



About the Icarus Project...

The Icarus Project envisions a new culture and language that resonates with our actual experiences of 'mental illness' rather than trying to fit our lives into a conventional framework.

We are a network of people living with and/or affected by experiences that are commonly diagnosed and labeled as psychiatric conditions. We believe these experiences are mad gifts needing cultivation and care, rather than diseases or disorders. By joining together as individuals and as a community, the intertwined threads of madness, creativity, and collaboration can inspire hope and transformation in an oppressive and damaged world. Participation in The Icarus Project helps us overcome alienation and tap into the true potential that lies between brilliance and madness.

About the Icarus Zine...

This Zine is a collaborative work by Icarus Project members. In expressing our feelings, insights, and ideas about madness and the world around us we hope to inform and inspire others. The stories told by the psychiatric establishment, pharmaceutical industry, and the mainstream media all to often overshadow our own. By sharing our stories with others we can reclaim the right to define ourselves and our experiences. We choose to honor our uniqueness and complexity by letting our voices be heard. We seeking understanding and openness in a culture far to prone to label and judge.





Zyprexa Coffee Cups

Fuck you, and your zyprexa clocks and pens fuck you and your fancy car you drive to the poor man's clinic

> Where many shuffle about from overdose assemblyline as you walk by in your fancy high heels

Lack of compassion shows on your pursed lips wrinkled on the edges with veins of frost lipstick

I need help, doctor not this mess

Fuck you and your elitist status and your power you have over me Fuck you all through history

> your nazi ties, your cia mind control experiments

your zyprexa calender your zyprexa coffee cups

Fuck you for thinking I need to be fixed

About this issue... Written Works Diagnosis "Human", by Polvora The Other Side of Incantation, by Ashley *Indicator Species*, by Steven Smiles Untitled Essay, by Will Hall Side-effect haikus, by various Icarus members Zyprexa Coffee Cups, by Nightbloom Comics Taking Care of Basics, by TeslaCoiled Freedom!, by Sarafin Loving With A Mad Mind, by Jelenazool Graphics & Photos Art of Vincent, by Vincent Andrews Cove (http://www.myspace.com/beholder fod) Barbwire Fence, by Decayed Beauty Medication Blues, by Nightbloom Asylum Squad, by Sarafin Additional Credits Original concept by Steven Smiles Official graphics (page 2 and back cover) provided by The Icarus Project Layout and all other graphics/photos by TheAntisocialite Special Thanks Inel, Sandpiper, Chiaroscuro, Catmind, Reese, and The Icarus Project online community for making this Zine a reality.

Diagnosis "Human"

by Polvora

The fifth Diagnostic and Statistic Manual for diagnosing "mental disorders" is currently in progress, and if a layperson logs into the DSM-V website, there's a place for "suggestions", with five listed categories for suggestions. One of these is "suggestions for a new disorder to be added to the DSM."

When one considers that the DSM is pretty much the be-all-and-end-all Bible of psychiatric diagnoses, that invitation sounds very strange. Nobody gets to "suggest" other types of "diseases"; one has to discover a microbe or isolate a cluster of symptoms. This exposes the fluidity and subjectivity of what many people like to present as a solid, objective science. This invitation to create mental illnesses out of imagination, social stigmas, boredom, thin air or whatever else speaks volumes about our society and the nature of mental illness. While it's true that some people perceive

an alternate reality or experience a state of consciousness that is foreign to most, the problem is that society as a whole has chosen to recognize some of these dif-

ferences as dangerous or broken rather than a unique experience of individual thought.

Most mental illnesses are seen as disorders because they prevent the person from functioning properly in the social world we have set up for ourselves. People have become so indoctrinated into this reality that they fail to realize almost all of the expectations placed on us are arbitrary and unnatural. If our society had an established place, purpose, or outlet for "mentally ill" behavior, it would become normal. If the majority of the population was bipolar, things would be set up to accommodate them, and those without bipolar "symptoms" would struggle to fit in and understand the world. Is failure to hold up to the expectations of other people really a disorder? What human being is so perfectly adjusted to this world that they may act as a benchmark for "normal"?

Why have we chosen to label certain thought patterns as disorders and not others? Anyone can write a checklist of traits and say "if these apply to you, you have X disorder," but that is meaningless.



LITHIUM twisting knotted rope sealing up Pandora's box keep that shit contained

-lupine

WELLBUTRIN
Though the sex is good
I find myself convulsing
At higher doses
-Sarafin

-Ativan. ; «

love that bitter taste on now I can be nice to you and take a full breath -strangedoll

That classic shuffle Itchy skin from inside out A long vacant stare

-Inel

Lamictal¹

I don't feel too much
There's no such thing as stable
Will this rash kill me?

