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Matthew Clarke, *Lacan and education policy: The other side of education*, London: Bloomsbury, 2019; 180 pp.: ISBN 9781350070554, £81 (hbk), 9781350201354, £26.09 (pbk), 9781350070578 £20.87 (eBook).

An engaging analysis of the governance of education under neo-liberalism, Matthew Clarke's brilliant *Lacan and education policy* also functions as a lucid and accessible introduction to Lacanian discourse analysis, a considerable achievement in itself. Building on work that scrutinises education through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis (e.g. Bracher, 2006; Brown, Atkinson and England, 2006; Johnson, 2014), Clarke engages the reader with seductive psychoanalytic concepts such as the unconscious, disavowal, jouissance, the split-subject, and fantasy. He deploys these terms against a variety of dispiritingly familiar tropes such as marketisation, accountability, competition, and managerialism. The abrasive encounter generates sparks of analytical insight.

Since the 1980s, educational policy in the English-speaking world has become increasingly dominated by a dubious crisis narrative designed to justify the desire for perpetual reform and to sanction the roll-out of marketization and its many woeful derivatives such as standardisation, performance monitoring, mandated curricula, and high-stakes testing. In order to facilitate a market-based, competitive ethos in all walks of life, neo-liberalism has sought to remould human subjectivity along competitive, entrepreneurial and individualistic lines. Consequently, education policy has been inevitably positioned at the forefront of this revolution of thought and deed.

Clarke demonstrates that education policy has been driven by tensions, contradictions, paradoxes and, above all, fantasies. Utilising Slavoj Žižek's argument that fantasy operates as a sublime object of ideology (Žižek, 1989), Clarke is particularly insightful when analysing those contradictions that fantasy's function is to obscure. So whilst education has been burdened with onerous and unrealistic social responsibilities and economic expectations, at the same time it has been esteemed as "an omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent phenomenon that is always at fault but at the same time able to right all wrongs and compensate for past and present shortfalls in efficiency, justice and equity". (pp.7-8) Likewise, while neo-liberal policy has justified the deregulation of education provision by mobilising empty signifiers such as 'clients', 'diversity', and 'choice', at the same time, and in opposition to deregulation and marketization, Clarke shows that there has been an increase in state control of both teachers and the topics they teach, as evidenced by "the identification of 'core knowledge' that all students must learn,...the development of ideologically driven subjects such as citizenship, and the promulgation of teacher professional standards linked to compulsory annual performance reviews" (p.37)

Clarke's powerful critique draws on Jacques Lacan's theory of the four discourses in order to 'look awry' at neo-liberal education policy with a view to glimpsing its 'other side' (Lacan, 2007). Each discourse articulates a unique configuration of power, a specific organisation of human relations, values and ambitions: *commanding* (in the discourse of the master), *rationalizing* (the discourse of the university), *complaining* (the discourse of the hysteric), and *analysing* (the discourse of the analyst):

As its name suggests, the master's discourse relates to mastering or the establishment of a hegemony in the social order; the university discourse refers to educating or interpellating subjects within a particular social order underpinned by expertise; the hysteric's discourse concerns protesting or resisting against a particular given order though it also involves an

impossible quest for unquestioned mastery; while the analyst's discourse relates to revolutionizing or bringing about change in the social order. (p.44)

Clarke considers the master and the university discourses to be reactionary and oppressive whilst the hysteric and the analyst discourses he positions as progressive and critical. All four discourses are arranged in terms of the inter-relationships between a dominating *agent*, who, via an unacknowledged *truth*, instructs an *other* who then unconsciously generates an unruly *product*. An example of the discourse of the university at work would be an OFSTED inspection, where the deployment of bureaucratic process (the agent), underpinned by the signifier of the market (the unacknowledged truth), seeks to discipline the school's management policies (the other) but generates an alienated split subject (the product), namely, a school torn between compliance and resistance.

