

MEGALOMANIA: PSYCHOTIC PREDICAMENT AND TRANSFORMATION

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Phases of Psychotic Predicament: 1. Character (“I am”) meeting force of circumstance, 2. Groundlessness; power failure, 3. “Switch-out”: Practice and Transformation.

Psychotic Practices: 1. Cutting doubt and self-surrender, 2. Wild identification.

Stages of Psychotic Transformation: 1. Speed of mind, 2. Desynchronization of mind and body, 3. Absorption states, 4. Insight and power, 5. Beyond the law, 6. Conflicting commands, 7. Death and rebirth.

Why is it such a commonplace among madmen, asked Nietzsche, to aspire to imperial heights, when even the most casual observation of the lives of kings and emperors reveals loneliness, misfortune and despair? Yet imperial heights are the aspiration and central theme of megalomania—a state of mind so vast that it has always been the subject of symbols, myths and epic dramas. Ajax, one of the great warriors of the siege of Troy, after being cheated out of the victory of inheriting the sacred armor of Achilles, in a fit of vengeful rage and megalomaniac delusion slew a pitiful flock of sheep, convinced that they were the Trojan army.

Then there is the case of poor Pierre Riviere,¹ the village idiot, who, unknown to anyone, witnessed the systematic moral torture of his father by his mother and resolved to free his father from bondage and death by murdering his mother, sister, and brother. In the process of completing what he felt to be a magnificent action, he first identified himself with ancient conquerors, which developed into his thinking of himself as the ultimate power of the universe. This was accompanied by

ecstatic sensations. But like Ajax, upon awakening from his delusion he demanded and designed his own execution.

So it was in the case of Donald Crowhurst, who is the subject of this study. Like Ajax and Riviere, his life is a story of the cycle of oppression, self-deception, victory through cosmic empowerment, and death. But he is different in that he made precise observations about his mind, and he highlights the clinical facts of: (1) the prototypical psychotic predicament, (2) that there is a particular propulsive sequence of events culminating in megalomaniac conviction, and (3) that the progressive series of psychological events is made possible and intensified by mental practices that unwittingly disorder the mind.

To begin with, there is the *psychotic predicament*. No one goes crazy without first having arrived at a predicament. That predicament appears to have two currents that collide. One is the personal collection of habits, tendencies, defenses, wishes, hopes and fears, all directed towards either neurosis or sanity. We sometimes call that "character," personality or personhood.

Secondly, because that character has an effect in the world, situations begin to ripen, like unpaid bills becoming due. It is the force of circumstances that confronts the character with its results, and that confrontation could lead to an explosive reaction. In the psychotic predicament, one takes the opportunity of the explosion to "switch" into another dimension of concern and another plane of activity. This new domain is vaster and endlessly more fascinating than ordinary circumstances. It is filled with a sense of insight and power, electric with the play of energy, perception, and messages, and a compelling drive towards completion that offers promises of bliss and happiness of all kinds. One's attention is thoroughly absorbed away from the pettiness of the mundane world from which one has switched-out. It was at just such a point that Donald Crowhurst would say, "Finally I have done something interesting with my life."

Let us consider the unique events of the life of Donald Crowhurst whose particular psychotic predicament occurred

while attempting to win a single-handed ocean sailing competition from England around Cape Horn and around the world. He died somewhere in the North Atlantic at the age of thirty-seven. His journals and logbooks reveal in caricature the nature of the psychotic predicament and the stages leading to psychotic self-transformation.²

From childhood until the time we meet him, Donald Crowhurst defined his existence with the words, "I am brave. I can meet any challenge or dare. I can overcome any obstacle." He actually lived out such an existence. Those who knew him said that he was possibly "the bravest boy in the world . . . he was so brave it was awesome."

Throughout his life, he engaged in a variety of spectacular daredevil projects which became legendary among his friends. His relationships were marked by an infectious enthusiasm that led those around him to suspend their doubts in the face of his ability to rise to any occasion. He continually dazzled his observers to the point where the environment would reinforce his sense of power. His mind was noted for its qualities of speed, intensity of absorption in tasks (particularly electronics), and a capacity to subdue all doubts that he could work out any problems into which he threw himself.

