

Cyberculture in Japan: 1990, 1993, 2007

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Part I, 1990

May 28, 1990, Morning. First sights.

We came in last night, first sight from the plane a long beach, the edge of Asia, the sand empty and gray, rice paddies lining the rivers, hillknobs sticking out of the paddies like castles, green and misty. The crowd at the airport: the variousness of the Japanese faces. I notice this again downtown later, the diversity of their faces from round to square, and skin color from yellow to pale white. Audrey and I hit the street to walk around the fancy Ginza neighborhood once we've checked into the Hotel Imperial.

An arched stone passage under a train line, barbecue smoke streaming out, people sitting eating and drinking, a TV crew with 12 guys pointing lights at the announcer, who waits poised, then starts screaming crazily and the camera and lights follow as he surges forward into the BBQ crowd and confronts someone. Taxi cabs like cop cars streaming by. It's all so cyberpunk.

We eat sushi and beer, and at some unknown signal half the people there get bowls of soup with clams in it. On the street we get lost, gawking at the huge electric signs. The oddity of seeing story-high electric letters that mean *nothing* to you. Pure form, no content. Burroughs talks about rubes staring up in awe at the crawling neon. It's humiliating to be illiterate.

Driving in from the airport we passed Chiba City on the right, and on the left I saw a building that might have been a motel, with sloping buttress side walls that went right down to the edge of a solidly building-lined canal leading out to the Tokyo Bay, and I thought of *Neuromancer*. There were a DJ man and woman on the radio, she repeatedly giggling madly, then they started a song; Roy Orbison singing "Only the Lonely."

Walking around the Ginza lost that night we see lots of groups of "company-men" in blue suits, some of them quite drunk by end of evening. One particular guy is doing the double-jointed wobbly-knee walk that my father used to call "the camel walk." He's fifty or sixty, gray-haired, leader of his buddies. They're having such fun out on the street, everyone: no one begging or stealing or looking for a fight.

May 28, 1990, Afternoon. Around Tokyo.

Audrey and I were up quite early, and spent about six hours exploring. We sat outside the Kabuki Theater for awhile to rest, and saw construction workers in split-toed cloth boots with rubber soles, good for climbing. "Split-toe" in Japan is like "hard-hat" in the U.S. Women in kimonos were going in and out of the theater, musicians and makeup people. They have the self-confidence of artists with a job.

The imperial palace is in the center of a park with deep-looking moats with slanting stone walls. There are also places where the slanting stone walls just come up from the ground, leaning against embankments. The walls are fascinating because at the edges they use rectangular blocks and towards the center they use huge irregular hexagons, all the blocks fitting together as nicely as soap-bubbles. It's interesting to me to see a transition between rectangular and hexagonal grid arrays, as this relates to a problem connected with the electronic ant farm program I've been working on recently.

We find a lovely green field in the palace park. It is deserted and Japan is so crowded. Maybe Japanese always do the same thing at the same time, so that either they

all go to the park or *none* do? Or maybe they have too much respect for the Emperor to enter his park. The hedges are trimmed with a peak running lengthwise along the hedge tops, like the tops of a roofs. We hear someone playing or practicing a flute, it sounds Zen and spacey. Hearing that and looking at the pleasing meadow with a few trees and its low ridged hedges I think, “Of course it looks nice, it’s arranged according to some transcendental holistic Japanese vision,” . . . then wonder if maybe I’m reading more into it than is there. The beautiful swooping catenary lines of the stone moat walls going down to the water are certainly by design.

We went to a museum with an art nouveau exhibit; all the other museum-visitors were young women. They look so goody-goody and tidy and sweet. Audrey says that sex is not viewed as sinful in Japan, maybe that’s why the women can be so clean and good, with nothing dirty about sex or the prospect of it to sully them? The women and children are in the shops and museums, and all the men are in the office buildings. After work the men drink and sing in the street and walk funny and go home and start over. Seems like a simple kind of life for either side.

