Szasz and Beyond: The Spiritual Promise of the Mad Pride Movement

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Dedicated to the memory of Thomas Szasz

In 1961 The Myth of Mental Illness by psychiatrist Thomas Szasz was published. No one knew it then but it would turn out to be one of the most important books of the second half of the 20th century. In the Preface 50 years later Szasz wrote in hindsight about the book. “I insisted that mental hospitals are like prisons not hospitals, that involuntary mental hospitalization is a type of imprisonment not medical care, and that coercive psychiatrists function as judges and jailers not physicians and healers…”

http://www.lewrockwell.com/orig10/szasz4.1.1.html

The main thesis of the book was that mental illness was “a myth” (non-existent); the mind is not a material entity, as the brain is, and thus ipso facto cannot be subject to illness, just as a circle could not consist of 90 degree angles.

Twenty years later psychiatrists implicitly acknowledged Szasz was correct by changing their paradigm—the new dogma is that various psychiatric symptoms (still called “mental disorders”) were manifestations of brain disorders not “mental” diseases. In other word it is now claimed that actual (physical) illnesses (i.e., brain disorders) cause psychological symptoms. From a Szaszian perspective this at least made sense. But Szasz argued that psychiatrists are bluffing; in all but a few cases there is no evidence of brain disorders. They did finally concede quietly that they had not found any evidence—but they claim it will be found soon. (The check is in the mail.)

Yet the term mentally ill is still used by psychiatrists. The term mental illness always had a patina of credibility due to prevalence of emotional suffering. But Szasz contended that to attribute emotional suffering to mental illnesses is ludicrous. Emotional pain results from contending with “problems in living.” To attribute it to mental illness is to obscure the fact that problems in living are universal features of human existence. They do not require a postulate of imaginary entities like “mental” illnesses.

Szasz argued that all of the so called mental illnesses, even those considered most “serious”—e.g. schizophrenia, bipolar (manic-depression) etc—were manifestations of problems in living. Szasz’s incorporation of the phenomena dealt with by the psychiatrists—unhappiness, anxiety, despair, social deviance—into a completely different cultural metanarrative led to the transvaluation of the protagonists: The psychiatrists were oppressors, not benefactors; they were Inquisitors, slave master, not doctors. (A metanarrative is a culturally sanctioned narrative that is comprehensive in scope which
seeks to make sense of the whole of reality.)

In the 1980s a former Szasz student, psychiatrist Peter Breggin, jumped into the fray: In book after book he argued that “anti-psychotic” drugs or neuroleptics were toxic agents that damaged and disabled the brain. Thus they transformed life crises into chronic problems—drug induced brain disorders. Neuroleptics were first introduced into mental hospitals in the mid-1950s in order to make patients docile and easy to warehouse. In the 1970s Breggin allied himself with the only popular force fighting Psychiatry: the mental patients’ liberation movement (see below). In turn he became one of their heroes. In 1991 Breggin’s book *Toxic Psychiatry* was published. This was less technical than his previous books, and attracted a larger more mainstream audience for Breggin. Breggin explained that in the late 1970s the American Psychiatric Association was undergoing a financial crisis and decided to change their rules so they could accept and solicit drug company money. This event marked the birth of the psychiatric-pharmaceutical industrial complex. Its goal was to make as much money for the drug companies as possible, to get more Americans on drugs, and to establish the bio-psychiatric metanarrative with its root metaphor of brain disorder as the new reigning paradigm.

Szasz's books had virtually no effect upon policy in the mental health field—although he provoked considerable controversy. Yet within 2 decades Szasz had revolutionized the way many schizophrenics saw themselves. *The Myth of Mental Illnesss* was the Communist Manifesto of the “mentally ill” and Szasz became the Karl Marx (not an analogy Szasz would like—as he was an uber-capitalist free market libertarian) of the emerging movement of mental patients.

**Laing and the Counter-Culture’s Critique of Normality**

R. D. Laing, the radical British psychiatrist famous for his first book, *The Divided Self*, joined the camp of psychiatric dissidents in 1967 with the publication of *The Politics of Experience*. Unlike Szasz, Laing, a British psychiatrist, was identified with the sixties’ counter-culture and the New Left. Unlike Szasz, Laing was critical of modern secular capitalist society. Laing wrote: “Normal men have killed perhaps 100 million of their fellow normal men in the last 50 years. The condition of alienation, of being asleep, of being unconscious, of being out of one's mind, is the condition of the normal man.” He was troubled by the Cold War and the arms race. “We all live under the constant threat of our own annihilation. Only by the most outrageous violation of ourselves have we achieved our capacity to live in relative adjustment to a civilization apparently driven to its own destruction.” Laing denounced every suspect of modern society which he like Max Weber he saw ultimately as a result of our loss of the sense of the sacred, our estrangement from God. In the absence of these values all that was left was a competition to get ahead of the one neighbor. *The Politics of Experience* was a jeremiad in the name of the values of the 1960s counter-culture. Laing wrote, “The condition of alienation, of being asleep, of being unconscious, of being *out of one’s mind*, is the condition of the normal man. Society highly values its normal man. It educates children to lose themselves and to become absurd, and thus to be normal.” (Farber, pp30-1).

On the other hand, schizophrenics, Laing claimed, were spiritual pioneers, bold explorers of the inner world to which modern man were oblivious. Laing wrote: “We respect the voyager, the explorer, the climber, the space man”. He wondered why we do not respect the
ad who are often exploring “the inner space and time of consciousness.” Madness, Laing believed, might be a path to hypersanity. He wrote: “If the human race survives, future men will look back on our enlightened epoch as a veritable Age of Darkness... The laugh’s on us. They will see that what we call ‘schizophrenia’ was one of the forms in which, often through quite ordinary people, the light began to break in the cracks in our all-too-closed minds.”

Virtually overnight The Politics of Experience became a campus best-seller and made Laing into a counter-cultural icon and a hero of the New Left. Although Laing wanted to make common cause with Szasz, Szasz would have nothing of it. Although Szasz wanted equal rights for psychotics, and he wondered what was wrong with our society that enabled it to tolerate the injustice of the mental health system, he had no sympathy for the counter-culture. He did not see normal society as fundamentally flawed– whereas to Laing it was outright insane.

