



The subject of the neuropsychosciences stripped bare by her bachelors, even

El sujeto de las ciencias neuropsi desnudado por sus solteros, incluso

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Abstract

In this paper I question whether the plea for depathologisation and the regaining of our expropriated subjectivity from its psy and neuro-colonization is, in fact, not itself enmeshed with the notion of some real core of the human being, and thus amenable to some or another Academic discipline and praxis. Critics of mainstream (neuro)psychology could unwittingly, then, join the strong but unacknowledged undercurrent in today's neuropsych-discourses to restore the subject as a fully fleshed-out agent; one who is situated beyond pathology, beyond abnormal and normal. I juxtapose this observation with critical readings of an artistic project looking to revalue subjectivity in the aftermath of a mining disaster, and the popular Theory of Mind-approach. In conclusion, I argue that an understanding of the subject as caught between subjectivation and de-subjectivation (where subjectivity becomes a social and a political issue) could allow us to rethink the terms of normality and pathology.

Keywords: Psychologisation; Neurologisation; Depathologisation; Subjectivity

Resumen

En este artículo pregunto si el alegato de despatologización y la recuperación de nuestra subjetividad —expropiada por su colonización de las ciencias psi y neuro— está, de hecho, enredado con la noción de algún núcleo real del ser humano, y de esta manera, sensible a alguna otra disciplina o práctica. Las críticas de la (neuro)psicología mainstream pueden, involuntariamente, unirse a los discursos actuales de la neuropsi —no reconocidos y a contracorriente— para recuperar el sujeto como un agente completo; un sujeto situado más allá de la patología, más allá de lo normal y anormal. Yuxtapongo esta posición con lecturas críticas de un proyecto artístico que busca reevaluar la subjetividad a raíz de un desastre minero, y el popular enfoque de la teoría de la mente. En conclusión, sostengo que un entendimiento del sujeto atrapado entre la subjetivación y la desubjetivación (donde la subjetividad se entiende como un asunto político y social) nos permite repensar los términos de normalidad y patología.

Palabras clave: Psicopatologización; Neurologización; Despatologización; Subjetividad

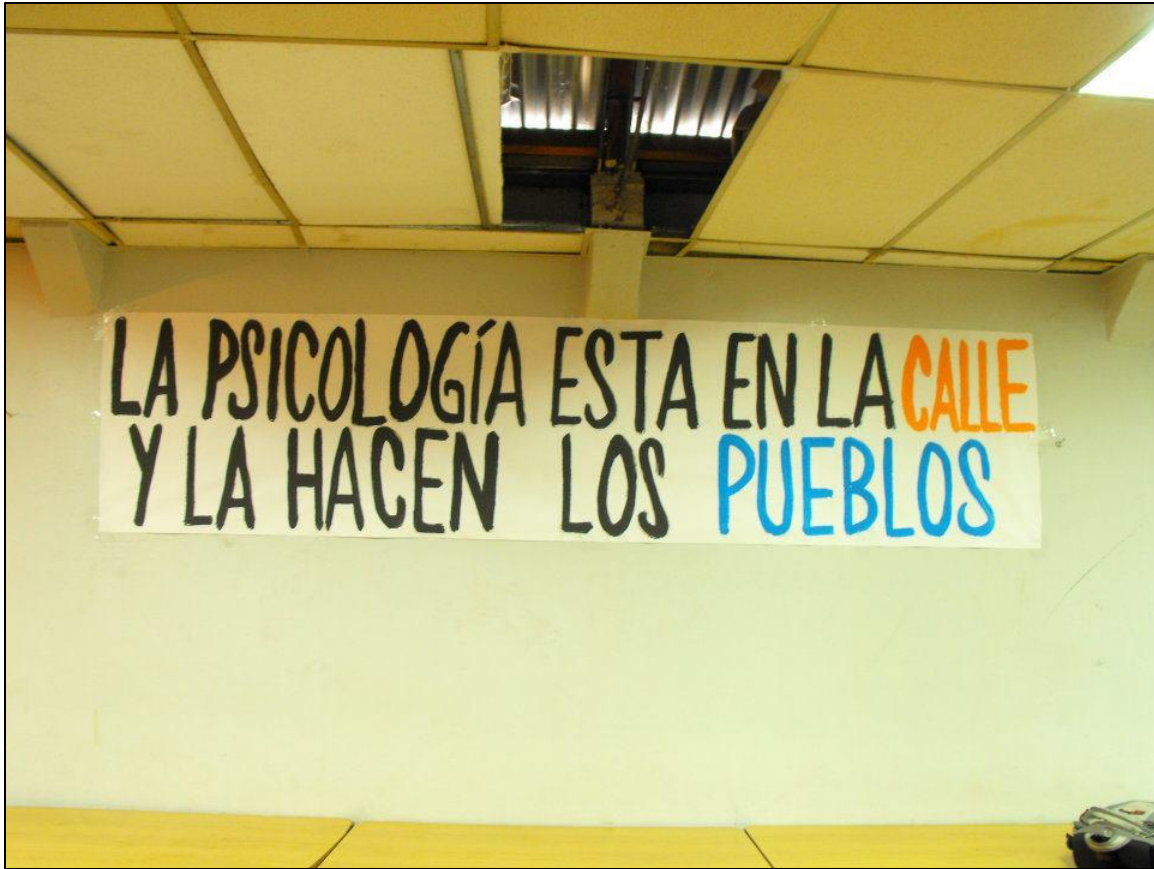


Figure 1. Psychology is on the streets and is made by the people.

