

Branney, P., Gough, B., and Madill, A. (2009) 'The Other Side of Social Psychology? A Review of the Utility of Lacanian Psychoanalysis with a Focus on the Theory of the Four Discourses', *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, 7, pp. 187-204  
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## **THE OTHER SIDE OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY? A REVIEW OF THE UTILITY OF LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS WITH A FOCUS ON THE THEORY OF THE FOUR DISCOURSES**

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### **Introduction**

There are two aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis that may be particularly appealing to those on the *critical* margins of social psychology. First, like discourse analysis and critical psychology, Lacanian psychoanalysis incorporates a focus on language (Branney, 2008) and therefore the concerns of some critical psychologists and discourse analysts, such as with critiquing the social order or bringing the social within psychology, may be easily assimilated. Second, Lacanian psychoanalysis would seem to be incompatible with psychology (Parker, 2003) and therefore provides an alternative perspective from which to consider, and perhaps undermine, the assumptions of psychology. Attempts to utilise Lacanian psychoanalysis that could be brought together under a rubric of critical psychology and discourse analysis include analyses of the production of girls' desire in comics (Walkerdine, 1987), of views of the self in long-term psychotherapy (Georgaca, 2001; 2003), and of understandings of domestic violence in government policy (Branney, 2006). We shall use 'critical psychology' (or 'critical psychologist') and 'discourse analysis' (or 'discourse analyst') as separate terms because, while many aspects of critical psychology do draw upon discourse analysis, a discourse analytic approach may be neither necessary nor sufficient to be critical of psychology. Hollway's (1989) consideration of heterosexual subjectivity is perhaps the one most obviously aligned with attempts, from the margins, to use discourse analysis to be critical of psychology. Along with *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation, and Subjectivity* (Henriques et al., 1984), Hollway's *Subjectivity and Method in Psychology: Gender, Meaning, and Science* (1989) can be understood as an attempt to change the subject of psychology and the theory of subjectivity that psychology relied upon. Hollway (ibid.) drew upon a mixture of discourse analysis, and Kleinian and Lacanian psychoanalysis to examine material from interviews and her journal. But, as Hook so aptly puts it: the lack of engagement of critical social psychology with Lacanian psychoanalysis is an 'oddity' that is "striking inasmuch as Lacanian theory offers important insights into many of what we might consider the constituting problematics of social psychology" (Hook, 2008, p. 2), such as racism, ideology, and social identity. If we are to combine Hook's work (ibid.) with Georgaca (2005) and Parker (2003; 2005), we have what can be understood as a small body of work on the margins of psychology that elucidates Lacanian psychoanalysis for critical psychologists and discourse

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analysts. Our focus is on Hook, Georgaca, and Parker, because they, whether explicitly or implicitly, explicate what Lacanian psychoanalysis would be if it were used in critical psychology and discourse analysis. This small body of work is steadily growing and includes, for example, Frosh and Baraitser's (in press) examination of psychoanalysis in psychosocial studies, a special issue of the journal *Subjectivities* and other work in this volume. In this paper, our first aim is to turn to this body of work to put a bit more flesh on what Lacanian psychoanalysis offers those critical of psychology.

What may be termed Lacan's theory – though the term 'theory' belies a coherence it may deliberately lack – of the Four Discourses (Lacan, 2007 [1969-70]) seems most obviously linked to discourse analytic work in social psychology because it appears to provide a theory of the (four) fundamental structures of Discourse (Clemens & Grigg, 2006), which incorporates an understanding of subjectivity (Alcorn, 1994). Thanks to the translation by Grigg (Lacan, 2007 [1969-1970]), Seminar XVII, where much of Lacan's thought on the Four Discourses is presented, is now available in English. While the theory of the Four Discourses has been little used in psychology (except, for example; Branney, 2006; Parker, 2001), it has been written about by a number of people outside psychology. Indeed, these accounts (Bracher, 1994b; Quackelbeen, 1997; Verhaeghe, 1998; 2001; Žižek, 1998; 2006) show a surprising similarity when compared with Lacan's account in Seminar XVII. That is, from these accounts it would appear that the Four Discourses are a discrete theory, whereas in Seminar XVII it is difficult to separate the Four Discourses from the discussion of other issues, particularly the role of psychoanalysis at the time. Indeed, Verhaeghe (1998; 2001) and Žižek (1998; 2006) seem to copy their own descriptions of the Four Discourses for use in arguably very different texts as if the Four Discourses are portable and, therefore, may be transported into critical psychology and discourse analysis. As such, the second aim of this paper is to move on to consider the utility of the theory of the Four Discourses for critical and discursive psychology by reviewing texts outside psychology. First, however, we want to consider the utility of Lacanian psychoanalysis for critical psychology and discourse analysis more generally.

