COUNTER-KNOWLEDGE, CRITICISM, AESTHETICS AND ACADEMIC DISOBEDIENCE: A THEMATIC HISTORY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN QUALITATIVE METHODS CONFERENCE

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"[K]nowledge is made for cutting - not understanding" (Foucault, 1980a:iv)

INTRODUCTION.
The event of the 2000 "What is *critical* in critical psychology?" conference marked the sixth birthday of the South African Annual Qualitative Methods Conference (QMC). Beginning as a largely student-run event in the Psychology Department of the University of the Witwatersrand in 1995, the QMC has grown both in scale and stature, resulting in a series of inter-linked conferences *(A Spanner in the Works of the Factory of Truth - 1995, The Body Politic - 1996, Touch Me I'm Sick - 1997, Histories of the Present - 1998, Normality & Pathology - 1999, What is critical in Critical Psychology? - 2000).* Despite remaining open to contributions from a broad variety of disciplines, the event's foundation has always remained that of psychology. In fact, if a single agenda for the event had to be isolated, it may well be that of attempting to bolster the practice of *critical psychology* in the South African context. The fourth QMC was something of a milestone in the history of the event. Not only did it represent the most multi-disciplinary - and hence diverse - conference of the six to date, it also attained the strongest rapprochement between aesthetic and academic disciplines. And as such several of the following examples of key QMC events will stem from this conference. The theme of this event, the genealogical injunction to write a "history of the present", provides a useful and synthesizing motif through which we may unify and contain many of the priorities of the Qualitative Methods series of conferences. Before turning to this thematic however, this paper will provide a brief overview of the *practical agendas* historically characteristic of the QMC. From this will follow a foregrounding of three fundamental concepts prioritized by the QMCs: 1) the enabling of effective criticism, 2) the production of *"counter-*knowledge", and 3) the use of aesthetics as means of politics. In this connection, and largely for convenience's sake I will use the work of Michel Foucault as something of an explanatory armature - a stabilizing reference point - through which to elaborate these agendas, although I admit that this may provide more an illusion of

cohesion than the "institution" of the QMC itself deserves.

A SERIES OF PRACTICAL AGENDAS.

Beginning in 1995 as a largely student-run initiative with the objective of problematizing the politics of knowledge-production in South African psychology (in particular) (cf. Terre Blanche 1996; Terre Blanche, 1997; Terre Blanche & Kruger, 1997; Terre Blanche & Kruger, 1998; Terre Blanche 1998), the Annual South African Qualitative Methods Conference (QMC) has grown both in stature and scale. Critical questions pertaining to research and knowledge-production in the human and social sciences continues to be crucial to the ethos of the event, despite that it retains the ground-swell of its support from those interested in the practice of critical psychology.

Indeed, a chief objective of the conference over the past four years has been to strengthen and substantiate the network of critical psychology scholars working within South Africa. More than helping to consolidate this informal network, the conference has also provided an important "site of exchange" where local academics have had the opportunity of meeting, engaging and collaborating with foreign academics conducting research in similar areas. (Past guests include Kum-Kum Bhavnani, Patricia Hill-Colins, Mark Seltzer, Orlan, Erica Burman, Ian Parker, Toby Nathan and Gillil Benani). More than providing local academics with the opportunity to make valuable international contacts, the conference has also been important in drawing the attention of international academics to the current critical psychology work occurring in South Africa. Indeed, next to the United Kingdom, South Africa boasts one of the world's strongest concentrations of scholars working within the broad rubric of "critical psychology", and it is the goal of extending South Africa's world-position in this relatively new area of enquiry and criticism that provides the QMC with much of its impetus.

Despite a strong focus on international participation and on fostering collaborative opportunities between academics across national and disciplinary barriers, the QMC also has pressing domestic goals. Foremost amongst these is to "open up" critical psychology in South Africa, to provide an entry point for young - and hopefully also racially diverse - researchers to present their work from the platform of an increasingly international conference. This objective of providing "spaces of exposure" extends also to new and multi-disciplinary research methods, and to the influx of those theories and subject-matters not typically considered within traditional or positivist approaches to psychology in particular. (The first pair of QMCs played an important role in the promotion of discourse analysis in South African psychology; they likewise drew significant scholarly attention (within SA psychology) to the work of Foucault and Derrida).

The abiding dedication of the QMC to progressive means of critical knowledge-production is not one of a naive fascination with the *avant garde* of current qualitative methodologies (as claimed by Van Staden, 1998). This attention to new theory and methodology is geared primarily towards a sense of *political utility* rather than merely an enthusiasm for formal innovation. The cultivation of a kind of "political consciousness" of the extraordinary power-relations and dynamics that characterize South African contexts and histories is a defining feature of the QMC. It is this multifarious and widening analysis of power-relations, the forcing of the ostensibly apolitical into the light of political critique and interrogation (most notably perhaps here the practices of psychology themselves), that has been one of its most vital agendas. Indeed, the trajectory of the QMC is marked not only with the

identification of new and less humanistically-orientated methods of research within psychology (discourse analysis, ideological critique, genealogy, various forms of textual analysis), but with equally new *subjects* of research in psychology (power, space, history, subjectivity, discourse).

