THEORIZING EMBODIED SUBJECTIVITY

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Abstract:

Critical psychology with no notion of embodied subjectivity encounters problems. This paper proposes the integration of social theory and neuroscience in order to develop a notion of embodied subjectivity capable of mounting a strong challenge to the essentialism, individualism and reductionism of the mainstream. Discussions of the disembodiment of psychology and the always already embodied status of subjectivity are followed by a description of Damasio's "somatic marker" hypothesis, and it is suggested that Damasio's ideas provide a powerful resource for critical psychology.

INTRODUCTION

It seems that for critical psychology to be a *psychology*, rather than a hollowed-out hybrid composed from philosophy, sociology and fragments of other disciplines, it must theorize embodied subjectivity. For without a notion of embodied subjectivity critical psychology is unable to theorize people's awareness of oppression or exploitation and their desire for a better world; nor can it properly ground its analyses with respect to the material factors and trajectories of social participation which shape and constrain the identities and subject positions that individuals occupy. In this regard, Foucault's question – "How did I become what I am, and why do I suffer so much from being what I am?"(Miller, 1993) – is a profoundly critical one that, if pursued, might infuse critical psychology with a powerful political intent. Moreover, without a notion of embodied subjectivity critical psychology becomes both dualist and reductionist, its practice tending toward an inverted mirror image of the mainstream. Mainstream [p.134] psychology reductively distorts human sociality into individual characteristics, such as facets of personality; critical psychology without a notion of embodied subjectivity simply does the opposite, reducing embodied subjectivity to discursive trope, performative stratagem or interactional effect.

This instantiates a problematic dualism between person and society producing both conceptual confusion and errors of reification.

However, theorizing embodied subjectivity is no straightforward task. There is a tension between anti-essentialism and naïve humanism that must be carefully negotiated to avoid the twin snares of linguistic relativism, in one direction, and reification of a transcendent self in the other. Furthermore, embodied subjectivity straddles a series of binaries - mind-body, individual-society, intellect-affect, nature-culture, and rationality-emotion - that potentially problematise its interrogation. Any adequate theorization therefore requires both halves of each of these pairs to be conjoined in a both/and fashion, treated as interdependent and mutually constitutive rather than exclusive and oppositional. Rather than understanding these binaries as antithetical pairs, indicative of unresolved tensions, exclusions and the play of power, we can treat their terms as co-constitutive poles that, together, demarcate a heterogeneous terrain of meaning and materiality. If each pole of these pairs is to meaningfully contribute, it must be acknowledged that each separately possesses irreducible characteristics or qualities not contained within the other. With respect to body, affect and emotion, such qualities cannot be theorized by treating them as symbol, metaphor, discursive construction or epiphenomena, since this conceptual move implicitly collapses the heterogeneity of each term back into a single discursive pole. Moreover, we cannot in any case theorize as though the body and its functions gain their meaning purely through socialization, enculturation, social construction, positioning or performance, since the body is not an object like other objects. The body is simultaneously the basis of who and what we are as subjects: it is not just something we know but also the very basis of our knowing, and so its character always already contributes to the meanings we make. It follows that we need a notion of embodied subjectivity that addresses at least some of its biological aspects, since irrespective of whatever body, affect and emotion actually *are* it is untenable to propose that their biological physicality is wholly irrelevant to their character. Accordingly, this paper will argue that the selective deployment of neuroscience, in [p.135] creative tension with resources from social theory and constructionism, can facilitate the generation of fluid, situated accounts of embodied subjectivity that mount strong challenges to the

essentialism, individualism and reductionism of the mainstream. A comprehensive socio-neural account of embodied subjectivity is of course beyond the scope of this paper, so what follows is no more than a first outline of some relevant aspects. First, discussions of embodiment with respect to psychology and then social theory illustrate that whilst psychology is largely disembodied, subjectivity itself is always already embodied. Some of the ways in which this embodiment is socioculturally specific are discussed, and Damasio's (1994) "somatic marker" hypothesis is then proposed as a neural mechanism that might enable this sociocultural specificity.

