



Rethinking Resistance as Relational – Resisting Psychologization in Psychology: Lessons from Carrère’s *Between Two Worlds*

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Abstract

Psychology, and in particular mainstream positive psychology, is fuelled by discourses on resistance strategies, understood as the individual capacity to resist and adapt to negative and oppressive thoughts, circumstances, experiences, and social structures. This *self-strategy* of resistance is evident in positive psychology’s notions of resilience: grit, life-crafting, and job-crafting behaviors, for example. While positive psychology would have us believe these strategies are associated with overcoming hardship and living a good life, they risk imbricating people in their own oppressions. In this paper, we engage in a reading of Carrère’s *Between Two Worlds* (original title *Ouistreham*) (2021), a movie featuring multiple examples of resistance. The movie shows how precarious workers enact self-strategies of resistance to fight for a decent and bearable life. They persevere despite ongoing hardships, seek joy amidst tragic life events, and find meaning in menial labor. However, resistance also appears as relational and political, and thus escapes and exceeds self-focused psychological categories of resistance. Resistance appears as the refusal to be understood solely in individual and individualizing ways – as a psychologized and knowable subject – and is characterized by relational, contextual, and political tactics. The movie *profanes* established positive psychology’s individualist focus on resistance. This profanation of self-strategies of resistance affords an opportunity to rethink resistance beyond the individual and compels us to problematize the tendency to psychologize and individualize social phenomena. In doing so, our paper too resists the determination of psychological language (i.e., psychologization) and advances ideas for alternative resistances in, to, and of psychology.

Keywords Precarious work · Social injustice · Resistance strategies · Demystification · Critical psychology

Instructions for Use

You are reading an article that instantiates academic resistance and profanation of positive psychology via a series of boxes. These are ventilations, openings that let our academic text breathe. The boxes' contents are playful, jarring, and offer ideas for alternatives to resist hegemonies of positive psychology. For best results, make sure you start with the right dose.

Between Two Wor(l)ds = Positive Psychology ⇒ (resistance) ⇐ Profanity

In the last two decades, research in psychology, particularly positive psychology, has shown an increasing interest in how individuals can optimally develop resistance strategies to cope with problematic social conditions and contexts (e.g., Donaldson & Ko, 2010; Luthans, 2002). Such emergent and continually emerging endeavors are offered as part of an expanding scientific literature fuelled by psychological discourses on resistance, which often fail to appreciate existing structural problematic conditions (e.g., structural insecurity, precarity, inequalities) (e.g. Han, 2021; Mumby, 2019). These resistance strategy discourses seem primarily concerned with providing mental models for adaptation to preexisting problematic conditions, rather than mechanisms through which problematic conditions might be challenged or changed – resisted.. For example, critics point to the mythologizing totems of personal mindfulness, resilience, stress reduction, life- and job-crafting behaviors as more akin to coping mechanisms than means of resisting environmental (undesirable) conditions (Bal & Dóci, 2018; McDonald et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2023). The *prescriptive* aspect of psychological discourses on self-resistance is powerful, given that these discourses appear as myths (e.g., heroes with ‘grit,’ who pull themselves up by their own bootstraps; the possibility of living ‘the good life’) that invoke fixed and normalized images of a desirable subject (McDonald & O’Callaghan, 2008).

These constant and well-established myths are, simultaneously, the object of contestation in the literature, with authors *criticalizing* (Abrams et al., 2023) positive psychology’s primary constructs (see Islam & Sanderson, 2022; Teo, 2017; Watson et al., 2023:). In positive psychology, one pertinent issue is the fictional and imaginative character of certain constructs which direct subjects’ desires rather than representing the subject’s form of resistance. On the surface, it seems that the elements of theorised self-resistance are bereft of concrete examples, and appear to emerge as a result of mythologised images inspiring such academic texts. Against this background, there is a wealth of critiques insisting that forms of resistance are not just nexuses in which people self-resist to a certain situation, but are, instead, essential sites that function to create and maintain personal and relational identity within unchanging structural inequities (Ashcraft, 2008; Islam & Zyphur, 2005).

In the present paper, we wish to unsettle current understandings of self-resistance strategies posed by that amalgam of knowledge production, which Miller and Rose (2013) refer to as “‘psy’ expertise,” and counter these *sacralized* mythical images of self-resistance by rethinking and offering alternative strategies from the perspective of the individual in their embodied, affective and politicized relationalities with/in their socio-cultural worlds. Following a more radical inception from within critical psychology, we wish to expand the existing literature by positing resistance as the act of the subject beyond such prescriptive and atomizing conceptual frames as a mindset (e.g., resilience, grit) and a set of behaviours

(e.g., life-crafting). We refer to these current conceptual frames as ‘sacralized mythical images of self-resistance’ in as much as they appear as figurations of resistance which separate the subject from reality and, in doing so, untether the subject in its relationality from possibilities of ‘real’ resistance. In these terms then, the sacralization of self-resistance operated by mainstream positive psychology removes subjects from the material contexts which bind them. As an alternative, we invoke the possibilities and potentialities inherent in thinking about the subject beyond the boundaries of mainstream psychology and highlight those extra-subject relationalities embedded in power relations that are intrinsic to the sociocultural work of the subject. To do so, we engage a reading of the movie *Between Two Worlds* (Carrère, 2021) as a site that demystifies such sacralized self-resistance strategies.

