

MAJOR ORDEALS OF PSYCHOTIC MIND

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This excerpt is a draft of the fourth chapter of a book called *Intelligence Running Wild: Psychosis and the Means for Recovery*, by Dr. Podvoll, to be published by Harper and Row, New York. References to characters and events from the first three chapters of the book are clarified in footnotes. [Editor's note]

“Rare indeed are the madmen equal to madness.”

Henri Michaux

I. RADICAL EXCHANGE

It is definitely possible to be of great use to someone in psychosis without knowing the almost unbearable details of the apparatus of their minds. Even children and elderly people—scarcely suspecting the complexity of the psychotic experience—through kind and intimate relationships, have been known to give comfort to people lost in psychosis. As much as such comfort and respite is a blessing to someone in the pain of psychosis, they are not sufficient to counteract the powerful tendency of psychosis to reproduce and recycle itself. Until the person in psychosis can *recognize for himself* the roots of the wild and exaggerated mental events that intrigue and come to dominate him, he will be subject to continuing cycles of seduction, confusion, and despair. Discovering the means for such recognition is what this chapter is about.

Ultimately, recovery depends on how much a person in psychosis is both willing and capable of relating precisely to the details of his mind, on his own, alone with his experience. Only this kind of precise observation can reveal the cause and effect of the mental events from which that person suffers. To demonstrate this we must turn the microscope into higher power and examine the movements and energies of psychotic mind—micro-movements and micro-energies. This will lead to a little-known depth of psychotic suffering and another magnification, or a “blow-up” of intelligence running wild.

Historically, among those who have cared for people in psychosis many have attempted to penetrate the mind of insanity in order to gain knowledge of it beyond a fleeting empathy, a momentary identification or simple exchange of feelings. They have attempted a “radical exchange” with mad people; they have tried to ingest madness within themselves, and to suffer some of its consequences for the purpose of intimately knowing its hidden ordeals. Some people attempted it out of compassion, in order to be of greater help. Some have done it out of a passionate curiosity to simply explore and know mind in its depths.

There have been a number of mishaps. A professor of chemistry in Leipzig in the early 1900s, Dr. Emil Staudmaier, insisted on knowing the mind of madness from the inside out. He trained himself in “practices” of deranging his mind, ones similar to those used by all the characters of the previous chapters; that is, he did everything he could to intensify his imagination to the point of hallucination. In the end Staudmaier became hopelessly insane, caught in an uncontrollable and seamless web of imagination. Eventually he recovered from his overly-ambitious experiment and described to us how *not* to engage psychotic mind.¹

Other explorers of madness have been naive about the hazards of using hallucinogenic drugs in their researches. As early as 1936, it is reported that a Dr. Morelli performed a remark-

able experiment on himself but, "after taking 0.75 gr. of mescaline he experienced such a furious onslaught of perverse impulses that he had to take refuge in a sanitarium."² In France there had already been a long tradition of poets, artists, and scientists who had experimented with mind-altering drugs. Baudelaire and Rimbaud are well-known examples, but perhaps the most notorious of all is the dramatist Antonin Artaud, a legendary figure in the Surrealist movement. In 1936 Artaud lived with the Tarahumara Indians in Mexico and participated in their elaborate religious rites of taking peyote. It was he who coined the term "metempsychosis," referring to the knife-edge of psychosis that one may experience with a hallucinogen.³ But, on his return to Paris, he became increasingly disturbed and spent the next several years in psychiatric hospitals, eventually dying in one of them.

The controlled experiments with mescaline conducted by Henri Michaux are perhaps the most successful in the field of hallucinogenic-drug research. This French poet and artist died in 1984 at the age of eighty-five and the record that he left of his ten years (1957—c.1966) of experimentation with mescaline is prodigious. During his studies he precisely described through essays, poetry, drawings, and paintings, the miseries, joys, and meaning of the hallucinogenic experience and, most importantly of all, its relationship to madness. In over half a century of sustained work Michaux produced seventy-eight publications and many hundreds of drawings and paintings. Thirty-six of his books were written after he began his work with mescaline (and other drugs), and nine of them specifically explore the nature of psychosis as it is revealed by the hallucinogens.

In spite of his stature in French letters, very little is known of Michaux's personal life. To the outside world he was always something of an enigma and his friends loyally protected his desire for anonymity. Other than his artistic and scientific

work, he is mostly known for being reclusive, a “loner.” Photographs of him are rare. But here is one description:

The eyes are Belgian—a pale steely almost arctic blue. The shoulders wide, surprisingly. Under them the walk, the open-at-the-collar bell-bottomed manner of a man who has spent most of his early life at sea; with something added—in a bald mass of pate and probing needlelike nose—that suggests less the sailor than a wise and penetrating seagull.⁴

Andre Gide celebrated him in a book called *Discovering Henri Michaux* as early as 1941, but then there followed twenty years of being largely unappreciated and sometimes scorned by literary critics. Mostly, the critics called him eccentric. His writing from the very beginning intimidated people and when he began his studies of hallucinogens, that intimidation grew worse. Some readers found him extremely sparse and private. But he also gathered a small readership (“the 200” he called them) of mostly French artists and writers. Along with his studies on the nature of hallucinogens, he wrote about the recovery from illness, aging, dreaming, children’s drawings, creativity, and the contemplative experience. All of these are unique and profound contributions to psychological knowledge yet unfortunately, they have gone largely unknown.

Here, Michaux’s inner journey of the “hallucinogenic experience” is used as a method of magnification and of radical exchange. It has been claimed that this experience can, among other things, give one a taste of madness itself, as well as a glimpse into its underworld. It is also well-known that this kind of intimacy with the wellsprings of psychotic mind can be both frightening and dangerous. Nevertheless, a certain willingness to take risks, along with a knowledge and training in relating to *the basic awareness always available even during mental crisis*, makes it possible to prudently engage in a radical exchange. It is certainly not being recommended that individuals who work with people in psychosis should take “madness-inducing drugs.” However, what has been learned from those who have performed such experimentation is of vital importance because a

precise understanding of the hallucinogenic experience can be a key to unlocking the nature of psychotic mind.

Michaux's work with hallucinogenic chemicals are not really comparable to those which have been written about before or since. He brought an uncommon knowledge and discipline to what he experienced. Prior to his experiments and even during them, he trained himself in the disciplines of yoga and Buddhist sitting meditation practice. He became stalwart and courageous in facing himself without distraction. Thus, Michaux approached the drug-induced state from what could be called a "contemplative" point of view; he was accustomed to being alone, practiced in observing states of mind, and had precise control and poetic expression of language.

In the Western world, he was one of the great cosmonauts of the hallucinogenic experience, a field of knowledge considered sacred for thousands of years by some traditional cultures. In 1956 at the age of fifty-seven, he began his explorations of hallucinogens as the drugs were becoming known and available in Europe. At that time, it became public knowledge that hallucinogenic healing traditions were actively flourishing in Mesoamerica. In an article for *Life* magazine, the mycologist R. Gordon Wasson told of his experiences with a Mazatec lineage of psilocybine mushroom-healers.⁵ Wasson's collaborator, also a world authority on hallucinogenic mushrooms, introduced Michaux to psilocybine. Thus, Michaux became familiar with the ancient spiritual tradition of using hallucinogens for healing purposes and he treated the drugs with an unusual respect.

Very quickly during his "controlled" drug derangements, Michaux made an unsettling discovery. There was virtually no symptom or sign of psychosis which he could not witness within himself under the influence of a hallucinogen. He observed that every possible disorder of mind was deeply, almost lurk-ingly, available within himself. This was an extraordinary realization. Undoubtedly, it troubled him. He observed people

in psychosis: in the hospitals, in their homes, in their letters. He noted their fragility, their arrogance, their fear, withdrawal, despair, secret raptures, mutism, stubbornness, pride in hallucination, and so on and he realized that all this could be (and would be) activated within himself by the drug. In fact, it could probably be activated in anyone!

Once, when Michaux accidentally ingested an excessively large dose of mescaline, it became apparent to him that there was probably no one who didn't have the latent capability to become insane. Certainly, all his observations indicated that everyone possesses the necessary psychological equipment. This is not an idea that pleases most people. But this finding is the reason why Michaux could talk of madmen as "brothers," and why he came to spend so much of his life and energy in trying to explain the ordeals of people in psychosis by uncovering the universal elements of insanity, "what is basic to human beings and what is abnormal." (MO 13)

The realization that psychosis may be an ever-present possibility in the human condition seems to trigger an instinctive fear and dread in many. John Perceval⁶ urgently tried to call attention to this singular fear because he witnessed it in all of his caretakers and he felt that it was having profound consequences on the way insane people were being treated and would always be treated. At the turn of the century William James said something similar and no one liked it then, either.⁷ This fear of "losing control" of one's mind causes a great resistance to any kind of exchange, or identification, or genuine empathy for a person in psychosis. From that has stemmed the neglect, therapeutic aggression, and the many impersonal theories of treatment that are now so prevalent.