-Inel

ZYPREXA
Bumping into walls
Heart gallops without warning
Bludgeoned into sleep
-babblefish

ABILIFY
One more false answer
to twelve years' madness twitching,
twitching, twitching hell.

-After

EFFEXOR

Missed a dose or two

Doc, why didn't you warn me?

Withdrawal felt like death

-clarextina

PROZAC

I like being numb

You magic little tic-tac
Oh wait, no I don't

-TheAntisocialite

DEPAKOTE

Its my dream come true

Still completely miserable
But now I'm fat, too

-TheAntisocialite

HALDOL
Ocean made still pond
stagnant murk reflects lost light
sad design of man
-youthfulfolly

ABILIFY
Antipsychotic
Why were you prescribed to me?
Thought I was depressed
-clarextina

RITALIN
You, this great swimmer
Have no one else to race
Trying to keep pace
-sweetmadness

Only for awhile You live in my denial Of what you can't feel

LEXAPRO
I'm nauseous again
but I do not want to die
oh such sweet relief
-strangedoll

TOPAMAX
Everything tastes bad
Slow motion memory loss
I don't understand
-Inel

thropic, shadows within shadows, claustrophobic and horrifying. It has always been one of my favorites. We sit silently in front of the television set, plates on laps, eating leftovers. My brother, my mother, and my father. And me. I watch them as they watch, transfixed on the screen. Their faces dance with faint shapes of light. My family.

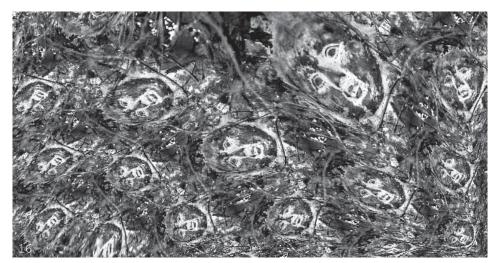
A feeling in my chest surprises me, a sensation that is my own. Mine, not from somewhere else.

I know this moment. I can't tell you much about it, because if I do, well, there are places that are inside that are outside that... (the birds have come to my window, wondering at the barrier before settling on the tree). My chest is the world and it is you who are reading these words.

I know this moment. My father looks at me and says five words, five mean, hurtful words, and I am crushed. They are familiar words in a familiar tone, raw, acid, etching deep. They are unrepeatable. I stand in front of him, and I know his eyes, but I can imagine only shadows of what he's seen in his life. Soldier in the Korean War, gunshot wounds, self-inflicted injuries, prison, torture, psychiatric wards, electroshock.. and his violent father, my grandfather, standing over him. To this abusive moment he brings his own abuse, his own history.

This time is different, though. I look into my fathers eyes and something within me stays within me. I feel myself part of this drama and also outside of it. I remember my phone call. I speak back to my father, I defend myself simply and clearly, I tell him to not degrade and belittle me, I tell him I deserve his respect. I stand up instead of collapse.

And does the fog burn off, and do the dead awaken? We'll see. Now I'm in front of the television again, eating junk food, but the film is starting to be kind of fun. The director's cut is even better than the other version I have seen, there are more lines and angles, more depths of brilliance shining through. That night in a dream I am struggling to walk, stooped over like my father. Hanging from a scar on my right side there is a flap of unhealed flesh, but it isn't bloody and gaping, it's dry. Like molting skin, as fragile and easily torn as paper.



Homosexuality used to be considered a mental illness but has been removed from the DSM because today it is a more socially acceptable variation on thought patters regarding sex. Did it suddenly become healthier? Medical science does not decide that diseases are no longer such when technological advancements mean that they are not as disabling as they used to be, so why does psychiatry do so?

It is true that people labeled mentally ill may engage in behaviors that are destructive to themselves or others, but people too often assume that these choices stem only from the thought patterns; without

considering that the choices may instead be a reaction to the frustration, anger and alienation that are a result of society's refusal to validate those thought patterns. In an interview on Madness Ra-

dio, Richard Unger points out that "recovery" rates for mental illness rose significantly in the 1970s and theorizes that it's because during that time, altered or extreme or alternate states of consciousness were more accepted and so the people experiencing them had the opportunity to work through, engage with, and share them.



Normal means only what we allow it to. There is no such thing as standardized, healthy behavior. Labels are arbitrary. When the DSM decides that certain combinations of thought traits constitute mental disorders, it uses a biased,

What human being

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unscientific, and damaging process to create a stigmatizing label and a false condemnation our very humanity. Failure to adhere to the standards put forth by a society-created world is only a disorder because

the world does not value or understand the difference. When the global community realizes that "mentally ill" thoughts are simply a variation on human experience, then we will be able to create a society in which alternate consciousnesses are embraced, understood, and guided instead of medicated, punished and pathologized.



