A Fool's paradise

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A FOOL'S PARADISE

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Since nature and instinct are good, they should be cultivated to the utmost; since life is enjoyable, the faculties should be developed and trained to enjoy it to the full. The body is not the corruption despised by medieval monks, it is the temple of the Holy Ghost, worshipped by Renaissance man.

Rabelais
"This is not a book." That is the first line of Paul Gauguin's writings called the Intimate Journals. I was most impressed by his writings. His paintings have had a strong influence upon me (especially his use of color) and I was surprised to find his writing just as strong, free, and easy. I have no intention of imitating his style (either painting or writing). It just seemed interesting to me that such a "savage" (as he called himself) painter could also be a prolific penman. It's admirable.

I think what I will do is discuss different topics which have influenced my life and work. I'll try to explain just what's in the soup. I'll write about ideas and events important to my work, including traveling, reading, and people I've met.
A SEPARATE REALITY

There is one theory I find particularly interesting. That is, the existence of a "separate reality," to quote Carlos Castaneda. It is a dimension or intense awareness which exists for all but is known to few. It is available for all, but for some reason most people do not realize it exists, or are not informed of it. I believe it is real.

Most eastern religions recognize it. Yoga, Tai Chi, Zen Buddhism, and Taoism all refer to it in one way or another. The North and South American Indians know of it. Mystics and seers talk of it. It can be reached through meditation, religion, exercise, drugs, or by "fine tuning" your own awareness.

I believe in this intense awareness, or "separate reality." I don't meditate or ingest drugs to find it, but try to intensify my awareness of the world surrounding me. I try not to miss anything. I use all my faculties and senses to get a clear picture of the world around me. Castaneda calls it "seeing." That is, a total awareness of all our senses and how they act with or against all which surrounds us or our environment.

But there is the unexplicable or mysterious, that
which we don't understand or don't want to. Perhaps it would be better to describe it as an extra sensitivity. I think that most of the "famous" artists (painters, writers, musicians, etc.), possessed this sensitivity, and that led them to their proficiency.

Rimbaud called his extra sensitivity as being a "voyant" (an untranslatable French term). For him it meant being a poet-prophet-visionary, who practiced the "long immense and reasoned deranging of all his senses."¹ "This language (perfect and total comprehension; my note) will be of the soul, for the soul, epitomizing everything, scents, sounds, colors, though seizing thought and reaching forth," eventually becoming the supreme Savant!—for he reaches the Unknown.

In A Separate Reality, Carlos Castaneda describes his teacher, Don Juan's, view on "seeing." He believes there are two ways of viewing the world. "Looking" which is how we are ordinarily accustomed to perceive the world; and "seeing," a very complex process by virtue by which a man of knowledge allegedly perceives the essence of the things of the world.² Don Juan says:

For me the world is weird because it is stupendous, awesome, mysterious, unfathomable. My interest has been to convince you that you must assume responsibility for being here, in this marvelous world...in this marvelous time. I wanted to convince you that you must learn to make every act count,
since you are only to be here for a short while; in fact too short for witnessing all the marvels of the world.  

Guy de Maupassant also had some thoughts on the matter. He writes:

There is a part of everything which is unexplored, because we are accustomed to using our eyes only in association with the memory of what people before us have thought of the thing we are looking at. Even the smallest thing has something in it which is unknown. We must find it.

August Strindberg writes of the ability to "see past the obvious."

I've invented a new form of art I call L'art fortuite. I've written an essay on my method. It's the most subjective of all the arts, so that in the first place only the painter himself can rejoice (= suffer) as a result of his work, as he knows what he meant by it as do the chosen few who know a little (= much) of the painter from within (= without). That is to say each picture has a double meaning: an exoteric meaning that everyone can see, though only with an effort, and an esoteric meaning for the artist and the 'chosen few.'

Through these readings I discovered an interesting comparison. Castaneda writes that Don Juan describes the human body while "seeing" as an egg-shaped, floating, luminous form with tentacle-like "feelers" emanating from the area of the navel. In the Tai Chi, total sensitivity and awareness is felt from the center of the body, the
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navel. And on a recent documentary on television, scientists have developed an extra-sensitive film capable of photographing the "aura" of the human body. It was oblong and glowing.