Between Two Worlds (Carrère, 2021) describes the experience of a writer, Marianne Winckler, who goes undercover and works in the cleaning sector in Caern (northern France), an area characterized by social injustice and precarity. Workers struggle to make a living whilst labouring as cleaners in return for dehumanizing and underpaid work, engaging in exhausting shifts, horrific conditions, and have no job security. Marianne enters this world of precarity to produce literary knowledge, to write a book, about how those organizations are responsible for workers’ precarity while also exploring how people resist in such conditions. The movie is a fictionalized example of how precarious workers enact self-resistance strategies in fighting for a decent and bearable life. The characters embody discourses of self-resistance and gradually reveal to the viewer the fallacy of these notions. Carrère depicts the inner tensions of Marianne, the writer, and her dilemmas in being a privileged undercover writer exploiting the objects of her research. The movie underscores her position as standing *between two worlds*. This paradoxical positionality occurs in an emotional finale where Marianne meets her ex-colleagues after unveiling the brutal conditions of their precarity in her published book. Here, Marianne’s ex-colleagues enact a different kind of resistance – a resistance unintelligible within self-resistance discourses that invokes a world beyond the desire for revenge, a critical resistance evoked from a sense of deep betrayal and violation of their identity, their work and their world.

Considering the movie’s themes and the myths of self-resistance inherent within its narrative tropes, we take the movie as an artifact that offers alternative images of resistance. Even if fictionalized, the film’s images and myths provide an opportunity to summon radical counterpoints to those discourses of resistance redolent in positive psychology. We take the movie for its potential to inspire psychologists to not only reconceptualize resistance but also to engage with the film as an aesthetic experience that unsettles the psychology of resistance (Beyes et al., 2019; Tommasi, 2024). As such, we are attracted to the movie as a set of images of improvised acts of self-resistance, and as a series of realisations – even if fictionalised – that demystify psychological notions of resistance. In doing this, the movie allows us to *touch* the *untouched* established images (Agamben, 2007) of self-resistance by looking at how the movie *profanes* the canon of academic texts in the literature of psychology. It is precisely the profanation that the movie produces that renders the academic establishment of positive psychology suspect and opens possibilities for a more critical understanding of resistance in psychology. What is more, this profanation of positive psychology not only affords us the opportunity to recognize and work with the notion of resistance (Fineman, 2004; McDonald et al., 2021; Townley, 1993) but also depletes the power and boundaries of psychologization which, consequently, offers us the possibility to think about alternatives for new vistas in psychological theory.

In the following sections, we proceed as follows. First, we present our methodological approach. In this section, we outline the use of *texts* (e.g., books and movies) for psychological inquiry and how such texts can help to question and disturb accepted psychological

models and discourses. Then, we recall the movie and present Carrere's work as it relates to the notion of resistance in psychology. We proceed by presenting our analysis of the movie and the profanation of the sacralized forms of self-resistance. Reflecting upon our analysis of psychological myths, we move forward by rethinking resistance and psychology. Fighting for a more critical psychological perspective of resistance, we conclude by discussing the further potentials of our analyses.

Disturbing/Resisting Academic Writing

A typical and conventional introduction sets the stage for a paper organized in traditional sections: an initial introduction to situate the paper, a subsequent section detailing the approach, the employed theory and methodology, and then a discussion of research results. Moreover, the paper concludes with a summary highlighting the contribution and the next steps for research.

Could an article aiming to contribute to the discourse on resistance adopt a tone and structure that is more ambiguous, creative, and experimental?

In writing such 'straight' papers, do you feel an obsessive concern to justify, to align, to conform? And, does this obsessive form and formation stiffen the narrative, constraining what the research/scholarly process might offer otherwise?

Might more experimental texts ruffle this traditional structure by introducing elements of, for example, 'cyborg writing' that question how psychology, and not only that, commonly represents life?

Cyborg writing could function 'as a radical site of possibilities—and at minimum, as a discursive means to disrupt Enlightenment ideals of Cartesian duality, objectivity, and rationality' (Prasad, 2016, 431–432).

How does positive psychology generate knowledge through this traditional form of writing? What might be(come) possible if we thought about textual representation in other ways?

Engaging with Texts and Profaning Psychological Models

A vast number of critical scholars within organization and management studies have advocated the use of creative and cultural texts (e.g., fiction, poetry, movies) in research related to work, organization, and society. Texts are living things that frame language, community, and identity: novels, movies, tv series, songs, and photography keep finding their way into the development of our ideas about identity and society. Not only do they reflect such ideas, but they are also active agents in shaping the experience and idea(l)s of such phenomena. Inquiring into (and with) texts is a way of restoring what academic texts can omit or occlude (Waldo, 1968). Extending academic knowledge and around a range of topics through the use of texts is a well-established methodology in organization and management studies, with a long historical tradition (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1999; De Cock & Land, 2006; Phillips, 1995). This is certainly the case in using texts to interrogate abstract notions via concrete examples offered by textual narratives. Texts construct and represent the lived experience of subjects—even when fictionalised—and can offer alternative interpretations as they reflect (on) socio-cultural meanings.

