

Japan 2006

Bill Berkson

United Airlines flight 885 SFO-Osaka

crossing international date line
leaving behind coffee and email

4 p.m. PDT April 7 = 8 a.m., April 7, Japan

Arrive in haze – skin of Sea of Japan like crinkly fabrics of new Japanese designers,
Miyake and after.

Ko-nishiwa. Hello.

“Prevention of Terrorism”
in beautiful streamers, red on yellow.

“Uneven access”
alert on airport doorstep.

5:47 to Kyoto – pause for extensive clean up of cars
-- *anime* seats in rows swivel at worker’s touch.

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“PRIORITIZE” – no can do.

It’s cherry-blossom time in Osaka sprawl.
Dusk in Otori, canted neon barber poles, passenger bows twice to conductor. train
stalled – “car accident,” says man behind us, somewhere down the line.

BLESSED
HEAD REST

Wes Westrum
Carl Yastremski
Elroy Hirsch

[Homage to P.W.*]

moving again.

Rattles of Rumi
amongst the vents

modern places packed with lights
Samuel Palmer & the Ancients

Althea Gibson
Sammy Sosa
Pete Reiser
Dolly Parton
Edith Schloss
Frank Lovejoy

UPDATE

breezing through
the Eastern Hills
en route to Three Sisters Ryokan
Kasuga Kita Dori

**never to be known as "Pee Wee Whalen"*

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April 9 – Sunday crowds for cherry blossom time.

Spend half the morning searching for a discouraging word, the rest for something – a gesture – to counteract.

A Theory of Quiet

next came the falling blossoms,
fallen on the Philosophers Walk
oohs & aahs prevail – the ceiling tondo
comical dragon John Suiter recommended as
one of Philip's haunts. It's a bit much –
hedges flowering, magnolias and camellias,
apples, trussed trees. Not roosters on those rooftops,
phoenixes. Love those square portals.
Expecting to see Donald Richie everywhere.

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April 10 -- The temples (ji) so far:

Day One:

Kurodani-ji
Ginkaju-ji (steep steps to observation deck)
Honenin (lotus fount)
Nanzenji

Day Two:

Daitoku-ji

Zuiho-in (garden with cross)

Kinkako-ji

Ryoanji – 15 rocks in garden & the wall “perspectizes” in favor of the greater distance.

Why rocks in the border ditch don’t count as much, “marginalized.” The small detail – how to run oneself, or town or country. “Marxism, too big!” says Larry. Right. All big ideas, plans – America, nation, state, War on Poverty – too massive, unwieldy. Zen teaches itself that way, too: “Zen, phooey! Wash that dish!” [Joanne-ji]

Shokoku-ji, PW’s place with Dharma Hall dragon ceiling – wild-eyed 6-D desire, 1605. Clap under him, the gates of the city go “aw.”

Funny face dragon no applause, pls.

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(BABY TALK WITH PHILIP WHALEN)

It is a wonder.

On the way out we murmur,
“Super Duper.”

old language manners from Ivan Morris, preface to Sei Shonagon:

ito – very

okashi – charming

medetashi – splendid

yoi – good

probably useless here (and so they prove)

OKINI – Kyoto slang for Thank You.

Achingly – penis & company brushed artfully by ample breasts

ji – temple

“Your body is a temple.”

you-ji

HAI!

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DEAR COUSIN ONUS.

Coffin whimsy.

“X told the world it could avoid change and, as exceptionalist as ever, escape immobility’s ridiculousness in the process. Absurdity certainly has caught up with this routine.”

– *Herald Tribune* 4/11/06

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KANAZAWA

Museum of the 21st Century

raining in/through Turrell sky trapezoid chamber

Anish Kapoor oblong hole in slanted wall – anamorph – oblong when you hunker down is egg-shaped, from either side pulls away.

“20th Century Modernism was driven by the three M’s of Man, Money and Materialism. With the replacement of these . . . with the three C’s of Consciousness, Collective Intelligence and Co-Existence, new forms of expression are now beginning to make their appearance.”