It is not my intention to write a paper on Tai Chi, mysticism, or the Yaqui way of Knowledge, but I think it important to include this "introduction" as a means of explaining some of the following writings. Other than those persons I have quoted in these passages, I believe there were and are many people aware of a different reality. Some of these people are William Burroughs, Henry Miller, Van Gogh, Walt Whitman, John Cage, Phil Glass, Kandinsky, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Christo, Picasso, Vladimir Nabokov, Aninis Nin, Leonard Cohen, Emily Dickinson, Breughel, Beethoven, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Jackson Pollock. I believe these people could "see" beyond our concept of the real world. I think it is important to open our minds, to go to extremes, to take chances. Find your extra-consciousness, feel your extreme awareness, and seek the "voyant."
I continually picture the artist as a minister without a parish or as some ludicrous opera singer, serious with hand on his breast—bellowing to an empty theater.

Larry Rivers
INSOMNIA

Insomnia has been a long-existing problem of mine. It is worse than the flu and poison ivy. Not only is it detrimental to your physical well being, but can wreak havoc on your mind.

From my adolescence to the present I have been plagued by this malady. I have spent innumerable nights tossing, turning, sweating, screaming, wetting the bed, and watching in horror as devils and demons danced and pranced in my room, destroying any hope of reality in the dark of the late night.

All methods of alleviating this problem have failed, save total physical and mental exhaustion, and some herb teas I have recently discovered. Much money was wasted on useless drugs, some probably doing more harm than good.

There are some positive sides to sleeplessness though. Much of my best work was done late night, be it painting or just thinking. At times it can be very peaceful and strengthening. Solitude is a very powerful thing if viewed in the right plight; it can also be very dangerous. I've had some extremely terrifying dreams or visions. For awhile I suffered from a mild disorder, due to
exhaustion and frazzled nerves. I read about it in *Psychology Today*. It involved partial paralysis of the body and either very vivid dreams or hallucinations. Many a night I woke up, unable to move or scream, while strange persons or objects wandered around my room. Sometimes the whole room would take a complete turn to the left or right, causing the bare light bulb above to dangle sideways in front of my face. My most memorable "dream" was as if the circus had come into town. As I lay in bed dancers, jugglers, prostitutes, clowns, midgets, and a couple of coolies marched into my room, putting on quite a show. I had my feet tickled, and the prostitutes joined me in bed.

I think that the worst part of insomnia is the terrible anxiety and sadness that can overwhelm you. Your past seems to take pleasure in torturing you with every unkind word spoken and deed done in your past. It's like your brain goes slightly berserk, caroming your thoughts around your head like a loose golf ball. The best thing to do is to try to ignore it, or busy yourself with something. Whatever you do is try not to dwell on it. Just relax. Perhaps you can even learn something from it.
Remorse is the impotent emotion felt by the man who will sin again; repentance alone is effective and brings all to an end.

Balzac
GETTING AN EDUCATION

"Getting an Education" was a term phrased by some friends and me to describe our experiences while attending college in Pennsylvania. It ranged from shooting pool in an unknown redneck bar, to attending Phil Glass's first concert in New York City. It had nothing to do with formal education as we know it. The broadening of the mind through personal experiences was the main consideration. Everybody goes through a "wild" period in their lives, but these were purposeful "excursions," anticipating some sort of reward. Getting an education included a lot of traveling, carousing, and "personal research." Since I am not writing an autobiography, I'll refrain from indulging these experiences unless I think it is necessary.

I think most of us take our everyday existence for granted, as in the play Our Town. We should take advantage of our every day and every minute in it. Learn and grow, grow and learn. Eugene Rastignac's experiences in Paris in Balzac's "Old Goriot" was getting an education as was Carlos Castaneda's apprenticeship to the Yaqui way of Knowledge. Basically it is a learning experience that never ends. As long as you want to learn, you will
never cease to learn more. You will continue to grow and expand. It is like an endless hallway, with doors on either side. Some open one or two, some half of them, and some will go all the way. That is what I intend to do. That is getting an "education."

I've been lucky to have had a large amount of good and bad experiences in my short existence on this planet. I'm sure we have all had memorable experiences in our lives, but right now I'm not concerned with them. I am only concerned with mine. I was brought up to believe that I was no different than anyone else. Even our educational systems encourage participation in groups, organizations, and committees (except for some instances in the college levels). Multiples are stressed over singles, many over one, Us over I.