Henri Michaux knew this fear acutely, yet he managed to accomplish the ordeal of a radical exchange: he witnessed the dormant seeds and earliest stirrings of madness, each of its embryonic forms, spring forth and proliferate through his mind, as the drug ripped through his body. His experiments

were not easy. At the height of his first mescaline experience he wrote 150 pages of notations: "during all those incredible hours, I find these words written more than fifty times, clumsily, and with difficulty: *Intolerable, Unbearable.*" (MM 7)

What follows is a collage of Michaux's deeply personal "journals" of hallucinogenic experiences, a record of microscopic observations of mind-tracking-mind. It can be considered clinical "case material" in the sense that it is a rare description of mental phenomena told by the subject himself. Its quality of excessiveness and repetition represents a painful experience of psychosis itself. This kind of documentation frequently draws a variety of reactions that can obstruct one's exchange and understanding: it is *only* a drug experience; or, it is merely one individual's idiosyncratic reaction; or, it is coming from a disturbed character. As with all such clinical descriptions it is best to avoid analysis and interpretation, and for the moment, let it stand on its own.

II. ANCIENT MISERIES

The following experience occurred on a summer evening at his Paris apartment near the railroad station. The apartment is cluttered with books, musical scores, and drawing materials.

He settles himself in. Preparations, precautions are taken: he makes his apartment orderly, a vague sense of protecting his environment. Friends who know what he is doing are "on call," who could be reached by a device so that he did not have to dial the phone at a time when he might not be able to, because of forgetfulness or panic or worse. Tranquilizers are at hand. So are fresh oranges for their revival power.

He rouses his intention, "to observe, to observe at all costs." Books and pictures are placed to act as reminders, as flashes of wakefulness or symbolic guidances during the deluge—accessible inspiration for when the bottom drops out. He knows that at the bottom will be his "concentration," or

something like that, which needs to be held steady in order to bear witness; because surely he will not be able to control the contents of his mind. It will not tolerate control, it will not be *his* mind to control.

In an atmosphere of razor-like apprehension he takes the drug. Once again, how to decide on the dosage?—an irrevocable turning point. He knows that he is in dangerous territory. He knows that the ancient peyote priests of Mexico began their “medicine” ceremonies, after fasting and continence, with a prayer to protect themselves against madness. There is no going back: once you take a bite of the center of the earth, it cannot be undone, you are stuck with it.

The drug moves through him, feeling him, caressing at first, then moving audaciously, shamelessly into private parts; invasion, taking possession, becoming one with the life of every cell. And vibrating, singing in unison, proclaiming a song of victory, its ancient ritual of terrible cleansing.

He attempts to make no resistance. He tries to open himself, to let the drug run freely through him in unknown channels, which at the same time, the drug is shaping, carving out, and vitalizing. He knows by now that his task is to relax his mind. But it finds him out: it begins to hunt and ransack (soon it will vandalize) every blockage and hesitation, every secret holding place and terror spot.

All of this first happens in his body and is soon to be followed in his mind. His fluids are saturated, he is drenched in the lust of the drug. He is theirs! Whose? Does he even want to find out?...

The beginnings of “thought disorder” are born from countless bodily “shatterings.” All the ordinary “connections” are being ravaged. He is being re-connected, re-wired. A sudden insight: “thought disorder” stands revealed as thought re-ordering.

.....

What we know of the nervous system cannot account for what is about to happen: "A shock zone has been entered." It is called the *second state*. We are entering into a different area of the mind-body connection, perhaps an area of the more "primitive nervous system." Here, the structure of the brain is close to the structure of thinking; where they mutually affect each other; where mental activity is creating structure or arousing latent structure; where pathways are activated which require mental stimulation to be awakened and become functional. He who takes the drug, the one who is being deranged or derailed, can actually *see* all of this—if he does not panic, in the face of what may seem to be a run-away brain and wild mind.

The soft whistling of the wind becomes inseparable from an inner shivering. Then a prickling sensation as if cells were in convulsion. There is a scintillation in the visual field, a herald of the "retinal circus" to follow. A vibration, not violent, more of a humming or "zinging," and sometimes several different vibrations are felt not only in the body, but *everywhere*: objects vibrating and singing to the point where they intensify into crystal. Everything is becoming fragile and excruciatingly precious.

Undulations begin. Out of microscopic swells, waves emerge and break loose. Images come in waves, *riding* the waves; and waves of thought, thoughts moulded by the waves. He feels in the grip of undulations as strange slow rhythms become established in his body: "It is as though one had another heart whose systole and diastole occurred fifteen or twenty times an hour." (LD 1) Wind, shivering, scintillation, vibration, undulation, primordial rhythm—a new tempo is being installed in him. And it begins to *accelerate*.

The brain is palpable. He *feels* the wave-forms: they change from the smoothly flowing sinusoid to jagged tiger-tooth waves. They transect him: "The lines, the lines, the diabolical lines of dismemberment!" -- undulations running "from one

end of the universe to the other.” (“Between the lines of the universe, a microbe is caught.”) He feels that he is being “*infinitized*.”

The waves become visual; not “pictures” of waves, but waves attached to images, waves clothed and dramatized by visions and ungraspable ancient memories. He is the waves, he is nothing but waves. All his mental images are pulsed by the waves, im-pulsed and pro-pulsed by the waves. Huge sheets of color, oceans of color—colors which he always avoids—are there. The images are captivating. He is losing control over his ability to will a thought, or even to force a thought. An unearthly *speed* has taken hold, beyond him, on and off like an alternating current, sweeping him into insane hurricanes of thought. Bombardments of thoughts.

What were the contents of his thoughts? It is impossible to say: they were of every variety, every quality and tone, ceaselessly moving through like flashes of lightning. Mescaline plays his emotional keyboard, *its* own tune, shrilly, sometimes discordantly, hitting every note, as if testing him, seeing how much he can take. Perhaps also tuning him? Tuning him for *what*? He dare not think.

Immediately, it is there! The full drama of what he had just refused to imagine: in full regalia, in *excessive* ornamentation. He sees the over-theatricality of someone’s (whose?) hands gesticulating toward him as in an Italian opera. The entire vision, lasting only a moment, nothing more than a “visual metaphor” of expanding and contracting rhythms, and still evolving.

And then it is gone. Vanished! Never to return:

each instant is formed, is completed, caves in, is remade in a new instant which takes shape, which is formed, which attains its fulfillment, which caves in and is remade in a new instant which takes shape, which is formed, which is completed, which bows down and is linked to the following which announces its appearance, which takes shape, which is formed, which is completed, which shrivels up and dies in the following, which is born, which rises up, which gives way and blends with the following, which comes along and sets itself up, develops and joins on to the following...which is formed, and so it goes end-

lessly, without losing speed, inexhaustibly, unmarked by accident, monumentally pursuing its wild perfection.(IT 61)

He suffers from strange discontinuities:

they left no trace. As soon as one had passed, it vanished into nothingness, leaving nothing behind it, neither in the two or ten seconds of 'immediate' memory, nor during the tiniest fraction of a second...There was no duration. It all streamed past me without my grasping it, without my being able to grasp it—in any manner...Absolute nonfixation.(MO 41)

Tremendous *speed* is the signature of "manic consciousness." Michaux had gone truly mad once, when he unknowingly overdosed on mescaline, taking six times more than he would have allowed himself. Then, the "pace" of thought was not merely accelerated, but *madly accelerated*, where the difficulties become insurmountable. He literally didn't know if his nervous system could take it, if the wiring wouldn't blow out: "It is the exertion of stress on his thinking, of which he is incapable, which is the main cause of his ordeals."

He is a man beside himself; "he" is everyman who has ever been intoxicated in this whirlwind of speed.

