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"This World Demands our Attention"

Ian Parker in Conversation With Dimitris Papadopoulos and Ernst Schraube

Key words: critical psychology, discourse analysis, discursive psychology, realism, constructionism, feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, postmodern conditions

Abstract: This conversation deals with the social role, epistemological presuppositions, and methodological questions of critical psychology and discourse analysis. The first part of the conversation touches on the social and epistemic conditions for the turn to the concept of discourse, the current status and functions of critical psychology, and methodological principles of the empirical research practice of critical discourse analysis. The second part focuses on the methodological and epistemological background of discourse analysis, particularly the challenge of discourse analysis for mainstream/positivist models of research and the problem of a realist vs. constructionist approach to psychological inquiry. The last part illuminates the relation of critical psychology with various major social theories and movements, specifically Marxism, feminism, and psychoanalysis in the context of contemporary postmodern conditions.

Table of Contents

About the Interview

This E-Mail-Interview was conducted in December 2002. The interviewers sent Ian PARKER a set of questions which were expanded in May 2004 with additional questions for *FQS*. The published interview is the complete version with the original q&a sequence. The interviewee authorized the text. [1]

About Ian PARKER

Ian PARKER is Professor of Psychology at the Discourse Unit at the Manchester Metropolitan University. He is one of the central figures of critical psychology in Britain. Among his most important book publications are: The Crisis in Modern Social Psychology, and How to End it (London: Routledge 1989), Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology (London: Routledge 1992), Psychoanalytic Culture: Psychoanalytic Discourse in Western Society (London: Sage 1997), Critical Discursive Psychology (London: Palgrave 2002), and the Annual Review of Critical Psychology. His newest book is: Qualitative Psychology: Introducing Radical Research (London: Open University Press 2005). You can find more information about Ian PARKER online. [2]

1. The Turn to Discourse, the Emergence of Critical Psychology, and Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis

PAPADOPOULOS/SCHRAUBE: Your book *Discourse Dynamics* was central in fostering the concept of discourse in psychology. On the one hand, you brought together the strands of uneasiness with mainstream psychological theory and practice. On the other hand, you proposed a new understanding of psychology as a sociocultural and political apparatus and attempted to reposition psychology within the landscape of postmodern critiques. How did you arrive at the importance of the concept of discourse at this time? How do you see the role of this concept in today's efforts for rethinking psychology? What influence does the discursive turn exert on psychological research and practice in Britain? [3]

PARKER: *Discourse Dynamics* focused attention on the development of "discourse analysis" in Britain. At least, this is where I focused my attention after my first book *The Crisis in Modern Social Psychology, and how to end it*. Already in *The Crisis* I had included a discussion of work on "social representations", which was starting to become attractive to some social psychologists here—mainly among those with a background in laboratory-experimental social psychology—and discussion of the contribution of ethnomethodology to our redescription of and intervention in micropractices of ideology and power (which is not to say that this is the way that ethnomethodologists like to think of what they are doing, of course). The argument in the *The Crisis* was that the discipline of social psychology was closely linked to the emergence of technologies of social control under capitalism, and the fragmentation of social psychology (as a manifestation of its "crisis" during the late 1960s and early 1970s) was already, and should be tied more closely, to the 1960s rebellions against capitalism. [4]

At the time it seemed to me that the most appropriate and accessible language to describe these processes was to be found in so-called "post-structuralist" theory, and so I brought to bear ideas from FOUCAULT and DERRIDA to characterise social psychology as an apparatus of surveillance and to open up spaces for its "deconstruction". One code-word for the crisis of capitalism in that book was "postmodernism", and there are many aspects of the argument that I now see as mistaken. My use of the term "ideology", for example, sat uneasily with the use of post-structuralist and postmodern themes. I had adopted those themes too quickly perhaps, and I also adapted myself to the language of "discourse analysis" in the later stages of writing the book. *Discourse Dynamics* takes up some of those issues, compounds some of the problems and (on a more positive note) elaborates a way of doing "discourse analysis" that brings a political dimension in the analysis to the fore. One consequence, of course, was that insofar as the book was read by those on the left or within feminism who wanted to find a different way of doing psychological research, it also focused their attention on discourse analysis, perhaps too much. [5]