DISEMBODIED PSYCHOLOGY

In attempting to describe psychological functions using information processing models equally applicable to both computers and humans, mainstream (predominantly cognitive) psychology promotes an individualised notion of subjectivity. Individualisation is achieved through the presuppositions of theories, which presume that only those influences immediately present and empirically tractable are relevant, and through the design of studies in which "responses" to "stimuli" are decontextualised from their origins within the lived subjectivity of embodied persons and aggregated across experimenter-defined "groups" or conditions in the search for statistical significance (Tolman, 1994). This practice, which treats mutually constitutive embodied desires and transactional processes as static, ahistorical variables capable of being understood mechanistically, is commonplace even in social psychology. It instantiates the primacy of supposed causal laws or individual mental processes, simultaneously rendering the social as mere context, somehow separable or distanced from the truly psychological. In contrast, constructionist and discursive psychologically oriented researchers argue that human activity is essentially normative in character, ordered in action sequences within which socio-cultural conventions, locally legitimated narrative forms and discursive accounting practices create the regularities about which cognitive psychologists speculate, and for which they misguidedly seek mentalistic causes (Harre, 2002). They observe that not only are the metacognitive skills of abilities such as memory socially acquired (Vygotsky, 1962) [p.136] but also that their moment-by-moment deployment "in the wild" is typically both dependent upon a range of interpersonal

strategies (Middleton & Edwards, 1990) and mediated by socially produced artefacts and spatio-temporal organisations. Empirical studies of discourse problematise the view of language as a neutral, transparent medium of communication, an assumption underpinning the interpretation of questionnaires or scales which falsely constrain responses and suppress variation. Such studies show that what people say is always both situated and occasioned (Edwards & Potter, 1992), but these aspects of their responses are camouflaged by psychological practices which erroneously assume that all truly significant processes occur *within* the individual.

But mainstream psychology not only promotes individualism, it is also largely disembodied, its processes and models usually as capable of being enabled by silicone and wire as by flesh and blood. With the exception of work within biological psychology and cognitive neuroscience (subdisciplines whose separate existence actually exemplifies the structuring influence of mind-body dualism upon the discipline) theories and models are typically devised with little or no reference to physical structures or processes in the brain-body-world system. They operate instead in a realm of assumptions where "what must be" is compiled through empirical data from studies intended to discriminate between competing, information processing hypotheses of this or that aspect of cognition. This may reflect a confluence of interests, from the military drive to model human cognition in computer hardware (Bowers, 1990), through to the broad ideological tenor of mainstream psychology with its prissy distrust of unruly carnal influences (see Webster, 1996). Nevertheless, it seems fair to say that the disembodied character of mainstream psychology has received less attention from critics, perhaps because critical psychology itself is a somewhat disembodied enterprise. This is not to say that critical psychology wholly disregards embodiment – indeed, some work takes it as central (e.g. Bayer & Ror Malone, 1996, Blackman, 2001). Rather, on the one hand important tendencies within critical psychology (some feminisms, discursive psychology and social constructionism) are, or tend towards, the disembodied; and on the other critical psychology exhibits a generalised reluctance to engage constructively with biological and related findings.

For example, feminist efforts to avoid essentialism might sometimes mean that embodiment is inadequately addressed, even within [p.137] strands of theorising that explicitly discuss the body. Poststructuralist approaches that treat the body and its parts as symbolic forms or cultural constructions can usefully highlight how embodiment is socially produced, but may tend in so doing to negate *actual* embodied experience, which "is at best left out of the discussion, and at worst precluded by the theory: here, feminist theory itself is alienated from the body" (Wendell, 1996 p.168). Wendell describes how becoming disabled led her to question Haraway's (1985) notion of the body as cyborg for failing to adequately include her own experience, which "was precisely .. being forced to acknowledge and learn to live with *bodily*, not cultural limitation" (Wendell, 1996 p.169, emphasis in original). Burkitt (1999) makes a related point about Butler's notion of the body as an object whose materiality becomes intelligible through performative iterations of socially-normative discursive practice. Butler proposes that the sexing of bodies flows not from their ontological characteristics but from their materialization in discourse, but simultaneously acknowledges that sexual distinctions are unstable precisely because some bodies resist this process. Burkitt observes that whilst this resistance must be grounded in actual embodied difference, Butler does not further engage with this issue and its implications for her position. Similarly, discursive psychology (e.g. Edwards & Potter, 1992) has been a major influence upon critical psychology: but not only does it operate solely with transcripts and texts, it also practices a methodology forbidding the introjection of extra-discursive influences into its analyses. Hence, it is paradoxically unable to theorise the motivations or embodied desires that underpin the notions of stake and accountability which are central to its analyses (Willig, 2001). Social constructionism also contributes strongly to critical psychology, but in most variants it too is disembodied. It lacks an accepted notion of embodied subjectivity, promoting instead an "ocularcentrism" that negates embodied experience and covertly reinstates dualistic thinking (Sampson, 1998). Constructionism also reductively conflates ontology with epistemology: not in the useful sense that it sees them as already conjoined, but in the sense that it tends to treat the ontological as lacking causal force or enabling potential, instead locating opportunity and action solely within language and epistemology.