Laing viewed schizophrenia as an altered state of consciousness and had several different explanations of its etiology. In The Politics of Experience for the first time—and the last—he interpreted it not as pathology (as he had in previous books) but as (frequently) a higher state of consciousness. In the counter-culture of the 1960s, Laing had been swept up by the Romantic zeitgeist and viewed schizophrenics as comrades of the cultural Resistance; when the dust settled Laing exchanged the persona of the revolutionary for that of the psychiatrist and philosopher. He continued however to be a professional gadfly, constantly making provocative criticisms of society and the mental health system. He abandoned but did not repudiate the idea that schizophrenics were spiritual pioneers. He continued to maintain that they were unusually sensitive, and often unusually insightful. He decried those psychiatrists who regarded them as mentally deficient.

The Politics of Experience was in effect the first Mad Pride manifesto of the 20th century. But it was 35 years ahead of its time. There was no mad pride movement then that invited Laing to become the theoretician of a mad revolution. The mental patients liberation movement that emerged in the 1970s was focused on gaining equal rights and on ending coercive treatment. Laing did not take much interest in this. What was the point of integrating schizophrenics into an insane and self-destructive society? As Laing became a new age speaker, pioneer of innovative therapy and advocate of the individual mad person, Szasz accepted graciously the role of the theoretician of mental patients' liberation, a movement that demanded equal rights for the psychiatrically labeled—and reform of the mental health system– but did not seek to otherwise change society. Szasz’s libertarian capitalism was tolerated grudgingly by patients’ who tended to be left-wing and who often remained, at least temporarily, dependent on the government’s financial help of which Szasz disapproved. Although many patients had been influenced by Laing, his ideas were not incorporated into the movement. Why? In this initial phase of the movement the emphasis was on the similarity between so-called schizophrenics and normal people. Laing’s emphasis on their distinctive albeit admirable traits was only an obstacle to the movement. Former patients wanted to demonstrate that they were as rational as “normal” people. (This was similar to the black and gay movements for equal rights which in their initial phases tried to be as conventional as possible.) One of the former leaders of the patients’ liberation movement whose story was recounted in my first book became enraged with me when I told him I was writing a book about Mad pride. “If you call us mad they will view us as irrational” he protested. But by then the younger generation was ready for mad pride, and tired of trying to seem normal.
Mental Patients’ Liberation Movement and the Szaszian Metanarrative

In early 1970s the mental patients liberation movement was spontaneously launched in America. The movement was organized by people who had read and embraced the theories of Thomas Szasz. Mental patients' liberation organizations started in Portland, in New York and Boston in 1970 and 1971 and spread up and down the coasts and even to parts of the heartland. Reading Szasz's books made it possible for the “mentally ill” to redefine themselves in ways many of them could not have imagined before Szasz – as survivors of psychiatric oppression, as heroes in the anti-psychiatric Resistance. Linda Morrison, a patients’ rights activist and a sociologist, brilliantly describes in Talking Back to Psychiatry (Routledge, 2005) the impact of social narratives upon the patients’ movement. However Morrison underestimated the influence of the new Szaszian metanarrative. She focused in on the individual patient's challenges to psychiatric dominance in the hospital ward but tended to underestimate the impact of the broader cultural metanarratives that informed both psychiatric practice and the new liberation movement, respectively.

Szasz's hermeneutic code transformed the nature of “reality” for his followers. For example, in his metanarrative “mental illness” denotes not an illness but a false allegation, analogous to the accusation of witchcraft during the Inquisition. In the Szaszian metanarrative as modified by the liberation movement the moment of existential rebirth is when the patient divests herself of the false persona of schizophrenic, stops taking psychiatric drugs and assumes the role of liberation fighter against psychiatric oppression. Morrison did not seem familiar with the psychiatric and cultural metanarrative about mental patients at that time. The psychiatric metanarrative did not merely confer upon persons the identity of the chronic mental patients. More specifically patients were inducted into identities of chronic schizophrenics or incurable bipolars. Having spent 16 years in the public mental health system as a therapist, from 1976-1989, before my opposition to psychiatric drugs made me unemployable, I know that the character of the schizophrenic—at that time—as interpreted by professionals was so lacking in existential worth and so odious it could only be compared to that of the untouchable caste in India 100 years ago. The extraordinary feature of the mental patients' liberation movement is that it was comprised not of the “healthier” classes of patients—for example of formerly depressed or suicidal patients—but of the “sickest,” the ostensibly incurable schizophrenics. Such was the power of the new metanarrative that many of those who would have been languishing in back wards in 1950s became the leaders of a major social movement a decade or so later.

The movement was given a boost with the publication in 1978 of On Our Own: Patient-Controlled Alternatives to the Mental Health System by Judi Chamberlin, who quickly became a leader and movement icon. (Judi was the one spokesperson who had not been a “schizophrenic.”) By the end of the 1980s the term mental patients’ liberation was considered too conservative and the movement became the “psychiatric survivors’” movement. (The original patients’ movement had also spawned a more conservative movement of psychiatric consumers but that lies outside of the scope of this commentary.) The movement’s two main goals, Judi Chamberlin wrote in a retrospective in 1990, were developing self- help alternatives to traditional mental health treatment and securing full citizenship rights for those labeled mentally ill—in particular this meant opposing the widespread practice of the confinement and involuntary treatment of mental patients in violation of their constitutional rights. The movement had little political impact. It did not reform the system, and although a number of patient-run drop-in centers were funded by...
reform the system, and although a number of patient-run drop-in centers were runned by the government, by the end of the century it had not achieved the goals Chamberlin aptly described as its priorities.

The movement had started in the early 1970s when its prospects seemed roseate but by the mid-80s the psychiatric system had merged with the drug companies. Once this merger occurred the survivors’ movement was doomed. By 1980 the NIMH had stopped funding alternative treatments for psychotics that did not require them to take drugs. In the 1970s the movement had attracted many sympathetic civil libertarian lawyers and won some significant victories. But while judicial decisions by higher courts often affirmed patients’ right to resist treatment, lower court judges continued to defer to the “expertise” of mental health professionals and ignored higher Court rulings. By the 1990s it became clear that the goal of ending forced treatment would fail. By the mid-1990s there was a push for out-patient commitment law—which mean primarily involuntary administration of psychiatric drugs. They were eventually passed in all but 3 states. The movement scored a number of individual victories against forced treatments that took on great symbolic significance.

But in one way the movement was extraordinarily successful. The mental patients’ liberation movement demonstrated the power of a (new) metanarrative to transform peoples’ lives. The former mental patients proved Szasz was right: “schizophrenia” was a social construction. David Oaks is the one person whose story was told in my first book in 1993 *Madness, Heresy and the Rumor of Angels* (Thomas Szasz wrote the Foreword to this book) — and then again in my recent book, *The Spiritual Gift of Madness*. By the time I wrote my recent book 15 years later, David had attained iconic status within the movement. Despite David’s “schizophrenic” breakdowns and five hospitalizations in the mid to late 1970s, he graduated Harvard cum laude in 4 years and in subsequent years went on to build up the largest radical organization of mental patients – now called psychiatric survivors - that had ever existed, Mind Freedom International. David’s unconventional Horatio Alger story was an outstanding example of the power of the new metanarrative.

