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## Chapter Two

### CONTEXTS AND CONCEPTS: CAPITALISM AND DESIRE

Part of the world has resolutely turned in the direction of the service of goods, thereby rejecting everything that has to do with the relationship of man to desire – it is what is known as the postrevolutionary perspective. The only thing that can be said is that people don't seem to have realized that, by formulating things in this way, one is simply perpetuating the eternal tradition of power, namely, "Let's keep on working, and as far as desire is concerned, come back later" (Lacan, 1992, p. 318).

#### **Introduction**

As noted in the previous chapter, this book provides a critical analysis, informed by Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, of recent and contemporary education policy. Specifically, I draw on Lacan's discourse theory and his theory of the four discourses – Lacan's attempt to explore the mutations of power and authority in society and their influence on subjectivity (Schuster, 2016, p. 170) – to explore the assumptions and assertions about the world, about human relations and about the sorts of people we are and can become that are embedded in education policy and politics. As part of this analysis, I look at the ways education policy limits and constrains, yet also shapes and moulds, what we – policy makers, parents, teachers, students, the media and the wider public – think education is and what its purposes are. In recent times, the possibilities for imagining what education, and hence education policy, might be have been particularly influenced by the politico-economic settlement, known as neoliberalism – a term with a complex history and a contested literature (Cahill & Konings, 2017). Critically for my argument, neoliberal capitalism has thrived by taking advantage of our psychic 'economies' and, in particular, the restless, unshakable and insatiable character of desire.

#### **Recognising desire**

We usually think of desire in terms of our desire for this object or for that person. At the same time, we are all familiar with the experience of attaining the object of our desire, only to discover that this item or person on which we had pinned our hopes for finding satisfaction, and which we had invested with a certain aura, is just an ordinary material object like all our others or just an ordinary person like us. This also occurs in matters like school choice, when the institutions in which parents invest significant emotional and financial resources fail to meet their elevated

expectations (C. Campbell, Proctor, & Sherrington, 2009). For Lacan, this is because desire is constitutive of who and what we are and cannot be eliminated or satisfied. Desire in this Lacanian reading is secondary in the sense of being the desire, not so much for this or that object or person, but the desire for more desire – “desire is produced not as a striving for something but only as a striving for something else or something more” (Copjec, 1994, p. 55). The secondary nature of desire arises from its genesis in our constitution as subjects of language and of the signifier. For the signifier is always the signifier of an absence, serving as a stand-in for the object and reliant on further signifiers for its explication. Crucially, this ceaseless sliding of signification means that language can never say everything, that there is no final word and thus that meaning is always open to further refinement, elaboration, clarification and contradiction. To the extent that it is linked to the shifting sands of the social order of language and the symbolic – which is one reading of Lacan’s oft-cited aphorism that desire is always the desire of the other (Lacan, 1981, p. 235) – and given the absence of any firm foundation for the symbolic order of language, one consequence is that desire is essentially empty. In other words, “desire has no content – it is for nothing – because language can deliver to us no incontrovertible truth, no positive goal” (Copjec, 1994, p. 55).

This emptiness renders desire vulnerable to colonization by the seductions of marketing and capitalism’s promises that our desires will be fully met if we follow the latest fashion, acquire the new improved model, or identify with the right brand. Neoliberalism has exploited this vulnerability and extended capitalism’s reach by rendering ever-more areas of life susceptible to the competitive and comparative logics of the market. Not only do we have to choose between brands of washing powder, we are exhorted to compare our options and make choices about the companies that provide our water and electricity, the institutions and schemes we believe will best meet our and our families’ health and social care needs, and the schools we send our children to.

However, the socio-symbolic orientation of the ways in which we seek satisfaction does not exhaust Lacan’s thinking about desire. Although our language always carries traces of desire it does not articulate the whole truth about our desire, meaning that there is always a residue or surplus left over that exceeds the symbolic (Evans, 1996, p. 36). Put differently, by inducting us into a world of meaning, the signifier simultaneously alienates us from unmediated access to being while also arousing “the desire for nonbeing, for an *indeterminate* something that is perceived as *extradisursive*” (Copjec, 1994, p. 56). Gaining a full sense of the significance of this

extradiscursive element for psychoanalytic understanding of desire requires introducing the notion of *das Ding* (the Thing), which for Lacan, as for Freud, represents a purportedly ‘lost’ object, offering unlimited, and unmediated satisfaction – in other words, offering access to the overwhelming experience of *jouissance*. Critically, the Thing is not an actually existing object so much as an object, the existence of which we retrospectively project as a consequence of our enculturation into the social order of the symbolic, and in pursuit of which we spend our lives in the hope that by recapturing it we will one day undo our alienation. Any complete reconnection, of course, is impossible since the lost object is a retrospective projection, consequent upon subordination to the signifier; and even were it attainable, the object’s attainment would entail a return to pre-linguistic, pre-subjective existence and thus the sacrifice our recognizability as social subjects (McGowan, 2013, 2016; Ruti, 2012, 2017; Shepherdson, 2008). It is for this reason that we seek objects of desire (*objets a*) that carry an echo or trace of the Thing, thereby compensating us for its inevitable absence.

Its impossible nature notwithstanding, the Thing exerts a pervasive influence on our lives – for in Lacan’s words “at the heart of man’s destiny is the *Ding*” (Lacan, 1992, p. 97) – compelling us to pursue its refracted reflection in the objects, people and experiences that populate our lives. It is this aspect of desire, its capacity to connect us to the traces of the Thing, that lies behind Lacan’s assertion that “the channel in which desire is located is not simply that of the modulation of the signifying chain, but that which flows beneath it as well” and that explains his characterization of desire as “the metonymy of our being” (Lacan, 1992, p. 321). For education we may be subjects of knowledge; but for psychoanalysis we are first and foremost subjects of desire.

The centrality of desire in our lives explains Lacan’s ethics of desire, captured in his proposition that “the only thing one can be guilty of is giving ground relative to one’s desire” (Lacan, 1992, p. 321). This can be taken as a formula for self-indulgence but as Mari Ruti helpfully points out, desire is amongst other things relational, connecting us to the worlds of other people, social experiences and external objects that lie beyond ourselves and, in this sense, in asking us to remain faithful to our desire, Lacan is asking us to take responsibility for the consequences of our desire, and the actions undertaken in the name of our desire, for others (Ruti, 2017, pp. 80-81). In other words, Lacan’s ethics of desire asks us to take responsibility for our assumption of subjectivity as subjects of desire in the absence of any final or ultimate ethical ground (Neill, 2011).

Desire is thus a double-edged sword. On the one hand, our relentless quest for satisfaction renders us vulnerable to the seductions and predations of an insatiable capitalist machinery as it “drives us to move restlessly from one object of desire to the next in pursuit of the perfect object that would finally bring our desire to an end by offering us complete satisfaction” (Ruti, 2017, p. 222). On the other hand, our fidelity to the stubborn singularity of our desire can be a source of resistance to coercion and conformity, particularly when it insists on persons, objects or values that resonate to the frequency of the Thing, thereby enabling us to approach the Thing’s sublime aura obliquely and providing us with the possibility of drawing upon its uniquely enlivening energies (Ruti, 2017, pp. 72-78).