Consequently, it is unable to adequately address not only embodiment but also materiality and power (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999).

So, important contributory tendencies within critical psychology [p.138] may fail to adequately address embodiment. More generally, there is in critical psychology a pervasive, largely unacknowledged reluctance to engage constructively with biology, physiology, endocrinology, neuroscience and the other sciences of the body. Rather than accept *any* of these discipline's findings as provisionally or partially correct, critical psychology typically treats them as objects of criticism, deconstruction or genealogical study - even when it could plausibly treat them as constraints or potentials to be sensitively integrated with more explicitly social understandings. Now, it is of course vital that ideologically loaded, crassly reductionist biological research is subject to searching, rigorous criticism: critical psychology would barely deserve the term if it did not fulfil this important function. Moreover, biological reductionism induces understandable revulsion and repulsion in those sensitive both to its historical associations and its contemporary mechanistic, degrading potentialities. Nevertheless, at least two kinds of problem flow from this wholesale reluctance to engage constructively with the biological. First, critical psychology weakens its own arguments, appearing biased, defensive and unconvincing to those not already sympathetic. This matters especially in debate, since the most convincing arguments against reductionism have often come from biologists themselves, who have marshaled both alternative evidence and methodological critique in support of more pro-social interpretations. For example, Murphy (1995) observed that in challenges to Herrnstein and Murray's racist interpretation of the meaning of I.Q. test scores, the evidence of biologist David Suzuki was frequently decisive. Second, not all of biology is simply reductionist in character and implication: as will be demonstrated later, some recent neuroscience actually provides a basis for conceptualizing how important aspects of embodied subjectivity are societally co-constituted. By not engaging constructively with such work critical psychology misses opportunities both to reinforce, develop and extend its own arguments and concerns, and to forge creative alliances with sympathetic tendencies in other disciplines.

EMBODIED SUBJECTIVITY

An appropriate starting point from which to begin developing an appropriate notion of embodied subjectivity is with those social theorists whose focus has been the sociocultural constitution of forms and modes of embodiment. For example, Norbert Elias sketches a history [p.139] of the "civilising process" where civilization is not something counterposed to savagery in a progressivist tale wherein a superior social form inevitably supersedes preceding others. Civilisation is instead a temporary monopolisation of the means of violence in the hands of police and other agents of the state, a moment within an ongoing competition for power where certain practices are understood as the rightful prerogative of some sectors of society and not others. It is the dynamic, unstable, and temporary solidification of a somewhat fragile power relationship, not a permanent consensus of liberal tolerance and consolidation of human rights. In his analyses, Elias deploys the notion of "figuration", a "flexible lattice work of tensions" played out between interdependent members of social groups. Power is not "owned" by any group or individual but is relational, the product of an unstable equilibrium within a figuration. The changing pattern of relations thus constituted is "created by the players as a whole – not only by their intellects but by their whole selves" (Elias, 1978a, p.130). The management and embodied expression of power within specific figurations includes such concrete aspects as modes of greeting, the inculcation of correct habits and etiquette, ways of eating and behaving in various public situations. These bodily expressions accompany and exemplify channelised forms of feeling and thinking, modes which reflect and enact social forms and are "embodiments of a ..mental and emotional structure" (Elias, 1978b, p.56)

So for Elias embodiment includes, but is not restricted to, the management of posture, gesture, and expression. It has a corresponding phenomenological dimension: modes of subjectivity, individual repertoires of thinking and feeling, are simultaneously societally induced through enculturation. The status and location of actors, their specific trajectories within particular matrices of figurations, will generate distinct and different modes of being – but these differences are themselves societal products:

> “the individuality of the adult can only be understood in terms of the relationships allotted to him or her by fate, only in connection with the structure of the society in which he or she has grown up. However certain it may be that each person is a complete entity in himself, an individual who controls himself and can be controlled or regulated by no-one else if he does not do so himself, it is no less certain that the whole structure of his self-control, both conscious and unconscious, is a product of interweaving formed in a continuous interplay of relation-[p.140] ships to other people, and that the individual form of the adult is a society-specific form”(Elias in Goudsblom & Mennell, 1998, p.73).