He sees thoughts operating by themselves. Suddenly, one of them prevails...digressions, side-thoughts; he cannot recapture a thought just passed, nor follow it; nor will the next thoughts follow in line; the speed of disappearance, the speed of appearance...increasingly disconnected from the first thought which he nevertheless continues to aim at...trying to rid himself of intruding thoughts, which inexorably bring a new digression...(IT 121)

And when thoughts are "madly accelerated" the *oppositions* begin: waves of contradiction, leading to seizures of doubt and ambivalence. All this born of an instantaneous and electrical polarization:

They pass at full speed, each of them affirmative at one moment, negative the next...Thoughts that occur in alternating, almost spasmodic oppositions. Shattered and shattering thoughts, thoughts which madden him, which he goes mad trying to follow, to correct, to reconstruct, to slow down, to unite, to make even, to make final, to make intelligible, to make tranquilizing and sound in spite of everything, thoughts on which he could still lean...(LD 162) He is no longer between two possible solutions, but in a mechanism of oscillations. A hundred times in a single minute he can see, now one pole, now the other, at a rigorously unchanging speed, without being able by groping to modify the 'lightning' in the slightest, or to imagine, even for a moment, a compromise between these two categorically clear-cut and opposed forms, an

ambivalence which will have no end, from which any conclusion is excluded.(LD 166)

He remains fixed in his armchair, unable to move, unblinking, unflinchingly watching the spectacle:

Just as the images then often appear paired, according to a rigorous, elementary, exaggerated, spontaneous, almost mechanical, and insanely repeated symmetry, the thoughts came in pairs, one provoking the other, one invoking the other (either similar or analogous, or antagonistic). Strange pairs they are, each thought with its contrary, the yes with the no, the pro with the contra, affirmation with negation, and if they were not too long, thesis with antithesis...evident effects of a doubtless normal function which maintains thought under tension, but at this moment, incredibly exaggerated and multiplied, distressing and useless, distracting and driving to perpetual indecision, a phenomenon of irreconcilable contradiction which endlessly returns to the charge, incessantly traumatizing...permitting us to understand the ravages it can make in a schizophrenic, as it sets up an insoluble ambivalence, expressions of the hell of an irreducible antagonism, experienced with no chance of ever escaping from it, either by progressing beyond it or by a final affirmation.(MO 16)

He looks into a mirror and is horrified to see a haunted face and, "The grave calmness of someone who is responsible for a dangerous maniac."(MM 66) He sees the behavior of madmen with new eyes: "If ever, I kept telling myself, if ever I recover my capacities, I must write in their name."(MO 37)

But writing has now become impossible. The agitation is too great, and it is all extremely personal, intimate. It is about one's self: self-deceptions, pride, conceit, sense of stain, lack of confidence, presumptions, anticipations; everything that he does to elaborate and "embroider," everything he thought he was, hoped to be or feared—all this is being shredded, *torn down*, as "he" watches like a homeless person seeing his makeshift dwelling being dismantled.

So this is the true beginning of mescaline madness, a caricature of all madneses: "Caught, not by anything human, but in a frenzied mechanical agitator...held prisoner in a mad workshop of the brain."(MM 63)

Suddenly, he wonders, has he really taken a drug? He gets up to check on the empty package, sits down, gets up to check again, and again. Beforehand, in his "normal state," he had set out oranges, as he always did, a natural antidote he felt, for

critical moments or “chasm situations” such as now. Wearily, he eats an orange. He looks at the clock: about one and one half hours have passed since taking the drug and entering the “second state.”

But years, hundreds of years pass in a moment.

He thought there was a remission, so to speak, but it was only a lull. “It” begins to churn. Dynamic pulsings of opposites, anti-thesisizing, pulverizing, atomizing: “the ‘yes’ and the ‘no’ pass back and forth, now the one, now the other, without gradations, unpremeditated, with the regularity of a motor piston.” (LD 6) Once again, he is “man in the presence of his motor.”

These are the *micro-operations* of this motor: speed, acceleration, and oppositions, and there will be many more to come. Each idea or belief becomes a center of energy—a pulsing machine, and it lashes out from there:

as if all the mind asked was to function much, much faster than usual, to function at perhaps its *‘free’ speed*, that of nightmares (estimated at fifty times faster than normal) the speed that is born in seconds in the mind of the drowning, the speed that occurs sometimes in the dying and causes delirium.(MM 87)

The micro-operations continue. A coat is lying on a chair: but he looks again and finds a slender young girl sitting upright, waiting. He corrects the mistake easily. But the next time he looks—there is no doubt, the chair is “occupied.” The same happens with a crumpled piece of paper on the desk. An orange skin on the plate arises as a “pre-being,” an “about-to-be.” And again the chair, which on the third sighting: “this time I cannot keep from becoming a woman.”

General animation on all sides, objects and limbs of animals, a kinetic debauchery, streak past me as they shoot across the visual screen...Possessed by the animate, by the extreme, the *infernal animate*, all I can attribute to anything is the animate, that extreme animate whose excess maddens me, and which I am forced to project, which I will project over everything unexpected which comes into sight. An object is a presence, primarily presence, and from presence, what demented movement might not ensue?(MO 51)

He watches as objects, even thoughts, spring to disturbing life, becoming beings and faces, a multiplication of presences, who watch *him*; echoing, repeating his words, mimicking him, soon they mock him. "A familiar sign: when you can no longer prevent things, objects, parts of objects from becoming faces, people, beings; or from turning into busts or masks which lie in wait, which will come to life." (MO 52) Whatever the perception—whether of sight, sound, feeling, even the perception of thought—is energy, presence, *movement*: whatever he sees has the capacity for pulsating life; whatever he hears sounds like human (or non-human) voice; whatever he feels is like living flesh; whatever he smells is the odor of a body; whatever he tastes might crawl in his mouth. But most distressingly, whatever he thinks may be someone else's thought.

Instinctive and subconscious micro-operations are being unveiled by the drug. They in turn, reveal the micro-construction of madness:

It is not foolish to say that it is the hallucination which produces madness and not madness which produces the hallucination; it is the dramatized and enacted, performed, hysterical, and unrelenting spectacle which drives mad the person who had only vague things to blame himself for, and perhaps he did not even know what they were. The tremendous and incessant spectacle madens the man who otherwise would be able to endure it. (MO 60)

Perhaps now he should take a tranquilizer, as he sometimes does when he reaches his limit of fear of becoming mad; after all, he has swallowed a "poison." But it is a question that sets off a fusillade of ambivalence.

He watches as it wears itself out. He is like a small boat entering a calm sea.

Emerging from that he discovers (or is shown?) a new meaning to the word "courage," in heroic visions of kindness and valor—each one of which is capable of changing a man's life!—and each one vanishes.

Michaux walks outside to a balcony:

A black sky filled with stars stretched out all around me. I plunged into it. It was extraordinary. Instantaneously stripped of everything as though of an

overcoat, I passed into space. I was projected into it, I flowed into it. I was violently seized by it, irresistibly. Dizzily, I sank upward.(MO 92)

At “full speed”:

A tidal wave which suddenly overwhelms the earth, but it was the sky, the enormous sky which I sovereignly entered. I received the sky and the sky received me. At the same time, I was in an extraordinary expansion. Space turned me into space...In a great many other ways, it came to me. Space was everywhere.(MO 93)

The relentless tearing-down has ceased. There is nothing left to ravage—only an “incorruptible observer” remains. He has entered a *zone* of utter simplicity and stillness:

Relieved of all surroundings, cleansed of all consistency, of all property, of all sense of ownership, incapable of conceiving any possession around me and lacking the preliminary minimum necessary to any attachment, I was in an ecstasy of space.(MO 96)

A completely unexpected “metaphysical rush” begins...once again. It is expansive, it is what all the mystics and saints have talked about. He was a man reunited with his depths, and with all men.

And after that is the alarming process of *re-entry*. Gravity re-asserts its claim on him. He is “falling” into consciousness, into re-consciousness. He witnesses a rare moment of the immediately-after-drug state, the fall into verbalization:

He is going to have a thought. It cannot fail...Here comes one, here's another. They flow in, resuming their interplay. The mind works again...He can resist the incontinence of thought, he can oppose contradictory thoughts.(MO 9)

Seven hours have passed. Finally, he is alone in his brain. What does it do? It takes bearings: second by second, “orienting himself in his memory, in his environment, in his future.”(MO 10) He is returning to “pedestrian speed,” the speed of retention, of computation, of scrutiny, memory, study. There is another danger here, he thinks, of “excessive mastery...of failing to leave intelligence *at liberty*, to remain in touch with the unconscious, the unknown, the mystery.”(MO 20)

The next day he draws. The drawings, wholly without his intention, are vibrating lines and undulating waves, intersecting and dissecting—and for moments, he is living the experience again. “Invasions,” he called them, “delayed invasions.”