However whatever threat the movement might have posed to the psychiatric narrative was vitiated by the merger of psychiatry with the multi-billion dollar drug industry. Psychiatrists, Madison Avenue and the drugs companies combined their efforts in the 1990s to market new illnesses along with the drugs to treat them. The new bio-psychiatric meta-narrative was promulgated by all the media: The number of people on psychiatric drugs increased exponentially—they were all convinced they had bio-chemical imbalances, a claim refuted by Breggin and Robert Whitaker, and quietly acknowledged as unfounded by the APA itself.

**The Bush Years and the New Political Normal**

During the Bush years the prospects for progressive change in general began to look dim. The trend in psychiatry was reproduced everywhere—ethical considerations subordinated to financial interests. The events on 9/11 permanently altered the political landscape of America, although in some significant ways it had really only accelerated trends that had begun two decades before, under Reagan. In 1999 it was possible for progressives to be optimistic. In the next decade the world became far more ominous. The state almost completely abdicated its role as the protector of the public interest/regulator of corporate interests and became increasingly a tool of those corporate interests. Despite Obama’s
interests, and became increasingly a tool of these corporate interests. Despite Obama's Presidential campaign that promised to restore the integrity of the political sphere, Obama continued to erode the autonomy of the state and to remove barriers to its subordination to corporate interests.

Occupy Wall Street protested the subordination of the government to the 1 per cent but failed to confront the most serious aspects of these developments: With a government in tow to private interests, there was no one to protect the environment. EPA's mandate was far too narrow, even had it not been captured by the very interests it was supposed to regulate. Since the corporations were exempted from any financial or legal liability for the costs of any environmental damage due to global warming they caused ("externalities") the population was without any protection—and in denial. The planet is heading towards a catastrophic environmental crisis—global warming is only one of the manifestations of the environmental crisis but undoubtedly the most ominous. Climate scientists have reached near consensus that in the absence of any efforts to mitigate global warming we will face a massive “die-off”—and perhaps the annihilation of humanity—by the end of the century. Global warming could very well also render the earth uninhabitable for millions of years as breakdowns of energy systems due to massive flooding could lead to meltdowns in nuclear power plants releasing amounts of radiation equivalent to that of a nuclear war.

Had the threat of global warming reached these proportions fifty years ago efforts certainly would have been made by both political parties to take emergency action but due to the complete dysfunctionality of the political sphere nothing is being done—not in the US, unlike Europe. As Chris Hedges former war correspondent for The New York Times wrote, "We face a terrible political truth. Those who hold power will not act with the urgency required to protect human life and the ecosystem. Decisions about the fate of the planet . . . are in the hands of moral and intellectual trolls . . . " "Our corporate and political masters are driven by a craven desire to accumulate wealth at the expense of human life. The leaders of these corporations now determine our fate. Their greed has turned workers into global serfs and our planet into a wasteland." (Farber, p387)

I bring this topic up because it is a defining existential reality. How can one speak of “progress” in any area when the survival of humanity can no longer be taken for granted? In 2007 when in the thick of these changes I started writing my recent book, I felt the psychiatric survivors' movement had become too narrowly focused. It should have expanded to adapt to the changes (for the worse) in the world. Their website stuck rigorously to “their” issues, with no discussion of the general social crisis, e.g., the war in Iraq, the new repressive policies of the Bush Administration, the threat of a catastrophic ecological crisis due to global warming or the acidification of the oceans. There was nothing unusual about this—it is in fact the way organizations usually function. However, arguably these facts are more relevant to the mad than it might seem at first. What if the mad were having a unusually difficult time coping, and what if their increased stress was a response to the increasing insanity of the world – this was a reason for expanding the topic discussed on Mind Freedom website;

The Icarus Project

I had been inactive for a few years—except for counseling persons and rescuing them from psychotic wards—partly due to personal issues. So it was a surprise in 2007 when I discovered The Icarus Project (TIP) had been formed in 2004 When I first read TIP’s 2004
The Icarus Project (TIP) had been formed in 2004. When I first read TIP's 2004 Mission statement I was stunned. The document could have been written by R D Laing. It read: “We are a website community, a support network of local and campus groups... created by and for people living with dangerous gifts that are commonly diagnosed and labeled as ‘mental illnesses’. We believe we have mad gifts to be cultivated and taken care of, rather than diseases or disorders to be suppressed or eliminated. By joining together as individuals and as a community, the intertwined threads of madness, creativity, and collaboration can inspire hope and transformation in an oppressive and damaged world.” They rejected the idea that they were mentally ill, “While we respect whatever treatment decisions people make, we do not define ourselves as essentially diseased, disordered, broken, faulty, and existing within the bounds of DSM-IV diagnosis. We are exploring unknown territory and don’t steer by the default maps outlined by docs and pharma companies. We’re making new maps.” It even picked up on the theory of Laing and John Weir Perry that madness could be regenerative: “We recognize that we live in a crazy world, and insist that our sensitivities, visions, and inspirations are not necessarily symptoms of illness. Sometimes breakdown can be the entrance to breakthrough.” Laing had been the first person to make the association of breakdown and “breakthrough.”

I called up the co-founder of TIP, Sascha DuBrul, and he agreed to meet. I was shocked when he told me neither he nor his co-founder, Ashley (now “Jacks”) McNamara had ever read anything by R D. Laing. They were both in their 20s when they wrote TIP’s Mission statement in 2004. Neither was attracted to Mind Freedom. They both felt a new language would provide new tools for self-expression and lead to greater tolerance for the non-conformity of the mad. It was clear we are now in the second phase of the movement, the Mad Pride phase: The focus had shifted from emphasizing how the patients were similar to “normal” persons to affirming and validating the distinctiveness of the mad.