But his hastily constructed electronics firm was failing so he threw himself into a competition to sail around the world single-handedly. He was confident that he could do a creditable job and that it would arouse financial interest for his failing business. He had sailed very little before and had done no single-handed ocean sailing. Though this might boggle the mind of anyone who has done such a thing, Crowhurst persuaded his investors to build an overly technologically sophisticated boat and on October 30, 1968, after innumerable mishaps, set sail around the world.

His psychotic predicament, the masthead of ego ("I am brave"), now began to meet with the force of circumstance that it had provoked.

Within the first two and a half weeks at sea, Crowhurst cruised in the Atlantic Ocean, frantically trying to keep his boat

together, literally trying to keep her from flying apart. It soon became obvious to Crowhurst, while approaching the furious waters of Cape Horn, that his poor sailing time and the inadequacy of his boat made it not only impossible that he would win or even finish the race, but that continuation meant certain death. Characteristically, in terms of his "character," Crowhurst never doubted his own seamanship or navigational ability.

It was during the following two weeks that Crowhurst began a fraudulent logbook of his journey. All of the authorities of Crowhurst's life and documents agree that it is difficult to find the precise origin of this path of deception.

It started as a seed of an idea with one step leading to the next. What is clear is that the new challenge that Crowhurst set for himself was more difficult than the original competition. By creating a falsified voyage around the world in a navigational tour-de-force, by using falsified radio messages, log books, tape recordings and video tapes, he would convince all observers that he had traveled around the world without ever having left the South Atlantic.

Crowhurst's mind now became riveted on the details of fabricating weather reports that would indicate that he was somewhere other than where he was. Most of his day was spent absorbed in the complicated details of plotting his illusory voyage, maintaining a genuine logbook as well as a falsified one, and accurately calculating the ever-diminishing prospects of success of his original voyage. He hardly had time to keep his boat in repair and afloat, much less on course.

His logbooks indicate that it was a difficult and frustrating time. Each further false record and radio announcement of his location demanded further confabulation. There appeared, however, hints that he was beginning to enjoy himself. Crowhurst gradually began to assume the identity of a heroic character, to become someone other than who he was. Eventually, by this same process he declared himself a "cosmic being."

It was a gradual switch, a re-emerging out of groundlessness and failure with a more exaggerated sense of egohood, more

vast than the world of competition. Crowhurst switched out of a circumstance that meant only defeat or death—he accepted neither. Instead, he set a course for an illusory voyage which in order to be faultlessly carried out, he had to totally believe in. It is unclear whether he took that final step.

It is interesting that Crowhurst had engineered a “switching” mechanism to make his boat unsinkable by electronically righting itself at the critical point of overturning. However, it did not operate. It seems that the switching mechanism itself was a conceptual metaphor of how to continue on—to back off from the fury of the Cape, and to right himself from failure, despair or groundlessness. It was Crowhurst’s approach to the world and it was so finely tuned it could cut each moment of self-doubt.

His efforts at deception were tumultuous. There were times of frustration and moments of agony in maintaining the fraudulent voyage, but each of these moments turned into a new and more encompassing plan of action. His new plan was to return home a creditable second or third in competition, in which case his logbooks and other revealing data would not be examined with close scrutiny. But this plan was not to work because on June 23, after almost nine months of sailing, the only remaining contender who stood between Crowhurst and eventual exposure and humiliation sank and had to abandon the race. Crowhurst immediately planned a one-word message—“desperation”—but never sent it. Instead, he decided on radio silence.³

At this point, a new psychotic predicament began. All systematic sailing ceased. Over the next five weeks, Crowhurst step-by-step switched into a new adventure, a project infinitely more vast than any he had embarked on before, which culminated in his deep delusional conviction that he had transcended the powers of God, thus successfully accomplishing and prescribing the path for the next stage of human evolution. He was involved in a psychotic transformation.

