

**IST RECOVER  
IFESTO MAN**

## INTRODUCTION BY WILL SELF

It doesn't matter what way you look at it, drug addicts and alcoholics get a bad press. This is understandable: we're feckless, heedless, selfish and destructive; we wreck families, jobs, lives – we wreak havoc on both the material and the psychic realms; we sop up the time of medical, social, police, court and prison services and show precious little gratitude for what they do for us. When we eventually put down the drugs and booze, and achieve some measure of sobriety, we're often amazed that the wider world, far from applauding our efforts, continues to deride us. Again, mostly this is understandable: we've done so much damage – collectively, if not as individuals – that many lifetimes might be not sufficient to make amends; moreover, we continue to require considerable support from hard-pressed professionals, although at least we soon begin to be grateful for what's on offer.

Yet a lot of the opprobrium that the recovering addict and alcoholic face has nothing to do with this – rather it's part of the same background noise that makes the drunk or the junky a figure of fun. We live in a society in which intoxication is regarded as not only a birthright, but its rituals are so seamlessly incorporated into the mechanics of collective abandonment that it's difficult to identify where one woman's tipsiness ends and a wholesale saturnalia ensues. Under such conditions an inability to handle ones drink – or smoke, or powder, or pill – becomes a sort of cosmic solecism: the recovering addict/alcoholic is the proverbial ghost at the feast, reminding the happy revellers that it's altogether possible – should circumstances or inheritance prove problematic – for their champagne to transmogrify into very real pain.

Can we blame them? No one likes to have the skull beneath the skin called to their attention, especially when they're staring into the perfect geometry of a beloved face; yet the predicament that the recovering addict/alcoholic finds herself in is a peculiarly isolate one: shut out from the very rituals of intoxication that blur the distinctions between persons (people get out of their heads, usually, in order to get into the heads of others), those in recovery are further disbarred from acceptance simply because of that fact. If I had a pound for every time I've read how 'tedious' or 'boring' the necessarily sober are, I'd be a wealthy man; that the intoxicated appear to us, the sober, just as tedious, is besides the point: by virtue of our malaise we have forfeited the right to judge the behaviour of others.

I don't think there is a ground for much militancy over this: the recovering alcoholic/addict simply has to accept – along with so much else – the surly indifference of the straight world, but what can be done is what everyone else seeks to do: find ones voice. Often it's simply in the act of being heard that the individual recovers her sense of autonomy, and with it her sense of purpose – that's what's entailed by the Recoverist Manifesto; it isn't intended to be militant or hectoring, but simply an expression of feeling; and if there's one thing that the vicissitudes of addictive illness teaches us, it's that in the last analysis what matters is not our circumstances or our experiences – let alone our thoughts – but our feelings: we need to feel and be felt by other feeling people. We need this more than we need therapy, religion, or any of the material trappings of so-called success – we need it, because it's a necessary condition of the spirituality we struggle to attain.

As a professional writer I'm leery of setting pen to paper – or finger to keyboard – purely in order to gain catharsis, but often just such a release is achieved; it's a by-product of the process – just as happiness can be a by-product of a happy and reasonably sober lifestyle.

**Will Self**

# TOWARDS A RECOVERIST MANIFESTO

Between 2012 and 2014, people in recovery from substance misuse, in the UK, Italy and Turkey, took part in artist-led workshops to explore the role of culture and the arts in their lives. Working with professional artists across the three countries, many people had a taste of contemporary art for the first time and shared their experiences through large-scale exhibitions and symposia. The Recoverist Manifesto came about through a meeting of minds, clash of cultures and diverse ideals.

The manifesto is presented here as a discreet outcome of those workshops. It is free from logos and ownership, and represents the authentic voices of people connected through the invisible threads of addiction. This work has been born with something of the spirit of anthropologist, Margaret Mead, who unknowingly empowered us when she declared: Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

Those of us who have contributed to this manifesto are affected by addiction in some way, and every word you will read is gathered from manifesto sessions that are synthesized into sometimes divergent, sometimes convergent, fears, aspirations and vision. Whilst some cultural differences emerged across the three countries, it is the similarities that connect us. For the purpose of clarity, this first printed English version of the Recoverist Manifesto will be framed in some of the material that was used to provoke discussion, exchange and solidarity.