## **Utility**

Parker (2003; 2005), Georgaca (2005), and Hook (2008) can be understood as introducing Lacanian concepts for critical psychology and discourse analysis. It would be easy to categorise all three authors as pro-Lacanian but this would be to ignore the complexity of Lacanian psychoanalysis that they do so well to describe, particularly concerning the utility of Lacan. In one paper, Parker (2005) sets out to describe aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis that are relevant for a discourse analytic psychology with a strong hint that these aspects are not compatible with psychology. In another paper, Parker (2003) is more explicit about the incompatibility by highlighting the contradictions between the work of Lacan and psychology.

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Not only does Parker (ibid.) single out cognitive, developmental, and social psychology but he also notes contradictions with alternatives on the margins of psychology including those aligned with a critical psychology. The details of these contradictions are not our concern here. It is sufficient to say that the main message from Parker (2003; 2005) appears to be that aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis “helps us to unravel and reflect upon the assumptions psychologists make about who they are and what they do” (2003, p. 97). While this will certainly interest those concerned with critiquing psychology, it may require unravelling aspects that critical psychologists and discourse analysts want to maintain, such as their role in the academe and the production of psychological knowledge.

Georgaca (2005) takes a stance against the subjectivity assumed by critical and discursive social psychology – particularly those drawing upon a Kleinian psychoanalytic and object relations perspective (Frosh et al., 2000; 2002; 2003; Gough, 2004; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) – and introduces Lacanian concepts that would appear to provide us with a subjectivity that is neither essentialist nor determinist. Again, this would certainly interest critical psychologists and discourse analysts, but there is a cautionary note underlying Georgaca’s work that might temper their enthusiasm:

“I do not think that an explication of the use of these [Lacanian] concepts in the clinic is a necessary prerequisite to employing Lacanian concepts either theoretically or as research tools. I also think that transposing clinical concepts to the theoretical and research domain – and considering, for example, the analysis of research material as equivalent to interpretation... – can also be quite misleading, if it is not based on an extensive analysis of the differences between the clinical and the theory/research domains” (2005, p. 84).

Lacan’s writings - as do the writings of many other psychoanalysts - have a foundation within clinical practice. In the first sentence of the above quote, Georgaca appears to be arguing that it is acceptable to utilise Lacanian concepts without consideration of their clinical application, whereas the rest of the quote seems to contradict such a notion. To elaborate, Georgaca suggests that it is acceptable, for example, to utilise a Lacanian concept in social psychology without *explicating* the use of that concept in the clinic. This does not mean that it is not important to have an understanding of their use in the clinic. Furthermore, Georgaca’s call for *extensive analysis of the differences between the clinical and the theory/research domains* seem to clarify that the (clinical) domain of Lacan’s work cannot and should not be ignored when utilising Lacanian psychoanalysis in social psychology. Indeed, the attention to the (clinical) domain of Lacan may provide enough of a different perspective to provide something new and challenging to psychology. Nevertheless, critical psychology and discourse analysis may be wary of giving the clinical domain such prominence because the time

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required for clinical training to master psychoanalysis is extensive. Furthermore, a focus on the clinic seems to hark back to mainstream psychology's concern with placing responsibility in the unitary-rational individual to the detriment of considering the social order. That is, the analysand on the couch in the clinic can be taken as akin to the experimental subject or the client of cognitive-behavioural therapy from which, for example, prejudice emerges as a result of the individual's cognitive biases.