There are many versions of "discourse analysis" outside psychology, and as the "discursive turn" hit psychology in Britain during the 1980s (in the wake of the HARRÉ sponsored "new paradigm" turn to language during the 1970s, from the

small but significant impact of the journal *Ideology & Consciousness* which appeared from 1977 to 1981 and the subsequent position statement for the discipline of psychology from the arguments in that journal and in the book *Changing the Subject*, and from the blend of conversation analysis and sociology of scientific knowledge arguments in social psychology) there were competing attempts to "define" discourse for psychologists. One consequence of this competition between different definitions was that "steps" and "stages" in the analysis of discourse tended to become rather reified. [6]

Discourse Dynamics did include detailed steps, and its successor *Critical Discursive Psychology* builds upon those steps and links the more radical arguments in discourse theory with a critique of postmodernism and other relativist themes in psychology. What is important to emphasise now is that at that time (the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s) the term "discourse" operated differentially in relation to other possible terms for a progressive reorientation of psychological research (other candidates included "social representations", for example), it was constructed out of available conceptual and political resources (which included some of the attempts in British academic Marxism around LACLAU and MOUFFE to rethink the category of ideology), and it functioned in a certain kind of way (as a term which signalled some refusal of mainstream social psychology and which linked with studies of culture and history). The founding of the Discourse Unit in 1990 keyed into that moment and into those progressive aspects of the signifier "discourse". Were we to set up a Centre for critical research today it quite possibly would not have the term "discourse" in it. [7]

Today "discourse analysis" in British psychology has effectively been incorporated into mainstream psychology. That does not mean that there are no spaces still to do critical work with it, and to turn the focus of research around to look at what "discourses" psychologists reproduce in the various dividing practices that comprise the discipline. The task for those doing critical work is to keep those critical spaces open, and to refuse to make their research—discursive or otherwise—correspond to the empiricist assumptions that structure British psychology. [8]

PAPADOPOULOS/SCHRAUBE: In recent years we have experienced an augmentation of alternative and critical psychologies, especially in the English speaking world: new departments, new journals, new societies, new MA and PhD programs, various international conferences etc. How is the situation in the UK? Where did centres of alternative psychology become established? What are the major studies, traditions of thought, or strategies of critical knowledge for rethinking and renewing psychological theory and practice? What are the ambivalences of this development? Why do you think the cultural and political context in Britain—in relation to Germany—is more conducive to the institutional establishment of critical and discursive analysis and practices? [9]

PARKER: The first masters course in "critical psychology" in the English-speaking world was set up at Bolton Institute while I was there between 1996 and

2000, and, in fact, it appeared just before the masters programme that is now running in Sydney. That development of the two courses (in Bolton in the North West of England and in Sydney in South East Australia, at different edges of the globe) was of a particular moment, and the two courses have put "critical psychology" on the map. (Of course we were aware that Kritische Psychologie in the German-speaking world had been around for some years.) We assembled a course that was a blend of the different approaches that have until today been used in different ways by critical psychologists (Marxism, feminism, psycho-analysis and post-structuralism). Now the Bolton Institute course only runs as a "distance learning" programme, and the Sydney programme has succeeded in maintaining itself in the face of some difficult financial and political conditions. [10]

Now we face a different moment, a different conjuncture in which to say that one is a "critical psychologist" in Britain is not such a big deal, and already there are undergraduate course components that promise to do "critical psychology" or "critical social psychology". The discipline of psychology is resilient enough here to provoke and then welcome the production of researchers who will be happy to work in their own little niche area, and the "ambivalences" of the development of "critical psychology" need to be tackled. The problem is three-fold: First, the linkage between "critical" and "discursive" psychology, so that it seems as if one can only be "critical" if one studies language and resolutely avoids political practice. Second, the turning of the focus of critical work away from the discipline and back onto the usual subjects of psychological research, so that the various categories of exoticised and pathologised categories of person that psychology usually likes to examine are now examined, with more critical eyes of course, by those doing critical or discursive psychology; and third, the embrace by some of various new age spiritualist or therapeutic notions so that the introduction of "qualitative research" also operates simultaneously as a substitute for critical work and as a simple shift of focus from measurement into meaning, as if that simple shift corresponded to a shift into something more radical. [11]