TRANSFORMATION

There are several *stages of megalomaniac transformation* that lead up to and are inevitable consequences of this pinnacle achievement in the psychotic drama. The psychotic predicament has been the setting and the tendency to switch-out is propelled forward with an increasing speed of psychological phenomena.

But what is this “switch-point” for which everyone involved in the phenomena of psychosis has such fascination, since it seems to be the point of origin of the breach with reality. Our own curiosity about psychosis impels us towards this origin. Ultimately, the switch-point takes place in the mind. Everyone concerned with psychotic phenomena is stunned by the suddenness and abruptness with which one can cross the border into insanity. That border has a particular structure, a sequence of psychological events. By a precise reading of Crowhurst’s logbooks, messages, and tape recordings that describe his passage through episodes of groundlessness, paranoid fear, and straddling the edge of meaninglessness and meaning, we find this sequence of switch-out completely detailed and documented.

The switch-out occurs during the first two stages of complete psychotic transformation. We could call the first, *speed of mind*, and the second, *desynchronization of mind and body*. These can be discriminated during the twenty-four hours of midsummer day, June 23, 1969.

Crowhurst was adrift and wandering. The speed of his activity had been apparent since he hastily entered the race. Now there appeared an increasing pressure of thought, and a gathering of attempts to manipulate his mind in order to blow away doubt with the winds of enthusiasm. Because of a power failure in his self-steering apparatus, sleeplessness, as is always the case, intensified the wildness of his mind. He was also using dexadrine to an unknown but minor extent. As this speed gathered, he began to feel its effects upon his body first as euphoria, physical well-being, and an increasing sense of accu-

racy which led him to proclaim, "My reflexes amaze me . . . I can catch things with my hands even before they begin to fall." Crowhurst began to feel "free" from the constant worry about the "rat race" of ordinary existence, and noted that his body was becoming cleansed of the accumulated "poisons" of ordinary activity.

At this point, he abandoned all attempts to sail and allowed his boat—what had been the body of his life—to drift in the Sargasso Sea. He began to switch from being aquanaut to being cosmonaut. Over the next week he wrote over twenty-five thousand words of "philosophy" which detailed his belief in the intellectual power of mind over body and matter. "Every word was of supreme importance; he had a message which must be revealed to the world, and he sensed he had only seven days to write it. Even as he began he was scarcely sane, with each page he wrote he lost more control, and by the time he finished he was totally out of touch with reality." With increasing speed he turned his attention to pure consciousness and the possibilities of ejecting a purified mind out of a degraded body and environment.

Along with this, there occurred *absorption states*. The tendency for this stage of his psychotic transformation was always apparent in his character and it now became intensified. He always had an ability to "lose himself" in concentrated effort, and this increased during his demanding electronic repairs, deceptive communication, and now his increasing dwelling in conceptualizations. He became absorbed to the extent of losing track of time, the one and only discipline that he had attempted to maintain.

Anyone who is involved with the production of such concentrated states of mind has been said to be approaching the realm of the "formless gods":⁴ "He realizes that he can achieve purely mental pleasure, the most subtle and durable of all, that he is able to maintain his sense of solid self continuously by expanding the walls of his prison to seemingly include the whole cosmos, thereby conquering change and death. First, he dwells upon the idea of limitless space. He watches limitless space; he

is here and limitless space is there, and he watches it. He imposes his preconceptions on the world, creates limitless space, and feeds himself with his experience. Then, the next stage begins of concentration upon the idea of limitless consciousness. Here one does not dwell on limitless space alone, but one also dwells upon the intelligence which perceives that limitless space as well. So ego watches limitless space and consciousness from its central headquarters. The empire of ego is completely extended, even the central authority cannot imagine how far its territory extends. Ego becomes a huge, gigantic beast.”