I am still not able to reach any of my friends, or at least the ones I don't think are trying to hurt me. Or did I try? Then I take a nap. There is no cooking oil that is not rancid, so I head to the gas station for Wesson for my falafels. I am using a boxed mix that says it expired in eight years ago. In the kitchen, I exchange words with my mother. She sends something into me, poison wrapped in secret messages. I dissolve and disengage, and the conversation ends.

At this point my body is something else, owned by someone I don't recognize. My thoughts are not mine. I am locked in the schizophrenia factory: trapped with my anguished family, with its confusing mixed messages and tangled dynamics, it subterranean flows of trauma and its history of violence and abuse. Who I have become, the pain and disorientation and madness I go through, cannot be understood without seeing where I came from. And this christmas vacation visit of just a few days has brought the mechanisms and my reactions out into the open. This context is a hypnotic field as tangible and overpowering as a storm wind, tearing and pushing and sweeping my being away. My mind is spilled, debris. I am strewn between invisibility and explosion.

I get out of the house on the pretext of finding good cell reception, and sit in the car. I stare at my phone. I know the people on the other end told me they are my friends. They told me to call them if I have a crisis. I am looking at their names and each one is a secret message like the ones inside the house, a trick of language, a smiling cruelty, a promise to hurt me. Did I call someone? On the other end is my poor friend's voice mail, and now all I can manage is to unleash my voices, a ventriloquist speaking through my mouth, a spite-filled disoriented outburst about how I need to hire my friends to comply with my treatment plan. I hang up, trembling, shocked that my effort to help myself has only made things worse.

Charlton Heston is white trying to pass for Latino trying to pass for white.

And then, just as Orson Welles's police captain Hank Quinlan is going to die in this shadow and crime infested maze of dusty streets and corrupt lawmakers, my own role as a stunted monster in the family drama reaches a climax. Someone answers the phone. Is it destructive to reach out to my friends who care about me? No, that is not my voice telling me that, it is a trick. There is no allegiance and there is no love and I am selfish. Did I say that? But is that someone different, someone there, on the other end of the phone, who is not part of the hypnotist's trance?

The clammy gray mist starts to burn off in the warmth of that voice. There is someone there from my other life, my real life, my chosen family. I'm not crying or raging from any of the emotion numb and buried inside, I am still and frozen and lost, but now I can feel that warmth somewhere. Simple words: take a risk, you're not alone, remember who you are, remember that your whole world is not as crazy as your family.

Back inside, we are watching the 1958 film Touch Of Evil. Film noir, dark and misan-

they are afraid of me, and the trance prevents anyone from talking openly about what is happening. So I sit there, paralyzed, and I am the proof on display: Yes, I am the person trained by diagnosis and institutionalization. I am the lost soul mental patient, the ostracized outsider who is not like us, not participating, not part of the family, unreachable.

I am not responding to my family's craziness. I am crazy and my family is responding to me.

I watch my father's secret gestures as he speaks with more coded messages. Now he is copying my text messaging: I have never seen him text message before. He has hacked into my cell phone and read what I wrote. He is talking with step-children somewhere, his backup family, another sign of my own irrelevance and failure as a son. He reads my thoughts and replies with a cypher: his talk of his world and work, intellectual property rights, infringement lawsuits, a biography he authored, his lawyer -- it is all cunningly directed at me, to harm invisibly. He is a writer, my father, and he is reading my thoughts so he can control me. He is the judge, he is the law.

On the screen, Janet Leigh is stalked by a Mexican marijuana and speed gang. Charlton Heston is searching the Hall of Records.

I'm not going to make it. On the drive back they ask me questions: how are you, how is work, how do you like Northampton. I don't answer. At least we tried, they will tell themselves, at least we tried. I am not in control of my own body, my mind, or speech. I try to phone friends, but do I reach them? It is christmas. Did I dial? I'm convinced that anyone I call will try to hurt me. I think, If tomorrow things aren't better I will hitchhike to a hotel and wait until the plane ride back. The plan is comforting, like all my plans to crawl away and hide. It is, maybe, a better plan than suicide. When we finally arrive at my dad's farm house, I collapse onto a 28 year old mattress in the back bedroom. My father's wolves and dogs penned in the yard howl at the crescent moon. I pass out, and dream I am facilitating a support group and my friend announces she has quit heroin. I wake up. It is a vivid image, but is it a prophetic riddle? Or ridicule?

