

Critical Fantasy Studies: neoliberalism, education and identification
An interview with Jason Glynos

Estudos Críticos da Fantasia: neoliberalismo, educação e identificação
Uma entrevista com Jason Glynos

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Abstract: Interview with Professor Jason Glynos, co-director of the Center for Ideology and Discourse Analysis (CIDA) at the University of Essex, UK, conducted by professors Joanildo Burity (FUNDAJ) and Gustavo Gilson Oliveira (UFPE). The interview explores the contours, the conceptual framework and the analytic strategies being developed in relation to the so-called Critical Fantasy Studies’ field, associated with his recent work. It seeks to investigate, above all, how these concepts and strategies have contributed and may further contribute to broadening our understanding and deepening our analysis of the spread of neoliberal logics and the emergence of “new” conservative logics in the contemporary social and political scene, particularly in the field of education.

Keywords: Critical Fantasy Studies, Discourse Theory, Research in Education.

Resumo: Entrevista realizada com o Professor Jason Glynos, co-diretor do *Center for Ideology and Discourse Analysis* (CIDA) da Universidade de Essex, Reino Unido, conduzida pelos professores Joanildo Burity (FUNDAJ) e Gustavo Gilson Oliveira (UFPE). A entrevista procura explorar os contornos, o quadro conceitual e as estratégias de análise que têm se constituído a partir da emergência do campo dos chamados Estudos Críticos da Fantasia, com o qual o autor tem buscado trabalhar. Procura investigar, sobretudo, como esses conceitos e estratégias têm contribuído e podem ainda contribuir para a ampliação e o aprofundamento das análises sobre a disseminação das lógicas neoliberais e a emergência de “novas” lógicas conservadoras nos cenários sociais e políticos contemporâneos e, especialmente, no campo da educação.

Palavras-chave: Estudos Críticos da Fantasia, Teoria do Discurso, Pesquisa em Educação.

Resumén: Entrevista realizada con el profesor Jason Glynos, codirector del Centro de Ideología y Análisis del Discurso (CIDA) de la Universidad de Essex, Reino Unido, realizada por los profesores Joanildo Burity (FUNDAJ) y Gustavo Gilson Oliveira (UFPE). La entrevista busca explorar los contornos, el marco conceptual y las estrategias de análisis que se han formado a partir del surgimiento del campo de los llamados Estudios Críticos de la Fantasía, con lo cual el autor se há dispuesto a trabajar. Busca investigar, sobre todo, cómo estos conceptos y estrategias han contribuido y pueden contribuir aún más a la ampliación y profundización del análisis de la difusión de las lógicas neoliberales y la aparición de "nuevas" lógicas conservadoras en los escenarios sociales y políticos contemporáneos, y especialmente en el campo de la educación.

Palabras clave: Estudios Críticos de la Fantasía, Teoría del Discurso, Investigación en Educación.

Introduction

From August to September 2019 Professor Jason Glynos, co-director of the Center for Ideology and Discourse Analysis (CIDA) at the University of Essex, UK, was in Brazil to participate in a range of academic activities at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ)¹, the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE) and the Joaquim Nabuco Foundation (FUNDAJ).

¹ Professor Jason Glynos came to the country as part of the “Capes PrInt Curriculum Policy Project” of the UERJ Graduate Education Program (PROPED), coordinated by Professor Alice Casimiro Lopes, from which he was also invited by the UFPE Graduate Program in Education (PPGE) and the FUNDAJ to teach a short course and a give conference in Recife.

Jason Glynos was a PhD student, and became a close collaborator and personal friend, of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe throughout the development of the theoretical perspective and field of study that came to be known as the Essex School of Discourse Theory, sometimes also referred to as poststructuralist discourse theory or political discourse theory (LACLAU, MOUFFE, 1985). Since then, Glynos' work has been devoted to exploring the potential and challenges of poststructuralist political ontology, particularly in relation to the conduct of critical empirical research in the social sciences. He has been especially active in exploring the possibilities of deepening the articulations between the conceptual framework of discourse theory and the theoretical and analytical resources of Lacanian psychoanalysis (GLYNOS, 2001a, 2001b, 2011a; GLYNOS, STAVRAKAKIS, 2008). Working closely with his colleague and long-term collaborator David Howarth – the other CIDA co-director – Glynos has been working on articulating a specific theoretical-methodological approach, the so-called “logic’s approach” (GLYNOS; HOWARTH, 2007), inspired by the political ontology informing Laclau and Mouffe's approach to discourse theory. In recent years, Glynos has also been devoted to delineating the contours of a field of study that would represent one of the frontiers for deepening and renewing discourse theory, which he has tentatively named *Critical Fantasy Studies*.