But how could two people who never read Laing have written such a Laingian document? The key may lie in Jung's theory of compensation. Paul Levy—a Mad person and author I interviewed in my book—writes, “When there is an unconscious imbalance or disturbance in the field, a co-responding and reflexive compensatory process becomes activated... invariably resulting in an archetypal, healing figure incarnating in human form—whether we call this figure artist, shaman, healer, seer, or poet. The intuitive human beings who become channels for this process are tuned into and sensitive to the underlying unified field in a way that helps the field to unify. To quote Jung, ‘Whenever conscious life becomes one-sided or adopts a false attitude, these images ‘instinctively’ rise to the surface in dreams and in the vision of artists and seers to restore the psychic balance, whether of the individual or of the epoch.” (The Artist as Healer of the Epoch, quoted in Farber, p19)

Sascha and Ashley were the “intuitive human beings” who had sensed the imbalance in the mental patients’ liberation movement. It was comprised of intensely spiritual people yet it was a purely secular movement. It was comprised of people alienated from the insanity of the world, yet there was no public venue for the expression of their alienation—their criticism not merely of the mental health system but of modern America. There were several reasons for this silence. The first reason I discussed above—the strategic value in emphasizing their similarity to “normal people.” This was the necessary foundational phase of the mental patients’ liberation movement—as it sought full rights as citizens for psychiatric survivors. Another reason is the movement against coercive psychiatry included people who were not spiritual—some were atheists with no spiritual beliefs. David Oaks
and the leaders of Mind Freedom not want to alienate these people by emphasizing spirituality—which was irrelevant to the goal of the organization. Finally as the founders of mental patients' liberation movement saw it they had no reason not to focus on the single issue most relevant to psychiatric survivors: involuntary treatment.

The problem was that Mind Freedom failed to attract many people who were spiritual, and who sensed the world was in crisis. Younger mad people yearned to be able to come out of the closet spiritually; they wanted to express their alienation from society, their social discontent. Looking through their writing on TIP venues many of them were profound social critics—like Laing himself. As DuBrul wrote, “There are so many of us out here who feel the world with thin skin and heavy hearts, who get called crazy because we are too full of fire and pain, who know that other worlds exist, and who are not comfortable with this version of reality... A lot of us have visions about how things could be different, why they need to be different, and it's painful to keep them silent...”

Like Laing DuBrul criticized the lack of community, the pressure to conform to 9 to 5 jobs in the “rootless lonely monoculture.” “Some of us can't handle the modern world no matter how many psych drugs...or behavior modification programs we've been put through.” TIP represented a more mature phase of the Mad movement. It had reached a higher degree of self-confidence, although its members were younger and thus paradoxically less mature in other respects. It felt no need to convince the world the mad were normal. TIP freed the mad from the pressure to be normal. TIP put spirituality in the center of their identity, thus seeking to restore the psychic balance. They expressed without reservation their alienation from the world. The extent to which this was necessary for the self-actualization of the mad was revealed by reading TIP's famous Internet discussion forums: They teemed with discussions of spirituality and the insanity of the world.

TIP was not in conflict with Mind Freedom. They complemented each other. Mind Freedom put its emphasis on protesting forced treatment but it also had begun to sponsor their own Mad Pride events (Farber, pp. 86-99). And TIP increasingly became involved in protests against coercive treatment. Mind Freedom continued to lead the way in the critique of bio-psychiatric propaganda, a discussion TIP preferred to avoid. It continued to “occupy” Psychiatry with the message that psychiatric survivors were disabled by psychiatric drugs. As an NGO in the United Nations it effectively made many people aware that involuntary psychiatric treatment was a human rights issue, a violation of the UNDHR. Mind Freedom held aloft the Szaszian banner. It continued to affirm the full citizenship rights of the “mentally ill.” However considering the power of the psychiatric-pharmaceutical complex it was not surprising that Mind Freedom was losing in the battle to restrict psychiatric power. Nevertheless on a symbolic level its existence belied the metanarrative of psychiatry.

TIP on the other hand gave those in the movement more space to be themselves, it sought to increase tolerance for “diversity”—it engaged in a broad affirmation of madness. It did not embrace the Szaszian patients' liberation narrative. The typical TIP member did not see herself primarily as a survivor of psychiatry who was now an activist. She was a mad person, a non-conformist, an artist, someone who had learned to walk the razor thin line between brilliance and madness. The mad person was a “crooked beauty”—to borrow the title of a brilliant film about Jacks McNamara by Ken Paul Rosenthal. New role models were co-created with which the mad could identify.
But TIP did not merely affirm the spiritual traits of the mad. It adumbrated a mad pride metanarrative, as indicated above. The distinctive traits of the mad—“mad gifts”—enabled them to “inspire [the] transformation” of the world. This motif was repeated in much of the literature. McNamara wrote in one essay that her mania gave her access to visions of “the wholeness” of the universe and “the interconnected nature of love, access to a sense of time and space that allows one to discern what is and what is not important.” “Is it possible that the very pieces of ourselves that get labeled pathological could also be like keys in the dark, their edges barely glowing, like silver question marks too easy to overlook?” The idea of madness as a key is followed in the next sentence with the suggestion that her mad imagination gave her “a wide open vision that reconsiders the role madness can play in our culture and imagines big possibilities” (Farber, p259). The “key” then opened up new possibilities in a moribund culture. Repeatedly DuBrul and McNamara stated or suggested in their blogs or essays that madness is not only personally regenerative but it can save and transform a world that is it itself damaged, if not insane.

Here was the sketch of a metanarrative with unprecedented possibilities. Yet it was not surprising that it was soon abandoned. The next step would have been to explain how madness, and mad gifts, could be used to change the world. TIP had a strategy for affirming mad people and for starting self-help groups but did the leaders (a staff of four who did not like to call themselves “leaders”) or the members want to take on the world? If the Mission statement was more than just ennobling rhetoric, TIP would have to think about how to organize its members to use their mad gifts to change the world—the world outside of the mental health system.

DuBrul affirmed this prospect on his blog in unequivocal but in vague terms in early 2008. (Farber, pp214-22) In March he wrote, “I have faith in the power of the mad ones because they’re the only ones that are crazy enough to think they can change the world and have the outlandish visions and drive to be able to do it.” But that train of thought came to an abrupt stop when DuBrul had an unexpected crisis—after 7 years—and ended up back in the psychiatric ward in Bellevue for a week. For some reason DuBrul believed that his relapse was evidence that the idea that the mad could be a cultural vanguard, let alone a messianic force, was ill-conceived (Farber, 2012, pp 240-50). Although he remained a dedicated activist in the movement, he now rejected the “mad gifts” theory. He contributed a final statement to my book in 2011 before it went to press: The mad were suffering from the effect of trauma and TIP’s alternative narrative, according to DuBrul, was now about alternative forms of healing. Although he no longer saw madness as a potential gift, TIP’s accomplishment was to create a new language that validated non-conformity and diversity.

