

The health society: polemics and problematizations

Monica Greco
Goldsmiths, University of London

Prof. John Catford



Editor-in-chief,
Health Promotion International

Professor Catford's dilemma:

‘In broadening its base and becoming part of the mainstream, health promotion runs the risk of being less innovative and radical. Indeed to some it has now become part of “establishment speak” ...’ (2004: 2-3)

Health promotion as *radical project*

Health society as *mainstream reality*

thinking with Foucault is useful to...

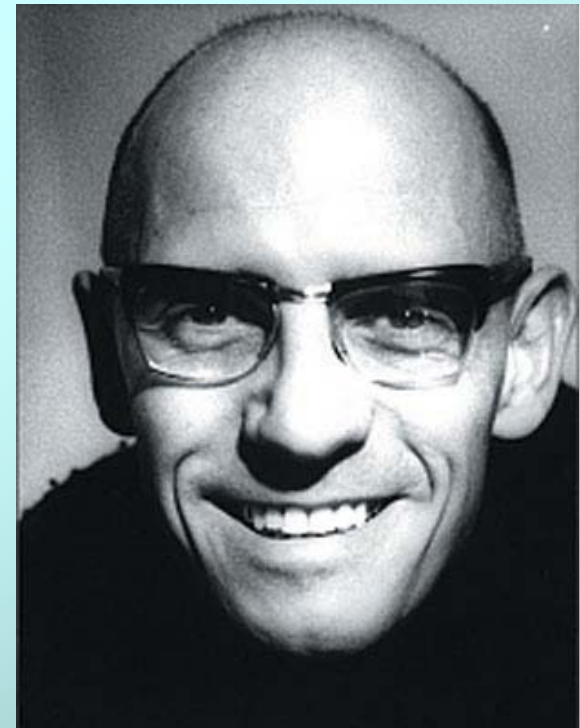
- consider a the relationship between health promotion and health society in a broader historico-genealogical context
- reflect on the meaning of ‘radical’: where is the edge if thought, today?

biopower

→ mainstream sociology of health/medicine

governmentality

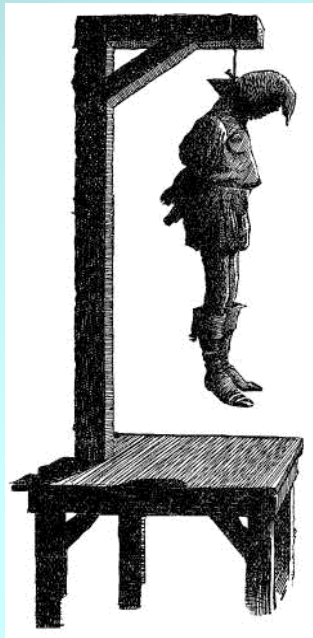
→ political theory, STS
management/accounting,
(some) medsoc



Biopower

The History of Sexuality, vol. 1

sovereign power



biopower



→ emergence of human sciences

- anatomo-clinical medicine
- statistics (...from *Staat*) and sociology
- psychiatry and psychology
- criminology
- pedagogy
- etc...

all refer to the **normal/abnormal** distinction

1974 lecture on social medicine,
State University of Rio de Janeiro

Foucault on the 1942 Beveridge Plan:

'the concept of a healthy individual in the service of the State was replaced by that of the State in the service of the healthy individual.'

'What is diabolical about the present situation is that whenever we want to refer to a realm outside medicine we find that it has already been medicalized. And when one wishes to object to medicine's deficiencies, its drawbacks and its harmful effects, this is done in the name of a more complete, more refined and widespread medical knowledge. ...

Anti-medicine can only oppose medicine with facts or projects that have already been set up by a certain type of medicine' (2004 [1976])

1974:

'There is no longer anything outside medicine'

2008:

There is no longer anything outside 'health'

Governmentality

‘government’: the conduct of conduct

public/private

state/market

nature/culture

Governmentality

‘... the point where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself and, conversely, the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion.’

(1993)

neo-liberalism

- economic rationality functions as the principle for legitimation of governance
- economic criteria are generalized to all spheres of life

individuals are encouraged to think about own life/self in entrepreneurial terms

For every individual

‘...it is a part of the continuous business of living to make adequate provision for the preservation, reproduction and reconstruction of one’s own human capital.’

(Gordon, 1991)

neo-liberal call for a 'care of the self'

(see e.g. Cruikshank, 1996; Greco, 1993 and 2001; Valverde, 1998 etc...)

