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Anderson, S. (2023). *The Devil's Haircut: My Life Before and After the Raurimu Massacre.* Urban Druid Press, 367 pages, ISBN 9781001187604

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On February 8, 1997, Steve Anderson shot and killed six people, including his father, and attempted to kill four others in the small New Zealand settlement of Raurimu. Ten months later, in the Hamilton High Court, it took a jury less than two hours to find him not guilty by reason of insanity. Anderson's autobiography, *The devil's haircut: My life before and after the Raurimu massacre,* is terrifying, not simply because of the killing described within, but because his story confronts the reader with the dangers of psychotropic medications (see Breggin 1994; Healy, 2003) and the failings of psychiatry in a way that sociological literature cannot. Anderson does this by using a first-person account showing how the institution of psychiatry operates in one life over a prolonged period of time. This book raises concerns about the efficacy and safety of the institution of psychiatry as a whole and challenges the assumption that the Raurimu massacre occurred because of failings of individuals involved in the management of Anderson's mental health care leading up to that day.

The devil's haircut is divided into three parts: Part One: Before; Part Two: Raurimu; Part Three: After. Part One begins with Anderson's self-described normal life and family and quickly introduces experiences of bullying, abuse, police brutality and lies, and an experience where, as a child, he nearly took his own life. It also discusses Anderson's life experiences in detail, including his thought processes throughout, and concludes prior to the shooting at Raurimu. Part Two: Raurimu is a difficult and painful read as it is Anderson's firsthand account of the shooting. It makes up only five of the forty chapters of the books. The first two of these chapters are direct copies of the handwritten account he made about his experience of the time surrounding the shooting for his lawyer, prior to his eight-day trial. His diary entries are italicised to distinguish them from the body of the book and the only changes he made to the original diary were to omit some aspects of his psychosis "because they were too humiliating to recount" (p. 203) and to correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Part Three: After is in some ways just as difficult to read as Part Two. Again, in italics, Anderson weaves through excerpts from his diaries following the shooting, creating a real-time reading experience that is hard to describe. He takes us through the High Court trial and his subsequent psychiatric detention, sharing again the distress of forced incarceration, but contrasts that suffering with the peace he has found through Buddhist teachings and the generosity and kindness of friends.

The devil's haircut furthers a user-led critique of psychiatry by centring Anderson's lived experience as a forensic mental health patient and recipient of forced treatment with antipsychotics. Though lacking a thorough bibliography, he weaves a significant body of critical mental health literature throughout. Anderson introduces, among others, the work of Robert Whitaker, investigative journalist, author of *Anatomy of an epidemic: Magic bullets, psychiatric drugs, and the astonishing rise of mental illness in America* (2010) and founder of Mad in America; physician and medical researcher, Peter Gøtzsche, author of the *Critical*

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psychiatry textbook (2022); psychiatrist, Peter Breggin, author of *Toxic psychiatry* (1994); and Bruce Cohen, sociologist and author of *Psychiatric hegemony* (2016). Despite the necessity of engaging critically with psychiatry's role in the Raurimu massacre as shown in *The devil's haircut*, one cannot read this book without considering the effect such a publication would have on the victims. Anderson himself states:

> I have tried to be respectful and sensitive to those affected by what I've done, and to preserve as much as possible the privacy of the other families of victims killed and injured that morning, yet still provide the reader with some insight. (p. 239)

Anderson deeply regrets his actions (p. 1) and asks the reader to engage with a "kind heart and compassionate mind" (p. 2). *The Devil's Haircut* is a book you want to put down, but cannot, and should not. It politicises the institution of psychiatry and shows in detail, through one life, how psychiatry and its allies function primarily as a form of social control. The devil's haircut provides valuable Mad knowledge to critique the institution of psychiatry. In personal communication between the book reviewer and the author, Anderson describes his entry into the mental health system:

> My first encounter with a psychiatrist was when I was 22 years old. This occurred after the encounter with the police which shook me up, December 1994. Medication came early 1995, then a period of sporadic use and not taking medication completely, and then psychosis in August 1995. I had never had questions raised over my mental health by others until I couldn't handle the police encounter, and never had a psychotic break until I got mixed up with psychiatrists and stopped taking anti psychotics. (personal communication, February 7, 2024)