Using the above perspectives, frameworks, and theoretical resources, Jason Glynos has produced several works on ideology and political discourse (GLYNOS, 2001a, 2003a, 2014b; GLYNOS, VOUTYRAS, 2016), political economy (GLYNOS, 2012b, 2014c; GLYNOS, KLIMECKI, WILLMOT, 2012), workplace practices (GLYNOS, 2003b, 2008a, 2008b, 2011b), health care policy (GLYNOS, 2014a; GLYNOS, WEST, 2016; GLYNOS et al., 2014), media (CHANG, GLYNOS, 2011), education (GLYNOS, HOWARTH, 2018; LAPPING, GLYNOS, 2018), gender and sexuality (GLYNOS, 2000a, 2000b, 2012a). Glynos's works have significantly influenced the fields of educational and social research in Brazil, especially through the scholars and research groups that draw on poststructuralist discourse theory (MENDONÇA, PEIXOTO, 2008; LOPES, MACEDO, 2011; LOPES, OLIVEIRA, OLIVEIRA, 2018). The following interview was proposed and conducted by two Brazilian researchers who also work in the field of discourse theory (BURITY, 2010, 2014; OLIVEIRA, 2018; OLIVEIRA, OLIVEIRA, MESQUITA, 2013) and who have been reading and debating Glynos' writings for a long time. The interview seeks to explore, in particular, the possible contributions and analytical strategies

associated with critical fantasy studies and their implications for the investigation of phenomena related to neoliberalism, political identification and the emergence of new conservative movements in the field of education.

Gustavo Oliveira

Jason, in recent years you have been discussing the emergence of a specific field of research that you have called *Critical Fantasy Studies*. What does this field consist of? How does it relate to the field of discourse theory and how do you see its importance, its value to the analysis of the contemporary political and social scene?

Jason Glynos

Ok, well, in one way I think of *Critical Fantasy Studies* as a kind of frontier in discourse theory, representing one of several possible ‘research avenues’ being explored and critically developed by scholars inspired by discourse theory and related research programmes. So one can think of other frontiers of discourse theory linked, for example, to populism, the economy, or new materialism. I have been involved in exploring these other frontiers too of course, but, as a frontier, critical fantasy studies appeals to me because it draws together two strands in discourse theory that have always interested me: on the one hand psychoanalysis, and on the other discourse analysis. Although I’m not yet convinced ‘critical fantasy studies’ is the right name for what I have in mind, or what intuitions exactly I wish to capture through such a name (I am still struggling with this), I could say that critical fantasy studies represents a way of marking out a space within which to bring together the insights of psychoanalysis and discourse analysis.

One key insight animating the turn to critical fantasy studies obviously has something to do with the concept of fantasy and, through this, the notion of the unconscious. What fantasy tries to capture is this idea of *enjoyment* and *overinvestment* (enjoyment is here understood in the way the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan understands enjoyment – as *jouissance*, which is not reducible to simple pleasure, but includes within its scope also the idea of pleasure in pain). Sometimes in everyday language, we tend to oppose fantasy to reality, and to think that fantasy is really a falsehood. A psychoanalytic understanding of fantasy, however, does not oppose it to reality or to representational conceptions of truth. Instead, it aligns fantasy with *desire*. Fantasmatic narratives may of course misrepresent reality. But then again they may not. What is

crucial from a psychoanalytic point of view is the question of desire. And I would say that there is an awareness of this too in everyday uses of the term fantasy. In any case, this is what I find to be one of the most significant psychoanalytic insights associated with the turn to critical fantasy studies. And so I find the idea of fantasmatic overinvestment (the way we become gripped by certain norms and ideas and identities) a very useful device - a useful language - for thinking about problems of reform and transformation – whether social, economic, or political.

It could, for example, have very interesting insights to offer around not just *resistance* to change and transformation, but also its opposite: the *embrace* of change and transformation. And so while these are, you know, somewhat at odds with each other, both can be looked at through the filter of fantasy and enjoyment. Of course, the psychoanalytic language is not the only language that's available to talk about these things. There are many other languages with which you could probably try to unpack some of these insights: myth, utopia, rhetoric, etc. In my discussions with researchers in Brazil recently mention was made also of Derrida's 'hauntology' or William Connolly's idea of the 'resonance machine'².

But for me, critical fantasy studies, on account of its appeal to the *psychoanalytic* idea of fantasy, brings with it a set of other satellite concepts drawn from the psychoanalytic tradition, the most important of which is the idea of the unconscious. So fantasy is one way of playing around with, circling around, or drawing out insights linked to, the unconscious, as is the concept of enjoyment.

Other satellite concepts that come with it include drive and desire, and I could probably add here the symptom and also the concept of mourning, which is also a very fruitful concept from the point of view of critical fantasy studies. So I would say that the idea of resistance to change, or its opposite, rapid transformation, are very abstract problem domains that I think the notions of fantasy and enjoyment can help shed light on, making clear their relevance to questions of ideology. I think, therefore, that this conceptual framework allows us to tackle questions in and around ideology, something that the work of other scholars too have been at pains to draw out, such as Yannis Stavrakakis or Slavoj Žižek³.