Similarly in the work of Pierre Bourdieu we find the notion that dispositions, defined as lasting ways of being, habitual states or tendencies of the body, are organised into structured and structuring systems known as the “habitus”. Dispositions consist of patterns of facial expressions, posture, walking, ways of using the head and the arms, all of these “always associated with a tone of voice, a style of speech and (how could it be otherwise?) a certain subjective experience.” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.87) Dispositions are related to individuals’ location within dimensions such as gender and social class, and, like Elias, Bourdieu emphasises the role of early experience in their acquisition. Thus, ruling ideologies and subcultural norms are not just discursive constructions. Systems of dispositions inculcated by the habitus are “political mythology realised, *em-bodied*, turned into .. a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.93-4). Social class, for example, is not only a matter of accent or dress style: it becomes quite literally embodied as an array of preferences and desires, a structure of things you like and things you don’t. The habitus instills within individuals patterns of dispositions which structure their embodied experience (in turn inciting them to reproduce its own structure), setting effective boundaries on the lived socio-cultural world. Through it certain things become unthinkable, “not for the likes of us”, whilst others become desirable and normal. On balance, societally structured dispositions lead individuals to distrust and reject that which they were never allowed to have, and simultaneously to desire that which, for their social position, is inevitable.

Because they are of the body *before* they are of the mind (although they are of course in both), the normative injunctions embodied in dispositions are not readily amenable to transformation. They are embodied in patterns of taste and habit outwith rational deliberation and hence are relatively intransigent, enduring, and transposable across social situations. As Bourdieu puts it:

> "The principles em-bodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, can't even be made explicit; nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and, therefore, more [p.141] precious, than the values given body, *made* body by the transformation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy, through injunctions as insignificant as "stand up straight" or "don't hold your knife in your left hand" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 94)

Similarly, Young (1990) suggests that girls typically learn to throw objects differently to boys: not because of the anatomical fact that their breasts might otherwise get in the way, since the difference can be observed well before puberty, but because their gendered upbringing encourages specific ways of relating to and using their bodies. In our culture, young girls typically throw without either fully extending their arms or twisting their body behind the movement, they "do not reach back, twist, move backward, step, and lean forward. Rather, the girls tend to remain relatively immobile except for their arms, and even the arms are not extended as far as they could be" (Young, 1990, p.145) Young identifies three modalities of experience that constitute women's embodiment: ambiguous transcendence (more so than men, women typically experience their bodies as both vehicle for potential action and burden or obstacle); inhibited intentionality (women typically experience their bodies as both capable and incapable, as imperfectly capable, and this experience inhibits their actual movement); and discontinuous unity (women are more likely to experience their bodies fragmentarily, capable and powerful only partially or in certain situations). Consequently, Young suggests, women's engagement with the objective, geometric space within which they live tends to be somewhat hesitant and

inhibited, since their phenomenal *lived* space is structured by these three inhibiting, fragmenting modes of motility. This way of being is instilled through the gendered organisation of practices such as play and sport; the promotion of specifically "feminine" ways of walking, sitting, holding oneself, wearing clothes; and the promulgation of emotional norms which attach greater anxiety and danger to girls activity in a variety of spheres.

So, for these social theorists the phenomenology of embodiment is not merely Kantian, it does not subsist in a simple array of givens derived from our physical nature and relation to the material world. Our embodiment is societally produced, reflecting both the culture we inhabit and our location within it. This can sound like a falsely universalizing or deterministic conclusion – Bourdieu, for example, is sometimes read in these ways (e.g. Throop & Murphy, 2002),[p.142] partly because of his emphasis on how dispositions are transmitted implicitly. However, an alternative view is that these theorists are not describing behavioural certainties but modal tendencies, that each highlights what we can call *somatic repertoires* that are typically, but not exclusively or deterministically, associated with gender identities or class locations. Three further, related points about these historically situated somatic repertoires can be emphasized. First, they have a *visible* aspect. Postures, gestures, styles and patterns of speech, accents and mannerisms, preferences and nuances of taste and judgement, index an individuals' location within a matrix of social positions, inexorably associating her or him with a body of assumptions and expectations corresponding to societally generated categories and positions. They are an extra-linguistic symbol system conveying, to those suitably enculturated, important information about the individuals' social status and trajectory. Second, they also have a *subjective, phenomenological or psychological* aspect. They include structures of taste, judgement, preference, desire, liking and wanting, choosing and assessing, that regulate the choices of subjects and make some courses of action more probable than others. And third these two aspects *are not in practice separate*: somatic repertoires have corresponding constellations of feelings, and each mutually reinforces the other.