I was surprised to see that DuBrul had followed unknowingly a trajectory similar to R. D. Laing’s. Once the excitement, the “mania” of being part of a new creation had faded, they tended to distance themselves from their original messianic vision in order to accommodate themselves to the zeitgeist of modern culture—while remaining on society’s margin as dissidents. And there was a political rationale in DuBrul’s case for this retreat: TIP was expanding. 10,000 persons were registered on its discussion forum. It was becoming a vibrant self-help organization that offered an alternative to thousands of people, most of whom had no desire to become messiahs or even social activists, many of whom were never even mad—just subjects of the bipolar labeling mania of the psychiatric establishment in the late 1990s and thereafter which tried to capture as many new clients—particularly children—for the drug industry as possible.
If TIP in its current phase of affirming diversity represents the second phase of the patients’ liberation movement, I am proposing here a third phase—a Mad Pride organization based on a messianic metanarrative like TIP adumbrated in its first few years but more overt and consistent—more political and more messianic (see below). Not as a replacement for what TIP is now, but as a third option for those who believe as I do that a messianic-redemptive transformation is the only solution to the problems of the world. In my book *The Spiritual Gift of Madness* I argue Mad Pride should be based upon a messianic-redemptive metanarrative. This vision may not be appealing to the majority of the increasing number of psychiatric clients in America but it will appeal to some, particularly among the mad (the “psychotics.”) My distinctive Mad Pride perspective is based on my conviction that the mad can make a unique and indispensable contribution to saving the world.

R D. Laing put the matter more bluntly than anyone had before him when he stated (emphasis added by me) in 1967 in *The Politics of Experience*, “The well-adjusted bomber pilot may be a greater threat to species survival than the hospitalized schizophrenic deluded that the Bomb is inside him. Our society may itself have become biologically dysfunctional, and *some forms of schizophrenic alienation from the alienation of our society may have a sociobiological function that we have not recognized.*” Laing wrote this at the heights of the Cold War and the nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union. Many of us lived in constant fear that one country would drop the Bomb—as almost happened during the Cuban missile crisis. To Laing the arm race (with its strategy of MAD—mutually assured destruction) epitomized the insanity of the modern world. Laing never explicated how he thought schizophrenics could serve a sociobiological function but obviously he was implying that the mad had the ability and inclination to do something to protect the survival of the human species. But how? How can their sociobiological function be fulfilled? To be more direct the obvious inference is that the mad can act redemptively. How? To answer this question we must first determine what it is that makes the mad distinctive—what is the basis for redemptive action. What is the basis of Mad Pride?

**The Messianic-Redemptive Perspective**

*Messianism is I submit the strongest basis of Mad Pride. It is the messianic traits of the mad which enable the mad to make a major contribution to saving the planet.* These are among the greatest “mad gifts.” Before I discuss the messianic sensibility I feel compelled to say a few words in defense of the messianic perspective.

The term messianic is often disparaged in the modern Western world; it is particularly at odds with the postmodern sensibility with its militantly secularist stance. Most persons do not know that many of the most eminent philosophers and theologians since the Enlightenment had an explicitly messianic (or utopian) perspective, although it is less common today. If we exclude those messianic thinkers who are spokespersons for a religious tradition we are still left with the tradition of European philosophical idealism such as Hegel and Schelling as well as the entire (virtually) Western Romantic tradition—including such titanic figures as Novalis, Schiller, Marx, Blake, Coleridge and Shelley. (Abrams, 1971). Or I might mention some renowned if not iconic messianic figures in American history (mostly Christian): Theodore Parker, William Lloyd Garrison, John Humphrey Noyes, Charles Finney, Walter Rauschenbusch, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr and Herbert Marcuse (described by *The New York Times* as “the ideological godfather of...
Jr. and Herbert Marcuse (described by The New York Times as “the ideological godfather of the New Left”). Among leading Christian theologians the German socialist Jurgen Moltmann, founder of the theology of hope, led the way in reviving messianism in Christianity. (Moltmann was a protégé of the messianic Christian-Marxist atheist, Ernst Bloch.) In America two modern outstanding messianic theologians were John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas. The Anglican Bishop N.T. Wright, one of the leading modern Christian historians, is another modern figure who has affirmed the messianic interpretation of Christianity. Among Catholics there are some liberation theologians and Johann Baptist Metz. I have argued Sri Aurobindo is the greatest messianic philosopher-seer of the modern age (Farber, 2012). The messianic vision has been embraced by some of the most formidable minds in modern Western thought. It is however often disparaged today due to its incompatibility with secular liberal and scientistic thought. On the other hand the emergence of non-materialistic paradigms in modern physics has made messianism more credible (Laszlo and Currivan, 2008).

For the messianic thinker the historical movement of humanity follows a spiral trajectory from simple unity (with nature, with others, and in religious thinkers with God) to alienation and conflict to a higher stage of unity—a recovery at a higher and more conscious level of the unity lost in “the Fall” (as it is called in Christianity). In the Christian narrative the cause of the conflict is humanity’s rebellion against God. But apart from Biblical literalists and fundamentalists, whose view of God is misanthropic, Christian theologians do not believe that suffering and death is inflicted by God; rather it is a consequence of man’s estrangement from God, the source of spiritual sustenance. “God in his compassion does not abandon his creatures under any circumstances. Man has fled and is called upon to return.”(P. Nellas, 1987, *Deification in Christ* p177). Redemption is achieved when union is restored, union with God and with others. But the union at a higher stage of development is a differentiated unity based upon the full development of human individuality.

While many Romantic thinkers viewed the messianic state as an inevitable product of evolution, most messianic thinkers today would note the almost intractable human resistance to a society that require a profound shift in priorities. The Romantics tended to be “cosmic optimists.” But such confidence is harder to maintain now almost 2 centuries later. We have witnessed the demonic forces within the human soul; the horrors of the 20th century are still imprinted upon our psyches. In the last few decades neo-liberalism has unleashed the forces of unbridled capitalism. In the last decade we have seen that even the specter of the destruction of the earth by global warming is unable to mitigate the greed of the capitalists, or to arouse within our political leaders any sense of responsibility to the common good. Writing in October 2012 the ominous predictions of environmentalists and climate scientists seem to be coming to pass. Yet the messianic thinker is never warranted in trading hope for resignation.