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## A LITTLE BACKGROUND - SHAME

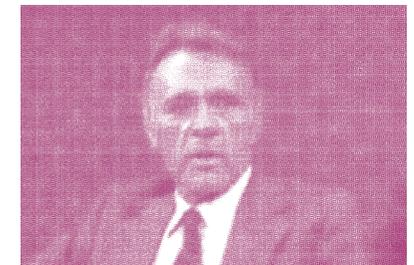
In a 1980 television interview, the actor, Richard Burton, was asked how and when he knew he was in trouble with alcohol. Burton replied:

**“I think that nobody quite knows which drink it is that takes him over the edge of being merely a social or hearty laughing drinker, into a morose and hung-over wretched creature who shakes and creaks and sweats and has nightmares and it’s always November and it’s raining and it’s three o’clock in the morning and there’s nowhere to go and you reach out for a cigarette and smoke and think about all the horrible things you’ve done in your life and [...] all the shames - you’ve endured and suffered, and the shame you gave other people and the wrongs you’ve done other people. I don’t know whether alcoholics can put it quite as eloquently as that; usually they just say, I just stared out of a window for two years - and it is, believe me, [...] it is no laughing matter - it really is not a laughing matter...”**

Referring to the inane laughter of an invisible studio audience, Burton highlighted the nervous embarrassment associated with the humiliations he was sharing. This mortification is perhaps magnified by contemporary daytime-TV audiences, baited into blood-lust by sanctimonious hosts, hell-bent on vilifying their celebrity-hungry participants, only to leave them exposed and ridiculed, posthumously posted to YouTube for the vicarious delectation of future generations’.

With our well-nurtured appetite for ubiquitously marketed pipe dreams and the trappings of a 21st century technocratic utopia, there’s no escape from the delusion of a perfect lifestyle. We are increasingly sold cheap alcohol, on one hand, and pharmaceutical snake oil for health and wellbeing, on the other. Who is it that’s selling us our booze, and who’s addicted to what - fast food, street drugs, spoonfuls of pharmaceutical elixir - to keep us passive, control our fears and rage? Paying their taxes, or hanging out on street corners - legal or illegal - who’s weighing out their profits?

Perhaps we are all ‘disordered’ - strung out and hung up - confused as to what constitutes addiction. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is the fundamentalists field guide, which psychiatrists the world over use to categorise us and transform our subtle differences, attitudes and behaviours into disorders and addictions. Gambling, sex, shopping, caffeine, cigarettes, drugs, alcohol, and so much more, all neatly wrapped up in a diagnosis - pathologised and pigeon-holed - conveniently forgetting the things that put us there. Richard Burton wasn’t just describing his addictions to alcohol and cigarettes; he was painting a picture of his own vulnerabilities, and the loneliness and shame of his addiction.



## **A LITTLE BACKGROUND - HONOUR**

With the words of Margaret Mead in mind, people in Italy, Turkey and the UK, began having discussions, in small huddles and sometimes larger groups, exploring how we see ourselves, our values and our futures. From these conversations, the idea of a manifesto was born.

We've been exploring artists, manifestos and activism, and central to this has been the idea of our fundamental human rights. With something of the spirit of Nelson Mandela, who was publicly and politically rehabilitated from 'terrorist' to 'saint', we began redefining ourselves from being passively in recovery to recoverists - sentient human beings with individual voices and with a shared vision beyond national frontiers.

Whilst we are bound by the invisible threads of addiction, we won't be defined by shame, deficit and stigma; instead, we will be defined by our value and potential. By giving a human face to recovery, we will break down barriers to dialogue. Our shared voices will confront and educate those who demonise and stigmatise us.

So, we've begun a conversation with each other, moving beyond being passive individuals to claim a voice - a loud voice - and think of ourselves as activists, not numbers or statistics, not disease and pathology, but human beings, apparently born equal in this world.