PAPADOPOULOS/SCHRAUBE: What are central methodological research principles of critical discourse analysis? [12]

PARKER: Critical discourse analysis still provides an ideal opportunity for studying ideology in psychology, if we read it right. Patterns of discourse in capitalist society hold in place chains of demeaning images of human beings divided from each other on the basis of different categories (of class and race, for example). These images are repeated across the many kinds of text we encounter each day—in advertising, television news and mainstream psychology reports—so that we live them out and come to believe them to be true, of others and ourselves. Discourse working in this kind of way is the stuff of ideology, and so we need to treat "discourse" as the organisation of language into certain kinds of social bond. There are four elements that are necessary to thinking about discourse in this way. First, that we should look out for the "multivoicedness" of language instead of searching for underlying psychological processes or themes. We attend to how we are made to fit into certain categories and how are we marked out as different, and how the contradictions in and within the categories

work. Second that we focus on "semiotics", the way we put language together in discussions and other kinds of text (in advertising images, journal articles or student essays) and how we are put together in a certain shape by the language as already organised into discourse. Third that we focus on "resistance" because language does not only describe the world, it does things. Dominant forms of cultural identity are kept in place precisely by the banal ways the categories are repeated in everyday discourse. [13]

The fourth idea that is useful for linking the study of contradiction, semiotic construction and resistance to power is that of "discourse" as a chain of words and images. When we treat "discourse" as the organisation of language into certain kinds of social bond we are led to ask how each bond includes certain kinds of people and excludes others. This then brings us closer to an examination of how discourse functions ideologically, how it presents an oppressive version of the world that may feel suffocating to speakers and listeners, and which shows no way out. Within each discourse there are, of course, contradictions, and the way the discourse is constructed in specific texts will mean that it functions in favour of certain power relations, or perhaps against them. The preparation for qualitative research using discourse analysis needs to include historical analysis of how the forms of language in question have come to organise certain social bonds. This is important for two reasons. First, so that analysis of language in a piece of text does not treat it as if it came out of nowhere; everything that has meaning for us has certain historical preconditions for it to be spoken, written or produced as an ideological image. Second, so that the text is put in the context of actual "social bonds" or power relations; everything that has meaning has a place in patterns of physical harm or well being, of material oppression and the attempts to challenge it. I elaborate these ideas, and connections with other methodologies in relation to action research in my forthcoming book *Qualitative Psychology: Introducing Radical Research* (2005, Open University Press). [14]

2. Realism, Constructionism, and the Question of Practice in Critical Psychology

PAPADOPOULOS/SCHRAUBE: We would like to explore a little further the question of how psychology perceives itself as a science. Critical psychology is seeing itself as an alternative to positivistic approaches still dominant within psychology. What do you see as the main problems, limits and contradictions inherent in mainstream psychology? Where are changes most urgently needed? [15]

PARKER: When "critical psychology" only presents itself as an "alternative" to positivist approaches, it precisely appeals to and then succumbs to a series of structural oppositions that hold in place the discipline of psychology in Britain. Here, we really are dealing with conceptual oppositions that can be analysed as discursive properties of the discipline, discursive properties that warrant certain kinds of practice outside the academic departments (in the schools and clinics, as well as all the other places where psychology is deployed explicitly or implicitly by those who have trained in or draw upon psychological knowledge). The "scientific" character of psychology is assumed, by its supporters and then its

opponents, as being equivalent to measurement, to quantitative research, and as a consequence the "critical psychologist" may assume that they need only turn to qualitative research, perhaps to discourse analysis, in order to be an "alternative". When they switch positions in this way, however, they leave the basic ground plan of the discipline in place. [16]