La psicología está en la calle y la hacen los pueblos

Psychology is on the streets and is made by the people: thus ran a slogan of Chilean psychology students during a protest in 2012 which expressed, both, their dissatisfaction with the actual reality of psychology in Chile and their hope for a better, dignified and just society (Lunes 16: Convocatoria Organización Estudiantes de Psicología a Asamblea Abierta, 2012. See figure 1). At first glance, one can, of course, express nothing but sympathy with this slogan and support for the students' cause, as it rightfully reacts against an academised ivory-tower version of psychology that operates in "blessed indifference" of the *real world*. And, indeed, we all recognise the unworldly, and other-worldly, perspective and agenda of the large majority of experimental, clinical, occupational psychology and the like whose shield of neutral objectivity leaves the researchers blind and deaf to the true solicitudes and concerns of real people.

However, when formulated in such essentialist terms the image rapidly gets complicated. Indeed, who are those who leave the campus and go out onto the streets to meet *real people*? Do they not risk, for example, through their very commitment to value "el saber del pueblo" (the knowledge of the people), acting like some kind of alien body snatchers expropriating this knowledge and turning it into academic currency? At the very least, the pre-supposition that there is a psychology *out there*, that there is a psychological agent on the street, that there is a psychology tout-court, is perhaps one that should be questioned, as such a perspective closely mimics the dominant view within Academia itself.

And if one will allow me to pursue this meta-critique from another perspective still: does such a slogan really get to the crux of the problem with current mainstream psychology? Is not in fact the case, rather, that there is *already* too much psychology and psychologists in the streets, in the schools, in the me-

dia, in the work place, in politics, in one word, in society as such? Just consider how our schools are on the verge of becoming therapy centres where access to education is precisely a DSM-label, the stamp of one or another pathology. That said, should the real plea of protestation not in fact be to keep psychology and psychologists out of the streets and let people get on with doing what they do? Such a protest would be tantamount to a call to reclaim the streets, in a gesture analogous to the religious imagery of cleansing the temple of the money traders: let us do away with all these psy-experts, these vampires that parasitically feed off everyday life. And above all else, let us do away with the pathologisation of everyday life, as the psy-complex uses the label of disorder/abnormality as a means for asserting control and power.

However, is this plea for depathologisation and regaining of our expropriated subjectivity and our very humanness against the psy and neuro-colonization, in turn, itself not still enmeshed with the notion of some pure, tangible and real core of the human being, one which would be, in the end, again amenable to some or another Academic discipline and praxis? This troublesome aspect of the depathologisation argument becomes readily visible within Francis Fukuyama's (of all people) criticism of the cult of self-esteem promoted by pop-psychology and Big Pharma:

The normal, and morally acceptable, way of overcoming low self-esteem was to struggle with oneself and with others, to work hard, to endure sometimes painful sacrifices, and finally to rise and be seen as having done so. The problem with self-esteem as it is understood in American pop psychology is that it becomes an entitlement, something everyone needs to have whether it is deserved or not. This devalues self-esteem and makes the quest for it self-defeating. But now along comes the American pharmaceutical industry, which through drugs like Zoloft and Prozac can provide self-esteem in a bottle by elevating brain serotonin (quoted in Žižek, 2004, p. 130).

Henceforth, is it back to the streets, back to the real stuff, back to nature -and thus more and more problematic terms come in- back to hard work, back to normality...? Paradoxically, then, the main argument against pathologisation and its strict division of normal and abnormal appears essentially bound up with the issue of what constitutes normality itself! Think in this respect of a typical critique of ADHD-labelling: *let us act normal once again,*

so the reasoning goes, *we should not understand boys with hectic, edgy or difficult behaviour in terms of disorders; for this is nothing but normal behaviour.* A plea for depathologisation thus, ultimately, risks turning into a naïve humanist, naturalizing, and even conservative discourse.

We will know less and less what it means to be human

To add to the foregoing one final turn of the screw: the plea for depathologisation is actually, and paradoxically, not that far removed from mainstream discourses within the contemporary (neuro)psy-disciplines themselves. For example, in a 2007 survey of members of the International Society for the Study of Personality Disorders and the Association for Research on Personality Disorders, 80% of the respondents agreed that "personality disorders are better understood as variants of normal personality than as categorical disease entities" (Bernstein, Iscan, & Maser, 2007, p. 542). Consequently, it is perhaps a misconception to think that the hallmark of current mainstream neuropsychoscience is a strict divide between normality and abnormality.