Many readers of this journal will recognise, with a demoralising familiarity, the discourse of the university: a phantasmagorical articulation of deadening rules and regulations, and bureaucratic codes that stifle innovation, thwart creativity and hystericise participants whilst maintaining a vague but ever-present threat to one's well-being. Through the sleight of hand of instrumental rationality, university discourse masks the obscene secret of the market and, in disavowing its own reliance on power and authority, elaborates the master's discourse. In Clarke's hands, Lacan's theory produces nuanced analyses of the many forms that fantasy takes: "In the discourse of the master, fantasy is disavowed; in the discourse of the university, it is orchestrated; in the discourse of the hysteric, it is performed; and in the discourse of the analyst, it is problematized." (p.152) Analysing education policy with this neat schema generates insights into the polyvocal nature of fantasy that would otherwise remain cacophonous and incomprehensible.

Fantasies of productivity are embodied in documents such as the UK government's 2016 White Paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere* which offers up education as the vehicle that 'unlocks opportunity' and functions as 'the engine of social justice and economic growth'. *Fantasies of objectivity* are evident in the efforts devoted to depicting policy as governed by science, reason and rules. *Fantasies of inclusion* can be detected in policy agendas such as Every Child Matters, when, in a competitive society, education serves the capitalist status quo to guarantee the failure of some children so that others will succeed.

Fantasies of victimhood are evident in the discourse of the hysteric which articulates the pervasive narrative about a reputed crisis in education, voiced in the register of complaint, by for example, authors of some recent products of popular educational literature (e.g. *Creating the Schools Our Children Need*; *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Teachers*; and *Cleverlands: The Secrets behind the Success of the World's Education Superpowers*). Clarke exposes the phoney radicalism of these breathless enthusiasts for what they are: retrotopian celebrations of Victorian values of comportment and deference, memoro-politics, authoritarian boot camps, and corporate capitalism.

The only discourse not dominated by the master signifier, the analyst's discourse, is the odd one out, "the hero of the four, insofar as it encourages unconscious desire to speak and to interrogate the subject" (p.154). Enigmatic and silent and resisting the temptation to reify, formalise and institutionalise, the discourse of the analyst operates from a position of distance and irony. With restless desire in the place of agency, the analyst is diametrically opposed to the universalist tendencies of the master. In elucidating the workings and structure of discourse itself, the discourse of the analyst offers a glimpse of the other side of education.

Ironically, but unavoidably the chapter on the discourse of the analyst is the book's least successful. Clarke's extended description of the plot of Jaroslav Hašek's picaresque tale, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, appears like an eccentric diversion to the Anglophone reader. The novel evidently "stages a struggle between the hegemonic authority of the discourse of the master and the subversive irony of the discourse of the analyst." (p.135) Yet as historical fiction *The Good Soldier's* link to education policy remains initially obscure, beyond the "potential of Švejkism as a strategy for resistance that draws attention to power and injustice through non-violent mimicry and ridicule." (p.139) Clarke's proposal to resist neo-liberal education policy with fictional texts to produce "covert transgression", using the tools of "equivocal affirmation, performative practice, scepticism, cynicism and irony" (p.138) is disappointingly deflating. The failure is not fatal to Clarke's overall project however, precisely because in traversing neo-liberal education policy's many fantasies, Clarke has, in any case, oscillated between the master's commanding authority and the analyst's penetrating gaze throughout the book. Clarke's invocation of *The Good Soldier* mimics the analyst discourse itself, which is always unique, emergent and unsettling. His masterful use of Lacanian discourse analysis not only effectively critiques the many contradictions that underpin neo-liberal education policy, but his analytic insight generates numerous suggestions for critical thinking, rebellion and subversion.

Lacan and education policy promises perverse enjoyment for anyone who has witnessed the destructive intrusion of market values into education over the past 30 years. It is a superb primer on educational policy, an enlightening discussion of neo-liberalism, and a crystal-clear introduction to Lacanian psychoanalysis. Freud may well have flagged education as one of the three 'impossible professions' but in helping us to understand the conditions of that impossibility in our era, Matthew Clarke's book inspires us to seek alternatives that transcend the fantastic.

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