Excuse me, but let me say something now. I am different. I am not the same. From now on I pride myself for being Me, and everyone else can do what they want with themselves. When I've had bad times people have said, "You know, there's always someone else worse off than you." That never offered me any consolation; in fact I think it is one of the most assinine statements I've ever heard.

Well, let me not get off the track. I have had both good and bad experiences, but I have basically placed
myself in the position to receive them. It is my way of educating myself. I have hungered and feasted. I have traveled and hermitted. I have bedded whores and princesses. I have dined with the rich and fancy, and ate leftover food at burger stands. I have been given and I have taken. When I walk I turn as I walk so there is nothing I miss, and I try to keep my eyes at 180° peripheral vision.

It is important to have an honest incentive to look for something different, the unknown. Carlos Castaneda described his initiation into the world of the "separate reality" as a jump into a seemingly bottomless abyss. He was getting his education. It is a leap. The thoughtful and willing jump from one world to another.
The most dangerous thing an artist can do is to fall in love with his work.

Picasso
POETRY

When I was younger I wrote a little poetry. Now I only read them when I feel I should punish myself for some horrendous deed. I am not going to be so cruel as to bore you with these writings. I must admit that there is one that is possible, like eating frozen vegetables instead of fresh.

I've never taken the time or effort to understand poetry. It never really captured my interest. Therefore, I should be the last to criticize it considering my attitude. At times I can appreciate it though.

I would like to share with you two poems that I particularly enjoy. One is by a Souix Indian named Adolf Hungry Wolf, and the other by Leonard Cohen.

I have a song to sing,
To sing because we are all here;
We are All here as One,
The One makes us All.

We have the Power, My Woman and I,
We have the Power in our Family;
We have the Power of Awareness,
Awareness so that Others give Us Spiritual Power.

Those others, we know Them through Our Old Man,
Our Old Man, He guides Us where We go;
We go where We can All be Together,
We go where We can be just what We Are.
With Our eyes far ahead, with Our steps big,
We can step over all obstructing logs;
With Our eyes far ahead, with Our steps big,
We can step over all obstructing logs;
Those logs, We just use them for Our fire,
Our fire that lights the way to where We are.

Ballad

He pulled a flower
out of the moss
and struggled past soldiers
to stand at the cross.

He dipped the flower
into a wound
and hoped that a garden
would grow in his hand.

The hanging man shivered
at this gentle trust
and ripped his flesh
from the flower's thrust.

And said in a voice
they had not heard,
"Will pedals find roots
in the wounds where I bleed?"

"Will minstrels find songs
from a tongue which is torn
and sick be made whole
through rents in my skin?"

The people know something
like a god had spoken
and stared with fear
at the nails they had driven.

And they fell upon the man
with spear and knife
to honor the voice
with a sacrifice.

O the hanging man
had words for the crows
But he was tired
and the prayers were loud.
13.

He thought of islands
alone in the sea
and sea water bathing
dark roots of each tree.

Of tidal waves lunging
over the land
over these crosses
these hills and this man.

He thought of the towns
and fields of wheat,
of men and this man
but he could not speak.

Oh they hid two bodies
behind a stone;
day became night
and they all went home.

And men from Golgotha
assure me that still
gardeners in vain
pour blood in that soil.7

I love that last line. Isn't it typical of human beings?
We always paint ourselves, or how we wish we were. You strain yourself to a moment and if it can be that moment, it can mean all the difference in the world.

Andrew Wyeth
MY LETTER

When Andrew Wyeth's father was killed in a motorcycle accident, my uncle was the officer on the scene. The son was there. They became friends and my uncle introduced my father to Mr. Wyeth. They had a casual acquaintance.

Some years ago my father encouraged me to write to Mr. Wyeth. I did and in 1964 I got this letter back.

Dear Gary:

Many things for your fine letter.

I am pleased to hear you are painting like your father and someday I hope your Dad will bring you down to see me---Please give my warmest greetings to your Mother and Father--

Warmest greetings to you.

Sincerely,

Andrew Wyeth

He didn't use any punctuation. This letter has always given me a good feeling and support. About ten years later, while visiting my uncle who was sick in the hospital, I stopped in to see Mr. Wyeth while hitch-hiking home. It was in September, around six in the morning. I never called or anything, I just dropped in. I waited in a field across from the house until I saw some sign of movement in the house. It consisted of someone letting four large dogs run out of the house. They

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immediately tried to kill me. I called out my name and after a small conference in the house, they let me in. I had a very nice breakfast with Mr. and Mrs. Wyeth and their son. This was when he first did his nude paintings and he had them hanging in a separate gallery room, so I got a type of private exhibition. Then I hitched back to Kutztown.
I'd rather be a free man in my grave than live as a puppet or another man's slave.