The use of creative and cultural texts within relatively ‘closed’ disciplines (e.g., organization studies) is less likely to be echoed in contemporary psychology, where factual and positivistic models are often preferred. This dearth reflects the partial absence of the sort of formalism for the use of texts that can inform a) the definition of methodologies and b) the pragmatics of using texts. However, texts are analytic sources within cultural and humanistic psychology (e.g., Bendassolli, 2022) and organizational psychology, which suggests possibilities for broader acceptance of such a methodology. For example, in the recent Encyclopedia of Organizational Psychology (Bal, 2024), Tommasi argues that “texts can offer insights not available through more conventional means of research and to[can] present a spectrum of possibilities in such a manner that the existing works in the literature can be complemented or extended”. Texts are recognized as living artifacts whose potential lies in their power to disturb conventional forms of representation and reframe language so as to explore idea(l)s of community, identity, self, and more in wholly different ways. As such, texts can provide psychologists empirical material relevant to psychological functioning when it is not (or even when it is) available through more traditional means.

Various modes of engagement with texts are present in the literature, indicating that texts function as essentially heuristic devices to engage with individual and social phenomena (De Cock & Land, 2006). To offer a classification of their use, Beyes and colleagues (2019) grouped modes of engagement into three modalities, which imply different heuristic readings of texts. First, the *ethical* mode of engagement implies a reading of texts for moral imagination. Second, the *representational* mode groups all those uses of texts as ways of representing existing theories and conceptualizations, while the third group, the *aesthetical* mode, refers to the reading of such texts as a means to advance provocations for alternative thinking and feelings about phenomena. In the present paper, our use of Carrère’s movie (text), *Between Two Worlds*, reflects a combination of the representational and aesthetical modes. It appears that the different modes of engagement are, in essence, the result of reading texts in which texts represent empirical material, data, that we can analyse to investigate, interrogate and, in our case, profane academic notions (i.e., to return things that had been consecrated by academic literature). Notably, following Agamben’s notion of profanation (2007), this occurs when sacralized myths that represent space separated from the mundane *return* to the use of the ordinary, i.e., the secular space of the subject. The point of sacralization of resistance in positive psychology is the realization of seemingly untouchable notions that can frequently result in forms of discrimination, repression, and domination which are separated from the ordinary. In our use of Carrère’s movie as it reflects a representational mode, we consider the movie’s depictions of self-resistance strategies as concrete examples of abstract concepts such as resilience, grit, life-crafting, and job-crafting behaviors. However, Carrère’s movie also lends itself to other readings that parallel its representation of how resilience is understood in positive psychology. In the finale of the movie, we point to an end that cannot be simply understood via positive psychology’s approach to resistance. As such we enter an aesthetical mode of engagement to read the movie; namely, the movie provokes alternative thinkings and feelings about resistance that ultimately *profane* positive psychology’s myth of resistance.

It is precisely the combination of representational and aesthetical modes that reflects the artistic valence of the movie, which prompts us to reflect on how resistance is presented in psychological models and compels us to profane such models. This movie text provides illustrations of the various forms in which models of resistance of positive psychology generate and occur in precarious and horrific living conditions, characterized by job insecurity. Moreover, the text invites us, as academics, to attend to the ways these resistance strategies are profiled and how positive psychological models of resistance strategies are profaned.

Carrère's movie shows the failure of positive psychology's models to capture subjective and relational forms of resistance and invites us to rethink resistance. Using the concept of profanation to engage aesthetically with the movie offers a reading of the sacralization of the myths of resistance strategies transferred to the (non-religious) context of the sacred idea(s) of self-resistance. Is the movie thus offers a form of contestation of the sacred in positive psychology's modelling of resistance (i.e., psychologization of subjects). Such contestation affords an invitation to demystify notions of self-resistance by neutralizing the power structures activated by the sacred, and potentiates the notion of resistance to return for the use of the subject. In addition, profanation entails rendering inoperative the sacralization of existing myths whilst also unveiling the power that lies at the boundaries between the sacred and the secular space without necessitating the creation (i.e., sacralization) of further counter-myths (Munro & Huber, 2012; Śliwa et al., 2013).

To summarize, while the movie offers an illustration of the sacred myth of resistance redolent of positive psychology, it also offers the possibility to touch and play with, to profane, the sacred. This is something that is not readily realized via traditional forms of research praxis: it is through critical readings of cultural texts that scholars can most vibrantly profane taken-for-granted, sacralized, and dominant myths of resistance associated with more hegemonic perspectives. The movie – and close readings thereof – offers a set of depictions of resistance and, in turn offers a provocation that we use to re-think myths of self-resistance, thus opening up spaces in which the psychologization of the subject can be made visible and contested.

