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Anticipating and inhabiting institutional identities

ABSTRACT

Rather than simply silencing or excluding actors, contemporary U.S. institutions commonly assign ways of speaking to the identities they forge and, therefore, preestablish ways of hearing the people who have come to inhabit them. Although institutional power is thereby reinscribed when "subalterns speak," people can also inhabit such identities, and speak from these designated locales, in politically efficacious ways. Examining the rhetorical practices of clients and social workers at one institutional site, I highlight the process of *anticipatory interpellation*—reading how one is hailed as a particular kind of institutional subject and responding as such. [*anticipatory interpellation, language, performativity, politics, representation, social work*]

Attending her very first board meeting as the "client representative," Rhonda donned a perfectly placid demeanor. Her two predecessors, by contrast, had initiated their own stints on the board by refusing to take off their puffy winter coats and answering professionals' open-ended queries in clipped or barely audible sentences. All three women had been nominated, in one way or another, to represent fellow clients on an advisory board for Fresh Beginnings—an intensive outpatient drug treatment program designed specifically for homeless women. For its first two years, the advisory board had exclusively hosted professional representatives from affiliated social service agencies, who had been charged with discussing and developing the new program's policies and treatment protocols. Uniformly endowed with bachelor's or master's degrees in social work or related fields, these board members had also been charged—by their funders and by the political climate, more generally—to facilitate "consumer participation" in program development and governance.[1] And, although almost all the professionals on the board initially resisted the idea of clients attending their meetings, they now sit alongside them every other meeting in the hallowed name of "empowerment."

As board members arrive on the afternoon in question, they notice Rhonda's presence immediately, warmly welcome her, and take seats around a makeshift conglomeration of institutional folding tables. Freshly copied meeting agendas also soon arrive with the fresh-faced director of the program, Marne; she warns of a busy two hours, scans the room to tally absentees, and exchanges a hearty hello for Rhonda's inquisitive gaze.

In acknowledgment of the new "board member," Marne calls for a round of self-introductions before taking a seat on the less populated side of the tables. Straightening up a bit in their chairs, board members haltingly comply, fiddling with pens and paperclips as Marne sets the stage with her own introduction. In classic institutional fashion, the others around the table take turns identifying themselves in terms of their organizational role and function, with friendly smiles but little personal embellishment: "Hi, I'm Polly Barth and I am the shelter manager at HELPNET"; "Charles Rankin, clinical supervisor. I make sure all clients' needs are being met

from a clinical point of view"; "I'm Letitia, I'm the HFC administrative assistant. I help Marne out." Although others look on, likely with varying degrees of critical assessment, each board member explicitly directs his or her introduction to Rhonda, the only new face at the table. She nods and returns smiles until the circling discourse makes its way to her seat. It is Rhonda's turn to identify herself.

Without hesitation and with seemingly unimpeachable confidence, the newest board member announces, "Hi, my name is Rhonda, and I am a recovering crack addict." As in an Alcoholics Anonymous pair structure, her professional audience responds with a semisynchronized but vigorous, "Hi Rhonda" and continues the round of introductions.

* * *

I draw this scene from more than three years of fieldwork during which I followed an interconnected group of social workers and clients affiliated with the Homeless Families Consortium (HFC), a network of social service agencies. HFC agencies were located in a midwestern city that was (and still is) suffering the effects of economic downturn, disinvestment, and welfare-state retrenchment. These agencies' daily work involved providing temporary shelter or finding affordable housing for the rapidly rising local homeless population; they also regularly helped people access food, warm clothes, bus vouchers, child care, income support, and mental health services. Indeed, within HFC, a diverse group of social workers evaluated people and problems and allocated basic but increasingly scarce goods and services on the basis of those evaluations.

As a former social work intern, responsible for helping facilitate "consumer participation" within HFC, I had grown fascinated with social service dynamics in the inaugural years of the postwelfare era. Accordingly, I shifted gears, taking U.S. social work to be my field of anthropological study.[2] My research focused on Fresh Beginnings—the drug treatment program at the center of the HFC network—and the tensions and negotiations between clients and social workers there. I soon found that these everyday struggles were semiotic entanglements.

For instance, addiction counselors conducted program intake interviews and clinical assessments to identify signs of personal pathology or progress. Their evaluations were transformed into further texts, as counselors wrote exonerating or damning reports to parole officers, placed calls to child protective service workers who can take children into state custody or return them to their homes, or consulted with case workers who may provide or withhold the means to consistently feed, clothe, and house a family. Aware of what hung in the balance of their verbal exchanges with counselors, clients worked to most effectively represent themselves and their problems in language.

Generally speaking, the evaluative and distributive elements of U.S. social workers' labor hinge on the production, analysis, and mobilization of the spoken word. However, talk plays an especially critical role in the field of drug treatment, in which healing people commonly involves reworking their relationship to language.[3] At Fresh Beginnings, counselors believed that clients, by virtue of their addiction, were unable to read their inner states and render them in words. That is to say, they believed their clients suffered from denial. Indeed, in line with a long tradition of cultural and clinical thought, program therapists theorized addiction as a disease of insight and worked to ameliorate this semiotic condition through a clinical regimen of language-as-inner-reference. Clients were therefore discouraged from using language to do things such as persuade, pronounce, or protest rather than simply refer to things. Counselors also formally forbade talk that indexed phenomena outside the client-speaker's psyche. Therapy at Fresh Beginnings, then, was an exercise in confession: matching spoken signs to preexisting inner states and gaining therapeutic absolution, if not spiritual catharsis, in doing so.

As I have argued elsewhere (Carr 2006, in press), the confessional talk that characterized group therapy was not simply the natural outpouring of the recovering addict. It was, instead, the product of significant metalinguistic labor on the part of program therapists and clients alike, as the following "Rules for Group Conduct," which hung on the group therapy-room wall, clearly indicate:

1. Prompt attendance to all group and individual sessions is required.
2. There will be periodic drug screens. If the client relapses, it is her responsibility to inform the therapist and group members.
3. Confidentiality must be maintained. Any violation of confidentiality is grounds for termination. Any thing that is shared in the group room must remain in the group room and cannot be discussed during breaks or anywhere with anyone outside the group room.
4. Avoid giving advice to anyone UNLESS the person requests your suggestions.
5. Show respect to others in your group by listening without interrupting, taking responsibility for your feelings without blaming others, and making eye contact when others are speaking.[4]

Notably, these codified rules of speaking, which required clients to produce transparent and strikingly monological reports of inner states, were quite unlike the metalinguistic norms that governed the program's boardroom, where interruptions were frequent, eye contact was sporadic, words were spoken primarily to persuade rather than to refer, and board members seldom "owned" their feelings when their tone sounded angry or inappropriately dispassionate.

In fact, a highly performative way of speaking—replete with euphemism, metaphor, and other context-creating talk—characterized administrative practice at Fresh Beginnings. For instance, board members negotiated internal and external demands for "consumer participation" by creatively employing the highly resonant political and therapeutic discourses of "empowerment" and "enablement." In forging meaningful ties between these potentially conflicting discourses, board members were less concerned with referring to how clients and staff actually interacted than they were with realizing ethical and efficacious ideas about those interactions with their words—a practice that I call "wordsmithing." Board members' wordsmithing clearly reveals the peculiar exigencies of providing addiction treatment during a period of rapid welfare-state retrenchment, which arguably requires that professionals learn to speak in a politicotherapeutic register. Yet in considering the divergence of professional norms of speaking from those inscribed on the therapy-room wall, my discussion here also, and more generally, highlights thorny questions about the politics of representation in contemporary U.S. institutions.

Notably, understanding the differences between therapeutic and administrative norms of speaking is not as simple as comparing relevant institutional sites—in this instance, the therapy room and the boardroom. For when clients entered the boardroom as client representatives, they continued to be held to the ideals of inner reference. And, although the tethering of people's words to the reference of the inner can be politically problematic (see Carr 2006), I emphasize the costs and gains of holding some people to a language that must accurately refer to effectively represent and allowing others to forge new realities with their representations.[5]

Focusing on the Fresh Beginnings boardroom, and approaching it as a political forum as well as a central institutional site, I suggest that ways of speaking—and particularly modes of representation—tenaciously adhere to "types" of speakers rather than defining specific institutional events or venues. Therapeutic norms of speaking informed how Fresh Beginnings clients were viewed as actors, as speakers, and—most specifically—as representatives well outside the therapy room. I touch on program administrators' rationales for resisting the idea of client representation on the advisory board despite their $3 million promise to involve clients in "program design and development" (per their grant application to HUD in 1995). I focus more concertedly on how explicit efforts to exclude clients from the board gave way to practices that served to delimit what client representatives could legitimately say and do there. Indeed, in this article, I tell the story of how the dynamic arts of rhetoric are practiced and refined at one institutional site, in large part by managing ideas about who can faithfully represent what.[6]

In addition to comparing the enacted norms that differentiated social workers' and clients' ways of speaking, I attend to the careers of two client representatives, who approached their charge very differently, and to the institutional effects of their respective modes of representation. Rhonda strikingly adhered to the rules of speaking posted in the therapy room when she visited the boardroom; the equally eloquent Louise attempted to borrow professional ways of speaking and employ an overtly political language to advocate for the clients she set out to represent. Louise received a sore lesson in the institutional efficacy of her representational efforts: She found that the same ideology of language that framed her words in the therapy room followed her straight into the boardroom.

