

jackets have actually become literal uniforms, and, as in "Territories," they *will* shoot you just for the color of your shirt!)

Right here we see the great alternative to dreams in "Vital Signs"—*conformity*. To put it simply, the expectations of the crowd, even a crowd that you like, a crowd of well-intended friends, work like a kind of gravity to prevent your life from blasting off into its own unique future. Dreams are the fuel for the rocket, and if one is to attain escape velocity, the fuel of dreams must be stronger than the gravity of the crowd's expectations.

It can't really be any other way, can it? Your own potential is a highly individual thing, suited uniquely to you, made possible by your unique combination of talents and desires. This is no less true for every member of every crowd, but for some reason the crowd seeks to stifle all individual destinies, to obscure all individual paths. When you strive to live up to the in-crowd's expectations, you cannot see the way for *you*. An ounce of perception is worth a pound of obscure.

Why does the crowd smother individual uniqueness? Wouldn't it be in everyone's best interest to pursue his or her own path instead of all trying to fit in the same niche, all trying to be the same stereotyped person? Sure it would, but the problem is that to follow your own path instead of being a Madonna "Wanna-Be" is that no one likes to go it alone. There is safety in numbers, or so it seems as we huddle like cavemen around the campfire of mediocrity, in deadly fear of what might be out there awaiting us. What if it were excitement? What if it were fulfillment? But we will never know as long as we cling pathetically to the safety of the "norm." What we don't know won't hurt us, but then again, we won't know what we're missing either!

It is to the creative and courageous transcendence of the mediocre norm that Rush calls us in "Vital Signs." Everyone owes it to himself to deviate from the norm, to elevate from it, or in other words, to transcend the conventional norm of mediocrity.

Seen another way, we are talking about what Carl Jung called the process of "individuation." It is easy enough, indeed inevitable, to have an Ego, a self understood as the natural product of heredity, environment, upbringing, and social influence. But that's really just the egg, just the cocoon. Our business in life is to blossom forth into our unique personhood, the Self. (That hardly implies selfishness; indeed, the resultant Self will probably be more self-giving and concerned for others, not less.) To do this, we must develop away from the "norm," as Rush calls it, for this is after all the lowest common denominator.

One of many possible examples we could draw from the world of youth movies would be what happens to Tony Manero in the hilarious 1979 satire of the Disco craze, *Saturday Night Fever*. At the beginning of the film, Tony is riding high. He is the king of the local disco, respected, loved, and lusted after by everybody he knows. He is the swaggering epitome of Cool. He succeeds so well precisely because