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Autobiographical Kaleidoscope

Franklin Rosemont

Fall-Winter, 2010

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From *Morning of the Machine Gun*, May 1968. Reprinted in
Communicating Vessels, Issue 22, Fall-Winter, 2010–2011, page 34

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“I myself shall continue living in my glass house where you can always see who comes to call; where everything hanging from the ceiling and on the walls stays where it is as if by magic, where I sleep nights in a glass bed, under glass sheets, where who I am will sooner or later appear etched by a diamond.” — Andre Breton

I was born the second day of October (the same day as Nat Turner) in 1943 and grew up in and around Chicago, home of the blues, non-cinematic gangsters, the Haymarket anarchists, the Industrial Workers of the World, the Water Tower and the Maxwell Street Market. Armed with Zen lunacy, Nietzsche, Rimbaud and the first glimmers of the surrealist adventure. I dropped out of high school and hitchhiked west through the giant bones of the Rocky Mountains, the bleeding deserts of Arizona and the ectodermic forests of California to those clouds of medieval radiance which is San Francisco...

Chicago is the lever which stands San Francisco on its head; it is the dialectical hammer and veritable pulse of all the American dreams. The latitude, longitude and temperature of this emotional, temporal and geographical chaos lead one to the conclusion that, as far as the human imagination is concerned, here and now, it

is a question of the Fox Indians, Albert Parsons, Nelson Algren, J.B. Hutto and his Hawks and the surrealists (a signal enumeration!) against Urban Renewal, Mayor Daley, capitalists, cops and the hideous Tribune. Urbanism is a problem for poetry and for revolution which sociology only conceals. Insurrection and revolutionary arson are the only "urban renewals" that matter.

I was an IWW organizer from September 1962 to November 1965: during this period I discovered the arcane proletarian revelations of T-Bone Slim (d. 1942). I studied anthropology for two years and went to Mexico in 1963, wandering through the streets of Tenochtitlan for personal illumination. If I believed in reincarnation, in former lives I would have been an Alaskan timber wolf at least once, certainly a Hopi Indian, and perhaps a comrade of Florian Geyer and the Black Troop in the 16th century Peasant Wars.

My poems and drawings erupt and flow automatically from my own psycho-physical and biomythological totality, and are offered for consideration as modest presentations of the true, delirious, electromagnetic river of surreality. I am a revolutionary mammal, an alchemical atheist, and an aquatic-aerial anarchist as well as a poet. From the past I feel closest to Paracelsus, Han Shan, Blake, Fourier, Nat Turner, Emily Bronte, John Brown, Lautremont, Marx, Rimbaud, Lewis Carroll, Rosa Luxemburg, Charles Fort, Andre Breton, Benjamin Peret, Emiliano Zapata, T-Bone Slim, Jose Guadalupe Posada, Arshile Gorky, Simon Rodia, the blues-singers Robert Johnson, Elmore James and J. B. Lenoir, the Durruti Column, the Kwakiutl Indians and Marilyn Monroe. I am irresistibly attracted to the Krazy Kat cartoons of George Herriman, the analogies of Malcolm de Chazal, and anything having to do with rabbits, Hegel, Black Hawk, Shays' Rebellion, Nat Turner, the Ferris Wheel, Zoroaster, cocaine and the Cthulhu Mythos elaborated by H.P. Lovecraft and his circle. In fantasies I often see myself as Bugs Bunny or a zebra. I play rhythm 'n' blues piano and harpsichord. I take this opportunity to spit on the President of the United States and his ignominious war against the Vietnamese.

I live with my woman, Penelope, in the Lincoln Park area of Chicago, a few blocks from the zoo, where several times a week (though less in the winter) we visit the African porcupines, the timber wolves, the nilgai, the gazelles, the secretary bird, the penguins, the elephants, the bushbabies, the giraffes and the Giant Anteaters. The revolution will liberate these beasts who will collaborate in the reintegration of the waking dream-life of man.

In December 1965 we went to Paris to meet with Andre Breton and the comrades of the surrealist group. Presently we are issuing an English-language periodical agitational news-poster, SURREALIST INSURRECTION, and preparing a surrealist theoretical journal and other publications and actions, including the establishment of a Bureau of Surrealist Research to coordinate the diverse interventions of the marvelous in everyday life, to assist in the elaboration of a liberating mythology, and in general to promote the convergence and synthesis of the real and the imaginary, waking and dreaming...

In poetry as in life I am for freedom and against slavery: for the Indians against the European invaders and the American exploiters; for the black insurrections against the white power structure; for guerrillas against colonial administrators and imperialist armies; for youth against cops, curfews, school and conscription; for wildcat strikers against bosses and union bureaucrats; for poetry against literature, philosophy and religion; for mad love against civilized repression and bourgeois marriage; and for the surrealist revolution against complacency, hypocrisy, cowardice, stupidity, exploitation oppression.