In following Rhonda and Louise, I seek to contribute answers to an ethnographic question of interest to cultural and linguistic anthropologists alike: that is, how do ways of speaking travel from one institutional context to another? Building on relevant linguistic anthropological work (i.e., Briggs and Bauman 1992; Collins 1996; Gal 2005; Mertz 1996; Silverstein 2005; Silverstein and Urban 1996; Spitulnik 1996; Urban 1992, 1996),[7] I bring to bear Louis Althusser's (1971) and Judith Butler's (1993, 1997) discussions of interpellation: the processes of call and response by which speaking subjects are hailed, recognized, and constituted. Specifically, I point to a process of *anticipatory interpellation* in which some client representatives, such as Rhonda, not only responded "like addicts" across institutional settings but also called on powerful others to address them as such. In light of the material and symbolic rewards of this interdiscursive process, the story of the Fresh Beginnings boardroom can be read as a parable about the unexpected political gains, as well as the strategic quagmires, of speaking "like an addict."

Familiar clinical themes run through the story of the Fresh Beginnings boardroom, but its central lessons are broader ones, as readers who have participated in organizational meetings of most any sort (including faculty meetings!) will soon detect. Specifically, I show that the work of wielding institutional power and authority involves the continual forging and stratifying of institutional "identities" or kinds of actors. This is particularly evident in institutions predicated on the differentiation of social actors— social workers as opposed to clients, faculty as opposed to students, corporate management as opposed to corporate employees (see Wasson 2004).[8] Rather than simply silencing or excluding actors, such institutions assign ways of speaking to the identities they forge and, therefore, preestablish ways of hearing the people who come to inhabit them. And, although institutional power is thereby regenerated when these "subalterns speak" (cf. Spivak 1988), people can also inhabit such identities, and speak effectively from these designated locales, in politically efficacious ways.

Institutional crises and rhetorical resolutions

Over the years I attended Fresh Beginnings advisory board meetings, the group gathered in three different settings within a ten-mile radius. Until 1998, board meetings were generally held in a mazelike office park, made up of seven two-story buildings, which were set off a busy suburban road, just across from the county circuit courthouse. This was the home of Hope Health, an outpatient branch of the large Catholic hospital with which HFC had contracted to provide clinical supervision and support for Fresh Beginnings therapists. Here, five to ten board members would gather round an oblong faux wood table, settling into tan-cushioned, metal-frame chairs, which offered a view of either the car-filled parking lot or a dry erase board that frequently featured vestiges of a group therapy session held in the same room earlier in the day. After relations between HFC and Hope Health began to sour, advisory board members convened at WISH, HFC's domestic violence shelter, which was tucked in a small wooded grove just west of the courthouse building. Like all visitors to the massive shelter, arriving board members were carefully monitored—by camera and available staff—as we approached tinted glass doors to be buzzed through. WISH line staff, equipped with large key rings, led us through a series of locked doors in the interior of the building, until we reached our meeting room, just off a corridor bleakly adorned with local newspaper articles about county women who had been killed by their boyfriends and husbands. When board members from the largest HFC agency, HELPNET, complained of the 30-minute traffic-laden drive these meeting venues demanded of them, conciliatory meetings were rotated onto their main site: a grim basement room in the county services building, where refrigerators full of brown-bag lunches hummed and posters from the latest "diversity training" clung to walls on strips of masking tape. The Fresh Beginnings advisory board meeting was never held at the treatment program facility itself, with relative lack of parking on Cliff Street being the most frequently cited rationale.

In theory, advisory board meetings were to be led by Marne, director of HFC, and were to involve the director of each HFC agency, the clinical supervisors from Hope Health, and all therapeutic staff at Fresh Beginnings. In practice, board meetings were attended by an ever-rotating collection of agency case and shelter managers who served as emissaries for their frequently overwhelmed bosses. Although one could always count on Marne and the lead therapist at Fresh Beginnings, Laura, to attend the meeting, the board mutated as the demands of members' jobs changed or as they "burned out" or "moved on," leaving HFC altogether. Regardless of these exigencies, Fresh Beginnings advisory board meetings commonly brought together social workers of varying institutional rank, from a variety of affiliated agencies, and with disparate, and some-
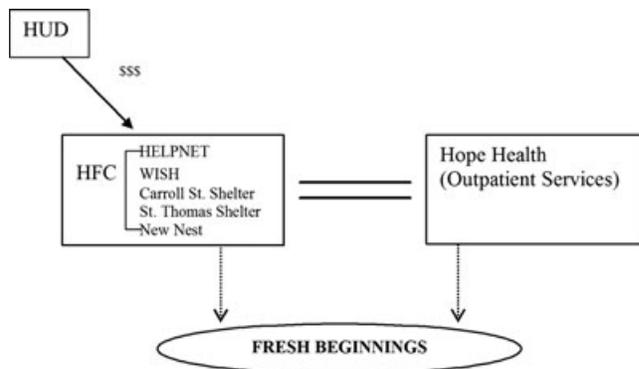

Figure 1. The institutional configuration of the Fresh Beginnings program.

times conflicting, orientations toward social service provision. Program administrators and clinical supervisors sat beside case managers and therapists. Those involved in the day-to-day operations of the program discussed program policy with those who rarely, if ever, directly interacted with Fresh Beginnings clients. And, on the rare occasion when the ponytail-sporting director of the grassroots Carroll Street Shelter had enough time to attend the advisory board meeting, he found himself confronted with a clinician who insisted that the residents in his shelter who smoked marijuana were prime candidates for a DSM-IV assessment (see Figure 1).

One of the first lessons learned by those participating in Fresh Beginnings advisory board meetings is that, whereas HFC social workers, in their daily practice, worked hard to get their clients to name their problems—in the sense of properly and accurately denoting preexisting material conditions and/or mental states —the linguistic labor of board meetings consisted of collectively deciding what language would evoke desired behaviors, practices, and sentiments in clients, staff, and funders alike. Indeed, board members were skilled wordsmiths who worked primarily to improve the form and function, rather than the denotative content, of a given professional text.[9] So, if clinical assessments and group therapy sessions were linguistic lessons in inner reference, advisory board meetings were primers in metapragmatics, that branch of linguistic practice devoted to reflexively determining what one can do and make with words in addition to what one can say with them. (See Figure 2.)

1. REFERENT >>>>> WHAT TO NAME? (agreed upon)		REALIST CRISIS
2. NAME >>>>> WHAT IS REFERENT? (agreed upon)		NOMINALIST CRISIS
3. HOW TO FRAME WHAT WE DO?		METAPRAGMATIC CRISIS

Figure 2. A taxonomy of collective linguistic crises.

Thus, when affiliated program administrators, case managers, and therapists debated whether they should use the term *client* or *consumer,* they were not working to refer most accurately to the people they treated or to how they treated them (what I call "realist crises"; see Figure 2.1). Nor were debating professionals primarily engaged in negotiating and collectively determining who "consumers" really are and how they differ from "clients" (or, what I call "nominalist crises"; see Figure 2.2). Rather, board meetings were devoted to resolving metapragmatic crises as participants worked to answer the open question, how do we most effectively and evocatively, rather than most accurately, frame what we do? (See Figure 2.3.)

Framing frames

Thanks in part to a long legacy of philosophers of language—from Plato to Ludwig Wittgenstein and Roman Jakobson, from J. L. Austin to Emile Benveniste and Judith Butler—many scholars consider language performative, meaning they recognize that, in saying something, speakers are doing something as well. Austin's examples of "how to do things with words"—such as get married ("I now pronounce you man and wife") or name ships before they set sail ("I name you Queen Elizabeth")—have been significantly augmented as anthropologists have documented empirical cases of people reproducing or subverting social hierarchies (e.g., Hill 2007; Irvine and Gal 2000; Kulick 2003; Rosaldo 1982), displaying features of identity (e.g., Agha 2007; Hall 1995; Silverstein 2004), and managing risk or ritualizing the everyday (e.g., Bauman 1975; Hastings 2008; Keane 1997) with their words. Importantly, Austin laid out a series of "felicity conditions," which, when not met, render a performance inert: One cannot be married by a monkey, for instance, and a drunkard's bottle cannot christen a ship; however, Austin tended to assume that authorized speakers—across time and space—had equal opportunity to make, take, and break things with words. Linguistic anthropologists, by contrast, have been careful to point out that what one can do with words in a particular time and place is largely determined by local ideologies of language, which establish the possibilities of verbal performance from the start. The ethnographic record, therefore, can be seen as elaborating the conditions in which a particular person in a particular time and place can do something by saying something.[10]

Although philosophical and ethnographic accounts of language-as-performance differ in significant ways, many adhere to the premise that language is not simply or primarily a reflection of the world or of speakers' realities; it is also often a mode of social action that constructs and creates realities. One such creative potential is language's ability to point to (or index) certain features of the complex circumstances in which it unfolds. For instance, through ci-

tation, one can index the authoritative language of powerful others and, in so doing, potentially enact the authority of those cited (Bakhtin 1984; Urban 1996). However, speakers not only act but also act on their (speech) acts by working to establish how their verbal performances are to be interpreted. Through metacommunicative processes, such as keying (Goffman 1974), speakers help establish interpretative frames that cue listeners as to how to understand their words (cf. Bateson 1972; Bauman 1975).