Given then that the conference has as a central objective an "opportunity creation" initiative aiming to provide a platform both for junior and for previously marginalized researchers, the issue of dissemination becomes apparent. As important as conferences are as sites of exchange, interaction, and paper presentations, the organizers have also done well in distributing and self-publishing QMC conference material (cf. Terre Blanche & Kruger, 1997; Terre Blanche & Kruger, 1998; Hook & Harris, 1999; Terre Blanche, Bhavnani & Hook, 1999; Hook et al, 1999). The publication imperative has thus become increasingly important for the QMC, as a way of maintaining the stature and development of the conference (as examples one should note the special issue of the **South African Journal of Psychology**, 1997, 27(2); the German **Journal Soziale Wirklichkeit**, 1998, No.1; and the forthcoming collection **Psychopathology and social prejudice** (in press), edited by Hook & Eagle).

ENABLING CRITICISM.
Speaking in 1976, Foucault noted that there had been, in the last few years, an "increasing vulnerability to criticism of things, institutions, practices and discourses" (1980a:80). He had in mind a variety of events, including the student uprisings of the preceding years, the anti-psychiatry movement, the recent publication of **Anti-oedipus** and a series of attacks on the legal and penal systems in France. In this connection, he noted that "[a] certain fragility has been discovered in the very bedrock of existence - even and perhaps above all, in those aspects of it that are *most familiar, most solid and most intimately related to our bodies and everyday behaviour*" (Foucault, 1980a:80, my emphasis).

The uncoordinated, fragmentary and even "disorganized" occurrence of such forms of criticism is not something which appears to have bothered Foucault. Indeed the lack, within anti-psychiatry for instance, of "any systematic principles of co-ordination" that would have provided it with a greater "system of reference" (1980a:80) is seemingly less important than its potential to produce a variety of local, autonomous, non-centralized criticisms whose validity "is not dependent on the approval of the established regimes of thought" (p81). This preoccupation with discontinuous, non-unitary campaigns of criticism "incapable of unanimity" and appositional to the effects of global, totalitarian theories is even more clearly evident in Foucault's introduction to **Anti-Oedipus** (1983) where he suggests that political action should be freed from all "unitary and totalizing paranoia", that action, thoughts and desires should be developed by "proliferation, juxtaposition and disjunction, and not by subdivision and pyramidal hierarchization" (pxiii).

By avoiding the inhibiting gravitas of such supra-theorizations (Foucault (1980a) had in mind particularly Marxism and psychoanalysis, critical systems which he clearly felt had outlived their usefulness), and by basing criticism in specific, local and micro-contexts, and by opening it up to new levels of analysis, new subjects of focus and new and previously marginalized understandings, Foucault's hope was that one would be able to generate an autonomous and non-centralised kind of theoretical production whose validity was "not dependent on the approval of established regimes of thought" (Foucault, 1980a:81). Here then one finds a vocal encouragement of *a culture of criticism* that sits alongside *a*

prioritization of specific and localized interests - two objectives that parallel one another in the fundamental disrespect they show for established theory. These are imperatives which under-write the QMC, and from which flow a series of other linked objectives: the impetus to defamiliarize the familiar (often taken to be a hallmark of incisive qualitative analysis); firstly, the attempt to emphatically historicize and contextualize the seemingly ahistorical or decontextualized; secondly, the initiative to hold up the arbitrary or seemingly innocent facets of social/psychological life/practice as themselves reasonable objects of critical analysis; and thirdly, the cautioning to attempt to manage all of these outside of the constraining gravity of any one single critical system.

ANTAGONIZING ESTABLISHED THEORY.

Perhaps the most vital injunction here though is to follow, wherever possible, *potential lines of critique*, rather than potential lines of theory, as viable means of producing knowledge. This is something of a "call to arms" that would seem to require further qualification, and this is a qualification which will hopefully build as this discussion unfolds. In attempting to consolidate strong criticism the QMC's agenda has not been one of theoretical loyalism. (Even the current reference to Foucault works more as a way of solidifying - dramatizing - a set of critical principles than as a means of verifying theory). Similarly, the QMC's objective has not been that of building a critical structure, an over-arching (singular) discourse of criticism. In the same vein, the QMCs have often taken irreverent, popular or seemingly "crass" forms, at least from the perspective of traditional academia (take for example, the rave at QMC3, the "deviant" sexuality of Cohen and Kapetanakis's performances at QMC4 and QMC2 (anal expulsion as form of painting, and penis-piercing as practice of queer-politics, respectively), the beachfront walkabout at QMC3, the "touch me I'm sick" theme as lifted from the discordant *Mudhoney* grunge anthem). An attendant critical focus has been the "localism" of much QMC work, which has taken specific, delineated and chiefly South African themes, subjects, processes, objects, texts, "things" as their level of enquiry and analysis. This bottom-up route of enquiry - as opposed to the verificationist project of "dressing up" local sites of analysis with pre-formulated top-down theory - stands in strong contrast to any attempt at theoretical unity.

KNOWLEDGE-PRODUCTION.