Recognising desire thus helps us to understand the possibilities as well as the difficulties of resisting the machinery of capitalism with its promises of satisfaction. This is particularly the case when, as under neoliberalism, it extends its temptations and exhortations into ever-wider domains of life and ever-deeper recesses of our psyches; when its promises and its lures are accessible to us at any time and in any place via digital technology; and when it elicits our complicity by entangling our personal and professional lives in the anxious logics of quantification, measurement and metrics (Beer, 2016; Muller, 2018). But exhortations and temptations to neglect our deepest desires – the ones that carry the echo of the Thing – in order to devote ourselves to what Lacan refers to above as ‘the service of goods’ are nothing new. In order to consider some of these ideas further, the following discussion explores them in relation to Billy Wilder’s 1960 film, *The Apartment*.

### ***‘Be a mensch!’***

Despite its surface humour, *The Apartment* offers a searing critique of a world in which lives are dedicated to the deities of money and status and in which those in positions of power and authority exploit and prey upon others for their own advantage. In Lacanian terms, the film highlights how our dedication to ‘the service of goods’ leads us to compromise on the ethics of our desire. The banality of this world is signalled in the opening voice-over as we are told by the main character, insurance clerk, C. C. ‘Bud’ Baxter (Jack Lemmon), that if the entire population of New York was laid head to toe they would extend all the way from Times Square to Karachi, Pakistan – pointless information that highlights the rationalisation of human intercourse and the vacuousness of the system, while also subtly suggesting the laying-low of humanity that the film critiques (Armstrong, 2000).

Early in the film, Bud gets promoted as a consequence of loaning his apartment to executives in his firm as a venue for their extra-marital affairs. However, focused on attaining promotion above all else, Bud is too busy enjoying the perks that come with it, including a key to the executive washroom and the ability to upgrade his attire, to think about the moral dimensions of his actions. Symbolically, he exchanges the key to the apartment, as a token of his personal integrity, for the executive washroom key, representing dedication to career advancement. But Bud is not entirely without romantic feelings and invites Fran Kubelik (Shirley MacLaine), the quirky elevator operator, to join him at a show, *The Music Man*, with tickets given him by the Personnel Director, Sheldrake, in exchange for the use of the apartment. Unbeknownst to Bud, Fran has been in an affair with Sheldrake and, on reconciling with him on the evening of the show, she stands Baxter up. Later, at the office Christmas party, Fran hands a cracked compact mirror to Bud to reassure him that he looks fine in his new executive attire. In a powerful moment, Bud recognises the mirror as the one he found in the apartment the night after Sheldrake and his mistress had used it and as he gazes into the its cracked surface, his face registers the sudden descent from buoyant gaiety to devastated dismay as he puts two and two together. The fragmented image of his face represents the divided nature of his subjectivity, split between pimp and dupe, while his desire is similarly split between unthinking professional ambition and romantic love, with Fran representing the knot linking these two incompatible worlds. In Lacanian terms, mirrors are associated with illusions of coherence, and in this sense, the broken mirror represents recognition of the enduring tragedy of human life and the non-coincidence between social and psychic reality, between external appearances and inner experience:

Fran: What's the matter?

Bud: The mirror, it's broken.

Fran: Yes, I know, I like it that way. Makes me look the way I feel.

Later that evening we see Sheldrake and Fran in the apartment. The atmosphere is as dark as the lighting, as Sheldrake back tracks on earlier commitments to initiate a divorce from his wife. A despondent Fran hands him a Christmas gift and he, clearly having not thought about a gift for her, opens his wallet and gives her a one-hundred-dollar bill before he departs, laden with a pile of wrapped gifts for his family. Recognising his duplicity, Fran takes half a bottle of sleeping pills in a suicide attempt, only to be saved when Bud returns and, finding her lying in his bed, rushes

to fetch the doctor who lives in the neighbouring apartment. With Fran out of danger, the doctor gives Bud – who he takes to be a playboy on the basis of the stream of empty liquor bottles and carnal sounds that emanate from the apartment – a lecture on his hedonistic lifestyle, admonishing him to grow up and ‘be a mensch’, a human being. A week later, at the end of the film, Bud repeats these words when he stands up to Sheldrake by refusing to give him a new key to the apartment to replace the one Sheldrake threw away in a moment of panic about the possible discovery of his affair. Bud does give Sheldrake a key but it turns out to be the wrong – or in terms of fidelity to the ethics of desire, the right – one:

Sheldrake: Say, Baxter, you gave me the wrong key.

Bud: No, I didn't.

Sheldrake: But this is the key to the executive washroom.

Bud: That's right, Mr Sheldrake, I won't be needing it because I'm all washed up around here.

Sheldrake: What's gotten into you Baxter?

Bud: Just following doctor's orders. I've decided to become a mensch. Know what that means? A human being.

Sheldrake: Now hold on, Baxter...

Bud: Save it. The old payola won't work anymore. Goodbye, Mr Sheldrake.

Bud thus bids farewell to his enslavement to ‘the service of goods’; and, of course, this being Hollywood, finds his fidelity to the singular track of his desire rewarded as Fran slips away from Sheldrake on the stroke of midnight at a New Year's Eve party and joins Bud in his apartment to celebrate the New Year and, presumably, the start of their new life together. Bud has finally ceased compromising and assumed ethical responsibility for the singular track of his desire. Of course, this is fiction and in real life the brief happy ending would inevitably be a prelude to further trials and tribulations. The couple may be united for the requisite Hollywood ending, and Bud may have learned a powerful lesson about integrity through fidelity to the Thing, but the mirror remains now and forever broken with no final redemption beyond an uneasy reconciliation with lack-in-being. The inevitable challenges that lie ahead include general existential dilemmas, arising from the lack of ‘fit’ between psychic and social reality, self and other, as well as those challenges related specifically to a capitalist society characterised by an untenable relation between, as Fran puts it, the ‘takers’ and those they take from. But critical as it is of American capitalism, it is sobering to note that *The Apartment* was made during the heyday

of Keynesianism; since that time the pervasive exhortations and temptations of capitalism have only become amplified as a consequence of the social, technological, economic and political developments comprising neoliberalism that are discussed below.

### **A brief history of neoliberalism**

In ambition, depth, degree of break with the past, variety of sites being colonized, impact on common sense and everyday behaviour, restructuring of the social architecture, neoliberalism does constitute a *hegemonic project* (Hall, 2011, p. 728, emphasis in original).