Alongside scholars of language, students of policy process have long noted that framing is an essential part of how social problems are formulated and policy solutions are attached to them (e.g., Best 1987, 2003, 2007; Coborn 2006; Gornick and Meyer 1998; Linders 1998; Spector and Kitsuse 1987). In their verbal performances, professional social workers affiliated with the Fresh Beginnings program clearly devoted much attention to explicit framing activities, particularly as they worked to collectively cast clients, their problems, and the practices professionals employed to redress them. Although there was sometimes discord in regard to naming referents so as to best reflect them (i.e., realist crises; see Figure 2.1) as well as some disagreement over what, in fact, constituted referents of widely traded terms, such as *client noncompliance* or *self-sufficiency* (i.e., nominalist crises; see Figure 2.2), most often board members debated how to establish authoritative interpretative frames about the nature of their work (see Figure 2.3).[11] Indeed, board members knew that if they could productively and evocatively—rather than most accurately—frame what program social workers were doing by sanctioning a client, running a group, or obtaining a urine sample, they could also generate effective ideas about their program and practices.

To be sure, Fresh Beginnings board members were constantly at work thinking about how their verbal representations would be understood and processed by others—what their words would do within an imagined set of immediate and future constraints. After all, these social workers rightly felt themselves on the horizon of a rapidly dwindling welfare state, which would leave them with fewer and fewer resources with which to fulfill their professional charge. In light of these dynamics, they were especially beholden to their primary funder—a federal agency (HUD) that itself had done much to cast devolution and retrenchment in the euphemistic terms of *empowerment*, *consumerism,* and *self-help.* It was by way of such critical relationships that board members were endowed with a potentially powerful, if constraining, vocabulary.

Empowering lexicon

In the early years of Fresh Beginnings, talk of "empowerment" was rampant in U.S. social work. The term served as a particularly potent keyword to describe a wide array of practices and ideas that, although often hazily defined,

nonetheless held great appeal for scholars and practitioners alike.[12] Rereadings of Paulo Freire's classic text *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and an attention to the feminist tradition of consciousness raising inspired a generation of social work scholars, who then held tenure-track positions, to produce scores of publications that proposed theories of empowerment (e.g., Breton 1989, 1994; Evans 1992; Gutierrez 1994; Gutierrez et al. 1998; Kieffer 1984; Rappaport 1984; Solomon 1976; Staples 1990) and delineated attendant practice prescriptions (e.g., Burstow 1991; Cohen 1994; Gutierrez 1990; Gutierrez et al. 1995; Mullender and Ward 1991; Parsons 1991; Sohng 1998).[13] Some of this new work was revisionist in spirit, proposing empowerment as an antidote to what had been identified as the "paternalism" of social work. For example, some claimed that empowerment could temper the myopic psychologism of prevention and intervention (e.g., Rappaport 1981; Wallerstein and Bernstein 1988; Yeo 1993), democratize social work education and group work (e.g., Breton 1994; Burstow 1991; Lewis 1991), and relieve professionals of their advocacy tasks by allowing clients to "speak for themselves" (e.g., Rappaport 1995; S. Rose 1990; Rose and Black 1985). Other social work scholars asserted that empowerment defined the "social work tradition" (e.g., Simon 1994), as if the historical practices and ideologies contained therein had finally found their proper moniker.[14]

Of course, talk of empowerment was hardly limited to social work circles. In the national political arena, "empowerment" enjoyed broad circulation in the 1990s. President Clinton set up "empowerment zones"—which offered tax and regulatory breaks for "empowered" entrepreneurs to open businesses in blighted urban zones—through his urban development initiatives. He even vowed in 1993 to "change the whole focus of our poverty programs from entitlement to empowerment" (Zippay 1995:263), a rhetorical packaging that helped precipitate the end of welfare as we knew it. Empowerment talk was by no means limited to the Clinton administration: The neoconservatives of the 1980s and 1990s were among the most vocal proponents of "personal empowerment" (Zippay 1995:263), an appealing dressing for their agenda of radical government downsizing. As Barbara Cruikshank has observed, since the late 1980s, U.S. politicians "have equated 'empowerment' with the privatization of public services and with market solutions to the problems of urban poverty and racism" (1999:68).

Notably, empowerment talk was especially prevalent at HUD—Fresh Beginnings' funding agency—thanks to the legacy of Housing Secretary Jack Kemp, who led the federal agency between 1989 and 1993. Arguably the lead architect of the empowerment zones that Clinton later implemented, Kemp established Homeownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere (HOPE), a downsizing project that sold public housing units to tenants in the name of citizen "empowerment." The HFC administrators who wrote the

grant proposals to HUD artfully responded, not just by using the language of "empowerment" and "self-sufficiency" but by promising to establish mechanisms by which the homeless drug users they served would participate in the development and governance of the treatment program itself.[15]

Cruikshank notes that empowerment projects are characterized by an insidious mandate: People should govern themselves through voluntary participation in community-level associations and programs—a striking realization of governmentality, which has gained Michel Foucault the status of particularly prescient seer. In fact, recent decades have witnessed the transformation of the very terms of citizenship as applicable to those who are not only able but are also willing to govern themselves. Take, for instance, the widely cited 1984 piece "Citizen Empowerment: A Development Perspective," by social work scholar and practitioner Charles Kieffer, who employs a developmental psychological schema to describe the process of "citizen empowerment" (see also Bernstein et al. 1994; Kaminski et al. 2000).[16] Empowerment, claims Kieffer, is the product of a linear development from an apolitical "infancy" to civic "adulthood" (1984:18).[17] Focusing on the "participatory competencies" of citizen-adults, Kieffer further suggests that the fundamental empowering transformation is the transition from a sense of self as helpless victim to an acceptance of one's self as an assertive and efficacious citizen.

Given that empowerment is a discourse that seems to perfectly bridge neoliberal ideas about economic and psychological health (Cruikshank 1999; Rose 1990, 1996), there is arguably nothing surprising about its allure among contemporary clinicians and politicians alike. However, a closer look at how people use the language of empowerment in their everyday practice, in precisely the kind of program that Nicholas Rose and Cruikshank critically target, reveals that the individual psyche empowered by institutional noninterference may not be the ideological goal of social workers operating in a rapidly shrinking welfare state. Rather, with an acute awareness of the high stakes of their labor—not the least of which is helping those they perceive to be in dire need—social workers use the highly resonant terms of empowerment discourse to appeal to powerful parties, such as private and public funders, who can help them to help others.

However, Fresh Beginnings affiliates did not simply parrot a neoliberal lexicon to appeal to powerful policy audiences. "Empowerment" was also a frame that helped them manage the everyday ethical and practical challenges of program administration. For instance, for Fresh Beginnings professionals, "empowerment" was not so much an inherited way to denote their own practices and principles as it was a creative way to frame their multifarious interactions with and relationships to clients, without whom their collective expertise could hardly be imagined. A May 1997

board meeting serves as a particularly illustrative case in point.

"Empower," "coerce," or "externally motivate"

It all began when Fresh Beginnings' lead therapist and active board member, Laura, took charge of revising the program's treatment contract, a document handed to every incoming client and requiring the client's signature. The contract delineated a long list of behavioral expectations that each client-signatory was to heed, including abstaining from drug use, attending daily therapy groups, and providing urine samples on demand. The terms of the contract were substantially undergirded by the requirement that all Fresh Beginnings clients attend daily treatment and follow program rules if they were to keep their housing or shelter, child care, legal counsel, and other services that affiliated programs provided. Still, feeling the existing treatment contract was "vague" and "uninformative," therapist Laura took on the work of revising the document, securing fellow board members' agreement to review her proposed revisions prior to the May meeting in question. At the meeting itself, board members placed copies of Laura's draft—many of which were freshly adorned with prolifically applied red ink—on the boardroom table. Soon, it became clear that a particular passage in the draft document was a focus of concern; it read:

Excerpt 1

1 Experience has demonstrated that clients coerced into treatment tend to be more successful than those who volunteer,
2 and it is [Fresh Beginnings'] experience that most clients were coerced into treatment.
3 With treatment providers working closely with case managers from referring agencies,
4 [Fresh Beginnings] can successfully optimize the value of coercion when a client is still in denial and suffering from impaired judgment and other symptoms of chemical dependency.

In the draft treatment contract, Laura sets up an explicit opposition between "coerced" clients and those who "volunteer" (line 1), placing Fresh Beginnings clients squarely in the former category. In so doing, she sketches out a clinically informed economy of agency in which her clients' ability to reasonably act is "impaired [by denial] and other symptoms of chemical dependency" (line 4). At the same time, Laura offers a decidedly potent portrait of social work expertise: Treatment providers and case managers, if "working closely" (line 3), can "optimize the value of coercion" (line 4) and thereby compensate for the putative weaknesses of their clients. Indeed, according to this account, whereas coerced clients "den[y]" and "suffer…" (line 4),

staff collectively and actively "work…" (line 3), and "successfully optimize" (line 4).