On the train from Kanazawa – about a mile to the right (East?) of the train tracks, misty hills in mist line the dusk; to the left, rain clouds hang low over the (good Golly!) Sea of Japan, maybe if we’re lucky mostly spent. There are islands out there, too, probably a mile in that direction. West? Where am I?

Dusk, yes, but I’ve yet to see the Asian sky turn color. Hills get bigger (qualification for “mountain” is an elevation of how many feet?). Clouds get darker yet. Not one bad meal yet. Best has been “temple food” tofu at Nanzen.

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- Udon in thick (egg?) soup + donburi, open market lunch.
- Bon Spirit dinner mix of veggies, tofu, tempura, cherry blossoms in soup.
- Museum of 21st C. lunch buffet.
- Shabushabu in Gion.

- Fat bricks of tost-o for breakfast at Three Sisters.
- Oden country vegetables in broth at Takocho near Shijo Bridge.

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M	HAIR DAY
E	HAIR CLUB FOR MEN
N	NAIR (FOR THE LADIES)
T	HAIRY RAG (THE KINKS)
A	CONK
L	TRESS
T	KIT 'N' KABOODLE
I	LOCK ("from time immemorial")
C	
T	
A	
C	
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April 7 was John Ashbery Day in New York/ everywhere.

Tonight I thought I heard Cat Power playing in the Handicraft Center kimono store.

6-D energy – I'm in my 6-Ds.

One car on the Shinkansen marked "For Ladies Only." Later I learn this is for women who want not to be molested by horrible sexist men in the other cars.

Screw Exception, Savor Exemption.

Names in the News: Villepin, Sakorsky, Hugo Chavez, Peruvian name like *Ümlaut*, Libby, Rummy, Condi, the whole sick crew.

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What/who is poor? On a case-by-case basis? – better than Social Capital or trying to figure what was better before Capitalism – *pace* the Golden Age – Absolute Monarchy modified by Feudal Barons, modified by merchants/bankers – who then take over, further (??) subjugating “the little guy”? – and sometimes when things get stressful, requiring tyrants (proto-fascist Louis Napoleon) and dress-up kings to restore order in the streets.

Industry differs from Care of Making Things – MOMOYAMA. No touch. Everything is outsourced.

“I wouldn’t dirty my hands!”

“Jobs Americans won’t do.”

I still don’t get it.

Missed 100-yen piece throw to slotted collection crate at Shokoku-ji – a forlorn wish I didn’t make in the first place.

Dorothy Parker’s ashes likewise remiss.

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In *Scenes of Life at the Capital*, the “capital” is PW’s head; Kyoto only intermittently makes a dent.

CHECK ON “THE GLASGOW COLORISTS.”

turn of the century artists group mentioned at breakfast by architect Tom the Scot here. his wife not happy as Connie and he engage in chat. These little breakfast nook socials are indeed an awkward rite.

Ed and Katie from Sheffield.

Palo Alto probably academe family – he Brit, she tall housemother varietal, 2 “strapping” teenage boys.

Two more Scots: she enthused, he sweet of the softer voice.
The other American turns out to be Brit as well.
Family from near Bremen or Hamburg – unclear which – man, wife, 2 girls, 1 boy.

Blossoms mixed with gravel.

decorated with wings of jewel beetles

MIROKUBOSATU'S "mission to relieve suffering"
made of cinnamon wood.

Try again: CEOs rake in 400 times that of a factory worker's salary. Unfair,
unproductive. People skills not that impressive. Support for this idiocy somewhere in
the Middle (aspiring CEOs). The theory that underlings go for all this because they
expect – hope or kill for – advancement one day, or the kids do. Profit motive – more
than you put in. 7th century Japan central government Shogun upset by "feudalism"
(huh?)

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SORTES ASHBERYANAE

"and the fried bats they sell there'

"and sudden day unbuttoned her blouse"

"you in the plural"

"Heh? Eh?"