In an approach that appears more welcoming of the use of Lacanian psychoanalysis in critical psychology and discourse analysis, Hook (2008) provides an overview of a particular Lacanian notion – that of the 'big Other' – with a concern for how it may benefit those critical of psychology. Hook focuses on writings outside of psychology, which, given the importance that Georgaca flags, of understanding Lacanian notions from their clinical roots, may provide critical and discursive social psychologists with the conceptual foundations from which to work. Yet, like Parker and Georgaca, there is an ambiguity over the utility of Lacanian psychoanalysis for critical psychology and discourse analysis underlying Hook's work. Bluntly:

"I should hasten to add however that the Structuralist quality of much Lacan ... precludes any easy assimilation into orthodox psychological thought. At first glance this may seem to signal a dead end to the broader project ... namely a rejuvenation of a critical psychoanalytic social psychology via Lacanian thought. Then again, the argument I am asserting ... would make little sense if it were not viable to align aspects of Lacanian theory with a given set of social psychological problematics" (2008, p. 17).

For Hook, the point seems to be that if he accepts that Lacanian psychoanalysis has no utility for orthodox psychology – or (more appropriately) the margins of psychology – then his work was wasted effort. For critical psychology and discourse analysis generally, the point seems to be that so much is invested in critical attempts to utilise Lacanian psychoanalysis that we want so much for it to provide us with something new. The failure of attempts to draw upon Lacan may mean that not only has the search been wasted, but also that it may be impossible to find a position from which to be effectively critical of psychology. An analogy with illicit drugs use as an anti-institutional statement seems apposite. Illegal drug use could be seen as an act of defiance against the political institutions making them illegal but it is also arguable that drug use dulls the mind and diverts attention away from the critiquing the current social order. There is a risk that the allure of Lacanian psychoanalysis may blind us to its lack of utility for critiquing psychology.

To elaborate, we are not using this paper to make a sweeping argument that Lacanian psychoanalysis has no utility for critical psychology and discourse analysis. Rather than developing a grand anti-Lacanian



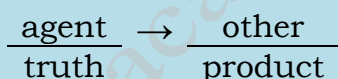
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narrative in the name of critical psychology, we want to encourage an engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis that is welcoming of what it may offer while also wary of its potential pitfalls. More specifically, our point is that the question of the 'utility' of Lacanian psychoanalysis for critical psychology and discourse analysis is a particularly important topic that Lacanians and social psychologists should continue to explore. We imagine that such an engagement would move away from a consideration of Lacanian psychoanalysis in general towards explorations of more specific aspects, such as the theory of the Four Discourses.

### The Four Discourses

In Foucauldian orientated discourse analysis, a discourse is usually used to denote regularities in the way something is spoken about. For example, the discourse of a biological drive for sex (Hollway, 1989) highlights a particularly pervasive way men may talk about sex as something they so desperately need as if it is a bodily drive that has more control over them than they have over it. The theory of the Four Discourses offers a very different understanding of discourse and we shall use a capital 'D' to signal this distinction. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that Lacan (2007 [1969-1970]) talks of only Four Discourses. This does not mean that there are only four different ways of talking about things but, rather, emphasises the focus on structure rather than content. When speaking, the content would be what is said whereas the structure could be understood as the relation between the agent who speaks and the other they address. Indeed, agent and other are two of four positions central to the theory of the Four Discourses. These positions always occur in the same order (see Figure 1); the *truth* motivating the *agent* to address the *other*, which results in a *product*.

