

## ARTIST'S STUDIO RESIDENCY TOKYO 1994

First impressions: at Denpasar airport in Bali, waiting for the connecting flight to Tokyo. I am struck by how much the Japanese returning from holiday resemble rich Californians.

A few details: too-deep tans, braided bleached hair, porno-style hot pants. I take these to be signs of wealth and I wonder what other mannerisms might have been adopted from shows like Beverly Hills 90210.

I'm actually impressed by how *normal* they look.

I am scheduled to teach English in a windowless meeting room on the 25th floor of a Shinjuku skyscraper. Upon arrival, each of my fifteen students (all employees of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government) introduce themselves in formal, crippled sentences and then they sit, waiting for me to begin the class. I am handed a textbook and find myself reading aloud a banal and contrived conversational passage - a speech of sorts.

*Friends: In 1963 when President John F. Kennedy announced the signing of the first nuclear test ban treaty he said, "Yesterday, a shaft of light cut into the darkness." In the same way through our discussions this past weekend we can also say, "A shaft of light cut into the darkness." Our shaft of light is friendship that penetrates the darkness of international misunderstanding. Thank you for coming to Japan. Thank you for becoming friends. May the light of our new friendship shine throughout the rest of our lives.*

My mind starts to spin and I feel its wild attempt to find a familiar foothold anywhere in the situation. Staring around the table at the bland polite attentive faces and feeling overcome with terror, I fan myself and sip water. I must be feeling what people call *aghast* which, and I haven't experienced it like this before, is pure xenophobia: acute and inopportune.

After the class, I'm treated to lunch at the Metropolitan Government cafeteria. Still only barely able to tolerate the situation, I try to explain that I suffer from claustrophobia. Everyone at the table immediately pulls out their dictionary and there is a general murmur and conference. Afterwards I go straight back to my *Australia Council Studio* and confine myself to bed for the remainder of the day.

A cool artist's statement:

"Art & Artist are going hand in hand. Conception and Love are the fundamental elements of artistic activities. Because they are seeking after the need to materialize the unrepresented things by all possible means and after creation on the condition that there are the shortcomings in the horizon of presence from unpresence is possible only when there is a love for existence free from the presented works and utilities and also a conception of an ideal which yields in a form equivalent to hand of an artist."

Somewhere in Tokyo I found myself trying to explain the significance of the last line of an Australian poem that goes:

*'Fuck the fucking fucker 'cause the fucking fucker's fucked'.*

Afterwards I was told that an expletive with a sexual or genital connotation is rarely used and its dramatic effect not easily comprehended in Japan. The closest I could get to the word 'mother-fucker' was a phrase that literally translates as "he whose umbilical cord has yet to be cut".

Japanese women can seem foal-like and have a habit of covering their mouths suddenly, as if something unpleasant might suddenly slip out, or be swallowed.

A flat-mate, Gaye, who worked as a prostitute, told me that Japanese men were her favourite customers. They were 'small, clean and quick', she said.

René Leibowitz (pupil of Schoenberg and  
Webern)

A typically Tokyo thought occurs to me: after  
purchasing that book of stereo pornography, I had  
meant to pick up some brochures from the plastic  
surgery clinic across the street.

An exhibition opening in Tokyo. What contemptible displays of air-kissing and ciao-bellowing! What a bunch of artful dodgers! For some reason, I have the idea of asking Martin Kippenburger to sign my forehead.

*Love Simulation*: a photo booth in a game arcade. A young couple take turns sitting for photographs. The two portraits are then pasted or morphed with a 'neutral' baby face so as to offer a composite impression of their hypothetical offspring.

On late night television - an interview with Magic Johnson.  
The delays; the silences; the ear-phone; the goofy grin; the huge black man.

On the train. The young woman with the pale scarred face leans down and asks in English if she can take my seat, as she is feeling unwell. I go and stand next to an older woman who is wearing a large fancy hat.