The next day I manage to eat a bowl of fruit, and then I spend hours trying to be in whichever room of the house no one else is in. I'm like those numbered tile puzzles where you can only slide one piece at a time into the empty space to make the other tiles move. My father, mother, and brother talk with me, but I can't say anything or make eye contact. I want to eat more but a stench is overpowering, so I spend the morning cleaning out cat litter boxes which haven't been emptied in a month. It is the day after christmas and dad has invited over people to work in the kitchen, so we can't cook. My brother sleeps until one.

From the television, Dennis Weaver scares me.

I manage to find a hiding place playing a video game on the internet and checking my email.

The Other Side of The Incantation

it is a summer day and you are too much alive.

The breeze removes your skin the chain link fence breathes light and time stops. It could all come crashing down again the way daylight savings time starts over and afternoons get black. There are no guarantees only facts, miracles, and misunderstandings.

In the beginning it seemed clear
the revolution was too urgent to be beautiful.
Freedom was something that made you grind your teeth
it made you sob it made you broke it made you come
like the explosions at the end of the world
it made you sorry. Freedom was something you could not carry
across the border. It was something you could not keep.
Freedom had scruffy wings and dirty hair and broken shoes
freedom had cold ears and holes in her heart
where the night went. Freedom got swept off the streets
and locked in a padded room. Freedom forgot that she was real

Sometimes what is real erupts through the keys in our spine to make music like earthquakes. Sometimes it plants a kiss like a promise smudged in the corners of our souls. Sometimes it leaves a ghost in our bellies and an ache in our eyes. It does not offer instructions. We do not understand that we must practice over and over again. The other side of the incantation is doing the work. It is not enough to climb this mountain once.

by Ashley

Indicator Species

by Steven Smiles

We need a new conversation in this country about the cause of mental health problems. The rate at which Americans are being diagnosed with psychiatric disorders and taking psychiatric medications has skyrocketed into crisis, and the simplistic notion that biology determines behavior is quietly altering our conceptions of humanity.

To be sure, digging up the roots of what gets called mental illness is an epic journey without many clear answers. It is impossible to separate individuals from their surroundings, so it is impossible to discern exactly which experiences and interactions lead to emotional and mental extremes.

However, one thing is clear: as long as the culture around us is broken, individuals will break, a process that is proportional and growing. Certainly, if we eliminated abuse, war, greed, racism, sexism, broken families, ecocide, monotonous wage labor and egoism, we would see a massive reduction in what gets called mental illness. But these bigger picture problems are overwhelming and require an enormous responsibility from

all of us to fundamentally change, so instead they are often cast into the background in favor of blaming an individual's brain or genes.

Thus, we are 'Depressed' not because the world is being destroyed while we sell our hours to mindless routines, but because our brains are too weak to handle it. We are 'ADHD' not because our culture slams us with an average of 3000 media messages a day, but because our brains are too weak to handle it. We are 'Borderline' not because we were beaten and neglected by our parents, but because our brains are too weak to handle it. We are 'Schizophrenic' and 'Bipolar' not because we were traumatized or overwhelmed by the madness of our society, but because our brains are too weak to handle it.

> Instead of taking a ruthless moral inventory of our culture, families, societies, religions, economics, education systems, and pointing the finger outwards, we do it of and to ourselves, and now of and to our biology. Choosing to drink alcohol is a disease. Shopping compulsively is a disorder. An inability to solve math equa

By the time we find a table at a chinese by-the-pound buffet, I am in -- I still don't really know what to call it -- one of my 'dissociated paralysis states.' My mind and body are seized by an overwhelming force, and I am acting and feeling the way that earned a schizophrenia diagnosis more than ten years before. The words of my mom and dad and brother claw at me. Coded tones of voice and a secret language of gestures and glances grab and pull me down. I stare blankly from farther and farther away, trying to resist, but across the growing distance something makes me listen closely. They talk about my father's work, they talk about our farmhouse, they talk about relatives. Between gaps in sentences and pauses in eye contact, voices in my head begin to yell and taunt. Nasty, cruel, and vicious. With each shouted accusation and whispered insult I withdraw deeper, wincing in the invisible crossfire.

How did I suddenly became suicidal, why do I imagine jumping from a bridge or hanging by a rope to escape the screaming in my head? Why have my own life, my values, friends, work, interests... all evaporated a few hours after stepping off the plane? A small part of me speaks up, in defiance of the clamor in my head: This is ridiculous. It's just a conversation with my family on christmas, no reason to be like this, and as soon as I've formed them, the words fall away. They begin to repeat over and over, more and more loudly, This is ridiculous, this is ridiculous, you are ridiculous, it's your fault, why are you so stupid. Now they are mocking me, swept up with the rest of the angry and contemptuous hammering words. It makes no sense. It's my fault. I am 40 years old and I am powerless. Stupid.