Although Laura presents professional coercion as a "value" that, when optimized, would help guarantee the success of clients and social workers alike, at the May meeting in question, clearly not all were in agreement with her drafted passage. At the board meeting, a barely detectable squirm seemed to travel around the crowded boardroom table as Marne listed off "review treatment contracts" while she read aloud the meeting's agenda. Before the word *contracts* had fully escaped through Marne's teeth, Cecelia, an outspoken representative from WISH, HFC's domestic violence shelter, quickly and dramatically interjected, "We do not *coerce* our clients, we *empower* them." She proceeded to distribute photocopies of the dictionary definition of "coerce," transcribed by her hand:

Excerpt 2

1 Coerce—surround, to restrain and to confine by force esp. by legal authority.
2 Curb, to force or compel, as by threats to do something, to bring about by force—enforce.
3 Coercion—the act or power of coercing, government by force

Aided by her dictionary definition, and the logic articulated therein, Cecelia effectively rekeyed Laura's use of the term *coerce* from a transparent reference to what Fresh Beginnings professionals may actually do to a term with an array of semantic equivalents that are dangerously evocative. Specifically, Cecelia suggested that if the program can be characterized as "coercing" clients, then it may also be found guilty of "restrain[ing]," "confin[ing] by force," "curb[ing]," "forc[ing]," and "compel[ling] as by threats to doing something" (lines 1–2). Reading her definitions aloud, with clear tonal emphasis on the words *legal* (line 1), *power* (line 3), and *government* (line 3), prosodic gestures made all the more dramatic by her penetrating gazes directed at those gathered round the table, Cecelia—in essence—called for a metapragmatic audit: Do we really want to frame what we actually do at Fresh Beginnings in the language of coercion?

As witness to what initially seemed the beginnings of an ideological battle between the service provision philosophies represented on the Fresh Beginnings advisory board, I was surprised when Cecelia's seemingly feminist orientations, born of her domestic violence work, and the discourse of denial and addiction, wielded by clinical staff, found speedy rhetorical resolution. Namely, Cecelia augmented her lexical lesson by reiterating the program's inscribed ideals of "flexibility," "individualization of services," and "consumer empowerment"; Laura and other clinical staff present enthusiastically indicated their dedication

to these goals while maintaining that addicted clients—particularly in the early stages of treatment—need strict rules, threatened sanctions, and authoritative guidance. No one objected.

With heads soon bobbing in unison around the table, Marne, who always worked hard to generate accord in advisory board meetings, plainly noted, "[The] problem [here] is bald terms, not concepts"—a comment captured and transcribed by the minute taker.[18]

Marne's casting of the boardroom crisis as one revolving around the "baldness" of specific terms rather than the legitimacy of collective "concepts" is one that suggests the importance of wordsmithing to the administration of the Fresh Beginnings program. Significantly, the solution was neither to reform the practices and policies that Laura referred to as "coercive"—such as linking clients' shelter and housing services to their participation in treatment—nor to distract the attention of those signing the treatment contract from them. Instead, the wordsmithing board members found a way to verbally finesse their (coercive–empowering) practices in an efficacious way. Tellingly, minutes from the May meeting read, "[Cecelia] had a problem with the word 'coerced' in the document. It was agreed that the word would be replaced by 'externally motivated.'"

External motivation, less hampered by the troubling associations of the "bald" term of *coercion,* serves as a poetic alternative to what board members had provisionally agreed was a treatment necessity (i.e., coercion). One might hazard that *external motivation* also served as a euphemism for professional power,[19] which allowed Fresh Beginnings board members to see power as inspired in, rather than exercised over, clients. However, social workers do not just frame their work so as to answer the question, "how do we best think about what we do?" but also must anticipate how their frames will be picked up by others. As wordsmiths, board members expected their words, especially when inscribed, to have social lives over which they had limited control. They therefore used a powerful vocabulary of empowerment and motivation, which was not of their own making, to direct their words' trajectories within institutional networks of current and future funders, clients, bosses, and other potential readers.[20]

Remember that advisory board members' highly instrumental approach to language was quite different from the metalinguistics that characterized the practice of therapy at Fresh Beginnings. Whereas professionals were at liberty to employ a language that selectively pointed to and framed institutional practices, clients were trained in a therapeutic regimen of inner reference. Quite unlike the wordsmithing practices described above, this regimen allowed clients' words only two possibilities in relation to a singular property: denying or referring to the truth. That is to say, linguistic agency—or what was possible to do with words—was differentially constrained by the organizational identi-

ties that people were assigned and inhabited (cf. Kockelman 2007; Silverstein 2004). This held true across the institutional spaces in which clients and social workers spoke, as I demonstrate below.

Discourses and practices of participation

Excerpt 3

1 [Cecelia] was also concerned about inviting clients to join the board.
2 Some of her concerns were that during the first couple of years of treatment the client is self-focused.
3 Clients would expect immediate change and would not be able to get that at this meeting.
4 And [clients would expect] that anyone who had completed phase 4 would be invited.
5 A question was asked why would a consumer want to be on the board?
6 The answer was that part of the recovery program is giving back to the community.
7 It enables them to gain personal growth by allowing them to help others who are coming from where they came from.
8 The decision was made that women who had completed phase 4 and had 1 1/2 years of recovery would be considered for the board.

—Fresh Beginnings Advisory Board Meeting Minutes, May 12, 1997

Cecelia not only "had a problem with the word coerced" in that May 1997 meeting but she also seemed to harbor serious concerns about sitting beside "externally motivated" clients at board meetings. If it still seems surprising that the dictionary-toting champion of "empowerment" was also a staunch opponent of clients' efforts to establish a representative position on the advisory board, consider also that she was not alone. Indeed, the minute-by-minute transformation of "the [self-focused] client" (line 2) into "a consumer" (line 5) who "giv[es] back to the community" (line 6) indexes an ongoing struggle over just how Fresh Beginnings clients could and would participate in program development and governance. I have documented the two-year struggle to develop a client representative position elsewhere (Carr in press); here, suffice it to say that it was in a therapeutic vocabulary of addiction and recovery (lines 2 and 6), self-focus and personal growth (lines 2 and 7), and unreasonable expectations of institutional accountability (line 3) as well as in the powerful terms of self-help (lines 5–8) that the battle lines were drawn. Notably, it was only by way of these terms that clients eventually found their way into the Fresh Beginnings boardroom (see Table 1).

Indeed, client representatives found that their contributions to board meetings were framed using the very same clinical rationales that professionals once used to control

Table 1: Professionals' rationales for why clients should not serve on the advisory board

1. Addiction, the demands of recovery, and the threat of relapse	Active addicts, by definition, make poor decisions. Addicts in treatment ideally learn to make "healthy" decisions, but only if they are "self-focused." Therefore, recovering addicts are unequipped to arbitrate extrapersonal matters, as would be demanded by participation on the board.
	Addicts' demand for "instant gratification" carries over into the early stages of recovery, leading them to demand "immediate change" from institutions, which is simply impossible.
	Clients, as addicts, will advocate for policies that facilitate their continued drug use, rather than aid in their recovery.
2. Overwhelmed clients	"Program politics are pretty low on the list of concerns when you are wondering on whose couch you and your kids are going to sleep." Therefore, clients who are taking care of their business (as they should be) would not be interested in participating on the board.
	When overwhelmed by poverty and homelessness, Fresh Beginnings clients will resort to drug use. The above rationales of addiction, the demands of recovery, and the threat of relapse will therefore apply.
3. Adequate representation	Clients already had ample opportunity to represent their interests through their case managers and therapists, who serve on the board, so "why would a consumer want to be on the board?"
4. Client takeover	"If one [client] comes to [board meetings], then they will all want to come," and inevitably "things will get out of control."

their access. For example, when the first client representative registered complaints about the significant administrative disarray of the program's affiliated child-care center—a problem of which board members were very much aware—therapist Laura noted:

Excerpt 4

1 L: [A] lot of the clients that we work with have some . . . ego defenses that are hard for a lot of people to deal with like projection, *blaaaame* and just walls of anger.
2 And when that stuff got directed at childcare staff, who were *not* supervised, not properly trained, were *not* properly supported/
3 I: mm-mm/
4 L: /and were not *paid* well.
5 And there *were* lots of problems. There were.
6 But I use it therapeutically to talk about, "how do you *feel* when they don't take care of your kids?"
7 ya know, "how do ya *feel* when they're late?"
8 I try always to bring it back to personal responsibility.

Although Laura acknowledges "there *were* lots of problems" (line 5) about which clients might legitimately complain, she begins and ends with an attention to the psychological attributes of the people complaining. Specifically, Laura suggests that the *"blaaaame"* (line 1) that clients placed on unsupervised, untrained, unsupported, and poorly paid child-care staff (lines 2–4) was a "projection" (line 1) of their own issues—an "ego defense . . ." (line 1) and iconic sign of an internal state rather than an indexical sign of an external one. According to Laura, clients are not really denoting child-care staff when they are complaining about them but are, instead, projecting their own less-than-responsible states of mind.

Laura is also quite explicit about how she handled clients' complaints about the administration of the child-care center: She "use[d them] therapeutically" (line 6) as

the fodder for further investigation into clients' feelings (lines 6, 7). As Laura "bring[s] . . . back" (line 8) clients' criticisms about the program toward the familiar referential terrain of how they *"feel"* (lines 6, 7) and their "personal responsibility" (line 8), she provides poignant evidence of the formidable challenges clients would face when working to represent, whether in the boardroom or in the therapy room. Although not as clearly articulated as other rationales for nonparticipation, the idea that addicts were constitutionally disinclined to speak in referentially meaningful ways affected each and every client representative, whose complaints, critiques, and contributions were always at risk of being heard and handled as not quite representative of existing internal or external realities.