If ever a political philosophy warranted the label hegemonic, surely it is neoliberalism, at least insofar as the prospect of a serious political aspirant articulating a program based around central economic planning, public ownership of resources, anti-competition, anti-choice and pro big-government is well-nigh unthinkable; and even if some of these policies have been advocated by counter-hegemonic politicians like Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn, prevailing wisdom says that, were they elected, the disciplining effects of the neoliberal establishment and the pro-neoliberal markets will force their abandonment as happened with the ‘asphyxiation’ of Syriza in Greece in 2015 (Varoufakis, 2016, p. 232). As Harvey observes (2005, p. 3), neoliberalism has become “the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in and understand the world”, while Mirowski notes “the accretion of neoliberal attitudes, imaginaries, and practices that have come to inform everyday life in the first few decades of the new millennium” (2013, p. 90; see also, Braedly & Luxton, 2010). As Saad Filho and Johnston bluntly put the matter back in 2005, “we live in the age of neoliberalism” (2005, p. 1), something that, despite the onset of the global financial crisis in 2007 and the subsequent predictions of neoliberalism’s demise, seems just as true today (Crouch, 2011; Mirowski, 2013; G Monbiot, 2017). We continue to live in a society in which “everyone – left or right – talks about the virtues of markets, private property, competition, and limited government” (Peck, 2010, p. 71).

Yet paradoxically, as Peck goes on to argue (2010, p. 74), pinning down the precise meaning of the term ‘neoliberalism’ is challenging. That this is so among its architects and advocates, is not entirely surprising, in part because the term tends to be a pejorative one employed mostly by critics, but also possibly reflecting Hayek’s original emphasis on the flexibility and adaptability of neoliberalism as a credo (2010, p. 274). The term’s elusiveness also reflects the ideological contradictions, between universally proclaimed inclusion and identity-based exclusion, inhering in its classical liberal forebear (Hall, 2011; Parekh, 1995). This elusiveness may help explain why,



despite neoliberalism's ubiquity as a concept in academic and media discourse across a range of fields, there has been a recent tendency to question its existence as a theoretical entity. As Ball puts it, neoliberalism "is one of those terms that is used so widely and so loosely that it is in danger of becoming meaningless" (2012, p. 3). Similarly, Mitchell Dean acknowledges the skeptical position, noting that "neoliberalism, it might be argued, is a rather overblown notion, which has been used, usually by a certain sort of critic, to characterize everything from a particular brand of free-market political philosophy to a wide variety of innovations in public management" (2012, p. 1). However, he goes on to advocate for an historically informed perspective on neoliberalism as an "identifiable but heterogeneous" (p. 11) thought collective, rather than a coherent ideology or form of state, and draws attention to the risk of underestimating the influence of this thought collective in terms of now-entrenched logics of government. This perspective informs the reading of neoliberalism offered here.

Drawing on the genealogical principle that "a good account of the world should be able to provide an account of how and why it arose" (Bevir, 2008, p. 269), I adopt the view that "clarification of the neoliberal program is first and foremost a historical inquiry" (Mirowski, 2013, p. 29). As Peck notes, "this means tracking the project's uneven and uncertain progress, from its inauspicious beginnings as a reactionary cult, through its moments of vanguardist advance, to its effective mainstreaming as a restructuring ethos and as an adaptive form of regulatory practice" (2010, p. xi) that has become part of the contemporary cultural and political unconscious, thereby constituting, as Stuart Hall notes above, a hegemonic project. The following discussion offers a brief history of that project.

### ***A brief history of Neoliberalism I: The Mont Pèlerin Society***

The 'inauspicious beginnings' of the loose body of beliefs now known as neoliberalism<sup>1</sup> can be traced at least as far back as the inaugural meeting of the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS) in 1947 where, in the comparatively tranquil setting of the Swiss village of Vevey, Friedrich Hayek and his fellow Mont Pèlerin Society members – including such familiar names as Karl Popper and Milton Friedman – envisaged, and began preparing for, an ensuing battle of ideas over the coming generation (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009). This was a battle framed by Hayek (1944) in his 'coruscating polemic' (Stedman Jones, 2012, p. 30) as one between freedom and serfdom. For

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'neoliberalism' was one that these same scholars had elected to adopt at an earlier meeting, the Colloque Walter Lipmann, in Paris, 1938, in order to convey their sense of the need for a revived and reconstructed liberalism to meet the economic and political challenges of modern times (Davies, 2014; Polanyi, 1944).

Hayek, the main threat to freedom, and the individualism on which freedom, in his view, depended, was posed by collectivism and central planning, including not only by the distant, if living, reality of Soviet-style communism but much closer to home in the contemporary liberal welfare economics represented in the US by the legacy of Roosevelt and in the UK by the agendas of Keynes and Beveridge (K. Tribe, 2009, p. 76). As he warned in the opening pages of *The road to serfdom*, “we have progressively abandoned that freedom in economic affairs without which personal and political freedom has never existed in the past” (1944, p. 13).

Against this backdrop, the Mont Pèlerin society brought together scholars and intellectuals from several groups that had been developing and exchanging ideas during the interwar years, including the London School of Economics, represented by Hayek himself, Lionel Robbins and others; the European Ordoliberals, comprising diasporic German economists as well as members of the Austrian school and led by theorists such as Wilhelm Röpke, Walter Eucken and Franz Böhm, and; the first Chicago school of economics, led by economists such as Frank Knight, Jacob Viner and Milton Friedman’s mentor, Henry Simons. Though these groups were united in their opposition to what they regarded as dangerous forms of collectivism in the shape of German Nazism and Roosevelt’s New Deal, they also had their differences in that the ordoliberals were “relatively moderate and pragmatic, espousing a humanist form of market economics” (Peck, 2010, p. 17), whereas the Chicago school was more theoretical in orientation and utopian in its idealization of the free market. It is worth noting that ambiguity, paradox and tension have always been core to the nature of neoliberalism as an ideological and practical project.

The economic ideas and the political agenda formulated at this and subsequent meetings would have a profound impact in the final decades of the twentieth century across a range of fields, including education. Yet in many ways, the immediate post-war years were not an auspicious time for neoliberal ideals of minimal government and individual responsabilisation through competition. Indeed, the aftermath of the Second World War – a conflict which witnessed the triumph over Fascism, only after unprecedented destruction and at incalculable human cost, by the strategically allied but ideologically opposed forces of Soviet communism and Western liberal capitalism – saw a widespread hunger for state-led economic security and a belief in the possibility of a ‘middle way’ between the equally brutal and unforgiving poles of soviet style communism and laissez-faire capitalism.

The desire for a compromise between social democratic and free-market models of society found at least partial fulfillment. For despite a climate of austerity in the immediate post-war years – particularly in Europe and Britain – subsequent decades witnessed steady economic growth and the emergence of a political consensus around the need for the active involvement of government in the economy and some degree of protection and provision by the state, reflected in Richard Nixon’s 1971 claim – ironically made on the eve of the slow unravelling of Keynesian economic policy – “we’re all Keynesians now”. In part this consensus reflected a deep-seated and visceral reaction on the part of Western liberal societies to the dislocation and destruction of the ‘Age of Catastrophe’ (Hobsbawm, 1994) that unfolded between 1914 and 1945; but it also reflected an underlying assumption “that the wholesale mobilization of the economy and society for the war effort had pointed the way to how social objectives might be achieved in peacetime” (Stedman Jones, 2012, p. 28). This was an assumption that neoliberals, convinced as they were of the need for a mode of political economy grounded in competition and markets, vehemently rejected.