In their critique of the mediatisation of the neurosciences, for example, Clíodhna O'Connor, Geraint Rees & Hoffe Joffe mention two opposite tendencies: that is, firstly, to ground "abnormality" in the brains; and secondly, seemingly in opposition, to deconstruct the normal/abnormal split. In regards to the latter, they point to the application of the terminology of addiction to a wide range of everyday behavioural domains, such as shopping, computers, sex, chocolate, exercise, adventure sports, and sunbathing (O'Connor, Rees, & Joffe, 2012). If everything is grounded in the brain, the normal and even what we consider as abnormal, then the strict boundary between these two gets blurred: they become but two variants of the natural.

O'Connor et al., however, attribute this double bind regarding the divide of normality and abnormality to the media's (mis)understanding of the neuroscientific data -an argument which could be immediately questioned: do not the media only exemplify and magnify what is already present in neuroscience itself (see De Vos, forthcoming)? Be that as it may, in their attempt to rescue an alleged pure neuroscience from mediatisation

and its distortions, they actually claim an absolute neutral objectivity. Is this not, then, the ultimate deconstruction of the normal/abnormal divide? For the neutral scientist, then, regardless of whether they are studying paedophilia, eating chocolate or going shopping, it's all in the brain; no moral value to be attached here. As *such* science does not concern itself with delineating, morally or ethically speaking, the normal from the abnormal. But, also, at the functional, biological level there is no understanding of such a concept as functional normality; as Ron Amundson contends, current biology does not imply a distinction between normal and abnormal function (Amundson, 2000). What we call pathology is just another mode of functioning, an adaptation to certain circumstances, which in the end, is exactly the same as that in which we call normality.

This is why in the neuropsychology-sphere one is not overly concerned when big brain lesions are not found in conditions such as ADHD, autism or PTSD. Overall, one is quite happy talking about some brain regions being more or less involved in certain circumstances, or pointing to the delicate balances at the chemical level: in other words, the difference between normal/abnormal is far from absolutely established. This is why in the psy-sciences it is generally agreed upon that the divide is arbitrary. As the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) is based upon the establishment of certain agreed upon thresholds which are to draw the line, one could argue that the DSM is actually a *deconstruction* of the difference between normality and abnormality. Hence, critics of the DSM who argue that a diagnosis of a disorder should express a “continuum with normal personality functioning” (Widiger & Costa, 2012, p. 1481) are actually in line with the DSM itself. One could even argue that the inflation of DSM-labels -as they proliferate in everyday life, incorporating sadness, grief etcetera into the DSM-listings (Kinderman, Read, Moncrieff, & Bentall, 2013)— boils down to a gradual deconstruction of the split between normal and abnormal, healthy and pathological.

It is noteworthy, then, that the recent DSM V actually leaves the labelling behind and opts for a trait-wise description (scaling of traits which then can be clustered or not). Is the logic underpinning the diagnosis of the disorder

of ADHD here not generalized to the whole of the DSM? ADHD, as we know, is already a non-label, it only conglomerates certain behavioural traits (attention and activity levels) scaling them in an overt and explicit arbitrary manner. If this is, of course, coupled with a firm scientific claim, then it can surely be readily criticised as merely “the classification of trivia”¹; the truly remarkable issue, however, is that everybody knows this and refuses to see anything problematic in it! Here, we might risk a bold step: the DSM actually has grasped what its critics are unwilling to admit: in the case of mental health and psychic problems, there is nothing to understand, nothing to grasp! This is what opponents of the DSM too often miss: for example, Kinderman et al., in their argument that “distress is a normal, not abnormal, part of human life”, contend that:

The clients and the general public are negatively affected by the continued and continuous medicalisation of their understandable responses to their experiences; responses that undoubtedly have distressing consequences which demand helping responses, but which are better understood as normal individual variation than as illnesses (Kinderman et al., 2013, p. 2).