"and I am lost without you"

"and then I get this feeling of exaltation"

"young love, married love, and the love of an aged mother for her son"

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Your mind is a beauty parlor
managed by ungainly estheticians, lap dancers, realtors and other specialists of sorts

cosmetic to the hilt

KATSUGA ALLEY
no visible Kyoto Hilton

eye-catching

non-descript

unfathomable

not to be missed

Connie's left foot blistered

"Nara has a great magical feeling"
-- PW, p. 42

In Nara Park one hears, beside the local uniformed schoolkids' chatter, Swedish,
French, Italian, English, German . . . & is that Nepalese?

NOT ONE RED
TEN-YEN

"Skilling insists . . ." – 20 lashes!
[Jeffrey Skilling, Enron company villain]

TRICHILIOCOSM

Bottom line: Not enough trash cans for US me in Japan; reason? maybe Japanese
make less trash.
Jimi says, they hold onto it & take it home at the end of the day – take-home trash.

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IT WAS ALL FOR YOU

Try sticking X to anyone's messiah.

The Empire of Signs is thinking ahead.

Another tofu-&-vegetables-in-water delight in another corner bistro (bistro-o?).

“He’s not having any”(sense of firm disbelief, phooey-- source is US Midwest or English – which?)

Corners auspicious for restaurants here.
What else is good for business?

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Got on wrong train at Nara for Kyoto – local line like an El with straphangers. Foul mood.

THINKING AHEAD

FUJI MEANS WISTERIA (PROBABLY NOT)

“constituting an event in the language”
– WCW, sensei

Birds race our bus to Ohara, win or anyhow vanish

white-tailed

My sister life’s in flood today
Supernumerary existence wells up

PURE LAND
ALL MIND {sects
(HOSSO)
JODO

=====

April 13th – Ohara

Shinzen-ji

25 stone bodhisattvas

Samuel Beckett’s
100th birthday

Amita 3 meters garish
lovely Kannons & Lute Playing Mercy Lady outside

oodles of moss
pickles, ginger, rice crackers

#17 bus delivers us to Gion – lunch perhaps with Howard & Maryann Rogers & 7-year-old Amber.

Revisit Connie's old ryokan Tawaraya

Choen-in – nice Bodhisattva in 6-D swirls

Skilling says, “Absurd”

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EXQUISITE

STUNNING

Sakura flurries – temple steps studded with petals

Sakura – excessive, often too much, like walking around inside a sea of Pepto Bismol.

multiple seas incarnadine,
to misquote the blessed William S.

PERFECT

on edge

memory of red
souvenir of mauve
parfait au chocolat
the color of gold, butter or ripe lemon

SHINKANSEN BULLET
5:06 p.m. bound for Tokyo

“The conductor’s room is in car number ten.”

Albers spoke of “craziness about color”; Rauschenberg remembered studying with Albers: “So I met a lot of nice colors.”

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coal-tar mauve – like Selsun Blue
synthesized by Sir William Perkin, 1856

palette colors by numbers:

Pliny counted 4

Newton 7

Roger Bacon 21

Matisse had 21 on his palette at a time

Unstable synthetics – hence innumerable Van Goghs, Seurats, etc., have lost out.

CHARACTERS IN PLAY SAY

(in Noel-Cowardville):

“How to live is not my concern; now, *where* to live, that is a conundrum.”

.....

“the name’s Camellia, pal – with a pair of ‘l’s as in ‘killer.’”

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at which point all these beauties cancel out
What’s the allegory?

Thus culture 100% politicized – no ethics, religion (how to live), philosophy, science (how objective existence proceeds), art (“& how!”) (joining the dots). Yes, there is sex, but try & enjoy it simply w/o defiance, spite or shame.

NUMB

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

-- NOT HAVING ANY

the kind of call that rings when you're sitting down to a frugal repast of rice and Ibuprophen.

Anything else is "aestheticized," you bet, like mother's milk.

"When did the dumb-bunny bomb first hit the USA?" – P.W.

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Q: What's so great about Ron Padgett?

A: Orderly and fragile, as I am not.
(Orderly because fragile.)

About Eleanor – how she showered her curiosity on the world & (some) people.

"You have a son?"

"Yes."