The relationship between somatic repertoires and feelings in psychology has informed such

diverse theorists as James, Reich, Sheldon and Perls. Our folk psychology affirms this putative relationship with cultural commonplaces: “walk tall” to boost confidence, “whistle a happy tune” to banish misery. Numerous studies suggest such assertions are not mere folk psychological myths, since they echo findings that deliberately arranging facial muscles into a smile can increase reported feelings of happiness (e.g. Soussignan, 2002). The body always already informs subjectivity, and so the socialisation of embodiment is not confined to visible habits and signs (gestures, posture, accent): it also implicates an accompanying array of *feelings*. The notion that feelings guide and shape our actions is embedded in our folk psychology and accounting practices (“I don’t know why I did that, I just felt like it”; “I felt that there was something odd about him from the moment I met him” etc.), although this is more rarely theorised. However, Shotter (1993) makes this guidance central, describing it as “knowing of the third kind”. Feelings supply an “embodied form of practical-moral knowledge in terms of which people are able to influ-[p.143]ence each other in their being, rather than just in their intellects” (Shotter, 1993, p.40-41). Shotter (following Vygotsky) characterises this knowledge as an “affective attitude”, a “transmuted version of a social relationship” lending our words and verbalised thoughts their “particular motives and valencies”. He locates its origins in “instructional” social relations, typically where children are being assisted to acquire or develop concepts. It appears phenomenologically as feelings which “are not properly called emotions” (Shotter, 1993, p.29) but are called out within streams of activity and functional within them, supplying sensuous practical-moral guidance and “rooting” our actions synchronously with others.

Shotter sensitively explicates the operation of “knowing of the third kind” within the uncertainties of interpersonal interaction; here we are more concerned with its explicitly societal and politicised dimensions. In this regard, societally acquired somatic repertoires and feelings embody normativity and reinforce the social order that generated them in two related ways. They do so externally, by marking individuals as exemplars of a specific social position, so shaping the opportunities and choices they encounter. But they also work psychologically, by ordering preferences and structuring desire, and so regulating self-directed activity. This confluence between the visible and the phenomenological comes about because, as Shotter suggests, our judgements concerning what is right are a matter of

feeling as well as of intellect, so that often what we choose is what *feels* right for us. But what feels right is not just an individual matter since the very structure of our feelings is always already enculturated. For example, English culture includes discourses and practices of “banal nationalism” (Billig, 1995) that constitute an informal or “lived” ideology, emphasising Queen and Country and, by implicit comparison, distrusting forms of otherness embodied in differences of accent, dress, skin colour, taste or style. This ideology, which is fertile ground for more virulent forms of nationalism (and for racism) is on the one hand durable and widespread, and on the other flexibly constituted from shifting and mobile hierarchies of difference that weave and interlock in various ways. From the perspective being developed here, this simultaneous durability and flexibility may arise because the differences the ideology references have been marked for subjects, from an early age, with inarticulate *feelings* of rightness and wrongness. These feelings are interpellated by embodied practices such as flag waving and saluting, and by [p.144] cultural forms embedded in architecture, the media and elsewhere: at the same, dialectically, they serve once invoked to sustain the ideology and propitiate its future transmission. Granting this distinct yet constitutive role to socialised feelings may explain why some individuals can claim not to be racist whilst nevertheless acting in overtly discriminatory ways: their inarticulate feelings seem ‘natural’ to them, and therefore inconsistent with a politically charged notion such as racism. It may also explain why, for them, there is no necessary contradiction between their acting in discriminatory ways but having black friends (see Billig, 1991): in friendships, but not in other contexts, localised feelings of love or affection may over-ride generalised feelings of prejudice.