I think Sri Aurobindo, whose philosophy transcended religious divisions but who drew most often upon Hindu archetypes, was able to most persuasively describe the messianic-redemptive ideal: “The ascent of man into heaven is not the key, but rather his ascent here into the spirit and the descent also of the spirit into his normal humanity and the transformation of this earthly nature.” This, and not “some post-mortem salvation,” Aurobindo tells us, is “the new birth” for which humanity waits as “the crowning movement” of its “long, obscure and painful history.” Society will be based on a sense of the
unity of humanity. “There [will be] a growing inner unity with others. Not only to see the Divine in oneself, but to see and find the Divine in all... is the complete law of the spiritual being... Therefore too is a growing inner unity with others. . . . [Man] will seek not only his own freedom, but the freedom of all, not only his own perfection, but the perfection of all” (Farber, p374). A society in which each person is guided by an intuition of unity would be a harmonious society. In Sri Aurobindo’s epic poem Savitri he calls this messianic state the union of heaven and earth, the marriage of the eternal bridegroom with the eternal bride. It is the victory of love, the conquest of death.

According to Aurobindo the “laws” of nature, will be transcended by newer ones more conducive to human happiness (Farber, p12). The “laws” of nature are really habits of nature which will spontaneously change once we have recovered the sense of unity. In Isaiah also the idea is conveyed that the laws of nature will change. The world will become peaceful. Men will give up war; the lion will lie down with the lamb, the predator with the prey. The recovery of paradise which has haunted the imagination of humanity for millennia will be realized. From the messianic perspective what we considered to be natural laws are products of our fallen state—our estrangement from each other and from God.

Human beings cannot create a perfect society on their own. They depend upon a supernatural Intelligence—God, in theological terms—to which they must surrender. But neither can God create such an order without human cooperation and participation. God cannot override human beings, or manipulate them like puppets. The Kingdom of God seeks to break into the profane world and to transform it. Rudolph Otto, the philosopher, wrote in The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man, “Jesus did not bring the Kingdom. The Kingdom brought Jesus.” God is continuously seeking to save the world. It is up to us to cooperate with the divine initiative.

The Christian idea of the incarnation is a mythical representation of this reality, of the redemptive drive of the Transcendent, of the eternal mercy of God. But orthodox versions of Christianity underestimate the redemptive will and force of the Transcendent. They depict the incarnation as a single unique messianic event. I argue there are many messianic events throughout history. The messianic event is the ingression of the Transcendent into the profane; its goal is the union of heaven and earth, the transformation of the earth. It is only because of the recalcitrance of the human heart that it has not yet succeeded, that Jesus was executed.

Today we are faced again with the same choice that Jesus presented: “Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” This starkness of the alternatives, the threat of God’s wrath/ the promise of his benediction, is clear to those who are willing to honestly face the facts. Even in America the majority of citizens are aware of the threat of ecological catastrophe. But few have had the kind of messianic vision described by Sri Aurobindo, by Isaiah, by Jesus, or by Serine the “bipolar psychotic” whose post I saw on TIP forum (see below). Few persons have the messianic sensibility that is so common among the mad. “Most of us don’t even acknowledge the existence of God,” Serine said. But “the time will come when we will know God, the Spirit that flows through all things.” In order to make a choice humanity needs to have both options placed before it. They need to attend to the visions of the mad.

Jung said that God is seeking to incarnate now through all of humanity. Paul Levy describes
Jung said that God is seeking to incarnate now through all of humanity. Paul Levy describes it, “Christ was the first attempt by God to incarnate and transform itself. Now humanity as a whole will be the subject of the divine incarnation process” (p146).

It is my contention that the Kingdom is now seeking to enter history, to incarnate, through the psyches of the mad. This is the unprecedented messianic event of 21st century. There are others with this messianic sensibility – e.g., visionary activists; some Christians; new age authors— who are sane by conventional criteria, but my focus here is on the mad. For the mad are among the first to awaken. There is a greater percentage of persons with a sense of mission among “schizophrenics” than among any other group in the country. “All great changes find their first clear and effective power and their direct shaping force in the mind and spirit of the individual or a limited number of individuals,” wrote Aurobindo (Farber, p.372). It is the mission of the mad to share their messianic vision.

Those with a messianic sensibility could change the world—if they prepare themselves for the mission.

The Messianic Sensibility

The overtly messianic sensibility has three salient features. First, as the quote from Laing on the Bomb suggests, it confronts life without blinders. Laing wrote this not long after the Cuban Missile crisis and he certainly must have met mad people who claimed the Bomb was inside them. Today the mad person would be more likely to say she can hear the screams of the earth. Laing believed that the “metaphorical” images of the mad were a potent means of communication. Laing of course realized that the mad person took his metaphors literally, but nonetheless the mad person was aware of realities normal people preferred to avoid. Psychiatrists, on the other hand, dismissed their statements as meaningless symptoms of pathology.

Of course not everyone with a messianic sensibility is mad, but madness often accompanies messianic experiences. In those cases the subjects speak in this unusual discourse—one might call it the language of dreams, of poetry. The psychiatrist would dismiss it as gibberish or “schizophrenese.” I contend that the ability to speak in this manner is another mad gift. It serves the messianic-redemptive function—when people are listening. The fact that the mad person takes her metaphorical statements literally is not a cause for concern: Madness is not pathology. It is an altered state of consciousness.

A second characteristic of the messianic sensibility is that the person feels she has an important mission, a mission from God. The first mad person I became friends with told me when I met her in 1972 that she was “the mother of the new messianic age.” The author Anton Boisen a “recovered schizophrenic” in the 1920s (when recovery was highly rare) became a chaplain in a psychiatric ward. He was a man of profound religious insight. On the basis of years working in psychiatric hospitals he concluded that the idea that one is going to play an important role “in resolving a world catastrophe arises spontaneously in completely different historical eras in persons who are going through a profound inner struggle.” This sense of a social mission Boisen discovered is characteristic both of psychotics in “hospitals” and of men of “outstanding religious genius.” In other words, contrary to the claims of many theologians, the sense of messianic mission is not a product of an apocalyptic culture—it arises in all kinds of cultures, and seems to be an artifact of typical “psychotic episodes” which both Laing and Jungian psychiatrist John Weir Perry
believed were potentially regenerative experiences. This sense that one has a mission is the mark of the messianic or prophetic *calling*. (Of course it can be specious.) In psychiatric terms it is considered a symptom of narcissism, grandiosity etc. But during messianic ages in history messianic expectations have been common and mania has been the prevalent mood of the masses.