In contrast to the postwar faith in the power and potential of social collaboration, Hayek and his neoliberal colleagues believed that rational self-interest, given free rein in arenas governed by competition, was the most truthful, powerful and reliable force in human affairs. For Hayek, liberalism as a philosophy of political economy “is based on the conviction that where effective competition can be created it is a better way of guiding individual efforts than any other” (1944, p. 27). This did not mean, however, that there was no positive role for the state: as the above passage continues, “it does not deny, but even emphasises, that, in order that competition should work beneficially, a carefully thought-out legal framework is required” (1944, p. 27). He also acknowledged that “where it is impossible to create the conditions necessary to make competition effective, we must resort to other methods of guiding economic activity” (1944, p. 27). In areas amenable to competition, however, anything grounded in a social rather than an individual ontology, and based on rational planning rather than trust in the competitive spirit, was counter to, and likely to be undermined by, human individuals’ natural propensity to pursue their own self-interest. The likely success of any interventionist approach to policy was likely to be further hampered by the impossibility of adequate knowledge on which such interventions might be based, a problem exacerbated by the immensely complex and widely dispersed nature of social reality. This resistance to government intervention found further support in the economic fundamentalist belief “that the market had a long-run evolutionary structure that

government intervention could neither change nor predict” (Blyth, 2013, p. 118; see also, Block & Somers, 2014).

In the postwar years, however, it was the followers of Keynes’ ideas, not Hayek’s, that were in the ascendant position. During these years of postwar boom, “politicians and public alike believed they understood how to effectively manage capitalism using the tools of demand management developed by John Maynard Keynes and especially as expanded by the next generation of Keynesian economists” (Stedman Jones, 2012, p. 180). The prime goal of economic policy at this time, in large part under the shadow of the recollected trauma of the Great Depression, was maintaining low unemployment rates, something that seemed to call for greater collaboration rather than the competition so fundamental to the neoliberals.

### ***Interlude: Postwar progressivism and education policy***

In education policy, the postwar years were characterized by a sense of optimism and political consensus around the potential of education to compensate for past and present injustices by providing equality of opportunity, thereby creating a more meritocratic society (Forrester & Garratt, 2017). This was a period in which teachers enjoyed relative professional autonomy and public trust in relation to curricular and pedagogic matters; in which progressive, child-centered approaches increasingly gained acceptance in primary schooling; and in which the comprehensive model of universal education made steady inroads in relation to the segregated models of that had been accepted in the past but that were now rejected by many on the basis that academic selection had often been a cipher for selection by class, race and gender (Pring, 2012).

Overall, there was a widespread belief that education was amenable to change and that it could, in turn, change society for the better. The optimism with regard to the potential of education during this time is reflected in the number of reform agendas and the policies these spawned, themselves linked to wider debates in the media, politics and society. For example, debates about how to transcend the historical burdens of class division in Europe and the UK found expression in attempts to create a ‘comprehensive’ system of secondary schools for all students and. In the US, the burgeoning civil rights movement and concern over the continuing manifestation of the legacies of slavery in contemporary racism, fuelled attempts to achieve racial balance through policies such as busing students thereby attempting to achieve educational desegregation in the face of ongoing residential segregation (Sleeter, 2010). These and other

attempts at reform typically fell short of the hopes of policy makers working within the limitations of the solution-led orientation to policy identified in Chapter 1. Indeed, the social, political and economic issues these policies sought to address were never going to be amenable to solution through policy since they revealed the far reaching and deep seated contradictions, tensions and fissures at work in the supposed golden era of welfare state Keynesianism (Leitner, Sheppard, Sziarto, & Maringanti, 2007; Lipman, 2011). The shortcomings of solution-oriented education policy agendas notwithstanding, and despite the growing condemnation of progressive education from right-wing academics and policy groups (e.g. Cox & Dyson, 1969a, 1969b, 1970), serious contestation of the post Second World War social contract was contained until the mid 1970s. And when a serious challenge to the postwar settlement did emerge, it was as a result of turmoil in the economy and not from education, though education would certainly feel its effects in due course.

### ***A brief history of Neoliberalism II: Crisis as opportunity, states of shock and psychic economies***

While it is naïve to describe the postwar decades as a ‘golden age’, this period of *relative* optimism and economic stability began to unravel over the latter part of the 1960s and early 1970s. Key contributing factors included the instability of the international monetary system and the collapse of the Bretton Woods exchange rate regime under the combined pressure of the deficits incurred by the Vietnam war, President Johnson’s Great Society agenda and the decline in American gold reserves. The breakdown of the Bretton Woods regime as a result of the unilateral suspension of dollar-gold convertibility in 1971 was the first of a series of crises that unfolded over the following decade providing the hitherto elusive climate for a sympathetic hearing for neoliberal political and economic ideas.

The end of the Bretton Woods international monetary system, two oil price shocks in 1973 and 1979, the Vietnam War, the Watergate break-in at the Democratic Party headquarters in Washington, D.C., at the behest of senior figures of the Nixon administration and the president’s complicity in its cover-up, Britain’s International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan of 1976, the virtual collapse of British industrial relations, and the failure of the prices and incomes policies that were supposed to fight inflation in both countries all created a policy vacuum into which neoliberal ideas flowed (Stedman Jones, 2012, p. 215).

For neoliberals, state-led attempts to manage the economy through Keynesian fiscal policy tools, such as price and wage controls, were anathema – misguided and hubristic attempts at imposing morality on the amoral market. From their perspective, the welfare state’s “do-gooding, utopian sentimentality enervated the nation’s moral fibre, eroded personal responsibility and undermined the over-riding duty of the poor to work. It imposed social purposes on an economy rooted in individual greed and self-interest” (Hall, 2011, p. 707). Fortunately for neoliberals, by the mid 1970s the failure of Keynesian approaches to remedy stagflation on both sides of the Atlantic created an environment open to new strategies and solutions. In the UK, a groundswell of neoliberal ideas, promoted and elaborated by think tanks such as the Centre for Policy Studies, the Adam Smith Institute and the Institute for Economic Affairs, championed by conservative politicians, such as Margaret Thatcher and her mentor, Keith Joseph, and circulated by journalists, such as Samuel Brittan, Peter Jay and future-Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson, inaugurated the construction of a new anti-Keynesian, counter-hegemony, which would culminate in Thatcher’s infamous catch cry, ‘there is no alternative’. A similar pattern unfolded in the US, involving think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute and the Manhattan Institute and individuals such as Charles Koch, Ed Crane, Alan Greenspan, George Schulz and Ronald Reagan. In a sense, the rest is history, not only because neoliberalism went on to see its champions, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, installed in office, their governments emblematic of the triumph of neoliberal policies, nor because the biggest testament to the influence of these leaders is perhaps embodied in the continuation of their overarching market-driven agendas by their successors, regardless of political party. More fundamentally, as Stuart Hall, above, and many others have noted, neoliberalism has gone on to transform the fabric of politics, economy and society in a range of global contexts. Indeed, the depth of its embedding into the understandings and practices of everyday life is one of the key factors explaining ‘the strange non-death of neoliberalism’ (Crouch, 2011), despite initial prognoses of its demise in the wake of the 2008 World Economic Crisis. As Connell observes (2013, p. 101), no region of the globe has gone untouched by neoliberal ideas and policies:

In the global metropole, i.e. North America and Europe, neoliberalism has gone far to dismantle the Keynesian welfare state, the system of regulated capitalism and state-supplied services that was dominant in the generation from 1945 to 1980. In the global periphery, neoliberalism thoroughly dismantled the strategy of autonomous economic development, and broke up the social alliances around it.