While Kinderman et al. focus upon the realm of the understandable in everyday life, the DSM, albeit unwittingly, testifies to the domain of the non-understood, the domain of the non-understandable. And does not a modicum of clinical experience reveal that it is precisely this non-understood and non-understandable that forms a central part in psychic suffering, both on the side of the person suffering, and on the side of the practitioner solicited for treatment? What the mainstream critique shares with the basic paradigm of the neuropsychology-sciences, then, is ultimately that which the novelist Jose Saramago succinctly formulated as follows: “we will know less and less what it means to be human” (Saramago, 2008). One way of putting this would be to suggest that we have also lost the idea of what is normal and what is not. Or, as the sociologist Doug Aoki wrote:

... the “normal body” is obese, the “normal state of marriage” is divorce, “reality” is something that you normally watch on TV, the “normal urban vehicle” is an SUV, the “normal consequence” of retiring from a job you hate is dying, “normal teaching” is lecturing on material that

¹ An expression I borrow from Christopher Lasch (Lasch, 1978).

has already been articulated in much finer fashion in a book by somebody much smarter (Aoki, 2009, p. 3).²

At the least such a description renders problematic any naïve and simple celebration that we are, in fact, finally, in these times of deconstruction, beyond the divide of normality and abnormality. Moreover, even when it is generally agreed upon that we have at last superseded the conception of a fully established subjectivity, things might be not that simple after all. At first sight, now that we allegedly know that free will, altruism and even consciousness itself are but tricks of the mind, it does indeed appear that the Cartesian Ego is finally on its knees. But if we undergo a closer examination of these discourses, it appears, in actual fact, that we lack the requisite courage to deliver the final death-blow to subjectivity. For, precisely where we would not expect it, i.e., in the neurosciences, there is a strong but unacknowledged undercurrent to restore the subject as a fully fleshed out agent; one situated, furthermore, beyond pathology, beyond abnormal and normal. That is, the main paradigm in current aetiology is that mental disturbances are grounded in the materiality of the brain. Or, phrased otherwise: if there is something wrong with you, it is your brain that is at fault. Does this not result in the production of another *you*, the *you* who is not to blame and surely, therefore, not have to feel guilty, embarrassed or awkward? This *you* can suffer from no pathology: the brain can, but not *you*, *you* are beyond normal or abnormal. Put differently: according to the neurosciences the subject does not lose track of itself, it is always on track; when it is off track, some brain lesion or dysfunction is present, or will be found. Hence, today's neurosciences, for whom there is nothing wrong with the subject, represent the ultimate attempt to save subjectivity, as they are creating, unknowingly, a new version of the ego and the Cartesian cogito.

² To add an everyday example: my stepson plays in a band and one day he said he had to make some purchases: he needed a new guitar amp (his current amplifier apparently did not go loud enough anymore) and he needed to have custom-made earplugs instead of the disposable ones he was using up until then. Annoyed with my joking remarks that the two issues might be connected, he said, "Everyone I know playing in a band wears earplugs!"

No archive images of the actual disaster

The foregoing should make us cautious about succumbing to our almost automatic reflex to defend the subject against the supposedly massive objectifying tendencies of the neurospy-discourses. That said, critical theorists and practitioners should be acutely aware of what Foucault once said: "People know what they do, they frequently know why they do what they do, but what they don't know is what they do does" (cited in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 187). In a similar vein, I would argue that critical discourses are always in danger of repeating the very thing they are allegedly opposing. To put it pointedly: if one really wants to understand the more tricky and obnoxious turns of a discourse, one should take a look at the opposing discourses.

To ground this strong assertion in something tangible, let me cite the example of a documentary movie I once saw screened during a conference. The film, *An American in Aberfan* by Chris Morris, was made as a commemoration of a mining disaster in Aberfan (Wales, UK) in 1966. The abstract of the film runs as follows:

A 60 minute documentary film about Internationally acclaimed American artist Shimon Attie. During 2006 he worked with the people of Aberfan, to create an artwork to mark the 40th anniversary of the Aberfan mining disaster. The producer and I knew the anniversary would be a media frenzy, so we began visiting the village in 2003, listening to their concerns about the approaching anniversary and trying to devise a film that would both satisfy the villagers and the needs of a television company/television audience. We tailored our film to match the requests of the villagers. Firstly they requested that the film contain no archive images of the actual disaster. The 17 other crews who filmed during 2006 all used the archive which so damages the village community. Secondly they wanted to 'create' something to mark the occasion, and so we introduced them to the artist Shimon Attie. Thus Shimon's central role in this film as 'the artist' working with the villagers is manufactured. In the finished film I concealed this fact - this was a film that managed to balance the ethical dilemmas of truth within documentary. Once again I was influenced by Werner Herzog's (Herzog on Herzog. Faber 2002) ideas of creating 'ecstatic truths' rather than 'literal truths' in film. The project addresses issues of representation, media responsibility and the exploitation of tragedy. The film also explores (with Shimon Attie) the tension and interplay between 'collective memory', history and storytelling. The impact on the community of Aberfan has

been huge - it acts as a mirror to their grief and casts new light" (Morris, 2006a).

