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From Panopticon to Pan-psychologisation or, Why do so many women study psychology?

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« (...) le discours de la science ne laisse aucune place à l'homme »

J. Lacan

« We will know less and less what is a human being »

José Saramago

What if you were haunted by the simple question, 'what is the social meaning of the increasing number of predominantly female students enrolling in the psychology departments of our universities?' When you recall how the monasteries and nunneries were formerly the prime attraction for society's fine young men and women, this question becomes even more pertinent.

Would it be wise to file a research proposal on this question in the human sciences department of a university? Imagine trying to explain your proposal, clarifying how your project is not merely about how psychology students are outgrowing their lecture halls but

asks, more centrally, why society is turning all of us into students of psychology. Just think, you might argue, of the idea proposed on a regular basis that every parent-to-be ought to take a course in parenting so as to be instructed in the basics of child psychology and pedagogy. Life as one big department of human sciences. "Who are we that we need so much psychology?" you would exclaim.

This article, actually based on the experience of submitting a research proposition on the subject of psychologisation (1), argues that psychologisation is not only the dissemination of the language of psychology into everyday life, but shows how we all became *academic subjects*. Contemporary subjectivity has to be situated in what Lacan called the 'universitarian discourse'. Along the lines of the writings of Žižek we'll try to show how Lacan's 'the discourse of science will leave no place whatsoever for man', means that for modern – and ergo, post-modern man – there is no *beyond* academic discourse. This paradox we shall explore by trying to understand what today's psychologization is about. It will bring us to the – mostly unacknowledged – crisis in today's human sciences: while everyone is supposed to benefit from a broad schooling in the socio-psychological theories, perhaps this is exactly why the human sciences, placing all stakes on a neo-empirical scientism, cannot account for 'contemporary symptomatology'. Drawing upon Žižek we will be lead to the conclusion that de-psychologisation or a celebration of real life offers no alternative to psychologisation: post-modern man is the homo psychologicus living in an a priori psychologised habitat.

Psychologisation: a research question?

It is clear, it would not be simple to legitimate a research question like "why there are so many feminine students in psychology?". Most probably it will be met with exasperation: *what is the relevance of this?* Let it be understood, the very word *psychologisation* itself is an implicit reproach to the psychology department. To insult a psychologist, all you need to tell him is that he is "such a typical psychologist". This should be taken into account when you wonder why "psychologisation" isn't really an academic issue and why the social implications of the rapidly increasing number of students in the human sciences is not easily considered a subject worthy of serious study. But foremost you should know that in these matters the very scientific arsenal is often used to neutralise certain questions which, on account of their reflexive character, should be the principal questions in every science: Why should something like psychology exist, and what is the effect of its existence on man and society? *But how would you operationalise your research question? Are you planning any quantitative research?*

Such questions would make you feel you were proposing to light a bonfire in the middle of the ocean during a tropical storm. So you would better bear in mind Žižek's statement that one of the telltale signs of university discourse is that the opponent is accused of being "dogmatic" and "sectarian" (Žižek, 2006). The hegemonic situation you are dealing with is that of the human sciences being under the enormous pressure of the dominant model of the quantitative approach, with very delimited, often utilitarian objectives to be met. It is not so much that research proposals are expected to be close to social topics, or that they ought to address questions that are relevant to institutionalised power. It is simply that, first and foremost, they have to be formulated in the standard vocabulary of the mainstream theoretical framework. Social relevance is replaced by the, seemingly neutral idea of scientific relevance. This imperative leads to what's known as the relabelling strategy; the only possible critical stance remaining is to translate what you really want to study into the ruling, hegemonic framework. The advice is ubiquitous: "put in an application on a delimited, falsification-prone and scientifically fashionable topic; regard it as a vehicle to do what you really want once the funds are granted". But is it not illusory to think that this will not affect your true subject? The vehicle will restrict you and inevitably commit you to certain deliveries; form is never neutral. It is the residue, the boiling down of implicit ideology.

Should we conclude from this that there is no forum, no public space for fundamental critique as such in the humanities? Perhaps the old and venerable critical tradition as represented by both the academic and the public sphere is disappearing, even if this was a tradition whose interests could be questioned, or regarded as merely predictable and therefore unthreatening. Recall the Sloterdijk/Habermas controversy, in which the former asserted that the traditional humanist approach to media and communications culture no longer constitutes an effective forum for reflecting on the challenges and even totalitarian tendencies of media and technology (see Hertmans, 2002). Editorial and op-ed pages, for example, have become nothing more than an impotent discourse that mistakes itself for the public forum. In this context, any space for reflexive and critical thought vis-à-vis the hegemonic discourses is difficult to find, even in academic circles. With respect to the contemporary rationalized and commission-based research policy for example, the problem is not so much that certain phenomena are not easily put into question or that they are wrapped in mainstream academic thinking and practice. Far more crucial is the fact that contemporary social symptomatology remains *invisible* simply because such phenomena are right at the very surface of things – perhaps the most effective hiding-place for truth these days (2).