Confession and critique

Rhonda's boardroom debut clearly indicates that, at Fresh Beginnings, therapeutic talk was not limited to the confines of the group room or to therapist–client interactions. Much to my initial surprise, Rhonda carries a prototypical Alcoholics Anonymous prologue from the group therapy room to the boardroom, announcing herself to be a recovering addict as readily as those in her audience of professionals introduce themselves in terms of their institutional roles and functions.

How might one explain Rhonda's boardroom confession—that is, her acts of inner reference on the highly performative boardroom stage? One possibility is that Rhonda has adopted the very same addict identity that she puts into words. That is to say, like psychic baggage, her identity as a "recovering crack addict" is carried from the therapy room to the boardroom and simply released into words. Certainly, this explanation would be favored by Rhonda's therapists, who not only worked to help clients forge cross-contextual identities as recovering addicts but also taught a way of using language that indexes inner

states regardless of the contextual features of speech events. Rhonda's confession, they might therefore assume, is not just a sign of her success in recovery but also an indication that their metalinguistic labor has not gone to waste.

If it is true that Rhonda's introduction is a transparent reflection of an inner state, radically insulated from the contingencies of context, one would expect her to introduce herself as an addict across other speech events, or at least those events in which introductions are elicited or expected. However, in the course of my fieldwork, I observed Rhonda introduce herself simply as "Rhonda" to incoming clients, clients' kin, and new staff members. I even have a record of Rhonda introducing herself—as part of a formal introductory "round" quite like the one in the boardroom—during a client focus group run by a cadre of program evaluators: In that case, she makes no mention of crack, addiction, or recovery. So, if Rhonda has adopted something like an "addict identity," she is highly sensitive to context—including intra-institutional contexts—when identifying herself as such.

Of course, Foucault (1978, 1988, 1993, 1999a, 1999b) famously initiated an inquiry into confession as a "ritual of discourse" key to the making of the modern subject. His work has been indispensable in understanding how confession wields power in the desire to know and speak innermost truths. Along Foucauldian lines,[21] one might suggest that, through her boardroom confession, Rhonda is expressing not the inner per se but, instead, a form of institutional power that has manifested as self-knowledge. So, whereas board members might readily respond to Rhonda's representation of herself as a recovering addict (i.e., "Hi Rhonda"), they have no need to explicitly elicit it: Rhonda confesses in the boardroom because she has been "disciplined" to do so in the therapy room. Like his teacher, Louis Althusser, Foucault explains confession by way of a theory of subjectivity, in which "the subject acts insofar as he is acted by the . . . system" (Althusser 1971:170).

Althusser's discussion of interpellation, that process of hailing by which individuals are transformed into subjects, also offers a seductive way to analyze Rhonda's boardroom confession. Most apparently, Rhonda both recognizes and responds to the genre of "the introduction"—continuing a round initiated by Marne and perpetuated by each party gathered around the table. And although Rhonda's self-introduction may seem strikingly at odds with those of her fellow board members, she actually follows in perfect suit: After all, it is precisely Rhonda's institutional role to function as and speak from the position of a "recovering crack addict." Recall too that Fresh Beginnings professionals have devoted much work to assuring that clients' role on the board is to inhabit this very position. This may partially explain how readily those gathered round the boardroom table respond to Rhonda's words (i.e., "Hi Rhonda"), almost as if on cue. Although Rhonda seems to volunteer herself as

an addict in introducing herself as such, she is simply responding to a subject position and a possibility for recognition that is already well established.

However, there is a formal precision to Rhonda's performance as client representative that necessitates a finer-grained account than, arguably, is offered by the lines of analysis reviewed above. Significantly, as Rhonda made several successful requests to her professional audience at the two board meetings she attended, she entirely eschewed the pronoun *we,* representing in terms of a clinically elaborated *I*. More specifically, Rhonda faithfully abided by her therapists' political pedagogy, articulated by Laura above: She carefully couched her requests in "feeling statements" and enacted "personal responsibility" (Excerpt 4, line 8) by refusing to *"blaaaame"* others (Excerpt 4, line 1) for the substantial problems in the program. Notably, Rhonda also followed the rules for speaking posted in the therapy room while visiting the boardroom—never interrupting or interjecting (Rule 5) and providing opinions only when asked (Rule 4), for instance—although her fellow board members almost never followed suit.

As an observer of what I had yet to recognize as a form of political representation, I was particularly impressed when, on her way with me to her second board meeting, Rhonda declared, with marked bravado, that she would be leaving the meeting having secured promises of respite child care.[22] As a mother of several small children, Rhonda had a clear individual interest in doing so. However, the understaffing of the child-care center, and decaying quality of services for children, more generally, was also the subject of her fellow clients' most pressing complaint. At the biweekly client meetings, they plied Rhonda with troubling anecdotes and trenchant critiques of the center as well as with their concerns that new state welfare provisions would require them to seek work after hours, necessitating respite care for their children. Some agitatedly coached a seemingly placid Rhonda on just what to say when she reached the boardroom. There were suggestions for speaking that indexed the terms of institutional contract (i.e., "you tell 'em, this here is not what they *promised* when they signed us up for this shit"). Other suggestions advocated a more descriptive approach, a detailing of the day-to-day problems at the center keyed either as a "report from the trenches" respectfully delivered to commanders-in-chief or as an implicit critique of administrators' remove from and ignorance of their own program's failings.

Rhonda's representation of the problems at the child-care center nonetheless took quite another form at the boardroom table, one that adhered to inscribed institutional logics rather than her peers' coaching: "I just feel like respite child care would really *help me* not to feel so overwhelmed, you know, 'cause *as an addict*, you know, that is dangerous, you know, to feel so *overwhelmed*." Board members were thereby treated to their own rationales for

resisting client representation, now articulated by the client representative and as an implicit threat (see Table 1.1 and 1.2). If Rhonda was slated to speak like an addict, she did so as a properly recovering one, reminding her professional audience that she was ready to translate their institutional failures into personal ones. And, notably, Rhonda's board-room performances of inner reference were well received. At the time, no one knew the results of her most recent drug test, which would swiftly end her career both as client and client representative.

* * *

Admittedly, I squirmed through Rhonda's self-presentation, assuming I was witnessing confirmation rather than mobilization of board members' rationales for client nonparticipation. Yet, ultimately, I could not ignore the nodding heads and displays of empathy that greeted Rhonda, along with assurances that she would receive temporary respite child care, despite the program's struggle to replace regular line staff. In eliciting professional action and garnering program resources, Rhonda was far more successful than her predecessors or successors precisely because she faithfully represented the very terms in which she could represent. She studiously spoke in the ways that had been laid out for her and gained tangible, not to mention intangible, rewards by doing so. Rhonda's boardroom confession was an acutely anticipated response to an institutional demand, which might best be cast as anticipated interpellation: She called on board members to recognize her as an addict—and thereby recognize their own categories of recognition—by introducing and presenting herself as such. In other words, she effectively hailed those who hailed her.

Clients called this practice "flipping the script," which I have explored in detail elsewhere (Carr in press). Script flippers learned to inhabit the identity of a recovering addict and strategically replicated clinically and culturally prescribed ways of speaking from that position. For instance, in a Tuesday-morning therapy group, Nikki, a 29-year-old program veteran, compellingly recited a confessional tale of triumph over crack cocaine, weaving autobiographical threads through the well-rehearsed plot of denial, downward spiral, hitting rock bottom, and willful recovery. Just hours later, Nikki poured her nephew's urine into a drug-screen vial marked with her own initials. Similarly, Rhonda engaged in a reproductive rather than an explicitly resistant linguistic practice when representing in the boardroom. And in speaking precisely as she was expected to, she successfully worked her way through the Fresh Beginnings program, garnering an impressive cache of resources and services for herself and her family. Thus, flipping the script was not only Nikki's and Rhonda's means of representation but also an efficacious mode of politics. Clients who chose

other modes of representation enjoyed little of script flippers' gains.

Representing Louise

After Rhonda "retired,"[23] program veteran Louise was elected client representative, and board members were greeted with a new style of representation—one that combined Rhonda's apparent ease in being nominated and acting as a representative with her predecessors' dedication to representation in the sense of accurate depiction. From the beginning of her tenure, Louise vowed that she would follow the same metalinguistic principles that governed the group room when representing in the boardroom. Of course, as client representative, she would transparently and thoroughly reference her peers' concerns and complaints—which she had carefully documented in notes if not committed to memory—rather than her own inner states. However, Louise was faithfully denotative regardless of the institutional context in which she spoke, privileging the content over the context of her representational acts. A good representative, Louise explained, was faithful to the people and the ideas she represented and undeterred by the indexes of actual performances (i.e., audience, script, etc.). So, whereas Rhonda was committed to felicitous performances of inner feelings, Louise was interested in transparent representations of clients' collective opinion.

Over the months of her work as representative, I observed Louise carry clients' words to the advisory board like precious cargo, hesitant to edit clients' trenchant critiques (in either their form or their content) as her predecessor dramatically did. In an interview conducted after she left the program, Louise described her approach in response to my question, "What was it like being the client representative?"