This is my family. They have the diabolical power to entrance me.

Sunk beneath a thick wall of ice, voices shouting and whispering in my head, I watch all this unfold. Is my withdrawal a shield from my family? Or is this altered state of mind and, pinned down and not responding, is that the trap too? Am I protecting myself? Imprisoning myself? Am I no longer normal? If I could say anything, would it be listened to? Or am I now just crazy? Yelling, cutting words condemn my failure to solve this puzzle. A whispering, sickly sweet voice reminds me how easy it will be to just end this, to find one of my father's guns or take a bottle of pills from the bathroom cabinet. Yes, that's it, that's what makes sense, just wait until you get home...

The television screen says: A policeman's job is only easy in a police state. That's the whole point, Captain.

Back in the car and all I can do is smell everyone around me. I'm frozen, silent, and hearing voices, and now I'm beginning to gag. I become more withdrawn, avoiding eye contact and not replying when anyone speaks, and even this is not enough, their odors are seeping into my body. My coping mechanism, if that what this is, is so bizarre that everyone is reacting, visibly uncomfortable and turning away. They won't ask me directly or try to understand,



by Will Hall

"...what is usually called hypnosis is an experimental model of a naturally occurring phenomenon in many families. In the family situation, however, the hypnotists (the parents) are already hypnotized (by their parents) and are carrying out their instructions, by bringing their children up to bring their children up...

I consider that the majority of adults (including myself) are or have been, more or less, in a post-hypnotic trance, induced in early infancy: we remain in this state until -- when we dead awaken, as Ibsen makes one of his characters say, we shall find that we have never lived."

-R.D. Laing, The Politics of the Family

The flight from Massachusetts to Georgia creeps along grey and shrouded in fog. At several thousand feet, there is a brief moment of sunlight: best wishes from a kind angel soon very far away. I am going to visit my family for christmas.

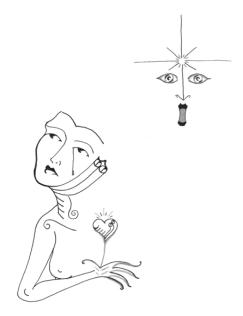
Two hours in a car in downtown Atlanta with my father, mother, and brother, the first time we have been together in more than three years. There, there, that was open. No it wasn't. Let's turn around. Ok so keep going. Should we go back? I think I saw lights. Look what about that place? Closed. Ok keep going, there's got to be something. I manage to text message a friend. TRAPPED IN PSYCHOTIC FAMILY VORTEX. DRIVING EMPTY STREETS LOOKING FOR PLACE TO EAT. My family and I ride in circles, on christmas day. Keep going, there's got to be something.

tions is criteria for a medical diagnosis. Everyone is mentally ill – that is, every individual except the sum of our parts.

Along this line of thinking, I have come to perceive most people labeled with major mental illness as an "indicator species." This term is borrowed from the environmental movement, which applies it to those species who are acting abnormally or dying because of climate change. Many people labeled with mental illness are also indicating on an individual level much more collective problems. Through their innate sensitivities, they are penetrated by the dysfunctions of our culture until they inhabit them.

Thus, instead of separating traumatized people into categories of abnormal psychology, we should be listening to their stories as reflections of ourselves. We can then begin a dialogue that roots out mental health problems from their sources and addresses them holistically. This process would entail envisioning what healthy families, healthy communities, and healthy cultures look like, then framing the suffering of people who are most afflicted as an indication of whether or not those ideals are being met.

Of course, diagnosing traumatized people with brain diseases, controlling them with medication and soulless therapies, then warehousing them into mini-institutions is the easier option. In today's America, where truths of hardship are often buried beneath the promise of consumerism and capital, most people prefer not to face the complexities of



rape, violence, and community breakdown. It's called denial, and it works – as long as the people who are oppressed remain voiceless.

But people labeled with psychiatric diagnoses are organizing and rising. We are finding our voices and making harmonies outside the dominant tune. Some of us are no longer willing to submit to other people's explanations of our existence, yet we are also taking personal responsibility to live well. In a decade, many of the millions of children who are now forced to take powerful medications will join us, and there will be an outcry too loud to ignore.

In the meantime, let us start a new conversation in this country about mental health that weaves people who break down into the interconnected fabric of American life. And please, ask us to define our experiences and needs, not the 'experts' on us.

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