The capacity of neoliberal ideas to fill the policy vacuum created by the series of crises that unfolded during the 1970s was not accidental but the fruit of disciplined, focused and persistent work over decades since the initial gathering of the Mont Pèlerin Society in 1947. Far from being the result of any natural evolution or unfolding of economic policy, “neoliberalism’ was and perhaps remains among the most militant and organized politically oriented thought collectives of the post-Second World War period” (M. Dean, 2012, p. 4). Whilst not a ‘conspiracy’, there was nonetheless significant strategic intent behind this militant network and capacity building activity that sought to integrate ideology with praxis and thereby “to produce a functional hierarchical elite of regimented political intellectuals” (Mirowski, 2013, p. 43), such as the “virtual conveyor belt delivering Chicago Boys” to the key institutions overseeing the enforcement of neoliberal ideas at the global level, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Klein, 2007, p. 161). Recognizing the scope and penetration of the activities undertaken by this collective is helpful in underlining the contingent nature of seemingly common-sensical neoliberal ideals and values, such as markets and competition.

Mirowski captures its multilayered nature through the image of the ‘Russian doll’ approach to building what he terms “the Neoliberal Thought Collective” (NTC) (2009, 2013). The inner layer of the Russian doll is represented by the MPS, whose organization and structure was shaped by Hayek’s belief “that ideas seeped into policy only very slowly” (Stedman Jones, 2012, p. 4); hence disciplined organization was prioritized over public profile, with the MPS seeking to avoid media attention and scrutiny in order to serve as a free-reining debating society for its members, who were initially hand-picked by Hayek himself, though this was later changed to a system of closed nominations. Within these structural limits there were further constraints in the form of any superimposed agenda or predetermined outcomes, though participants in the debate were united by a deep-seated rejection of all forms of collectivism, particularly contemporary forms such as the Soviet style communism and Western welfare-statism, in the face of which liberalism’s *laissez faire* past was deemed inadequate. Academic appointment was not a requirement, which would have placed an unnecessary and unhelpful limitation on the society, but many members were leading academics in the university departments, such as the economics department at the University of Chicago and the London School of Economics, which formed the next layer of the Russian doll. Over time the standing of many of these academics and their departments enhanced the credibility and acceptability of neoliberal ideas in the eyes of policy makers and politicians (Stedman Jones, 2012, p. 5), who were likely to receive further affirmation of these ideas via the outputs and activities of the next outer layer of the doll. This consisted of special-

purpose educational foundations, such as the Bradley Foundation and the Foundation for Economic Ideas, which were established for the specific purpose of promoting neoliberal beliefs and ideas, and general-purpose ‘think tanks’, such as the Institute for Economic Affairs and the Hoover Institute, whose members were often of a neoliberal persuasion.

The crucial ideological role that these think tanks and their connections played in the eventual triumph of neoliberal ideals of markets and competition – vindicating the belief in the key role of intellectuals that underpinned Hayek’s creation of the MPS – should not be forgotten, nor should the pragmatic political function served by this networking and promotional activity be underestimated, regardless of any deficit neoliberalism may harbour in terms of the coherence and consistency of its ideas. In a very real sense, neoliberalism has been a ‘constructivist’ project seeking to actively engender the market-based, competitive practices that it preaches (W Brown, 2005; Seymour, 2014) with its ultimate aim being nothing short of remoulding human subjectivity along competitive, entrepreneurial and individualistic lines (Scharff, 2016).

At the same time, and mindful of the premature prognoses of neoliberalism’s demise after the financial upheavals in the last decade and their aftermath, it is important not to overstate the rational element to neoliberalism as an ideological project (Cahill & Konings, 2017). While it clearly has identifiable signature traits, such as the use of the state to promote privatization, deregulation, marketisation and the embrace of market-like rationalities of calculation, measurement and comparison (Davies, 2017), it is also important to recall that “neoliberalism has often thrived on confusion and political disarray and that we would be naïve to think that its future requires an active embrace of its formal ideological tenets” (Cahill & Konings, 2017, p. 146). Critically, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, neoliberal capitalism has thrived by tapping into, mimicking and exploiting the mobile, restless and insatiable nature of desire (McGowan, 2016).

### **Neoliberalism and neoliberal education policy: A contradictory nexus**

Given the world (re)making ambitions of neoliberalism, it would be surprising if education – a key arena for the shaping of souls – were to have been left untouched by its core tenets and preferred practices. As it was, until the 1980s, schools and teachers enjoyed public and political support in a period of relative autonomy, in which curriculum, pedagogy and assessment were largely determined at the local level. This is, of course, not to imply or pretend that everything was perfect and that teaching and learning were occurring in all contexts for all students – far



from it – and, in the UK context, despite the shift towards more student-centered approaches and the growth of comprehensive schooling, segregation, discrimination and neglect characterized the encounter with education of far too many young people and families. Yet despite these failings many educators maintained deeply held beliefs about the potential of education to contribute to increased degrees of equity and social justice.

With the election in 1979 and 1980 of political leaders in the UK and the US sympathetic to neoliberal ideas and ideals, it was only a matter of time before education policy in these and other contexts where neoliberalism gained ascendancy, including Chile, China, New Zealand, South Africa and Sweden, was cleansed of any lingering collectivist orientation. Neoliberal policies have also been imposed on a host of ‘developing’ countries via the ‘arms free imperialism’ represented by the structural adjustment programs of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (Grant, 2008, p. xiii). The overall thrust of neoliberal education policies reflects the emphases on marketization, deregulation and competition characteristic of the neoliberal economic worldview. This is not surprising for as Fisher observes, “education, far from being in some ivory tower safely inured from the real world, is the engine room of the reproduction of social reality, directly confronting the inconsistencies of the capitalist social field” (Fisher, 2009, p. 26). Thus, although the particular mix of policies pursued varies between contexts, influenced by different traditions and competing ideologies, a number of overarching trends characterizing global neoliberal education policy can be identified. This suggests the need to be alert to these global patterns, for “critical policy analysis in an era of globalization requires that we recognize the *relationality* and *interconnectivity* of policy developments” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 69, emphasis in original; see also, Ball, 2012; Hirtt, 2008). However, as one might expect, these policy developments do not comprise a cohesive package and include a number of contradictory tendencies.

On the one hand, neoliberal education policy has prioritized the deregulation and decentralization of education provision and the development of new categories of school, operating with varying degrees of managerial autonomy within and alongside the state-run sector and frequently catering for groups of students differentiated by academic selection and/or along class, ethnic or gender lines. These developments are typically justified in the name of notions like ‘diversity’, ‘choice’ and ‘responsiveness’ and reflect the reconfiguration of education as a marketplace, within which schools are required to vie for ‘customers’ or ‘clients’ (students and

their families) through various forms of marketing, including touting their performance in examinations and inspections.