Excerpt 5

1 L: Now that was something I *enjoyed*.
2 I enjoyed . . . getting points of view from the women, taking it back to our leaders, you know, um . . . and bringing the information back.
3 You know what I'm saying? Relaying the information and, and, um, letting people know what the people who were *using* the program . . .
4 I: Okay.
5 L: I figure if we're the one that's using the program, then we should definitely have an input into how it should be run.
6 I: Right, right.
7 L: And, um, I think that the ladies enjoyed having me doing that type of thing for them,
8 because I, hm!, excuse me, because I *made sure* what they said was brought to the table, you know.

9 You know, and then I made sure that everybody knew what was being, you know, what the *boss lady* and the boss man said, was brought back to them, you know.

Louise describes an enjoyable process of playing linguistic liaison, eliciting "points of view from the women," "taking it . . . to . . . leaders," and "bringing the information back" (line 2) to the therapy room. As she figuratively circles around the institution, she articulates a classically liberal philosophy of representation, which values the transparent revelation of linguistic content and distrusts elaboration (cf. Bauman and Briggs 2003). Indeed, although clients' "points of view" (line 2) are transformed into programmatic "input" (line 5) and "what the *boss lady* and the boss man said" (line 9) is rendered and returned as "information" (line 3) by virtue of her representational labor, Louise was consistently faithful to linguistic content regardless of these transformations. Note that she emphatically *"made sure"* (line 8) that the clients she represented were privy to what board members said, just as she had relayed clients' "points of view" to professionals.[24]

As Louise continued with her representational work, she seemed to enjoy the job less and less while continuing to show dedication to it. More specifically, Louise began to suspect that board members were working hard to circumvent her representational efforts.

Excerpt 6

1 L: They . . . the thing that . . . it's as if they were attempting to talk *around* me.
2 I: I see.
3 L: You know what I'm saying? It could have been just my own feeling but . . . I don't think so.
4 I: Like they'd use certain *terms* or something?
5 L: Yeah, and then . . . then, you know, to think that I didn't know what the hell they were talking about, you know.
6 And then I was . . . you know, it got on my nerves so much that instead of sitting quiet, I'd have to jump up like, "*Yeah,* and . . . " you know,
7 so that way they was like, "Oh, she *understood.*"
8 Like, I'm not *sitting* here, you know what I'm saying?
9 I'm just a sweater in a chair, you know.
10 It was not good. *Really*, not good.
11 I: Okay.
12 L: You know, so in no uncertain terms, I, well, actually in *certain* terms,
13 I had to, you know, "Hey, I know what you're saying, *okay*?"
14 And I had to do that by the raising of the hand, or "*hellooooo!,* I've got something to say, recognize me" (waving).
15 In other words, almost to the point of being *rude.*
16 I: Okay. Like very assertive.
17 L: Right. Exactly, because other than that it was like "she's not here."

Suspecting that board members were "attempting to talk *around*" her (line 1), Louise suggests that professionals did not share her goal of transparent verbal representation. She also indicates that board members treat her as something less than a speaking subject—a "sweater in a chair" (line 9), to which she takes clear offense. Proving her mettle, Louise therefore engages in a game of linguistic chase, tracking and pinning down board members' circuitous talk and establishing, "in *certain* terms" (line 12), that she "know[s] what [they]'re saying" (line 13) but will not participate in talk that performs at the expense of accurate reference. Indeed, Louise's frustrated call to board members (i.e., *"hellooooo"*) suggests a metalinguistic formulation quite consistent with her therapeutic training, one in which recognizing that "[she has] something to say" is also, fundamentally, "recogniz[ing her]" (line 14). However, at the same time, Louise is seemingly forced to play along in quite a different language game: In board meetings, she infuses her representational efforts with dramatic signs of her comprehension (line 6) and supplements steady words with paralinguistic markers, such as raising her hand and waving (line 14).

Although Louise, in my estimation, was never "rude" to board members (line 15), as she suggests above, clearly her words became more and more difficult for her new colleagues to ignore. More vociferous, more assertive, and less susceptible to her listeners' linguistic machinations than other client representatives, Louise attended board meetings determined to get through a long list of clients' concerns and document, in detail, board members' responses. And, when the program found itself grappling with institutional crises, Louise's tenacious representations of clients' concerns and critiques clearly began to ruffle some professional feathers.

Perhaps most troubling to program administrators was Louise's insistence on garnering information about the transition between recently fired therapist Laura and the yet-to-be-announced appointment of a new therapist, Lizzy. After many weeks of tolerating substitute therapists on Cliff Street, Louise began to demand satisfying answers about the program's hiring plans to "bring back" to her consternated peers.

Excerpt 7

1 L: We still hadn't met the new therapist, although they kept telling us that there was somebody, that "You're *going* to get a new therapist,"
2 blah-blah-blah-blah blah-blah-blah-*blah!*
3 That's all I kept hearing. I, no, I took my job as a representative, *client* representative, very seriously.
4 I: Uh-hm.
5 L: And I had been on the phone prior to [Laura] leaving to, um . . . the rights advisory people and all that,
6 trying to find out, um, *who, what and where and how,*

7 and when we were going to get our new therapist and so forth and so on.

Framing administrators' explicit, definitive promises (line 1) as just more "blah-blah-blah-blah" (line 2), Louise indicates that she has caught on to the logic of board members' wordsmithing. She also implies that it is board members, rather than client script flippers, who use language in empty ways. In a striking role reversal, Louise initiates a familiar interrogation by quizzing the advisory rights people,[25] whom she had called for procedural advice, much as Fresh Beginnings assessors quizzed their incoming clients (lines 6–7).

In retrospect, Louise surmises that both the direction of her questions and the role reversal they implied got her into trouble at Fresh Beginnings. She explained:

Excerpt 8

1 L: You know, as a client yourself, you can . . .
2 you have a better overall *picture* of what it is that the clients want or need.
3 You know what I'm saying?
4 The client representative, the client is there *every day* so, you know, they, like I say, they have a better overall view of what *actually* is going on, you know.
5 Which I . . . hm-m, never mind.
6 I: What?
7 L: (laughs). I was going to say, which I think was their . . . I feel that was their whole purpose is *not* to have a client representative.
8 Oh, boy, okay. I speak on *personal* terms.
9 With . . . with me, once I get comfortable in anything, I'm a talker.
10 And, um, any representative that's doing their job, I feel is going to bring to those who need to know what. . .the thing they need to know.
11 And I feel that I was saying more than what they wanted to hear.

Note that Louise breaks frame in line 5, shifting gears from a "report" elicited in an interview to an implicit comment on that report, which continues through line 9.[26] She seems to acknowledge by way of her extensive qualifications (line 7–8) and expressions of hesitance (line 5) that the way she figured the people she represented—as well as herself as a representative—was taken up by some as an institutional threat. After all, she suggests that it is clients, rather than therapists or administrators, who best know what clients "want [and] need" (line 2). In doing so, Louise turns an institutional logic on its head in implying the superiority of an "*every day*," experientially based knowledge that reflects "what is *actually* is going on" (line 4) and the "overall *picture*" (line 2).

In suggesting that she was "saying more than . . . they wanted to hear," (line 11), Louise also acknowledges that clients were expected—by board members and therapists alike—to speak only of, as well as from, their inner selves. Indeed, as both "a talker" (line 9) and one who evidently hesitates to speak on "*personal* terms" when not in the therapy room (line 8), Louise was not talking as a recovering addict should, irrespective of her explicit dedication to representation-as-accurate reference. Recall that addicts are commonly thought to suffer from a disease of insight. As a result, they are presumed to inappropriately and unhealthily index the contextual features of social life, including speech events themselves, when talking about why they suffer. This logic was clearly at play in the Fresh Beginnings therapy room. The question here is why this very same logic served in the boardroom as a representational filter through which clients' words were heard and understood. And although one might suggest that client representatives—whether healthily indoctrinated, powerfully disciplined, or simply duped—carried ways of speaking from the therapeutic to the administrative stage, it is notable that in defending the board against client representation in the first place, one administrative member of the board once stated, "Women [in recovery from drug addiction] tend to be externally focused and need to [be] encourage[d] to be internally focused." Thanks to the minute taker, board members could read and potentially reuse this statement in their future wordsmithing work.

So, whereas Rhonda was seen by board members as demonstrating that she was a recovering addict—and therefore that the institution was successful in its therapeutic efforts—because she cast her representations as referential reports of inner states, Louise was ultimately read as failing to recover precisely because she so often explicitly relayed her "overall view of what actually [was] going on" (line 4) around her. I differentiate Rhonda and Louise as representatives along different lines. Rhonda, as a relatively more experienced and therefore skilled client in social service agencies, anticipated how she would and could be heard and adjusted accordingly in advance.