There is nothing mainstream psychology would love more than to find a way to explore the "meanings" of behaviour among its subjects, and there is already enough movement among the "non-critical" psychologists towards qualitative perspectives for them to embrace with open arms the "critical psychologists" who can reassure them that all they intend to do, as part of their "alternative" approach is to interview people more sensitively so that they can produce research articles which re-describe rather than challenge the order of things. The spiritualist and therapeutic turn among some psychologists—which operates alongside and as a complement to the discursive turn among some of them—is not reactionary as such. But I would argue that it is reactionary when it combines hostility to theory (something that is necessary to any adequate research on the ways in which capitalist society is reproduced at the level of the individual and at the level of the disciplines which specify how the individual works) with an appeal to feeling (something that reproduces at the deepest and most difficult to challenge level of each individual the taken-for-granted "truths" of commonsense under capitalism). [17]

PAPADOPOULOS/SCHRAUBE: Much of your work is concerned with building a bridge between constructionist and realist approaches. However, such a position has to deal with the difficulties of conceptualizing a relationship between material conditions/interests and language that is neither direct nor concrete. How do you avoid the trap of falling back on a dualistic conceptualization of this relationship? [18]

PARKER: I am not interested in building a bridge between the two approaches, and perhaps I have been misunderstood on this question. Insofar as I have tried to build a bridge, it has been between those who have worked with constructionist approaches to engage in a critique of psychology and some kind of linkage with radical politics. And, at the same time I have wanted to build some kind of bridge between those who are repulsed by the liberal relativism of much constructionist work in psychology who as a consequence turn to realism and some kind of linkage with radical politics. The simplest (and misleading, of course) formula for this is to say that constructionism is the most radical stance to take with respect to the domain of psychology as lived experience (that is, the range of phenomena that psychologists try to comprehend in their research), and realism is the most radical stance to take with respect to the discipline of psychology as an institutional and ideological practice (that is, the organised theoretical frameworks of knowledge and methodological procedures used to understand the others, the "non-psychologists"). You need some version of constructionism to respect the variety of activities and experiences that may be "psychology" for people of different cultures and different periods of history (and, crucially here, the different forms of culture that are in the process of being constituted in the process of

resistance to capitalist society), and you need some form of realism to take seriously the way that the discipline of psychology functions as one of the ideological apparatuses of contemporary capitalism (and not only ideological, for it has a directly coercive aspect as well). [19]

The constructionists too often make the mistake of making of "discursive" research in psychology (which can be useful enough in displaying and deconstructing the rhetorical functions of reality-construction in the formulation of psychological categories, especially for the purposes of seminar argument and publication in academic journals) a model for understanding everything outside the psychology department. Perhaps the material conditions in which many successful constructionist psychologists live—secure jobs, status in research groups, access to an international community through internet access and funding for travel to conferences around the world—are also relevant to understand how it is that these people can apparently really believe that changing the discursive construction of things is all that needs to be done (and accuse those who say otherwise of being the spoilsports who make the everyday process of deconstruction and reconstruction more difficult by talking too much about material exploitation and oppression). [20]

The realists also too often make the mistake of importing their own attempt to grasp the underlying relatively enduring structures of relationships (which are relevant, of course, to explain how globalised capitalism operates not only at a macro-level in processes of imperialist expansion and competition between sectors of the world economy but also at a micro-level in processes of colonial subjugation in exotic places and with the enclosure and racist attacks on immigrants at home) into psychology. And not only importing that analysis into psychology as a discipline (for yes, it is relevant to explain how the extraction of surplus-value works at the level of academic work and career trajectories of those engaged in certain kinds of theory, to mention evolutionary psychology as one case in point), but into our understanding of what human psychology is. It is at this level, with the specification of what human psychology actually is and how one might divide the normal from the abnormal, that we are starting to see the worst errors of "critical realism" played out. I did once, I admit, think that "critical realism" might be a useful framework, but it does now seem to be too badly comprised, not only through its attempt to recast all the worst of experimental and psychoanalytic psychology in the language of critical realism (in an account of relatively enduring structures of cognition and personality development and so on) but also through its recent turn to spirituality (in which the "discovery" of "meta-reality" has at least, not too late we hope, revealed the character of critical realism as a hermetic discursive system) which will only serve to encourage all the more those who did hope that looking into psychology would help them to see into the deepest vaults of the soul. [21]

