matthew Sciabarra, 223 – 230. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press.

Butler, Judith. 1983. Imitation and gender insubordination. In *The gay and lesbian studies reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, David M. Halperin. London: Routledge, 307 – 320.

Cocks, Neil. 2014. *The peripheral child in nineteenth century literature and its criticism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cooper, Melinda. 2017. *Family values: between neoliberalism and social conservatism*. New York: Zone Books.

Copjec, Joan. 2005 [1994]. *Read my desire: Lacan against the historicists*. Cambridge: Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Dickens, Charles. 2009 [1870]). *The mystery of Edwin Drood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Douglas M. Charles, Douglas M.. 2007. *J. Edgar Hoover and the anti-interventionists: FBI Political Surveillance and the Rise of the Domestic Security State*, 1939-1945. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Duggan, Lisa. 2019. *Mean girl: Ayn Rand and the culture of greed*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Gladchuk, John J.. 2009. *Hollywood and anticommunism: HUAC and the evolution of the red menace, 1935-1950*. London and New York: Routledge.

Lacan, Jacques. 2006 [1969]. *The seminar of Jacques Lacan: the other side of psychoanalysis*. Trans. Russell Grigg. New York: W.W. Norton.

Mayhew, Robert. 2004. *Ayn Rand and* Song Of Russia*: communism and anti-communism in 1940s Hollywood*. Lanham. Scarecrow Press.

McElroy, Wendy. 1999. Looking through a paradigm darkly. In *Feminist interpretations of Ayn Rand*, ed. Mimi Reisel Gladstein and Chris Matthew Sciabarra, 157 – 171. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press.

O'Reilly, Kenneth. 1983. *Hoover and the un-Americans: the FBI, HUAC, and the red menace*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Rand, Ayn. 1975. *The Romantic manifesto*. New York: Signet.

_____1999 [1936]. Notes. In *Journals of Ayn Rand*, ed. David Harriman, 77 – 116. New York, Plume.

_____ 1999 [1943]. The moral basis of individualism. In *Journals of Ayn Rand*, ed. David Harriman, 243 – 310. New York, Plume.

_____ 2007 [1943]. *The Fountainhead*. London: Penguin.

_____ 1999 [1947]. Testimony before the House Un-American Activity. In *Journals of Ayn Rand*, ed. David Harriman, 371 – 381. New York: Plume.

_____ 1999 [1947b]. Suggestions regarding the congressional investigation of communism. In *Journals of Ayn Rand*, ed. David Harriman, 381 - 386. New York, Plume.

Stockton, Sharon. 2006. *The economics of fantasy: rape in the twentieth century*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Wilt, Judith. 1999. The romances of Ayn Rand. In *Feminist interpretations of Ayn Rand*, eds. Mimi Reisel Gladstein and Chris Matthew Sciabarra, 173 – 198. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press.

Ziarek, Ewa Plonowska. 1997. From euthanasia to the other of reason: perfomativity and the Deconstruction of Sexual Difference. In *Derrida and feminism: recasting the question of woman*, eds. Ellen Feder and Mary C. Rawlinson, 115 – 140. Abingdon: Routledge.

Žižek, Slavoj. 2009. *The ticklish subject: the absent centre of political ontology*. London, New York: Verso

_____ 2002. The actuality of Ayn Rand. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 3/2, 215 – 27.

_____ 1996. 'There is no sexual relationship': Wagner as a Lacanian. *New German Critique* 69:7 – 35.

_____ 1992. *Looking awry: an introduction to Jacques Lacan through popular culture*. Cambridge: MIT.

[i] One should not take from this the idea that Wood is trying to subvert the will of the Committee. A member of the Klu Klux Klan, he was instrumental in directing HUAC towards New Deal and

communist subjects, and away from 'UnAmerican' activity on the right. See O'Reilly (1983).For an account of why it is crucial here to resist any easy and total separation of the Republican and the Democrat, the laissez-faire and the Keynesian, see Cooper (2019). I return to this text in the conclusion of this book.

[ii] I am relying on the HUAC transcripts for this quotation, but be aware that rather than the neat sequence of one speaker following the other, the video record shows Stripling and Chairman J. Parnell Thomas speaking over Biberman, and Parnell, in fact shouting 'That is not the question! That is not the question! Not the question! Not the question! Not the question!' as he continually pounds the gavel, rendering Biberman's speech almost incomprehensible.

[iii] It is important to note here, however, that if Rand was allowed her uninterrupted time upon the stand, she was not asked back. Lisa Duggan convincingly argues that this was because Rand misunderstood the way in which HUAC was approached by powerful Hollywood players: redirect anti-Semitism towards a few perceived troublemakers, and shore up anti-Union power, but other than that, keep the investigation contained. In accordance with Žižek's reading below, Ayn Rand over-identified with American capitalism, and in so doing threatened to upset this scheme. She attacked popular films, and threatened to draw anti-union executives into HUAC's line of fire. See Duggan (2019), 40 – 41. For an Objectivist defense of Rand before HUAC, see Mayhew (2004).