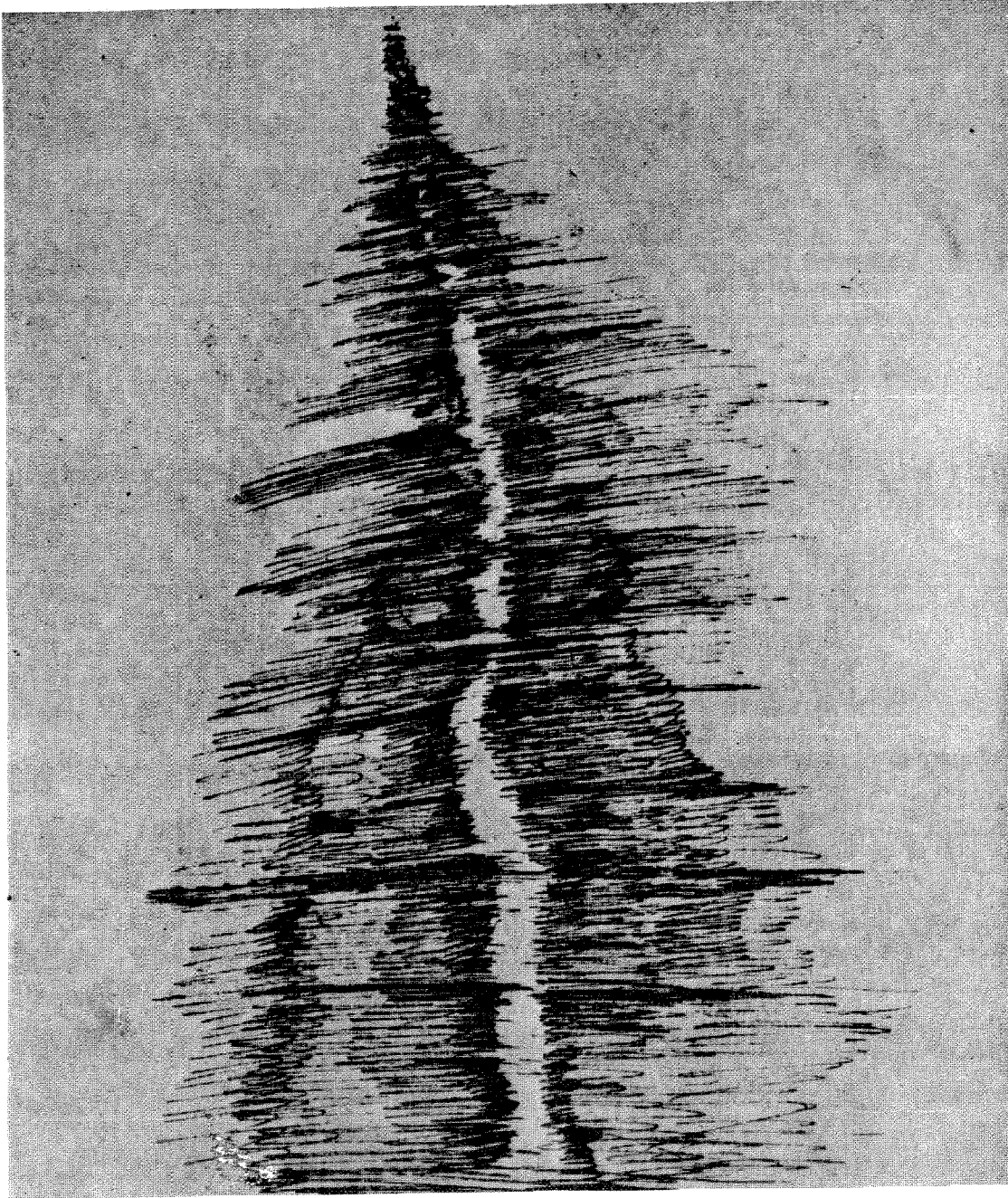


Figure 1: Drawing by Henri Michaux



Figure 2: Drawing by Henri Michaux

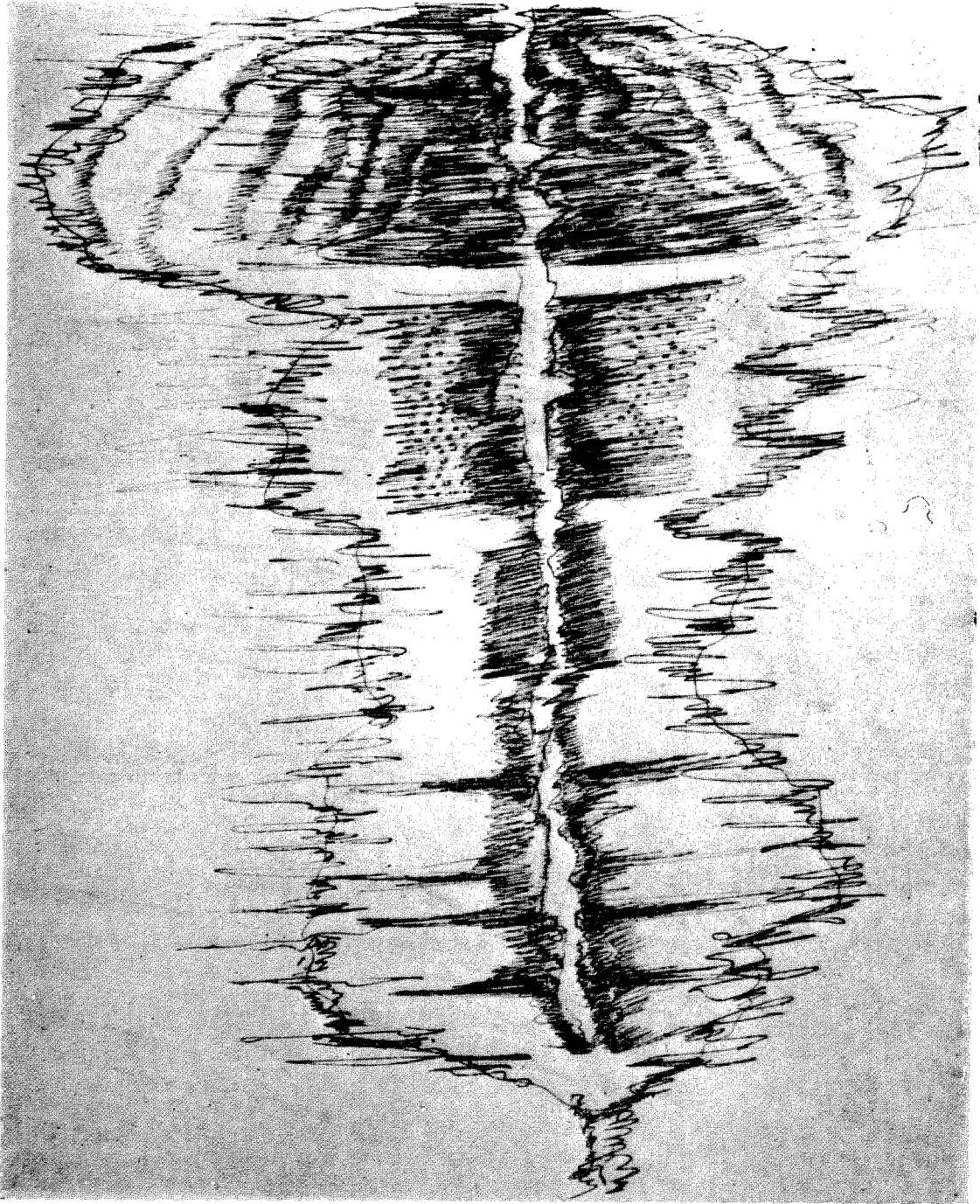


Figure 3: Drawing by Henri Michaux

III. THE ROOT DISTURBANCE

At the onset of a psychosis, as with the onset of an hallucinogenic drug, one begins to lose one's willful control over mind. One cannot change direction or linger over a detail. One cannot follow through, or "think" through anything. One cannot stop or start; some great system of inertia is gone, one cannot "operate" the machinery. It is a shock zone, the universal experience of what Michaux has called the *second state*.

The second state becomes a struggle for personal survival because everything one has or thought one was, one's "identity," is being stripped from consciousness as a certainty or constant reference point. The early experience is the same for both types of madness: the "brakes" in the system give way, unbridled thought processes cannot be stopped, unveiling a life of their own, and an unfathomed and elaborate mental machinery of micro-operations becomes exposed. One begins to function differently; one *must learn* to function differently. In a sense, a person in the second state has been "wounded." It is similar to the person who awakens from a head trauma and discovers himself to be aphasic and unable to find words. For the time being, he is *dislocated* from words and must function without them. There is a panic: groping in a world stripped of words; dislocated from being the "operator" of words, one must function differently, or not function at all. Then, like all aphasics dislodged from this center of activity, he realizes the enormous extent to which words have created and manipulated his world.

So too, the wound that leads to madness is a dislocating wound, but here one feels dislocated from *life*, from family, relationships and what has always been important. The usual ways of controlling mind have become unusable: they are overrun, sometimes annihilated, by the sweeping mental acceleration. Now, without the everyday orientation of being the one who controls, the "operator" who directs the mind, he re-

alizes that he must function without a sense of self. And, like the aphasic who perpetuates his wound by too rashly trying to force words and becomes panic-stricken, the person entering psychosis creates limitless confusion by trying to reinforce his personal identity, in an attempt to catch his bearings by trying to build himself up. What began as a desperate attempt to “hold ground”, and re-gain the center ends in grandiosity or despair. It is an over-shoot of the reflex micro-operation that re-locates and *re-orient*s. This is the fundamental situation—what Michaux termed a “chasm situation”—which turns an acute mental derangement into prolonged turmoil, a “bad trip,” or madness itself.