Take the psychologisation of every day life for example; quite unnoticed and in a short time there is practically no longer any social space that doesn't have the presence of the psychologist: the psychologist of the maternity courses, the child psychologist at your

kids' school, the work psychologist, the TV psychologists, the trauma psychologists at the site of great disasters, the psychological expert in the courtroom should a member of the jury break down. Is this a new *fifth column*?, you might ask. But precisely what is omnipresent is easy to overlook. So if you are planning to do some research into psychologisation you ought to know that there is more chance of getting a project approved on the similarities between earthquakes and climate changes on the one hand and mass violence and terrorism at the other (a project that was in fact recently funded by the European Commission) (3).

What then would exactly be your stance: would it be to make science more critical, or would it be to underpin your criticism in a scientific way? Of course, both are pseudo-hegelian forms of synthesis: today science and critique are so entangled resulting in the disappearance as such of any critical space. Think about Žižek's notes on Agamben's approach on the relationship between law and violence: Agamben's idea that we need to separate law and violence and untie their knot – although he calls it's a anti-Hegelian idea – is according to Žižek effectively what the Hegelian synthesis is about: the opposites are not reconciled in a "higher synthesis"; it is rather that their difference is posited "as such" (Žižek, 2006). So in the same way as it is not about bringing law and violence together (so that right will have might and the exercise of might will be fully legitimized), shouldn't we strive to separate science and the space for critique? That is what a project on psychologisation should be about: disentangling science's tentacles.

Psychology is the script

But where would it lead you, if you would try to *operationalise* the idea of psychologisation? You could start, for example, by questioning the definition of the Dutch theorist Ruud Abma (Abma, 1995). According to Abma, psychologisation is the dissemination of the language of psychology into everyday life. Exemplary of this is school. In a recent interview on TV, children were explaining to the interviewer that '*we have to respect one another and um, also meant to be assertive in a, um, positive way, and there was something about emotions but I've forgotten it.*' These kids were using precisely the tone and manner of speaking that children traditionally used to adopt when reciting some kind of classical standardized knowledge. To understand psychologisation in the school, in the sense of the dissemination of 'psych-terminology', one should recall that the basic paradigm of the school as such is the theoretisation of life. In opposition to this, and especially since the Enlightenment, many philosophers and pedagogues (such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel) promoted *real life learning*. Education was considered too artificial, teachers were therefore supposed to bring their pupils in contact with real life and to leave the classroom as much as possible. But this

could only have paradoxical effects: *real life* cannot be experienced without mediation; this is the classical (Hegelian) difference between man and animal: we experience reality via a medium, whether it be language, culture, society, history. In addition, this loss of man's immediate and unmediated presence in the world – and how to re-mediate or simply deny it – can easily be called the basic theme of the whole history of religion, literature, philosophy and science, in short, the whole of culture. Every call for a return to *real life* is accompanied by a new and frequently unperceived theoretisation. Thus *real life learning* was mediated first and foremost by philosophers and pedagogues' theories of what 'real life' was.

What stands between Rousseau's *noble savage* and nature is Rousseau himself and his exalted and romantic theories about the noble savage. Today, *real life learning* begins from the theories of life propounded by the human sciences and especially by psychology: *we're um, also meant to be assertive in a, um, positive way, and there was something about emotions but I've forgotten it.* This kind of psycho-education has meanwhile spread far beyond the schoolyard: through the mass-media and governmental campaigns, psychologisation has found its way into the broad spectrum of society. The basic idea is that knowledge helps and empowers, '*what you are going through is what psychology calls...*' The administration of theory is supposed to have preventive and even curative effects; *Knowledge* must therefore be spread. One of the chief characteristics of today's psychologisation lies precisely in the way we all have become psychology students, through school, work (e.g. the discourse of 'human resources'), television, magazines... Accordingly, Abma's definition of psychologisation must be refined: to the extent that it has become part of common knowledge, psychology is caught up in the paradox of the plea for 'real life'; psychologisation is a new schooling of society based on the paradigms on life of the psych-sciences.

The question then is, when society becomes a school, condemning everybody to life-long learning, does this not lead to a general *school exhaustion*? Is not the core of psychologisation – while the idea is that information and knowledge bring empowerment – the fact that it is paid for by derealization and absence of desire? (4) Let's try to concretize this. On one of today's many *psychotainment* television shows, during an episode on 'difficult' children, a father and son were playing in a public playground. A therapist stood a few yards away and was connected to the father who was wired with a hidden earphone: pedagogical advice in real time. She, the therapist, whispered that the father had to reinforce the positive behaviour of his clearly overactive son; *tell him he's doing great.* The father just slightly altered her words: *you're the best, you're the champ*, resorting to the *pep talk* of the common football coach. For her part, the pacing therapist praised the father continuously, like a hyperactive guardian angel on the loose. So if recently attempts were made to rehabilitate and re-establish the significance of the father figure via research and

accompanying informational campaigns, this example clearly shows how we must understand the idea of the *father role* in the human sciences; the father has a role to play and the script he must follow is psychology. Hence these theories should be general knowledge and if difficulties arise, there is always the psychologist or psychotherapist who from the *prompter's box* ensures that everyone has his or her lines straight.

