

Electroshock: Opposition, Oprah Winfrey, precision and Peake¹

Craig Newnes

SUMMARY: Electroshock is again receiving publicity around its use and renewed efforts for both its re-invention and banishment. This article uses examples from past texts and contemporary writing and media to illustrate some industry myths concerning electroshock, Psy's history and status as a science.

KEY WORDS: electroshock, myths, protest, pseudo-science, Oprah Winfrey, Mervyn Peake

There have been campaigns against most Psy treatments for well over a century – from the Alleged Lunatics' Friend Society of the mid-nineteenth century to Witness today.² There are several websites devoted to critiquing electroshock.³ Facebook and related media are a vibrant source of information from electroshock survivors.⁴ Campaigners aim to make the practice more *visible*. Thomas Szasz rightly says that campaigns and electroshock-opposition, though understandable, miss the target. If psychiatry doesn't 'cure' real illness then debates about which treatment is bad or best miss the point.⁵

In the late 1990s my Shropshire neighbour's 40-year-old son was killed in a climbing accident. By now almost 80, the neighbour was overwhelmed with grief. A few days after the accident his wife called to say he had been admitted to the local psychiatric hospital and the consultant psychiatrist was considering electroshock.

Craig Newnes remains a reasonably independent scholar. His latest books are *Inscription, Diagnosis, Deception and the Mental Health Industry: How Psy governs us all* from Palgrave Macmillan (2016), *The Critical A–Z of Electroshock*. The Real Press (2018) and, with Laura Golding *Teaching Critical Psychology*. Routledge (2018). His novels *Tearagh't* (2017) and *Paris* (2018) are available via Amazon from The Real Press. His fingers ache.

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