

CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA: APPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, POSSIBILITIES

Derek Hook
Department of Psychology
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3
WITS 2050
e-mail: 018hod@muse.wits.ac.za

1. INTRODUCTION.

Critical psychology - to my mind at least - revolves around one central (and fairly basic) tenet - *that psychology is a political tool*. Bulhan makes this point at the beginning of his (1985) **Frantz Fanon and the psychology of oppression**, by means of a pointed comparison between the careers of Fanon and Verwoed:

“The two men ... were psychologists who put to practice their profession in ways that made history and affected the lives of millions ... Verwoed was a staunch white supremacist, a Nazi sympathizer, an avowed anti-Semite, and a leading architect of apartheid ... Fanon, in contrast, was a relentless champion of social justice who, when barely 17 ... volunteered for the forces attempting the liberation of France from Nazi liberation” (p3).

This is an important contribution to the socio-political history of psychology in that it leaves little doubt as to the *political utility* of psychology, as either instrument of oppression, *or* as potentially enabling means of progressive politics. One word of caution though: this comparison should not be taken to imply that psychology’s involvement in politics is merely circumstantial, arbitrary, opportunistic. As Bulhan (1985) goes on to make abundantly clear, and as critical psychology *should* assert whenever possible, psychology is always - even in its most everyday and mundane forms - *political*. In many ways in fact, and depending on the radicalism of one’s critique, this may be not only psychology’s most important function - generating and cementing kinds of politics - but also *the* motivating objective behind its initial emergence as a disciplinary practice. [In this respect see particularly Foucault (1977) and Rose (1991, 1995), but also Cushman (1990, 1992)].

Just as critical psychology endeavours to “play up” the very *political* nature of psychology, so the traditional, or mainstream practices and applications of psychology have, historically, attempted to do just the opposite, to “play down” this nature. Hence Hayes’ (1989) understatement: “The study of ideology has not been a central issue in the history of psychology” (p84). The link here - between psychology’s omission of ideology as an important focus of study, and psychology’s own immanently (yet elided) political nature - may not yet seem quite clear. Hayes’ further comments help articulate this link. There

could, Hayes (1989) claims, be at least two possible ways of addressing the issue of ideology in psychology, one which at basis is *critical*, another which at basis is *substantive*: "The critical dimension refers to the knowledge claims and the ontological status of psychology as a science ... The substantive dimension refers to the operations of ideology at the level of the individual" (Hayes, 1989:84).

Whereas the critical dimension would interrogate psychology across the science/ideology dialectic - engaging psychology as a particular *politics of knowledge* - the substantive dimension would examine the theoretical and formal constitution of the *subject* of psychological theory and research - engaging psychology as a particular *politics of subjectivity*. It is on these bases that Hayes (1989:84) makes the appeal that "[T]he whole question and place of politics in psychology ... certainly ... justifies a more coherent and rigorous analysis "

A politics of knowledge and subjectivity.

Why are these (that is, the dual foci of the politics of knowledge and subjectivity) *the* target areas for the analysis of the politics of psychology? Well, because they are, ostensibly at least, the most effective means of eliding the politics of psychology. By presenting itself as a science, psychology would pretend that it is free of politics, because science is assumed to be, *by definition*, value-free (Hayes, 1989). Likewise, by omitting to provide an account of the processes whereby an individual becomes the "subject" of and for ideology, psychology has effectively isolated the individual from the societal, the intrasubjective from the ideological, and of course, the psychological from the political.

What are the implications of these two lines of critique? That psychology *does* produce certain ideologically-loaded views of the world. That psychology does produce powerful effects in its subjects - such as the crippling of opportunities for political critique, explanation and action - by focussing on the individual, the intrasubjective and the psychological, at the exclusion of all else. This latter critique, of the isolation of the psyche from other elements of the greater social sphere deserves elaboration. This isolation is particularly questionable, because it precludes the possibility that the facts of social and political power may precede - or even *constitute* - the subject, rather than the reverse being the case. Taking this position is to risk missing that, as Hayes (1989) puts it, "the category and notion of the individual itself...[may be] constituted by particular, historically situated, ideological discourses" (p85). Hence Hayes' argument that this "subject" of psychological theory and research "needs to be de-centred from its illusory coherence of an integrated psychological unity, or some essential core personality" (Hayes, 1989:84-85). These are the two most vital lines of critique - to my mind at least - that critical psychology concerns itself with. In many ways in fact, critical psychology, in its entirety, seems little more than the elaboration and substantiation, in different ways, of exactly these two critical positions.