PAPADOPOULOS/SCHRAUBE: We would like to turn to psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic thought has always had a love-hate relationship with critical currents in psychology, be they Marxist, post-structuralist, feminist, discursive, or constructionist (and of course vice versa). This is the feeling we had reading your

recently published book on psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis posits a certain knowledge which in one way or other appears to capture the truth of the individual. We believe that the love-hate relationship begins here: claiming to know the true functionings of the self is extremely powerful because it becomes a practice for social regulation and especially for self-regulation. However, at the same time it is very limiting because it seems to reify a historical form of individuality that it tries to make us believe that it has dismissed. In the final analysis, do you think that psychoanalytic discourse and psychoanalytic practice, also in its Lacanian versions, invigorates the liberal subject? [22]

PARKER: The love-hate relationship with psychology does need to be taken seriously. You are right that psychoanalysis appears to capture the truth of the individual, and so one of my tasks is to disrupt the ambitions of the discipline of psychology, which is to ally with psychoanalysis so that it can turn psychoanalysis into a form of psychology and so "capture the truth" of the individual. One way of doing that is to show that psychoanalysis itself is a form of truth that emerges and coexists with capitalist society. It seems to me that psychological "truth" is never spoken whole, that it is always spoken in a way that is dialectically-entangled with the forces against which it speaks, and what psychoanalysis—as a form of theoretical understanding of the formation of subjectivity under capitalism—speaks in and against is what it is to be an "individual" (alienated, commodified, an element of a class merely in-itself). I want to repeat here that I see this "truth" as something spoken within certain conditions, of capitalist society, and not at all as some empirical or submerged universal quality of human experience. [23]

Now, as far as Lacanian versions of psychoanalysis are concerned, there is, I think, something specifically conjecturally relevant about the Lacanian specification of the divided subject in relation to the signifier in late capitalism (which is not to say that LACAN was any kind of "postmodernist"). Lacanian psychoanalysis does indeed take that "love-hate" relationship between psychoanalysis and psychology to breaking point, to the point where LACAN explicitly—and yes we could say that it is a result of his "excommunication" from the International Psychoanalytic Association—breaks with any form of psychology (for it speaks to him of the US-American ideal of adaptation and so on). And, as a result, Lacanian psychoanalysis moves furthest toward the most radical refusal of capitalism (within the parameters of the tension I remarked on a moment ago about the contradictory nature of psychoanalysis born with capitalism), to the point where the "truth" that the subject speaks is viewed no longer as "empirical truth" but as a truth of that subject in which the speaking of the truth must assume the full historical weight of what it is to be a subject divided from itself—including its division into masculine and feminine—by virtue of its existence under capitalism. [24]

3. Feminism, Marxism, Postmodernism

PAPADOPOULOS/SCHRAUBE: Feminist thinking lies at the core of critical thinking in psychology. In contrast to other currents of critical psychology, feminism is still marginal in psychology. Why is this the case? Could this have to do with the implicit radicalism of feminist thinking (at least of many currents in it)? A radicalism which pertains to a thorough and exhausting critique of the liberal subject and simultaneously attempts to engage actively with the politics of representation. Feminist critiques are very concrete and simultaneously very broad; they are on the surface of social and political struggles and at the same time at the heart of the problem. [25]