Gustavo Oliveira

² For these concepts, see Derrida (1994) and Connolly (2008).

³ See, for example, Stavrakakis (1999) and Žižek (1989).

But in what sense should fantasy studies, in this perspective, be viewed as "critical studies"?

Jason Glynos

Ok, so far I have focused on the rationale underlying the use of the term *fantasy* in ‘critical fantasy studies’. What about the *critical* aspect of critical fantasy studies?

In a first approach the use of the term critical here acts for me as a kind of reminder that a large part of the motivation for engaging in these studies is to show that their analyses matter in one or another way from a critical point of view. But the idea of critique here is understood both *normatively*, in terms of the kind of concrete programs that might be promoted by certain sets of practices, but also *ethically*, at least the way it's understood in psychoanalytic terms. In fact a large part of my work with David Howarth⁴ and other colleagues over the last decade or so has been about drawing out in a more systematic way the implications of such a distinction, serving as another focal point in efforts to draw together insights from psychoanalysis and poststructuralist discourse analysis.

So the explicit appeal to ‘critical’ in ‘critical fantasy studies’ is a kind of reminder that this domain of research can and should be understood to be part of a broader project of critical empirical research.

Ok, finally, then, what about the term ‘studies’ as it appears in ‘critical fantasy studies’? This I would say opens up a whole other area in which to explore the importance and value of linking psychoanalysis and discourse analysis in our explorations of ‘the contemporary political and social scene’, as you put it in your opening question. Why? Because the idea of ‘studies’ forces onto the agenda questions about research strategy and method.

In other words: *how* should we study fantasies critically? And here I would say that there are different ways of approaching this sort of question. For example, we can we can try to locate the operation of fantasies at different levels. We can think about locating fantasies at the level of policies and policy practices, or we can think about locating fantasies at the level of organizations and organizational practices, when, for example, we are concerned to understand how policies become implemented, institutionalized, or resisted.

⁴ See Glynos and Howarth (2007, 2018) and also Howarth (2013).

I think that these fantasies can be located at each of these different levels and we can also find resonances between these levels, as well as connections with broader cultural and national narratives. That is a first attempt at thinking about research strategy - locating, in other words, fantasy as the object of analysis at the appropriate level of abstraction. But then the analysis itself also needs a set of methodological tools.

Gustavo Oliveira

What, then, would be the most appropriate methodological tools for the critical study of social and political fantasies?

Jason Glynos

When I speak of method, here, I don't mean it in an overly prescriptive sense – more as a way to indicate ‘direction of travel’ in relation to our empirical material. In a first approach we could say that there are different ways that you can *analyze* the corpus of material, and there are also different ways you can *generate* the corpus that is then analyzed. So there are methods and ways of thinking about the analysis of material. And there are also ways of thinking about how the corpus is produced in the first place. And obviously, from a psychoanalytic point of view, there's lots that can be said about both of these. Rich reflections of this sort, then, can contribute to the ‘studies’ component of ‘critical fantasy studies’.

In fact, there is already considerable literature devoted to these sorts of question. ‘Psychosocial studies’ and ‘psychosocial methods’ are now relatively common terms, which explicitly signal an effort to bring insights about psychoanalysis to debates in and around methodology. There are such things as ‘free association interviews’, which are supposed to resonate with the way that we think about free association in the context of the clinic.

Obviously, these are not the same thing. The clinical context and the social studies context are very different. Nevertheless, there is a principle here that can be productive in both contexts, about creating an environment in which you can produce material that has a ‘floating’ character, that is not so restricted by one’s attempt to impose order, either as an analysand or as an interviewee.

In the clinic, as in the social studies context of a free association interview or free association focus group, the idea is – to put in Freudian terms – to try and catch the ego ‘off

guard'. The ego tries to control things and to impose a certain order, and what the 'facilitator' tries to do is create an environment which is relatively 'safe', let's say, in which you can become 'at ease' and 'honest' in relation to vulnerability, enabling you say things that in other environments you might find difficult to say or to become aware of things that were only vaguely intuited before. Now, obviously, there are different ways in which this sort of thing can be operationalized, raising important ethical issues that we are familiar with in relation to 'standard' interviews and focus groups.

So all I'm trying to say here is that critical fantasy studies, insofar as it brings into focus a set of themes and issues around questions of research strategy and method, can produce some very rich and productive insights worth taking seriously.

Gustavo Oliveira

How do you see the current situation of the education system in the UK and its relation to the European and the international scene?

Jason Glynos

Ok. So there's a question about educational practices, and the educational regime more generally, in Europe, as compared to the UK, which is a big question, not least because there are many different layers here. For example, we can think of different levels of education and differences within each of these levels: secondary education, primary education, tertiary education, etc.