As intimated by the foregoing discussion, this special issue of **PINS** focuses on the theme of critical psychology as it is practised in South Africa¹. A key forum for work of this sort in

¹Hence my selection of opening references. Bulhan's commentary clearly points to the power of psychology in the history of South Africa. Hayes' (1989) comments, on the other hand, appeared 12 years ago in a South African context (the **South African Journal of Psychology**) when the ground-swell of what was to become "critical psychology" was gathering momentum. These comments were to prove prescient of the overarching priorities of a South African critical psychology to come.

the local context - much like PINS itself - has been the Annual South Africa Qualitative Methods Conference (QMC). As such, five of the following papers (those of Hayes (*Marxism and psychology*) Shefer (*Ordering gender: Revisiting the role of psychology*), Hook (*Counter-knowledge, criticism, aesthetics and academic disobedience*), Collins (*How the social psychologist got his facts: A post-colonial tale*) and Hook & Vrdoljak (*Fear and loathing in Northern Johannesburg: The security park as heterotopia*) stem from the 2000 QMC, appropriately entitled "What is critical in critical psychology?". Kometsi's briefing constitutes a report on the same event. Two additional papers, Gerhard Maré's *From "traditional authority" to "diversity management": Some recent writing on managing the workforce* and van Vlaerenden's *Psychology in developing countries: People-centered development and local knowledge*, whilst not presented at this conference, certainly share - and importantly extend - the over-riding interests and objectives of critical psychology as applied in the South African context.

In what follows I will hope to avoid simply providing an expository definition of what critical psychology is; to do so would be somewhat redundant given that such attempts have been undertaken in detail elsewhere (see Fox & Prillelensky, 1997; Ibanez & Iniguez, 1997; Parker, 1999; Prillelensky, 1999). What I will do however - as way of providing something of an introduction to the topic - is to offer a succinct description of four basic tenets of critical psychology as summarized by Parker (1999). I will refer to the content of the papers collected here as means of animating these tenets. Furthermore, in addition to Parker's descriptions of what critical psychology ostensibly *is*, I will add some of my own critical speculations on what critical psychology perhaps should, or *could* be, as way of prompting a series of critical questions I will pose to critical psychology further on in this paper.

2. ILLUSTRATING BASIC TENETS.

Striking a critical distance from psychology.

What is critical psychology? Well, perhaps most basically, (and on the basis of what was suggested above), one might suggest that critical psychology is a series of *critical* engagements with the kinds of knowledge, practice and subjectivity produced by orthodox psychology. As reasonable an answer as this might appear, it is in fact one which tells us very little. Surely any disciplinary practice "worth its salt" should, *by definition* be critical of its own produced knowledges and practices? For any intellectual pursuit to have attained the status of a "discipline" in the first place, it would need to have operationalized such a critical function within even its most basic activities; it needs to know on what grounds to disqualify certain knowledge-claims and on what grounds to protect or legitimize certain others. (Likewise, any disciplinary practice needs know on what basis to sanction and on what basis to preclude certain kinds of practice). This however, is exactly the point. There is an important distinction to be made here. On the one hand we a discipline which disqualifies contesting knowledges and which perpetuates those which sustain it *without fundamentally calling itself into question*. On the one hand we have a set of critiques which obeys no "holy cows", which is willing to take self-critique and self-reflexivity to their logical conclusion, *beyond the requirements of sustaining the discipline itself* - on the other. The distinction, in short, is between a discipline which is critical in a self-perpetuating way, and a set of critiques which are critical beyond potential concerns of the possible demise of the discipline in question.

One aspect of a definition then - which is at the same time an implicit challenge to how critical psychology is sometimes conceptualized (cf. Fox & Prillelensky, 1997; Prillelensky,

1999) - is that critical psychology is, or should be, fundamentally about the criticism of psychology, *above and beyond any necessary allegiance to the discipline itself*. My concern here is simply this: if critical psychology cares to articulate its agendas and concerns in line with improving, developing or advancing psychology in its mainstream forms, then it risks being assimilated into mainstream psychology before it has even begun. This is a cautioning we will return to; it is also one that is necessarily introduced here - bracketing the discussion to follow - both as a way of “seeding” further criticism to come, and as a way of warning what critical psychology should *not* be.

The ideological functioning of psychology.

The first of Parker’s basic tenets bears a strong resemblance to aspects of Hayes’ (1989) above commentary. Parker claims: “Critical psychology ... is ... first of all *the systematic examination of how ... dominant accounts of ‘psychology’ operate ideologically and in the service of the power*”, such that “*some varieties of psychological action and experience are privileged over others*” (Parker, 1999:13, original emphasis). Parker prefaces this by stating that “the realm of psychology is wider and more deeply historically embedded [than we might imagine] ... We do not discover psychology but live and *produce* it” (1999:13).

