

LETTER TO AN OLD FRIEND – Montreal, April 5th 2017

Estimadísimo Compañero:

I've just about finished reading your *Memory Fragments* and have decided to send you this essay with a few of my own thoughts and memory fragments as relate to you and your book. I'll skip any criticism of your book as to literary form and style –my normal pedantic wont– and dive headlong into its surprisingly candid content.

First of all, I was struck by the parallels between your life history and mine, as we are both contemporaries of approximately the same age. We both grew up in unusually-dysfunctional families –you in a Jewish/C.P./Upper Middle-class Long-Island home; me in a Catholic/conservative/Upper Middle-Class Havana home. We both started out as children in the 1950's –generally-speaking a more stable and conservative epoch than what has come after.

We were both victims and perps of the hallucinatory chaos that was the Sixties. I can see from your autobiographic sketches that –as I did– you reinvented yourself many times, trying to navigate the ever-changing definition of whatever “being with it” meant. We both discovered and explored non-Eurocentric cultures and lifestyles, and shed the Weltanschauung of “straight” society. Inspired by Timmy Leary, we both turned on, tuned in and dropped out. Ask Alice: Once you step through the looking glass, you can't ever truly come back.

We swung like monkeys from Left to Right and back again. We were both shocked and disillusioned by Prague and Tlatelolco in '68, heralding the slow death of Soviet-style communism. But we both believed in the necessity to organize the “people” against the oppression of what Horkheimer and Adorno called the “Administered World” and we called in those days The System or The Machine. You, more than I, felt the Horror of Auschwitz closer to the gut. I, being darker-skinned, felt the dehumanizing power of racial discrimination from a very early age.

Back in the late sixties, we both worked together in Montreal, organizing the Plastic Roseland Dance Conspiracy rock shows to raise money for community-based programs and anti-racist solidarity activities. We both survived the November 14th, 1969 “Mindfuck”, which left dozens of acidheads scattered throughout a cold Montreal dawn trying to recover their sanity.

I must confess that the first time I met you, I never could quite “get” you. Perhaps it was a neurochemical miss-alignment... You appeared to me as perhaps too gung-ho American; whereas maybe you saw me as too Gandhian... Who knows? It was the Season of the Witch, and nothing appeared quite as real and clear-cut as they do today.

But now, after reading your book I think I grok you in your fullness. I admire your commitment to Spanish-American culture as well as your exploration of Afro-Cuban religion and music. As I was born in Havana, these entered by osmosis into my spirit at an early age. Your discovery of Tai-Chi and other Eastern spiritual practices parallel my own –which began in Puerto Rico when I was 21. Theravada and Zen Buddhism especially have had a powerful influence in my spiritual development. As you wrote: balance, constant change and movement are essential for attaining true Peace and Satcitānanda.

I see from what you've chosen as your field that you are living in a world much darker and violent than my own. The ethical parameters are much more blurred in the San Francisco of 2017 than is the case in Montreal. And now, you will face the Trumpian world of lies and persecution much more than I will –karma being what it is.

I enjoyed our short time together last summer, and I hope we can see and hug each other again before our mutual parinirvāṇa.

¡Hasta la Victoria, siempre!

Tu ecobio,

/cual