Similarly denying hopes of any overall theoretical or formal unity is the fact that the QMCs have entailed a breadth of diverse activities within their programmes, including dramatic and musical performances, art exhibitions, multi-media displays , in addition to displays of polemic and controversy, alongside academic paper presentations. Such diverse presentations have stemmed from a wide array of disciplines (Oral History, Education, Philosophy, Political Science, Sociology, the plastic and dramatic arts, Geography, Architecture, Social Work, Criminology, Comparative Literature, English and Law amongst others) and from a similarly broad spectrum of presenters. (It is an important aside here that there have been no criteria for exclusion for work submitted to the conference).

Rather than a staid or unchanging theoretical solidity or theoretical allegiance then, the QMCs have been a smorgasbord of activities and ideas, a conscious attempt to cultivate something of an "academic disobedience" and to formulate criticism in the terms of content, demonstration and transgression, rather than simply in terms of academic argument. Indeed, given a primary agenda of consolidating a base of inventive, effective and multiple criticism(s), this diversity of actions and practices has been rather a boon than a stumbling block to the efficacy of the conferences. That the internal coherence of the

event has at times risked collapsing into the fragmentary is, in many ways, a safeguard of a non-unified critical agenda that is mobile, re-inventive and shifting.

Two qualifications become important here. Firstly, a fundamental disregard for established theory does not translate into a simplistic advocation of *anti-theory*. Secondly, a commitment to criticism does not mean a dedication to the mindlessly anarchistic, to the merely destructive. Criticism, like theoretical innovation, is a productive activity, a positive and generative force of change and development. Foucault's surprisingly optimistic assertion that "knowledge can transform us" (cited in Best & Kellner, 1991:55), informs us of the importance of building different understandings and new ways of thinking and reading, of inserting new pivots and relays of resistance into what de Certeau calls "the practices of everyday living" (1989). If critical practices are going to become properly politically active, formidably appositional, then they need, in some way, to be substantial, difficult to merely re-marginalize, or re-colonize, able to work their terms and understandings into the vocabulary of everyday discourse.

Put differently, we might say that one half of adequate criticism is in fact *knowledge-production*. Critical activity must provide us with new instruments, and new kinds of resistant knowledge(s), variable enough to ensure the ongoing operation of flexible and durable critical forms. For the QMC, criticism is a generative project, *an ontological activity* one might say, an ongoing and differently articulated type of research, that *creates* something, that leaves us with research products, that offers re-readings, re-thinkings, *re-theorizations* of precisely those things typically most easily passed over by criticism. The attempt to make operable forms of resistant knowledge, to employ counter-discourse, or better yet, *counter-knowledge*, in Foucault's term (1980a), has been an integral part of the QMCs since their inception. This dedication to the attempt to produce critical "counter knowledge" - to emphasize simultaneously the importance of criticism, and the value of its utility as viable, appositional knowledge - is perhaps best summarized in Foucault's (1980a) idea that "knowledge is made for cutting not understanding".

SIDESTEPPING THE CO-OPTION OF CRITICISM.
We are approaching a difficult position here; for to demand that critical activities *produce knowledge* is to risk facilitating exactly the various insidious forms of power we are attempting to critique. What is required here is an awareness of how new and seemingly critical knowledges become "spokes in the greater wheel of power". Indeed, the supply of sporadic auto-critique within a powerful domain of knowledge or discourse restores to it an egalitarian facade, a veneer of fairness and justness, without ever risking the fundamental balance of power. If we are to follow Herman & Chomsky (1988), this pretence of criticism, opposition and debate is vital to producing illusions of consensus and democratic progress which become difficult to attack in a reasonable manner. Indeed just as consent may be manufactured, so can criticism, as a way of smoothing the route of power's hegemonic development.

The co-option of criticism also occurs through an emphasis of the *extremity* of critical voices, which, by their very distance from current norms and socio-political arrangements increasingly come to solidify and re-substantiate the exact values they had hoped to critique as moderate, normative and rational. In this way governing relations of power can come to appear as more *reasonable*, more *just*, more *natural* than whatever critical force it is that is threatening enough so as to increasingly *deserve* ostracization, disqualification,

dismissal. It is in this sense that Foucault (1977) notes that modern disciplinary power actively produces not only norms and normal subjects, but also aberrance and deviant subjects, as ways of furthering and legitimizing its normalizing agenda. In attempting to mould the critical and knowledge-producing responsibilities of the researcher we have to be aware not only of facilitating the development of power, but also of *reproducing the very power we wish to interrogate*. Indeed, this is the case where critical voices, eager to speak out against power and confident in the assurance that knowledge is necessarily *inimical to power*, end up speaking the forms of their own oppression. This for Foucault (1980b) is the case in discourses of sexuality which speak openly and freely against sexual repression whilst ever more pervasively circulating rigid, normative and constrictive values and norms of permissible sexual activity.

For Foucault (1980b), this "speaking against power" is the familiar pattern of seemingly liberatory discourses which pretend that new knowledges are dissociable and separable from contemporary technologies of power, from the "regimes of truth" maintained by dominant discursive practices in a given society. Rather than knowledge being antithetical and necessarily antagonistic towards power, knowledge is in fact vital to the ongoing production and expansion of power, just as an arrangement of power is a prerequisite to the formation of knowledge. In the by now famous maxim: "Power and knowledge directly imply one another ... there is no power relations without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault, 1977:27).