Parker is right to insist that psychology has come to saturate our social and cultural understandings, to permeate our most basic understandings of self. He is likewise right to suggest a critical historicizing impulse as a corrective to the universalizing, naturalizing and essentializing tendencies of much psychology. There are essentially two critical injunctions here. The first is to draw attention to how implicitly and automatically we actively *psychologize* in day-to-day interactions and discourse. The second is to unsettle and “de-reify” exactly these kinds of understandings - to challenge their common-sense status with viable alternate accounts. In fact Parker’s second basic tenet of critical psychology flows directly from his first: “Critical psychology is ... *the study of the ways in which all varieties of psychology are culturally historically constructed and how alternative varieties of psychology may confirm or resist ideological assumptions in mainstream models*” (Parker, 1999:13, original emphasis).

A concrete example of the powerful and ideological use of a “common sense” psychology - and, how it may be resisted - is found in Maré’s *From “traditional authority” to “diversity management”*: *Some recent writing on managing the workforce*. Maré’s argument leaves little doubt as to the power-interests served by psychologized accounts of the “African workforce. A kind of “critical industrial psychology” - the paper presents a critique of the essentializing trends so omnipresent in the literature on so-called ‘African’ or “diversity” management. Such a “racialized essentialism” is not confined to literature alone, in fact for Maré it “lies close to the surface of much ... discussion and everyday common sense discourse in South Africa”.

Making brief recourse to history, Maré explains how the perceived psychological make-up of the migrant worker in apartheid was employed in “differentiated authority structures” so as to better enforce social control and productivity in the workplace. Linking currently popular explanations of “African difference”, such as decontextualized appropriations of notions of *ubuntu*, of “the extended African family” and “the African community”, to essentialized primordial notions of difference in apartheid (along cultural, spiritual, linguistic and ethnic grounds), Maré contends that the new industrial “psychologese” of “diversity” management is a reformulated means of extending authority within the workplace.

Undeniably driven by capitalist “bottom-line” demands of market competitiveness, such explanations reify “Africanness” whilst at the same time omitting any speculation on essential nature of the social identities of those occupying the upper echelons of industry.

Constructions of psychology and resistances to them.

Continuing a concern with the reification of ostensibly “immutable” - or rather, *essentialized* - differences, Shefer’s *Ordering gender: Revisiting the role of psychology* points to how psychology has reproduced and legitimated gender inequalities not only at the level of produced knowledge, but also at that of psychology’s concrete practices and its organizational structures. Pointing to the massive historical investment psychology has had in perpetuating the notion that men and women are “deeply different psychical beings”, Shefer goes on to entertain a variety of counter-arguments undermining the idea of a fixed, static, stable, unitary gender identity. In this way, whilst strongly rooted in the critical psychology endeavour, Shefer’s paper makes for a useful and accessible primer to key debates in gender identity politics. She ranges in her focus from the perspectives of social learning theory, developmental psychoanalysis and models of androgyny to the pro-difference arguments of feminists intent on arguing for the “specifically alternative feminine subject”. Whilst providing an important overview of the inherent problems both in de-emphasizing *and* exaggerating gender difference (the former obfuscates women’s “special needs”, the latter provides justification for differential treatment), Shefer also equips the reader with a series of alternative accounts that may - *strategically* - be used to oppose the universalizing, dichotomizing and essentialist trends of many of the mainstream and historical accounts of gender.

“Psychological culture”.

Parker’s account of critical psychology is one always ready to emphasize the easy interchange between popular culture and psychology, an interchange he evokes with the term “psychological culture”. The papers of Shefer and Mare both point to this dubious kind of “knowledge-sharing” through which various notions of psychology act as cultural resources, and through which ordinary (and often politically-questionable) explanations of people and behaviours are “digested” by academic psychology and then “regurgitated” back - in Parker’s (1999) terms - in the forms of “expert” psychological knowledge. A third characteristic of critical psychology for Parker is hence “*the exploration of the way everyday ‘ordinary psychology’ structures academic and professional work in psychology*” (1999:15, original emphasis). Similarly, a fourth characteristic revolves around paying considerable attention to “*the ways in which psychological culture operates beyond the boundaries of academic and professional practice*” (Parker, 1999:14, original emphasis). It is worth reiterating the importance of this bidirectional interchange of “psychological culture” in the terms of Parker’s own description:

“Commonsense in psychological culture contains all the things we ‘know’ most deeply about ourselves, and the things we feel to be unquestionably true. It is all the more misleading for that, however, and is suffused with ideological representations of the self and others that structure our seemingly spontaneous psychology Gender differences, racial peculiarities, anxieties about our bodies and other peoples’ sexualities each inform our psychology in ways that reproduce patterns of exclusion, pathology and power, and each is carried to us and through us by commonsense” (Parker, 1999:14).

What is hence called for is a profound sensitivity to how deeply penetrated the

psychological has been by the overt and subliminal (everyday) politics of social practice and discourse, and vice versa.