One cannot, once again, be anything but sympathetic with the initial setup: it admirably reacts against the vulture-like mainstream media wanting to rake over the same old story. As the villagers themselves had already thought of marking the anniversary through a commemorative piece of artwork or sculpture, Shimon Attie made a video installation portraying the villagers in their social or occupational role. In the words of the BBC news item on the artwork: "The villagers "performed" being themselves, while Attie filmed them on an unseen, slowly revolving stage" (Morris, 2006a). Or, as Shimon Attie puts it himself:

I wanted the piece to confound our expectations and projections onto what it means to be a 'victim' or a 'survivor', and to resist easy interpretation and sentimentality (...) Ultimately, I wanted to create an artwork that - at least in the realms of the imaginary - might help Aberfan take its rightful place as a Welsh village among other Welsh villages (cited in Gabriel, 2008).

However, are we not slowly drifting into potentially problematic territory? By seeking to portray the villagers as they are, apart from, or beyond, the mining disaster, this not only risks charges of essentialism, it also invites a therapeutic if not overtly normalising agenda. Although it should be duly noted that Attie is well aware of these pitfalls, as he stresses that his artwork above all wishes to function in "the realms of the imaginary", the question is, then, what happens when the meta-perspective is put in gear, that is, when the documentary maker comes in to mark and to lay down the event? One should, in this respect, also keep in mind that Shimon Attie was brought in by the producer of the documentary who managed to get the BBC to pay for his stay.

In an attempt to disentangle all of this let us return to the abstract of the film. One way to read it is to leave the antagonisms behind which the film maker himself puts forward ("truth within documentary", "tension and interplay between 'collective memory', history and storytelling"), and focus on the other, visible, but not further developed, oppositions. To begin with, there is the opposition between "the villagers and the needs of a television company/television audience" (one could wonder why these differing needs

should be reconciled at all). Secondly, and in connection with the former, the makers claim a difference between their documentary (artful, serene and human) and the "17 other crews" who, predictably and shamelessly, made abundant use of archive footage. But perhaps *the* central opposition overriding these other concerns is: on the one hand, the artist Shimon Attie (the American outsider) and, on the other, the seemingly neutral, merely observing documentary film-maker himself. What leads us in the direction of seeing this as a basic opposition, is the rather strange argument in the abstract pertaining to the concealment of the manufactured role of the artist in the film (which the author justifies by referring to Werner Herzog). In a personal communication, Chris Morris indicated that he might have used some stylistic infelicities in the abstract. He explains that the artist was indeed invited but that the interaction with the village was more a sort of "organic and creative manufacture", which was not really "concealed" in the movie but, rather, *left out* as this making-off-history was only a distraction from the main theme of the film.

However, perhaps the film-maker proceeded a bit too hastily in the edit room and so we might be legitimated in our endeavour to read the abstract and its stylistic infelicities at face-value (in the Freudian tradition of *you've said it anyway*). For, as such, does not leaving out the fact that the film makers invited the artist have the effect that we assume that the documentary maker is an independent party and, hence, a mere neutral and disengaged observer? To put it bluntly: what would make this little manipulation - for if we take things at face value, this is indeed what it is- any different from the reporter asking a child "to cry for her dead friends because it would make a good picture" (as an Aberfan rescue worker recalled hearing a press photographe, see Wikipedia, "Aberfan disaster," 2013)? The obscurement of the fact that they hired and engaged the artist, thus, ultimately, risks confirming rather than disproving the resemblances with the sensation-seeking documentaries. By concealing the fact that he is working together with the artist, the film maker acts fully in concordance with one of the basic principles of reality TV: cover up the fact that "reality" is heavily scripted and artificially manufactured.

In this way, some of the peculiarities of the movie become clearer. In the beginning of the film, for example, we hear the familiar off-screen voice announcing that the film features people from Aberfan, many of whom which --at least so far as we are told-- have never spoken before on television about the incident. At once, it is difficult not to hear echoes of other trailers for more despicable sensation-seeking documentaries: *we've got them to speak...* The film then goes on to show the artist taking pictures and filming the villagers as they stand on a rotating platform striking poses from their everyday life. After which those people are brought in front of the camera of the documentary maker, whereby they speak in single words: "horrible", "unimaginable"... Are these answers to the question: *could you describe the drama in one word?* So, here we have, on the one hand, the American outsider, the artist who explicitly wants to do something else (he is asked to do so) besides revisiting the drama, while, on the other, on his tail, the documentary maker who in quasi-paparazzi-style asks: *just one word, concerning the disaster; in one word, what do you feel?*