"APPEALS TO THE MARGINS".
That knowledge does not contest or refute power is assured by the simple fact that what is known and recognized as a reasonable knowledge within a society is contingent on its specific economy of discourse. Or, as Foucault himself puts it: " ... there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated, nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without ... discourse" (1980a:93). For Foucault (1977:199), discursive practices are characterized by a "delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories". It is here that the term of *counter-knowledge*, and the objective of *counter-knowledge-production* begin to take on their full relevance. If we are producing what counts as knowledge within a given society then we are, almost by a relationship of default, *advancing certain relations of power already established* rather than contesting them. The goal of counter-knowledge production requires the generation, or as Foucault, in his historical preferences would prefer, *the recovery*, of precisely those things lying outside of a given arrangement of knowledge.

In this sense, one needs to look away from theory, away from legitimate forms and domains of knowledge, to find new, forgotten or silenced levels of analysis, subjects of focus and understandings (here of course the attraction of aesthetic rather than institutional academic modes of expression, here too the attraction of a mode of "academic disobedience"). As Young (1981:43) puts it, eager not to under-estimate the domain of presiding relations of discourse: discursive practices "make it virtually impossible to think outside of them ... [t]o think outside of them is, be definition, to be mad, to be beyond comprehension [and] ... reason". Edward Said is equally unrelenting in sketching the

breadth of power's hold, through discourse, on contemporary knowledge: "the will to exercise dominant control in society and history has also discovered a way to clothe, disguise, rarefy and wrap itself systematically in the language of truth, discipline, rationality, utilitarian value, and knowledge. And this language in its naturalness, authority, professionalism, assertiveness and anti-theoretical directness is .... discourse (Said, 1983:216).

Hence it is "appeals to the margins" which must lead the project of counter-knowledge production, because it is precisely at these points, lying exactly beneath knowledge, beyond its permissible parameters, that the most forceful forms of criticism can be tapped (Foucault, 1980a). It is here, once we have sufficiently distanced ourselves from meta-theory, with an attention to the local, micro, contextual and marginal that we enable the generation of a resistant and non-centralizing kind of theorization whose validity "is not dependent on the approved regimes of thought" (Foucault, 1980a:81). Hence, no doubt, Foucault's concerted focus on the fundamental "othernesses" of human experience - madness (1973), criminality (1975b; 1977), sickness (1975a; 1977), delinquency (1979), perversity (1980b).

SUBJUGATED FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE.
These areas "beneath and outside of acceptable knowledge" are not the realms simply of ignorance - for Foucault (1980a) they are instead areas of "subjugated knowledge". These kinds of understanding represent for Foucault a powerful reserve for criticism and political thought. No doubt the prime "surface of emergence" of such knowledges is that of rediscovered historical content, through the vehicle of genealogy. A second source however, with which the first should ideally be linked, is that of *actively disqualified* knowledges, those low-ranking forms, insufficiently elaborated, differential, popular with no common meaning, that are "located beneath the required level of cognition and scientificity...that lay fragmented, incomplete and in varying stages of disuse" (Foucault, 1980a:82). More directly put, these are the kinds of knowledges continually rejected and dismissed by the hierarchy of knowledges and sciences, precisely the kinds of understanding that could not emerge from the practices, foci and priorities of a science of a recognized or "reasonable" knowledge. Foucault has in mind more specifically the "naive" knowledges of the psychiatric patient, the ill person, the nurse, the pervert, the criminal, the delinquent; those regional knowledges which owe their force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it (Foucault, 1980a:82). "[I]t is through the re-appearance of .... these popular knowledges ... that criticism performs its work" (Foucault, 1980a:82).

These knowledges are not necessarily an end in themselves; they need be tactically put to use as part of a greater strategic offensive. So whilst these voices of subjugated knowledge do not possess unconditional or incontravertible truth-claims, they do constitute an important resource, a reserve of critical raw materials that may be linked up to a cogent epistemology, a substantial and viable methodology, or to empirical forms of investigation or comparative forms of analysis. Once such a linking is properly solidified we may have the germinal bud of a growing counter-knowledge, a viable platform for rethinking certain priorities and historically-contingent truths. Indeed, careful to avoid overstating the critical efficacy of various "voices of opposition" Foucault distinguishes between sources of subjugated knowledge from naive varieties of empiricism (which would doubtless include appeals to the relevance of personal experience), opportunistic eclecticism (which would

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refer to each and every theoretical position best suited to serve its interests) and self-imposed asceticism (which typically leads to the "worst kind of theoretical impoverishment" (1980a:81).