James Cliff
CAMPING OUT

One of the best experiences I had in my life was spending two months camping out in New Jersey. I had total freedom to do and live as I pleased. I went with a good friend of mine, Spencer Gregory, who knew of a campsite outside of Sea Isle City. I had a suitcase with some clothes, a sleeping bag, cooking utensils and a few other odds and ends. We had no tent, so the first thing we did while there was to visit a nearby dump to scavenge for materials to construct a suitable shelter. We called it the "hoogan" (the Apache term for dwelling). It was constructed with pieces of tarp, rope, window screen, and plastic. It was just about water and bug proof. It was rather cramped though, and fortunately some friends who visited us during the summer, brought tents and hammocks. Soon the campsite looked like a gypsy camp. It almost became a tourist attraction.

I met many different people throughout this experience. There was one man at the campground with his two sons and his girlfriend. For some reason or another she slit her wrists and was taken away. There was also a few interesting grounds keepers, and periodically a small group of high school girls would camp out for a weekend.
Something I'd rather not talk about.

What I appreciated most about the trip was the total freedom. I could do whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted. I could spend hours at the beach swimming, learning to surf or just walking around. I ate and slept when I wanted, and worked when I wanted (I held a part-time job at a roadside vegetable stand). I never felt so good in my life.

I suppose what was so appealing was that I'd never been able to live that way, being perhaps a vagabond. I must admit that there were some hardships. We would often go without food for one or two days and during bad weather lacked proper shelter. The first week I was there I spent two days alone in the hoogan during a constant damp downpour. I had no heat and it was too wet to start a fire.

I imagine I looked rather odd to the townspeople. I was extremely tan with wild sun-bleached hair, and smelled like a campfire (something even persistent bathing could not seem to wash away). One woman who owned a bar in Sea Isle City said I looked like her son, and if he were walking around looking like I did she wouldn't forgiver herself. From that point on whenever I was in town she would give me a free meal.

Spencer and I traveled up and down the coast of New Jersey stopping here and there to see the sites or visit
friends. We particularly liked Cape May and would hitch-hike there as much as possible. Cape May is a beautiful Victorian fishing village at the Southern tip of New Jersey. It is very popular with young people and I always enjoyed myself there. Many times though I couldn't get a room and would end up sleeping on porches or in parked cars. I remember one rainy night telling my companion that I thought churches kept their doors unlocked and we might be able to sleep on the pews. The one we went to was locked though, so he slept on the steps and I in a nearby car. It just so happened that while hitchhiking home I was picked up by the driver who owned that car. I could imagine the look on his face if, while going to work, he would have looked in the back seat and seen someone sleeping there wearing a horrible Hawaiian shirt and smelling like a campfire.

I had many such experiences while there but I haven't the time to relate them all. It was a good thing to do though and I learned a lot. It was very peaceful. There were times of solitude and gaiety, loneliness and adventure. It helped me to open my eyes more, to strengthen my senses and become more aware. I got to explore the beauty of the nature around me, a beauty only God could create.

I think of those times often as I am painting. When
I paint a beach or island their colors are the colors that I saw that summer. The dark blue skies of my night scenes are the skies I gazed at while laying in my hammock under the trees. I felt strong and peaceful; like a "savage" as Gauguin would say. Maybe that's why he went to Tahiti.
I: I who called myself a seer or an angel, exempt from all morality, I am restored to the earth, with a duty to seek, and rugged reality to embrace! Peasant! Farewell.

Rimbaud
I love to read. From my room I can travel anywhere in the world, at any time in history. I read for pleasure and to gain knowledge. It also gives me many ideas for the imagery in my paintings, such as landscape, clothing styles, colors and personalities. For instance, in my painting "Monsignor Quannah Akkeyvich," the landscape comes from Mihail Sholokhov's description of the homeland of the Cossacks, in his "Don" novels. His garment comes from Nikda Gogol's description of a country priest in his childhood Russia, and the face comes from the sacred masks of the False Face Society of the Iroquois Indians of North America. To these influences I've added my own decorations and embellishments, or some of my own personal imagery. There is no outright symbolism (at least that I'm aware of, who knows, maybe my use of palm trees symbolizes ejaculating penises; thank you, Freud).

