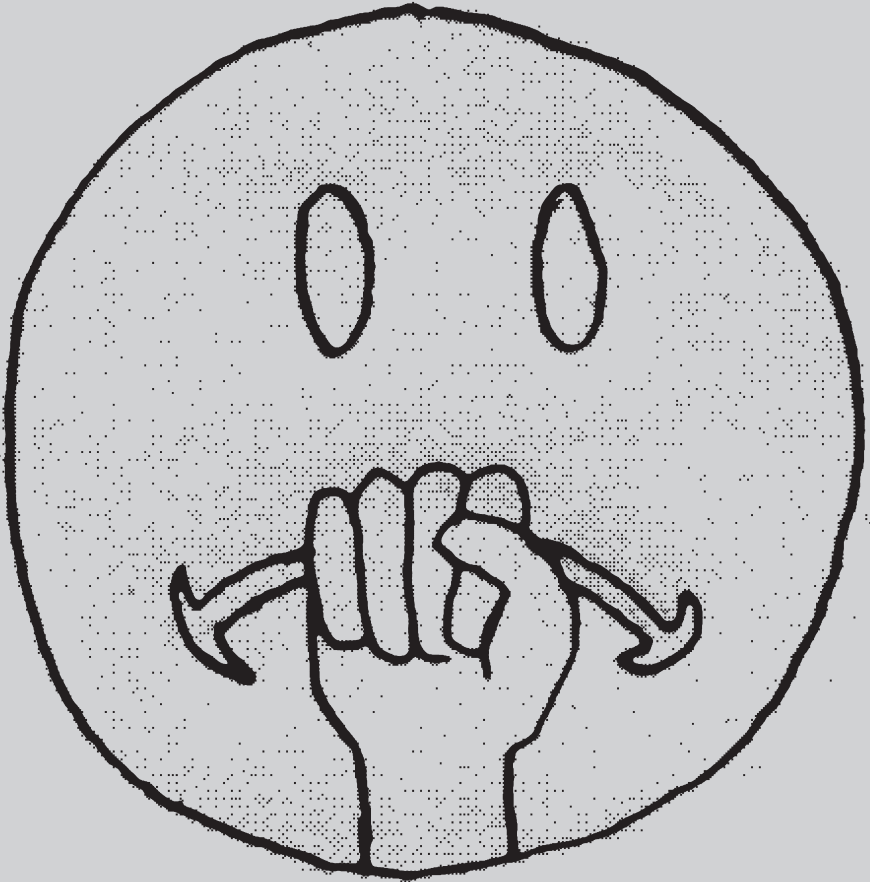


Dora García

The Right
to be
Unhappy



D Y S T O

STATE
CENTRAL

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13

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STATE

Dora
García

The Right to be Unhappy

What is the principal object of punishment in relation to him who suffers it? It is to give him the habits of society, and first to teach him to obey.

—Alexis De Tocqueville, *The Penitentiary System in America*, 1833

Although stigma and some harmful side-effects of psychiatric treatment (e.g., addictions, neuromotor disorders, and cognitive interference) are broadly acknowledged, others are not. Penology is replete with sporadic attempts to control prisoners through mutilations including castration and sex-inhibiting drugs. Nine states currently mandate “chemical castration” of certain repeat sex offenders. But commonly applied antidepressants and neuroleptics are also effective sex suppressants. Secondary and spin-off effects of singular reliance on psychotropic medications are no less debilitating. Medications condition learning in ways not generally recognized. While medication may stabilize behavior and emotions, it may also rob the patient of precious insight, self-recognition, and self-regulation lost in the non-medicated state. Otherwise intelligent and motivated therapeutic staff are deprived of useful roles. Beyond cognitive interference, coerced psychotropification is social cleansing pogrom conducted in the name of science against distressed, disempowered, and professionally branded peoples.