There is a tremendous variety of causes of such dislocating woundings. Each one is a brain/body insult that also causes a mental wound. Each wounding carries within it the same ominous potentiality for exaggerated attempts at self-fixation, a trade-mark of “psychotic excitement.” It is the psychiatrist’s nightmare that he may mistake a rapidly growing brain tumor for a psychotic turmoil, because the mental signs are so similar. Here follows an abbreviated list of the kinds of woundings reported to directly or indirectly interfere with brain functioning and which may result in major disturbances of consciousness. When that occurs, the *subjective reality* is indistinguishable from hallucinogenic intoxication or the psychotic experience:

- Allergic viral encephalitis (which may follow infections of measles, German measles, chicken pox)
- Allergic reactions to wheat or rye
- Toxic brain pathology in reaction to local anesthetics, penicillin, and others
- Endocrine imbalances, such as in hypothyroid or hyperthyroid crises, adrenal diseases, and steroid replacement
- Central nervous system involvement from autoimmune illnesses, such as multiple sclerosis, systemic lupus erythematosus, AIDS

—Central nervous system involvement from the steroid medications used to treat the preceding diseases

—Introduction of, or withdrawal from, a host of psychoactive (“neuroleptic”) medications which affect the many known and unknown neurotransmitters

—Overdosage of stimulant drugs, such as amphetamine, cocaine, etc., even caffeine intoxication

—Reactions to antimalarial drugs and anti-asthmatic drugs

—Postoperative complications, ie. following coronary artery bypass surgery

—Chronic epileptic disorders of all kinds, most notably with temporal lobe seizures

—The consequence of childbirth, ie. post-partum psychosis

—Head traumas of all kinds, (more commonly from right-sided injury)

—Assorted brain abnormalities, such as basal ganglia calcification, frontal arterial-venous malformation, brain stem tumors, thalamic infarction, and aging or senility

—End-stage kidney or liver failure

—Vitamin B12 deficiency

—Chronic dialysis brain inflammation

—Acute alcohol poisoning

—Prolonged sleep deprivation, from whatever cause

—A variety of sensory isolation phenomena

Each of these conditions has been documented to be a physiological insult which can lead to the experience of insanity. These woundings appear to be able to mimic any form of psychosis, just as the mental manifestations of advanced syphilis were well-known to mimic *every* diagnostic category of severe mental illness. At the same time, there is a prodigious variability of manifestation between the different types and even within the same type: each beginning and ending differently, of shorter or longer duration, accentuating manic, depressive, paranoid or catatonic features. They are all distinct forms of psychotic derailment, but psychosis nevertheless.

In the usual psychiatric diagnostic classifications they are grouped together as borderline, contingent, or “secondary” manias or psychoses. They have been labeled by make-shift and elusive diagnostic categories (changing over time) known as “organic mental syndromes,” “atypical psychoses,” “schizophreniform reactions,” and “schizoaffective states.” These are said to be eruptions from a hidden and simply unrecognized disease which, in turn, has been labelled “masked schizophrenia”, “latent schizophrenia”, “psychotic character”, or “schizotypal personality.”

But this pigeon-holing of diagnoses—as if they were separate states of mind—always ignores the subjective quality. The feelings, the sensations, the ideas which occur to one during any of these so-called different derangements are the same. It can be said that the *second state* is the common denominator for all these derangements, and that the felt texture of the mental derangement is similar because the mechanisms of their production are the same. The second state can be realized by a great variety of offenses to the nervous system, whether they be physical, chemical or psychological.

“Brain fever” is what John Perceval called it in the past (and which some still do) but he did not mean it in the same way as did the brain pathologists of his time. He meant more of what Michaux meant, an acute body/mind imbalance which throws one into the second state. Michaux’s observations indicated that,

all forms of madness have common features. The disordered mind establishes a precarious and even dangerous equilibrium just as, in a hundred different infectious diseases, the same fever is experienced by the diseased body, the same dangerous equilibrium unfailingly found, for this is the only equilibrium that the organism afflicted by microbes and viruses is capable of knowing. After a long period of incubation or following upon a simple blow on the head, or as a result of purely psychiatric elements, or subsequent to neurological lesions, or due to any number of extremely varied causes, *the speeding up and then the slowing down of associations*, the escape of ideas, megalomania, paranoia, hallucinations and visions are likewise to be found in a great many pathological states, as a kind of mental ‘fever’. (IT 139)

At critical points during any of these psychotic phenomena the subjective experiences turn out to be strikingly familiar. It is a time when those afflicted share some or all of the common symptoms of "wounded" minds: intensified senses, illumination and the herald of a "new life," conversion, surges of insight and power, an egoistic twist, an ever-present doubt or threat, a hint of paranoia, a glimpse of possession.

The wound that leads to madness resulting from a shock-substance, or a brain infection, or a vitamin deficiency, or an endocrine imbalance, etc., is a wound which both *releases and reveals*. Mental acceleration, the common denominator of all "wounds," is released; the "power" of mind is revealed. As the "free" speed of mind is approached, a further sequence of mental mechanics is released. This is said to "feel" like one is becoming naked: "exposed to oneself," "stripped down to essentials," driven by the bare elements of mind. Many people have referred to this sense of release as the "beginning of a new life."

This "new" life, said John Perceval, becomes exposed as a secret life, an innermost life of man, the life of the "soul." In this way Perceval conceived of the second state as having both divine and demonic potentialities. Perceval intentionally produced a wound in order to enter the second state; he did this through fasting, what he called "watchfulness" (an intense attention to his mind), and "prayer" (including repetitive mental recitation of certain "spiritual" words). He did these, he came to believe, in the same way as did the prophets and desert fathers of any religion, and with similar consequences. The prayer, he felt, excited his "imagination," while at the same time, the fasting and other austerities fatigued and exhausted the controls of his mind. Thus, he repeatedly could enter a state that he called "trance." It was in that state that he said, he "had no choice or control" but to see the magnificent visions of a new life brought before him. His greatest

mistake, he concluded, was to be so gullible, as to yield to these visions and to become guided by them.

These were the mechanics through which Perceval brought about two "conversions," namely "tranquility" and "power." Soon, however, he was being elevated and destroyed in rapidly alternating visions of heaven and hell. Yet, within these abrupt re-cyclings there were moments of hyper-lucidity in which he saw the operations of his mind clearly and in a new way. He too, called it a maddening machinery of the mind. About his experiences of the "ravages," the "tearing down" ordeals of the second state, he could not help but feel that they were the preparatory purifications required for his "new" life, his "spiritualized life," a re-birth, born again, with meaning.

For John Custance⁸, the dawning of a new life was inspired by special personal "powers," which he experienced in the second state. The "lights went on," he said, as if awakening from the sleep of ordinary existence, and the world became enlivened, vitalized, re-animated, made exotically real and exquisitely precious. He simply could not get enough of it. The second state became tinged by a greed to pursue "manic consciousness" at *its* "free" speed, which was to end in a final exaltation of mania, a spiritual perfection or "enlightenment."

In Donald Crowhurst's⁹ experience, the second state consisted of not only a new life of power, fitness and omniscience, but he took it beyond the others; he was to be the vanguard to our species, a transformation into the "new being," the next step in a dramatic forward thrust of human evolution. He faced his ravages with a single-minded urge toward complete alchemical transformation. While sailing alone in the south Atlantic ocean, Crowhurst was lashed by the elements, went sleepless for days, was cut off from communication, and struggled against exposure and disgrace. Under these extreme conditions, Crowhurst sustained a wound leading to madness.

When a "wounding" occurs—by whatever means—it gives rise to a common experience that something new is "dawning," which may be hopeful or foreboding. This is the most common initial expression of the root disturbance.

As much as they were sufferers, Perceval, Custance and Crowhurst considered themselves explorers of unknown mental realms, as did Michaux. With mescaline as his vehicle, Michaux set out to "unmask" the enormity of the mental operations responsible for madness. For him, mescaline was "a drug to violate the brain, for it to 'give up' its secrets and the secret of rare states. To demystify." (LD 3) In this dangerous journey, at times Michaux became the hunted as well as the hunter.

There are by now many people who have experienced the intoxication of psychosis *and* the similar intoxication of hallucinogenic drugs, usually at separate times, but sometimes together. In fact, there is no other social class of people who use hallucinogens with more frequency than the chronic mentally ill. The usage has become endemic to this population, especially since the drugs are often used by them to overcome what is called the "consciousness clouding" effects of various tranquilizers, and the feeling of a lack of "spontaneity." Even more frequently marijuana is used for the same purpose. Another reason for taking hallucinogens is that they intensify the psychotic experience. I have known some people who were recovering well from psychosis without any tranquilizing medication but took large amounts of LSD because they were becoming depressed and they longed for the energy of psychosis. All of the reports testify to the similarities of entering the second state, regardless of whether one enters it by drugs or by psychosis.

The ones who have known both madnenses say that the real difference between them is the "duration" of the dislocating experience. The experience of the drug usually lasts from five to seven hours. But often during the drug miseries one may

panic thinking, thinking excessively, "This might last forever!" Henri Michaux said of this: "What saves one in the case of mescaline poisoning is the lack of duration. If the second state lasted longer, those who take the drug would suffer the permanent ill of the interruption of consciousness and many others. But they do not have time to become bound up with the drug." (MM 83) And occasionally the intoxicated one seriously mishandles his mind, a mind already under attack, and his situation degenerates into a prolonged madness.