During the next stage, Crowhurst expanded his practice of speeding through the cracks of doubt in his increasingly solid world with *practices of identification*. He attempted to tune his mind into the mind of Einstein, specifically Einstein’s audacious leap beyond space and time in the theory of relativity. Crowhurst felt he had absorbed himself into the mind of Einstein, and began to recognize his own *insight and power* within his projection of other, a still further stage of transformation. Then, in a hectic intellectual effort, he transcended the limits of Einstein’s mind and felt himself take the next powerful step in the evolution of human nature. Crowhurst later repeated exactly the same format in a wild contemplation of the nature of God.

In this “mindless” practice of identification, Crowhurst grafted onto his root-stock delusion (“I am brave”), an escalating series of displacements (“I am”): “I am brave”/“I am capable of anything”/“I am energy and impulse”/“I am God”/“I am beyond God.” He said, “Now at least man has everything he needs to think like a cosmic being. At the moment it must be true that I am the only man on earth who realizes what this means. It means I can make myself a cosmic being, by my own efforts, but I have to hurry up and get on with it before I die!”

Crowhurst began to play with his newly won understanding and his sense of power over mind, imagination and nature. He calls it “the power of the Gods” and names it “creative abstrac-

tion.” It means he can create universes. “Like nuclear chain reactions in the matter system, our whole system of creative abstraction can be brought to the point of ‘take off’—By writing these words I do signal for the process to begin.”

Now, intoxicated with the power of his mind, Crowhurst achieves a particular form of psychotic freedom and inexorably enters into the stage of being *beyond the law*. As he has transcended the boundaries and regulations that ordinarily limit mind, he also feels he has transcended all other conventions, boundaries and laws as well. They are the laws of lesser beings that bind us all in a “rat race” of competition; they include conventional morality, all systems of human ritual, the rules of language, all secular and cosmic authority. He feels that all laws are shoddy constructions and that he can instantly create and dissolve them. At will, he can enter and exit any universe or “game.” He notes that “complete freedom of choice beyond the reach of any discipline is the meaning of free will,” and declares himself “beyond God.”

This stage of psychotic transformation is typically one of violence. Violence is justified because there is no higher authority than oneself. Because he feels in full command, violence is possible in the service of a truth discovered by an empowered “I am.” It is in such a way that Crowhurst excuses himself from the attempt to create a fraudulent voyage, his “sin of deception.”

The next stage ushers Crowhurst into a final episode of transformation that leads to death. He experiences “perplexity . . . a dark uneasy feeling . . . in the pit of my stomach.” This represents the beginning of the “natural history” of psychotic states of mind, to plummet into paranoia, on the verge of “complete freedom.”⁵ What Crowhurst alludes to, for us, is the microstructure of paranoia, the stage of *conflicting commands*. He says, “I was annoyed with the cosmic beings. Something was going wrong.” A cryptic note refers to the “anguish of a cosmic being.” Then imagery appears: “tentacles reaching out at me from the depths of the sea.” Aggression begins to color his perception, including the perception of thought itself.

He is experiencing the whiplash effect of aggression. It is as in a dream, where the interrupting or awakening outside stimulus is engulfed by and woven into the dream drama in the imagery of persecutors.⁶

The persecution that psychotic people begin to feel at this stage is a personification of their own doubt, a doubt that has been ignored and aggressively cut short with the increasing speed of mind. For Crowhurst, there came the inescapable revenge of his mind. That doubt which he tried to obliterate was an indestructible aspect of his mind, a sign of his basic intelligence. It sometimes makes itself known in the only transfigured forms allowable: hallucinations of images, voices and feeling states. They demand attention. Again, it is as in a nightmare, where the persecutors become more insistent the more one tries to ignore them. That is to say, doubt eventually returns even if it has to clothe itself in the animated images of fear.

Nevertheless, we find Crowhurst continually rising above his moments of fear, each time with a new proclamation of glory and achievement. This is the switch-out, the switching mechanism, backing off from despair. It is a period of tremendous compression, his thoughts running wild in what he sees as an awesome birth process. He says, "by this process I have become a second generation cosmic being. I am conceived in the womb of nature in my own mind. Then I too have a problem. I must move the bulk of mankind in the right direction at once." A moment of peace is followed by a moment of rude awakening.