In the end, it is hard to measure exactly how much less effective Louise's referential talk was than Rhonda's script flipping in terms of spawning institutional change or garnering specific resources. One thing is certain, however: Rhonda's strategy was much less risky. Soon after her therapist's controversial departure, Louise, who had relapsed and completed her inpatient time, returned to Cliff Street to sign the probationary contract that awaited her. While reading the contract—with the new therapist, Lizzy, Lizzy's supervisor and board member, Angie, and her case manager from WISH looking on—she was surprised to find a personalized provision that read: "#8: [client will] participate appropriately in all groups at [Fresh Beginnings]." Louise found this strange and, indeed, according to my observations and the reports of her case manager and former therapist, Louise not only acted "appropriately" in group but was

considered a particularly dedicated adherent to the principles of group conduct posted on the group room wall. Saying nothing, Louise put pen to paper but was stopped by Angie, who pointedly asked if she was "sure she understood and was willing to comply with provision #8." In frustrated response, Louise held up her hand, as if to stop the interchange, rolled her eyes, and again began to affix her signature. Angie abruptly swiped the contract from underneath Louise's pen, saying something to the effect that "those gestures are exactly what we mean by 'inappropriate'—it appears you are not ready to participate again in group." Without further ado, Louise was informed that she was terminated from Fresh Beginnings and was escorted out of the building and into the rain, with her stunned case manager in tow.[27]

On the phone later that night, a crying Louise poignantly asked me, "You know they didn't discharge me for rolling my eyes, right?" As a former program intern who had once encouraged Louise's political approach, and as an interested anthropologist who had witnessed it, I did not know what to say. This article is an attempt to answer her.

Conclusions: Language, Latour, and Louise's losses

According to Bruno Latour, contemporary politics has been strangled by a pernicious entanglement of two meanings of the term *representation*—representation as the gathering of legitimate political actors and representation as the accurate portrayal of an object of interest.[28] He writes, "For too long, objects have been wrongly portrayed as matters-of-fact. This is unfair to them, unfair to science, unfair to objectivity, unfair to experience" (Latour and Weibel 2005:19). The alternative, he posits, is a form of democratic gathering in which interested assertions, rather than putatively transparent facts, are the currency of political exchange. In advocating a revision of *Realpolitik* as *Dingpolitik* (or, a politics devoted to things),[29] Latour bemoans the tenacious and limited view that politics is primarily a matter of the people who represent—both as those who gather and those who portray—and proposes a politics that is, instead, centered on "matters of concern," along with all their "complicated entanglements" (Latour and Weibel 2005:41). Rather than gathering under passionless "domes of rationality" and "properly speaking parliaments" in which seemingly petty, self-interested rhetoric eventually finds its rational way to the representation of Truth (Latour and Weibel 2005:41), Latour suggests that representation-as-gathering should take place along fault lines, which expose difference and cultivate its expression.

Although Latour's emphatic calls to jettison a politics improperly focused on people and to initiate an "object oriented" democracy is quite compelling, the study of Fresh Beginnings suggests the complexities of simply getting "back to things." All client representatives eventually found that their representations of clients' concerns about institutional matters, no matter how artfully or persuasively formulated, were taken up by board members as clinical issues. Whether "things," like problems at the affiliated child-care center, were greeted as therapeutic opportunities to cultivate the insight clients are thought to lack (e.g., "how do you *feel* when they don't take care of your kids?") or as chances to cultivate psychologically developed citizens, clients were preconfigured as types of speakers before they uttered a word in advisory board meetings. Indeed, the diverging career trajectories of Rhonda and Louise suggest the difficulties of circumventing ideologies of language and personhood—which construct people as kinds of speakers and as more or less equipped to represent—well before they engage in acts of representation.

Consider a final example. After Louise's departure, the energetic clinical consultant, Diane, worked to institute a new client representation system, this time without any client enthusiasm to speak of. Board meeting minutes read:

Excerpt 9

1 [Diane] wants to legitimize working within systems, and not wait until people are mad.
2 It's an empowerment issue—a way to be a responsible citizen.
3 In fact, we think the best time to teach this is when there are no 'issues,'
4 and therefore the learner is less likely to be so judgmental.

Strikingly in line with the definitions of empowerment in the scholarly literature reviewed above, Diane, and her colleagues, link empowerment with "responsible citizen[ship]" (line 2), on the one hand, and psychological development, on the other hand. Diane's client is not just a "citizen" (line 2) but also a "learner" who is taught to "work . . . within systems" (line 1). In this sense, Diane's political pedagogy is strikingly at odds with Laura's: Diane wants to teach clients to work within systems in a decidedly nonemotive way. Empowerment, here, is a matter of trading a person's anger for a citizen's "responsib[ility]" (line 2).

All the more striking is the consistent promotion of a kind of "empowerment" that is explicitly divorced from systematic critique or judgment (line 4). In terms directly antithetical to the kind of "object oriented" politics that Latour promotes, the advisory board (using the rare moniker *we*) envisions a form and forum of client politics that is issueless (line 3) as well as passionless. More specifically, under Diane's pedagogy, clients will learn to work within systems when "there are no 'issues'" (line 3) in relation to which they might develop angry "judgment[s]" (line 4). Instead, her lessons in empowerment are ones that aim at

the (developing) psychology of the empowered "learner" (line 4) rather than at judgment-provoking "issues."

Although their wordsmithing suggests that they had much more legitimate(d) room to linguistically maneuver than clients did, social workers were also constricted and enabled by the institutional identities assigned to them, along with attendant ways of speaking. The transition from liberal to neoliberal modes of governance imposed new rhetorical as well as material demands on social workers, who were told that the best way to help people was to allow them to help themselves. "Self-help" entails new practices of participation and representation that are often quite at odds with social workers' professional, institutional, and clinical goals—a conundrum that they worked to resolve by their wordsmithing. If treating addiction means teaching clients to use a language that denotes inner states, and program administration is an exercise in wordsmithing, "client participation" in administrative venues, such as board meetings, put Fresh Beginnings social workers in an understandable bind. Interestingly, some clients got caught in this metalinguistic bind, and others found ways to productively untangle it.

Louise's losses and Rhonda's gains suggest that speakers, as well as forms and forums of speech, are always already products of semiotic ideologies and that an effective politics must take this into account. As many of her peers seemed to realize in coaching and warning her, Louise's representational strategies were bound to be ineffective as long as she tried to circumvent rather than mobilize the expectation that she would speak like an addict. Although there were also risks and losses associated with the practice of flipping the script, as a representative, Rhonda demonstrates how carefully rehearsed scripts and perfectly enacted representational roles can alter scenes of political performance. After all, there are many things that skillful speakers can do with words.

Notes

1. The program's client base was diverse in many regards, but all clients were homeless by U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition. The receipt of housing and support services from one of the program's five affiliated agencies required them to follow a variety of staff directives, including, in some cases, mandatory drug treatment. Although the clearly nonvoluntary terms of service receipt bore little resemblance to the free-market relations evoked by the term *consumer,* this was the term most program-affiliated professionals used to refer to clients. The use of the term *consumer* to refer to U.S. social service recipients can be traced back to the late 1960s, more specifically to Edith B. Back's (1969) scathing critique of the increasing technocratization of social work; she clearly uses the term pejoratively. However, by the early 1970s, the term was widely used as a synonym for *client,* a term that many social workers have discarded as implying "a dependent status for the service user" (David Austin, personal communication, July 11, 2006; cf. Beck 1970; Buttrick 1970; Daniels 1971; Kahn 1976; Kamerman 1974; Patti 1974). With *consumer* having gained the status of a keyword, very few have explicitly challenged the term, although Ralph M. Kramer did in noting, "Despite its increasing popularity, the term 'consumer involvement' is somewhat a misnomer because of the usual absence of choice and pricing mechanisms in the social service 'market'" (1975:341).

2. The year after entering an MSW program, which entailed a 16-month field internship at HFC, I began pursuing my doctoral degree in anthropology. Because it was through my field internship that I gained access to the site that I later took up as my field of ethnographic study, I had the unique opportunity to participant-observe, as I was an accepted member of the institution. I continued to serve on the board, work with clients on various projects, and consult with program social workers, as I had when I was an intern, throughout my ethnographic work.

3. This is true of insight-oriented drug-treatment therapies—such as the kind that characterized Fresh Beginnings—and the addiction counseling methods that are increasingly seen as "state of the art" by many U.S. clinical scholars and practitioners, such as Motivational Interviewing. Although I plan to elaborate the significant differences in these therapeutic approaches in later work, particularly in relation to how they respectively figure the relationship between speech and client-speakers, here, I draw attention to a single striking difference. Whereas counselors at Fresh Beginnings worked to get clients to match spoken signs to inner states, which they believed was cathartic and healing, Motivational Interviewers are primarily invested in getting clients to articulate "change statements" and are less concerned with how perfectly and transparently those statements reflect an existing state of being.

4. Strikingly, aside from Rule 1, each proviso is explicitly metalinguistic, indicating that, at Fresh Beginnings, linguistic conduct was the kind of group conduct that was of the utmost concern.

5. Although these distinctions are often drawn along the lines of race, class, and gender (cf. N. 6), my broader point is that they are always drawn, and a theory of political representation must take this into account. As Judith Butler has sagely noted, "The one who acts (who is not the same as the sovereign subject) acts precisely to the extent that he or she is constituted as an actor and, hence, is operating within a linguistic field of enabling constraints from the outset" (1997:16).

6. In this sense, my analysis follows the lead of scholars who note the way that women, especially women of color, are commonly regarded as "truth tellers" and therefore are figuratively stripped of political complexity (i.e., Alcoff 1991; Gal 1991; Haaken 1998; Mohanty 1992; Scott 1991; Spivak 1988). More specifically, these scholars have effectively critiqued popular and scholarly exaltations of women's "voices" as revelation rather than mediation of embodied experience—a warning that resonates well with the central lessons of linguistic anthropology (see, especially, Gal 1991). The interesting twist at Fresh Beginnings is that clients—most of whom were women of color—were considered to be failed truth

tellers by virtue of their addiction; their treatment was thereby devoted to the reference (or representation) of inner truth.