Profaning Myths of Self-Resistance

Carrère's "Between Two Worlds"

Adapting the French non-fiction bestseller *The Night Cleaner* (2011) by Florence Aubenas, Carrère's *Between Two Worlds* depicts the experience of a writer going undercover and working in the brutal world of service cleaning in Caen (northern France). In this region, desperate applicants must burnish their CVs with fatuous assurances about how passionate they are about cleaning in return for dehumanizing work with low pay, horrific conditions, and no job security. Carrère's lightly adapted version of the book is devoted to the dramatic narrative of the work of Aubenas—the character of Marianne in the film—who is the centre of an imagined gallery of courageous workers. Rather than using a documentary approach or focusing on the workers' lived experience, Carrère opts for a narration of the lived experience of an author, Marianne, entering the world of precarity, sacrificing the comforts of her private and privileged life in the pursuit of journalistic answers to how today's organizations create and sustain employment precariousness. Marianne goes undercover, maintaining her standpoint of a privileged author, while aiming to give sense to the reality of underprivileged work. Carrère's fictional strategy introduces ways that viewers, including psychologists, might encounter the "politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler, 2009, p. 25). Marianne assumes a different identity to fit into the milieu—she constructs a fictional biography to explain her need to accept any job and to justify her recent move to a part of France where she knows no one, and no one knows her. On the surface, Marianne uses the pretext of her

own precariousness—to cover her aim of writing a novel—to enter a different world and to intervene in social phenomena as a form of engagement against precarious work.

For example, the movie opens with Marianne presenting herself at the employment office, where she aims to gain a job. Marianne is thrust into the negative and oppressive social structures with the various vicissitudes of the world of precarious employment open for women in Caen. There, she witnesses the *degradation* of rights for the unemployed and the daily vicissitudes of a precariously employed woman, Chrystèle, who will later become her friend in her new world. The opening scene defines the unfolding story of Marianne. Daily, she encounters the difficulties that this group of women must confront in order to combat the dehumanizing conditions in which they live. These difficulties are reflected in subsequent scenes when Marianne is called back by her cleaning employers to contest the quality of the work she did – all as a pretext for not paying her for doing the job. As the movie depicts the living conditions of these women who are precarious workers, we attend to, and read, the conditions in which they enact resistance.

Betweenness: A Worthy Academic Fight



It could be proposed that *Between Two Worlds* offers a paradoxical perspective on betweenness. If the world is seen as more than a representation of poor and wealthy lives, working class and middle class, failure and success, *Between two worlds* is a paradox, temptation, and oversimplification which is simultaneously for and against, simple and complex, in and out, faith and betrayal and more. The movie's beautiful yet disturbing ways aim to create boundaries of single identities, fixed categories, and stable economic selves. Yet, it offers complex overlaps, role reversals, and hybrid identity formations that live and pollute the straight plot.

Worthy of a Fight?

Pluralism and collectivism

Multiple worlds and cosmologies

Decentering the human and human values

Ecological action

Relational resistance

Celebration of betweenness and liminalities

Profaning Myths of Self-Resistance

The sacralized character of self-resistance strategies stands in its separation from the ordinary (Agamben, 2007) and, in its tenets of individualism and self-determination, calls into question whether subjects can ever overcome hardship and live the good life; is an individual's striving in the face of structural inequality merely a form of participating in their own oppressions?.

Myths of self-resistance occur multiple times in the movie. For example, in the opening scenes, after the initial job interview at the employment office, Marianne is sent to a training centre for adults where she learns the job of a cleaner. During the course, the tutor imbues the myths of 'self-growth' and 'self-determination' by saying that he, too, had started as a cleaner. By adapting, resisting, and accepting those conditions, the trainer has taken the opportunity to grow and make his working conditions better, i.e., to advance from a mere worker to the loftier position of trainer. To underline this individualistic, personal-growth approach, the trainer goes on to suggest some strategies that are typical of the behavioural notions of resistance from positive psychology, i.e., life- and job-crafting strategies (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019). The trainer insists on the need to take an appropriate behavioural approach while working, trying to optimize work opportunities, avoiding external pressures (such as criticism from customers), and approaching work as a series of challenges that can be overcome to keep one's job and status. These are common tenets of positive psychology's interventions; ones that foster resilience as a form of individualised resistance. For example, in life-crafting interventions, positive psychologists urge individuals to engage with work challenges by following different stages of self-analysis/development spanning from imbuing ideals of self-growth and self-realization to highlighting the role of competencies and education.

The sacralization of the myths of self-resistance are present across the entire movie. In the scenes following the one described above, the precarious female workers have to find personal strategies to resist, and adapt to, life and work conditions that are often way beyond their own control. Sometimes, this happens in the form of taking pride in

practical skills, for example in bed-making, in cleaning cabins and bathrooms of boat ferries. Sometimes, this happens when the women realize a subjective orientation toward work as wholly meaningful or, even more, in exaggerated acceptance of their social and work conditions. Certainly, the movie offers ideas of how myths of grit (i.e., the spark that ignites passion, tenacity and perseverance, Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) and resilience (i.e., a successful adaptation despite everyday adversities Rutter, 1985) can be realized in concrete terms.