Then we found the main art museum and saw an interesting show on “The Best of Bunten 1905–1917.” Turns out Bunten is an acronym for a national art show/contest they had in Japan for awhile, till the artists quarreled so much the shows stopped. The pieces we saw were really interesting. Lots of them were straight copies of impressionist style. Cézanne and Degas and Manet copped composition ideas from Japanese prints, fans, and kimonos — and then the Japanese turned around and copped back impressionist lighting tricks for their own pics. Mirrors of mirrors. There were some wonderful big traditional-style scrolls and screens, too. Some of the screen paintings are done, if you look closely, in a fast loose brush style almost like cartooning, but at a slight distance they look formal and dreamily real. I noticed one beautiful woman guard in the museum, slightly plump—I keep trying to fix mental images of people I can use for Japanese characters in future books.

In the park, there’s a woman kneeling, taking a picture of her toddler coming towards her saying “Mama,” glancing over at us with such a shy happy look on her Asian secretary’s face, not that she was a secretary, she had lipstick and a silk suit. With “Asian secretary” I’m thinking of the weak-chinned long-toothed look that kind of goes with the idea of a gossiping office-girl, a pretty fair number of the women here have that look, with a bright lipstick mouth stuck on like a mouth on Mr. Potato Head, only using a chinless yellow parsnip instead of a potato. In the primo examples of this look, the lips won’t quite meet and an asymmetric bit of front tooth is always visible. But *regardless* of what anyone might think of her looks, there she is, the woman in the park, a mother getting her pictures of her toddler, having the nicest kind of simple fun. These people are so alien to me, I see them in a clearer way than the people back home—kind of like the thing with their writing: since I can’t read it, I notice its pattern and semiotic weight, like *there* is an advertisement, right on the handle of the subway strap (Audrey noticed that one), and not be caught up in reading the message. Thus with the woman in the park, I have no ability to “read” her appearance and surmise her life (what kind of house, what kind of husband, kinds of opinions, etc.—and one can, or at least thinks one can, surmise all this easily and automatically from people back home), so instead of saying, like, “Oh, there’s a yuppie woman with her baby,” I just see the ideograph, the form, the woman, the mother getting a picture of her baby’s early steps. “Mama,” he said, same as us. I

could push this further, of course, to get a concept of being around real aliens, though to do that I'd have to imagine not having mothers and children. Much is readable even here in Japan; I know for instance that letters are for expressing words, and I know what a mother is.

We found our way to the subway next, also interesting, two women walking past talking, one of them smiling almost crazily while talking to her friend, pausing to clear throat or wet lips and the smile is completely gone, it's simply part of talking. Audrey figured out the kanji sign for IN it's a picture of lambda and a box: walking person + hole. And OUT is a picture of like a double psi and a box: cheering person + hole. You walk in the hole and then you cheer when you get out.

May 30, 1990. Cyberspace, interviews, pachinko.

Yesterday was the big work day. In the morning I went to the building that the Ministry of Information uses for their Hightech Art Planning (HARP). These are the guys who paid my plane fare and hotel and gave me righteous bucks to come give a twenty minute talk on the topic of cyberspace.

There was an exhibit of some computers on one floor. I played with one for quite a while. It was a realtime graphics supercomputer called a Titan. It had a simulation of a flag which was made of a grid of points connected by imaginary springs, and with two of the points attached to a flag pole. You could crank up the wind, or change the wind's direction, and see the flag start to ripple and flap. I kept thinking of the Zen story about three monks looking at a flag flapping in the wind. A: "What is moving?" B: "The flag is moving." C: "No, the wind is moving." A: "Ah no, the mind is moving." To keep the flag from looking like a bunch of triangles they used a cool computer-graphics trick called "Gouraud shading." You could rotate the flag too, and as a last touch you could cut one or both of the flag's tethers to the pole and see it blow away, a crumpling wind-carried shape.

We all did presentations on our work, Scott Fisher on work he did at NASA with headmounted displays with one screen for each eye (immersion in Virtual Reality), in which the view changes as you move your head (realtime controllable viewpoint), and in which you can move an image of your DataGloved hand and do things (user entry into the image). He feels all three features are essential for creating the feeling of being in the artificial world. He used sound instead of tactile feedback, meaning that if you are manipulating, say, a robot arm, there is a sound whose pitch grows as the arm gets nearer to a wall. He spoke of a "3-D window" as a clipped volume containing a different viewpoint; you can reach out and resize a 3-D window. It would be nice to have several 3-D windows to other worlds in the room with me, even better than the old 2-D magic doors of SF.