Of course I think there are some resonances between the kind of developments and reforms we find in Britain and other European nations (think of the 'free school' idea imported into Britain from Sweden, with very problematic consequences), which is not to say that there are also not very profound differences in implementation and understanding. There are resonances in the sense that there are some very similar imperatives imposed on our practice as educationalists. And I mean that not just at a higher education level, but also at a secondary education level. Largely this gets cashed out in terms of targets and a steady stream of new iterations of the so-called performance management governance regime. And we can understand this governance regime as a *neoliberal* governance regime, especially if we see neoliberalism through the prism of competition, a neoliberal 'govern-mentality' being one in which

competition is elevated into a principle of governance, one that can be readily internalized. Targets and performance management structures are ways in which the logic of competition becomes operationalized.

Of course the logic of competition is performed in different contexts: a secondary education context, a higher education context, a specific country or cultural context etc. So that in the end we have not one logic of competition but many different logics of competition (in the plural). In some countries, for instance, there's a stronger presence of unions and that means that there are sites in which resistances can be constructed and battles fought in a way that would be more difficult to do in the absence of these organizations. So different contexts give rise to important differences in the way competition practices are performed. Nevertheless, we can insist on there also being important 'family resemblances' across different contexts.

Gustavo Oliveira

About this topic, you and David Howarth have addressed in some of your work the issue of neoliberal reforms in the UK education system. In a couple of recent papers, especially working in collaboration with Claudia Lapping⁵, you have also addressed the role of fantasies in school life and teachers' work. How do you see the link between these two levels of analysis? Can critical fantasy studies also help to understand the logics of educational politics in the contemporary globalized world?

Jason Glynos

Well, I've already tried to say something about what is happening in the British and European educational context from the point of view of 'clear and present' neoliberalizing tendencies. What, then, is the added value of a critical fantasy studies approach?

One way of seeing this is to ask how fantasy (and associated satellite concepts in the psychoanalytic tradition) can help us better understand the way competition logics are institutionalized or resisted. And one can see this at both a policy level and an organizational level.

At a policy level, we can ask how our policies around higher education or secondary education are formulated and debated. So observing or studying the debates that take place

⁵ See Lapping and Glynos (2018, 2019).

within parliament, for example, can offer us insights into the kind of language and discursive frames, that appear to be very prominent, very appealing to policy makers.

One question might then be: where does this language come from? Which is a kind of a genealogical question that arises at this level of analysis, pointing to discussions and debates in other sites within the state but also in civil society: government, other political parties, the civil service, various think tanks, and so on, always looking to see how assumptions linked to competition and targets inform those debates and discussions.

However, beyond these sorts of discussions and debates – which are ‘public-official’ in character – there are also wider cultural assumptions that can be said to give a certain energy to these discussions and debates. These are a little trickier to identify of course, but my feeling is that these are crucial in understanding the ‘grip’ of certain images and ideals we have about competition and targets, and which moves us in the direction of fantasy. They are trickier to identify because, almost by definition, fantasmatic elements are not necessarily things that you’re going to find very easily within the context of formal, public-official debates. Nevertheless, it is possible to find clear evidence of these elements in the way that people talk about these public-official debates, whether in the broadsheet press, the tabloid press, various newscasts and commentaries, not to mention social media, all typically sites occupying the margins of public-official discourse. As a very rough first approximation, then, in our attempt justify qualifying an element as fantasmatic, we can ask ‘does it resist public-official disclosure’ (what I call the DIRPOD test – I know, a rather ugly term!). And this exploration includes looking at the way such debates are thematized in various cultural productions: novels, TV series, cinema, etc. Precisely those outlets where one is likely to find material which could not appear without difficulty in more public-official fora.

So I think this sketches out a very rich terrain of investigation, with very interesting analyses that can be done from a critical fantasy point of view, about identifying resonances between the formal debates that are taking place in the policy arena and the storylines and assumptions evident in the wider mediatic and cultural arena. It suggest we might attempt to map out those resonances and show how particular collective fantasies and the islands of enjoyment they make possible have a role to play in accounting for the ‘grip’ of certain policy ideals, especially the ideal of competition.

So much for a critical fantasy studies located at the macro-level, concerned with questions of educational policy and their links to wider cultural themes. We can now consider how such a critical fantasy studies approach might be relevant to research at a meso level, concerning particular educational organizations and institutions, regarding for example how certain policies are being implemented. After all, some of these policies will be implemented with relative ease and some will be resisted. And this enables us to pose some questions: Under what conditions are such policies simply rolled out without any resistance? Under what conditions are they resisted? Under what conditions do we reach a compromise?

Posing questions in such a conditional way is important, because it highlights the performative and articulatory dimension of reform and transformation, and makes visible the horizon of alternatives. It opens up a horizon of alternatives because even after a policy has been decided, there are different ways these can be implemented or 'performed'. And I would say that, again, fantasy has a role to play here, because people who are in the institution, who are in the workplace, who come into the workplace - they do not necessarily leave their personal fantasies at the door. And so we have to assume that people's fantasies have a role to play in the way they respond to the announcement and introduction of new norms of practice in their organization.