At the same time, and in direct tension with deregulation and increased flexibility, there has been an increase in state control of curriculum and teaching. This is evident in a number of developments, including the identification of ‘core knowledge’ that all students must learn, the mandating of outcomes-based curricula monitored via high-stakes testing and other forms of accountability, the development of ideologically driven subjects such as citizenship, and the promulgation of teacher professional standards linked to compulsory annual performance reviews and, in many contexts such as the USA, performance-based pay. The neoliberal education policy environment has also been characterized by a renewed instrumental vocationalism. This trend is manifested in the development of school-industry partnerships and reflected in curricular emphases on core or basic knowledge and skills that are deemed fundamental to individual and societal economic welfare, such as literacy and numeracy, at the expense of more esoteric or aesthetic forms of learning, in order to prepare future workers for the challenges of competing in the global economy.

Overall, across the various developments comprising the globalized neoliberal education polycscape, it is possible to identify a number of commonalities. Thus, for example, we can focus on key overarching policy *themes* – accountability, competition, and privatization (Rancière, 2010b) – on core policy *technologies* – the market, managerialism and performativity (Ball, 2003) – or on fundamental underlying policy *logics* – competition, instrumentalism and atomisation (M. Clarke, 2012b) – that drive the development of new policies and practices. However, tempting as it may be to read these themes, technologies and logics as evidence of a global neoliberal conspiracy, they are probably be more accurately considered *aposteriori* features, identified in critical policy analysis, rather than comprising a set of ideals explicitly subscribed to and promoted by policy makers.

Indeed, just as recognizing its contradictions is core to understanding neoliberalism as a political and economic philosophy, so too neoliberal education policy is riven by tensions and contradictions. For instance, as is the case with neoliberal politics generally, neoliberal education policy’s preferred scale is the individual and it is reluctant to recognize the significance of the group or community, but it relies on the societal organs of government in order to prosecute its individualizing agenda. When it does recognize society, its methodological individualist

epistemology sees this entity as constituted by the aggregation of individuals, but it remains reluctant to acknowledge any reciprocal influence of society on the individual. It advocates democratic qualities of accountability and transparency, but its technologies of governance are unidirectional and, in education as in other fields, “institutions, agencies and individual citizens are expected to make their activities visible to centers of calculation, but these centers are less required (much less enticed or persuaded) to make their activities transparent to neoliberal subjects” (Leitner et al., 2007, p. 4). A similar blind-spot or moment of disavowal is conflict between, on the one hand, the promulgation of professional standards for teachers and, on the other hand, espousal of need for greater teacher professionalism, which arguably includes the autonomy such standards both question and undermine (Sachs, 2001). Likewise, emphases on tighter control of curriculum are at odds with the promotion of market values of choice, just as the latter, which pits school against school and positions parents as competitors, sits uneasily beside the communitarian values embodied in curricular emphases on citizenship and values. There are additional tensions between moves to promote aspiration more widely and the increasing inequality characteristic of recent decades, just as there are between “the push to massify schooling, and the push to produce elite knowledges and credentials” (Thompson & Holdsworth, 2003, p. 387). Underlying many of these tensions runs the doomed fantasmatic attempt to square the circle, through conflation or colonization, by reconciling notions of quality, or excellence, defined in competitive and performative terms, with equity, fairness and justice (M. Clarke, 2014b; Gillies, 2008; Savage, 2011).

Tension and contradiction are also at the heart of psychoanalysis, as will have been evident in the discussion of desire earlier in this chapter, which is why it is particularly well suited to analyzing the contradiction-riddled manifestations of capitalism (Harvey, 2014; McGowan, 2016) of which neoliberalism may be seen as an intensified version. Indeed, the enduring challenge of psychoanalysis is “to examine the fraught connection between language and the body, the symbolic constitution of human reality, with all the equivocations and paradoxes and slippages that belong to the ‘illogical logic’ of the signifier, on the one hand, and the strangeness or perversity of an animal whose enjoyment is far from being always or unequivocally ‘enjoyable,’ on the other” (Schuster, 2016, p. 44). It is to the challenge of explaining some of the key conceptual – and often paradoxical – tools of Lacanian psychoanalysis that the discussion now turns.

### **Lacanian discourse theory**

Lacan's theory of discourse can be considered both a summary and the summit of his contribution to psychoanalytic theory (Verhaeghe, 1995). As this suggests, Lacan's conception of discourse is about more than just communication since, for Lacan, discourse is central to human life in that it "fabricates the context of the imaginary and symbolic world of the subjects, the borders of which are engraved and constantly defied by death, trauma, violence, anxiety, sexual acts and the like" (Vadolas, 2009, p. 135). Putting this another way, we might say that Lacanian discourse theory is about more than just speech and the exchange of ideas and information but engages at a deeper level with "the structure of the speech exchange that accounts for the complexity of such an exchange more broadly conceived" (Hook, 2018, p. 99). This notion of discourse, therefore, transcends meaning and content in the form of the semantic intent of the subject of discourse, for the subject's meanings are always dependent upon the views, purposes and interpretations of others, which in turn rely on a background of shared social norms, values and assumptions. In other words, Lacan's discourse theory represents an attempt "to circumvent the psychological ('imaginary') concerns of subjective sense-making and meaning by looking for an *underlying grid of interlinked symbolic positions* (Hook, 2018, p. 99, emphasis in original).

Lacanian discourse theory may be about more than the communication of information and ideas; but the abstraction that results from the effort to transcend subjective meanings results in a level of abstraction that is initially off-putting to many readers: complex, technical and rarefied, it seems to comprise what look like exercises from an mathematics textbook with its formulas and symbols. Compared to the rich, evocative imaginary world of Freudian myths, Lacan's algebraic structures look decidedly uninviting. Nonetheless, there are at least three distinct advantages to this approach (Verhaeghe, 1995, p. 79). First, the minimalism of Lacan's model, reflecting its high level of abstraction, lends it a degree of transferability to different subject matter and contexts that is harder to achieve when a theory carries more narrative and cultural baggage. Second, and relatedly, this abstraction makes the model less prone to psychologizing – as Verhaeghe observes, Lacan's notion of a master signifier, for example, is less likely to become overlaid with pre-existing images and stereotypes than Freud's primeval father. Third, awareness of the character of each discourse and the relationships between its constitutive elements – between master signifiers and the split subject, for example – makes it possible to gauge what the potential consequences of its deployment are likely to be.

