

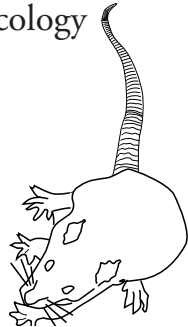
Psychotropic Paste-Up

by Millie Niss

i.

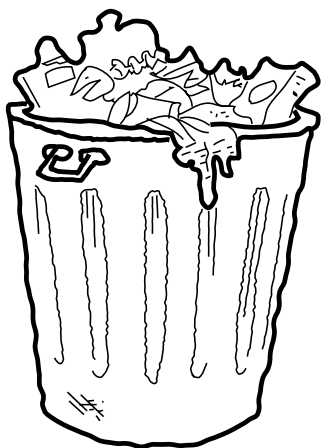
*administration of amphetamine to rats
which releases both dopamine and norepinephrine
causes a cessation of normal ratty behavior
(exploration and grooming)
and the appearance of repeated stereotyped actions
such as gnawing, rearing, and so on
unrelated to external stimuli
this can be fixed by administering
dopamine antagonists*

—adapted from Rang & Dale, et. al. Pharmacology



I.

The rats that gnaw at the garbage on 112th street
in front of the Colonial welfare hotel
must've gotten into the residents' supply
of crystal meth because
they certainly seem
to persevere as they dissect
the smelly remains of tattered lives
from the discharged mental patients
who live in the Colonial
according to The New York Times
that's where my father wanted my boyfriend to live
while I lived in his building in a studio
apartment he would buy me
with the proceeds from the court case he is pursuing
against the motion picture studio
who bought — or stole — the copyright
to his father's screenplay
way back in 1962



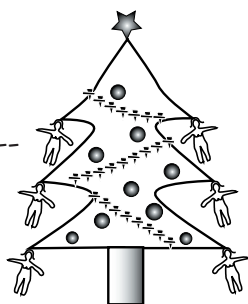
ii.

One died by heart attack, one by suffocation during an epileptic seizure, one by ruptured aneurysm, one had been killed by a car, and three others had disappeared without taking their belongings with them. In Oklahoma, a woman was released from a psychiatric hospital in January, sought shelter in an old chicken coop where she froze to death and was not found for two years. In Virginia, the skeleton of a seriously mentally ill woman was found a year after she had apparently been murdered.

—E Fuller Torrey, *Surviving Schizophrenia*

II.

my schizophrenic boyfriend
dumped me because I took in a homeless man--
mentally ill like himself,
having just overdosed and been released
from an uncaring hospital ER
which didn't even bother to refer
him to a clinic which would take him. They didn't care
whether he lived or died. I did. My boyfriend thought
I should not care for anyone but him.
Even though he had women dripping off
his sleeves like tinsel on a tree
in a Christmas display.



I didn't like
the weekends he disappeared
to spend with other women
incommunicado
and without warning

And when he finally left
he took five bookcases of mine
and all my files
and the computer
which was half mine by rights
and should have been discussed

iii.

*And as for these Bhud-foes,
they provide no mental means for
Running an empire, nor do taoists
with their internal and external pills
— is it external? the gold pill? —
to preserve them from physical death?
and as for those who deform thoughts with iambs...
ten billion wordings
and destroy the five human relations.
Is the Bhud likely to return for these harridans?
having had his palace with courtyards?
— Ezra Pound, Cantos*

III.

Luvox Loxitane Risperdal I take 'em all!
Mirapex Adderal Seroquel go to Hell!
Prozac Haldol Mellaril I've had my fill!
Synthroid Symmetrel Ativan it's hit the fan!
Lithium Librium Valium tally 'em!
Moban Xanax Buspar horror!
Trilafon Elavil Pamelor what a bore!
Celexa Zyprexa Prolixin bitchin!
Navane Zoloft Nardil poison pill!
Parnate Desipramine Imipramine what a scene!



iv.

*I saw a face with a white halo
appearing in the mist
a hand held out with glistening pills
just swallow these she said
I heard the guy from down the hall
say they're gonna drill my head
and Fred my roommate heard it too
cause he ran like a light
when rumor came you were around
but there's no getting out
he just got to the other end
and hit a plastic plant...
the Time Lord and the Cosmic Warps
and all that funky stuff
faded away with all the pills
now they drag me off to a room
and make me stare at inkblots
what do you see here says the doc
paper you can't reuse
why not says the doc lifting his specs.
it's all destroyed I said.
hmm hmm.
in the school for docs that's what they taught him
lift your specs and repeat after me: hmm hmm!*

—very loosely adapted from Patrick
McCabe, The Butcher Boy



IV.