However, and more intriguingly, while *touching* on myths of resistance, the movie also *plays* with them. This turn, from touching to playing with myths of self-resistance, profanes positive psychology's prescriptions. This occurs in scenes in which forms of relational and political resistance subvert individualized/psychologized forms of self-resistance. One long-standing profanation of the myth of self-resistance strategies arises in representations of collective forms of resistance that directly challenge the tenets of instrumentality and individualism. It is indeed the presence of collective and relational resistance that appears most obviously in the movie. The characters help each other in all their desperate and disparate life-work situations. In the initial scene, the employer of a cleaning enterprise refuses to pay Marianne and her colleague, pretending that they did not do a good job cleaning the apartments. In this scene, her colleague supports Marianne in dealing with this unexpected and iniquitous distress. In another case, Marianne is in need of a means of travel, which is provided by another friend lending her a car. The collective resistance continues across the rest of the movie: living the precarity of such employment sees the characters engage with each other in much more communitarian ways. We see in the movie that it is not just individual grit or resilience or the way subjects craft their own life choices and their jobs that makes them overcome hardship situations. Rather, they 'overcome' them through the relationships they cultivate with/in the world.

Who Cleans our Shit?

Butler (2020) says we are born into and out of relations of dependency. They turn to psychoanalysis to make their point. Dependent as we are on the mother, breast, milk, love, on someone to clean our shit – dependence is the condition of our psychological make-up and our social bonds. These dependencies do not disappear as we age, so much as they proliferate and disperse into 'new forms of dependency that recall the primary ones,' housing, schooling, hospitals, social services, governments, cleaners (p. 96). Who do we depend on now to tidy up our faeces?

This is perhaps worth fighting for? The communal relations that define us and the necessity, value, equality, and power of those we cast off, of those who do our dirty work?

'What if the situation of those deemed vulnerable is, in fact, a constellation of vulnerability, rage, persistence, and resistance...?' (p. 192)

Solidarity and compassion for others mark the plot of the movie in which we also see Marianne who brings her personal forms of self-resistance to the group of cleaners. While witnessing and benefiting from *relational* resistance, Marianne brings individualised resistance strategies from her privileged world of being a bestselling writer. In one of the scenes showing the back and forth from work to home, Marianne invites her co-worker/friend Chrystèle to discover the pleasure of lying on the beach after their shift, or taking some private time beyond work while enjoying a cup of coffee and cigarettes. Chrystèle seems confused in these scenes, as if she refuses the *madness* of lying on the beach, neglecting her daily responsibilities as a mother and worker. For Chrystele, these individualized resistance

strategies are not just failures; they are privileged absurdities which, in turn, reveals the close associations between positive psychology's resistance strategies and particular positionalities in terms of socio-economic class.

Be Well

“*Topic: Emotional wellbeing!* When people have emotional wellbeing, they're able to maintain supportive relationships, keep their emotions balanced and face life's challenges with resilience. They're flexible in adapting to new situations, and *they make room for fun in their day*. Learn more in this month's newsletters.” (University wellbeing workshop advertisement; Magellan Health, 2023, emphasis added).

Individualised wellbeing is...

...prior to relations.

...necessary for resilience.

...teachable.

...a privilege.

What forms of wellbeing are worth fighting for?

The movie's profanation of the myths of self-resistance does not just occur in comparisons with relational resistance. It takes place in an emotional finale, in an eye-opening moment of resistance by the films' precarious workers. In the closing scenes, Marianne, Chrystèle, and Marilu (another co-worker/friend) work as cleaners on a ferry. Their job consists of cleaning the ferry cells as fast as possible to let the ferry leave at the end of their shift. One night, at the end of their shift, they cannot get off in time before the ferry sails. This unlucky event puts them at risk of losing their jobs. However, this seeming crisis turns into a break of serenity and happiness as the three women take refuge in a free first-class cabin enjoying its privileges with champagne and macaroons. Later, on that same ferry, Marianne meets an old friend, and she is forced to unveil her identity to Chrystèle and, above all, the fact that she is writing a book about cleaners. A disappointed Chrystèle breaks off all relations with Marianne who has, however, enough information to finish her book. Indeed, the subsequent scene is at Marianne's book launch, but neither Chrystèle nor Marilu are there. After the book's launch, Marilu informs Marianne that Chrystèle would like to meet her, despite her profound disappointment at Marianne's betrayal. Marianne accepts and follows Marilu to meet Chrystèle, whose aim is to propose to Marianne a sort of a challenge, inviting her to board the ferry with her and other companions to do the cleaning job one last time. However, Marianne refuses, and the three women leave. What Marianne is implicitly refusing here is a kind of revenge for her betrayal. Moreover, she is also refusing Chrystèle's attempt to re-establish herself by refusing Marianne's description of her and her comrades as precarious – and therefore agentless – women. Chrystèle seems to want to recall her own identity beyond Marianne's—and any—attempts at explanation. After Marianne refuses, Chrystèle throws away her apron and marks her own dignity and sense of belonging to a context in which Marianne has no place. In the end, the group of women cram onto the bus and head to the ferry to do their usual work. They leave Marianne's useless book, profaning the constant sacralization of resistance.