It is, however, important for Parker (1999), not only that we be aware of how popular notions and discourses flow into (and even structure) professional, academic, “scientific” psychology, but also that we remain on the “look out” for potential bases for resistance to these psychologized ideas, whether formal or informal. This attempt to “avoid the many ways that psychology lures us into thinking about people” (Parker, 1999:12) is exhibited both by Maré’s and Shefer’s papers, whether as an attack on the dispensing of racial stereotypes (even in so basic a form as to question: “Why should a black worker be so different to any other?”), or through the elaboration of a different (in this case post-structural) platform from which to approach questions of subjectivity.

External means of criticizing psychology.

Parker’s (1999) attention to “alternate forms” of criticism, to those kinds of activities that typically fall beyond the ambit of a “qualified” psychology, is extended by two papers in this collection, Collins’ *How the social psychologist got his facts: A Post-colonial tale*, and Hook’s *Counter-knowledge, criticism, aesthetics and academic disobedience*, both of which take to heart the attempt to foster a criticism of psychology from outside the domain of the discipline. Hook’s paper - drawing on the methodological and theoretical vocabulary of Foucault - furthers an argument on the importance of the criticism of “institutional knowledges” in psychology via recourse to multi-disciplinary research, the innovation of new methodological frameworks, the prioritization of new research subjects/objects, and the forging of critical alliances of aesthetic and academic practices. A further means of breaking the epistemological and ontological “set” of institutional knowledge comes with the attempt to produce effective “counter-knowledges” which appeal to the marginal domain of disqualified or local knowledge forms, and which are driven more strongly by the objectives of producing a *politics* than *truth*.

Furthermore, Hook also refers to the genealogical injunction to create “histories of the present” as an overarching thematic for the QMC series, referring as it does, to attempts to critically apprehend and subvert what counts as the “normal” or “natural” in a given socio-political-discursive context. Such attempts to suspend essentialist kinds of explanation, to prefer (critically) historicizing and contextual accounts, and new anti-humanist and anti-psychological themes of analysis, are as important to the ethos of the QMC as they are to the future of critical psychology. In this sense, if what obtains as “the normal”, “the commonsensical” in psychological culture is exactly that saturated with ideology - as Parker suspects - then critical psychology should, in a meaningfully committed *methodological* or even *aesthetic* way, cultivate a taste for the *counter-intuitive*. (See Hook’s paper on the QMC for further elaboration of this idea as a key critical psychology objective).

Collins’ paper espouses a different kind of “academic disobedience” to Hook’s. Taking as its targets the self-representations of Social Psychology (generally) and the introductory textbook as “crucial ideological apparatus” (in particular), the paper has two principle objectives, both of which prove central to the critical psychology project. The first is to destabilise the ways in which a particular sub-domain of psychology has been “imported and marketed as an authoritative body of knowledge ... [which fails to] ... reflect on the problems and limitations it might face in being implemented in local contexts”. The second is to draw attention - via a sort of “guerilla tactics” - to the ways in which this particular body

of knowledge has so successfully managed to assert its authority. This authority relies on a number of tactics, among which are the use of the rhetorical structure of academic writing, the forcible exclusion of radical internal critiques, the implementation of a hidden series of rules of rationality, and the operationalization of an underlying conceptual hierarchy which legitimizes certain concepts, while systematically de-legitimizing others. In the course of his paper (actually the transcript of a video shot as the introduction to a course in Social Psychology) Collins “plays up” and subverts each of these tactics, at the same time providing a rallying point for critique by demonstrating the particularly questionable politics of knowledge production that the greater discipline of psychology relies upon.

A “politics of psychology” and a “psychology of politics”.

Lying just beneath the skin of Parker’s outline of critical psychology is a commitment to what one might call a “political psychology”. In fact if there were one crucial addition to be made to Parker’s four basic tenets, I would recommend it be this: a more explicit reference to the attempt to institute a “political sensibility” into psychology. By “political sensibility” I am referring both to the need to install the notion of power into the vocabulary of psychology in a meaningful and self-reflexive way, *and to the need to be able to facilitate the influx of progressive political action into the domain of psychological practice*. A “political sensibility” would then entail a heightened awareness of how knowledges and practices of psychology are participant in the extension of social, discursive and historical dispensations of power, what we might refer to as “the politics” of psychology - firstly (and to be fair, Parker’s tenets would seem to cover these requirements in an awareness of the ideological functioning of psychology). Such a political sensibility would, secondly entail also an awareness of how forms of psychological action and knowledge may be put to work as part of politics, as mechanisms of struggle and resistance - what we might refer to as a “psychology of politics”.