When the train stops at the next station a large dragonfly flies in and settles unseen on the wide brim of the hat. I think about grabbing this dragonfly but then hesitate, the carriage doors still open.

While conducting an English class, I respond to a question about my first impressions of Japan by remarking that the similarities between the two cultures were more striking than the differences.

No, no, the class assures me: the differences are not only there, but greater than I realise. After some discussion we compromise by agreeing that the differences are subtle but 'run deep'.

## Korea

- Girls hold hands
- Pedestrian crossings are all underground so as to make it possible to build above-ground traffic intersections the size of football ovals.
- Youths in grey uniforms with sticks and shields and riot buses that are battered and scratched.
- The extreme youth of these youths.
- Everything American is genuinely adored.
- The pathetic attempts to promote Seoul as a tourist destination. I have been here for two days, walked about 20 kilometres, and haven't yet been able to buy a postcard.
- Much greater Christian presence than in Japan.
- Not as much written English in public places.
- Generally feels as though things have been constructed not well, but with great ambition, and then badly maintained.
- Grudging service.
- What signs remain of inter-war Japanese occupation (1910 - 1945)?
- Unusual toilet protocol in the back-packers hostel - used toilet paper is placed in a bin rather than flushed away.
- Kentucky Fried Chicken is just the same here, with the exception that they cook it without the famous herbs and spices.

Skinny Tokyo youth - flared denim overalls,  
platform Nikes, tartan beret.  
Glam moving sarcastically toward punk.

“Solo sex” - a masturbation manual.  
Possible companion to the suicide manual  
(which I was unable to procure).



Sex Queens - Tall, big hair-dos, huge breasts, ugly.

Fetching - how does it come to mean attractive?

Another *Gaijin* enters the train carriage. I am compelled to look in their direction but after a short time I feel self conscious and if our eyes happen to meet I turn away and ignore the person. Why is this?

The Canadian woman explained the estrangement between foreigners as having something to do with the special status that is accorded the English teacher. She described watching a foreigner walking down the street surrounded by an entourage of respectful students and being reminded of the story of the emperor's new clothes. It is possible that the English teacher also thinks of this and, in moments when not completely absorbed in their role, they realise that their qualification is not entirely deserved. They fear being unmasked by a jealous compatriot.

The first sensation upon catching sight of the other foreigner is a feeling that one's own singularity is slightly diminished. It is preferable to be completely alone than to be one of a foreign minority. A grand feeling of foreignness comes at the expense of the company of ones fellow country-men.

I feel an impulse to speak to the other foreigner but it is checked by the realisation that they may very well speak no English. Worse still, they might reasonably see foreign-ness (which is to say; a shared exclusion) as being a pathetic pretext for conversation and, on my part, a sign of helplessness.

Looking at the foreigner's face, one sees just what it is that amuses the Japanese child. The bridge of the nose juts out from between the eyebrows. The eyes bulge and wander without restraint or modesty. Hair grows everywhere on the body. The face writhes, like a basket of snakes, with an urge to express and betray emotion.

I realise, at the instant our eyes meet, that a similar idea might occur to the foreigner when they look at me. This thought is unbearable and my gaze is immediately deflected by this thought.

I wonder if I am getting any better at understanding and following narratives on television and in comics even though I still can't speak a word of Japanese? I fancy that not knowing the language might encourage one to pay more attention to other clues and signs that would usually drop by the wayside of literal comprehension.

I thought I might be getting adept in the same way that blindness can strengthen and concentrate a person's hearing. Last night I enjoyed and understood the Kung-fu movie on TV but this doesn't necessarily prove anything.

I walk into a department store minutes before closing time just to use their toilet.

Sales staff lining the aisles bow to me as I enter and bow again as I walk out.

*Boku wa karak-ketsu da* - "I am broke!"  
or literally:  
"My arse is empty."

The last ten minutes of a television show. The set: a domestic bar, potted palms, nondescript paintings. A scene of people drinking and talking. Simple camera shots of a glass being filled and the gestures of conversation. A woman touches her breasts to illustrate the story she is telling.