**Figure 1: Four positions**



These positions provide the matrix or fundamental structure of Discourse. How an agent relates to, or addresses, another person can differ and would presumably depend on that agent's motivation. As such, there are a number of terms that can occupy these four positions (see Figure 2). For Lacan, the master signifier, knowledge, divided subject, and *objet petit a*, are the only four positions and, as if the positions occur in a loop, the terms are always in the same order. That is, if the master signifier is first, in the position of *truth*, then knowledge will be second, in the position of *agent*, with the divided subject in the position of *other* and the term *objet petit a* in the position of *product* (University Discourse; see Figure 2) but if the master

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signifier is last, in the position of *product*, then knowledge will be first, in the position of *truth*, etc. (Analyst's Discourse; see Figure 2). As the order of the terms does not change for Lacan, there are only four possible ways in which the terms can be arranged in the four positions, which gives us the Four Discourses; The Discourse of the University, The Master's Discourse, Hysteric's Discourse, and the Analyst's Discourse. The Discourse of the Master is the only Discourse where the signifier partially guaranteeing meaning (the master signifier) motivates (from the position of truth) the agent to address the other, which means that the master signifier is unconscious. Consequently, the Discourse of the Master is given priority by Lacan and change cannot occur in jumps between any two Discourses. The structure of the Discourses means that change only occurs through the rotation of the terms around the positions and more specifically each Discourse has its own instability that leads it to break down and gives way to the next Discourse as from, for example, the Discourse of the Master to the Discourse of the Hysteric.

**Figure 2: Four Discourses**

Four terms:

master signifier (S<sub>1</sub>)

Knowledge (S<sub>2</sub>)

objet petit a (*a*)

divided subject (§)

University Discourse

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$}$$

Hysteric's Discourse

$$\frac{\$}{a} \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$

Master's Discourse

$$\frac{S_1}{\$} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a}$$

Analyst's Discourse

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1}$$

The Discourse of the Master can be seen in authoritarianism where a dictator (master signifier) issues orders. While someone who is subject to these orders (barred subject) may know what they need to do they will not know why. That is, they will not know what (truth) motivates the dictator

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and in obeying the dictator's commands they will never really know what they are producing (*objet petit a*).

In the Discourse of the Master, a dictator (master signifier) would speak from the position of agent unaware of its own division (barred subject in the position of truth). The dictator guarantees meaning and would speak to, command of, the Other as knowledge but the separation between the speaking agent and the knowledge in the Other means that the unity of the agent is unobtainable (the *objet petit a* in the position of product). In the Discourse of the Hysteric, the cause of the hysteric's symptom (the *objet petit a*) is unconscious, the hysteric is a barred subject who addresses the Other (the master signifier) in order to understand their symptom (truth), and the knowing they bring about (truth) is not related to what caused their symptom (*objet petit a*). The Discourse of the University is common to education where the master signifier is unconscious original knowledge that supports the knowledge that is to be taught, and the knowledge that is to be taught (truth) addresses the student (*objet petit a*) as lacking knowledge (barred subject). In the Discourse of the Analyst, the analyst's knowledge (truth) leads them (*objet petit a*) to address the patient (barred subject), which elicits knowing (master signifier) from the patient that is not connected to the knowledge in the analyst. While both the Discourse of the Analyst and University suggest a particular setting – therapy and education, respectively – this does not mean they will only, or always, be evident in these settings.

It will be useful to highlight that our reference to the Four Discourses as 'fundamental' is contentious. Clemens and Grigg (2006) mention that the Four Discourses is one of Lacan's "first attempts to use letters to define a fundamental structure of psychoanalysis" (p. 2), which suggests that there may be other structures that are less important. Feltham (2006) does explore why, since the four terms can be arranged in the four positions to create twenty four combinations, there are only four discourses and concludes that one position of Lacan's is that the Four Discourses are the only structures. While it would therefore seem that there are no other structures than the Four Discourses, this is not something that is explored in detail in this paper so we want to leave the possibility of other structures open.

The theory of the Four Discourses requires more description than we have given it here, particularly if it is to be taken up within critical psychology and discourse analysis. As the seminar where Lacan describes these Discourses in the most detail has only recently been translated, it may not be surprising that the Four Discourses have been little used in, or on the margins of, psychology (except, for example; Branney, 2006; Parker, 2001). Outside psychology, descriptions of the Four Discourses (Bracher, 1994b; Quackelbeen, 1997; Verhaeghe, 1998; 2001; Žižek, 1998; 2006) have been available for some time now. From these descriptions it would seem that the Four Discourses offer three particular advantages and exploring

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these will allow us to consider the utility of a specific part of Lacanian psychoanalysis for critical psychology and discourse analysis.