Fantasies matter when we want to understand how the norms of an organizational practice are performed. But I don't mean just fantasies that we bring from our own personal life. These matter of course, they do play a role. There's no doubt about that. But we should not overlook fantasies which we co-construct with our colleagues in the workplace for example, and that tend therefore to have a more institutional character, let's say, connected to the organization itself. These too can become important over time.

I would say that some of the work that I've been doing in a UK context with my colleague Claudia Lapping takes seriously precisely these personal and organizational fantasies. I have benefited greatly from my collaboration with Claudia, because her expertise lies in the field of education and education policy, but also because she has a very strong interest in questions of methodology. A shared intuition and interest in the role that fantasies play in the workplace brought us together in thinking about these things and about developing different techniques of intervention and doing interviews and focus groups using some of these psychoanalytic insights – the sorts of psycho-social methods I mentioned earlier.

Gustavo Oliveira

Could you talk a little more about your work in collaboration with Claudia Lapping?

Jason Glynos

I am happy to say something about this research project, but I have to be cautious because I do not want to reveal too much about the subjects involved, who are trainee teachers engaged in a primary education context. The project centred around the idea of remuneration: how labour is recognized and rewarded. And we wanted to explore how questions of desire and fantasy played a role in the way professionals – in this case teachers – engaged with the norms governing their workplace practice. The psychoanalytic intuition animating this inquiry was linked to the widely noted observation that people –in Britain at least – generally find it difficult to talk about pay or how much they earn, these kinds of things being tied up with questions of desire and fantasy. When, however, these desires overdetermine workplace relations, particularly relations governed by norms that appear oppressive or unjust, it raises both substantive and methodological issues about how to investigate these relations and norms. While many participants felt quite dissatisfied with their work environment, feeling very much under pressure, often accompanied by very high stress levels, others appeared to thrive under conditions of the new public management culture, with all its targets.

So this is the research context. And I can give you a brief indication of the sorts of method we used in exploring the question of remuneration in the educational context, at least as regards trainee teachers and how they saw their professional identity. It involved conducting an initial free association focus group session to which we invited a whole bunch of trainee teachers to talk about remuneration. That was it. After saying something about the idea of free association, we simply asked participants to talk about remuneration (and anything else they felt relevant) amongst themselves. And we then remained in the margins, just listening, and only very occasionally making small interventions. The idea then was to take this material – the material produced in this focus group - and to pick out what we thought were interesting, odd, maybe repeated, terms ('signifiers'), which we would then use to provoke free associations in our subsequent individual interviews.

And it was there that we tended to find very interesting, sometimes very powerful, investments in some of the terms which were quite commonly invoked in collective discussions,

but which carried individually-specific affective investments. We could see that there was a plausible case to be made about how these personal-biographical investments had a material effect on how they comported themselves in relation to workplace norms and relations.

For example, one person's free associations to the notion of 'vocation' quickly led to religiously-inflected thoughts about sacrifice, that appeared to play a role in this person's tolerating difficult workplace conditions that others may have found oppressive and unjust. Another person's free associations lead to thoughts linked to paternal injunctions about the need to accept the rules of the game, but play them well and with confidence. And so on. So this research reveals not just that people can respond very differently to what appears to be a similar environment, but also the subjective-biographical conditions under which these responses vary.

In many ways, then, we are addressing the question: under what conditions do people affirm or resist change? Posed in this way, we start to add other layers. We can point not just to the personal-biographical fantasy of workers, employees, or professionals. We can also point to fantasies that are more collective in character, linked to fantasies co-constructed and shared across colleagues and that are specific to a particular organization and institution. Critical fantasy studies can be mobilized to investigate this overdetermined mix of factors and tensions, to better understand differential responses and their conditions of possibility. Such an approach is interesting not just because of the insights generated by the theoretical perspectives it brings to bear, but also because the methods of investigation it spawns, such as the free association interviews and focus groups, tend to produce very interesting streams of thought and insights at an empirical level that would not normally appear in the context of standard interview processes. So I'll just leave it at that.

Joanildo Burity

I'd like to pick up on the co-constructive aspect that you mention, which is not always about personal fantasies, and which I think points to another dimension of the Foucauldian view of neoliberalism, which is connected with competition, but it's not exactly about competition – it has to do with the culture of assessment.