Given the foregoing assertion that one should endeavour to *oppose* rather than *join* psychology’s practices, it would seem easier to *politically criticize* psychology than to *pursue a political psychology*. This problematic shoots to the heart of the old political dilemma: attack from the outside, or attempt to reform from within. On the one hand: assume an external position which maintains its oppositional integrity, but ultimately risks being ineffectual, marginal, *too distanced*. On the other: adopt an *internal* position which whilst crucially involved, able to practically implement criticism, always risks being recuperated back into the politics it is attempting to transform.

To my mind, and following the Bulhan quote at the beginning of this paper, there should at least be the possibility for a progressive or liberatory “psychology of politics”, despite that it may be more difficult than we may at first imagine. Perhaps what is important to note here is that critical psychology, if it is to sufficiently engage with its object of criticism, must be more than just an intellectual or academic activity, like mainstream psychology itself is. If psychology is as much practice as it is knowledge, then critical psychology’s attempt to apprehend and interrogate psychology will only be half served by merely “re-thinking” psychology. Critical psychology hence needs defer as much to the level of “a politics of *practised criticism*” - *to a politics of intervention, reformulation and action* - as to the level of merely theorized critique. This would seem to be particularly pressing in the post-apartheid context of current-day South Africa, where agendas of transformation and development are still far from being met.

I for one am under no illusions as to the difficulty of reconciling these two currents (theoretical criticism and political action) within critical psychology.² Their prospective volatility should not be seen as necessarily destructive to the project of critical psychology however. To me, this seems an important and indeed *necessary* critical tension, one which should in fact remain. These are two different forms of critical activity that are able, in certain instances, to counter and oppose each other, and at others, perhaps, to work in conjunction. What this seeming conflict *does* urgently point to however is the need for critical psychologists to attend more closely to this issue, to think how the relationship between these two objectives may most productively be articulated so that critical psychologists are as able to produce as much a psychology of politics as a politics of psychology.³

3. CRITICIZING CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY.

Methodological scarcity.

Having made recourse to four of the papers in this special issue to illustrate a series of basic tenets of critical psychology, I'd now like to now ask some critical questions of critical psychology, and draw on the remaining papers collected here as way of animating prospective answers to these questions. One of the most pressing of such questions is that of methodology, which itself points to the implicit criticism that much critical psychology has become overly synonymous with discourse analysis. The criticism of discourse analysis (and here I am referring particularly to the methods suggested by Potter & Wetherell (1987)) is another question in its own right - and one that I (*in press*), amongst others (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Burr 1996), have addressed elsewhere - although, then again, given the reliance of so much critical psychology on discourse analysis, it is an issue which "shoots to the heart" of its project.

Now whilst discourse analysis was of vital importance to critical psychology - in some senses even representing something of a 'growth industry' within the broader ambit of its practice - and whilst it did prove an extraordinarily effective way of decentring the 'usual suspects' (that is the routine subjects and objects) of psychology - showing just how contrived and indeed *constructed* such notions were - it seems unnecessary to limit critical psychology to this methodological approach alone (or its deconstructive variants, see Burman, 1994; Parker *et al*, 1995; Parker & Shotter, 1996; Parker, 1999). Now of course there is little doubt that critical psychology did not intentionally set out to base itself so seemingly exclusively on discourse analysis, and, no doubt, other possible, if not perhaps

² The difficulty in thinking around these two strands of critical psychology seems to have plagued Parker's (1999) editorial to the **Annual Review of Critical Psychology**, where explicit endorsements of activism and political action feature considerably less than references to the theoretical or intellectual undertakings facing the critical psychologist (although one might argue that the article had explicitly planned to focus on the latter). This weighting appears to have been reversed in the articles and editorial (Goodley & Parker, 2000) of the subsequent **Annual Review of Critical Psychology**. This same "split" between priorities of political action and theoretical criticism characterized the proceedings of the *Action Research and Critical Psychology Conference* (Manchester, England, July 1999) upon which the first issue of **ARCP** was based.

³ British critical psychology has for a while been attempting to move beyond the impasse imposed by the question of what practical and political form, beyond academic activity, to give to critical psychology. The answer it has posed, as we will go on to see, is that of action research.

largely theory-based, methodological perspectives could be discovered were one to look hard enough⁴. Unfortunately however, such a relationship, of a singular methodological reliance, would, until fairly recently, have seemed a reasonable characterization.

Accentuating the problematic nature of this apparent reliance is the appropriation of discourse analysis by positivist and actively psychologizing perspectives. (These are perspectives which are anathema to the critical and post-structural epistemologies at the basis of at least Foucaultian applications of discourse analysis). Hence Collins' (2000) outcry in the call for papers of the most recent QMC: "Discourse analysis has quickly become acceptable, partly by moving away from its Foucaultian roots and the theoretical traditions which these entailed, and instead towards a notion of discourse closer to traditional linguistics: a neo-positivist dissection of utterances rather than a critical analysis of power and knowledge".

A lack of theoretical resources.