He awakes from sleep thinking it is morning but sees the moon low over the horizon. At that point he literally confuses the sun and the moon. He believes he sees the moon setting in the sky, when actually it is the sun rising. He quickly calculates the time from his charts and comes up with an absurd number. He comes back to his senses. In an instant all his previous calculations about himself and the universe dissolve into doubt. It is a situation in the middle of the third predicament, unspeakable "groundlessness."

Everything begins to move more quickly than before. Welcome-home boats are about to rendezvous with him. "How

could he, Crowhurst, the supremely precise calculator, the beautiful shining instrument that now knew the innermost secrets of time, have made such a culpable error? And at a time when he was caught up in the ticking movements of his clocks, counting down the seconds towards the moment when he must become a cosmic being?" Then, the words appear in his logbook, in disgust, with a thick pencil:

"MAX POSS ERROR."

Now begins the last ninety minutes of Crowhurst's life and his last daredevil attempt—in his characteristic style—to force the issue, to force circumstance.

He had come to his senses; that is, suddenly he could discriminate between dream and not-dream. A shadow of doubt fell on all that had gone before. But Crowhurst did not linger on this point. He dismissed it in a moment and sat down to force the issue of his enlightenment, by ejecting his purified consciousness out of the body, into space. He carefully ruled a logbook and, in the next hour and a half made notations as to his state of being, logging it like a weather report approximately every seventy seconds.

Thus begins yet another spiritual journey for Crowhurst and a final attempt at "switch-out." He has given himself a deadline and has thrown himself into a final predicament in the same way that he talks about the leap of a porpoise embodying a crucial instant of commitment to action and then a point of no return. It is at such points that Crowhurst has recognized his bravery and has confidently put himself to the test.

He quickly reasserts a successive series of identification, "I am brave . . . I am the truth . . . I am the exact." He continues writing with full conviction as if to say, "I am enlightened and what you are reading is exactly how I did it." He now is working constantly, to cut his doubt about his final "I am." He is determined to ride the "impulse" of his own "will." He is at the point of saying, "I am impulse, pure energy, one who by pure effort could become whatever one thinks." And he gives himself until twelve noon to do it. By such one-pointed concen-

tration he drove himself to the verge of absorption states of mind.

COUNTDOWN

Crowhurst had “come to,” woken up out of a fit, as out of a fit of rage, a fit of passion, or a fit of any kind: epileptic, catatonic, concussion or any loss of conscious awareness. We could say that within a moment Crowhurst spontaneously recovered from his psychotic period. It is not unheard of. In fact, it happens in the midst of psychosis all the time—a small island of doubt and clarity that is quickly covered over by the surging hope of transformation, the effort to be someone else.

Now, with human time running out, Crowhurst sat down face to face with his chronometer, to record the moment-to-moment movements of his mind, this being all that he had left to work with. It is the final stage of *death and rebirth*. He writes, “. . . reason for system to minimize error/to go/remove experience/barometer pressure on the move.” He will proceed to have “realization” after realization, all recorded in the terse, condensed poetry of those who are about to die. This was not some headlong sloppy suicide. It was Crowhurst’s final attempt to bring his mind to a peak point of pressure, thereby crystallizing his intelligence in an unyielding countdown to death. He wrote about beginning to understand how to press on with this awesome task.

Within the first fifteen minutes, one of the notes indicates that he has identified his major obstacle: “. . .my folly gone ‘forward’ in imagination.” He sees that each moment of “hesitation” leads to an imaginative sidetrack and within two minutes after beginning to speculate and ramble he writes, “. . . right, sorry waste of time.” He continues, “. . . if game to put everything back? where is back?” He is struggling with the meaning of life, time and death.

He continues in his characteristic style, despair rebounding into insight. He has begun to feel that he had set himself an

“impossible task” and he rebounds on to a new tack to “free himself from the need to be blown by a cosmic mind.” Then, after struggling to find the “perfect way” he declares, “I am what I am, and I see the nature of my offense.” He begins to ramble about the singularity of his revelation but abruptly cuts it short with the words, “it is finished . . . it is finished . . . IT IS THE MERCY.” Even seeking the truth had become another kind of game and all that was left was to unhesitatingly live out the force of circumstances. In his final words he attempts to reassert another peak of freedom: “I will play this game when I choose. I will resign this game 11-20-40. There is no reason for harmful.”