One way to become "bound up" with a psychotic experience is to try to hold on to one's position, or try to stabilize in a particular experience of self, and self-enjoyment ("the *real* me, who I wish to remain forever"). Some attempt to appropriate the energy, power, and speed of a beginning psychosis as a sign of their unique station in the world, "for their own glory" as Perceval said. In this way they accelerate their psychosis to a maddening pace. It is the same with the drug, only in microcosm: even a momentary attempt to revel in self-importance or egocentricity involves one in a massive diversion of energy, and a torrential backlash of the micro-operations.

Generally, we think of psychosis as lasting for years, but there have also been many thousands of psychoses of shorter duration. This applies not only to those who have intermittent bouts of psychosis but also to those who have only a single experience, like many children who have a grand mal epileptic seizure and may never have one again except under conditions of high fever or exceptional stress. There have been psychotic episodes that have lasted only several days. There are other episodes (including most drug-induced states) that last only a few hours. In fact, I have seen people endure psychotic turmoil for only an hour, or less. This was the case with a dyslexic adolescent who dreaded being at school. He would spontaneously feel that everyone was reading his mind, mocking him, when he had a particularly difficult time in the classroom. For a few hours afterward he might feel that messages were being

given to him through the television set. In terms of the subjective reality of a person entering the second state, its duration is not the immediate concern—especially as all time appears to collapse into what is universally called the “timelessness” of the second state. Real time, that is, clock-time, dissolves into mental time, where it feels like the experiences of a lifetime can be had in a moment.

How long a particular psychosis lasts—no matter how it was induced—obviously depends on a great variety of conditions including one’s general state of health, one’s relationships, one’s life circumstances, and so on. But more significantly, the outcome depends on how one *relates* with one’s disorientations during the disorder: what one’s intention is; whether one’s concentration is stable or wandering; one’s power of “recollection,” meaning an ability to come back to one’s senses; the depth of one’s courage; and the degree to which one is either punitive or benevolent to oneself. People who have recovered from psychosis have said, “What you bring to it is what you get.” This is true for every variety of madness, or whenever the second state is awakened.

The difference between guarding one’s intelligence and sanity during a psychosis, or abandoning it, has very great consequences, yet only a hair’s breadth separates them. The early situation of psychosis is usually very fragile and flickers back and forth between clarity and confusion. The amount of this flickering is often conditioned by *who* one is with, and *how* one is being treated. When the environment is a safe one, with healthy friendship and patience, the psychosis may resolve itself in short order. On the other hand, when a psychosis which might naturally last only several hours or days is over-reacted to by others in an attempt to suppress it as quickly as possible (as with an overuse of medications or other subjugating techniques) the disoriented one often fights against the effects of what he feels is an intrusion and a punishing abuse of his already fragile mind. Such situations commonly lead to months

or years of aggravated struggle (while the psychosis worsens) with oneself and with psychiatric and legal authorities.

Anyone who becomes wounded in this way and is thrown into the second state (whether by a brain tumor, a poison, or a predicament), eventually becomes bound up in it, and experiences the micro-operations of acceleration, antithetical thinking, sense of "freedom" (or imprisonment), infernal animation, and a gathering omnipotence. When that happens, they are living in the same domain as Perceval, Custance, Crowhurst and countless others who have been overburdened and overwhelmed in the second state.

In Michaux's disciplined hands, mescaline became a microscope. With it he could examine the interior of the second state. He found the second state of mind to be fundamental and anterior to the development of every variety of madness. The second state was revealed to be a natural but archaic substratum of mental functioning, built into the nervous system, always available, but accessed only by exceptional circumstances and conditions. Initially, it is a neutral state, but when its rudimentary reflex micro-operations become exposed to awareness, they may come to *dominate* awareness.

IV. THE MICRO-OPERATIONS

The hallucinogenic research of Henri Michaux provides compelling evidence that the world of madness is born from the second state. That is, the second state contains all the seeds from which the different phenomena of madness can wildly germinate. The micro-operations *are* the seeds.

Although each of Michaux's drug experiences was uniquely different, each one invariably included a "tearing-down" by the actions of the micro-operations. Many who have entered the second state have felt that they were in the midst of some shattering rite of passage. Michaux catalogued the micro-operations: speed, accelerated thought, madly accelerated and

repetitive multiplying thought, the oppositions, and infernal animation (already highlighted in the “Ancient Miseries” section), and others to be described. He found that every one of these operations could suddenly evolve into a distinctive offshoot of thought (a “defective sequence”), the first recognizable flicker of a psychotic state. It is in this way, for instance, that the micro-event of infernal animation springs forth into the thought and feeling of “being watched.” A proto-paranoia is activated.

From these beguiling and pernicious sidetracks of thoughts and images, “chasm-situations” can evolve. The sense of being watched develops: one is stared at, mimicked, mocked. Then, a hair-trigger blame, finding an object to blame, followed by a sudden accusation. Abruptly, the paranoid one has estranged those closest to him. Now, he is in a “chasm” of loneliness, and he may even begin to feel that his relatives have been transformed into “strangers.” He is in a “crisis” of escalating alienation, a chasm-situation of recycling loops of thought and action and it is these that are clearly identifiable as madness itself.

A chasm-situation is what underlies the behavior of someone who appears to be “stuck in a mad place,” where he is unable to go forward or backward, and sometimes fights tooth-and-nail to hold his position within an unfamiliar functioning:

He knows now, having been its prey and its observer, that there exists another mental functioning, quite different from the usual one, but a functioning nevertheless. He sees that madness is an equilibrium, a prodigious, prodigiously difficult attempt to ally oneself to a dislocating, despairing, continually disastrous state, with which the mentally deranged must, at all cost, get along, in a frightful, unnameable partnership. (LD 131)

The concern here is with mental operations that ordinarily escape detection. Due to a shock-substance or a psychosis (or at the moment of death, it has been said) consciousness is dislodged from places where it has always been and it re-focuses elsewhere. Some have said that this event feels like a “release” from all-consuming “normal” preoccupations and is thus a

new-found freedom. John Perceval called it an “emancipation of the senses” and of many other mental faculties, which would otherwise remain unknown to us. John Custance called this process an “illumination” of certain areas of mind, while the lights dim in the conventional sectors. Michaux said it was like a queer case of drawers that can function only alternately—some must be closed before others may open. It could be said that this is a revealing of the “unconscious,” the micro-unconscious, where a continuous stream of instantaneous and electrical micro-events is ceaselessly shaping our conscious world. (“Beneath each thought, what plankton!”, said Michaux.) This unconscious, closer to the world of particle physics than it is to psychology, is injected with consciousness by both the drug and psychosis.

Though invisible on the surface, meteor showers of micro-events are displayed. Later, when they overwhelm one, they become destructive and initiate “the great tragedies, the great deliriums of madness.” It is by them that madness persists. Mental disturbance would not exist without them.

The Infinitizing Machine

As the second state is entered, the ordinarily silent micro-operations begin to spring to life. Their “cover-up,” by the usual lumbering and meandering activity of forming a thought, is lifted. They compel and command attention.

It can feel like the micro-operations are slicing through the mind. In gigantic razor sharp “Zs” the undulations come, zig-zagging, severing, dissecting, disconnecting, and showing the molecular structure beneath:

Everything in thought is somehow molecular. Tiny particles that appear and disappear. Particles in perpetual associations, dissociations, reassociations, swifter than swift, almost instantaneous.(MO 13)

The Speed of Mind. The sense of energy, like a wind reaching galeforce, is a common theme in the life of everyone who has lived in the second state. To them a "speed," of which they had no comprehension in their normal state, at first thrills them, and then dislocates them. This ubiquitous phenomena of insane speed has been described in a number of different ways, but mostly in terms of its effects and consequences. Here, with Michaux, we are examining the nature of mind-speed itself. What is the origin of this speed, so infamous to every species of madness, and what are its characteristics?

First, the speed is *already there*. Anything which moves one into the functioning of the second state reveals it rather than creates it:

a speed now seen as much more considerable than previously supposed, an intensity which brings to perception the images (and micro-impulses) otherwise imperceptible, vague and remote. The drug makes the subject conscious of many other transitions and also of desires, which become sudden, violent, lightning-like impulsions. (MO 23)

Man is composed of many different speeds happening simultaneously, but usually we are aware of only a narrow band of speeds, the ones we can comfortably attune to. The speed band of the micro-operations is beyond our everyday ability to observe. The ponderous speed of language—a summation of thousands of high-frequency thought processes which give birth to content and grammar—is hopelessly inadequate to describe the rapid conduction systems of the micro-operations. Meanwhile, for all of us, words and sentences calmly pass over abysses of speed: "Let us not be fooled by them. Man is a slow being, who is possible only as a result of fantastic speeds. His intelligence would have long since divined this, were it not for the very operation of intelligence." (MO 23) For Michaux, perhaps not everyone is always so far from the real mental speed. He suggested that "idiot savants" and lightning calculators, those who are prodigious for their speed, somehow manage to take advantage of the ultra-mental speed—the fast circuit—and can enter into a direct relation with it.