Scooping up blossoms with a Nara temple ticket; leaves from very old trees, pine button, white rock, pickle stick.

Amita – instant wisdom

-- linger awhile –

-- abide with me –

with chocolate ice cream and coffee in Kyoto train station basement café

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WHY A CHICKEN GARUDA?

"to employ her

construction
ball”

& the Ambiguities

DISAMBIGUATION

LIGHT ON THE FORWARD HEEL OF THE HAND OF THE SECOND
BUDDHA DOWN THE ROW IN TREASURES HALL – the hand in more
straightforward blessing but at the same time difficult to draw it back like that, a
contortion act, fingers almost straight up. Practiced. Supple.

in the event that

“For the Japanese clean stands for beautiful and vice versa.” – Bernard Rudofsky via
Connie.

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Now and again Unpopular War.
Lincoln and the War Office.
Bush and Rummy.
Matthew Brady & Co. and the snapshooters at
Abu Ghraib.

FAVORITE CHILDHOOD LIGHT READING:

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE

photobook of Japanese and German atrocities, published circa 1946, Tojo suicide,
beheading of US airman, Auschwitz, all – all fascinating death amazement to 7-8 year
old Manhattanite.

Get the skinny on Japanese military 1930s – why? How US pushed this – something
about oil.

Museum of Traditional Japanese Hair Styles
– sign in Gion.

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UNPOPULAR WAR

Hiroko's chirashi in Kanizaki
Jimi Suzuki's moss gardens
Jimi's hero: Bando Tamasaburo, Kabuki actor

Shinjuku Station
Odaku train
Express
change at Shinyuri Gaoka
same platform to local
Tsuikawa
2nd station
main (East) exit
044-968-6073

metro samadhis

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YOTSUYA ART STUDIUM

4th floor
Shinjuku-ku Yotsuy 1-5

Kenjiro Okazaki, director

April 15, 7 p.m.

Reading at Yotsuya Art Studium, 50 students, Sawako Nakasaya and me. Fluorescent-lit classroom. Q&A students want to know about different jobs I've had & being a poet, Philip Guston, what was New York like in the 1970s (because I had mentioned Patti Smith). I tell the old story of how Japan has 1000 weekly poetry magazines, "Waka everywhere!" Laughter – I guess that old story isn't true. Nice, spicy Korean stew dinner after with Mrs. Okazaki, Korean poet. Talk of John Cage, Trisha Brown, Joanne and Norma Cole.

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April 16 – Departure. Miss Kyoto’s modest splendors, not megalopolis Tokyo. Did not connect with John Suiter, Burton Watson, Haroki Murakami, Donald Richie. Final museum visit to Mr. Okuru’s “cultural property” halls – mostly 18th century paintings, scrolls.

Tokyo cab companies – one fleet in Torii gate orange, another in dusty bamboo green – wonderful when they sidle up to one another.

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Buddhist Universe
TRICHILIOCOSM
3 worlds
6 paths
myriad subdivisions

Sanzen – greater part
“3000 Great Thousand World”
a thousand cubed

Japan is the last customer for old-time pop instrumental Muzak – version of such wistful melodies as Fascination and Moon River – the program called “Environmental.”

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Shin – heart

Ponds at Ohara (Sanzen-ji etc)
in Shin-character form.

[leaf paste up]

“It is possible of course that the portable items in these rooms will not always be in the locations listed above.”

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ARM YOUR DOORS FOR
DEPARTURE AT THIS TIME.

DREAMING IN COLOR

CONTENTS OF THE OVERHEAD BIN
ARE LIABLE TO SHIFT DURING FLIGHT.

No problem – or “That’s the trouble.”

SPLAYED

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Virgil, Frank, Jim Davidson, Kenneth, Eleanor, Philip & Musa, Rudy, Edwin, Philip, Bob, Ted

-- "Is earth as full as life was full, of them?"

& on a lighter note: 7:30 a.m. Pacific Daylight Saving Time, April 16, 2006, in the trichiliocosm.

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KEEP YOUR TEMPLES STRAIGHT.

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SUPER DUPER!