Furthermore, even when the documentary maker at the conference explained how he deliberately chose not to feature zoom-ins and, in fact, turned the camera off at points when people got overly emotional, one is left wondering if this desperate attempt to be different from other mainstream low-budget documentaries did not eventually lure him in to precisely the same paradigm. Indeed, how else can we view the recourse to a highly suggestive and emotional music score, accompanying the slow zoom-in to a photograph on a wall featuring one of the schoolgirls who died in the Aberfan disaster? Moreover, if, as Shimon Attie noted, Aberfan had indeed had enough of those old black and white images that had been showed a million times on TV, then why opt, in turn, for a minimalistic yellowish colour palette that one usually associates with the 1960s and 1970s (Morris, 2006a)?³ Hence, it appears that even when so-called credible TV documentaries, in stark opposition to ordinary reality TV, refrain from showing grand emotions and reject the cheap sentimentality offered by close-ups and other ed-

iting techniques, there nevertheless remains an imminent risk that this will amount to an equally alienating aestheticization. After all, the objective of documenting and celebrating human resilience and the beauty of everyday life is, for all intents and purposes, reality television at its purest: it wants to show us the real, vibrating essence of human kind. The sensation-seeking gaze is substituted for a more refined, aestheticizing outlook; one that, moreover, closely resembles the academic and clinical psychological-anthropological perspective. Does this constitute the return of the body-snatchers, feasting on human subjectivity? Subsequent to the screening of the film at the conference, the appointed respondent had a hard time pulling himself together: he had to excuse himself for getting so carried away. A large section of the audience evidently was equally moved: it was as if the veracity of the academic analysis of the human subject seemingly needed the tears of Academia for its validation.

We should not mistake the emotionality described above as merely accidental: rather, it is symptomatic of how Academia is trapped in an illusion that it can deliver the ultimate meta-perspective wherefrom a final, and thus solemn but also joyful and celebrative account of all things sublunary, can be given. Academia poses, then, as the consciousness of consciousness and in so doing obscures the fact that the ultimate consciousness can never be grasped (a meta-perspective always invites a meta-meta-perspective). *An American in Aberfan* -which maybe should be renamed *An Academic in Aberfan*, as the American artist is no more than one of the characters on a heavily-scripted theatrical stage-- thus rejects disaster tourism only to end up portraying an aestheticized, academicized glorification of the tragic beauty of subjectivity. Not surprisingly, the real dirty underside, that is, the political socio-economic background of the Aberfan drama, was barely an issue in this documentary; *no archive images of the actual disaster*. The overall focus, rather, remained depoliticised and psychological; the community was characterised as passing through a mourning process, seemingly having become pathological as "the village's privacy was lost as the worldwide media descended", or to use the words used in the BBC-news item itself: the village had "to cope with the trauma of its unimaginable loss in the glare of the

³ For a fragment of the film see: <http://vimeo.com/38499697> (Morris 2006b).

world's gaze" (Gabriel, 2008). The supposed depathologisation that the serene documentary was to effect, via a process of aestheticization, can be said to have faltered precisely when Academia situated itself as the new gaze substituting for the prior gaze of the worldwide media.

Where will Sally look for her marble

What should we do with everyday life, with the real of human beings, with the real that human beings or communities experience? Is not the solution, here, to see people as commentators, documentary makers, or even as plain scholars themselves? That is, instead of them having or making psychology, or displaying a beautiful resilience to be aestheticized, are they not making sense of themselves, of others, and the world as if they were theorists and, above all, psychologists on their own account, deciding on their own normality and pathologies? To answer these questions, we should follow them right to their respective dead-ends; that is, as interesting as they are they all, I want to argue, overlook the subjective -and, concomitantly, the political- dimension.

Let us hereto return once again to the neuropsychosciences in order to demonstrate how already there knowledge is given a central mediating role in terms of how the subject is present with itself, others and the world. Take for example a central argument of the American neuroscientist Joseph Ledoux pertaining to how we come *to feel emotions*: "Emotional feelings result when we become consciously aware that an emotion system of the brain is active" (LeDoux, 1996, p. 302). Do we not have here precisely a peculiar splitting up of the subject? As in the Aberfan-constellation: we are our own reality TV reporter/paparazzi: an emotion in our brain (an emotion system is active) needs to be probed: *in one word, what do I feel?* The basic idea is that we do not feel emotions directly; rather, there is a mediation (becoming conscious) involved, a kind of translation of a real, preliminary level, with the latter only directly accessible, allegedly, via science:

Emotions evolved not as conscious feelings, linguistically differentiated or otherwise, but as brain states and bodily responses. The brain states and bodily responses are the fundamental facts of an emotion, and the conscious feelings are the frills that have added icing to the emotional cake (LeDoux, 1996, p. 302).

According to Ledoux, the first reality is that of the material, raw flesh situated beyond logos, beyond discourse. *Psychology*, one could argue, comes later, as the icing on the cake. Or, to put it otherwise: if psychology is on the streets, then it arises from the brain; it is a product of neurons. Subjectivity is in this way secondary, and, as demonstrated earlier, it is consequently not the place where things go wrong: on the contrary, if there is a malfunction it originates not in the streets, but at the level of the brain; and even then, in the case of malfunction, as also aforementioned, the categories of normal, abnormal, healthy, pathological do not really apply, they only come in at a secondary level.