[iv] Rand (1999), 384 – 5.

[v] As Kenneth O'Reilly summarises: 'the purpose of the committee and its constituency, chiefly conservative journalists and other publicists, was not to investigate subversive activities but to disseminate information already known to the FBI.' O'Reilly (1983), 7.

[vi] This is a repeated formulation, but see, for example, Rand (1975), 31.

[vii] At one level, the failure of Randian purity before HUAC can be accessed simply in the inability of her Manichaean worldview to engage the history of HUAC. The committee resists the secure binaries that a philosophy of purity requires. HUAC utilised FBI powers, and built on practices that infringed civil liberties, that were introduced and developed in the New Deal, yet it arose out of a propaganda machine designed to subvert New Deal policies, and was antagonistic to the FBI. HUAC occasionally

fulfilled its obligation to disrupt fascist and far right organisations, yet was run by racists. See Douglas (2007); Gladchuk (2009); O'Reilly (1983).

[viii] See also Branden (1986),134.

[ix] A number of such essays are collected in Gladstein and Sciabarra, eds., (1999). As I indicate above, Judith Wilt rigorously reads such claims in her crucial overview of the controversy, anthologised in the same volume.

[x] I am thinking, for example, about the following: 'He's [Roark is] only a common worker, she [Francon] thought, a hired man doing a convict's labor. She thought of that, sitting before the glass shelf of her dressing table. She looked at the crystal objects spread before her; they were like sculptures in ice- they proclaimed her own cold, luxurious fragility; and she thought of his strained body, of his clothes drenched in dust and sweat, of his hands. She stressed the contrast, because it degraded her. She leaned back, closing her eyes. She thought of the many distinguished men whom she had refused. She thought of the quarry worker. She thought of being broken - not by a man she admired, but by a man she loathed. She let her head fall down on her arm; the thought left her weak with pleasure', Rand ([1943b]), 208 - 209; 'She [Francon] asked her old caretaker and his wife to remain in the house that evening. Their diffident presence completed the picture of a feudal mansion. She heard the bell of the servants' entrance at seven o'clock. The old woman escorted him to the great front hall where Dominique stood on the landing of a broad stairway […] He wore his work clothes and he carried a bag of tools. His movements had a swift, relaxed kind of energy that did not belong here, in her house, on the polished steps, between the delicate, rigid banisters. She had expected him to seem incongruous in her house; but it was the house that seemed incongruous around him'. Rand ([1943b)), 214.

[xi] Rand (2007), 218.

[xii] For more on this, see Chapter 4 of Cocks (2004).

[xiii] Žižek (2002), 217 -18.

[xiv] To be clear, my issue here is not with drive as such: I have no wish to claim there is no 'beyond' to the pleasure principle. My reading instead is that in Žižek's reading of Rand such a principle returns

to and as its own beyond, with the resistant 'beyond' constituted in the impossible antagonism between the symbolic and its beyond.

[xv] Žižek quoting Rand (2002), 224 – 5.

[xvi] It is worth noting here just how complex and contradictory is the relationship between the court house scene and Rand's take on HUAC. Certainly, there is irony in the fact that Roark, unlike those accused of communist membership, is allowed the space to make a long, didactic speech at his trial, wholly uninterrupted, and praised by all who witness it, despite this testimony calling into question the authority of the court. At the same time, however, the necessity of an individual perspective is undermined, the guarantee of the third person narration securing the truth of the individual subject from a perspective that is not their own. My concern here is not with setting up such a perspective as a site of truth or point of pure origin, but rather questioning any account that engages the subject, however compromised, without it

[xvii] For an alternative view of Roark as fascistic, patriarchal rapist, see Stockton (2006).

[xviii] I acknowledge the difficulty of the term here.

[xix] I am thinking here about Judith Butler's celebrated working through of the demands of coming out, especially Butler (1983, 309): 'To claim this is what I *am* is to suggest a provisional totalization of this 'I'. But if the "I" can so determine itself, than that which it excludes in order to make that determination remains constitutive of the determination itself. In other words, such a statement presupposes that the "I" exceeds its determination, and even produces that very excess in and by the act which seeks to exhaust the semantic field of that "I"'.

[xx] See, for example, Žižek's reading of the work of Judith Butler in Žižek (2009). See also Copjec ([1994]). For a critique, see Ziarek (1997).

[xxi] See Lacan, [1969]. See also, for example, Žižek (1992); Žižek (1996).

[xxii] Althusser and Balibar [1986], 38 – 39.

[xxiii] Žižek (2002), p. 220.

[xxiv] For an overview of this kind of 'effective' reading see Copjec (2005), 138.