This audit culture, which developed very strongly in the early 90s in the development field. The idea of NPM (New Public Management) - monitoring and assessment evaluation and so on, which slowly fed into the educational system itself, certainly in a Brazilian context. And

I'm thinking here about higher education, postgraduate education inclusive, when a whole system of practices developed to systematically gather information about what people are doing in departments. What is interesting here is that there was nobody actually pressing for that auditing system to be put in place. But it came out of this idea that this is how we could make our work more effective, a way we could regulate ourselves and in this way demonstrate we can be autonomous in the way that intellectual and academic life is supposed to be. And the end result of that has been a very intricate web of accountability assessment data production, which tends to create a growing pressure about performance, about, you know, effectiveness, which, of course, links up with competition, but is more about co-construction.

So we now live and work in an academic context where we constantly need to show we are able to do things well and to be accountable, and this has produced an environment which appears – rather ironically perhaps – inimical to the conduct of research. So how would you see this kind of scenario from both the perspective of your reading of neoliberalism and of your use of the concept of fantasy?

Jason Glynos

I entirely agree that this culture of assessment and self-imposed target-setting is related – but not reducible – to competition. In my view NPM and similar audit regimes are very particular – albeit dominant – ways of operationalizing the principle of competition as a principle of governance. As you say, there is a lot of data here that's being gathered. But it's the nature and the way that the data is being gathered and manipulated that matters. In an audit regime like the one we are experiencing, there is always an imperative to convert this data into units that are commensurable and thus comparable.

Joanildo Burity

Yes. And create classifications.

Jason Glynos

Yes, and especially rankings. Because the creation of league tables and rankings are, you know, partly what's at stake in this culture of assessment. We're getting assessed all the time. Will we be number one or number two? Are we in the top 10? Are we in the top 20 or the top

100? This is everywhere now, whether we talk about secondary schools, primary schools, higher education, or in any number of other fields, including health, etc.

And this is where your point about co-construction becomes critical, because it raises questions about how autonomy and systems of accountability should be understood and constructed. There are various related angles to this. This first one is about complicity. To what extent do we, as academics, become willing agents in our own oppression? In the name of autonomy and self-governance, do we end up accepting too readily regimes of governance that militate *against* academic freedom and the kind of exploratory and experimental forms of research and teaching that academic work is supposed to be about? So this raises a question about different types of co-construction and what our role in this process of co-construction should be: more or less democratic forms of co-construction, for example.

Another related angle concerns not the *process* of co-construction itself (whether more or less democratic) but the *object* of co-construction. This is because different forms of accountability regimes (conceived as objects of co-construction) appear to promote tendencies that push in a progressive or regressive direction. Some may argue that *all* governance regimes founded on the principle of competition are regressive, for example. Some may argue that what is problematic is the *particular way* the principle of competition is operationalized through techniques of quantification or monetization.

Take quantification. It is easy to see the appeal of quantification, since it is obvious that comparisons and rankings are efficiently conducted through numbers. Quantification makes sense from the point of view of commensuration, comparison, and thus competitive rankings. In this sense, numbers have a kind of universal appeal. No matter how different things appear to be, you can attempt to assign a number to them and in doing so, bring them all within a world in which comparisons and rankings are easily made. It is a very simple and very powerful way of promoting competition. It's very easy to visualize where you are in the competitive ranking business, and that's important for many, many reasons, however much one might disagree with those reasons. And one of the more important reasons for constructing league tables is to find a 'rational' way of distributing funds, particularly state funding for education, whose pot of money invariable is subject to the shrinking pressures of austerity imperatives.

Or take monetization. It is easy to see the appeal of monetization, too, particularly from the point of view of funders who wish to demonstrate 'value for money'. This means that

charities and other voluntary organizations often find themselves under pressure to express in financial terms the goods they produce for the community. And that's very often about transparency. So if I'm a funding body I have to make sure that I'm accountable for the way I distribute funds, especially tax payers' money. So that means that when I give money to an organization to do what we think is important work, I want to make sure that they're doing it properly or that they actually produce the outcomes they claim they're going to be producing. Otherwise, I neglect my duties. I'm not being accountable.

In this context it is very interesting to consider the development of particular assessment techniques that are considered by some to be rather progressive. The valuation practice called Social Return on Investment is one such approach, which insists we take seriously the fact that many things which don't have a readily available market value, do nevertheless have value, and so therefore we must attach a monetary value to those things too, in order to make them count! But of course there's a question mark here about how the process of quantifying and monetizing itself, which is designed to give value to things which we would otherwise neglect, participates in a system which then makes it more difficult to 'properly' appreciate or recognize the value of things that don't have a market value. This takes us back to the 'complicity' issue I mentioned earlier.

Joanildo Burity

But how can the concept of fantasy be productive in broadening and deepening the analysis of this scenario?

Jason Glynos

Having said all this (I hope what I'm saying makes some sense), I also feel it is important to point out that there is nothing wrong with targets, quantification, monetization, or competition *per se*! And it is here that questions of subjectivity, identification, and fantasy can find a place in better understanding the way auditing practices are performed, resisted, or progressively inflected.