It is worthwhile here providing a couple of emblematic examples of the kinds of counter-knowledge that the QMC has attempted to foreground, whether with reference to subjugated forms of history, the accounts of "sufferers of power", or simply with reference to radically disqualified and unaccepted forms of "knowledge". The fourth conference, *Histories of the Present*, for example, featured a powerful workshopped theatre production "The story I am about to tell", which, to quote from the proceedings of that event, "consisted of disturbing re-tellings of true personal trauma (snippets of survivors' Truth & Reconciliation Commission testimonies) which upturned commonplace assumptions of the meaning of truth and reconciliation in Post-Apartheid South Africa. These were factual accounts which had emerged from a history of apartheid oppression in which their contents had - within the dominant structures of the presiding social structures of the time - a social meaning which could either not be uttered at all, or that could not attain - at least within the minds of the majority of white South Africans of the time - any substantial, or reasonable level of 'truthfulness'" (Hook, 1999:4).

The third conference, *Touch me I'm sick* featured a strong focus on the marginal voices of those on the "receiving end" of psychotherapeutic, psychiatric and medical power. The event was opened by psychiatric survivor Felicity Belovitch, and featured subsequent talks on the experience of being diagnosed with OCD, on the misogynistic pre-history of modern medicine, and on the implicit heterosexist bias underlying much psychotherapy.

BODIES, TRUTH, HISTORY, SICKNESS, PATHOLOGY.

Historical content and typically marginalized voices are hence particularly useful in enabling the critique of "those aspects of our existence most familiar and most intimately related to our bodies and everyday behaviour" (Foucault, 1980a). Indeed, given the fore-running explanation, it becomes easy to see why the QMCs have chosen the themes they have of bodies, truth, history, sickness and pathology. Three of these objects, namely bodies, sickness and pathology, have been longstanding and conventional domains of social science attention. Indeed, in Foucault's opinion, they represent nodal points in the generative flow of disciplinary knowledge that has increasingly come to define and in a sense "produce" us, indelibly affecting how we understand both others and self. More than this, these are the nodal points from which technologies of cure, intervention and rehabilitation are continually legitimated and motivated. These three points of "knowledge's colonization" (bodies, sickness and pathology) are hence powerfully in need or radical interrogation, reassessment, revision, relative at least to how they have been typically approached within mainstream psychology.

Truth and history, the other two chief themes of past qualitative methods conferences, make for a different case. Whereas bodies, sickness and pathology are, from certain vantages, familiar characters within the ongoing stories of social science and psychological knowledge, the notions of truth and history *as themselves subjects of critical investigation*, are, within traditionalist approaches to psychology, relative aliens. The critical prospects of history, with particular reference to how it might historically contextualize supposedly universal and ahistorical psychological concepts - such as those of mind, psyche,

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personality and psychopathology - has been traditionally been kept at bay from an insular psychology. Likewise, some notional variety of truth, as the implicit point of navigation and essential goal of psychology, has, until fairly recently, remained in a hallowed and un-interrogated state of grace. Critical notions of ideology and discourse, and how they disrespect the "truths" of a society and a community, have, to say the very least, not featured as standard elements within the mainstream teaching and training of psychology students. Indeed, within the last 10 years at least, and considering the withering strains of Marxist critique within the greater domain of psychology, it has only really been the advent of the post-modern and post-structural "turns" which have turned attentions within psychology, *to truth's contingence on relations of power.*

The QMCs have attempted to re-engage these three fundamental spheres of social science knowledge (bodies, sickness and pathology) in different ways, examining them more through a focus *on power* than through unquestioned notions of *truth* and *knowledge*. Likewise, the QMCs have attempted to lift the level of critique in South African psychology up a notch, by bringing "into the critical picture" the goals and means of the traditional objectives and practices of psychology. In these ways, and in accordance with Foucault's preferences, the most important agenda of the QMCs has been *to further substantiate the force and breadth of de-centred, diffuse and local forms of criticism, to bring the inappropriate practices, foci and priorities of marginalized concerns and disqualified understandings into the frame of a "reasonable knowledge".*

It is important to make mention here also of the last QMC, *What is critical in Critical Psychology?*. Although not embodying an *untraditionally-handled* traditional subject of social science, like many of the previous QMCs, this event made for an important addition to the series of conferences, precisely because it so explicitly focussed on self-critique. Given the above discussion of the "co-option of criticism", the objective of critically reflecting on the QMC's content and activities - along with those of South African Critical Psychology more generally - was clearly paramount. A central issue here, signalled by Foucault's unbending declaration that the social sciences were born as measures of control, as means of perpetuating and extending oppressive relations of power, is whether such social sciences, no matter how critical, or detached from the scrutinization of human or statistical subjects, can ever be operational in producing properly politically-utile, non-repressive, non-hegemonic or liberatory knowledges. A declaration of this sort makes the speed with which the QMCs have rushed to align themselves with various disciplines of the arts and humanities quite unsurprising.

Basic to this seemingly intrinsic problematic of the social sciences is Foucault's (1977) understanding of disciplinary power. Butchart distils an aspect of this concept of power in noting that "all disciplinary enquiry relates to its subject matter not as a means of discovery against an object awaiting to be known, but as a productive power that is also its effect" (1998:ix). That power cannot be separated from knowledge and that such power-knowledge unavoidably serves the interests of state and reigning asymmetries of power - in the surveillance and disciplining of human subjects - means then that the social science enterprise will always and seemingly unavoidably feature as a vital component of modern power.