This is not only the paradox of an objectified, empiricist psychology with its barely concealed but still denied strongly moralist tendencies - where *mainstream psychology* turns out to be nothing more than a vulgar pre-script-ive discourse. Moreover, today's psychology shows science's ambition to be life's *script as such*. This structural shift has to be thought through carefully; psychologisation is not just the seeping through of scientific psychology into everyday discourse, it is not only the moralising of everyday life. It essentially means that science claims everyday discourse as such. This is our second amendment to Abma's definition; given the current context where science regards itself as the only legitimate player in our entire reality, psychologisation boils down to an all-embracing and even totalitarian grip on the human being. The scene I just described of the wired psychotherapist could thus be seen as a realization of *The Truman Show*; the perfect Sunday afternoon in the park that was set up by the psych-expert herself. We can only assume the moment will come when the child will be confronted, in a traumatic movement, with the canvas of the contemporary psych-version of 'all world's a stage', a confrontation leading either to aggression or depression. Knowledge on man, as history shows, invariable is linked to alienation: as Žižek writes on the never to be subjectivized knowledge of the drive: 'it is uncanny, horrifying even, since it somehow "depossesses" the subject, reducing her or him to a puppet-like level "beyond dignity and freedom.'" (Žižek, 1997)

Psychology clearly restricts the play of choice and adaptation since it imposes on everyone its own path to the acquisition of happiness and protection from suffering in equal measure. Its technique consists in depressing the value of life and in distorting the picture of the real world in a delusional manner – which presupposes an intimidation of the intelligence. If these words sound familiar, they should be. I'm wired too it seems; these words are Freud's, from 'Civilization and its discontents' (Freud, 1930a). All I have done is replace one word: where Freud wrote about *religion* restricting the play of choice and adaptation, I took the liberty of saying *psychology*. Because the question seems to me, why did we so easily trade the *vicar-from-cradle-to-grave* for the 'psych' *from pre-maternal to palliative care*?

The deadlock of *critical psychology*

We've ended up with a question which, admittedly, is not easy to operationalise. Ultimately this is bound to the fact that if Freud's critique cannot but be made from a point *beyond* religion, this *outside* is (equally) highly problematical regarding the phenomenon of psychologisation. One could even argue that the operationalising of research questions in the human sciences as such cannot be seen as a simple matter once one realises that what is being researched is a *psychologised reality* in which the research is fundamentally embedded. Psychological analysis has become the central paradigm of everyone's outlook on reality; how to live your life, how to raise your child, how to love and how to work...: everyone is familiar with what the experts say about these matters. And even when the psych claims not to know what it takes to be happy and says you have to go your own way, he is still acting as the expert; the expert in *not knowing*, giving scientifically reliable examples of *good practice* and *evidenced-based methods* instead. Where religion once offered the language and guidelines according to which mankind saw himself, these days it is science and psychology. Shouldn't we then speak about the genuinely tautological and circular effects of psychologisation? By this I mean that widespread psychological-education threatens to make psych-research reveal nothing more than what the '*psy-complex*' itself injected in society. The psychologist of today appears as the prototype of the naïve scientist who overlooks the way you always get your own message back in inverted form (5): psychologists do research on people without realizing that once you probe someone, you trigger the questions, 'who are you and what do you want?', the mirror image of your own research question. If psychology students were still to have an open mind, they would, in the classic assignment of infant observation, discover a little psychologist in the child: the child as a researcher into what others want from him.

In this neo-empiricist climate, where the 'psych'-sciences deny their own – foundational – paradoxes, the importance of critical theory has almost been lost altogether. I would not bet therefore on grounding your research proposal in critical literature. However, the psych-sciences were initially, particularly through psychoanalysis, embedded in the context of the emerging critical theories on alienation and 'false consciousness' of the late nineteenth century (Whyte, 1960). On the other hand, psychoanalysis was assessed quite early on by the Frankfurt School as both the solution and as part of the problem (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944). Already in 1939 Norbert Elias stated that the 'civilizing process' led to the emphasis on the 'inner life' and made 'self restraint' the central tool in regulating interpersonal violence (Elias, 1982). The Sixties and the Seventies heralded the critique of the *antipsychiatry movement* on the entanglement of the psych-sciences with the mechanisms of power and control (Laing, Foudraine). *Antipsychiatry* was even surprisingly

popular in broad layers of society, but perhaps the fact that the theme interested so many people should be understood as a foreshadowing of today's phenomenon of psychologisation. In the Eighties, Ingleby introduced the concept of the 'psy-complex' and defined it as "the ensemble of agencies, including clinical, educational, developmental and industrial psychology, psychotherapy, and social work" (Ingleby, 1984). The critiques of Ingleby and others (e.g. Donzelot, Castel, Rose, De Swaan) were strongly influenced by the structuralist writings of Michel Foucault and led to a broad critical questioning of the fundamentals of psychology. In this context, a movement emerged under the name of 'Critical Psychology' (see Fox & Prilleltensky, 1993) with a clear link with sociology and possessing a radical political perspective. Another movement, linked to the European Society for the History of the Human Sciences, started off as politically-inspired but gradually shifted its attention to the historical viewpoint to engage in a critical study of the psychological sciences and practices (see the work of Ruud Abma). Both critical currents, however, arrived at a deadlock: Abma describes how the theoretical and political counterculture seemed to have died a silent death in the nineties (Abma, 1995), while Ian Parker wrote that 'Critical Psychology' became "just another commodity in the academic market place" (Parker, 2003).