—Seth Many, <http://smpsych.com/>

George
Orwell
1949

1984
Dystopian
Sci-Fi

1949
1984
EVEN

1984
1984
1984

LEADERS
F451

DYSTOPIA

STATE
CONTROL

SEX
IS BANNED

STATE OF
TOTALITARIANISM
WE
NEED THE LAWS
WE
CAN BREAK
THEM

TOTAL
SURVEILLANCE
COMPLETE

LOSS of
LOVE
TRANSPARENCY
PSYCHE
PAST

END
LIEGEMAN
SUICIDE
EXILE

“Psychotropification” is a *portmanteau* word made of “Psyche” - the human soul, mind or spirit - and tropism: the turning of all or part of an organism in a particular direction in response to an external stimulus. Therefore, the portmanteau word Psychotropification refers to the ways we are modeling our soul, by means of external stimuli. These external stimuli are many, but mostly we are speaking here of psychiatric medications, although not only. A psychiatric medication is a licensed (legal) psychoactive drug taken to exert an effect on the chemical makeup of the brain and nervous system. Since the mid-20th century, such medications have been leading treatments for a broad range of mental disorders and have decreased the need for long-term hospitalization, therefore **lowering the cost of mental health care**. This is what is called post-asylum health care. Or the mental hospital without walls.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is the American Psychiatric Association’s standard reference for psychiatry which includes over 450 different definitions of mental disorders. The International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD) is published by the World Health Organization, and it contains a section on psychological and behavioral disorders. The diagnostic criteria and information in the DSM and ICD are revised and updated with each new version. This list contains conditions which are currently recognized as mental disorders as defined by these two documents. Among those mental disorders we find: adolescent and adult anti social behavior, bibliomania, delusional parasitosis, Fregoli delusion (The Fregoli delusion, or the delusion of doubles, is a rare disorder in which a person holds a delusional belief that different people are in fact a single person who changes appearance or is in disguise), insomnia, male erectile disorder, maladaptive daydreaming, melancholia, mood disorder, mathematics disorder, reactive attachment disorder (excessive familiarity with strangers), selective mutism, social anxiety...

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality from its official Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 1973. This decision was

fundamentally due to the cultural changes brought on by the social protest movements of the 1950s to the 1970s: beginning with the African-American civil rights movement, then evolving on to the women's and gay rights movements. Otherwise said: it was the social climate of civil rights struggle, and not "scientific" research, that de-pathologized homosexuality.

How about these new pathologies, depression - melancholy - mood disorder - maladaptive daydreaming? In 1987, prior to Prozac hitting the market and the current ubiquitous use of antidepressants and other psychiatric drugs, the U.S. mental illness disability rate was 1 in every 184 Americans, but by 2007 the mental illness disability rate had more than doubled to 1 in every 76 Americans. Rates of depression and anxiety among teenagers have increased by 70 per cent in the past 25 years. The number of children and young people turning up in A&E with a psychiatric condition has more than doubled since 2009 and, in the past three years, hospital admissions for teenagers with eating disorders have also almost doubled.

In a few years, the number of children diagnosed with ADD (attention deficit disorder) has multiplied by four. The number of children on medication for the disorder had soared to 3.5 million from 600,000 in 1990, in the US. In Spain, recent surveys point out that 6% of the children aged 6-15 are diagnosed and treated with ADD.

This "condition" is treated mostly with MFD, a derivate of amphetamine, mostly commercialized under the name Adderall. ADD was included in the DSM III (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) in 1980, suspiciously coincident with the commercialization of drugs to treat it. In the case of Adderall, since its initial release in 1996, prescriptions have more than tripled. Of course, many students using Adderall never get a prescription at all. And many who do have a prescription faked their symptoms. Just last year, the demand for the drug—originally meant to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and narcolepsy—was so high that patients were turned away from their local pharmacies and the DEA eventually had to increase the drug makers' annual amphetamine allotment to combat the shortage.

If we are all going mad, we are certainly getting more than enough treatment for it. Or, are we looking at things from the right angle?

In the article published by the International New York Times “Diagnosis: Human” by Ted Gup, April 2, 2013, we hear the story of the author’s son, David, diagnosed with ADD at the age of 5.

As a 21-year-old college senior, he was found on the floor of his room, dead from a fatal mix of alcohol and drugs.

In the words of Ted Gup: “My son was no angel (though he was to us) and he was known to trade in Adderall, to create a submarket in the drug among his classmates who were themselves all too eager to get their hands on it. What he did cannot be excused, but it should be understood. What he did was to create a market that perfectly mirrored the society in which he grew up, a culture where Big Pharma itself prospers from the off-label uses of drugs, often not tested in children and not approved for the many uses to which they are put.”

Heartbroken by the death of his only son, the author is diagnosed as depressive and offered a treatment. He declines. “My profound, deep sorrow” - he says - “It is the best bond I still have with my son. I love my pain”.

Ted Gup would have had more difficulties to refuse treatment if he lived in England: senior ministers discuss stripping benefits from claimants who refuse treatment for depression. “The intention of the scheme is to give benefit claimants early access to experts who can help them prepare for work while they are receiving treatment for mental health issues.” (The Telegraph, July 12 2014)

What do we exactly mean by treatment? And treatment for what exactly? for failure in life, for the sorrow of losing our beloved ones, for lack of support, for lack of confidence, for joblessness, for dead-end lives, for old age, for loneliness, for dismembered families, for impossibility of a political or class consciousness?