The prospect of new methodological horizons and new anti-humanist themes, like those of history, space, discourse, that surrender their grip on the human subject, would appear

to mitigate somewhat against Foucault's grim prognosis. Likewise an avoidance of research that gratuitously "psychologizes", hence providing clinical professionals with additional surfaces of purchase *within* the human subjects, may appear to go some way to alleviating the "subjectifying" tendencies that so attach particularly the axis of psychological knowledge/practice. Perhaps future conferences will be able to offer a more convincing or substantial retort to this predicament. For the time-being it is worth noting that the QMCs have taken as basic to their programmes the attempt to turn particularly its putative home-discipline of psychology "in on itself", to lend the discipline a greater "reflexivity of practice". Whether this line of criticism will ultimately yield formidable results and equip laypersons with adequate vocabularies and resistances (against the power-knowledge complex of psychology) is something that future QMCs and the field of critical psychology as a whole still need to assess. Until then the QMC faces, as an incentive, Foucault's (1977) challenge that a critical, progressive, politically-active social science remains a contradiction in terms.

"CROSS-DISCIPLINARITY" AND METHODOLOGICAL INNOVATION.

The priorities of producing critically-effective, or reasonably *destabilizing* "counter-knowledges" have, as suggested above, led to a pronounced emphasis, within the QMC, on cross-disciplinary work. This intellectual investment in "cross-disciplinarity" is based on an optimism regarding the potential for such collaborations to yield new forms of knowledge, which bring with them new possibilities for political action. The development of hybrid disciplines would seem to offer the possibility of introducing new intersections of understanding, and new expositions of power beyond the jurisdiction of singular, insular domains of study. What is seemingly required for effective critical practice is not a discrete and all-purpose method of scrutiny, but something of a toolbox approach, hence the variable analyses Foucault himself conducts whereby a spatial or geopolitical analysis is utilized to study architecturally-sited forms of power (as in the Panopticon), whereby historical and material (genealogical) analyses are utilized in the case of the developmental lineage of current orders and practices of power (as in the modern, disciplinary era), whereby a linguistic analysis is adopted in the case of discursive forms of power.

Part and parcel of this "multi-disciplinarianism" hence is a focus on methodological innovations. Indeed, if it is the case that "knowledge can transform us", and that, in some meaningful way, *one's method is the font of the knowledge one is able to produce*, then this emphasis on formal methodological innovation would seem well-founded. Bluntly put: new critical projects would appear to require new methods, new mechanisms of enquiry. Not only do new methods allow for the prospect of counter-knowledge production, they also enable us to envisage new concepts, new objects and new practices, and to bring them into operation. They bear within them the possibility of making different areas of critical intervention "thinkable and practicable" as Rose (1991) puts it. Concomitant with such a focus on new and less-humanistically orientated methods of research (like those of discourse analysis, archaeology, genealogy, geopolitics, interpretative analytics) is the identification of equally new *subjects* of research (space, time, power, discourse), that both problematize older subjects (principally of "man" whether approached through the deviant, individual, through the body, the mind, the norm, the standard, the population, the statistical analysis) and likewise represent new horizons for critical analysis.

"SOME COMFORT GAINED FROM THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE INHERENT LIES IN EVERYTHING".

The QMC's prioritization of "making heard" disqualified or subjugated forms of knowledge - of "trying to say what could not easily be said" was expedited by making recurrent and thorough reference to the field of *aesthetic endeavour.* The role of art-making and performance within the QMCs has been more than decorative - it has in fact proved a vital and central means not only of enquiry and critical practice. Indeed, the fact that practices of art-production and performance belong to different epistemological and ontological orders - as *aesthetic* endeavours - to those of conventional social science practices, means that they have been able to lend the conferences certain unique opportunities in terms of brokering appositional "counter-knowledge".

Clearly the objects of aesthetic practice are not assessed with the same standards as those of ostensibly scientific knowledge; and they are not thought to attain the same level of relationship to a scientific "truthfulness". By the same token though, by virtue of the fact that the aesthetic is so intimately associated with the fictional, the metaphoric, the poetic or irrational, its practices are not subject to the same kinds of policing, exclusion and disqualification as other forms of knowledge. More plainly put, the domain of the aesthetic offers novel and affective means of challenging status quo understandings and values; indeed one is hard placed to find more vital opportunities for subversion.

Both the centrality of aesthetic practice to the QMC, and its prospects in terms of producing counter-knowledge were reflected in the (1998) choice of Orlan as one of the conference's keynote speakers. Orlan's artistic project, the gradual transformation of her face and body through life-endangering bouts of cosmetic surgery, which are filmed and then broadcast around the world, (grizzly excerpts of which featured in her presentation), displaces a number of pressing issues concerning the female body and its relationship to desirability and malleability within the given patriarchal social milieu. In many ways Orlan's "carnal art" is successful in producing a kind of counter-knowledge by threatening the collapse of one of modernity's most cherished divisions: that between the pathological and the rational, the abnormal and the sane, the accepted and the transgressive. The division is of course, a mutually-exclusive one, one whose perpetuation is of massive importance to a human science like that of psychology. Indeed, an applied discipline like clinical psychology would, arguably, cease to function in the absence of so fundamental a distinction.