I missed most of the other presentations because the HARP organizers led me off to do interviews, but another significant flash I got was from Susumu Tachi, who is into telepresence robots. He had a robot like a tricycle with a pair of binoculars sticking up out of the seat, able to swivel back and forth. A user drives the tricycle by wearing goggles and a head mount and using a brake and accelerator pedal. So you see the tricycle going along, turning its pair of eyes this way and that and stopping if someone is in the way. This is an interesting way of separating the problem of hardware and software. You can postpone getting pattern-recognition and judgment programs by letting the control go to a telepresent operator, and meanwhile just get a robot which can

mechanically move around and, for instance, pick up objects the way you want it to.

I also got to hear part of Jaron Lanier's talk. Jaron is the hero of Virtual Reality; his company, VPL, is the first to sell DataGloves and the EyePhones with the two little screens. Jaron is a plump, substance-free hippie with Rasta-style dreadlocks. I sat next to him at the dinner day before yesterday and talked a lot; I ended up defending him when the waitress incredibly started harassing Jaron for having long hair. She's all, "You are woman?" Jaron took it in stride, calmly saying, "She only acts this way to promote a feeling of rowdiness." Two of Jaron's beliefs are, "It's not really a Virtual Reality unless there're at least two people in it," and, "Sex in cyberspace is a dumb idea: polygons aren't sexy."

In the morning we rehearsed the talks by talking to our translators and seeing if the video stuff worked. For lunch they brought us Styrofoam boxes of Japanese food. My lunch consisted of a *single* shrimp and *two* beans. Really *large* ones though, each bean a kind of giant lima that you squeeze out of its husk, and the shrimp a hefty little dude the size of a thumb. There was also a table full of soft drinks. The first one I tried, nothing came out, it was a "soft drink" of grape jelly. I had some Pocari Sweat instead. Who is Pocari and why are we drinking his sweat?

My talk went well, I had a video of my [CA Lab](#) cellular automata software (now called *Cellab*) showing behind me, and I talked about Artificial Life, about robot evolution, and about growing Artificial Life in cyberspace. It was an easy, painless talk. Doing a bunch of interviews was part of the gig, too.

One of my interviews was by a skin magazine called *Goro*, all their questions were about sex and drugs, like, "Do you feel pornography is a driving force for high tech?" I played along, "Of course. The same human thrill-seeking which makes sex and drugs important is a big factor in seeking out astonishing computer graphics." I asked about the "soapland" sex places I'd read of in the guidebook, places where, it says, a woman soaps you all over, *using parts of her own body to soap you with* (I assume soapy boobs and soapy pubic hair), they were surprised I knew of it. They asked what I and my fellow Americans thought of the Japanese, and first I said, "Cool and strange," and they were happy, and then I said, "In the USA, many think of Japan as an anthill," and they looked upset. I was sorry I'd said that—over here I'm quickly getting into the concept of "*wa*," the common happiness and agreement. One aspect of *wa* is that whether or not I thought we had time to squeeze in yet another interview, they always said, "Yes we must do it."

Interviews I had: (1) A music magazine with all Japanese writing on its cover except *New Age Total Magazine*, though perhaps the name is Rock Land, which phrase appears several times on the table of contents. This interview was conducted by a guy who had been active in getting *The Secret of Life* published in Japanese, which I'd never even known happened. (2) *Goro*, as mentioned. (3) *ASCII*, a computer magazine. I remembered near the end of the interview that my friend Bill Buckley writes a column for them. "Buckley and I smoke marijuana together at hackers' conferences," I told them truthfully, though mischievously. (4) Yesterday evening with *Hayakawa's SF Magazine*. This was by my Japanese SF translator, a nice guy called Hiroshi. (5) and (6) Today by two more computer magazines, *Log In* and *Eye Com*. The guy who asked questions for both of them had some quite complicated fantasies about artificial realities. "In *Sim City* artificial world, would you rather be the mayor or the Sim?" He had the idea of *becoming*