The above warning of the new "acceptability" of discourse analysis parallels Lopez's (2000) concerns about the 'psychologization' of critical psychology (2000). The latter's argument calls to mind the above cautioning regarding the necessity of striking a distance - in the objectives, content and methods of critical psychology - from the practices and "outputs" of mainstream psychology. You will recall my suggestion that a vital function of a discipline is to *control a set of rules for actively disqualifying certain knowledge-claims*. If this is the case, then, almost by definition, one will be unable to find *within* the discipline either the theory or the tools that would enable any properly destabilizing or meaningfully subversive criticism of that discipline. (It is on exactly this basis that one might motivate for the methodological efficacy of discourse analysis). Accordingly, the attempt to source viable critical instruments - of either a methodological or a theoretical capacity - from beyond the domain of psychology, should represent *an absolute imperative* for the development of critical psychology.

Quite frankly, it is the use of extra-disciplinary methodological and theoretical tools that have enabled an "opening up" of psychology's most protected principles in the first place. One cannot divorce the relative successes of critical psychology from "multi-disciplinarianism". Even the apparently more watered-down versions of critical psychology have found it necessary to import the extra-psychological notions of ideology, interpellation, social construction, the text, and so on. The overflow here has been largely that from sociology, and in different variations, that of Marxist, Feminist, Post-Structural, and even for a short while, Post-modern forms of criticism. The worrying concern here is whether critical psychology is doing enough to consolidate and expand upon these critical resources.

⁴One such (largely under-utilized) perspective is that of critical history. Rose (1991, 1995) has, for one - although to the best of my knowledge never having self-identified as a critical psychologist - relied almost exclusively on this source as the underlying basis of his critical formulations of/against psychology.

Despite the promise of these early borrowings, (and it seems there are many, particularly if one is to track the proliferation of avowedly Feminist forms of critical psychology, and to a lesser extent, Marxist (or Marxist influenced) forms), one gets the distinct feeling that critical psychology's expeditions to extra-disciplinary terrains, and to the central critical schools of modernity (Feminism, Marxism, Psychoanalysis) may be waning, or lacking in creative vigour.

Furthermore, even in the prospects of such connections, are we viewing a stylized and selective assimilation of key terms, or the substantiation of robust critical bridges, that might be developed and expanded in innovative and fruitful ways? Increasingly more a critical "school" unto itself, and less an interconnecting matrix of different forms of criticism and politics, one feels that critical psychology, if it is to maintain its vibrance, its "cutting ability", should continue to explore theoretical opportunities, both new and old, or risk its own kind of insularity⁵. Without exploration of this kind, critical psychology is likely to evolve its own orthodoxy and homogeneity, which, no doubt, would ultimately prove antithetical to any aggressive political or critical activity. In short: it is not only the case that critical psychology must remain outside of, and in opposition to, the orthodoxy of mainstream psychology. It is also the case that critical psychology must avoid becoming formulaic unto itself - a factor which would (and in some cases *has*⁶) lead to its recuperation back into the mainstream.

This is not just a problem of limited methodological and theoretical resources. It is also a problem of a stilted, conventionalized and perhaps under-explorative series of research subjects and objects. By the same token, just as critical psychology appears to have become formulaic, unexplorative, so it appears - much like the greater disciplinary enterprise from which it has emerged - to have become too insular in its focus. With one important exception (that of participatory action research - to be discussed shortly) this is exactly the impression one gets running one's finger down the contents page of the first two issues of the **Annual Review of Critical Psychology**: a notable lack of theoretical and methodological exploration).

4. CRITICAL POSSIBILITIES.

Critical psychology does however have a series of retorts to these claims of methodological and theoretical scarcity. Likewise, it is able to respond to suggestions that it has cemented a static field of research objects. Furthermore, critical psychology is also able to offer an answer to the unspoken challenge - latent within the discussion above - that it has not done enough to enter the actual field of practical politics. The last three papers in this special issue provide just such corresponding retorts. Hayes' *Marxism and psychology* for example engages all of these issues (of methodological and theoretical resource, of politics, and of new "apsychological" research subjects). Suggesting that critical psychology, even in its Marxist and radical versions, seems little influenced by the tradition of critical theory (as

⁵ This is not the fault of critical psychologists alone. Indeed it seems that the "boom" period (and I use the term relatively) of critical psychology may well have come and gone. Indeed this would seem the suggestion given the apparent reticence of many previously supportive major publishing houses to take on any new explicitly critical psychology texts. If critical psychology has indeed gone "out of fashion", it will be a test of the project's real worth and integrity if it is able to maintain and renew itself as a formidable critical opponent to the discipline of psychology.