No lechery, just the signs of gentle and intimate ease. Was this staged or scripted? As if a man and two women were being led on by another man (the host, a bartender) to confess or reveal. The name of the show was "Touch me".

What the hell was going on here?

My friend's irritating 'honesty': no thought could occur without being spoken aloud.

- The twee high-pitched melodic frill that ornaments the conclusion of so many television commercials.
- The commercial in which both the husband and wife are drunk.
- The spare, melancholy style of the advertisement for tea.  
Tall willowy high school girls in long skirts. A dark forest.  
Melody folkish - but not upbeat. The younger boys laughing; the gloomy secrets and introversion of puberty.
- The sound in beer commercials of liquid rinsing the throat - amplified, unreal, obscene. Like *nureba* - wet/fuck scenes in porn films.

Tokyo TV: Pro-wrestling matches fought between blood-spattered contestants in a ring surrounded by an electrified barbed-wire fence.

Panic attack: a kind of vertigo perched at the dizzy height of the thought that a thing exists.

My favourite Japanese chocolate:  
“Vessel in the fog”.

A solicitation:

Transform your “Inner Scream” suppressed consciously or unconsciously into a work of art and get it published.

Express yourself A completed work make not only inspire you to go on to greater things but you may also find your hidden identity through your creativity.

Creation gives you the effects like facing a stronger in you, reaching the deep resources your soul. So, express yourself for all you are worth.

‘When The Foetus Goes Poaching’, containing surreal and erotic torture scenes. Made in 1966 by Wakamatsu Koji and Adachi Masao, who later fled to the Middle East because of his links with the Red Army. Could he have been the one mentioned in the news recently, who was released, ‘a broken man’ from a prison there?

The mystery of lanterns.

They mediate and obscure the source of light. They will always make us think of standing outside a dwelling at night. While illuminating things around them, they draw attention to themselves. Unlike a beam directed outward, that locates points within a dynamic geometry where centres are shifting and only temporarily important. The lantern says that there is a private body of life here. Someone's shadow against the drawn blind of a boudoir window. One feels unburdened by the lantern's gravitational pull. It is somehow generous and discreet.

The second event staged by the Experimental Workshop was a combination of constructivist sculptures and special lighting to accompany the first performance in Japan of *Vision de l' Ament* by Olivier Messiaen.

How popular was he amongst the avant-garde of the time? (Takemitsu)



Tokyo cockroaches. At first one crushes them unthinkingly with a cold eye and for reasons that seem practical. Then in the course of cohabitation, one may become more aware of the human-ness of their behaviour.

They are generally timid, preferring the dark in which they move quietly about, looking for food. Turning on a ceiling light will scare a cockroach away but the beam of a single torch may inspire in it a brave curiosity - it will creep forward with antennae waving gracefully, stopping to consider its next move. Unlike other insects that trundle dumbly forward like trolleys or street-cars, the cockroach will watch for trouble and appear to deliberate even when the coast seems clear. How it panics when uncovered or caught in the open! It will run frantically this way and that, as if it feels the exact weight of ones gaze but, being low and flat, is unable to exactly locate it.

The thrill and obsession with hunting these repulsive vegetarians must owe much to the challenge presented by their speed and intelligence. Add to this the precision needed to make a conclusive strike with a shoe or newspaper and the force required so as to kill without making a mess of the Tatami matting.

The mess! The sight of the pulp exuded by the crushed body makes ones skin crawl, and after a month of obsessively hunting these quick, scared creatures, the skin crawls simply in anticipation of this sight.

Why did Kafka choose this creature as the subject of his story of Metamorphosis? Already present in the cockroach are the human qualities of unassuming, nervous humility. The first (unwritten) part of the story introduces a cockroach named Gregor who had awakes one morning to find he is human.

“Beautiful things are beyond time.  
Women’s history never cease to yearn for beauty.”