Now we must speak carefully, in a psychological universe dominated previously by cognitivism and now by discourse, because within both paradigms feelings are typically consequent upon, or an effect of, discursive or cognitive activity. In contrast, the argument here is that influences are bi-directional: feelings and discourse are conjoined and mutually influential, analytically rather than actually separable, but neither is simply reducible to the other and they operate together to *co-constitute* subjectivity. Neither wholly autonomous from language and the symbolic, nor simply reducible to it, feelings are, in the memorable terminology of Vygotsky (1962), the very essence of thought and

the core stuff of being, but are "completed" and so given their full-blown significance and meaning by language. To theorise how feelings are both socialized and embodied in a way that engages with their irreducible embodied characteristics, we will now consider an idea from contemporary neuroscience. Damasio's (1994) "somatic marker" hypothesis focuses explicitly on the origins of feelings in experience, and their subsequent influence on decision making in social settings. His work is influential and highly respected, although sometimes considered controversial, and his theories are supported by experimental studies but derived initially from clinical work with brain-injured people, giving them a large degree of ecological validity. Moreover, Damasio's writings are explicitly informed by his readings of philosophy, literature and the arts: he adopts an explicitly Spinozist position, denying the Cartesian separation of mind from body and instead conjoining subjectivity with the material body. These characteristics make his work fruitful territory for constructive engagement by critical psychologists.[p.145]

DAMASIO'S "SOMATIC MARKER" HYPOTHESIS

The "somatic marker" hypothesis describes a neural system that facilitates decision-making in social settings by utilising acquired repertoires of feelings or somatic feedback. It is derived from studies of people with injury to the ventro-medial sectors of the frontal lobes: Damasio has now worked with 60 people with such damage (Damasio, 2002), all of whom display the same two consequences. First, their range of affect is greatly diminished; second, they are unable decide effectively in social settings: even simple choices, such as which day some months hence to book a doctor's appointment, are problematic.

Linking these deficits, Damasio suggests that the ventro-medial sector of the frontal lobe is vital to systems that bring feelings into consciousness. Loss or damage to the ventro-medial frontal lobes removes many feelings from consciousness and also impairs the ability to make decisions, suggesting that "rational" decision-making is somehow related to somatic feedback. On the basis of this "double dissociation" Damasio proposes that through experience we learn to classify some stimuli as positive and others as negative, and this learning includes a somatic component. On future occasions where this learning may be

pertinent, the brain calls out patterns of bodily activity consonant with previous experience. When this happens, physiological states previously associated with either positive or negative outcomes get reconstituted as feelings, *somatic markers* which stamp putative options with valences: "When a negative somatic marker is juxtaposed to a particular future outcome the combination functions as an alarm bell. When a positive somatic marker is juxtaposed instead, it becomes a beacon of incentive" (Damasio 1994, p.174).

Somatic markers are bodily states called out within streams of interaction, experienced in the form of feelings and utilised to assess alternatives. They do *not* decide for us, but they do accelerate and simplify decision-making by reducing the set of options we must rationally consider. Moreover, their character for each individual reflects the particular history of incentives and penalties of that person. As Damasio puts it: "Somatic markers are thus acquired by experience, under the control of an internal preference system and under the influence of an external set of circumstances which include not only entities and events with which the organism must interact, but also social conventions and ethical rules" (Damasio 1994, p179). The somatic marker system, like the ability to acquire [p.146] language, is part of our species-nature: but, like the languages we learn, its content is a product of experiences within a particular socio-cultural niche.

Somatic markers have two further relevant features. First, the body proper can be bypassed in "as-if body loops", where the somatosensory cortex is organised by the prefrontal cortices and amygdala into the activity pattern which would have been induced had the body itself been engaged. Such loops cannot replicate precisely the feelings which would have ensued had full-blown somatic markers been engaged, but are an economy of processing forged during enculturation: "as we matured and repeated situations were categorised, the need to rely on somatic states for every instance of decision-making decreased .. Decision-making strategies began depending in part on "symbols" of somatic states" (Damasio 1994, p.184). Second, somatic markers may operate covertly, outside of consciousness: although not in principle inaccessible, they may not always enter the limited capacity of awareness. This may be more likely where faster, more subtle "as-if body" loops are engaged, but could potentially occur at any

time, especially in charged or complicated situations where the situated demands of interaction command the full capacity of consciousness. Somatic markers may thus introduce into activity a "patterned irrationality", responses disjunctive with the present but consistent with aspects of past experience.