### **Advantage 1:**

#### ***Condensing Lacanian psychoanalysis into a single theory***

Lacanian texts represent a huge body of scholarship. Indeed, the annual seminar in which Lacan (2007 [1969-1970]) dealt most with the Four Discourses is his 17<sup>th</sup>, which illustrates how much there is to choose from should one want to read and engage with Lacanian psychoanalysis (although not all of them are available in English). In addition, Lacanian texts are often notoriously difficult to read and many of the concepts are elliptical, hindering the possibility of comprehending an overarching theory. As such, the suggestion that the Four Discourses condenses Lacanian psychoanalysis into a single theory (Verhaeghe, 2001) may be seen to be an advantage by many. For Hook (2008), the lack of engagement of psychology with Lacanian psychoanalysis is striking. Could the Four Discourses therefore lure psychologists into a more in-depth examination of Lacanian psychoanalysis?

The difficulty of reading Lacanian texts may be important. More specifically, this difficulty cannot be easily dismissed by ascribing it to poor scholarship because it may be theoretically necessary. For Billig (2006), Lacan not only places obscurity over clarity but, as can be evidenced from Lacan's often misleading citation practices, is contemptuous of scholarly activities. In contrast, we suggest that the obscurity of Lacanian texts may encourage questioning, disagreement, and further inquiry, which may lead to a more fruitful process. In relation to editing a collection of essays on Lacanian theory of discourse, Bracher's comments are instructive:

"We have found some of the essays in this volume [Bracher et al., 1994] to be quite difficult, but we have included them nonetheless because we have found that they not only provide rich insights but repay each rereading with further insights and with new questions and problems demanding further work from the reader" (Bracher, 1994a, p. 16).

Indeed, Lacan's putative contempt for scholarship could undermine an image of Lacan as knowledgeable and master of all that he writes about, which may, for example, leave us better able to break through the confines of psychological or psychoanalytic scholarship. There is a risk that we may mistake the Four Discourses for a comprehensible theory hidden within a mass of confusion and therefore lose sight of what that confusion may offer. It is important to emphasise here that Lacan does not deal solely with the Four Discourses in Seminar XVII (2007 [1969-1970]) as he, for example, also comments on the student uprisings the previous year and the founding of the radical new Department of Psychoanalysis (headed by Michel



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Foucault and including Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Rancière, Alan Badiou, and Jean-François Lyotard) at the Université de Paris VIII (Vincennes). While we do not intend to explore the different aspects of Seminar XVII in this paper, we want to avoid leaving the impression that critical psychologists and discourse analysts can turn to this text for an easy explanation of the Four Discourses. Indeed, our point is that any explanation of the Four Discourses that is easy to read is likely to lose the advantages offered by Lacan's elliptical writing and would potentially result in a theory that could be all too easily assimilated and neutered by orthodox psychology. The advantage of condensing Lacanian psychoanalysis into a single theory does appear to mean that critical psychologists and discourse analysts could *initially* limit themselves to Seminar XVII and the descriptions of the Four Discourses being explored in this paper (Bracher, 1994b; Quackelbeen, 1997; Verhaeghe, 1998; 2001; Žižek, 1998; 2006). Another point is to consider the need to specify how the Four Discourses condenses Lacanian theory. It would be surprising if the Four Discourses could condense work that was developed by Lacan after Seminar XVII and this highlights the possibility that there is a historical development in Lacan's work. For example, Miller (2001) delineates three periods in what he terms 'Lacan's teachings' and it seems unlikely that a single theory could encapsulate them all. What the Four Discourses could do is provide a matrix of the main elements of Lacanian theory that is flexible enough to be applied to a wide variety of contexts, such as education, political repression, religion or gangs (see Bracher et al., 1994).