an artificial reality in which networkers live, any of them able at any time to, e.g., stop your heart. Another of his ideas was that you could shuffle your direct reality with someone else's, taking in their reality as an artificial reality. If you did this very often, like ten times a second, you would effectively be living as them and as you. If you speeded up the shuffle rate and brought in more and more people, then everyone would be the same metaperson. A catch is that you probably couldn't effectively even walk with all that shuffling. He gave me a wad of yen worth about \$70 at the end of the interview! (7) Then a TV taped interview for NHK TV. This interview had interesting, well-thought-out questions, like, "How can artificial reality help children learn?" and several about ideas of cyberspace and mathenautics as a new frontier with an excitement more relevant to us than the somewhat boring and used-up stuff of space-travel. I really got into all this and laid it on thick, especially since the translator was the same charming woman, Ryoko Shinzaki, who had simultaneous-translated my speech. She was quite small when she stood up, but she had a beautifully symmetric face, with eyes that turned into semicircle slits when she smiled, also a nobly straight nose and a big upper lip. I got so interested in watching her talking that I would hardly hear what she said. (8) Then a stupid interview with someone who said he was a massage person who worked with HARP and mainly wanted to explain his theories of massage. I told him my gums hurt, and he pushed his knuckle into my hand until I said my gums felt okay. (9) Finally a magazine called *Diamond Executive* with a guy who actually understood no English, but would nod and look so much like a promising executive that you felt he was on your wavelength, only then the translator would take three minutes to tell him what you said.

The *Diamond Executive's* translator was an expatriate American woman. I met several other people like her, Westerners who'd established themselves in niches of the Japanese culture. They all seemed to have a somewhat hangdog and dispirited air.

At the reception after the HARP stuff, there was a whole table covered with glasses of whisky on ice, God how I hated to leave that room! Standing there talking to the guys, two of them managers of HARP (at least seven people were introduced to me as *the* manager of HARP), and the guys are so fucking drunk they can hardly stand up, yet they give off no vibe of USA-style shame for their altered state.

We had supper with my science fiction guys from Hayakawa Publishing, Inc. As well as publishing *Hawakawa SF Magazine*, they're the biggest SF book publisher in Japan, and have, incredibly, all of my books in print. If only I were so well-loved in the U.S. We ate as a party of 6 people in a basement French restaurant, some of the best French food I ever had, and then all five others start smoking, unbelievable, smoke and drink aren't evil here and people aren't embarrassed about sex, what a country.

Hiroshi the translator was a really good guy, I was tired but insisted on doing the interview after dinner to get it over with, up on the third floor with the Hayakawa offices — the French restaurant we had supper in turned out to be owned by Hayakawa, is in the basement of the same building. Propped my feet up on the sill of a huge open window, four and five-story Tokyo buildings outside, the night and the street, talking about my various careers. The electroshock excitement of the computer graphic world is one thing, the thoughtful artfulness of writing another, the clarifying formulas and occasional revelations of math a third, and the humble public service of teaching is an underlying fourth.

This morning Audrey and I went to a shrine at Asakusa, on the way came up from

the subway looking for breakfast, bought cheese rolls, but then where to eat? I ate mine on the street, but I wouldn't do it again; if you eat in public, Japanese look at you like you're taking a dump on the sidewalk. At the shrine there were zillions of school children, all in white shirts, so cute, group after group coming up to us, "May I speak with you?" to practice their English. At the shrine there was a shiny brass Buddha to one side, with a slot for money. You put money in the slot and then rub a certain part of Buddha, and then rub the same part of you, to heal. I tried it on my cheek over the gum where I've had the unbelievable, unrelenting pain ever since I had a bunch of back teeth pulled two weeks ago; recently I've been scraping agonized gum away to chip off spiky dead jawbone frags, and stirring up incredible endless torture of nerves up and down neck and deep into inner ear. The bone pieces are like having a [higher-dimensional Mandelbrot set](#) pushed through my gum one cross-section at a time.