But was this not due to the fact that critical psychology was stuck in a classic *ideology critique* – psychology serving the de-politization of social antagonisms - without realizing that ideology and politics as such had already left the building? With the idea of a de-politicised technocratic and minimal state, politics showed ideology the door, claiming that doing *the right thing for the people* should be above the old divisions of left and right. The grand narratives or, better, the great Lies are over and done with; it's time to be rational and logical and just do the best for the greatest number of the people, neo-positivistic, neo-empirical, neo-Enlightenment style. There is no longer any point in continuing to criticize the psychological sciences for being enslaved to the dominant ideologies if ideological discourse as such is said to have become history. It is in this context that the psych-sciences reclaimed *rationality* as their central slogan, the word having been cleansed from its totalitarian connotations. A no-nonsense approach, efficiency and cost-effectiveness led, for example, to a standardized approach in the field of mental health problems. Biased theories, contaminated with outdated ideology, have been dealt with through fixed protocols for diagnosis and treatment – evidence-based, of course. The social sciences serving the de-politicization of social antagonisms? The social sphere per se is purged from ideology and outdated politics. It seems that in this way that the *marriage de raison* of the policy makers and the social sciences had never been so successful. Market capitalism was declared the only natural state of things, and its minor negative side-effects are imagined to be successfully dealt with by our welfare system, the latter being the business of a type of social engineering based on the results of the scientific research of the human sciences. The

question then is, whether a minimal space for fundamental reflection is not lost in this close bond of post-politics with the *post-human sciences*? Never in history did the relation between power and the theory and praxis of the social sciences seem so powerful as to numb all possible critique; which is to say, this *disavowal* of the ideological threatens to dismiss every critique as the return of Utopia.

Man became psychologist

So maybe you should restrict your research proposal, stating that your subject is the historical and ethical (two rather safe terms) aspects of the impact of psych-sciences on contemporary subjectivity and society. In this respect, literature talks about a structural change. In the field of mental health, one traditionally expresses this as the following: the first time around, it was the therapist who translated the particular problems into the theoretical framework, in the second, the *patient* himself already did his part in the translation, bringing theory-compliant symptoms into the consulting room. De Swaan calls this proto-professionalization (de Swaan, 1997). But isn't there a third incarnation? where it is not a question of translation by either the therapist or the patient, but which is about the fact that the experience as such takes place in a psychologised context. Personal problems or social antagonisms are taking place inside an already psychologised discourse. In the case of educational problems in the context of the family, for example, parents do not translate the problems with their child into psych-talk, they are taken place *en principio* in psych-terminology. Life is a particularisation of general academic theory; it is not about their son being naughty or disobedient, it is about him being hyperactive or not. There is no pre-psychological context or experience: post-modern man is the homo psychologicus living in an a priori psychologised habitat.

Hence the principal question is not whether the assertions of the psych-sciences are right or wrong, because another question displaces and distorts every possible answer, namely, what does it mean for modern man to live his own life as a psychologist, anthropologist, or whatsoever? The paradox of psychology's claim to lay hand on 'real life' should thus be understood in the paradox of today's all-pervasive renaturalization which according Žižek is strictly correlative to the global reflexivization of our daily lives (Žižek, 2006). Recall the school: in several Western countries, legislative work consolidated and effected in a fairly short space of time a thorough psychologising of the education system. In the discourse of efficiency and quality, the school has been redesigned to provide a total package of schooling, education and therapy. The attainment targets, the pupils' objectives, are in fact, often literally, based on neo-normative models of the human sciences. Think, for example, of the model of *social skills* or *social competencies*: originating in the neo-

behaviouristic discourse, these competencies are declared the central objectives of the school. Teachers are trained to act as proto-psychologists: they are part of a vast detection network of psychological, affective and behavioural disorders. The critique is that teaching as such becomes less and less important – the children will get knowledge from television, gaming or the Internet, etc. But we shouldn't miss the paradoxical twist of the phenomenon of psychologisation. It is not about *knowledge versus competencies*: those social competencies are exactly taught within the classic model of *transfer of knowledge*. So our children are not only assessed and probed with psych-theories in school, they are also and primarily themselves educated in these theories. So it is not only a question of teachers who are supposed to enhance and improve the children's *social competencies* in order to resist abuse, for example, from adults or bullying from peers. The pupils are themselves also given a course in the basics of the psychology of the social competencies. As mentioned previously: it is the theoretical instruction, the knowledge itself that is supposed to have positive effects.