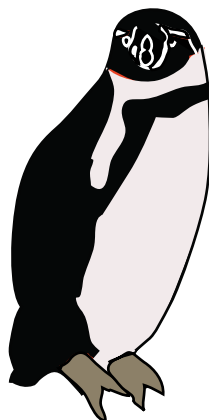
the week I had my first psychotic break
and saw my former best friend turn into a devil
or wanted to think I saw her turn into a devil
because I wanted some attention, too
after I had taken care of her
and called the police twice when she was ravingly manic
and said she would jump off a bridge.
I grabbed her legs when she dove
out the window and tried to save her life
at some personal inconvenience
but she slept soundly
under the influence of the thorazine I fed her
when I freaked out later that day
I got angry and frothed at the mouth

I thought the walls were just an illusion
or that I had the power to transpierce them
like the character in Marcel Aymé's *Passe-Muraille*
and so I ran my fastest and bashed against them
with predictable consequences
I took my first Risperdal that day
and it worked really well
and I became a convert
to the cause of atypical antipsychotics

v.

Suppose you hallucinate a pink penguin. Nothing in your brain is pink or penguin-like. Indeed, it is entirely possible that nothing anywhere in your vicinity — indeed nothing anywhere at all is pink or penguin-like. Visually hallucinating a pink penguin resembles having a visual experience of a pink penguin, it does not resemble a pink penguin. Just as the experience is not pink and penguin shaped, neither is the hallucinating pink or penguin shaped.

—John Heil, *Philosophy of Mind*



V.

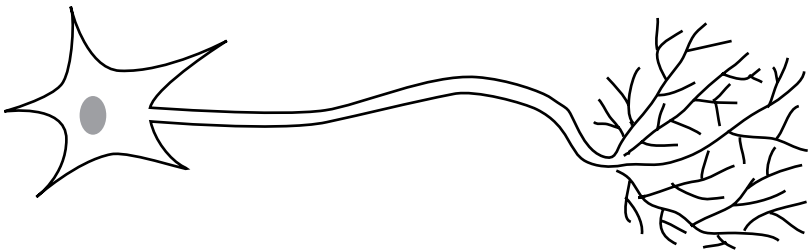
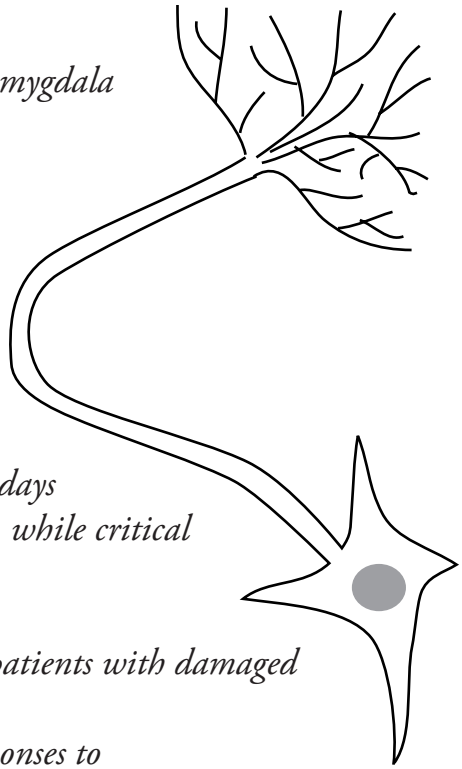
there is a Monty Python sketch
about psychologists performing IQ tests
on penguins, asking them questions
such as what the next number in the series
1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, is, and recording
their squeaks and silences, and graphing
their replies against those of a group of
foreigners who speak
no English, and concluding
that the penguins and the foreigners
are of similar intelligence

this reminds me of a time
I was given a mental status exam
while unconscious
so it was written in my chart that I was so disoriented
that I didn't know the day, my name, or where I was,
couldn't count to one hundred by sevens and didn't know
who the president was —
of course they had to give me
smelling salts
an EKG
and lots of IV fluids
before the night was done

vi.

*implanting electrodes in the amygdala
and turning on the juice
can produce hallucinations
visceral sensations
autonomic changes
(primarily fear)
and other effects
but the same person may
have different experiences
when stimulated on different days
thus activity in the amygdala, while critical
for the production of emotion
is not in itself sufficient;
there are even case reports of patients with damaged
amygdalas who show
normal skin-conductance responses to
emotional stimuli*

—adapted from Kosslyn & Koenig, *Wet Mind*



VI.

If emotion
that commotion
in our brains
is just a motion
of mere sparks
of electricity
and (bio)chemical
particles
where then is there
any room for
us as
individuals?

Are we
no more
than a
mere
epi-
phe-
nomi-
non of
syn-
ap-
tic
trans-
miss-
ion?

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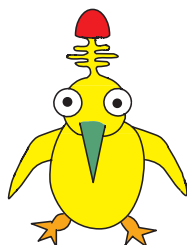
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