We had a disgusting lunch in a badly chosen restaurant. Many Japanese restaurants display plastic models of the food they serve; I ordered from the plastic displays, but erred and ended up with a potty of utterly tasteless tofu custard, and a salad of cold noodles topped with 2 maraschino cherries and slices of scrambled eggs. Yum! Actually it had a single tempura shrimp on it, the come-on. Two women in kimonos were there eating, one of them our age, delicately pincering bits, her complex cheek muscles working. The waitress had hair over her face and a cheesy dumbbell mouth with the upper lip literally vertical at the ends where it met the lower lip.

I played pachinko, you put a few bucks in a machine and get a basket of ball bearings, and then dump them in a hopper and they are rapid fired into a steep, nearly vertical playboard studded with nails and with high-scoring input hoppers here and there, and a big zero-score hopper at the bottom. Your control over it is via a knob that affects the speed with which the successive balls are launched up into the board. A special hopper guarded by two kneeling spacemen figures opened up on my machine, and I held the knob at the right position for many balls to stream in there. More and more pay-off balls came out into a basket under the machine — there's a slot-machine aspect to it, and you get paid off with extra balls — finally I had a whole shoebox full of balls, many more than the 700 yen worth I'd started with. Audrey and I took the box of balls back to a woman in an apron, she had the stubby sticking-out curly bob so popular here, she poured the zillion balls into a counting machine and gave me a piece of paper and gestured towards some cigarettes and candies. "Can I get money?" I said, pointing towards some coins in my hand. She nods and gives me some lighter-flints with the brand name "MONY." Like what are these good for? This is *money*? I start to complain, then she gets another girl to watch the counter while she leads me out of the parlor, out of the chrome and the whooping sound effects, into the street, down an alley to the right, down a smaller alley to the left, walking rapidly in front of me, aproned, walking with a rocking motion, walking so fast I can barely keep up and Audrey is a block behind me, she stops finally and points to the door under a horizontal red sign with writing on it, I go in, there is a tiny window at waist level, wood, I put the MONY lighter flints in there, and a hand passes out 2200 yen! Three to one payoff, all right! I asked my Japanese contacts about it later, they said, yes it is always lighter flints, and it would be illegal for the payoff to be inside the pachinko parlor proper, but this way is all right.

On the subway riding back, looking at the faces across from us, I see one old guy with a face all folded, the upper eyelids folded over the lower lids, the mouth folded shut,

huge eyebrows, skinny skinny legs, he made me think of my pictures of old idol D. T. Suzuki in his *What is Zen?* book. Next to the old guy I see a succession of younger guys, one replacing the other stop by stop, the flow of life through the different bodies of man, each of them so individual and various, each life unique.

May 31, 1990. The Gold Disco.

Yesterday evening we went to the Gold Disco, a multi-story building that looks like a shitty warehouse from the outside, down under a freeway by the river, guests of the same Mr. Takemura who was the organizer and panel-discussion leader for the HARP Cyberspace Symposium. He is a man who looks and behaves something like our San Francisco SF friend Richard Kadrey, kind of a maven, hiply up on all the latest. I first met Takemura when Allison Kennedy of *Mondo 2000* put him onto me in SF, he was doing an article for a Japanese magazine called *Excentric*, a *Mondo*-type publication with features on all the weirdos in a different given area each issue. He photogged me in front of the San Francisco Masonic headquarters in my red sweater, had me in the mag with Dr Tim Leary of course, and mind-blown John Lilly, and Marc Pauline, who puts on the great Survival Research Labs fire-breathing renegade robot events, also Steve Beck, a friend of Allison's who does computer graphic acid videos and talks about using electric fields to stimulate phosphene visions in the closed eye, which process he calls "virtual light."

Here in Tokyo Mr. Takemura is quite a heavy dude it seems, and he does a monthly "show" at the Gold Disco. His show is a series of collaged videos he makes, also lighting effects, smoke clouds and scent clouds, and fast acid-house disco. The Gold Disco building has a traditional Japanese restaurant on an upper floor, we went there first, it was an airy room open at the sides to the sky (though it developed, on closer inspection that this "outdoors" was an artificial reality, was really a black painted ceiling with brisk ventilation, and that there was another story above ours!) Audrey and I were quite hungry, having skipped supper till now (9:00 PM) as Mr. Takemura's friend Kumiko had assured us it would be "traditional" Japanese food, which Audrey and I imagined as being banquet-like. Jaron Lanier was there, also Steve Beck and Allison Kennedy, also two friends of Jaron's, also Audrey's cousin Zsolt and his wife Helga. Zsolt grew up in Budapest with Audrey, now he's turned German and he's here in the employ of Bayer doing chemical engineering of rubber. Various Japanese companies have licenses to use Bayer's proprietary trade-secret ways of making rubber have special properties, and Zsolt oversees some of that.