Throughout the countdown, Crowhurst was on the edge of losing his mind. The tendency of his mind to wander was profound. He escalated the pressure of mind and circumstance at the same time and attempted once again to drive himself into a stage of insight and power. He thought he could do it sanely this time. But he recognized that he could not rouse himself by his own willpower to reach the stage of beyond the law. The only law that he felt he discovered was that of the indestructible linkage of cause and effect.

He wanted us to be able to say that his work, his task and his feat were brilliant, and he carefully left his record as an invitation for us to get inside his mind. But nothing really happened. He exited his life in the same way he had lived it. Before he had set sail, nine months before, he had left a tender and ominous letter to his wife in which he said, “. . . whatever happens you can be certain I did not spend my last moments paralyzed with fear.” Eight days after Crowhurst began his countdown, his boat was found empty and adrift.

THE URGE TO TRANSFORM

All psychotic transformation is a desire leading one to death. Not every attempt at psychotic transformation will have the linear compactness and apparent suddenness of Donald Crow-

hurst's, but if one goes through two or three or more psychotic episodes such as this one, each awakening from the dream and nightmare of psychosis is more devastating than the last. One wakes up, looks around, and unlike the dream when asleep, one has to take responsibility for the actions and reactions committed during the delusion. One feels at that point like King Lear, who recognizes that he has made a monstrosity out of his life and that his authority, and even his love, were destructive to other people. At such a point, people frequently say, "I am getting out of this before I do more harm."

It is not just that the consequences of psychosis lead to death, but also that death itself is inherent in the urge to transformation. Because death is the undercurrent of the pleasure and the freedom being courted in the psychotic transformation, it requires the death and eventual freedom from the body, from relationship to the world, and from the workings of one's mind.

The body in psychosis is in transition. It begins to manifest a variety of possibilities. Sometimes, it is felt to be a spiritual body, a purified body, an invisible body, a body of the other sex, an inanimate body, a machine—a new body, endowed with new characteristics and possibilities far beyond the confines of the body left behind. This is a hard-won transformation following an intensely painful struggle within the body itself. It is sometimes experienced as a war, a revolution, an agonizing gestation, or a titanic struggle between the forces of good and evil, a power struggle between one's degraded humanness and the sacred forces of nature. At first, one's body feels tortured in being selected as the arena of such a battle. Then one is either blessed with orgasmic sensations that herald a transformation or the body is destroyed and one begins to identify with the living dead. The blessed body is short-lived and it is grieved for. Nevertheless, it remains the reference point and hope for all further life.

Psychotic communication or relationship to the world is also a vehicle of the urge for transformation. One's language, perceptual contact with the world, and the projection of mean-

ing, represent the same fundamental aggression: that is, to be someone else or to be somewhere else. The quality of psychotic language or interchange with the environment is a continually changing reflection of the different stages of the psychotic predicament. There appears a pressure of speech that indicates something intensely important is happening, and it is filled with multiple meanings and a hunt for messages and coincidences that confirm and further the transformation. Sometimes it is like the highly condensed speech of dreams, where words become elements of a stage set intended to create the atmosphere of a total drama. Eventually, words become the fabric of delusion, woven together out of symbols, messages, and memories that begin to clothe the world into a single coherent story about oneself at the center of the universe. Crowhurst began to speak like a "cosmic being." Others speak in "tongues," or highly cryptic messages as mediums for powers beyond themselves. It is a purified speech, more urgent and important than their own. Sometimes that speech is proclamatory and one assumes the role of an insistent prophet.

But a struggle occurs within speech in the same way as it does with the body. The speech which at first was so fearless and confident becomes riddled with conflict and fear. As doubt returns, there occurs a struggle between inner speech and outer speech. It often appears in the conflicting demands that make their appearance in auditory hallucinations. Then, all communications may become paralyzed. Complete muteness may become the effort of reconciliation between the gift of higher speech and the tendency of the impure, degraded speech that represents oneself.