The micro-operations are neither good nor bad, sane or insane; they are simply the essential building-blocks of our "macro-mind" abilities (of discrimination, of "holding in mind," of following through, of imagination). We cannot function well without them. However, they are a potential problem, an enormous problem if one does not relate to them properly. "Normally," they are ignored, taken for granted. In the "drugged" condition, they are forced into awareness; there is a direct confrontation with the reality and configurations of ultra-speed. The one who enters the second state has no choice, he *must* enter into some kind of relation with the speed, whether it be accurate or inaccurate. There is no reverse gear. How one relates to the micro-operations will tell a story of either health or illness. First, they need to be recognized.

Here is the sequence of their appearance when someone is going mad. Sometimes they appear in a steadily advancing order, sometimes they are all happening at once. They are natural functions running amok, brush-fires flamed by winds of psychosis, and moving.

Repetitions. The repetitions of ideas and images come in bursts and are related to the sensation of advancing wave-forms. Like a thought or an image suddenly caught reverberating in an echo chamber and becoming insistent, louder, accentuating.

Multiplication. Everything in mind is multiplying: cloning, branching off into endless varieties of itself, never tiring, producing a jungle of new species of thoughts, an insatiable evolution, filling the whole world.

Proliferation. The energy of proliferation has been let loose. Proliferation occurs in a dimension just behind the ordinary linking of thoughts. It is the energy that links thoughts together in what is ordinarily called "discursive thinking": leaping out in any direction, generating an endless procession and what on the surface appears to be a continuous running-on of thoughts.

As fast as everyone knows such racing can sometimes be, it is slow-motion compared to the speed of the micro-operations spinning thoughts together. The running-on, or flight of ideas, happens in minute surges: first, the thought or image is “named,” then appropriated as “mine, my thought,” then judged pleasant or unpleasant, and to be approached or avoided. That high-speed sequence produces a chainreaction of thoughts.

Proliferation increases as the speed increases. It loses inertia or resistance. All resistance to proliferation is swept aside as proliferation “runs over” every sense of pause, every gap in thinking, every moment of rest, becoming a wall-to-wall consciousness of thoughts. Along with this there is a gathering of suffering:

Thoughts, images, urges—everything comes at an excessive speed, disappears with the same speed, which no sentiment will influence. It thinks, it doesn't need him to think. It does without him entirely. It leaves him outside. Without thought, in a parade of thoughts! Wholly disarmed, impotent. To think is to be able to stop thoughts, to take them up again, to find them, to place them, to displace them and especially to be able to ‘go back.’ But he can only go forward, forward... His head cannot stop thinking. He cannot say ‘enough’ to the swarming useless activity which continues and which he cannot stop. (LD 175)

Thought-Image. In a lightning-like interlock they are wedded: a thought, and the spontaneously imagined sensation of it, causing a momentary “dream” of the thought, are linked together. This linkage is a building-block of ordinary “imagination,” and also of hallucination. It is the basic fast-circuit habit of a natural, or constitutional, “tendency to apparition.” The second state startlingly uncovers this linkage. It can also be seen “in action” if one is able to pay extraordinary attention to the formation of a dream, as it is being fabricated in front of one's eyes. For example, when one is falling asleep, a sudden “twitch” of the leg is immediately linked to the drama of stumbling.

This imaging micro-operation, the relentless illustrator, creates theater by dramatizing ideas, and it does so “without the least participation of the will and without any consciousness of

desire.” Within the second state, this micro-operation can be seen to be embedded in consciousness, an automatic act of being “conscious.” Some have said that this action is in “bondage to consciousness.”¹⁰ It is a common experience in the second state (and sometimes while dreaming¹¹) that it dawns on one, “Whatever I think is going to happen, and then it *happens!*” Within the excesses of second state speed one may come to feel, “I can create worlds!” Donald Crowhurst called this phenomena “creative abstraction.”

A chasm-situation is created through a “calamity of intensifications.” Thinking, intensified by speed, repetition, multiplication and sensation-lock, becomes *heard* reflection. Thinking is made present in voices, or whisperings, or buzzings. It feels like: “Someone is saying aloud the thought which I am about to think.” And the sound takes over, said Michaux, and “glues itself to the front of the stage which everyone carries within himself behind his brow.”

Inside or Outside? Where is all of this happening? That is always the question. Perception teeters on the brink of doubt as to whether what is happening is inside one’s mind, or in the environment. Or whether it is happening at all! One appears to have fits of inattention when all one’s concern becomes fixed on a dangerous interior.

Oppositions. Oppositions are endless whiplashing chains of thought together with their negative anti-thoughts, in mechanical coupling, in sub-atomic parity. This is a reflection of how the nervous system is built: every neural unit is an on-and-off coupling, every impulse arises with its counter-impulse, every muscle group is linked with its antagonist, every perception includes its negative after-image. The structure of the system seems wired for instant complementary counterpoint—a primitive stereo-thinking principle. Whatever is subjected to it, whether it be a sight, sound, idea or feeling, is as if put in a rotary blender: “Everything you offer to the mescalinian schizo will be ground to pieces.” It is

“infinitez;” *he* is infinitez. Within the micro-operation of oppositions, speed thrives on itself, perpetuates itself, accelerates.

The chasm of oppositions: a chorus of discordant and disparaging voices, conflicting commands, and staggering ambivalence at every level. On the surface, he is unable to eat, or not to eat. At times it comes to a stand-still, a grid-lock, a jamming, perhaps the only “braking” this system can know.

Infernal Animation. In a sense, this is nothing more than the human tendency to “personify,” to imbue with life. It is a further action of the nervous system at liberty, to do more freely what it already does. It is usually innocuous on the surface. But at the point of its micro-development__almost mockingly brought to light in the second state__the micro-operation of infernal animation can achieve demonic proportions. The first moment of animation feels like a sense of presence, of imminence, of “about-to-happen.” At first, it is only a potential space, pregnant with possibility, yet directly sensible. Then it begins to pulsate (and what space can resist throbbing in this atmosphere of pulsing proliferation). A “pre-being” begins to quicken and emerge.

Yet it cannot stop there. The presence becomes a creature, the creature has eyes, around which forms a face, which looks at you, which is inquisitive, and so on...anything can happen from there. To John Perceval they often appeared out of a flame. (For years, Justice Schreber called them “fleetingly improvised men.” They could appear out of anywhere, some even lived in the pores of his skin.)

Perverse Impulses. The attack of perverse impulses may begin slowly, at first only by innuendo, suggestions, urgings. But they escalate into a furious onslaught of infernally animated oppositions:

a procession of mad ideas, for they always came one by one...I might do a thousand insane things, cut my finger, break the window, set fire to the chairs, open my veins with a razor, smash the mirrors. The contrary of normal action was what seemed tempting. The fascination of the aberrant idea, the fascina-

tion of the thing that should not be done. Any object, when an idea for dramatizing gets hold of it, is capable of anything. I was afraid to go to sleep. I was afraid to let myself go. I was afraid to turn out the light, knowing that in the dark my thoughts would be without resistance.(MM 72)

The one who is attacked struggles with all his might against preposterous acts rushing into his mind. Arriving at unbelievable speeds they seize him, goad him, throttle him to make him carry out the acts in question. Everything that has been rejected raises its head. They are all abnormal ideas and they are avid for realization, the lure of the indecent, a kind of perverse "freedom." Many of the saints, during "sensitive" states of mind, have attested to the temptations of the demonic. But here, the brakes have faltered; Michaux felt it impossible to resist a perverse impulse: "I am they. They are identical with me, and I am more than acquiescent, I am inseparable from them the moment they appear."(MM 67)

Now arises an archetypical chasm-situation of madness, the sense of persecution:

That he is assailed is the pure truth. He undergoes assaults, mysterious, invisible and not understood by others. This persecutes him. Who holds this extraordinary power over him? The lunatic sometimes takes years to be able to point out his persecutor or persecutors, and sometimes they never are clearly designated. Generally, both ignorant and educated people likewise end up in madness by incriminating secret societies, supernatural, paranatural beings, who act at a distance, by magic, by fluids, by rays. This is in a sense a rational reaction. It is hypotheses to be tested, which is dictated by circumstances so singular. *The general idea of a persecution* invades him, comes from all directions, a real crossroads-idea which everything supports.(LD 135)

There is no doubt, it *feels* like one is being "possessed," sometimes by a demoniacal double or opposite: "By idealized perversity which every man unknowingly carries within him, an ideal made up of thoughts and desires grouped together, momentarily forming the 'self', a self which is totally and vertiginously swept along." (IT 148)

Selves. Selves come and go. They are utterly real new visions of oneself, at times a processional of them. In an instant, a "past life" is lived and abandoned. There may be many of them, new personalities, momentary, short-lived. They may be

lives of nobility or of infamy. One may experience them like a tearing-apart, a tearing-down, or stripping-away. While that is happening there might be flashes of insight: "There is no one self. There are no ten selves. There is no self. SELF is only a position of equilibrium. One among a thousand others continually possible and always ready." (SW xvi)

Each self is experienced as complete and profound, intensified and exaggerated by the micro-operation machinery, yet it also has a certain hollowness. But it is not simply their transiency which makes them suspect. Each is transparently manufactured, and when it leaves there is a momentary disillusionment. However, when one of these selves is held onto and elaborated, it leads to chasm-situations of disastrous self-importance.