What if...

What if all Marianne's actions and responses were only guided for her own benefit; her opportunity to reveal, and revel in, the spectacle of poverty, to flirt with 'poverty porn'? What if Chrystèle has a choice? what if the community and government would regulate the exploitation of the workers more effectively? what if these events took place in Ethiopia? What if the ending indicated acceptance and mutual understanding? What if one could not get employed at all? what if the characters were separated from this cultural and economic context, what changes? what if the movie took place in Wall Street? what if the movie was an example of non-un-resistance?

Disturbing/Resisting Being Marianne in Academia

All the movie resonates with what we, as researchers in psychology, anthropology, sociology, or whatever field, have been debating for a long time — that sense of guilt for having exploited the natives... that sense of guilt for having exploited and keep exploiting.

In the final scenes, we watch the classic event of the presentation of a book, where everybody seems to be celebrating Marianne's success. However, Chrystèle and Marilu are not there, and Marilu waits for Marianne when the presentation is finished. Chrystèle and Marilu refrain from applauding Marianne's stories which are, at least in part, the stories of their own lives.

In the final crescendo of scenes where the feeling of being spied on, betrayed, and exploited creeps in, there also appears the sense of guilt for having deceived, stolen, or taken something from that community of workers.

How can we (psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, etc.) resist/counteract these forms of exploitation that propel our careers? Is it possible? Is this dynamic worth fighting for? And how?

What is Worth Fighting for (in Psychology)?

At this point, it is worth reflecting on what the movie leaves us with concerning its profanation of positive psychological discourses of resistance. On the surface, the movie offers a contestation of the sacred positivistic approach to the psychologization of the subject. Our reading of the movie followed positive psychology's prescriptions to interpret certain scenes in particular ways. However, these prescriptions are neutralized in many ways by other scenes in which a relational form of resistance contests the power of the myths of self-resistance strategies. The profanation occurred with the movie advancing its own terms of resistance. In Agamben's terms, the movie touched and played with resistance without creating counter-myths but, rather, by secularizing the sacralized space of academic views of resistance held by mainstream positive psychology. This act of profanation affords us the opportunity to also touch and play with the sacred spaces of resistance as prescribed by hegemonic perspectives of positive psychological discourses. In doing so, the movie disrupts and queries the largely unquestioned nature of academic positive psychology and reveals to us the necessity for reflecting on resistance within mainstream psychology's purview, and resisting the sacralized psychologization of the subject and of the social.

The Subject?

The subject of positive psychology is a unified, self-founded, rational individual – stable, coherent, self-conscious, and outside of history. However, the modern notion of the subject is replaced by that of an emerging or fragmented one, constantly ‘becoming’ in relation to the positions occupied simultaneously within discourses.

Formally innovative, the sculptures of Andra Ursuta seduce and unsettle. They evoke the fragmentation, the vulnerability and the precariousness of the human form. Ursuta experiments with creating crystal sculptures fusing direct casts of her body with everyday objects, including glass bottles, plastic tubes, packaging paper and filling, old clothes, BDSM attire, and cheap Halloween costumes. The forms of Ursuta are in constant flux and evoke the continuous movement of a cyborg body (Fig. 1).

Are we predators?

Are psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists... predators?



Fig. 1 Andra Ursuta, *Predator's R Us*, 2020; Biennale Arte, 2022

It appears, then, that the movie affords psychology the opportunity reflect and refuse establishing (or sacralize) yet new discourses and forms of power. Rather, the movie asks for further understanding in working with, and on, the notion of resistance (Fineman, 2004; McDonald et al., 2021; Townley, 1993) while removing the power of the boundaries of psychologization. Without a doubt, this is not a mere cynical provocation against positive psychology. Still, it is worth noting that Carrère's *Between Two Worlds* shows the barriers of the dominant and oppressive act of psychologizing the subject, insisting on its own responsibility for overcoming precarity. In brief, we can take the movie as a series of warnings for a psychology of resistance. First, it warns against labelling resistance as

a self-adaptative individualistic strategy. Second, it reminds us that where there is power, there is also resistance (Foucault, 1988), and we, as academics, should take into account the reinforcement techniques of psychologization that make positive psychology ignore and dominate other forms of resistance. That is, the movie stimulates us to fight for a psychology that acknowledges the discourses and practices that it, itself, promotes.