In the text “Murky Thinking” by Eduardo Losicer, a Brazilian psychiatrist (Mad Marginal cahier #1, edited by Dora García, Mousse 2010), he warns us against the fallacy of understanding normalized psychiatric medication as a form of taking away the

stigma of mental illness. It is exactly the contrary: all human behavior that does not conform to the norm (homosexuality in 1973, hyperactivity, daydreaming, melancholy in 2016) is pathologized and medicalized. He mentions the “I have” campaign (2010) sponsored by the establishment of Brazil psychiatrists in the Brazil national television network. In fifteen daily 30-second spots, the video claims to be “fighting the stigma on mental health”, showing people who simply say “I have”, while the announcer explains the “high frequency of mental disturbance and the importance of seeking care,” ending with the appeal: “don’t be afraid to seek help. You have a right to be happy”.

Do we have the right to be happy, but not the most elementary human rights? We cannot resist treatment or else we’ll lose... our job... our family... our children... our house and our unemployment subsidy...

And what is the measure of happiness? The same as the measure of mental health. You are cured when you are able to hold a job, when you are able to go back to the job machine. Hyperactivity, daydreaming, melancholy, are a problem because they might hinder your capacity to be productive in your job. Do we try to understand how is that you are hyperactive, a daydreamer, or melancholic? No, it is simpler and cheaper to promptly administer psychiatric medication. But for how long? As Glasgow-born psychiatrist R.D. Laing said: “Why try to cure anybody if the aim is to send him/her back to the same place that made him/her sick in the first place?”

This is not really an article on psychiatry nor on psychiatric medication, but on politics, human rights and the human condition. We have wondered why psychiatry always seemed to have so little do with medicine and so much with politics. We wonder as well who might be benefiting from the incredibly rising number of mental health users. But also, and more importantly, we wonder what we could still do to keep our right to be different, to be eccentric, to not work, to not being productive, to be sad, to be obsessed, to day dream, to not concentrate, to not deliver excellent results, to not earn money, to not contribute to society, to speak nonsense, to hear voices, to see visions, to have nightmares, and not to be happy. **We have a right to be unhappy.**

In *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, the central character named “The Savage”, John, is the one who utters this sentence: “I am claiming the right to be unhappy”. Although Bernard Marx (an Alpha-male and yet an outsider, a misfit in the perfectly happy World State society) is the primary character in *Brave New World*, after his visit with Lenina (the belle of the story) to the (Indian) Reservation, Bernard fades into the background and John the Savage becomes the central protagonist.

John first enters the story as he expresses an interest in participating in the Indian religious ritual from which Bernard and Lenina recoil. John’s desire first marks him as an outsider among the Indians, since he is not allowed to participate in their ritual. John becomes the central character of the novel because, rejected both by the “savage” Indian culture and the “civilized” World State culture, he is the ultimate outsider.

John is invited by tourists Bernard and Lenina to go back with them to civilization, to the *Brave New World* (an expression taken from *The Tempest*, by Shakespeare) and the World State. As an outsider, John takes his values from a more than 900-year-old author, William Shakespeare. As a child, the illegitimate son of an abandoned mother, he learnt to read and to speak English through a copy of Shakespeare Complete Works, forgotten by some tourist at the Reservation. Shakespeare embodies all of the human and humanitarian values that have been abandoned in the World State. John’s rejection of the shallow happiness of the World State, his inability to reconcile his love and lust for Lenina, and even his eventual suicide, all reflect themes from Shakespeare. He is himself a Shakespearean character in a world where *any poetry that does not sell a product is prohibited*. Here a transcription of the dialogue he holds with Mustapha Mond, the most powerful and intelligent proponent of the World State, and one of the few who has read Shakespeare in that world.

*Chapter Seventeen (fragment) Brave New World
by Aldous Huxley*

“But I don’t want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin.”

"In fact," said Mustapha Mond, "you're claiming the right to be unhappy."

"All right then," said the Savage defiantly, "I'm claiming the right to be unhappy."

"Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen to-morrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind." There was a long silence.

"I claim them all," said the Savage at last.

Mustapha Mond shrugged his shoulders. "You're welcome," he said."