### ***Advantage 2: Abstraction***

The Four Discourses reaches a level of abstraction that is unattractive for many critical psychologists and discourse analysts. Abstraction is presented (Verhaeghe, 1998; 2001; Quackelbeen, 1997) as an advantage with two elements. First, it would seem that the Four Discourses are not tied to any particular context or situation and so could be used to examine or represent (Verhaeghe, 1998; 2001) any subject. Whereas, for example, a focus on individual choice in a particular situation may be seen to exclude consideration of politics, the Four Discourses would presumably be able to include, or account for, both. Second, as an abstraction that is not apparently tied to anything that we may recognise within our lives, the Four Discourses will not be diminished by individual stories. How or why individual stories would be theoretically or practically 'diminishing' requires further exploration. As Quackelbeen puts it, "the Lacanian 'formali[s]ations,' once established, are able to prevent a lot of superfluous imaginary constructions, so that psychoanalysis becomes more easily teachable and describable" (1997, p. 38). In a similar manner, Verhaeghe states that "because these formal structures are totally stripped of flesh and bones, they diminish the possibility of psychologising (Verhaeghe, 1998, p. 98). Freud drew upon, and developed, many myths, stories, or narratives for his

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work, including the Oedipal complex, and it is to these that Verhaeghe contrasts the advantage of abstraction:

“For example, if one compares the Freudian primal father with the Lacanian master-signifier  $S_1$ , the difference is very clear: with the first one, everybody sees an elderly greybeard before his or her eyes, roving between his females, etc. It is difficult to imagine this greybeard using the  $S_1$ ... which precisely opens up the possibility of other interpretations of this very important function” (2001, p. 19)

It is the avoidance of psychologising that may be the advantage most welcomed by critical psychologists and discourse analysts. It is important to note that for many critical psychologists and discourse analysts, psychology is a discursive practice and it cannot simply be avoided by, for example, shunning cognitive-behavioural theory because orthodox psychology will seep through theoretical and historical boundaries to be reconstructed elsewhere, including the practice of those on the margins. For example, the free-association narrative interview method (Hollway & Jefferson, 2001) emerged from attempts to change the subject of, and the subjectivity assumed by psychology, but Georgaca's critique (2005) arguing that FANI privileges the individual, highlights a similarity with the role of the individual in mainstream psychology. As such, the possibility that the Four Discourses could provide a framework to break through psychology's boundaries and imagine something new should be warmly welcomed. An example could be a consideration of gangs that neither commends nor condemns (Apollon, 1994). Despite such potential, we are concerned that the advantage of abstraction brings with it the risk of deluding us into believing that we have transcended the difficulties of psychologising. That abstraction may avoid psychologising sounds all too familiar to claims that experimental psychological methods can take out subjectivity so that we can learn about ourselves from an objective position. The delusion of objectivity is best countered by suggesting that objectivity is a subject position. The point can be explained by focusing on Verhaeghe's reference to Freud's use of myths. If the Four Discourses helps us avoid lapsing into myth there is also a risk that this – the avoidance of lapsing into myth – is a myth. That is, the myth that we may avoid myth, the narrative that says we can avoid narrative, the story that says it is not a story, the avoidance of the imaginary that is imaginary. It will be useful to point out that Lacan did argue that there is “no such thing as a metalanguage that can be spoken” (2007 [1960], p. 688) and it is therefore important to ensure that the Four Discourses is not used as if it offers understanding from outside of language.

### ***Advantage 3: Dialogical structure***

The last advantage builds upon the notion of a single, condensed and abstract Lacanian theory to consider that the Four Discourses provide a

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clear structure with which to work (Bracher, 1994b; Quackelbeen, 1997). In this paper, we have initially described the Four Discourses as consisting of four positions and four terms. Each of the Four Discourses emerges as a result of the structural relation of the terms as they take up their positions. More specifically, the Four Discourses present a dialogical structure through which we can potentially understand and explore subjectivity and the social order. For Quackelbeen (1997) and Bracher (1994b), this structure tells us where to look to ask:

“Who is speaking?’ ‘What is the place of the subject in its speaking?’ ‘What drives the subject in its speaking?’ ‘What place does he assign the other?’ ‘What are its effects?’” (Quackelbeen, 1997, p. 21).