Henry Miller is probably one of my favorite writers. I enjoy his writing, have learned a lot from it, and find he has introduced me to many different writers through his writings. Through his writings I was introduced to Guy de Maupassant, Arthur Rimbaud, and Francois Rabelais. Maupassant introduced me to Flaubert, and Rimbaud to Paul
Verlaine. Rabelais—well, one could write a book just about him; he is probably one of the most versatile and enjoyable of writers. (I see no reason why his writings shouldn't be taught in high school English courses.) His satire and knowledge of the human situation is unsurpassed even today.

I'm not going to bother to list all of the writers I have read. I like most of the French and Russian writers. I also enjoy William Burroughs (who is not unlike a contemporary Rabelais), Nikos Kazantzakis (an interesting Greek writer), W. Somerset Maugham, and Vladimir Nabokov. I also like reading history and autobiographies.

I think that it is very important to read as much as possible. It is another way of gaining knowledge and broadening the senses. Just as all of the wonderful arts available to us, it should be utilized as much as possible. They are an important part of total awareness. Use them while they are still available. One never knows.
To really enjoy life you shouldn't be afraid of making a fool of yourself, for as it is said, "Fools dance where angels fear to tread."

Todak
PAINTING

Painting is everything to me. Everything I do is somehow related to my work. It is the most important thing in my existence—the reason for my being here.

I work without any preliminary sketches, nor do I plan out the painting on the canvas. I've tried to in order to alleviate some of my problems with composition, but it just didn't "feel" right to me. I just start to work, directly on the white canvas. It is a direct extension of all my energy, all of me, onto the canvas. All my thoughts and experiences, all I've read and seen, come together on the canvas. It is an continual flow, spontaneous and free.

At times it becomes difficult to work this way. I'll step back to study the canvas and will be faced with what seems to be impossible disorder. Unharmonious colors and weak compositions; finished areas of the painting and some yet blank. Only patience and hard work will bring them together. It shouldn't be rushed, just like making love. I enjoy working this way and it sometimes takes on the attributes of a love affair; sometimes pleasant and enjoyable, and other times cruel and perplexing. It's something I can't really explain....something that must
speak for itself through my work.

Art should be a twenty-four hour involvement. All your thoughts and energy must be integrated. Your every move anticipated and counted as your last. Constantly using all of your senses together, using your third eye, feeling with your whole being. Then incorporate all this into your painting, all you've learned and felt, both the good and the bad. Open all your pores, elevate your awareness, push yourself to the limit. That is how I think you should approach painting. Art is my Life, and my Life is my Art.

There is Ying and Yang, fire and water, good and bad, love and hate. Each the opposite of the other but totally dependent on each other; in fact one being worthless without the other. I stand on the tightwire that spans the opposites, being able to watch both operate simultaneously. It is a precarious perch, but well worth the danger. Just remember to keep your balance well.

These are some of the concepts I apply to my painting. Everything I've learned and experienced, all that I've stored in my brain. I take my work very seriously, and I try to give my all, my one-hundred percent. It is really too much for me to say with words.

Art for Art's sake, why not?
Art for life's sake, why not?
Art for pleasure's sake, why not?
What does it matter,
As long as it's Art?
FOOTNOTES


3Carlos Castaneda, Journey to Ixtlan (The Lessons of Don Juan) (New York: Pocket Books, 1974), Front page.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


1. Untitled
   14" x 16"
   Watercolor

2. "Woman on Bed"
   34" x 46"
   Oils

3. "Crazy Ann"
   36" x 36"
   Oils

4. "Crazy Ann in Bermuda"
   50" x 74"
   Acrylic

5. "The Birth of Venus"
   36" x 36"
   Acrylic and Oil Pastels

6. "The Peaceful Island"
   26" x 40"
   Acrylic and Oil Pastels

7. Untitled
   19" x 24"
   Acrylic and Oil Pastels

8. "Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane"
   38" x 60"
   Acrylic and Oil Pastels

9. "Monsignor Quannal Akkeyvich"
   34" x 48"
   Acrylic and Oil Pastels

10. "Lovers Quarrel"
    40" x 63"
    Acrylic and Oil Pastels