Lacan's approach to discourse also differs from that of Foucault, with which readers are more likely to be familiar. The key difference is that Foucault's focus is on the concrete materiality of

discourse – on, for example, the way the modern subject of education is formed through the micro practices and technologies, including the endless grids, charts, lists, rows, tables, columns, levels, sets, streams, examinations and reports that comprise the discourse of modern schooling – “Lacan on the contrary works beyond the content and places the accent on the formal relationships that each discourse draws through the act of speaking” (Verhaeghe, 1995, p. 81). This formality, however, does not entail that Lacan’s theory of discourse is unsuited to grappling with the rough and tumble of politics and the political;

### **Lacan’s four discourses**

Much of Lacan’s oeuvre can be read as an extended meditation on the nature of knowledge – clearly a practical consideration as well as a theoretical issue for a practising psychoanalyst – and in this regard, the four discourses suggest a number of ways in which knowledge can be organized (Frosh, 2012, p. 182). Specifically, Lacan highlighted how all claims to knowledge – at least in any final, absolute or complete sense and including, of course, mine and Lacan’s as well as those of education policy – are undone by the unconscious, desire and the intimate alterity of otherness. This does not necessarily mean that we lapse into nihilism; but it does involve “affirming human reality as a montage of the imaginary and the symbolic, as a rich tapestry of ambiguous and conflicted fictions – suspended over the void” (Thomas, 2013, p. 86). Such a refusal of the comforts of fixed or absolute knowledge clearly has relevance for education, the stock in trade of which *is* knowledge. It also suggests an *other side*, a subversive and subverting inverse, to the technocratic perspective of much education policy that seeks to govern and regulate education through reified notions of knowledge.

But in addition to suggesting how ideas of the other, otherness and the irreducible difference inhering in the subject and in knowledge might have for thinking about education and education policy, the book’s subtitle involves a more specific reference to the title of Lacan’s seventeenth seminar (2007), *The other side of psychoanalysis*. In this seminar, Lacan elaborates his theory of four discourses – the discourse of the master, the university, the hysteric and the analyst – that together comprise his “thoroughgoing critique of the quest for the One (truth, system or revolution) – arguably the most salient contemporary manifestation of an impulse to totalizing knowledge that he saw as characteristic of the political as such” (Starr, 2001, p. 34). Despite the misleading promotion of notions of choice in education today – notions which despite suggesting an open system embracing difference, catering to diversity and opposed to uniformity, are actually as much about allowing the privileged and mobile to choose not to have

their children educated with their social ‘inferiors’ (Reay, 2017; Reay & Lucey, 2003) – recent education policy might well be characterised in terms of the ‘the quest for the One’ as evident in moves to centralise curriculum, standardise pedagogy and regiment assessment, legitimated by the pseudo-scientific claims of ‘evidence based’ policy and practice discourse (‘what works’) (Hammersley, 2013).

For Lacan, discourse is a “social link founded on language (Lacan, 2000, p. 17). We might say that discourse forms a social bond woven by words. But though language is clearly central to the four discourses, Lacan’s notion of discourse is not the same as that of linguistics or semiotics and is not reducible to grammar, phonemes or semantics. Lacan’s discourse starts from the simple premise that every communicative act involves an agent who communicates something to an other. Furthermore, such an act of communication will be grounded in certain axioms and assumptions about the social and material world, taken to be truths. It will also result in some effect, or product, since for Lacan language is performative, a mode of acting on the world, rather than merely descriptive. So we now have four positions: a *truth* that drives an *agent* who speaks to an *other* which results in a consequent *product*. The four positions can be represented diagrammatically as follows:

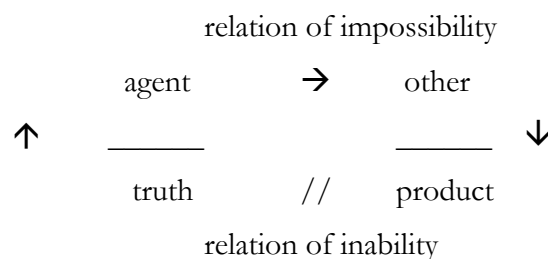


Figure 2.1. The four positions in Lacan’s discourse theory (after Verhaeghe, 1995)

The relative location of the positions within the diagram are significant. On the one hand, the left-hand side designates the productive factors in the discourse, while the right-hand side designates the receptive factors. On the other hand, the upper position on each side represents the conscious or explicit aspects of discourse, while the lower position represent the unconscious or implicit factors. Critically, in contrast to classic communication theory, with its ideal of perfect communication envisaged as analogous to the transmission of binary code between two computers (Schirato & Yell, 1996), for Lacan communication always fails to some degree, as indicated by the relation of impossibility in Figure 2.1 above. This is due in part to the

disjunction between conscious and unconscious, represented by the horizontal bar on each side of the diagram, which means that the truth underlying the discourse can never be fully put into words<sup>2</sup>. In Lacan's words, "this is the other face of the function of truth, not the visible face, but the dimension of it which is necessitated by something hidden" (Lacan, 2007, p. 187). This in turn means that perfect communication with the other can never be achieved which entails "as a consequence the endless compulsion to repeat, as a never-ending attempt to verbalize the non-verbal" (Verhaeghe, 1995, p. 84). In similar fashion, the product of communication resulting from the effect of the discourse on the other, bears no necessary relation to the agent's truth. As Verhaeghe puts it, "once one speaks, one does not succeed in verbalizing the truth of the matter with, as consequence, the impossibility of realizing one's desire at the place of the other... resulting in the inability of the convergence between product and truth" (1995, p. 86). This relationship of impossibility is represented by the two diagonal bars separating the two sides in the lower portion of the diagram.

In addition to these four *positions* – or, as Verhaeghe describes them, four 'bags' into which we can place things – Lacan's theory comprises four *elements* that rotate through these four positions. These four elements always remain in the same relationship, or order, with respect to each other, so that *each* element occupies *each* of the possible positions over the four discourses. These elements are derived from Lacanian theory in relation to the structure of language and of the unconscious (Verhaeghe, 1995, p. 87).

It is in relation to language that we derive the first two elements: the master signifier, S1, representing the primeval cut of language into the an otherwise inchoate, semiotically speaking, existence and representing nothing but itself, yet fulfilling the necessary role of temporarily arresting the shifting flux of signifiers; and S2, representing web of signifiers comprising the wider network of knowledge. The other two elements are both effects of the signifier (Verhaeghe, 1995, p. 88).

The third element is the split subject, \$, simultaneously constituted and alienated through its entry into language and divided between conscious and unconscious. This contrasts with the

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<sup>2</sup> As Verhaeghe and others point out, in Lacanian theory there is no such thing as a truth that can be put fully into words. The best we can hope to achieve is a half-speaking of truth, 'le me-dire de la vérité'. But as Vighi reminds us (2010, p. 46), this "does not imply that beyond this half there is some unreachable hidden substance. We should not transcendentalize Lacan's notion of truth. Rather, he suggests that beyond this half there is, literally, nothing – a nothing, however, which is given to experience as *plus-de-jouir*" or surplus jouissance.

everyday, common-sense view of the individual subject as the originator of speech – “the subject as it appears to itself and to the other (for example, as someone who believes herself to be a diligent student)” (Van Haute, 2002, pp. 39-40). This notion of the subject as the originator of speech, the producing subject of the statement or utterance, relates to the conscious self of the imaginary. This subject of the statement is distinct from the unconscious subject of the enunciation who is produced in communication and who emerges through the stream of signifiers and who always says more, as well as less, than s/he thinks. What Lacan is suggesting here is that rather than language merely involving a single unitary subject who uses words to convey a meaning or a sentiment, there is also a subject who is revealed in the flow of language, a subject exposed in the very words or signifiers themselves, who is not equivalent to the subject speaking as ‘I’ – which, after all, is what linguists refer to as a ‘shifter’, occupied by innumerable different people in different contexts. So the subject is split in various senses: between conscious and unconscious; between the subject of the statement and the subject of the enunciation; and between the three registers of the Lacanian psyche, real, symbolic and imaginary.