→ '*wellness revolution*'

lifestyle and consumption *choices*

paradoxical dimensions/effects, e.g.:

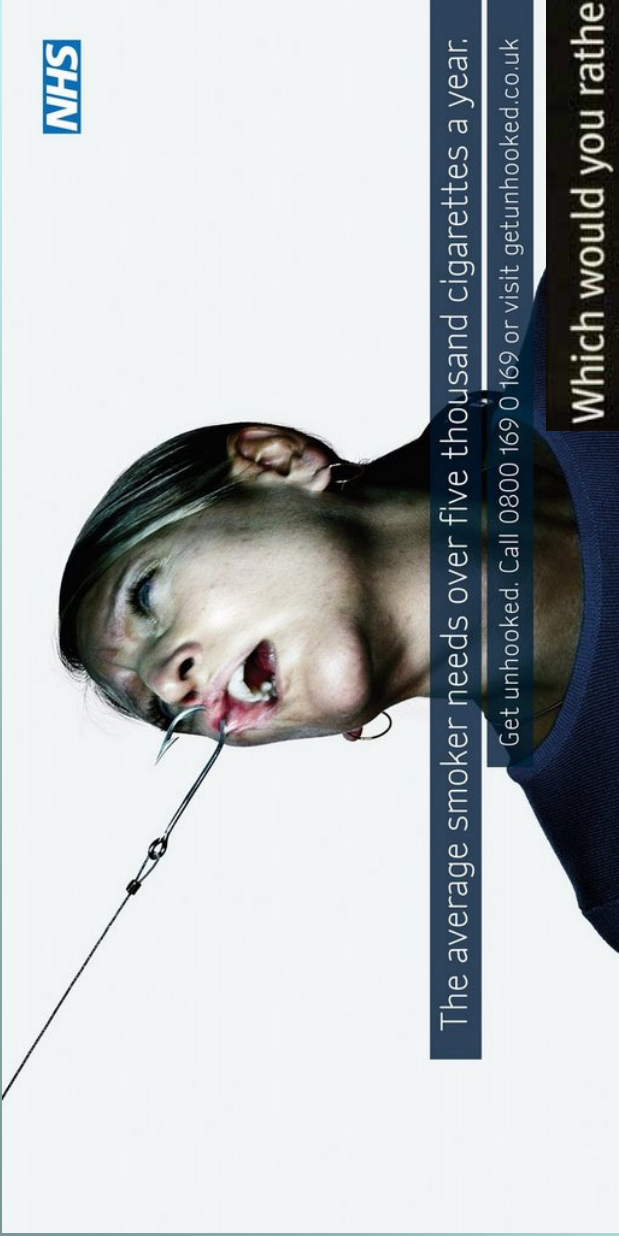
- unrealistic body image
- endemic depression
- risk taking as dissent/empowerment

The paradox of neo-liberalism

a political rationality that
governs through 'freedom'

we are 'obliged to be free'

Rose 1996



The average smoker needs over five thousand cigarettes a year.

Get unhooked. Call 0800 169 0 169 or visit getunhooked.co.uk



Which would you rather have, a **cholesterol** test or a final exam?

For many, the first sign of heart disease is a heart attack. Did you know that one out of two adult Canadians is at risk of developing heart disease because they have high cholesterol?

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in Canada. It's a major risk factor for heart disease, but managing your cholesterol is quite simple.

FAT CHANGE
 Obese children are a good bet for type 2 diabetes, Heart disease, Stroke, Cancer, Sleep apnea, Depression.

Obesity is robbing our kids of their future. Anything you can do, about it? First, stop, go to www.metrowestkids.org

A MESSAGE FROM THE METROWEST COMMUNITY HEALTH FOUNDATION

- Two or more of the following:
- Overweight
- Physically inactive
- Smoker
- High blood pressure

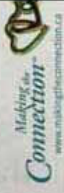


OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER

Case No. 5541-96
 Name J.B.
 Cause of Death Heart attack

Overweight No
 Age 42
 Sex M

Call toll-free at 1-877-4-LOW-LDL (1-877-456-9535) or visit www.makingtheconnection.ca and you will receive this free booklet describing the connection between cholesterol and heart disease.



For details on the program, please contact your local health authority.

imagining 'health' otherwise...

a politics of *what*

vs a politics of *who*

Mo1, 2002

Lessons from new biotechnologies...

- pluralization of norms of life and health
- opening of bio-norms to democratic debate

See e.g. Rabinow 1994, 1996; Rose 2000, 2001; Rheinberger, 1995



‘a baby would be a blessing. ... a deaf baby would be a special blessing.’

Sharon Duchesneau, as reported by *Washington Post Magazine* and BBC, 2002

A politics not of *who*

but of *what* ...might be empowered:

...not a question of establishing a true/objective/consensual meaning for 'quality of life'!

i.e. beware of 'anti-political' techniques

(see Barry 2001)

‘That people have different investments in life, that we clash when it comes to striving after the good, is turned into a mere calculative challenge. We are each accorded our own opinion. Here, fill in your form, of course your opinion will be taken into account. Not as a political act, however, but as a social given. Instead of being staged in a theater of discords, differences are flattened onto a spreadsheet.’

Mo1, 2002

democratic deficit in
relation to health

the importance of asking
relevant questions