Another QMC performance which powerfully evoked issues of sexuality, deviance and transgression was that of Steven Cohen. Cohen, a participant of 1997, 1998 and 1999 QMCs, conducted perhaps his most memorable performance at the opening of the *"Histories of the present"* conference exhibition. Dressed in drag, but essentially naked, Cohen was caned across the buttocks by a co-performer in an apparent mime of sado-masochistic sexual practice. In a second piece, Cohen ejected viscous red dye from his mouth before douching the same blood-like substance over a kitsch nude of a young girl that he'd previously placed amongst the exhibition. Although perhaps more spectacular in their shock-appeal, both Orlan and Cohen's performances brought to mind the work of British Artist Damien Hirst. One of his most notorious pieces, namely *"Some comfort gained from the acceptance of the inherent lies in everything"* features two dead cows, which have been divided by vertical cross-sectional cuts into 12 separate segments, each floating upright in its own separate tank of formaldehyde. As an exhibit the 12 tanks are placed in a discontinuous but linear order such that the various cross-sectional segments

of the two bodies are interchanged. Separated from one another equi-distantly, the tanks are arranged so that spectators may walk around *and between* the various segments of the carcasses and benefit from both external and internal anatomical vantages of the two animals. The attraction of these works, and the power they exude from the perspective of the critical and subversive social science researcher, is that they are able to displace certain dominant social values by exhibiting the facts "hidden", or secreted away by more acceptable practices. Each of the above examples, Orlan's cosmetic surgery, Cohen's sexual exhibitionism, Hirst's displayed carcasses, have strong corresponding co-ordinates in the field of culturally-valid, socially-acceptable objects and practices. Face-lifts, attempts at modifying the body through various practices (like those of tanning and exercise), are quite "unextraordinary". The means, understandings and forms of predominant and socially acceptable forms of sexual interaction, at a given time and place, are likewise understood as quite "natural". Even the mass mutilation and destruction of cattle, and the use of their carcasses as food-stuffs, clothing and means of decoration, is a basic and unqualified condition of the everyday modern, western life-style. All of these examples are, quite undeservingly, *unremarkable*, normal, until re-contextualized, placed back into relation with their seemingly more extreme forms.

At their most forceful, these works of art are able to "re-semanticize" (in Said's, 1978, phrase) facets of normality, displace them so as to make *them*, by contrast, quite strange and alien. The surfacing of such marginalized contexts operates to interrogate practices of normality, disrupt *their* apparent arbitrariness, their secured positions within the normalcy of modernity, invert their acceptable positions in the cultural domicile of our particular times, places and spaces. At their most seductive, these works, like the incisive and compelling evidence of visionary research, have the ability to make normalcy appear counter-intuitive, absurd, irrational. Their counter-knowledge, their logics, twisted and abstracted from those of normative objects and practices, come, however momentarily, to seem immanently *more sensible, more believable* than those of present culture. It is through this quality that such works become able to challenge and ultimately refute the given order of normality.

"HISTORIES OF THE PRESENT".
As a way of drawing to a close - and pulling together many of the diverse ideas presented thus far - it is worthwhile elaborating briefly on the theme of a "history of the present". This elaboration will necessarily be schematic and brief, and its purpose here will not be that of staking out a methodological procedure, but rather that of sketching a unifying critical thematic. This theme, the title of the 1998 QMC, suggested a unifying way of loading critical enquiry across a wide array of qualitative research methodologies; likewise it served also as a viable aesthetic credo. A call to attend to the details of the historical and contextual moment/location of the "here and now", this theme hopes to relativize the present cultural and political status quo. It hopes to destabilize and defamiliarize the present, so to speak, to develop a form of counter-intuition with which to critically apprehend exactly that which counts as "normal", "natural", standard, as undeserving of critical attention within a given location. The idea - most straightforwardly - is to build up a critical velocity with which to prevent the routine reproduction of commonplace values and forms of common-sense which, in fact, are integral to the insidious perpetuation of asymmetrical relations of power in society.

This is a notion which signals a special suspicion of essentialist or supposedly fixed or

truthful meanings. Similarly, it suggests that every conceivable object, practice or discourse, so long as it entails the social production of meaning and power, is amenable to analysis: no concept or subject/object is above the jurisdiction of its critical analysis. The thoroughly politicizing force of a "history of the present" makes for an unremitting and forceful scepticism which, rather than presuming the objective existence of any objects of knowledge, or of the apparently transcendental nature of subjectivity, rigorously denies any trans-historical stability that such notions would pretend to have. In perhaps the most dramatic example of this - and in meeting a political scepticism of the knowledges "that are" with a suspicion of the phenomenological subject "that is" - Foucault famously declares that "One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject" (1980a:117).

Given the pragmatic concern of avoiding the mere reproduction of currently dominant social meanings - a history of the present hopes to displace current rationales and understandings with very different forms of explanation. A history of the present exhibits a fundamental disrespect for explanations of a conventional historical type. Unconcerned with providing stories of evolution and achievement, stability and continuance, a "history of the present" is a problematizing methodological ethos that seeks out discontinuities where others have found continuous development. In short, the "historian of the present" chooses rather to head "against the grain" of predominant understandings.

