

Recovery, power and resistance¹

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One of the benefits of being located within the field of philosophy, theology and religious studies is that one develops an especial appreciation of the arts of critique. "A critique", Foucault suggested, "does not consist in saying that things aren't good the way they are. It consists in seeing on just what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established and unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based".

Insofar as recovery scrutinises professional and popular assumptions, received knowledge, and the various material practices of "treatment", it can be regarded as a multivalent social critique of extant modes of provision - an attempt to to 'disrupt the taken-for-grantedness of the present and to show how things could be different'.²

With a penetrating appraisal, "recovery" discloses the stagnant politics of prevailing institutional practices. Recovery reveals the correlated discursive production of myriad addict identities. Recovery challenges the hegemony of expert knowledge, strips naked a finely arrayed body of truth-claims and lays bare its emaciated, desiccated physique.

Above all, recovery resists. Recovery resists the powers of domination and subjugation that produce governable order out of ungovernable chaos - the forces that regulate disorderly misuses of pleasure and mold, shape and transform the most unproductive members of the population into compliant and docile bodies.³

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² A. Petersen & R. Bunton, *Foucault, Health and Medicine*, Routledge, London, 1997, pp. 3-4

³ According to Foucault, a docile body "is one that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved... and that this docile body can only be achieved through strict regiment of disciplinary acts".

Those entering drug treatment programmes are subjected to potent disciplinary biopower mediated by miscellaneous institutional actors and framed within the logic of harm reduction and risk management - from rigorously controlled substitute prescribing regimes where subjects become "violently, physically disciplined – if not fully controlled - by manipulations in their dosage levels",⁴ to the surveillance of drug consumption through NDTMS/ TOPS monitoring, to the use of cognitive behavioural therapies (CBT) as a "psycho-social intervention" to foster neoliberal ideals of productive self-efficacy and personal responsibility.

In the UK, although harm reduction initiatives emerged locally as a site of resistance against the dominant ideologies of the time, they rapidly became subsumed by the apparatuses of government. This was largely due to the consonance between harm reduction and the preventative approach of public health, the HIV/ AIDS crisis of the eighties, and the emergence of post-welfare, neo-liberal economics which shifted the burden of responsibility for being a healthy, autonomous citizen from the State to the individual.

As a consequence of this institutionalisation, many proponents of harm reduction became assimilated into the very system of power they were trying to overcome.⁵ For those exploring the ideological horizons beyond harm reduction it's vital to acknowledge and learn from this historical point.

The mental health recovery movement has retained an authentic grass-roots spirit of resistance whilst simultaneously informing policy and engaging in expert discourse. Similarly, the success of AA/ NA can be attributed in part to the organisational consistency (codified in the "12 traditions") which insists upon complete independence from all statutory/ voluntary services and organisations. One doesn't have to become institutionally anonymous to engage in an ongoing project of reflective practice - however, one should always be able to step back and critique one's position. This is especially true for those recovery activists currently shaping

⁴ Phillipe Bourgois, "Disciplining addictions: The bio-politics of methadone and heroin in the United States", *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, 24, 2000, p. 183 (pp. 165-195).

⁵ See Brent L. Pickett, "Foucault and the Politics of Resistance", *Polity*, Volume XXVIII, Number 4, 1996, p. 447 (pp. 445-466).

and forming the field. Failure to resist administrative assimilation means we'll simply replace one regime of institutional truth with another: a net gain of zero.

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