We're eating in a tatami room, meaning you sit on the ground with a tiny lacquered TV-dinner tray in front of you. First a waitress in a really great kimono and obi crawls around taking orders, and then there appears a geisha in the center of the floor/table, sitting there like a center-piece, simpering a bit and fanning herself, answering a few questions which we Westerners put through Kumiko, me and Audrey too appalled however to ask anything. Completely white face and red lips, all kinds of plastic and cloth in her hair, major kimono silk, etc. "She's not actually a geisha," Kumiko explains, "She is younger, she is a Maiko, this is a young girl of 15 to 20 who has not mastered the necessary skills of singing or storytelling or music to be a geisha, she will in fact most likely not become a geisha, her purpose here is really to find a man who will take care of all her needs." And keep her as mistress, it goes without saying. She's plain and looks sad, and makes me feel so uncomfortable, she's like the goat

tethered as bait for the T. Rex in *Jurassic Park*. Then all of a sudden we have to run downstairs to be photographed by Japan's most famous society photog, in front of The Gold Disco, all of us, The Gold Disco supposedly the hottest place in Tokyo these days, just like Andy Warhol or something man, outrageous, and we're just people after all, we glittery ones, then it's back upstairs and *whew* we have a new maiko, and this one is cute and *loud*, asking questions and saying things. And here's the food. A plate with a spiral tree snail, perhaps not dead, three whole salted shrimp each the size of a toenail clipping, and a small piece of what I take to be tuna, but is, on biting, a slice of some fish's long strip of roe, all egg-crunchy. Now the second course comes, two rice balls for me — *ba-ru*, the loud geisha explains, making a throwing motion, meaning "ball," and then putting her hands up to her mouth "gobble gobble," she's a regular bad-ass teenager under the paint, and three crab claw tips for Audrey, who thought to ask for them. Not much food but lots of sake.

Then it's downstairs to see Mr. Takemura's show, first Lanier and I go down, then a bit later Audrey — who'd been waiting around in the hope of more food — is led down with the others by the loud junior geisha, who starts dancing, what a sight to see her in the disco, it made me feel so much better for her to be there amidst the incredibly various throng. For me the best thing of all in the disco was that, incredibly, they had a computer monitor set into the wall with *CA Lab* running on it, showing my high-speed "Rug" rule.

Later we went up one floor to the so-called Love Sex Club, a lovers' retreat with big banquette/bed seats and a bar decorated with skeletons, skulls, and, dig this, bottles of clear alcohol, each containing an entire gecko, a really *big* gecko, barely fitting in the liter bottle man, not just some insignificant tequila worm here. According to Steve and Allison, who'd already tried it a few days before, this is an incredibly powerful aphrodisiac. Audrey and I split a glass of it, as do Zsolt and his wife. And soon thereafter we all go home to bed. Dot, dot, dot.

So today I'm clear of all my interviews and duties, though it took some running around to find a new hotel. We'd been in the luxury Hotel Imperial and now found, thanks to connections of HARP, a more affordable room in Ginza Dai-ichi Hotel, which is a surprisingly large step down in the direction of the proverbial coffin hotel. The window is like a bus window with rounded corners, the bathroom is made of one single piece of plastic and is tiny, but for now it's home. At first I'd tried calling hotels — our prepaid Imperial reservation ran out today, along with HARP's responsibility towards us — but all were full, but cute roundeyed roundmouthed plumpcheeked Mr. Fujino of HARP helped us out one last bit by finding this.