The language and communication of autistic, psychotic children is yet another variety of speech in the service of transformation. At first, language is seen to be ineffective, confusing, and filled with a hypocrisy that makes it unutterable. Eventually speech itself becomes an object of mockery. One's internal dialogue is besieged with oscillating contradictions. The speech of others becomes permeated with disguise and threat, and speech in general becomes a weapon that might be

dangerous to oneself or harmful to others. Outwardly, such a child abandons speech altogether and assumes the stubborn position of animal speech—more basic, fundamental and pure than human speech—using the utterance of echo, gesture, and display. Inwardly and secretly, speech is being created anew from the bits and pieces of conventional language and symbols to create a private world in which a tenaciously transformed self continually triumphs over the fear of annihilation.

Psychotic speech, whether it be internal or external, private or public, is always to another. One feels specially “chosen” and thus obligated to speak, sometimes to preach, sometimes not to speak at all. There is a great variety of these “others” even within a single psychotic experience. They might manifest as “spirits,” as animated personifications of the energies of the natural world, or as messengers or agents of higher powers.

The most general sense of other, however, is in the form of an eternal lover. One person might call it “queen of the galaxy” who strikes like lightning to produce pleasure or pain. Another person calls it the “dead father” who oversees, guides and controls, and whose return is awaited in the form of a lover or savior. At times it is God or Satan, or any number of people who are thinly disguised appearances of those who were supplicated for help.

But whoever it is and in whatever form they assume, the relationship with “other” has a quality of bondage. At some point, the other demands self-surrender, devotion, and unhesitating obedience to the letter of its will. It may become a master-slave relationship, where the master requires loyalty of action under the threat of withdrawal of protection and love. The slave then strives for the perfection of self-surrender, by the painful renunciation of all self-willed activity. But the slave cannot help himself. He always finds himself in some process of revolt or indiscretion. In some situations of intensive psychotherapy, the therapist comes to be seen as the miraculously created “other” and the drama of the original predicament begins to be recapitulated.

In the same way, Donald Crowhurst was involved with a variety of others even though his situation cut him off from any genuine relationship. In his logs and journals he slid from one object to another: from the bravado of public address, to a select gathering of his supporters, his wife, himself in the process of transition, his dead father and mother, to "everyone," and then to the principle of truth itself . . . incarnate as a god, who was "master of the game" of life.

Even though all his objects are embraced in the service of further transformation, the megalomaniac switch-out has within it the seed of compassionate impulses. This is always a subtle but intensely meaningful quality of all megalomaniac episodes and of psychological conversions in general. In the early phases of a psychotic predicament, one has lost the sense of personal honor and one's heartfelt connection with the world is severed. But these are regained within the switch-out, and one's formerly frozen compassion is liberated in triumphant messianic outpourings. This joy is an important aspect of transformation. One is transformed and can thus complete a necessary act, perhaps even heal the world.

Psychotic mind in its rapid transitional states remains the basic instigator and impetus of transformation. Mind wanders with increasing speed as the gaps of doubt are overridden. Then, there is intense fascination and absorption in the sliding speed of thought. There occurs a progressive disjunction of mind and body, an unhinging of mind and environment. One feels that one is breaking through the barrier of the thought processes that had been so rigidly confining. With increasing intoxication in the newfound powers of mind, insights appear like fireworks and revelations. It is at such a point that one claims to have attained "freedom." Psychotic mind declares, "Whatever I think, I can become." Psychotic self-transformation is made complete in the free play and manipulation of delusions and it is fully confirmed by the sensation of mental pleasure. Inevitably, there occurs a "maximum possible error." It is then that the urge to transformation can be seen for what it

is—a fundamental aggression against oneself, the ground of psychosis.