It is important to recognize that this is not merely reconstituted behaviourism, since Damasio's hypothesis differs from behavioural conditioning in at least three significant respects. First, even when we fail to notice their contribution somatic markers still operate by influencing conscious choice. Damasio's hypothesis thus maintains an important role for subjectivity, rather than relegating it to the status of epiphenomena as behaviourism did. Second, unlike behavourism it is not deterministic. Somatic markers operate through subjectivity and so function probabilistically, not deterministically: we *can* still choose an option carrying a negative somatic marker, it is just harder (we have to "talk ourselves into it"). And third, whereas behaviourism primarily emphasized an asocial "environment" Damasio highlights the social origins of somatic markers, tying them to "social conventions and ethical rules". This makes their operation normative (further avoiding determinism) and circumvents behaviourism's unsavoury "prediction and control" connotations.

It should also be emphasized that Damasio's hypothesis need not [p.147] implicate a rational, unitary subjectivity. Rationality is challenged because choices are shaped not only by the exigencies of the situation at hand but also by the effects of prior socialization, mobilised by the mind-brain-body system in the form of feelings that (sometimes covertly) guide our actions. Such guidance is not irrational in the sense that it is *random*, for it has a logic derived from the past that we might (typically in retrospect) be able to identify. But it is irrational in the sense that it may introduce biases and blind spots into the field of choice we encounter. And neither is subjectivity necessarily unitary: somatic markers inform subjectivity in ways that we sometimes only later (if at all) might recognise, and in any case are at least partially enabled by neural systems not available to introspective awareness. So, subjectivity is distributed across facets of experience, some of which appear only as embodied echoes of prior socialization introjected now into present activity.

CONCLUSION

In conjunction with other resources, Damasio's hypothesis could help critical psychology to formulate an effective notion of embodied subjectivity. His insertion of socialised repertoires of somatic feedback into decision-making strongly challenges the disembodied cognitivism of mainstream psychology, placing the socialized, enculturated body at the core of subjectivity and giving it an important role in guiding activity and making choices. Decision-making is embodied: not just in the banal sense that minds need embodied brains to exist, but in the much more interesting sense that the actual process of decision-making relies upon, and quite literally incorporates, bodily feedback or feelings. Not only is decision-making bound up with feelings, but these feelings are the socialized product of a particular world of ethical-moral conventions and social rules. By identifying a neural system that conjoins acquired somatic repertoires with subjectivity, Damasio's hypothesis bridges between the individual and the societal at the same time as it embodies subjectivity within the flesh that bears it. A notion of embodied subjectivity incorporating Damasio's hypothesis could help critical psychologists avoid problems caused by refusing to engage with the biological. It might enhance the explanatory power of their work by comparison with the individualizing explanations prevalent in fields such as personality and psychopathology (Cromby, 2004; Harper & Cromby, 2004), allowing critical psychology to mount a stronger [p.148] challenge to reductionist, biologically determinist accounts. Indeed, the growing body of evidence that the fine structure and dynamics of the brain itself are socialized may provide a new opportunity to insert a critical agenda into the very heartland of mainstream psychology.

The way of thinking advocated here suggests a critical psychology confident enough to decisively go beyond the purely discursive and engage constructively with neuroscience, a critical psychology able not just to highlight problems of dualism and representation and articulate critiques of essentialism, but able also to illuminate issues and tensions that neuroscientists find problematic. Neuroscience tends toward both individualism and various forms of reductionism (ontological, explanatory, and eliminative – see Bennett & Hacker, 2003), and so generates paradoxes, omissions and reifications that critical psychology might

illuminate, providing a usefully pro-social corrective to these problematic tendencies. In this way, critical psychology might treat neuroscience as a heterogeneous, conflicted and disputed terrain like any other, and attempt to nurture its progressive tendencies by engaging constructively with them whilst vigorously countering others. Somewhere along the way, this will require critical psychology to abandon its unexamined notion of the human subject as something akin to a *tabula rasa* and articulate minimal positions with regard to our intrinsically societal nature. Some may find this suggestion deeply disconcerting but perhaps need not, since in critical psychology:

> "..the choice doesn't lie between those who have a concept of human nature and others who haven't, but between those who reflect and expose their ideas about 'human nature' and those who don't"
>
> (Osterkamp, 1999)

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