One has to carefully think through this paradoxical stance of psychologisation; this takes us back to the idea of hiding in plain sight. Consider the bizarre idea, for example, that, during or just prior to reaching puberty, schools instruct adolescents in *the psychology of puberty*. But if puberty is taught to adolescents as a *phase in which you have to deal with sexuality, struggle with your identity and have problems relating to parents and adults*, then the question is what effect this knowledge has on the youngster, regardless of whether these assertions of the psycho-medical discourse are valid. Does knowing these *facts* in advance create room for alternatives, once one starts to *observe* – to become one's own psychologist – the described phenomena with oneself? Or could it be that teaching psychology estranges one from oneself? Doesn't teaching a theory about how things are in the 'outside world' remove pubescent adolescents from the very thing they are living, life itself? Once could maintain that real life learning, or learning the theories of life, makes real life appear further away than ever. But, then again, the basic problem or paradox of all this is not that this is the framework of our psychologised times per se - because, isn't this self-reflexive stance the essence of the human being as such? The problem lies in the fact that this paradoxical reflexivity is disregarded or disavowed. It is not the fact that we think that we can *teach life* that is the problem, but the fact that we are teaching *theories* about life without acknowledging it.

So perhaps you could introduce into your research proposal a conceptual difference between psychologising and psychologisation. Formerly, psychologising was the way to depoliticise social antagonisms; currently psychologisation is linked to a de facto depoliticisation. Psychologising was about making the socio-economic and political aspects

invisible, psychologisation is about making itself invisible: it is a theoretisation which asserts itself as a pure and direct reality, turning everybody into a psychologist.

Psychologisation and the burnout of human sciences

But then again, it is doubtful you will get away with all this; you are dealing with academics, after all, whose natural habitat is the education system. And in this post-modern day and age when psychologisation could be considered an aspect of a more general colonization by what Lacan called the “university discourse”, the reach of the schoolyard of the Academy covers all of society. This colonization is so thorough, academics paradoxically often fail to see the equally paradoxical symptoms of a *schoolified* society. Consequently, in the human sciences one often looks upon man as if he were still a primitive, pre-Enlightenment being on whom science is to shed its light. Reducing man thus to his *genes and neurotransmitters*, to *behavioural patterns*, to the *sub-consciousness*, to the *desire of the Other*, invariably overlooks the fact that all this knowledge is reflexively incorporated in man’s subjectivity. This is the paradox of modern man who as a Cartesian being is at risk of succumbing to the scientific gaze; considering himself as an object of psychology, for example. Man is always at risk of losing touch with his subjectivity. In this way psychologisation is an interesting illustration of Lacan’s statement - ‘the discourse of science will leave no place whatsoever for man’.

To make this tangible one could, in the tradition of the psychological-hygienic prophylactic discourse itself, warn the general public about the major occupational risk facing psychologists and everyone working in social care, namely *burnout*. If psychologisation turns everyone into a psychologist, then one can expect pandemic burnout. Workers in social care and mental health were always thought to experience higher levels of stress and to be more subjected to burnout than comparable occupational groups (Lloyd, 2002). Recall also Slavoj Žižek’s comment how the *social services industry* as such is more alienating than its predecessor: in industrial times it was about selling your body, the factory worker could be totally disengaged, nobody cared about his views regarding the aims and the methods of the company. This shifts fundamentally in a service industry. The Child Care worker, for example, has to be emotionally involved and connected to the job; she or he has to sell his or her emotions as well which, according to Žižek, is more alienating than before (Žižek, 2004). One could say that in the social services industry there is nothing that can be held back: there is no hidden *agalma* you can keep secret. All your cards must be on the table. Žižek’s idea that the post-modern social worker has to sell his emotions must be understood as saying that they are to be sold to the psych-sciences. The social worker is not only obliged to

account for his job in the terminology of psychology and the like, but also his own private well-being has to be sold to the same discourse. If one has been around long enough in social care, one could have observed that the social workers themselves were the forerunners of the now widespread phenomenon of psychologisation; they were the first to bring their work home with them, so to speak, translating and experiencing their own everyday life in psych-terminology ('I need to be more assertive', 'I have to find my true self', 'my children need structure', etc.).

The fact that everything you say, do or think can be subjected to a psychological analysis is certainly not reserved for the caricature of the pseudo-Freudians. The whole discourse of the psych-sciences is a discourse from which nothing can escape. But doesn't this suffocating and totalitarian aspect point precisely to the opposite: there is a fundamental kernel that the psych-sciences are unable to cover or to master; something at the level of the Real always escapes? Consider the striking parallel between the Žižekian skinhead and the Muslim protest in 2006 against the cartoons in a Danish newspaper portraying Mohammed. While Žižek's fictional skinhead provides a neat socio-psychological theoreticization about his actions to the TV reporter (Žižek S., 1998), the Muslim parrots our own standard multicultural discourse about respect for diversity. In both cases, the violence and aggression are not in the least reduced by those perfect self-assessments. Žižek talks about 'impotent cynical reflection': repeating the social workers, sociologists and social psychologists, the skinhead is not hindered in doing what he's doing. According to Žižek, the classical formula "they are doing it, because they do not know what they are doing" (where knowledge is the remedy) should be replaced here: the violent skinhead "knows very well what he is doing, but he is nonetheless doing it" (Žižek S., 1998). The highly valued, supposedly emancipatory, self-theoreticizations are ineffective because, in the first place, they don't seem to be able to cover the entirety of the Real. What both the skinhead and the Muslim protester show is that our academic grip on reality fails. One should expect that this excess on the level of being will always lead to new attempts of colonisation: it will be psychologised over and over again. But one can also predict that it will continue to burst through the cracks of the edifice of the theories and the praxis of the human sciences. And again, with two possible outcomes: aggression or depression.