But do we have to agree with this specific paradigm of subjectivity and psychology only being on the streets, being solely secondary issues? Do we have to accept that they are merely about becoming conscious of, giving words to things, the *real* things, happening in our brain? However, upon closer examination, it is evident that within neuropsychological discourses there is a fully established psychological agency to be discerned precisely at the alleged primordial level itself. Just consider Ledoux's path of emotions: if the paradigm runs that *I* become consciously aware that an emotion system of the brain is active, then this cannot but mean that subjectivity, in the form of the "I", is the necessary *primus movens*. In other words, to explain the transition from the brain to the streets, the transition from the neuronal level to the realms of meaning, of subjectivity and society, invariably, but seldomly acknowledged, a form of primordial Cartesian unifying principle is presupposed.

To illustrate this further, the well-known "Theory of Mind"-approach is especially useful. David Premack and Guy Woodruff define *Theory of Mind* (ToM) as the ability to impute mental states to oneself and to others. This ability is said to be a crucial component of social skills as it allows us to make inferences about what other people *believe* to be the case in a given situation and allows us to predict what they will do (Premack & Woodruff, 1978). Of course, the problem, readily overlooked in the theory of ToM, is the paradoxical twist of a primordial reflexivity: one only has access to *oneself* via a theory of mind. But even when the ToM-approach tries to ac-

count for the fact that one also theorizes about oneself, its problematic underlying assumption remains that the human subject *naturally* is a theorizing and reflexive being, and that these natural capacities of reason⁴ are put to work in an institutionalised and formalised way in science. In other words, to explain the genesis of the conception of a Self in the theory of ToM (a Self which would be the result of a Theory of Mind), one cannot avoid preconceiving a primordial Self who performs this operation.

This is especially notable in the classic Sally-Ann model for researching ToM with young children, in which the researcher seated in front of the child manipulates two dolls (see Baron-Cohen, Leslie, & Frith, 1985). The scenario goes as such: firstly, the doll called Sally places a marble in her basket. When Sally leaves the scene, the second doll called Ann transfers and hides the marble in her own box. Then, as Sally returns, the experimenter asks the test subject “where will Sally look for her marble?” Should we not immediately note here that, regardless of the actual results of the experiment, the child is put in an all-seeing and omniscient position, that is, in the position of the primordial Self? Moreover, the child is thus placed in juxtaposition with the test leader, the Big Other, pulling all the strings and manipulating the props on the stage. One might even put forward the hypothesis that this is why young children tend to give the wrong answer (“Sally looks in Ann’s box”), as they generalise the omniscient perspective of the Big Other. However, let us resist the temptation to succumb to an alternative kind of psychologisation and, rather, attempt to discern here what could be said to be the basic scheme of Western subjectivity: we have access to others, ourselves and the world via the mediation of the Other --be it God, the media or Academia.

What, ultimately, seems to be enacted in both Ledoux’s imagery of a second-level subject becoming conscious of what its brains feels, and the ToM imagery of a kind of Archimedean subject mirroring the Big Other, is a full, unproblematic and primordial subject ensuring its own existence in a Von Munchausen *tour de force*. Even when, in the

case of theory of ToM, it is argued that children with autism suffer from a specific deficit at the ToM-level, one could argue that the instance of the subject as a positive entity is still maintained: Simon Baron-Cohen et al. argue that the deficit children with autism show is “a cognitive deficit that is largely independent of general intellect” (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985, p. 44). The subject is saved.

Against all these reifications of the subject the question becomes: is not the most human and subjective stance, contra Ledoux, not exactly the loss of any emotion, to find oneself at the limit of feeling, or contra the theory of ToM to be at a total loss concerning what the Other knows or wants, and, consequently, what oneself knows or wants? The obstinate attempts to safeguard and to fix subjectivity cannot but lay bare a rift within subjectivity itself. Or, in the words of the Slovene philosopher Slavoj Žižek:

The subject is correlative to its own limit, to the element which cannot be subjectified, it is the name of the void which cannot be filled out with subjectivization: the subject is the point of failure of subjectivization (Žižek, 2006, p. 254).

For structural reasons, this scandal of subjectivity can have no place in Academia.

Conclusions

Recently the newspapers reported on the progress made in the charting of our brain. We were shown two colourful brain scans, one supposedly depicting the mental state of “glad to see you” and the other of “leave me alone”. Life again seemed surprisingly simple: either *I like you*, or, *I don’t like you* -no 50 shades of grey here. I like, I don’t like: a Facebook neurology the relevance of which escaped me. But even if the newspapers were to present a more nuanced picture of the brain -drawing on more refined neuroscientific research, for example- would Cathérine Malabou’s question not yet still return with full force: *what should we do with our brain?* Although Malabou’s book, thus entitled, above all poses this question in a straightforward way (what to do, personally and politically, with the *plasticity* of the brain), at a precise moment she gives it a more existential twist. She writes:

At one point we nonetheless have the feeling that we lack a future, and we ask ourselves, What good is having a brain, indeed, what should we do with it (Malabou, 2008, p. 11).