⁶ I am referring here in particular to positivist applications of discourse analysis.

originating in the Frankfurt School of the 1920s), Hayes both points to a new theoretical horizon and to a crucial challenge for the critical psychology project. For Hayes, critical psychology needs think through exactly what it mean to be *critical*, and with what prospective (critical) historical antecedents it might best align itself with. More than this, its search for strategic theoretical forms needs be lead both by a suspicion of the neutralizing trappings neo-liberalism, and by the objectives of active political action. In his own words: “[C]ritical psychology needs to engage with and develop concepts that have the potential to transcend merely abstract ... analysis, and point the way to practical ... political engagement ... critical psychology would be ... incomplete if it did not try to take on the injustices and inequalities of the world that we find ourselves in”.

Reviewing a series of Marxist concepts as a means of hopefully rejuvenating the critical psychology project, Hayes settles on dialectics as a core methodological instrument. Dialectical thinking would prove particularly useful to critical psychology - despite thus far being largely under-utilized by it - particularly in its ability to articulate an object's relation to a greater whole. Why is this so important to critical psychology? Well, as discussed in the introduction, psychology has traditionally repressed any real consideration of the social whole, the “social totality” (to draw on another central Marxist concept) at the expense of a bloated sense of individuality and individual agency. A dialectic means of thinking, taken in conjunction with a respect for the notion of social totality, would offer an effective corrective to this “over-balance”.

Furthermore, Hayes offers a focus on the “lived experience of everyday life” as a new subject focus for critical psychology. Clearly he means this not in a typically “psychologizing” way, but as in fact a corrective to exactly this tendency. He is at pains to point out that people's lives are not “intrinsically personalistic and insular”, that the “cult of the self”, like the defence of the personal, the individual and the private, are historical constructs. Hayes preferred frame of analysis is one which pays particular attention to the social relations, the historical, discursive and concrete material conditions “underlying” ordinary experience. He adopts this level of analysis exactly so that these factors can be reconnected to a critical politics of action concerned with developing responses to emotional and material forms of oppression.

Taking up Bulhan's (1985) suggestion of the potential progressive utility of psychology, van Vlaerenden questions how the discipline may provide knowledge and services that contribute to national development. Her paper discusses the varying roles that psychology may take in facilitating rapid social change. Central to van Vlaerenden's account is a people centred development paradigm - based on people's participation and empowerment, and relying on the basis of local knowledges as a vital resource. Part of the benefit of this approach is that it does not accept Western values as a necessary model for developing countries; likewise, it recognizes the pivotal significance of political and economic power differentials in the development process. Furthermore, and in van Vlaerenden's own words, this approach “embrace[s] a conflict model and considers working with power struggles at national and local levels as central to its work ... [It] reject[s] the notion of the ‘value free scientist’ and acknowledge[s] the ... political bias in ... [its] work”.

One of the most important aspects of van Vlaerenden's paper is her assertion that a major “shortcoming of psychological practice ... is the lack of an appropriate research paradigm and research techniques that prepare psychologists for ... activist work”. She goes on to

elaborate, through the model of participatory action research, a series of concepts crucial to the operationalization of just such an activism (participation, empowerment, capacity building and local knowledge). Action research, as hinted above, has been the answer that much of British critical psychology has posed both to the methodological “stalemate” of discourse analysis and to the perceived “apoliticality” (see Hayes’ contentions in this regard) of the critical psychology project. Action research, in basic terms, is a collaborative research process in which researchers join marginalized or disempowered groups with a view to furthering what such groups see as their most important needs or priorities. Researchers aim to achieve this by becoming involved in concrete and politically progressive forms of action which have both political and “knowledge-producing” outcomes.

In a detailed discussion of participatory action research, Van Vlaerenden touches on several basic themes: the importance of this approach to developing countries, Freire’s notion of conscientization (learning to perceive socio-political contradictions as a prerequisite for political action), and an awareness of how scientific methodology needs be transformed if radical social change is to be achieved. Van Vlaerenden’s is a description which emphasizes community problem-solving, skill-development, resource-finding and knowledge-production. Each of these is a component part of the three types of change that participatory action research would ideally like to see cemented within oppressed communities: the development of a critical consciousness, an improvement in life conditions and a transformation of social structures. The participatory action research approach is not without its drawbacks, and van Vlaerenden dramatizes these in two case-study accounts of the application of this method. (Her own difficulties revolve around being able to enforce only limited material improvements, around combining diverse and potentially contradictory roles as a researcher/activist/facilitator/psychologist, and around accessing the needs and voices of the whole of any given community).

Van Vlaerenden finishes on a note of equal importance to critical psychology’s hope of practising a political psychology, and to those concerned about the professional (degree) changes currently taking place in South African psychology. In order for psychological practice to contribute to national development, she claims, it is necessary for psychologists to engage in a participatory process with disadvantaged or oppressed people so as to generate new knowledge and new skills, which will be able to improve living conditions and enhance their quality of life. This stands in sharp contrast to the current changes in the profession of psychology, which are “geared at producing mid-level psychologists trained in practical counsellors techniques with the aim of executing highly structured intervention models”. For van Vlaerenden, this is a reversal of priorities. Her claim for a different, exploratory and generative approach to deal with psycho-social problems at an actively political and community level demands a different type of training, and a different pedagogical focus altogether.