7. For instance, Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban (1996; see also Urban 1996) have usefully addressed this question in the terms of entextualization (the making of relatively stable, presupposable texts) and contextualization (the accommodation of those texts to a particular here-and-now environ). They further suggest that, if politics is a "struggle to entextualize authoritatively" (Silverstein and Urban 1996:11), success is measured by how texts are strategically situated in institutions and interactions by interested actors. Silverstein's (2005) work on "axes of eval" offers a distinction between intertextuality, in which a structural feature of a text remains constant and recognizable across speech events, and interdiscursivity, in which a relationship is forged between spatiotemporally distinct speech events by a "message" sent from one participant involved in those events to another participant. This useful distinction suggests the need to provide evidence and develop theories that account for the various ways people serve as messengers.

8. This, of course, is not to say that social workers or clients were considered internally homogenous groups. Indeed, both groups drew clear and often hierarchical internal distinctions. In the case of staff, rank in the institution, relative proximity to clients, and degree of education were regularly noted as criteria to differentiate administrators, clinical supervisors, clinicians, case managers, "line staff," and paraprofessionals and often glossed what might be read as race and class distinctions. In the case of clients, experience within the organization, number of services procured, and quality of relationship with staff were the explicit categories of differentiation, although some clients pointed to class background and gradations of skin color to differentiate themselves from others. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that very firm institutional boundaries were drawn between "staff" and "clients," and the few who strayed across these lines were criticized and punished by both groups.

9. As I define it, wordsmithing is a collective and contextual practice, in which wordsmiths work to articulate a mutual interest through rather than in a text. That is to say, wordsmiths use text as a tool rather than as a mode of expression.

10. This is not to mention the anthropological critique of speech act theory, launched most notably by the late Michelle Rosaldo (1982). In short, Rosaldo argued that Austin's (and John Searle's) propositions relied on sincere and intentional speakers, which he failed to acknowledge as a culturally specific model of personhood.

11. Anthropologist Paul Brodwin's (2008) work on "everyday ethics" in Assertive Community Treatment also addresses the evaluative and distributional elements of "post-institutional" social service provision and has inspired my own thinking on this question.

12. Raymond Williams defines a keyword as a word that "forces itself" on scholars' attention "because the problems of its meanings" are "inextricably bound up with the problems" we use it to discuss (1983:15). In using keywords, Williams further argues, we may be articulating "forms of thought" and ways of viewing culture and society in a referential sense, or we might be "open[ing] up issues and problems" in a more performative one (1983:15). In their compelling discussion of *dependency* as a keyword of U.S. welfare politics, Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon write, "unreflective uses of this keyword . . . serve to enshrine certain interpretations of social life as authoritative and delegitimate or obscure others, generally to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinate ones" (1994:311). Although I agree with Fraser and Gordon's emphasis on enshrining and obscuring, I treat *empowerment* as a keyword used in a highly reflexive way by a wide range of social actors.

13. Indeed, as a student of social work, I myself became invested in the discourse (see Carr 2003). Although my work critiqued what I found to be the troubling implications of empowerment discourses in social work scholarship, I laid out my own prescriptive model of "empowerment practice" on the basis of my readings of feminist scholars such as Linda Alcoff and Theresa de Lauretis.

14. These social work and community psychology scholars were hardly alone in this regard. In the academy, many lauded the analytical merits of "empowerment," including scholars in women's studies (Bell 1996; Benmayor 1991; Fine 1992; Young 1994), education (e.g., Benmayor 1991; Weiler 1991; Zacharakis-Jutz 1988), the anthropology of education (Lima and Gazetta 1994; Mitchell 1994; Shethar 1993), political science (e.g., Bookman and Morgen 1988; West 1990), and public health (e.g., Braithwaite et al. 1994; Coombe 1997; Eng and Parker 1994).

15. For a discussion of discourses of "participation" in relation to visions of political process—and particularly, to visions of democratic process—see Paley 2001. The "paradoxes of participation" Julia Paley describes in postdictatorship Chile, wherein "participation" simultaneously serves as a mode of social control and a call to action, constitute an interesting comparative case.

16. According to Google Scholar (December 26, 2008), Kieffer's piece has been cited 328 times since its publication.

17. Others agree that empowerment is, in essence, "a developmental construct" (Bernstein et al. 1994:286) but describe a much less linear process than Kieffer proposes. See also Michelle Kaminksi and colleagues' (2000) use of Kieffer's developmental schema in their study of union activists. These authors also suggest that people move through stages of empowerment, developing skills, understandings, and resources in a more or less linear and progressive way.

18. I have addressed minute-taking practices in detail elsewhere (Carr in press). Suffice it to say here that minute takers—who were usually student interns or administrative assistants—became astute students of institutional discourse dynamics, taking intensive lessons on felicity conditions and becoming skilled practitioners in framing. Oddly, although many organizational researchers have used board minutes as more or less transparent sources of data for their studies (i.e., Adams 2004; Ariño and de la Torre 1998; Lamoreaux 1986; Miller 2002; Peck 1995), very few scholars have examined board meeting minutes as organizational artifacts, worthy of analysis in their own right (for noteworthy exceptions, see Schwartzman 1989:130–132, 147; Tracy and Muller 2001).

19. Social theorists have long suggested that euphemization is a metalinguistic practice central to institutional stability (e.g., Bourdieu 1977; Goffman 1979; Weiner 1976). Through euphemism, a speaker can connect a term or terms of interest to a limited range of positive other terms, in effect creating or exploiting analogic relations. One might suggest that euphemism is quintessential performative practice, because it (ideally) affects how speakers feel about what they are talking about (cf. Cohn 1987).

20. As Susan Phillips (1998) has noted, the contemporary linguistic anthropological study of institutions and organizations has been dedicated to showing how language practices within institutions are linked with various state projects and processes. It is in this vein that I remind the reader of social workers' rhetorical and practical ties to the state and, particularly, to the neoliberal project of "empowerment."

21. In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler identifies what she sees as a shift in Foucault's explication of confession between *History of Sexuality, vol. 1* (1978) and his 1993 lectures at Princeton. According to Butler, Foucault revises his early analysis of confession as a relationship of social control between confessant and confessor, wherein the former is regulated at the hands of the latter via

the demand that the repressed be verbally revealed. She argues that Foucault comes to see confession as a performative exercise in verbalization aimed at the confessants' self-sacrifice and self-constitution (see Butler 1993:164). Foucault's valuation of confessional government surely changed over the decade of his writing on the topic, but the analytic separation of the referential and the performative and the privileging of the latter (whether Butler's or Foucault's) seems of questionable utility. I would argue that if scholars are to understand either the regulative or the self-making function of confession, we must understand how the performative and the referential are practically correlated in the very constitution of the confessional act.

22. Rhonda was seeking child care beyond the 8 a.m.–5 p.m. weekday hours that the affiliated, on-site child-care program—when functioning at full-staff capacity—provided.

23. Rhonda was discharged from the program after testing positive for cocaine. She was already on a probationary contract for failing drug tests over a 16-month time span.

24. Although Louise portrayed her institutional work in client representation much as she did her therapeutic work in inner reference, it was clear to me that, like her new colleagues, she was also a skilled wordsmith. For instance, Louise framed her representational work as an entitlement, born of and supported in extension by the moniker "consumer"—a term rarely used by clients.

25. Louise contacted the county community mental health office devoted to the investigation of "consumer appeals and grievances regarding denial, suspension, reduction or termination of services" in substance abuse programs. Her first call to this office was to investigate if and how Fresh Beginnings clients could lodge complaints in regard to Laura's firing. She would be in contact with them a few months later in relation to her own termination from the program, as I subsequently describe in the text. Louise's interaction with these parties is further indication of her sense of the political—she consistently lodged complaints along formal institutional channels and was consistently disappointed when powerful parties seemed to ignore or dissipate her claims.

26. For an excellent discussion of how ideologies of reference affect ethnographic interviewing, see Briggs 1986, 2007.

27. This account is pieced together from several sources, including interviews with Lizzy, Louise, and Louise's case manager as well as the accounts of recipient rights "advocates" who investigated Louise's subsequent complaint. No action against the program or its staff was ever taken and Louise was not reinstated to the program.

28. Dedicated as he is to "Making Things Public" (see Latour and Weibel 2005; also see Bruno Latour's Website n.d.), Latour is well aware of a third (or meta) meaning of *representation,* which certainly pertains to the task at hand—that is, "How to represent, and through which medium, the sites where people meet to discuss their matters of concern" (Latour and Weibel 2005:16). Amahl Bishara's 2008 article on the politics of Palestinian news making and reporting also works, ethnographically, with Latour's three senses of representation. I find it helpful and therefore borrow her language of representation-as-gathering and representation-as-depiction to gloss Latour's taxonomy.

29. Latour uses the German word *ding* to refer both to "an issue that brings people together *because* it divides them" (Latour and Weibel 2005:23) and a form of "archaic assembly" such as the Icelandic Althing, in which people gather on fault lines. Indeed, division is at the heart of Latour's efforts to revive political representation—in both senses of the word: "If the Ding designates both those who assemble because they are concerned as well as what causes their concerns and divisions, it should become

the center of our attention: Back to Things!" (Latour and Weibel 2005:23).

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