⁴ The assumption that people spontaneously theorize is most often explained from an evolutionary perspective (Leudar & Costall, 2009).

However, Malabou in fact does very little with that uneasy feeling of having a brain, that *unbehagen* that touches upon what Žižek referred to as the “element that cannot be subjectified.” One could recall here Andreas Vesalius’ drawing of a skeleton holding a skull in its hand: in a strange way the skeleton exhibits a grand *tristesse*: what on earth should it do with the skull...⁵

Could one not argue, then, that the current preoccupation with the fleshiness of the subject represents, above all else, a turn to *reality* in order to escape the *Real* of the fundamental uneasiness related to the structural failure of subjectivation (as apparent at both the individual and the political level)? This would be in accord with the old propaganda rule: if nothing else works, tell the truth in order to deceive. The alleged turn to hardcore materiality in the contemporary psychosciences is in this way the ultimate veil of their impotence to conceive of subjectivity. The vulgar materialism of “we are our brain” obscures the fact that the human being, when adopting this lemma, calls into being another ghastly level, that of an agent holding its own brain in its hand, seeing it as a thing, looking at it from all sides, always with the temptation to drop the whole thing and see what happens then.

This veiling of what is really at stake by waving the flag of reality reminds us of Theodor Adorno’s seminal critique of astrology. Adorno argued that the obscure and blindly-accepted logic of the supernatural reflects the ‘opaqueness and inscrutability’ of social life under capitalism and its concomitant vicissitudes (Adorno, 2001). Today the neuropsychosciences can be understood in the same vein. Consider, for example, Malabou’s contention that “the great metaphysical teaching of neurobiology today” is not to consider brain damage as an isolated possibility, rare things that happen in hospitals, etc., but as a constant possibility (Malabou & Vahanian, 2008, p. 9). In other words, then, the neurological has replaced astrology, as it is also a lottery based on blind fate, which you can try to influence with magic powers, or by living healthy and

eating the right stuff. We can lure our brains, so we are told, with brain exercises, neurological feedback, or via the manipulation of our eye movements. Even if the latter examples can be classified as misleading popularizations, they are still drawing upon what can be considered as a basic insight of the neurosciences: that is, that we are always already lured by the brain in the first place (think of the tricks the brain is said to play on us, from visual and optic illusions it lures us into, to the illusions of the free will). But, yet again, even when formulated in this way the problematic spectre of the subject reappears: who is the *I* tricked by its own brain?

Based on this, we can thus assert that the slogan of the people in the streets making their own psychology is, at least, not unproblematic, as it once again redoubles the subjectivities at play. Moreover, as I hope I have demonstrated, neither is the solution to think that we can directly address *real people* untouched by the varnish of psychologisation and neurologisation (in order to lay bare their true nature or their own knowledge, which we, the psy-scientists, could draw upon as a resource within Academia). And if those people are, in fact, theorists of mind, they are certainly not lay or folk psychologists, whose amateur psychology is in need of some academic validation. Consequently, the well-known Rom Harré and Paul Secord phrase “for scientific purposes treat people as if they were human beings” (Harré & Secord, 1972, p. 84) should in this respect be reversed: *for human reasons, treat people as if they were scientific (theoretical) beings*.

For, a critical stance that focuses on de-psychologisation and de-pathologisation runs the risk of merely repeating a un-empowering, naturalising discourse. In contrast we should not reject an, albeit different, universalization, which is, due to the fact that we live in modernity and subjected to science, *we are all the subjects of science*. The emancipatory potential, here, lies in the fact that, as modern subjects we are not merely that which the sciences say we are (as when we are reduced to chemistry and physics, etc.). But, and this is the crucial point, this mismatch, or distance, should not be understood as an excess of nature or reality (the argument that the sciences will never be able to fully grasp the human). Rather, the excess

⁵ In contrast, Malabou seems to know what should be done regarding the brain (on the subjective level and on the political level): the brain’s natural destiny is plasticity and this should be rescued from capitalism’s expropriation of the brain’s plasticity turning it into flexibility.

should be more fruitfully understood in the following terms: as science (potentially) is able to fully chart the human, this results in a left-over or a surplus --namely, the gaze of the baffled subject looking at itself being determined. Put differently, if science tells us: *this is (all) that you are*, then this calls into life a new subject; or, to put it in the terms of Giorgio Agamben, *the subject of one's own desubjectivation* (Agamben, 2002, p. 142). Modern subjectivity is therefore born at the horizon of knowledge of the sciences; it arises as a kind of surplus out of the question, *what is it to be the subject of one's own desubjectivation*.

Thus, to reiterate, for human reasons, treat people as if they were scientific beings. It should be clear that it is at this very axis of subjectivation and de-subjectivation where the terms of normality and pathology can perhaps be rethought, precisely because this is also the very place where subjectivity is a social, and, above all, a political issue.

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