The third trait characteristic of the messianic sensibility has been described aptly by the Jungian psychiatrist John Weir Perry. “Almost always within acute psychosis lies a messianic vision of a new world order.” This is characterized by a sense of unity, of oneness. “The vision of oneness is expressed in the messianic ideation, along with the recognition that the world is going to be marked by a style of living emphasizing equality and tolerance, harmony and love. This hope is almost universally seen in persons in the acute [psychotic] episode.” (Farber, p. 375)

**The Second Great Awakening: The Kingdom of God as a Force within History**

During the 2nd Great Awakening in the early 19th century America was “drunk on the millennium,” as one writer put it. One could also say they had a “mania” for the messianic age. During that period virtually all Americans were evangelical Christians—but that was a very different animal than it is today. H. Richard Niebuhr (brother of Reinhold) captures the popular mood well in *The Kingdom of God in America*, written in 1937, “[A] great wave of expectancy came over men. . . . A Christian revolution was evidently taking place; a new day was dawning.” The expectation of the coming kingdom on Earth was “nurtured by the continuing [religious] revival until it became the dominant idea in American Christianity.” (Farber, p311)

As discussed in my book because it became the *dominant idea* in American Christianity—and in American history at that time (in the North, not in the slavocracy) –it became socially volatile: it fueled what today would be called progressive activism. The idea of the imminence of the Kingdom of God on earth engendered the greatest reform era in American history, including most prominently the abolitionist movement. Numerous historians believed that the sweeping movements for radical changes in this era would not have occurred had not the messianic expectations been ignited (Farber, pp. 306-324). John L Thomas attributed the social activism (e.g., abolitionism) of the period more generally to the Romantic faith in human “perfectability” which spread across “the whole spectrum of Protestantism.”

Perfectionism was the opposite of the doctrine of original sin. (Farber, p309). It must be emphasized that Evangelical Christianity was completely different than it is today—it was spiritual, populist and to use an anachronistic term it was politically progressive. It underwent a great reversal in late 19th century—the epitome of its reactionary trajectory was its embrace of the bizarre doctrine of dispensationalist premillennialism (including the “rapture”) which was antithetical to perfectionism. Since Jesus's own teachings were relegated to the distant future, it effectively destroyed Christianity.

The kingdom of God entered history through the miracle of the mass conversions of the 19th century; this produced a transformation of collective consciousness. H Richard Niebuhr, the Christian theologian wrote in 1937 “This gospel of the coming kingdom which began with
men in their solitariness became definitely social, for it had social effects in mind. It insisted it needed to appear and would appear in the whole common life, in science, art, agriculture, industry, church and state." (p148)

Theodore Weld was a stellar example of the fusion of the personal and political dimensions represented by the awakening. He was a convert to evangelical Christianity who became one of the leading abolitionists. He went from town to town preaching against slavery and braving the wrath of pro-slavery mobs in the Midwest. Weld was passionately convinced that the abolitionists would triumph because ending slavery was the “cause of God.” The days of slavery are numbered, he asserted, “in this land of liberty and light and revivals of millennial glory.” It was the same spirit that led Edward Beecher to cry out in 1865, “Now that God has smitten slavery unto death, he has opened the way for the redemption and sanctification of our whole social system.” Weld regarded the revivals, moral reform, temperance, women’s rights and the anti-slavery movement as part of one whole—the realization of God’s kingdom on earth (Niebuhr, p158).

This period combined left-wing political radicalism (one is compelled to use modern terms in order to make comparisons) with messianic expectations. It was a unique phase in American history yet it has been mysteriously occluded from the American imagination. Perhaps because the reversal of evangelical Christianity after the Civil War makes it difficult to conceive that Evangelical Christianity was at one time the opposite of what it is today. What took place during the Second Great Awakening was a popular theological revolution. Christianity was democratized, Christians en masse rejected their Calvinist past: the burden of original sin, the bondage of the will. Instead it affirmed the perfectibility of every person and the freedom to prepare the condition for the realization of the messianic ideal. This was a mass based theological revolution—a paradigm shift (Farber,Ch.15). But the Christian revolution had no impact upon Christians in the South—they were too corrupted by slave-owning, even though most could not afford slaves.

Metaphorically speaking, after the Civil War Satan took over evangelical Christianity, and wiped out the memory of its progressive past. In the Gospels. Jesus had made his followers pledge to practice forgiveness, non-violence, and universal love. Post-war evangelical “Christianity” preached religious exclusivism, national chauvinism, guns and vengeance; it cultivated a perverse romance with the military, and the American killing machine. Tragically as a result of the reversal of Christianity after the Civil War, progressive political activism was sundered from the kind of messianic vision that had such a galvanizing effect on political and social activism in the first half of the 19th century.

This is precisely why I argue that the messianic sensibility of the mad has such a potentially transformative power—it could reintroduce the messianic dimension into political activism. Messianic themes emerged spontaneously in the counter-culture of the 1960s—in the music, in the political manifestos— but they were isolated images: The metanarratives that dominated were primarily secular, unlike the 2nd Great Awakening when Christianity was still a revolutionary force. We need to revive a messianic-redemptive metanarrative.

Mad Messiahs in Search of Mad Pride

In 2007 I came across the following statement on a TIP forum: “I am a 31 yr [sic] old single mom, and I have BP [“bipolar disorder”] with psychosis. When I go into mania, I have
conversations with God and He has told me how He plans to bring together the plan for the ages. Or how he is going to bring about global awareness. And of course it is something that I have to do. Now every time I go into mania, I am consumed by it, when I come out I am ‘normal’ but still believe it. I mean what better thing is there to believe than God has chosen you to do an earthly mission for Him. Anybody else out there in the same boat? What do they call it... Grandious [sic] delusions?"

Was this woman mad or is this a messianic call? Both. What if Mad Pride became a force for encouraging people like Serine to become prophets? I wrote her immediately in 2007. I told her I was a renegade psychologist and that I believed she was right—God had chosen her for a mission. I don’t think she believed I was a psychologist. She asked me if I was also a bipolar psychotic. I said I had never been locked up or labeled psychotic. She wrote “The reason I asked if you had a mental illness is because of your ideas. I will continue thinking you do [have a mental illness] and if what you teach is correct it should be considered a good thing.” (I think she meant my teaching would be a good thing despite my mental illness.) I was amused that she thought I was “psychotic.” I tried to disabuse her of the idea of being cured of her “mental illness,” but the pressure from her parents and her psychiatrist was too great.

There are thousands of people like Serine — they become incorporated into the psychiatric metanarrative and they learn to view their messianic calling as a symptom of mental illness. When I said to her “Serine, you are called by God” that was evidence to her that I too was mentally ill. I became incorporated also into the psychiatric metanarrative she had internalized. It was a vicious cycle. I might have been more successful had she lived near me and I met her in person. Or if we had a Mad Pride organization based on a messianic narrative.