Sense of Conviction or Certitude. Everything is convincing: once you get a mescalinean idea into your head, it is more real than anything else, and it has to be reckoned with, on the spot. An intensification of thought-images, plus the sense of "presence" linked to most sensations, gives mental images a surreal presence. These hallucinations are infinitely more compelling than the sight of ordinary reality, they are "super-real." Ideas become reality, memories become present tense, speculations ("what if's") become convictions.

In the tragedy of the measureless intensifications in the midst of which he is advancing, here comes the one which is perhaps the gravest of all (and he does not see it), the one which will cause the doors of the asylum to close on him, the sense of *total certitude*.(LD 156)

Everything becomes a "sign" to him, or a proof of what he only suspected. But the glibness of his explanations gives him away. After all, he is using logic only as an afterthought. His real basis for argument is in his conviction, in knowledge by direct revelation. He is again in a chasm-situation of "insight and power."

The most natural study of the sense of conviction is, of course, the dream state. The dream state is marked by com-

plete certitude, by a conviction in the reality of what is happening. In fact, it is a caricature of our inherent tendency to become so convinced. Thus, the apparatus, the means necessary for such an illusion of surety is within all of us and always disturbingly available.

Two Places at Once. Being in two places at once is a "trick" that we perform very comfortably in the normal state. It is our tendency or habit to be somewhere else, as to be in a daydream at the same time that we are trying to be here. We can eat, read, bathe, and do most of our work and at the same time we might be absorbed in a mental drama. We often seem to prefer to indulge a divided world, to dilute the world by living with a split consciousness. In the second state this tendency too is accentuated to the point of a chasm-situation.

The dislocated one is torn between the absolute certitude of an inner reality as well as of an outer reality, and both are making demands on him. John Perceval felt overwhelmed with ingratitude when he could not do it, when his world of angels and demons demanded his complete obedience at the expense of his body and mind. It is no wonder that the deranged one so typically asks himself, "In what part of the world am I at the same time that I am here?" He feels that his survival depends on how well he can perform the difficult feat, like a juggling-act, of living in two places at once.

When he is able to do it, he feels that it is a most magical sensation: "The lunatic constantly talks of magic. He has a right to do so. On whom more than on him does magic operate, an altogether special magic?" (LD 157) But otherwise, and for most of the time, he lives in the great pain of feeling inadequate and doing poorly in both worlds—he is a "failure."

Re-orientations. In the normal state, we may notice that we have casually glanced at our watch for no apparent reason. That is only the tip of the iceberg of what we ordinarily do in the micro-unconscious. The one in the second state discovers himself invoking micro-orientations to trace, to recall, to

grasp, to fix, to predict, to recapture a sense of place—many times a minute. He tries to find shelter. But over and over again, in hundreds of ways, he keeps losing track of it. This repeated orienting of himself, this abrupt and incessant taking of co-ordinates, is like a continual tic movement of the mind.

These ordinarily silent operations of re-orientation and re-alignment are uncovered and magnified in the “desperate attention” of the second state: “I had to admit it: from birth, I had spent most of my life orienting myself...taking bearings, second by second.” (MO 4) The amount of time and energy spent in attempted re-orientations is phenomenal, and fatiguing. The moments of exhaustion can be profound.

The Waking Zone. The above observations of micro-operations in rapid action, noticed and recorded as they are happening, requires tremendous accuracy of perception. It is remarkable that, in spite of all the mental turbulence of the micro-operations, this wakefulness and precision is completely available during the second state. Michaux called this function of intelligence an “incorruptible observer”: “All is madly shaken. All or almost all, because at the same instant, a new, hitherto unknown watchfulness is there, installed, observing, reflecting...purely me, a separate me, irreducible me, beside the mistreated, fragmentary, intermittent one.” (IT 173) This acute awareness appears to function almost unaffected by mental speed and has an unshakable capacity to discriminate the micro-moments of experience. It is on this “waking zone” that all recovery depends.

During the hallucinogenic experience, there are moments, sometimes long moments, when there is a direct perception, a direct “knowing” of the waking zone. It happens most strikingly when there is a “*slowing of associations,*” as Michaux called it. Thoughts may entirely cease. It has been likened to entering a calm sea, the relaxation after the struggle of birth, of truly being on earth, or in the true depths of oneself. It is sometimes described as being pristinely clear to the extent that the cause

and effect of all activity happening in the realm of mind is illuminated. This experience is usually overlooked and ignored by everyone around the person having it. Professionals, especially, dismiss these experiences as having no value, of being only further "imaginings." Yet the one who experiences the waking zone as being at the very core of existence, feels it as a momentous event of life-changing and "spiritual" proportions:

A psychotic episode may contain within it the beginnings of a spiritual breakthrough. The spiritual qualities of extreme mental states are real and powerful, and they are part and parcel of the pain, confusion, and dangerous quality of madness. To devalue or negate these spiritual aspects is to devalue or negate the person who experiences them, for these qualities are inseparable from the person. That is the true definition of stigma—a devaluation or negation that marks as shameful qualities that are in a person's heart.¹²

It is almost impossible to chemically obliterate this awareness. But it can be obstructed. It can be clouded over, or made dysfunctional by a variety of conditions. For instance, there can be an extreme swing of the pendulum toward slowing down. Just as the speed of mind can be seemingly infinitely accelerated, so it can be decelerated, to the point of complete "numbness" or total inertia.¹³ Thus, the waking zone needs to be protected, supported, and strengthened during the turmoil of the micro-operations. Recognizing both the existence and the vulnerability of this waking zone is therefore of critical importance to an intelligent administration of powerful mind-altering "anti-psychotic" medications.

What happens within the waking zone that makes it so indispensable to recovery? It precisely separates and distinguishes between the appearances of mental events. It is attentive without bias or distortion. It can recognize what is happening within the mind for what it is, whether sane or insane. It focuses particularly on a fundamental quality of mind, *the impermanent nature of the field of consciousness*.

During the speed of the second state, no phenomenon of mind is brought to as much painful realization as the imper-

manent flux, the continual arising and dissolving of mental worlds and apparitions. This impermanence is also responsible for the momentary breaks in what might otherwise be an unbearable intensity:

No matter what the spectacle you were watching in your vision...it will suffer a general overthrow. Another composition will take its place, will be developed, will be repeated until a new upheaval occurs and your attention will turn to the next sight. It is then that you give a low sigh, a sigh of extreme relief which is very moving to anyone who hears it and understands. But the new presentation will follow without delay. Here it comes: it emerges, grows distinct, is developed, is manipulated, changes, multiplies, then in turn, when its time has run out, it collapses and is not seen again. (MM 37)

The shock-substance is not creating this spectacle of "change." It simply allows what is ordinarily taking place to be unveiled in agonizing clarity. Many people who have not necessarily been in extreme mental states, have spoken of the inherent and fundamental role of the impermanent nature of mind. It is crucial to early Greek philosophy, to the Hindu and Buddhist meditative traditions, to the philosophy of Nietzsche, and in its most abstract form, to modern physics.¹⁴

In its most subjective form, impermanence is dazzling. It gives no quarter. Michaux called it the "torture of what is unstable" and it is at the very center of the infinitizing machinery. This fundamental situation of chaos is itself represented, is itself theatricalized in hundreds of ways. A deluge of images dramatize what is happening. Here is one of Michaux's "field notes," called *The Razor of Impermanence*:

dazzling scythes of light, scythes set in flashes of lightening, enormous, made to cut down whole forests, start furiously splitting space open from top to bottom with gigantic strokes, miraculously swift strokes which I am forced to accompany internally, painfully, at the same unendurable speed and up to the same impossible heights, then immediately afterwards down into the same abysmal depths, with the ruptures even more and more monstrous, dislocating, insane...and when is it going to end...if it is ever going to end?...Finished. It's finished. (MM 10)

Impermanence in excess and the chaos of losing orientation are translated into bodily feelings of huge extension. The sense of the body loses its limits: transformed into another body, or into an abstracted body, one without restraint, or released