With respect to the first warning, the movie shows that resistance is prescribed in positive psychology as the individual/psychological capacity to thrive through vulnerability whilst failing to take full account of subjugated persons' experiences and forms of resistance. Rather than obtainable ideals or myths, the psychologization of resistance postulates subjects as cruel optimists (Berlant, 2011) that ensnare themselves/ourselves within situations from which they/we might seek liberation. Resistance, in positive psychology's terms, places responsibility for change squarely at the level of the individual, and it becomes a sort of privatization that can be easily linked to capitalism/neoliberalism (Chandler, 2014; Evans & Reid, 2014). Such subjects live restrictive and generalized agency in the context of socially constituted norms which accords with a competitive logic of success and adaptation of one's subjectivity (Holzkamp, 1983). The movie's *plot twist* – and profanation – offers a new conceptualization of resistance. This conceptualization is not grounded in individual striving but in collective and performative refusals to be fixed subjects and therefore open to multiple possibilities for living a liveable life. The idea of self-resistance as a celebration of the inherent strength and will of individually and precariously positioned subjects normalizes power imbalances and discrimination. In Papastamou and Mugny's (1990) terms, the movie establishes this by subverting the causal link between subjects' individual behaviour and psychological characteristics that are supposedly fixed and supposed to prevail. It does so by showing how resistance is a relational and political concept rather than a simply psychological one. In this, it appears that resistance has much more to do with the context—and the subject's relational engagements with that context—which informs, forms and confirms, the very meanings of resistance (Schwarz, 2018). What is more, if resistance is cultural, social, and political by nature, then every act of resistance is meant to realize social justice and not only the private-individualistic celebration.

With respect to the second warning, the profanation of resistance realized in the movie stimulates us to fight for a psychology that acknowledges the oppressive and dominant discourses and practices that it promotes. On the surface, the movie motivates us to consider the tendency of psychologizing that reinforces the perspective of positive psychology on resistance while ignoring and dominating other ways of “forming, organizing, disseminating, and implementing truths about persons” (Rose, 1998, p. 59). As just noted, the celebration of myths of resistance valorises and normalises structural problems and conditions that do not allow oppressed and disadvantaged groups to create their own spaces for, and shapes of, resistance. In addition, the use of psychological vocabulary to explain everything from lived experiences to social phenomena, makes it seem as if—indeed inevitable that—psychology can apply to all these elements by emphasizing the subject (De Vos, 2014; Rose, 1998). In turn, the psychologization of structural and social problems is realized in a pathologizing of the individual that obscures the recognition of structural and social problems as existing beyond the individual. According to De Vos (2014), psychologization happens as a sort of self-surveillance in which the focus is on the subject to frame what goes wrong as solely a problem of the individual. Acknowledging the profanation available in and through particular readings of the movie leaves us with an impetus for engaging with uneasy work; of taking up the worthy fight aimed at creating alternatives to the problems of psychologization, i.e., to resist linguistic psychologizing tendencies, to resist the scientifically observable constructed nature of the object of psychology.

How Can We Sit Here and Theorize Worker Motivation When We Know They're Being Bugged Up the Backside?

Alternatives to psychologization:

- Breaking disciplinary boundaries – leak and drip, plop and move-movement.
- Deconstructing the human, decentering the subject positioned at the center of the world.
- Contaminating with poststructuralism and the posthuman.
- What is beyond the firmly knowable—the spiritual? What would happen if aliens arrived and walked among us? They already are between us.
- Some branches of psychology already embrace ideas beyond the knowable.
- Sometimes psychology is boring. More interesting are liminal spaces between psychology and other discipline.
- Psychology is abstract; it modelizes everything.
- Start from the very material needs of people. Psychology of poverty. Psychology of climate change. Is there still a need for psychology? Or is it blended or integrated with other disciplines – psychologists seem to be desperately holding onto their turf in an era of interdisciplinarity.
- Psyche was the Greek goddess of the soul. What would the goddess Psyche look like (in Psychology) now?
- *Human Arenas* has published other forays into/outside Psychology – this is what we need.
- to not be productive, to be lazy, to be indolent, to be intentionally willful (Sara Ahmed), to be curmudgeonly, to disrupt and distract.
- alternatives to positive psy's insistence on the individual as responsible for their own happiness and well-being. Glory in sadness and things that seem nihilistic but that offer freedom from the hegemony of happy/well/mindful i.e. productive.
- Technology: (how) is psychology being replaced by robots/AI? How would we program our psybots?
- ...

psychology

Conclusion

In this paper, we speak to timeless concerns about resistance; how (groups of) subjects might overcome restrictive societal conditions and dysfunctional structural problems. We sought to provide insights into the psychological literature on the meaning of resistance, particularly the potential contribution of psychology in approaching the notion of resistance. We did so by referring to an exemplary *text*, Carrère’s film *Between Two Worlds*, which deals with precarious subjects who struggle for a bearable life in problematic and unjust social structures. We analysed the movie as a representation of positive psychology’s notions of self-resistance and as an aesthetical artifact profaning the hegemonic perspectives of resistance promoted and promulgated by positive psychology. In doing so, we reached a different take on resistance – that is, one realized in the secular spaces of the movie – which contrasts the power boundaries of positive psychology’s understandings of resistance while highlighting the movie’s depictions of resistance as deeply embedded in relational embodiments. Accordingly, resistance appears as a relational and political concept: it is not simply psychological but rather contextual, whose realization stands in creating an agenda for social justice. Moreover, the profanation of resistance gave us the impetus to *criticalize* (Abrams et al., 2023) and acknowledge the power of psychologization in positive psychological discourses. In this, we identified the need for alternatives to the forceful psychologized view.

