

Special print from: Peter Lehmann (Ed.), “[Coming off psychiatric drugs: Successful withdrawal from neuroleptics, antidepressants, lithium, carbamazepine and tranquilizers](#)”, Berlin / Eugene / Shrewsbury: Peter Lehmann Publishing 2004, pp. 72-75

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Don Quixote and the Drug-Free Zone or: What Now, Little Jumping Jack?

Neuroleptics: Etumine, Haldol, Imap, Melleril, Nozinan, Sordinol / Lithium: Maniprex / Tranquilizer: Rohypnol

Representation 1: For the hasty readers

During a period of seven months in 1980-1981 I was pumped full of drugs in a hospital on the Flemish Archipelago Gulag. This was done by the hands of criminals in white coats using physical violence under the pretense of a treatment for mania. What started it all was my free-thinking and my rejection of the delusions of the Catholic faith.

After I was released, I remained in a twilight zone for months. Then I ritually burned the Huxley Soma tablets. The main ingredients of the Caligariesque cabinet of horrors were the neuroleptics Haldol (made in Belgium), Imap (*neuroleptic, active ingredient fluspirilene*), Etumine¹, Nozinan², Sordinol³, lithium poison Maniprex and the sleeping pill Rohypnol⁴.

1 Neuroleptic, active ingredient clonazepam, apparently not currently marketed in AU, CA, GB, NZ and US

2 Neuroleptic, active ingredient methotrimeprazine, marketed also as Levoprome

3 Neuroleptic, active ingredient clopenthixene, apparently not currently marketed in AU, CA, GB, NZ and US

4 Tranquilizer, active ingredient flunitrazepam, marketed also as Hypnodorm

“Either you are part of the problem or a part of the solution,” said Ulrike Meinhof back then. That’s why I decided to bear witness to the public concerning the medical totalitarianism I experienced on my own body. So that no one can later say they hadn’t known anything about it.

Representation 2: For Literature Fans

“Ruined by war, dedicated to victory, memorializing peace,” is written on the victory gates in Munich. In the context of our subject this would read: “Ruined by chemistry, dedicated to withdrawal, memorializing a drug-free state.”

Involuntarily committed

So you’re a process engineer responsible for the gold-plating of electrical plugs. You are thirty-eight years old, tobacco and alcohol-free, a family man with two sons aged seven and eleven. The boys’ school asks you routinely to vote on what type of religion or world view they should be instructed in. You choose the morality of undogmatic free-thinking. Suddenly all hell breaks loose. They work on you but you insist on your conscientious position. They’ll get you one way or another. They’ll get you, all right. Without you having done anything evil, you are arrested by three guardians of the law and immediately sent off to a madhouse run by a Catholic charity. You learn the term “involuntarily committed,” in Flemish “kollokatie” (that means “an assembly of similar kinds”). You are injected seven months long and then simply set free again. What now, little jumping jack?

Drug addiction

You are homeless, without money and drug-addicted. So-called cold turkey makes you completely crazy. So you go to a rehab center. On the same day you take off because the guys there belong to a subculture you can’t understand and yet you are worse off than them—can’t stand, sit, lie, sleep or wake even for a minute. Your soul leaks out like water through a sieve. You ask the fool in the mirror what he’s doing there. Involuntarily you go back to the damned madhouse and beg for the same pills or drops that you had previously managed to spit up again in the most creative ways. A seductive inner voice

suggests suicide. You consider it and decide for life instead. As a preventative measure you sign in at a psychiatric hospital with a good reputation, you swallow Melleril and for three months, you only get up in order to eat.

One day a very clean cut person with the expression of a grave digger shows up. “Blood letting,” she says, and she means it seriously (not in a medical sense but in the financial sense). You take off immediately and go to your father for a crisis session. He doesn’t understand why you are constantly grinning and twitching like a monkey with a rash. You need a lawyer—but only the sun comes up for free. Your father rents you a room. You are going mad. For months you stare at the white-washed ceiling, 20 to 22 hours a day and you attempt to comfort yourself with the thought that things could have been worse. You have no idea what to do. Will you kill yourself? You write your wife and kids a 100-page testament, give them courage, and lay yourself down on a primitive cot after getting some things done. You are wondering what else will happen. Nothing happens. After a week you go walking on the streets, purified for the first time in months. There are people who move forward like ants without the least effort. You are invited for a coffee by a charismatic group. Regarding further care, they refer you to a childhood friend who belongs to the same group, a mother of six children, the wife of a teacher at the art academy and living in the opposite part of the country. You find yourself in a real living room again with a stove in the middle. The family is astonished at your shaking, your robotic movements and zombie mimicry. You are lovingly taught to eat, speak, walk, stand, sit and lie down again. But the psychiatric drugs get in the way, and withdrawing gradually is difficult for you.

Ritual

Your childhood friend, a former hippie girl, thinks up a ritual. You proclaim the place a drug-free zone in which you throw the chemicals into the stove one by one and listen to them crackle. With each one you say the magic word “goodbye” and let out a good cry for joy. Eight pairs of hands applaud you. You spare half the cabinet of poisons in case you need to repeat the ritual in the far corner of Belgium, where even your mother-tongue sounds foreign. That place will also become drug-free, just like everything else. It is 1982;

there is life after death. So you get on your way down yonder, not yet aware of your future nickname, Don Quixote.

Translation from the German by Christina White