This excess that always escapes the attempts to master it, is also closely related to the problematic status of the human sciences. Traditionally one was obliged to ground both the theory and the praxis of the psych-sciences *outside* their own domain. The justification, the ontological basis, had to come from elsewhere. As such, the human sciences have no corpus of axioms or firm internal basis of their own, they must borrow from outside. The *hard* sciences were always the privileged provider of paradigms. In the field of psychology the paradoxical nature of this becomes clearly visible: while the point of departure is that certain

human phenomena can be understood by *psychological* analyses, it seems necessary to ground this elsewhere, for example in genes and neurotransmitters. Thus, intended to provide a solid base for both theory and praxis of the psych-sciences, this import eventually threatens to become the denial of the psychological analysis. This must be understood against the background of the human sciences which were historically bound to *the subject of the Enlightenment*. Modern man engaged in a search for the ontological foundation of man and society that had perished during the course of the cultural and socio-economic changes of the modern period. But couldn't it be said that it was never so much about a search but, first and foremost, about a covering up of the fundamental *lack of being* which modernity brought us? The current neo-empirical, utilitarian, no-nonsense climate in the human sciences is, then, just the latest attempt at this. Just when its theory and praxis are swarming out in an eager attempt to cover the whole of *being* with statistics and evidence-based methods, the structural gap in its ontology threatens to reappear elsewhere.

Psychologisation thus seems to point paradoxically to a burn-out of the human sciences themselves because, while their function is to veil the lack of being, this lack inevitably seeps through, leaving the psychologised subject without any firm ground to stand on. Current socio-pathology, the alleged increase of disorders like ADHD, anorexia, auto-mutilation problems, toxicomania, depression etc., points to a generalised burnout and depression and this could represent a radical realisation of the truth of the human sciences: the falling away of the psychologised veils of current *discontents in culture*. Perhaps those so-called *contemporary symptoms* are to be understood paradoxically as symptoms of being fed up, being made ill by a psychologised and medicalised society which is supposed to offer us ultimate happiness and well-being, if not by neurological drugs, then by psycho-education.

Pan-psychologisation, virtualisation and fooling the Other

At this point you could contemplate the possibility of a quantitative approach: try to prove a correlation between for example the number of psychology students, psychologisation in the media and the rising numbers of the aforementioned contemporary symptoms. But isn't this the major and classic way to avoid the ontological gap of the psych-sciences?, by having recourse to hard statistics, leaving the explanations to trendwatchers or to biologists and neuroscientists? This is the approach of the *evidence-based methods*. One need not bother about why or how something works so long as the numbers prove that the method leads to results. In this way, the much celebrated *to measure is to know* is surprisingly subverted: we don't need or even want to know, let's just measure. The classic Foucauldian critique explains this statistical probing of man in terms of the social sciences becoming caught up in

the processes of power as a *conduct of conducts* (une conduite des conduites) (Foucault, 2000, p. 341). Techniques were developed to extract data, measure, gauge, and compare individuals and in this way exert power over *correlated man*. But if one regards this only as an external threat, it fosters the illusion that once you stop *probing*, once you get rid of that hostile invasion of humanity by the human sciences, the pure human individual can return. Man as he is, living life as it is. However, the phenomenon of psychologisation shows that the probing is internalised; these are the times when the superego feeds off the ideas of the social sciences. *I should be more assertive, I should develop my personality, I should enhance my coping capabilities and strengthen my social network*. This is what I've called the *a priori psychological subject*; the child of the Enlightenment is a reflexive subject. It shows that, although psychologisation appears a post-modern phenomenon, it is nevertheless based on the foundations of modernity; searching for firm ground it invariably tries to probe itself from a distance.

The question then becomes: is it that in modernity - and consequently post-modernity - one cannot but represent or experience the world with the mediation of psychology and the social sciences? Here I am simply rephrasing that other issue of our times, as put by Druckrey, for example, who in speaking of the mediation of technology remarks that technology has become "integral to concepts of the 'natural' environment" (Druckrey T., 1996). Druckrey adds that Foucault's idea - that enlightenment, modernity and its technologisation can be understood in terms of the panoptic gaze as the central control mechanism - must be reinterpreted: seeing, representation and the image have been altered in a radical way through the means of information technology and cybernetics. As Druckley writes, the reflexive representation systems of modernity are replaced by forms of recording, rendering, and surveillance in which *information* serves as deeply as *observation* to regulate behaviour (Druckrey T., 1996).