We approached the topic of resistance by recognizing extant critiques on how positive psychology’s conceptualizations of resistance appear to be more prescriptive rather than descriptive (McDonald et al., 2021). Elements of self-resistance thus appear as myths without concrete images, which reminds us how psychology appears as abidingly unmoored from the social world. Then, we engaged with a thematic reading of the movie *Between Two Worlds* (Carrère, 2021) as a site to demystify resistance strategies. Our engagement with the movie results in taking it as an artifact that can offer attractive images of resistance, i.e., *touching* and *playing* the *untouched* established images (Agamben, 2007) of self-resistance by looking at how the counter-myths of the relational resistance profanes our academic texts in psychology. Agamben’s framework of profanation helped us to understand how the movie renders inoperative the established academic view of positive psychology in relation to resistance and gave us the opportunity to reflect upon resistance and psychology in more creative and contesting ways.

At this point, it is perhaps worth emphasizing what this intellectual work on resistance and its profanation can contribute to the literature of positive psychology and to psychology as a discipline. In this, it is important to inform the reader that profanation does not occur by substituting myths with other myths. This would mean sacralizing yet another (set of) myth(s). Rather, profanation involves the creation of a secular space after it deprives the myth of its established power. However, acknowledging and building on our intellectual work, the present paper responds to the call for a critical understanding of resistance and leaves three main impetuses to the literature of positive psychology and psychology as a discipline. First, it is perhaps worth noting again that the form of resistance that appears in the movie invites psychology to understand resistance as more than merely the province of the individual. Indeed, the movie suggests that resistance is as much, if not more so, about a relational, community-level forms of political action that are inherently contextual. As cultural, social, and political in nature, resistance is realized as the creation of agendas and the formation of alliances to fight against social injustice (Schwarz, 2018). Accordingly, theoretical and empirical efforts are needed in psychology to interrogate the notion

of resistance as cultural, social and political. Yet, we suggest here that psychology can also put more effort into extolling and sustaining such an agenda and the formation of alliances to fight against social injustice.

Second, it is intriguing to reflect on the potential alternatives to psychologization. In our work, we profaned psychology to reimagine the banality of conventional hegemonic positivistic perspectives. Our *reading* of *Between Two Worlds* freed us to resist a habitual reading and violent forms of discussing data in psychology (Tateo, 2015, 2017). In these terms, we see that our textual analysis and critical textual interruptions (boxes) of how the psychologization of resistance excludes other forms of resistance is just an initial step for the discipline. Accordingly, our work has shown that this can happen via a critique of the hegemonic discourses and narratives of resistance strategies such as grit, resilience, and life-crafting. Moreover, the appearance of another form of resistance provided by the fictionalization of precarious women in *Between Two Worlds* offers an opportunity for expanding critiques so as to abolish psychologized notions of resistance. In this way resistance can return to its conceptual position of having political valance. This affordance also has the implication of enlarging the discourse of resistance by highlighting elements such as community, the context in which resistance occurs, and of the implications to which it aspires (e.g., social justice). Ultimately, it gives the basis for offering initial alternatives to psychologization for which psychology can fight, such as for new grammars and vocabularies in relation to resistance (Rose, 1989). In these terms, future research can engage with crystallization (Degen et al., 2023; Ellingson, 2009) to access multiple lived experiences and with reimagining psychology while refusing conventional hegemonic positivistic terminologies, methods and perspectives.

In parallel, there are also implications for new vistas of theory and practice for psychology/ That is, the present study also advances the use of literary texts for research. While limiting our understanding of resistance to intellectual work, the current project would not have been possible without the exemplary movie by Carrère. Against the contention that the knowledge that art and humanities methodologies deal with is less legitimate material than other conventional methodologies, our study shows that literary and media texts are an excellent source for the representation of psychological constructs and offer an aesthetical experience that helps us confront theoretical tensions in the field. What is more, cultural texts offer the opportunity to take into consideration dominant socio-political ideologies, which can, subsequently, enrich our understandings of phenomena under scrutiny (De Cock & Land, 2006; Phillips, 1995; Tommasi, 2024; Waldo, 1968). Lastly, cultural texts share the same nature as academic texts in that they engage with behavior, feelings, emotions, cognition, and psychology in general as much as, if not more than, academic texts do. Perhaps it is worth mentioning here also that there is no doubt that there is only one main difference between the two. Literary texts have the potential to represent subjects and society more (fully, accurately, complexly) than academic texts do; they also reach a much wider public.

Finally, we close by highlighting that our paper is a humble form of resistance in which we have sought to pursue a collective resistance against hegemonic discourses within the literature of psychology and, in particular, positive psychology. Our wish is that this paper can be read as an attempt – even if it is a very small step in doing so – at realizing some agendas that rail against social injustice.

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Declarations

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