From the women who have lost their children to the men who have lost their families, from those who thought their lack of education made them worthless, to those who were told that boys should never cry, these are the words of those people labelled selfish by the ignorant and fearful.

**So, with the conjoined,  
genuine voices of people  
in recovery, families  
affected by addiction and  
professionals in the field  
from our three countries,  
here is a poetic taste of our  
first Recoverist Manifesto.**

# TOWARDS A RECOVERIST MANIFESTO

And how it is possible for anyone to enjoy other things in life if they are hungry?  
I cannot think of anything else, because I am so very sleepless and hungry.

Oh this temporary, unequal world.

But, open your eyes, you are dying...

Here are your grave clothes and there is the black, black soil.

Was it better, when it was worse? When our struggle was immeasurable?  
Or did we die in the past only to live in the future?

All I know, is I am fighting with the past, but fighting with all my strength.

Sure, I've made mistakes in my life, but bravely I will stand up again and  
bravely, I will walk forwards...

But how do we escape the descent into this vortex?

Sometimes it feels like a black-hole... but it's just fine... hold your head above  
the water and swim through it. We'll hold your hand.

What is this fairy-tale of lies, this state of decay, this void of loneliness?  
A sad, chaotic, dehumanised and objectified world.

I can't find peace and be seduced by this frigid awareness.

I see no future – go fuck yours!

Am I lost?

LOST and broken-hearted!

This pain and loneliness, this shame, it's all consuming

In all of this, I am anonymous, invisible in this chaotic and unequal life.

...and in this medicated world, aren't we all addicted: addicted to greed?

Our past and present are full of lies, defamations and plots.  
The same games will be played out in our future, by those in power,  
the ones who don't want people to prosper or be educated.

Controlling our lives – silencing our voices – your prejudices  
and fears don't surprise me.

**IT WILL BE FINE...**

Don't be afraid; you see, we're creating the future, (you and me)  
creating it all the time...

Stop judging people with problems; nobody is perfect...

And you, you're being hard on yourself.

Clear your eyes, wash away that grit, hold your hand out to me.

Listen... behind all that white noise, that chaos of existence, there are  
quieter sounds. Our beautiful green earth moving in the inky blackness.

There is space to be who you really are, beyond superficial appearance...

Let's learn to listen and not just look and judge...  
let's move beyond this apathy.

Let's listen to the background sounds, the sounds at the edges  
that are not so familiar.

...a new star is being born inside me... I can see a future that was hidden  
so, so deeply.

I listen... I hear...

...but there is pain involved in this birth, in every birth.

HOLD ON...

...this is dangerous; dangerous and beautiful

We will sweat to achieve our imaginations... we hold the world in our hands,  
small and immense

Let us cradle our aspirations, nurture our possibilities

To share is to double - we do not have to face this world completely alone

So, let us summon the strength of the universe and revel in the  
magnificence of who we actually are...

**OUR KNOWLEDGE  
IS OUR POWER**

But does the world want to hear us, to listen to us...?

Open your clear, fresh eyes, look up to the sky – look at us, respect us, love us – don't be scared by that confusion. Let us take a leap from our years of uncertainty...

...become the things we dreamed of.

We are a powerful voice, a vital energy; we are part of a bigger something.

Let's unite, let's wake up our conscience, stir our sleeping imagination

Be inventive, be curious – fulfilled with purpose.

**THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR**

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I don't have all the answers, but that's ok...

Am I ready for a change? Whatever I am going to say, will you be as determined as I am, when you are listening?

When I don't speak up for myself,

**NOBODY ELSE WILL...  
SO I WILL  
WE WILL**

**We are Recoverists  
and we are  
committed to  
solidarity and  
equality**

**We are Recoverists  
and we ask for  
respect and  
tolerance**

**We are Recoverists  
and we are diverse  
and evolving**

**We are Recoverists  
and we are nurturing  
our voices**

**We are Recoverists  
moving forwards**

**To Forgiveness  
and Education,  
to Family, Sincerity  
and Freedom,  
to Friendship  
and to Love.**

**I can't, but we can**