Take competition. You can think about all sorts of competition in many different fields. We have been talking about competition in the academic and in the educational fields. But one can also think about the field of sports, which tends to be all about competition, though it does

not appear to raise the sorts of worries we have been talking about – at least not to the same degree. And yet there are similarities across the different fields in the way people talk about competition that can easily be linked to questions of fantasy of being the ‘top dog’ for example. This is a very clear fantasy of mastery and control. But it's not just within sports. It can also be found in the academic field. How invested are we in such a fantasy, individually and collectively? To what extent does such investment, often unconsciously so, make it difficult to resist league table and ranking trends that also offer people ready-made short-cuts when making decisions about services in a context of increasingly busy lives?

Still, the idea that competition and the fantasies that underpin it can vary from individual to individual, from collective to collective, from field to field, from culture to culture, from context to context, means that these performances should always be understood to be plural. It means we can ask what other ways there are of relating to others other than purely in terms of this ranking? Or are there ways of thinking about competition that don't necessarily mean that there are also losers?

The idea of competition for me is interesting because it's often assumed that there is one particular logic of competition, and I see this reification tendency on both sides of the political divide: the left and the right. So perhaps we should insist – very much in line with the fundamental assumptions of poststructuralist discourse theory – that there are many varieties and many ways of thinking about competition. For example, we can readily think about competition in a way that, you know, I can exert my individual capacities to promote and develop who I am to my full potential, but to understand this as a way of contributing to the collective good. My competitor may win and be awarded due recognition, but while I lose, I don't get punished. I am still treated as a valued member of the community, I still have access to resources that enable me to realise my potential, and I still want to compete because I know it is a means of reaching my full potential and doing so in concert with others as part of a broader collective endeavor. It's a very different way of conceptualizing and understanding the principle of competition that doesn't get talked about very much. Sometimes you do see it. It does appear. And people do talk about it in those ways, but it's quite marginal. And it can find expression in a wide range of domains, particularly those which are traditionally thought of in social insurance terms, such as in health or in pensions, etc. This image of competition, of course, contrasts with an image of individual

competition in which the winner takes all, and in which the consequence of participating and losing is that you also lose support.

Joanildo Burity

A zero-sum game.

Jason Glynos

Right. So, it's very interesting therefore to ask about, and to investigate – as a topic of research – the *varieties* of competition practices that can be performed. You can imagine a research project exploring the varieties of competition practices and also the kinds of fantasies that underpin these different forms and modalities of competition. Clearly the "winner takes all" approach to competition has a very potent and highly invested mastery fantasy intertwined with it. But there are other ways of thinking about competition, as I've suggested. So that could be part of a critical fantasy studies project. You can imagine this being part of that kind of a project.

Gustavo Oliveira

We've talked about neoliberalism, the question of competition and the question of assessment, and how this all helps to create a different environment for the way that professional identities are constructed and organisational life is governed. But more recently, what we have also seen – at least here in Brazil – is an articulation, a growing emphasis on the links, between these neoliberal logics and neoconservative social and political movements that resort to a fantasy that looks back to more stable and harmonious times embodied by a specifically Christian unity – times when traditional family values prevailed and times when society was not characterize by difference and division, and so on.

Neoliberalism with its stress on competition, but also neoliberalism, thought of as an economic discourse, appears now to be strongly articulated with a new conservatism, a moral and social neoconservatism, in a very powerful way, with profound effects in the educational field too.

Joanildo Burity

For instance, some progressive views on educational content have come under attack from these more conservative quarters because they see such progressive ideas as a cause of fragmentation, threatening social cohesion, and so on. Antagonistic frontiers have thus been drawn in the field of education between the more progressive pedagogies and contents on the one hand, and the more conservative views of what and how things should be taught.

Gustavo Oliveira

Yes. Now, do you see any of this coalescing of neoliberal practices with social and political neoconservative thought in the UK context or in European context for instance, that you are more familiar with? How can we understand how such apparently different things come together? And again, how do you see the fantasy approach shedding light on these matters?

Jason Glynos

Well, from a political point of view, I can certainly see the worry and urgency underpinning such a question, not just in light of what is happening in Brazil, but also in the US, and in some parts in Europe, though in Europe – particularly central and eastern parts of Europe – the link between conservatism and neoliberalism tends to pass through the prism of immigration and nationalism. And although the surge of social conservatism that you have in mind is not so prominent in Britain now, it is certainly something that is not foreign to the British context, looked at historically. One could say that something similar was taking place during the Thatcher era – similar in the sense that there was an attempt to forge a new type of hegemony by linking together free market ideology with social and moral conservatism, at least as far as questions of sexual identity were concerned.

