Woody Allen: Showing up is 80 percent of life.

I was walking by the Thames. Half-past morning on an autumn day. Sun in a mist. Like an orange in a fried fish shop. All bright below. Low tide, dusty water and a crooked bar of straw, chicken-boxes, dirt and oil from mud to mud. Like a viper swimming in skim milk. The old serpent, symbol of nature and love.


Well, my grandfather came from Poland, and he just died here about a year ago, at the age of ninety-five. I remember one thing he said. He was a very wise man, but he was kind of a boozed all his life...On his birthday or something like that I'd take him a bottle of bourbon. And he told me one day when I brought him a bottle of bourbon for his birthday--I think he was ninety-two at the time--he said that he had given up alcohol, that alcohol had killed two of his brothers and he thought that it was time for him to quit, because he wasn't old enough to die yet. So I asked him about the brothers it had killed. And he told me it had killed his brothers Colin and Stanley. I checked up on it and found that Colin was ninety-two when he died and Stanley was eighty-nine.


Frank Lloyd Wright: TV is chewing gum for the eyes.

Woody Allen: Why does man kill? He kills for food. And not only food: frequently there must be a beverage.

Fear is a slinking cat I find
Beneath the lilacs of my mind.

Sophie Tunnell.

August Strindberg...peered through his microscope into a walnut and saw, perfectly formed, "two tiny white hands, white as alabaster, raised and clasped as though in prayer." In his book, Inferno...Strindberg describes how the rumpled pillow on his bed began to figure marble heads in the style of Michelangelo. Once in the half-shadow he saw on his bed the form of a recumbent Zeus, and his companion, a painter, exclaimed: "A great vanished art of the past born again! I tell you there's a whole school of drawing here!" On another occasion he admired a drawing of a Madonna in a friend's studio, and was told that it had been copied from a pattern of weeds on the surface of a lake; and when Strindberg raked some coals out of his fireplace, he found that they had taken on the shapes of gnomes, goblins and writhing human figures. A visiting friend took them for the work of a Norwegian sculptor famous for his illustrations of folk tales, and they were so life-like that when Strindberg put them out on the roof they frightened away the sparrows!


Phyllis Diller: Cleaning your house while your kids are still growing is like shoveling the walk before it stops snowing.

Vera Gauditas [immigrant from Czechoslovakia]: And in the city you walk between people like you walk in the woods.

Alberto Giacometti: In a burning building, I would save a cat before a Rembrandt.

J.B. Morton: Wagner is the Puccini of music.

When I was a child my mother said to me, "If you become a soldier you'll be a general. If you become a monk you'll end up as the pope." Instead I became a painter and wound up as Picasso.

In cases of extreme necessity, and when the preservation of human life depends on the obtainment of water, the supply to be found in the stomach of the camel should not be overlooked or forgotten. During the Algerian campaign the French made some investigations in order to find out the quantity of water a dead camel's stomach would contain, and the result was that about 15 pints was the average arrived at. This water, although green and turbid, had no offensive smell.


Spike Milligan: Are you going to come quietly or do I have to use earplugs?

H.H. Munro (Saki): In baiting a mousetrap with cheese, always leave room for the mouse.

Where did ideas come from anyway? This one had leaped at him when he'd been exhausted, AWOL from his search.

As I write this I am reminded of a conversation I had sometime ago with a contemporary poet whom I asked: "What is and what is not poetry today?" The simple answer has remained with me: "If one has read Ecclesiastes, Shakespeare, Keats, T.S. Eliot, etc., one realizes that all possible ideas have already been expressed. There are no new ideas. What may make poetry is a new way of expressing that which has already been said."


In his native Hungary, Max Kiss was a practicing pharmacist, familiar with a chemical, phenolphthalein, that local wine merchants were adding to their products. The practice was at first thought to be innocuous. But soon the merchants, and the wine-drinking public, discovered that a night's overindulgence in wine created more than a hangover in the morning. The chemical additive turned out to be an effective laxative. And when Max Kiss emigrated to New York in 1905, he began combining phenolphthalein with chocolate as a commercial laxative. He initially named the product Bo-Bo, a name inadvisably close to the slang expression for the laxative's target. Kiss reconsidered and came up with Ex-Lax, his contraction for "Excellent Laxative."

John Lennon:
Yea, though I wert through
the valet of
thy shadowy
hut I will feed
no norman.

W.H. Auden:
A professor is
someone who
talks in some-
one else's
sleep.

Spike Milli- 
gan: He
walked with a
pronounced
limp, L-I-M-P,
pronounced
'limp'.