PARKER: It would not have been possible to do critical work in the context of British psychology without feminist research (and here by "feminist research" I mean the academic practices in sociology that were a valuable resource for the emergence of feminism in psychology in the 1990s and also the research through multiple interrelated practices of consciousness-raising and direct action in the realm of politics, the political organisation of left groups and everyday life that comprised the women's movement from the 1960s on). The old slogan "no socialist revolution without women's liberation, no women's liberation without socialist revolution" calls for a conceptual and practical interweaving between different aspects of exploitation and oppression that the slogan only partially grasps. The linkage promised in the other well-known slogan (developed actually through participation and then constructive challenge of left organisational practices) which was "the personal is the political" calls for some attention to "psychology". But here, if we are "critical psychologists" we need to attend to what this "psychology" might have been then and might be now (that is, we precisely need to attend to the way it was constituted by those who placed their hopes in it rather than simply be delighted that radicals outside our discipline were taking an interest in the things that interested us). The field of "psychology" has a two-fold character here: as a domain of individual experience and action through which we may unthinkingly or deliberately maintain relations of power and through which we reflect upon who we are and through interpreting our life-world change it; and as a discipline and set of disciplinary practices that promise privileged access to the structure of thoughtless and thoughtful behaviour and insight into how it functions and can be remade. There are two important issues here. The first is to do with the realm of the "feminine", which is too often associated with feminism by its friends and enemies, and the second is to do with the character of feminism as radical politics. [26]

First, the feminine serves as a peculiarly "psychologised", we might say, version of feminism, and in this psychologised (and so individualised and de-radicalised form) it functions as the gateway to a world of feeling—intuition, empathy, connection, spiritual connectedness—to which only those genuinely open to the "feminine" have access. What is dangerous about this is not "insight" (something we might understand and indeed encourage as the ability to step outside taken-for-granted—usually masculinised—frameworks), but the way the appeal to feeling functions as something that is then not open to question. The gateway is

actually to a world in which what is "deepest" is assumed to be what is most true, and what is felt deepest is felt to be the kind of insight that should not then be questioned. Then it is a one-way street. [27]

The association between qualitative research and critical psychology can facilitate this ideological construction of the "feminine" as the point of truth around which less enlightened forms of psychology (or politics) can only gaze in awe and then try to access (or, more to the point, mimic) themselves. The mistaken structural opposition that positivist psychology has long championed, between the objective (scientific reasoning and empirical observation) and the subjective (individual intuition and numinous deep-felt truths) is then, unfortunately, the ground on which some qualitative researchers play out their "critical" work. It is, of course, only "critical" on the ground plan of traditional positivist psychology, and precisely because it celebrates feminine qualities that traditional psychology usually disparages. To understand the personal as political, of course, is to tackle how the personal operates as part of the texture of contemporary political struggle not to take the personal realm as it is currently constructed as an "alternative" or "critical" substitute for politics. [28]

Now, turning to the second issue, let me say a little about what "radical politics" might be. This radical politics might be Marxist, and yes in some ways I might prefer that, but need not necessarily be Marxist, for there are different ways to conceptualise and challenge everyday exploitation and oppression in contemporary society. Perhaps even I am too much of a Marxist here, and take seriously MARX's own favourite dictum, to "doubt everything" alongside the awareness that Marxism itself emerged at a particular point in history (that is, with the birth of capitalism) as a kind of counter-knowledge to the knowledge that capitalism has of itself (or at least the knowledge produced by those who formalise and try to render more efficient the capitalist economy). Here again, Marxism is not "true" as a universally valid form of knowledge (and we cannot imagine, only in our dreams, Spartacus finding Marxism of use to comprehend the decomposition of the Holy Roman Empire). Marxism is a form of counter-knowledge and emancipatory practice that functions from the standpoint of the proletariat (with "standpoint" to be understood here as dialectically-constituted refusal of capitalism and not as a preferred point of view, and "proletariat" to be understood as an embodied political category rather than an identity to be read off from social position—again, it is necessary to beware of the psychologisation of a historical process and our theoretical grasp of it). [29]