Under the panopticon, man was probed and, most importantly, knew that he was being probed by the panoptic gaze. The individual didn't have to know what precisely was being probed. Through such measurement and comparison, he could be part of a potentially endless number of statistical groups without his knowledge. It is precisely this that has changed; the individual now *has to know* the object of the search, just as he knows the social and psychological theories and analyses. Post-modern man has to be informed; he needs to know the figures; "20% of our children...", we read in the headlines of our popular newspapers. The information of the psych-sciences is vital because it gives us meaning, it structures, outlines our post-modern world. The theorization of life is in fact post-modern life itself, life at the level of the virtual. Psychologisation has thus introduced us into a rather strange habitat: a world where living means engaging in some sort of *behaviour*, having communicational exchanges and sometimes also having to deal with a *sub-consciousness*. It

is a world where medication and psycho-education enhance our coping skills in dealing with our manifold traumas and our genetically-determined minor and major physical and mental disorders. All this is embedded in a social network neatly supported and structured by social workers, providing us with a variety of early assessment and detection programs for all kinds of psychosocial problems. Let's not forget the backup by broad informational and sensibilisation campaigns organised by resource centres and governmental agencies. In short: a pan-psychologisation, which is nothing less than a virtualisation of everyday life. If modernity was panoptical, technological and control was realised through the social sciences, post-modernity is informational, cybernetic and psychologised.

It should be clear that a research proposal on psychologisation based on indignation is flogging a dead horse: nobody feels that current statistical probing and man's subjection to the discourse of the human sciences is threatening. There is absolutely no point in engaging in an unveiling of the motives of those sciences; current psychologised life sphere is our very habitat so do not expect any indignation or outrage if you state that psychologisation has finally brought us Brave New World. The chances of getting an *anti-psychology* movement happening are very small. But, haven't we arrived here at the basic paradox of your research proposal? You cannot embark on researching the post-modern position of the psych-sciences without engaging in some kind of critique which implies a desire for something different, for a change. You are driven into making a plea for *de-psychologisation* and this reconnects you with the Foucauldian stance you actually wanted to leave behind. For the sake of clarity: Foucault justly attacked the dualistic conception of power as divided between those who have power and those who do not. For Foucault, power is situated at the micro-level, which leads him to the following:

The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualisation which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of (the) kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries. (Foucault M., 1982, p.216)

Foucault's illusion is that we can fool ourselves, that subjectivity is nothing more than a type of individualisation. It is the idea that we can freely choose our form of subjectivity, that we can choose our Other. Recall Žižek's critique that Foucault leads to an aestheticization of ethics: the idea that a subject can build, without any support from universal rules, his own mode of self-mastery, harmonizing the antagonism of the powers within himself (Žižek, 1991, p.2) [6]. In this way the question is what have we gained by the Foucauldian move from *imposing forms of subjectivity to promoting new forms of subjectivity*? Doesn't psychologisation show precisely that these two things are one and the same? One can easily

observe in today's academic practices that the Foucauldian critique has led directly to the promotion of just another form of social engineering. If Foucault's idea to promote new forms of subjectivity is often linked to Raoul Vaneigem's *Revolution of everyday life*, then it should be clear that this revolution is a already fact: it is the already realised psychologisation of everyday life.

Don't study psychology, study psychologisation

A new name should perhaps be introduced into the social sciences to clearly state this epistemological shift: *e-psychology*. Post-modern man can avoid the hassle of going to the mall because the e-shop is at hand. He doesn't have to go to boring schools either; he engages in e-learning. He is no longer confronted with a Kafkaesque government, but exercises e-government and can participate via e-democracy. In this happy e-nvironment, e-psychology is a natural.

"Psychology," said William Bricken (a virtual reality researcher), "is the physics of virtual reality", suggesting that psychology is the most important tool for building virtual realities (Bricken, 1991). If you want to build realistic virtual worlds you must understand mankind. We are tempted to alter this by stating that psychology is the physics of our *virtualised* reality: we need so much psychology because it structures our post-modern globalised, virtualised sphere. But we should not forget, as Žižek remarked, that virtuality is already at work operating in the symbolic order as such, "to the extent to which virtual phenomenon retroactively enable us to discover to what extent all our most elementary self-experience was virtual" (quoted by Druckrey T., 1996). Thus we are back to the conclusion already made earlier: there is no, and never was, a real authentic life or world beyond psychology. No calls, therefore, for de-psychologisation or for fostering the illusion that behind the heavy veils of psychologisation the promised land of authenticity lurks. Recall Žižek's summary of Marx: it is not that we have the wrong idea about how things really are, but that we have the wrong idea of how in reality things are mystified (Žižek, S., 2005). In the same way, with respect to the phenomenon of psychologisation, one should not focus on the supposed real life behind it, but instead try to show how in reality life gets psychologised; that what we take for reality is a psychologised reality. Marx's aim was not to prove that behind religious formations, for example, lurks a real, material and social reality. He primarily asserted that behind the *commodity*, which appears to us as a real thing, something is operating at the level of the fetish, at the level of the imaginary (Žižek, S., 2005).