Samuel Gold- 
wyn: If Roose-
veldt were
alive, he'd
turn over in his
grate.

Roger Fry: Art
is significant
deformity.

The Bauhaus school of design and
my early experiences left me with
the impression that I could solve
anything. This attitude was as
natural as breathing. I was al-
ways sure that there was an an-
swer to any question, if one kept an
open mind.

Primo Angeli, quoted in Ed Gold,
The Business of Graphic Design
(New York: Watson-Guptill,

Recommended: Vision in Motion by
Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (Chicago: 
Paul Theobald, 1947). Published
more than four decades ago, this
chock-full manifesto by the Bau-
haus photographer, foundations
professor, and founder of the New
Bauhaus still seems strangely up-
to-date.

The Composition Class instructor,
Henry J. Thouron, sought to stimu-
late the creativity of his students.
He would draw a rectangular area,
then locate within it a few free-
hand lines and a dot. "Now I want
a picture where this dot is the lobe
of a man's ear and these lines are
incorporated," he would advise.
All of the elements would have to
become part of the composition;
that was the challenge. Each stu-
dent then evolved an original pic-
ture where the design was con-
trolled by the novice artist, rather
than by happenstance.

Bennard B. Perlman, The Golden
Age of American Illustration: F.R.
Gruger and His Circle (Westport,
CT: North Light Publishers, 1977),
p. 294.
Blaise Pascal: If you want people to think well of you, do not speak well of yourself.

Nubar Gulbenkian: The best number for a dinner party is two: myself and a damned good cook.

Dr. Seuss, who claims to be a self-taught artist, had a drawing lesson once. When he turned his paper upside down to study the composition, the teacher walked by and said, "Ted, real artists don't turn their paper upside down." He never returned to class.


Crossing the country, every piece of machinery I seen in the field, I thought I seen a lot of airplanes. The farmer had a piece of machinery in the field and it had paddles on it and I thought, 'There's an airplane.' I had never seen an airplane at that time, you know. In fact, it was quite a while before we seen airplanes in this country, until after the war.


I write because, exacting as it may be to do so, it is still more difficult to refrain, and because—however conscious of one's limitations one may be—there is always at the back of one's mind an irrational hope that this next book will be different: it will be the rounded achievement, the complete fulfillment. It never has been: yet I am still writing.


The whole secret lies in arbitrariness... You go to see the middle of a play, you read the third part of a book. By this means you insure yourself a very different kind of enjoyment from that which the author has been so kind as to plan for you. You enjoy something entirely accidental; you consider the whole of existence from this standpoint...


They strive deliberately to transcend the commonplace—that is to say, the habitual—configurations rather than to conform to them. In this, artists do not differ from inventors; and they are similarly constrained by the number of available configurations within their cultural tradition and the degree to which the internal cohesion of these habitual configurations resists their efforts to break them down and reintegrate them into new units.


Moses [his identical twin brother] once appeared in a TV interview. Next day a woman, passing me in the street, said: "I saw you on TV yesterday." "It was Moses, not I," I said. Looking at me closely, she questioned, "Are you sure?"


Paula Laib, 1986.
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Recommended: The Arts at Black Mountain College by Mary Emma Harris (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987). An illustrated, thoroughly researched account of a highly unusual school of the arts, formerly located 18 miles east of Asheville in North Carolina, founded in 1933 (coincidental with the closing of the German Bauhaus) and dissolved 23 years later. Among its students and faculty were Josef Albers (who later taught at the Art Academy of Cincinnati), Anni Albers, Eric Bentley, Paul Goodman, Elaine de Kooning, Willem de Kooning, Charles Olson, Marguerite Willdenhain, Marcel Breuer, Robert Motherwell, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Creeley, Jack Tworkov, Franz Kline, Merce Cunningham, John Cage, Buckminster Fuller, and many others.

Samuel Goldwyn: Anybody who would go to a psychiatrist ought to have his head examined.

Henny Youngman: Did y'hear about the time they crossed a mink with a gorilla? They got a real nice coat but the sleeves were too long.

Virginia Woolf: Art is not an imitation of life. One of the damned things is enough.

By memorable events are understood, in the murky bell jar of prison, things like getting potato soup instead of bean soup for the midday meal, a few privately exchanged words with the warder or the orderly, a cigarette given one by the warder, a spider in the window, or a bug in the bed. These are breathing experiences, they employ and stimulate the free-running mechanism of thought for hours at a time. They are substitutes for the cup, quite as real as storms at sea.