Anne-Marie Smith's discourse-analytic work⁶ on the New Right discourse of 1980s Britain is instructive in this regard, part of which focuses precisely on some hegemonic struggles around how questions of sex – homosexuality in particular - entered the school curriculum and how they were to be taught (through the infamous 'section 28' debates). What is interesting to note here is how such morally conservative struggles appeared to underpin – and give affective significance to – a wider hegemonic struggle - spearheaded by Thatcher's government - to weaken the authority of local governments and unions and thus weaken resistance to their efforts

⁶ For example, Smith (1994).

to drive through reforms to downsize the state and expand the private sector by selling off state assets and privatizing public utilities. Still, this link between free market economics and social conservatism was specific to the British case, since the role of religion – though not absent – did not figure as prominently as it does in Brazil or the US now.

What all these cases highlight of course is how different discursive elements can be linked together in very different ways, depending on the socio-historical and political context and the skill and imagination of agents tasked with forging such links. After all, if you open up the market and you allow the principle of competition free reign, you might – always under certain conditions of course – expect a kind of ‘equalization’ of civic positions and identities, since what matters tends to be not what you look like or what ethnic, sexual, religious or other identity you profess, but your purchasing capacity. Think of the expressions we have to capture this idea: the grey pound, the pink pound, and so on.

So from a theoretical point of view, the substance of your question quite neatly illustrates the fundamental importance of the category of ‘articulation’ in discourse theory. What we know from Laclau, Mouffe and the Althusserian tradition through the categories of articulation and overdetermination is that many things which appear *prima facie* contradictory can be brought together under certain conditions. The question then becomes: under what conditions can these be brought together through the practice of articulation? From a discourse theory perspective, this is where we start to see interesting things happen.

We can also think of ‘resonance’ as another useful concept for thinking about how links are made between different sorts of code – religious codes or economic codes, for example. I mentioned Bill Connolly earlier in relation to the idea of the ‘resonance machine’, which owes a lot to Deleuze and Guattari’s work, and who argues that we can understand how evangelical Christianity gets ‘hooked’ to free market fundamentalism if we focus on the way these discourses, while admittedly very different from one another, nevertheless ‘resonate’ with one another through a common set of resentments or – better – a kind of Nietzschean *ressentiment* aimed at a threatening big State or a threatening sexual deviance.

Gustavo Oliveira

Would the classic dialogue between discourse theory and Judith Butler's work still be viable and productive in the context of this debate?

Jason Glynos

Where there is articulation, there is also often resonance, and I would add: fantasy and enjoyment. And so here again I see a role for critical fantasy studies in better understanding the way discursive articulations are forged and the way we come to affirm certain outlooks and identities, including gender and sexual identities. Judith Butler's early work on *Gender Trouble*⁷ of course was seminal in emphasizing the potentially infinite fluidity of gender identity performances. A turn to fantasy and enjoyment, however, seeks to emphasize how our identities can also often get 'stuck'. Resentment of the Other becomes an inverted expressions of the fixity of the Self. Hating the Other becomes a way of stabilizing a sense of Self. And this image of the Self is connected to a specific fantasmatic narrative and the enjoyments this makes possible, for example, narratives of a nostalgic past, or some other fantasmatic narrative. So I would say that such over-investments, can have a role to play in trying to understand how and why certain norms and ideals can exercise such a powerful grip over subjects who are involved in movements that defend the *status quo* or indeed who seek to overturn the *status quo*.

Which raises another big question: What are the conditions under which we can imagine transforming our relation to fantasmatic narratives and thus changing the modality of our enjoyment? (I say transforming our *relation* to fantasmatic narratives, not *abandoning* our fantasies, since we can clearly not do without fantasies, they being central to our capacity to desire and to our imagination).

So I will close with a reference to one other, final, psychoanalytic category, which I find particularly helpful in thinking through this question, namely, the category of mourning (again, here, I have learnt a lot from the work of Butler, Freud, and Lacan⁸). The category of mourning is helpful for at least two reasons. First, it appears perfectly suited to becoming a key part of critical fantasy studies. Why? In part this is because what accounts for the grip of fantasy is not so much the content of fantasy so much as the fact that its content and significance always appear to remain 'between the lines' and thus rather opaque to us. The paradox of fantasy is that it appears to dwell at the margins of our deliberations and thoughts, always just out of reach, while it also appears to be absolutely central in defining who we are. Psychoanalysis suggests

⁷ See Butler (1990).

⁸ On this topic, see Derrida (1994) and Butler (2004).

that the grip of a fantasmatic narrative tends to lose its force when it becomes articulated *as* a fantasmatic narrative. My claim here is that the concept of mourning is helpful not only in thinking about this process of fantasy construction (since it concerns the loss of something important: our identity supports), but also (and this takes me to my second reason) in posing questions about the conditions under which mourning can take place, to be explored in relation to state-specific sites, as well as – perhaps especially, and very much in line with Gramsci’s way of thinking – sites in civil society. These questions, which are ultimately also critical questions of both normative and ethical import, are as pertinent for dealing with collective fantasies about sexual and economic identities, ideals and discourses as with individual fantasies.

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