RECOVERY

The story of Donald Crowhurst is a gruesome one but when we intimately study the bare facts of psychotic experience and the stages of transformation it becomes possible to think in terms of stages of recovery. The stages of recovery can only be understood from the experiences of those who have actually recovered. But one thing is clear. Recovery can only take place within the context of a sane environment, an environment of compassion and appreciation which can permit the unwinding of the stages of transformation. Otherwise, recovery is extremely rare.

Obviously, no one should be left alone in a psychotic predicament. When we understand the nature of the predicament, whether it be in children, or adults, there is a simplicity and straightforwardness to it that allows us to extricate another from the necessity of switch-out. We begin to recognize that someone is “in trouble” when his sense of existence or character is beginning to be challenged and overwhelmed by the forces of circumstance that the character has created.

Beyond that, we can organize the unstable nature of the experience of groundlessness. When we relate intimately and precisely to such people, we find the experience of groundlessness constantly recycling. Furthermore, there can be an exit from it in either of two directions: ordinary disillusionment or psychotic switch-out. Within an impending psychosis or its continuous recycling, there are innumerable experiences of spontaneous awakening, or maximum possible error. When that is acknowledged within an ongoing relationship, communication can be open and direct. Even though those small islands of awareness may be quickly covered up, they gradually begin to accumulate and string together in a way that allows for a genuinely sane relationship to occur, side by side with, or

beyond, the experience of delusion. Eventually, one may be more attracted to the richness of an awake relationship and begin to shift allegiance away from the world of delusion.

When we begin to see the propulsive aspect of the predicament and the urge to transform, the typical psychotic practices of wild identification and cutting doubt become more apparent. In many ways, these practices can be slowed down within the spaciousness of a relationship that will allow the ordinary function of doubt to make its appearance without being ignored or seized upon. When the manifestations of doubt are simply accommodated they can be seen clearly as moments of awakening and do not have to eventually return in the images of fear, struggle and conflict. Because of this, the stages of transformation become less forcibly linked to each other, and become only transient experiences.

If one is already enmeshed in the transformative delusion, there remain two aspects which maintain a fragile connection with real human relatedness: appreciation of the insights into the nature of mind that arise during the psychosis, and appreciation of the compassionate impulses which become distorted into megalomania. Within the delusion itself, phenomena are seen to dissolve into new phenomena. There are shock waves of clarity where one recognizes that the phantasmagoric play of projections has created a private universe that is utterly unreal. All of one's convictions, beliefs and perceptions are experienced as unendingly hollow. This recognition might be devastating, but it need not be. With the help of another, it can be seen as a dream that one can refuse to enter or from which one can come and go. What is left are the hidden and tender impulses toward others that have always been embedded within the megalomaniac delusion. They can be appreciated and acknowledged when they subtly make their appearance within the therapeutic relationship, and because of that there is a further invitation to shift one's allegiance to health.

In his brief recovery from madness, King Lear discovered that he must live his life with courage and with patience. It is a tragedy that that dawning recognition did not occur to him

sooner. In much the same way, Donald Crowhurst became one of the multitude of the minor tragedies of madness, of those who would be kings and queens.

NOTES

1. M. Foucault, ed., *A Case of Parricide in the 19th Century* (New York: Random House, 1975), chapter entitled "I, Pierre Riviere. . ."
2. The data that is processed throughout this article comes from the excellent work of N. Toralin and R. Hall, *The Strange Last Voyage of Donald Crowhurst* (New York: Stein and Day, 1970). They have reported and reviewed the massive amount of detailed information that Donald Crowhurst left behind, so that his tracks could be followed. All quotations are from their work unless otherwise specified.
3. This event was reported only in a survey article: G. Bennet, "Psychological Breakdown at Sea: Hazards and Singlehanded Ocean Sailing," *Br. J. Med. Psychol.*, 47 (1974).
4. Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* (Berkeley: Shambhala Press, 1973).
5. See E. Podvoll, "Psychotic States of Mind," in *Naropa Institute Journal of Psychology*, ed. E. Podvoll (Boulder, CO: Prajna Press, 1980).
6. See S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: Basic Books, 1955). Especially examples of the dream dramas that are woven around interrupting outside stimuli.