Aldous Huxley wrote *Brave New World* in 1931. In 1949, another dystopian novel amazed the world: *1984*, by George Orwell. Orwell, a socialist and a labour party member, was a staunch anti-Stalinist and it is not difficult to imagine Stalinist URSS as the main model for *1984*, and Stalin as the template for Big Brother. Orwell's dystopia received immediate and almost unanimous critical acclaim, so much so that it might have awoken the monster of jealousy in his former Eton French teacher, Aldous Huxley. In 1949, George Orwell received a curious letter from Huxley. Here a fragment:

Wrightwood. Cal.21 October, 1949

Dear Mr. Orwell,

It was very kind of you to tell your publishers to send me a copy of your book. It arrived as I was in the midst of a piece of work that required much reading and consulting of references; and since poor sight makes it necessary for me to ration my reading, I had to wait a long time before being able to embark on Nineteen Eighty-Four. Agreeing with all that the critics have written of it, I need not tell you, yet once more, how fine and how profoundly important the book is. (...) The philosophy of the ruling minority in Nineteen Eighty-Four is a sadism

which has been carried to its logical conclusion by going beyond sex and denying it. Whether in actual fact the policy of the boot-on-the-face can go on indefinitely seems doubtful. My own belief is that the ruling oligarchy will find less arduous and wasteful ways of governing and of satisfying its lust for power, and these ways will resemble those which I described in Brave New World. (...) Within the next generation I believe that the world's rulers will discover that infant conditioning and narco-hypnosis are more efficient, as instruments of government, than clubs and prisons, and that the lust for power can be just as completely satisfied by suggesting people into loving their servitude as by flogging and kicking them into obedience. In other words, I feel that the nightmare of Nineteen Eighty-Four is destined to modulate into the nightmare of a world having more resemblance to that which I imagined in Brave New World. The change will be brought about as a result of a felt need for increased efficiency. Meanwhile, of course, there may be a large scale biological and atomic war – in which case we shall have nightmares of other and scarcely imaginable kinds. Thank you once again for the book.

Yours sincerely,

Aldous Huxley

How right was Aldous Huxley in this letter? Stalin died long ago and the URSS does not exist anymore; the cold war is over. Communism is no threat anymore to the “western values”. Capitalism reigns unbridled. The policy of the boot-on-the-face seems to be, to a certain extent, and in some parts of the world, gone. We are still a long way, however, from freeing ourselves from surveillance, only now it is different from **1984**: the digital revolution has constructed a system where there is nothing easier than to follow our digital trail... and we love it! We post endlessly on Instagram, Facebook - we exhibit shamelessly our privacy and this privacy - our lifestyle, our desires, what we want from life - can be used without any control by anybody and for

anybody's profit. Big Brother is now beatifically smiling in an endless succession of digital hearts and thumbs up. Total control has mutated from the Stalin days, and now - yes, Huxley seems to be completely right here - control is exercised in a different way, by making people "love their servitude". And next to this near perfect fractal surveillance system, we are getting very close as well to resemble the Soma-state portrayed by Huxley. Soma, the perfect drug, "euphoric, narcotic, pleasantly hallucinant"—as Mustapha Mond describes it- is arguably the best tool the government has for controlling its population in ***Brave New World***. It sedates, calms, and most importantly distracts a person from realizing that there's actually something very, very wrong—namely, that the citizens of the World State are enslaved. Yes, Huxley was and is right, we live in that ***Brave New World***, and we have been given, whether we want it or not, the right, the need, the obligation - to be happy. To be happy in order to be efficient.

1984 and ***Brave New World*** share with all the other great dystopian narratives of the 20th century - *We*, by Yevgeny Zamyatin (1921), *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury (1953), *Logan's Run* by W.F. Nolan (1969) - the impossibility of independent thought, banished, in one way or the other, by the all-encompassing state, the Total Institution. In all of them, love/ sex/ reproduction is either compulsory or forbidden, but it is in any case fully controlled by the state - the whole of life is. These total states portrayed in these dystopian masterworks have taken away something very valuable from us: love, transcendence, our mind, our memory, our past. In all these narratives, the final outcome of the hero is one of enormous sacrifice: lobotomy, suicide, or exile.

Is that future already here, Huxley, Orwell, Bradbury, Zamyatin, Nolan? We must defend our right to be unhappy.

Dora García is an artist living in Barcelona now after almost two decades of residence in Brussels. She is a teacher in Oslo National Academy of the Arts and HEAD Geneva, and co-director of Les Laboratoires D'Aubervilliers

Paris. She has exhibited her work since the late 90s and among these exhibitions she especially remembers Münster Sculpture Projects (2007) Venice Biennale (2011, 13, 15) Documenta13 (2012) and Toronto Power Plant (2015).

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P I A

LOSS of
LOVE
TRANSPARENCE

TOTAL
OBLIVION

PSYCHE
PAST

END

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