The fourth element, the object *a*, is probably the most abstract and elusive, representing an excess or surplus – a remnant of the real that “functions as an internal limit to the symbolic’s quest for closure” (Ruti, 2017, p. 115) and thus cannot be captured or articulated in the symbolic or imaginary registers. One way to explain this surplus is with reference to our *subjectification* through entry into language. This becoming-a-subject entails separation from a primary condition – we can call it ‘nature’ – condemning the subject to an endless yet futile quest to recuperate this condition and grasp some elusive Thing, as we saw in section 2 above, beyond language. As Verhaeghe explains, “this object represents the final term of desire itself... In that sense it constitutes the motor which keeps us going for ever” (1995, p. 88). If lack, or loss, is the non-place, the void of emptiness, indifference and disorder, from which the subject desires, then it is via objet *a* that this void takes on a corporeal dimension (Schuster, 2016, p. 174).

We are now in a position to briefly outline the four discourses: the discourse of the master, the discourse of the university, the discourse of the hysteric and the discourse of the analyst. Each of the four discourses reflects a different possibility for the structuring of social relations yet “all of the discourses, the elements of which appear in a fixed order set by the Master’s discourse, represent, at one level, unconscious internal relations to the Other, Imaginary relations on which social bonds are formed and which exist to deny the underlying split (inconsistency, self-division, non-self-coincidence) of the subject – and the law” (Rothenberg, 2015, p. 43). In other words, just as the signifier gives the illusion of autonomy and agency, so discourse creates a sense of



social cohesion and coherence, enabling us to forget and encouraging us to ignore the alienation and alterity, fragility and fallibility, denials and divisions that constitute both the subject and society.

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 hysterics 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. Furthermore, as suggested by the French title of Lacan's seventeenth seminar, *L'envers de la psychanalyse*, each of the four discourses is the inverse of another in the schema. Lacan's title is also a veiled reference to the pervasive and continuing presence of discourses of mastery, and specifically the discourse of the master, which represents the antithesis of the discourse of the most open of the four discourses, that of the analyst. My own title plays on this, in that 'the other side of education' refers, amongst other things, to the dominance of neoliberal policy agendas, which represent an antithesis of key aspects of what I argue education could potentially entail, such as notions of openness and becoming, whilst also referring to a vision of education that offers an alternative – an other side – an 'anti-education' in relation to the version of education offered by the neoliberal imaginary, one characterised by openness to notions of the 'other' and 'otherness' that are inextricable elements of the complex Lacanian subject.

Indeed, to say that the Lacanian subject is characterized by complexity, however, is something of an understatement. It is not merely complex but a creature of paradox, juxtaposing individuating identity and dividing plurality, intentional agency and structural necessity, identificatory sameness and alienating otherness, enunciation *of* discourse and deprivation *by* discourse (Pavón-Cuellar, 2011, p. 235). We can think about this complexity in more detail by recognizing a number of ways in which the subject is not a unified, seamless, self-sufficient or hermetic entity but is divided from itself by a series of disjunctions involving language, by desire and the unconscious. In other words, a series of unbridgeable gaps exist: between self as subject and as object of discourse; between the subject as agent of signification and the Other of discourse; between the individuating circumscription and closure of the master signifiers with which the subject identifies and the endless, open-ended slippage in the wider network of signifiers comprising

language; and between the positivity of the act of identification and the negativity of the constitutive outside upon which such acts of identification inevitably rely.

A number of enigmas surround the four discourses. We might well ask, for instance, why four (and *only* four) and why *these* four (K. Campbell, 2004, p. 57)? There is no satisfactory answer to these questions, though it is worth noting that Lacan himself later identified a fifth discourse, a mutation of the discourse of the master that he referred to as the discourse of the capitalist (Lacan, 1990), while Levi Bryant (2016), by violating the strict order of the elements in Lacan's original four discourses, has outlined what he refers to as four universes of discourse, each comprising four discourses, and thus identifies twenty four possible discourses. We might also ask how, given the origins of the discourses in Lacan's psychoanalytic practice, valid is the move to mobilise them in social and political critique? In relation to this last point it is worth noting that Lacan himself clearly related the discourses to political patterns, both historical and contemporary, linking, for example, the university discourse to Stalinism (Lacan, 2007, p. 206), a potential that Žižek (e.g. 1996), in particular, has built on and extended. Thus, my reason for using Lacan's theory is not because it can claim any status as a meta-theory in relation to other theories of discourse, "but because it allows us to understand the functioning of different discourses in a unique way" (Fink, 1995, p.129). In particular, it provides unique insights into the interrelationships between knowledge, truth, subjectivity and otherness, and how particular configurations among these elements are produced by different discourses. In the context of the predominant discourse in contemporary education policy i.e. neoliberalism, Lacan's discourse theory helps us in grasping – and hence potentially resisting – the nature and dynamics of its hegemonic influence.

Lacan's theory thus offers a dynamic perspective on the relationship between knowledge, power, subjectivity and desire in social practices involving the formation and transformation of social relations – key concerns, I suggest, of both psychoanalysis and education. Critically for this book, Lacanian discourse theory, and in particular the two discourses of mastery, the discourse of the master and the discourse of the university, provide powerful insights into contemporary globalized neoliberal policy discourses and how they have reshaped the meaning of both knowledge and education. Dominated by 'thought stopping' master signifiers (Gunder, 2004, p. 301), the discourses of mastery have a tendency to repress the more tentative and open discourses of the hysteric and the analyst. Neoliberal education policies, characterized as I have argued by modernist proclivities for certainty, systematicity and the recurring blank slate, and

dominated by master signifiers such as ‘choice’, ‘competition’, ‘standards’ and ‘quality’, can be read as classic instances of such discourses of mastery.

Yet as noted above, each discourse has its inverse. In contrast to these discourses of mastery, the other two of Lacan’s four discourses, which we might describe as discourses of critique or discourses of thinking otherwise, offer potential signposts to the other side of education – to an education policy-world not subordinated to the totalizing master signifiers of quality, standards and reform and guided by principles other than those of competition, instrumentalism and atomisation. These other two discourses are the discourse of the hysteric, associated with resistance and protest, and particularly the discourse of the analyst, associated with analysis and critique.

The following four chapters draw on the four discourses to structure its analysis and critique of neoliberal education policy. Specifically, Chapter One provides a deeper exploration of neoliberal politics through the lens of the discourse of the master. Chapter Two examines neoliberal education policy through the lens of the discourse of the university. Chapter Three employs the discourse of the hysteric to think about the challenges facing teachers and teaching in the neoliberal era. Chapter Four draws on the discourse of the analyst to explore the location of students and learning in the era of neoliberal education policy. Chapter Five draws the threads of the arguments presented in the earlier chapters together in order to consider the implications of looking at education policy through the lens of Lacan’s four discourses and reflect on the possibilities and the challenges inhering in the other side of education.