Similarly, a "history of the present", rather than stationing itself in "the now" and projecting current values back into the past [as Butchart (1998:2) puts it] and into the products of its present analysis, opts instead to uproot the "now" of commonplace understandings, normalities and subjectivities, with recourse to a source of otherness or difference (such as marginalized knowledges, repressed history, aesthetic activity). Considering the critical and political value of ascertaining a viable source of "otherness" it becomes clear that a "history of the present" represents an almost absolute reversal of the typical function of conventional histories. As opposed to a "history of the past" - which is essentially a work of the present produced as way of understanding the past - we now have a "history of the present" that looks everywhere it can beyond its domicile culture to assemble competing means of making the present intelligible. A "history of the present" then is largely written from a collection of fragments of the forgotten, suppressed, disqualified or otherwise marginalized. A successful "history of the present" then may be understood as equipping the researcher with different accounts and readings of what had appeared to be ontologically secured meanings.

The risk of evoking "history" here as a powerful form of non-centralised criticism that stands as far as possible outside of a reliance on the approval of established regimes of thought, is that we will stretch the understanding of the concept beyond its capacity. This may well be the case. But then again, such a "history" that acts as a reservoir of otherness, as a source from which may be drawn the insurrectionist force of subjugated knowledges, as a means of "rediscovering the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle" (Foucault's phrase, 1980a), such a "history" would be a potent political weapon indeed.

EPISTEMOLOGY AND POLITICS.
Prior to closing it seems prudent to anticipate the attacks of the conferences's critics (like that of Van Staden's, 1998). Foreseeably the predominant criticism of the objectives of

particularly the earlier QMCs is that they ostensibly espoused a misguided celebration of "anti-knowledges", sacrificing epistemological rigour for a flavour-of-the-month methodological experimentalism and "avant-guardism" for "avant-guardism's" sake. No doubt the QMCs have provided a forum for experimental work, and for performances and arts broaching a celebration of "anti-rationalism". On one level it is perhaps understandable that so diverse an ensemble of works and practices may be construed as unscientific, and hence epistemologically invalid. For the record: the espousal of naive "anti-knowledges" has never been an objective of the conference: a problematizing of the politics of knowledge-production, however, has been. In assessing the validity of the truth-claims of what have been referred to above as "counter-knowledges" it is important to qualify *exactly the kind of epistemology* that is being developed before embarking on an overzealous interrogation of epistemological rigour as defined in merely positivistic terms.

From the very outset the QMCs have been unconcerned with producing scientific "truths". Rather than science, their overwhelming concern has been with producing *politics*. They have, in short, entertained a fundamentally different - and from their perspective a more pressing - research imperative to that of the more positivistic social sciences. Foucault neatly surmises this imperative when he states: "It seems to me that the real ... task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticise them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them" (Foucault, 1974:171). As such political-orientated research such as that foregrounded by the QMC does not address itself primarily to *truth*, but rather to *political activity*. This is not to suggest that politically-motivated research of this sort need have no epistemological integrity. Indeed, quite the contrary, the initiative is to "render certain critical knowledges capable of opposition and to struggle against the solidity of the theoretical, unitary, formal and scientific discourse ... [of] ... opposition to the scientific hierarchization of knowledges and the effects intrinsic to their power" (Foucault, 1980a:85). Work of this sort hence needs a kind of epistemological strength if it is effectively going to be able to enter the field of struggle and contestation.

The contestation of power however cannot simply orient itself around the positivistic goal of determining the truth, substantiating knowledge, given that both of these are, according to Foucault (1977), and as we have seen, functions of reigning asymmetries of power. The analysis of power (the putative function of political research), in short, thus makes for a special case in research. It is not enough to simply "map the terrain of power". To attempt doing so risks "discovering" a description that has to a certain extent already been pre-determined. The criticism of power needs to set up a utile and "unassimilable" framework of criticism, engender a political matrix that is thorough, combative, and ultimately politically effective against reigning understandings to "stand its own ground" without being colonized or re-possessed by the very object of is criticism. Such a political agenda however by no means vindicates a lyrical right to ignorance and non-knowledge: "we are opposed primarily not to the contents, methods or concepts of a science, but the effects of the centralising powers which are linked to the institution and functioning of an organized [social] scientific discourse within a society such as ours" (Foucault, 1980a:84). Political research *does* as such apply itself to knowledge-production and the generation of kinds of truths - however, these are critical, operative, action-directed truths capable of strategy and resistance, rather than truths of a static or merely factual variety. Political research is *tactical* as opposed to *unconditional* in its relationship with truth - not merely positivistic. In

closing it is appropriate again to turn to Foucault: "I am fully aware that I have never written anything other than fictions. For all that, I would not want to say that they were outside the truth. It seems possible to me to make fictions work within truth, to introduce truth-effects within a fictional discourse, and in some way to make discourse arouse, 'fabricate', something which does not yet exist, thus to fiction something. One 'fictions' history starting from a political reality that renders it true, one 'fictions' a politics that does not yet exist starting from a historical truth" (Foucault, cited in Morris & Ratton, 1979:75).

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