According to Žižek, this means that the fetishist illusion resides in our real social life, not in our perception of it: for example one knows that money is not a magical thing, that it is just an object standing for a set of social relations, but one nevertheless acts in real life as if

money were something magical (Žižek, S., 2001). In the same way, we know psychology isn't the real thing, that it is just a representation of life as it is. But this is precisely the fetish: the belief that there is a life beyond psychology, which obscures how modern life as such is psychologised. This is what the *reality shows* on television are really concerned with, and also what one can call *psychotainment* in the various media: our thirst for a real, authentic life that they cater for is exactly the core of psychologised life and of psychology tout-court. What today's pan-psychologisation shows us is that psychology never was a, more or less accurate, map or guide of real life, but essentially, in its fetishization of *real life*, the very blueprint of our (post)modern times. If you want to know something about man, don't study man, don't study psychology, study psychologisation.

Conclusion

A good departure point is then the question why there are so many students of psychology nowadays, and why are they mostly female? Does our essay here leads to the conclusion that the weight of the psycho-social dimension in our educational system and in the broad layers of society, pushes especially girls to the theory and the praxis of the psycho-social sciences? Such an answer based on alleged gender differences cannot satisfy us, we should seek a more structural explanation, taking into account the history of the social sciences. Let us end here with a tentative answer. If we begin with the analogy of psychology with the former monasteries I indicated at the beginning, consider this hypothesis: at one point the monasteries and nunneries were the best hiding place from a world whose dominant paradigm was Catholicism in conjunction with a pre-capitalist economy. These days the psychology department takes over that function in a pan-psychologised world; it is the perfect hiding place in a world where the social sciences are backing up post-politics as the spokesman of globalised capitalism. If so, why are the faculties of psychology predominantly filled with young *female* students? In 2003, in the university of my home town, more than 80% of the first year enrolment were women in (you see, a quantitative approach is possible after all for this research project). But this doesn't reflect the historical inflow into the religious houses, where there were more monks than nuns, so the parallels must be read in another way. The fact that monasteries and nunneries were, at least at the formal level, a-sexual places, could lead the way: the antagonisms and deadlocks in the socio-economic sphere of the Catholic pre-capitalistic context were dealt with in a way that touches the field of sexuality, the field considered by psychoanalysis as the *nec plus ultra* of the Real. The hypothesis, then, is that this link with the problematic of sexuality returns in the phenomenon of psychologisation in these post-modern times. If, in the tradition of Freud and Lacan, one

can say that woman has always been the first name for the problematic, or the Real as you wish, of human sexuality, it should come as no surprise that women are a main target of psychologisation. Recall Dr. Spock and co's vast attempts at psychologising and reducing women to *mothers*, a category under the jurisdiction of the medical discourse and the psy. Forced to be good mothers, woman were furthermore rapidly forced into the position that psychologisation leads: the mothers were instructed and trained how to read the psychological signs with their children: in short, they had to become psychology trainees or proto-psychologists, albeit under supervision of the doctor. The problematic Real of sexuality, in its vital link to the socio-economic reality, is the reason why in these (post) modern times, woman is the psychologist of the world.(7)

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Endnotes:

(1) After this essay was written, I did receive the news that my second attempt at passing Academia's Gates had succeeded: funds for a scholarship was granted.

(2) Think about how Lacan discussed Poe's "Purloined Letter" (where a letter is hidden twice by leaving him in plain site) by evoking a Jewish Joke: "Why are you lying to me?" one character shouts breathlessly. "Yes, why do you lie to me saying you're going to Cracow so I should believe you're going to Lemberg, when in reality you are going to Cracow?" (Lacan, 1972)

(3) See the website of the project: http://www.ipsl.jussieu.fr/~ypsce/py_E2C2.html

(4) Here I'm paraphrasing the words of Slavoj Žižek while talking about virtualization, quoted by Druckrey (Druckrey, 1996)

(5) Jaques Lacan's definition of communication is that one gets ones own message getting your own message back in its inverted and true form (Lacan, 1988, p. 324). But do we not have in our case a peculiar situation? Think about the fact that the psy generally doesn't like those patients who play they role all too well and turn out to be real psychology-adepts; when the face-value of the position of the psy today is 'I am your slave' (I do not know what's good for you, I just can show you the way to empowering knowledge), the inverted form "Yes, you are my master" is what he gets back from the psy-adept.

(6) In the Žižekian perspective the alternative would be situated in the field of the act against the background of a fundamentally traumatic conceived subjectivity: instead of fooling the Other, the act would envision a suspension of the Other (see for example Žižek, 1991).

(7) Ending up with such an assertion I cannot but advice anyone considering to engage in a call for projects procedure to above all start with the writing of the delimited proposal; do not sit down at your desk and start writing the project as-it-would-be if there were no restrictions or academic conventions. This seriously complicates things.