

## **EDITORIAL: Critical psychology**

It will not have escaped the attention of **PINS** subscribers and readers that the journal has been appearing irregularly for some time. More accurately, **PINS** has been appearing *regularly*, albeit too *infrequently*. There are many complex reasons behind this state of affairs, and in this *special issue* on Critical Psychology, it is worth commenting on some of the issues and problems that inform the production of certain intellectual projects.

The extreme individualism and “Taylorisation” (the SAPSE system of funding amongst other things) of intellectual life at South African (and international) universities is part of the explanation of why much academic writing (and publishing) is so mercenary, strategic, and mean-spirited. Also the forward lurch towards conservatism in political and intellectual life, both nationally and internationally, make for difficult times for left-aligned projects. Many independent journals struggle with issues of funding, production, regularity of appearance, and fluctuating interest from subscribers and readers. To mention some *reputable* journals at random – **Historical materialism**, **Free Associations**, **Annual Review of Critical Psychology**, **Transformation**, and obviously **PINS**, of course! What distinguishes these journals is a commitment to some identifiable project, and in that sense they are more than just avenues for publication. In other words, **PINS**, and many other journals for that matter, besides being publishing ventures, are also *projects* committed to promoting certain ideas and practices, while at the same time advancing critiques of mainstream orthodoxy.

What then is **PINS's project**? In a recent set of editorials (**PINS 21**, 1996; **PINS 25**, 1999) **PINS's** original (**PINS 1**, 1983) editorial statement was modified, refined, and re-affirmed. Without rehearsing those discussions it is worth emphasising, especially in the context of this special issue on *Critical psychology*, the types of discussions that **PINS** would like to promote and encourage in the form of contributions, either as substantive articles and / or debates. The uncertainties of life, in what Ulrich Beck calls “risk society”, seem in part to be responsible for the decline of critical thought in many spheres of society, and not just in psychology-related matters. **PINS** would want to be part of a discourse and set of practices that challenges the social and intellectual conditions conducive to the demise and retreat of critical thought, ideas, and practices. The shouts of pragmatism and realism from so many quarters these days make the project of critical engagement all the more imperative.

It is *not* **PINS's** intention to prescribe what the broad project of critical theory *in* psychology, and a critical theory *of* psychology, might look like. **PINS's** commitment is more open than this, and would like to situate itself as a vehicle and forum to promote the development of ideas that offer a socio-historical analysis of psychology in South Africa, while at the same time being bold enough to suggest how things might be changed *for the better*. As psychology is part of society (**psychology in society**), so

there is a dual responsibility of providing objective analyses, *and* offering constructive critiques.

**PINS** is painfully aware of the risks involved in espousing a project of critique in psychology. Internationally the number of scholars involved in such research and debate is incredibly small, and many of the international “projects” concerning critical psychology struggle to survive. It is precisely for this reason that **PINS** wants to encourage readers, writers, and subscribers to be part of a *project* for a critical perspective in psychology in South Africa. The pool of scholars committed to a critical stance and practice of psychology in this country is admittedly very small, and yet this is what needs to be seen as a challenge, rather than as a basis for resignation and defeat! If certain ideas are worth fighting for and sustaining, then so be it if this starts out as a “small army” of critical thinkers. The size of the grouping is less important than the task of keeping alive the “big ideas” necessary to promote a critical perspective in psychology.

So where does **PINS** stand with regard to a view on what counts as “critical psychology”? A cursory glance at critical psychology shows that what it includes under the rubric “critical” is very broad, and often lacking in definitional and political clarity. The challenge arising out of this state of affairs is that a critical psychology is still in the process of being formed. How does an emerging critical psychology understand what it means to be *critical*? Is critical to be understood in a Marxist sense, or in terms of the Frankfurt School's notion, or in the diverse range of meanings attributed to the term critical within current critical social theory? How is critical psychology to be understood in the context of the particular set of social forces that make up South African society? Is critical psychology identified by specific contents or topics, like questions around “race” and identity, HIV/AIDS, sexual abuse of children? Or are the tasks facing a critical perspective in psychology much more *theoretical* in nature? These and many other interesting questions are what **PINS** would like to encourage people to think about, and *write* about, and to use **PINS** as one forum for the discussion of these ideas. It is in this sense that **PINS** would like to be the *collective* project for all those who want to participate in debate and argument pertaining to what it might mean to advance a critical perspective in psychology, and especially in this country.

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**Erratum:** In **PINS 25** (1999; p73) a review of Ian Parker's (1997) **Psychoanalytic culture** opened with the following erroneous sentence: “Freud is reputed to have said to Jung on their journey to the USA – Freud had been invited by Stanley Clark to lecture at Stanford University ... “. It should have read: “Freud is reputed to have said to Jung on their journey to the USA – Freud had been invited by Stanley **Hall** to lecture at **Clark** University ... “.