... “and on that basis, the means for gauging the psychological and (thereby) social-political functions it [the dialogical discursive structure] might serve for its producers, as well as the various psychological and (thereby) social-political impact it might have on various types of receiving subjects” (Bracher, 1994b, p. 127).

The dialogical structure is likely to be particularly appealing to critical psychologists and discourse analysts because it will offer the ability to combine the psychological and social in such a way that will allow comment upon the social order. Sharpe’s analysis (2006) of advertising and the University Discourse initially appears close to the style of discourse analysis while bringing in more consideration of the historical context but it does deserve more detailed examination to consider how it combines the psychological and social and if it does so successfully. There are two points that need emphasising when considering the structure of the Four Discourses. The first point links in with the advantage of condensing Lacanian psychoanalysis into a single theory. While the Four Discourses can be separated out as a single theory of Lacan’s, more detailed explorations of them is likely to lead critical psychologists and discourse analysts in many different directions within Lacanian psychoanalytic scholarship. As such, while the Four Discourses provide a clear dialogical structure, they will link into other Lacanian concepts that may take us beyond initial concerns with the psychological and social. This is perhaps most evident in Žižek’s (1998) descriptions of the Four Discourses where he keeps turning to another structure of Lacan’s, the formula of sexualisation (1998 [1972-1973]). In this chapter, Žižek turns from describing the Four Discourses to considering how sexual difference is inscribed within them and therefore it is not so surprising that he would turn to Lacan’s own attempts to deal with sexual difference. Lacan does this by developing the formula of sexualisation, which has a similar abstract feel to the Four Discourses, particularly to their graphic representations (see Figure 2, above), but they are very different concepts. In repeatedly turning from the Four Discourses to the formula of sexualisation in his attempts to understand

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sexual difference, Žižek provides an illustration of how a particular use of the Four Discourses may lead into the exploration of other Lacanian concepts. Second, the structure of the Four Discourses seems to necessitate an explanation of how the shift between Discourses occurs, which does not seem to be explained by the structure itself. That is, the Discourse of the Master and the Discourse of the Analyst can be understood as resulting from the particular arrangement of the four terms in the four positions, but this structure does not appear to explain how we could move from one to the other. Verhaeghe (1998; 2001) notes that the movement between Discourses is one of the most important aspects of the Four Discourses but does not go as far as to provide his own explanation. Žižek (1998) does tackle this shifting of Discourse but it is where he flips from the Four Discourses to the formula of sexualisation. Consider an oft quoted statement of Lacan's:

"I would tell you that, always, the revolutionary aspiration has only a single possible outcome – of ending up as the master's discourse. This is what experience has proved. What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a master, you will get one" (Lacan, 2007 [1969-1970], p. 207).

In the Discourse of the Analyst (see Figure 2), the agent is the *objet petit a* and the product is the master signifier. We can understand the master signifier as signifier without a signified (an empty signifier) that, momentarily, fixes a number of other signifiers in place and therefore partially guarantees meaning. Initially, it would seem that the Discourse of the Analyst (see Figure 2) appears to be the structure in which the potential for radical – revolutionary – change is uppermost because it is here that the agent produces the master signifier that will partially fix the conditions of possibility. In contrast, the Discourse of the Master seems to be the structure associated with authoritarian control because the master signifier is the agent and would therefore seem to impose the conditions of possibility it momentarily fixes on the other. From this understanding of the Four Discourses, it would appear that Lacan is suggesting that there is an inevitable movement between the Discourses, as if the positions are forced to *revolve* around the positions, taking revolutionaries full circle, back to where they started. That is, for example, the master signifier revolves clockwise from the position of truth in the University Discourse, to the agent in Master's Discourse, to other in the Hysteric's Discourse, to product in the Discourse of the Analyst before, finally, returning to the position of truth in the University Discourse. While the Four Discourses do provide a clear dialogical structure with which critical and discursive psychologists may want to work to consider subjects from religion to gangs (see Bracher et al., 1994), it still links in with many other Lacanian concepts that are difficult to master and does not offer an easy understanding of how, once we have



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critiqued the psychological and social order, effective change may be achieved.