I am attracted to examples of "Japlish" not because they are simply comical corruptions of good English but often because they emphasise, in an uncanny way the absurdity and the conceit lurking in our own, native utterances. In this fashion - as so often in Japan - the familiar is estranged and revealed.

English, and the command of its idioms, is sometimes the only thing of value one feels one possesses in Japan. Surrounded by wealth and infallible manners it is a small consolation to think that one holds this thing innately and in this respect one's qualification will always be higher than that of a native-born Japanese.

It was disconcerting to discover that many of the young people were simply not impressed by any of this. Within their milieu it was considered far more fashionable to be able to speak French.



*This picture appeared in the newspaper just before I left for Japan. It is a photograph taken by a man named Shigeno Takasu from inside the aircraft in which he was travelling hours before it crashed at Nagoya airport, killing everyone aboard. The caption to the photograph was a little strange; it said that the photo showed passengers 'relaxing only hours before their death' - as if they had been patiently waiting for the crash that was scheduled to take their lives.*

- From my seat in the aeroplane I was facing at least five colour video screens of varying shapes and sizes. As we took off I saw that they were monitoring the view from a camera mounted in the nose of the plane. It was quite a thrill to watch the tarmac rushing forward on television at the same time as feeling the bodily crush of take-off. An interesting analog to virtual reality.

Found myself thinking of the photograph (a relic) that was recovered from the wreckage of the aeroplane that crashed at Nagoya recently. What a fantastic and banal image- because it had achieved profundity by a sleight of (God's) hand.

Wondered if what I was watching on the monitor was being recorded at that moment in the aircraft's black box. Imagined that I was already analysing an incident that had yet to occur. Being incinerated in the catastrophe and simultaneously witnessing its replay on the evening news.

Reminded me of a device developed by the French military that consisted of a camera mounted on the barrel of a rifle. The camera carries an enhanced image of whatever direction the gun is pointed to a pair of VR goggles worn by the soldier. As well as enabling him to fight by starlight, it obviates the need to take aim - anything that he 'looks' at is already in his gun-sights.

- Kids stumbling around in the padded harness of the VR game. How amusing it is to watch someone's virtual blindness.
- "Interactive Media" in many instances promising everything but delivering nothing more profound than the possibility of having a direct neural connection to the channel selector of a television set.

● ♥ ★ Symbolizing the Three F philosophy in which we aim at discovering every need in daily life and an emitting base of creation and suggestions of new life, this mark consists of three forms with free strokes. The round shape of “Circle Green” which gives a feeling of warmth represents the earth fostering us and a solidarity ring combining the new life style of people who are increasingly becoming sensible with local communities to support the people’s happy and healthy lives. The bright heart of “Heart Red” represents information-emitting energy, indispensable for today’s convenience stores and the “service mind for rich lives.” The bright star of “Star Blue” represents Three F attitude of trying to materialize a peaceful and affluent future. When today’s life style exists free from uniformal patterns, our store itself is a message for the people of a new kind. Thus, as the core of the message, this mark symbolizes the spirit of Three F rendering thoughtful services.

**WE ARE ECOLOGY-MINDED.  
THIS BAG WILL SELF-DESTRUCT IN  
MOTHER EARTH.**

“We are in a time of momentous change. New concepts are born and from them new words are created and the beauty of new feelings arises. The creative impulse is born of the impressions we get from a several thousand years which feels so close as to be only recent. A lesson for the heart, these impressions are trapped within the struggle between body and spirit. It is here that my creativity lies.”

T-Shirts from Hiroshima:

**ACQUAINTANCE**  
**IN AN ERNEST TONE**  
**my friends dog gained**  
**favor with me quickly**

**SPREAD BEAVER**  
**SHOWING THE**  
**VAGINAL AREA**

**MORE THAN A WOMAN**

**Girl in your hand is a paradise**  
**for me**  
**I feel to be happy in that place**

Schoolgirl shopping with her mother in  
Tokyu Hands department store.  
Girl's T-Shirt reads: "too drunk to fuck"