The last paper in this collection attempts, in a largely experimental way, to consolidate a relatively new subject of critical psychology attention, namely the idea of “place-identity” (that is, the idea of the discursive links between power, space and subjectivity). Whilst the paper represents a fairly loose extemporization around this prospective subject, (place-identity is treated as the *staring-point* of speculation; the paper does not in effect aim at this as an end-point), it is still worth reiterating the importance of such an anti-humanist perspective to the critical psychology project. Rather than reifying, *psychologizing*, *subjectifying*, the individual, as does the vast majority of psychology, this perspective aims

to look at a series of spatio-political factors which play a role “before the fact”, in *constituting* the subject and their subjectivity, rather than celebrating after the fact the essential nature of this subject, what it means, and how it may be altered. Not only does the paper offer a less than humanistically-orientated subject, it also suggests an actively depsychologizing theoretical means of analysis. The heterotopia, a loose and largely hypothetical geographical-political concept is, as Hook and Vrdoljak claim “a way of conceiving social space, a model ... of contemporary (or historical) socio-spatial life”. The concept works as “a *spatial frame* for analysis, from which larger commentaries may be drawn about the values, practices and discourses of a particular social site”. This is exactly how Hook & Vrdoljak apply the notion, as a means of arguing how the practices of South African “security parks” (those affluent and security-riddled “gated-communities” of Johannesburg’s Northern Suburbs) have endeavoured, in both increasingly formal *and informal* ways, to “inscribe an historical structure of privilege into space”.

Although the politics of place engendered by the security park is one which adopts a seemingly pragmatic and reasonable face - these regulations and fortifications of space have been brought into being only by the existence of a rampant crime-rate after all - they provide a “grounds of identity”, an ideological means for structuring the lives and experiences of its residents. It is in this way, so Hook & Vrdoljak argue, that security parks “cede” certain prerogatives within their residents, particularly those of exclusion, separation and avoidance (on an abstract level), but also, more concretely, those of self-entitlement, violent self-protection and self-government. The value of this account - aside from its efficacy as form of socio-political criticism - is that it opens up a rival level of explanation, a theoretical and empirical opportunity for the analysis of subjectivity that lies outside of psychology’s typical ways and means of apprehending the subject. It points to the fact that psychological analyses which omit ideological dimensions are, as Hayes (1989) put it, at best incomplete, generally seriously distorted, and at worst (were I to extend his sentiments) complicit in the perpetuation of oppressive politics.

5. CONCLUSION.

Framing the critical psychology project as the attempt to critically expose and counteract psychology as an often dubious politics of knowledge and subjectivity, this paper has hoped to describe a series of applications, limitations and possibilities of critical psychology as it is, or *could be*, practised in the South African context. Critical psychology, one hopes, is still in “the upswing” of its historical trajectory - this despite having outlived its initial “fashionability”. In this respect the critical questions posed here are meant more as directives toward improvement, rather than as detractors meant to cripple further potential advances within the “field” of critical psychology.

Perhaps one area to look to, to consolidate these advances - despite being so obvious as to be at first neglected - is that of teaching and training itself. Particularly in the South African situation, where imperatives of transformation, development, integration and indigenous knowledge-production are still far from being met - and where prospective professional (structural) degree changes are currently taking place - this would seem to represent a site of vital promise, a flash-point of future critical practice. The recently developed Community-Counselling MA programme at Wits University, like the coursework Psychology and Society Masters Programme offered by the University of Natal (Durban), are examples of exactly such critical initiatives. I would like to take this opportunity to

propose a further special issue of **PINS** where various Southern African institutions might care to discuss the innovations they have made in terms of better accommodating the critical psychology objectives of practising a psychology of politics, and a politics of psychology.

This distinction (that is, between a psychology of politics, and a politics of psychology), as discussed earlier, need not always be of a harmonious sort. However, given both that we are here attempting to channel productive criticism, and that we are viewing critical psychology as still on its historical “upswing”, it seems worth suggesting that it is now time - just as certainly as it is now the place - to focus more on a psychology of politics than a politics of psychology. Perhaps the formative stages of the critical psychology project have been well-served by theoretical forms of criticism, by a largely academic politics of psychology. That would seem no longer to be the case; to overstay such a preoccupation seems to risk being academic in the worst of senses. If we are wondering how a psychology of politics might proceed from critical psychology, then maybe it is time to give thought not to how politics might fit within the domain of criticism, but to how criticism might fit within the domain of politics.

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