### **Concluding comments**

On the margins of psychology, Parker (2003; 2005), Georgaca (2005), and Hook (2008) are presenting a detailed and complex picture of what Lacanian psychoanalysis may offer critical psychology and discourse analysis. Broadly, Lacanian psychoanalysis appears to present something so different from orthodox psychology that it may offer the potential for radical critique. In addition, such a critique of psychology will not necessarily exclude critical psychology and discourse analysis from its remit. Nonetheless, the position offered by Lacanian psychoanalysis seems to require consideration and understanding of the (clinical) domain of Lacan and some may find this to be a diversion from explorations of the social order. Furthermore, there is risk that Lacanian psychoanalysis may appear so exotic and different to psychology that it creates an allure that blinds us to its dangers.

By focusing on the Four Discourses, we find a particular unorthodox perspective from which to critique psychology and the social order. The Four Discourses seem to condense Lacanian psychoanalysis into a single theory although understanding them as constituting a distinct theory risks losing sight of what else Lacanian scholarship may offer and may ultimately produce something that is too easily assimilated by mainstream psychology. More specifically, the Four Discourses presents a dialogical structure through which critical psychology and discourse analysis can explore subjectivity and the social order. That is, where the address of an agent to the other serves both psychological and social-political functions. An example is where the relationship between a psychiatrist and his or her patient is not reduced to the effectiveness of the intervention but as two psychosocial subjects in a structural social-political relation to each other. The structure of the Four Discourses is not self-containing and is likely to lead onto other aspects of Lacanian theory and, particularly, will require further exploration of how the Discourses shift between each other, or of how change occurs. The abstraction of the Four Discourses may help us avoid the psychologising evident in many of, for example, Freud's concepts. Indeed, the avoidance of psychologising – of myths, stories, narratives, of the imaginary – may just be what critical psychologists and discourse analysts need to break through the boundaries of orthodox psychology but there is a risk that evading such myths is a delusion.

On reflection, we are concerned that we are presenting an exploration of Lacanian psychoanalysis that is just too negative. Such a picture belies the way in which we have drawn upon Lacan elsewhere (Branney, 2006; Gough, 2007) but may also appear to be underlined by an anti-Lacanian stance. We would argue that if critical psychology and discourse analysis are going to find anything in Lacan, they will not do so as either pro- or anti-Lacanian. To take sides with or against Lacan risks ignoring the dangers of

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the positions from which we are critical of psychology. The main point of connection between Lacanian psychoanalysis and critical psychology and discourse analysis would appear to be the potential to combine the psychological and the social. The Four Discourses have been used to provide commentary on the psychological and the social order outside of psychology (see for example; Bracher et al., 1994; Clemens & Grigg, 2006) and we would suggest that it is important for critical psychologists and discourse analysts to examine these attempts as part of their own excursions into Lacanian psychoanalysis. This does not mean that Lacanian psychoanalysis is necessary for critical psychology and discourse analysis. As Parker writes in his short biography for a recent paper:

“these practices [psychology and psychoanalysis] must be understood as part of a political-historical context that will be transformed by the collective agency of working people to render those practices one day unnecessary” (Parker, 2007, p. 13).

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Peter Branney's research is concerned with critically exploring contemporary issues around gender and health while developing and evaluating methods for doing so. His doctoral thesis, *Deconstructing Domestic Violence* (University of Leeds, 2006), argues that critique of public policy needs to be able to imagine its own policies and ways of realising them and highlights that psychoanalysis has the potential to offer an effective approach. Current research focuses on the gendered use of health services. Peter is a research fellow at the Centre for Men's Health, Leeds Metropolitan University.

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