The detail Anderson provides of his experience with psychiatry is unsettling. "I was thoroughly retraumatised by the August 1995 committal, when twice in the first few days, I was injected with antipsychotics without my consent." (p. 47). He says, "On a bad day, I feel I am being tortured" (p. 34). The impact of the violence Anderson experienced prior to entry into the mental health system and the shootings reverberates in his words over 20 years on. "It may sound weak but I still feel traumatised by the events in the police station and the avalanche of experiences since" (p. 112). With approximately 10,000 patients forcibly incarcerated and treated in New Zealand each year under the Mental Health Act (Ministry of Health, 2016), Anderson's account supports abolition scholarship and the concerns raised by scholars around the legality and morality of our current Mental Health Act.

Through this book, Anderson shows how psychiatry has operated in his life as a form of social control since his teenage years, monitoring and disciplining his social deviance. One form of social deviance Anderson has displayed is his belief that he is taunted by powers operating at a high level within the mass media. However, Anderson's ideas surrounding the media only started after his experience of police brutality and lies.

> At first I thought the media was on my side. Then I quickly realised the media is the system's mouthpiece and I got scared thinking I was being teased, intimidated and bullied by certain aspects of the content as a consequence of getting in trouble with the cops. (personal communication, February 17, 2024)

When Anderson began writing, he was living in Porirua Hospital on a medication regime including Risperidone and Aripiprazole. These are antipsychotic medications known to cause dangerous side effects such as akathisia, proven to lead to suicide and homicide in some people (see Breggin, 1994; Gøtzsche, 2022). The variety of dangerous 'treatments' Anderson has received to date for his 'schizophrenia' are based on a label and diagnosis that John Read (2004), Professor of Psychology at the University of East London, argues does not exist, and one that Anderson and even his own mother doubt as well.

> Since the diagnosis, I haven't altogether gone along with the idea that I have the condition. Just by begging to differ, I am taking a big risk with my liberty, physical health, and mental well-being. I open myself up to extra unwanted and unwarranted scrutiny and I risk forced medication increases, which come accompanied by negative side effects. (p. 34)

By refusing to accept that he has schizophrenia, Anderson is signalling to the psychiatrists that he is really mad and not making 'progress'. In the book, Anderson mentions the threat he faced by psychiatry of being given injectable medications. At the time of writing this review, that threat has become realised. Despite no longer being a special patient, Anderson has been receiving forced intermuscular injections every two weeks for the last 18 months. One of the justifications used for this treatment, according to Anderson, is that he admits to cannabis use and "psychiatrists believe this is a risk factor in the management of my mental illness that is mitigated by the surety of the injection" (personal communication, January 29, 2024/February 6, 2024). This book, however, offers user-led critiques which support the critical scholarship that challenges the connection between cannabis use and schizophrenia (Dolphin & Newhart, 2022).

The devil's haircut reads as a real-life horror story showing the necessity of thinking critically about the dangers of psychotropics. Anderson describes the antipsychotics as leaving him feeling "vacant, restless, and socially numb" (p. 42) and raises the question of whether psychotropics work as advertised. This question has been answered by several scholars. Breggin (1994) claims psychotropics do not work by correcting a 'chemical imbalance', rather, they create a chemical imbalance, and Gøtzsche (2022) confirms one of the primary ways that psychotropics work is by numbing you so that you are less distressed by your circumstances or surrounding environment.

Prior to the shooting, Anderson had been placed on amitriptyline, thioridazine, paroxetine, pimozide, haloperidol, and stelazine. All these medications have serious negative side effects (Gøtzsche, 2022). Anderson shares how he was often not 'medication compliant' in the time leading up to the shooting and states the reason he would start and stop medication or avoid taking it altogether was because he would feel "zonked" on them (p. 65).

In summary, *The devil's haircut* is a gripping, painful, and necessary read for academic audiences in sociology, psychology, critical disability studies, mad studies, and critical indigenous studies. By examining one life in detail, scholars can see how the legal system and psychiatry work in collaboration to incarcerate and torture and kill. *The devil's haircut: My life before and after the Raurimu massacre* is challenging to its core and leaves the reader asking the question: If Anderson is not guilty then could the institution of psychiatry be the one with blood on its hands?

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