Feminist theory and practice too is a form of counter-knowledge, in its best most radical forms it changes the world at the very moment that it interprets it, and it does so using the analytic categories of patriarchy, heterosexism, emotional labour and so on in such a way as this thing that we (the "we" here refers to we Marxists) call capitalism is comprehended and challenged, grasped and refused. And feminism does so (and perhaps we should say that it can do so rather than saying that it always does so, for there are of course as many forms of "feminism" that have been effectively recuperated as there are forms of Marxism that have been corrupted into being more effective relays of state power) in a way that

insists on the "prefigurative" dimension of political struggle. That is, the forms of activity through which we refuse power always anticipate the forms of social relations that will be the outcome of that refusal (a hierarchically-structured vanguard party may succeed in overthrowing capitalism, but in the process would then also institute a regime that crystallises very fast from being a Leninist revolutionary force into a Stalinist counter-revolutionary regime); and, as well as repeating this lesson about the prefigurative nature of radical politics, feminism may well be correct, politically more astute as a form of praxis than Marxism. It is not, I think, merely the case the feminism (and perhaps a similar argument could be developed in relation to other newer political movements too) may bring about socialism (that is, that it unbeknownst to itself realises the aims of Marxist politics), but it may actually turn out to have a better understanding of what the real fault-lines in the contradictory meshwork of power that this thing that they call patriarchy is. I don't know. The most I can say, with this doubt about Marxism and this sense of what feminism may tell us of the truth of political action in mind, is that Marxism—and a "critical psychology" that draws on Marxism—has to be open enough in its theory and forms of practice to make of itself something feminist. [30]

PAPADOPOULOS/SCHRAUBE: You write that as "postmodern" psychologist, you are after traditional psychology in the double meaning of the word—timewise and in terms of tracking it down. Do you think that critical psychological research could also be "ante", i.e. before the materialization of specific conditions? In other words: How could critical approaches in psychology engage in prospective analysis? In trying to find out the social implications of the worlds currently on the drawing board and the psychological conditions we are "before"? [31]

PARKER: I am not a postmodern psychologist. Really, I am not a psychologist at all, rather someone who performs this identity at various times, and not many of those, to bring about certain effects. To speak in and against the discipline of psychology it is useful, I think, to claim a right to participate in the discourse of psychology, and for those purposes I am willing to adopt the identity of a psychologist. How one adopts and performs an identity is, of course, a contextually-situated and precarious matter (even down to the level of one's bodily implication in the range of identity practices that are required by an audience and an institution), and the question as to how one does that is a question that disturbs some of the core assumptions of psychology. So, to say that I am sometimes a "psychologist" but that this is performative and does not mean at all that I am "really" a psychologist is to draw attention to the conditions of possibility for identity rather than treating it as a thing as such. And then, we must disturb the psychologists who search for underlying core identities further by pointing out that none of them really are psychologists as such either. [32]

Perhaps there is a connection with the problematic of "postmodernism" here, for postmodernism is attractive to many "critical" psychologists because it seems to open up a more fluid way of thinking about identity, and it seems to promise a more fluid world than the one that is too firmly fixed by psychology. I did too once find the motif of postmodernism an attractive option, perhaps as a route out of

psychology. But it is, instead, a dead end. Postmodernism is one of the ideological forms of late capitalism, and appears at the intersection of European literary deconstruction (in which texts are opened up to be interpreted and rewritten at the whim of the analyst) and US-American pragmatism (in which relationships are viewed as amenable to change if only there is good will on the part of the participants). If capitalism inaugurated a world in which, as MARX pointed out, everything that melts turns into air, then postmodernism takes that diagnosis of rapid change and repackages it so that it really does look like the best of all possible worlds will appear if we buy into it. And if we do that we pay a heavy price. What we must remember when we examine the different varieties of psychology that are offered to us, whether they are packaged as "postmodern psychology" or "critical psychology" (or even as "Marxist psychology"), is that they are commodities that circulate in a particular kind of world—of academic practice which is governed by its own version of the rules that structure contemporary capitalism—and which are then sold to those outside the psychology departments. One worst case scenario is that radicals outside look at what we are doing and find "critical psychology", which they embrace and consume with all their energy so that they can forget the real world of anti-capitalist struggle which demands their attention. And that world should really demand our attention if we really are "critical" in any collectively meaningful sense of the term. [33]

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