Serine also had the two other traits of the messianic sensibility. She was aware of the evil in the world—and the fact that it manifests itself socially, not just in the individual psyche. She wrote me “Do you know only 15% of humanity have a roof over their head, food, clothing, and a violence free life? What we should be doing is to free our people from the tragedies of the world. Jesus’ victory was partial. He did not defeat Satan on earth.” She’s right, I thought! Her perspective was what Christian theologians call an “inaugurated eschatology.” From this perspective Jesus did defeat evil but his victory was partial. It was up to the Church to carry on his mission since his victory has not been consummated. But in my experience the Church—any of the major Churches—has no interest in doing this. It had accommodated itself to the world. We can’t depend upon the Church. “We are and always have been the very Messiah we have been waiting for.” (Levy, pp138-9)

Serine beautifully described the final goal. “When the time comes, our eyes and hearts will be opened, and we will see what is Love, our hearts will be filled with fire, to light that darkness, and the 2 commandments (love God above all things) how could we not with a direction relationship with Him!! And love your neighbors as ourselves (we will have no more war) I was being told to gather earth children, and all that, there was many people around who were in on the conversation, we were speaking telepathically, as they were in different countries, and spread all over North America. Jesus is coming to establish his kingdom, and I think there will be a huge awakening. I think that we will no longer feel pain, and no longer feel any evil thought, or disappointment, we will be able to speak to all things. We will do different things on earth. different desires will come into play. God’s
things. We will do different things on earth, different desires will come into play, God's desire. The time will come, I tell you, we will be aware of the most prominent parts of ourselves, our spirit, and we will know God, the spirit that flows through all things.” (Although Serine’s panentheistic (yes the word is spelled correctly) theology was similar to many Christian mystics I had read I knew in her case it was derived exclusively from her own experiences.

Serine was clearly mad: She was in an altered–and inspired– state of consciousness. And yet had she said something like this during the 2nd Great Awakening, she would have seemed perfectly “normal” because many people during that period were “manic” or mad. Here we have a perfect illustration that “mania” can become a statistically normal characteristic, and that further it can be socially adaptive. But to talk about being chosen to inaugurate the Kingdom of God to a psychiatrist in America in 2006 was not socially adaptive. She was alone in a small town—although the Internet mitigated her isolation. Her experiences of the divine constellated complementary experiences of the demonic—these terrified her. The demonic is a reality, otherwise the desire for money would not prevent our leaders from immediately restricting the burning of fossil fuels which threatens to destroy humanity. Although there were a few others on TIP forum who told Serine they had similar experiences, I was the only person trying to present her with a messianic-redemptive metanarrative that valorized her experiences. (I was the only person who wrote her privately.) But I was on the other side of the continent. I was not able by myself to empower Serine. The mental health system was the only organization offering to help her allay her anxieties. After holding out, she succumbed: She took psychiatric drugs and suppressed her spiritual visions.

I want to see the creation of a Mad Pride organization based on a messianic-redemptive narrative that will help budding prophets to become catalysts of messianic transformation. After Sascha’s retreat he told me in 2011 that he repudiated any messianic beliefs and embraced a narrative of healing; I told him that they were not mutually exclusive (Farber, pp 250-9).

For example when patients are immersed in their madness they sometimes need support and guidance—healing. But there is no need to prevent them from assuming greater responsibilities in accord with their talents. For years the transpersonal psychology movement embraced the psychoanalytic idea that the ostensibly damaged ego of the “schizophrenic” needed to be built up before she should explore the spiritual world. But transpersonal psychologists use this analogy to support their dogmas. If a talented pianist had a breakdown, playing Bach’s concertos before an audience would be contributing to the audience’s inner life and reviving the musician’s inner strength simultaneously. It would not help the healing of the ailing pianist to avoid exercising her gifts. For a person with a messianic calling to share her inspiring vision is analogous to playing Bach. Paul Levy writes, “Each of us is being asked to incarnate the truth of our being in a particular unique way. If we refuse this calling we give away a part of our power and dis-own a part of ourselves. If we are not willing to step into our truth, we literally become part of the problem” (Levy, p.166) One grows strong through exercise, using one’s gifts–even if one is in a state of trauma. The mental patients’ liberation movement of the 1970s showed that political activism was therapeutic and empowering for so called disabled schizophrenics. Eventually thousands of schizophrenics embraced the Szaszian metanarrative and became highly competent and effective political activists.
What if Serine and other mad persons are channels for the divine, what if Laing was right, that their madness has a “sociobiological function”: to save humanity from extinction by well-adjusted bomber pilots, well-adjusted CEOs and well-adjusted politicians, including our well-adjusted President? Clearly such messianic powers should not lay fallow. The mad person who becomes a messianic catalyst in a secular society must undergo a growth process. This requires emotional support and spiritual validation. In the absence of this support the mad will not be strong enough to resist being incorporated into the psychiatric metanarrative.

The messianic consciousness typically appears spontaneously in the experience of madness. But so far it has not been fully and consciously affirmed as a foundation for any Mad Pride organization.

We could create today a Mad Pride organization determined to support and cultivate mad prophets who will recreate (what kind of activities is a question for another essay) the messianic Zeitgeist that existed in 1830, and cultivate the expectation that it is within the power of human beings to act as conduits for the Kingdom of God, to make it a living force within history that will overcome with its message of eternal love and salvation the power of those who are destroying the earth in pursuit of money, power and vengeance. This would not be a substitute for political activism to abolish coercive psychiatry, to curb corporate power (in psychiatry or elsewhere); to the contrary, it would inspire and infuse such political activism. It would make it possible to stop living in denial and confront the fact that this may be our last chance to save the earth, that the worship of Mammon is leading us into the bowels of hell.

Vaclav Havel said in 1991, “Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better and the catastrophe towards which this world is headed will be unavoidable.”

Both Mind Freedom and TIP have shown that they could offer the mad and many other psychiatric survivors a viable alternative to a life as chronic schizophrenics or chronic depressives. Their greatest social accomplishment was to provide vehicles for the spiritual growth of mad persons. That was a major social accomplishment. But the Mad Pride movement today can and must go further, not for its own sake, but for humanity’s.

If we cannot save the planet from being destroyed does anything else matter?

I see Mad Pride as a force that will empower and inspire many of the mad (even just a few hundred persons could make a difference) to be catalysts for a new Great Awakening which could be the first major step towards ushering in the Kingdom of heaven on earth, thus saving humanity and our sacred mother earth from destruction.

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