We were thinking of taking a train to Nikko, but just things like eating are hard enough. We did have a good lunch today, in the basement of the Ginza Style Department Store at Audrey's urging. In the store we first went up to the roof and looked at their bonsai, they had one pine for something like ten thousand dollars, it was especially valuable because it leaned way over and half of its trunk was like rotted away. There was a thick-gnarled azalea for a nine thousand bucks, though the flowers on it seemed, to my mind, to ruin the effect of the scale. The department store was full of recorded voices, women's voices talking, Audrey said, in the voice of a Good Doll, a sing-song almost lisping voice. We sampled some of the many available things to taste in the gourmet food-shop in the second sublevel basement, hideous fishy wads and tortured slimy

vegetables. After awhile I was laughing so hard at the gnarl of it all that I couldn't stop. My lunch was good except that the soup reeked of mildew. Traced the cause finally to some thick limp strands of fungus(?), maybe they get the spores of mildew and nurture it like a bonsai until it's a stalk the size of a carrot and then they slice that up and soak it in gecko juice or something and they put that in your soup. Once the offending strands were pincer-ed out and banished to the furthest corner of the table, the meal was all right.

June 1, 1990, Morning. Shinjuku.

Morning, it's raining cats and dogs outside, Audrey is cheerful. Cozy in our tiny room.

Yesterday afternoon we went to Shinjuku. They had lots of pachinko places. I realize now that the machines are not separate entities, there is a vast common pool of pachinko balls behind the stuck-together rows of machines. Proof is that to buy new balls you put coins in a slot shared by your machine and the next machine, the balls don't come from one machine or the other, they come from the common ball space. How apt a symbol of the Japanese flowing out of their offices and through their subways, the pachinko balls, each ball by the way with a character on it, invisible unless you pick it up and peer closely to see the character scratched on. When you're through playing, there is a sink with towels near the door to wash off your hands. We walked through a neighborhood where I'd expected to see sex shops, but with Japanese reticence there was no way to tell which might be sex, or if you could tell, no way to tell what lay inside. Well, there *was* one obvious place — it had a big statue of a gorilla in boxer shorts with stars and stripes and an English sign saying, "This Is The Sex Place." Gorilla in shorts is the typical USA male sex-tourist in their minds no doubt. Mostly Shinjuku was like a boardwalk with games, etc. There was a thin old-fashioned alley with a hundred tiny yakatori (skewered meat) places, we squeezed into one, with like a 5 foot ceiling, had a couple of beers and some skewers, a man helped us translate, "What kind you want? Tongue? Liver? Kidney?" "Uh . . . are those all the choices?" Then we went to an eighth floor bar called Gibson — I'd imagined maybe it was a cyberpunk theme bar as I'd heard some people use the phrase "Gibson literature" for "cyberpunk," but that's not what it was, it was just another of the zillion places selling whiskey and pickled veggies. We wrote postcards while the place filled up with office-workers in suits. When we got outside the Shinjuku lights were on, the big signs, awesome as the Ginza, but harder to see with all the train stations in the way. One particularly unusual light is a big 3-D cage of bars with neon tubes in every direction. A surface of illumination moved through the cage this way and that and then more and more of the bars came on to make a big chaotic 3-D knot of light.

Beautiful people on the subway, a schoolgirl with a big round chin, her lips always parted in a half smile, all of the women with the lusterless black hair and a few strands of bangs. Heart-stopping symmetries in these young faces, another girl with a slightly rough complexion carrying a basket of arranged flowers, pressing her offering into a corner away from the subway wind.

June 1, 1990, Afternoon. The Kabuki theater, Momotaro.

Leaving the hotel for Shinjuku yesterday afternoon I decided, once we were a block or two away, that I should go back and leave my sweater, and then made a wrong turn and blundered around in circles for half an hour, finally giving up and keeping the

sweater and with difficulty finding my way back to waiting Audrey. Our first night here we had to take a cab just to find our way back to our hotel. Amazing how difficult it is to orient with *no street names*. Some of the larger streets have names, but the names are “all the same” and “impossible to remember,” especially since it is very rare that the name, if there is a name, is written out in Western letters. And you can’t orient very well by landmarks since the buildings are mostly gray concrete boxes, or by signs, as the signs are crazy scribbles. Seeing some country-yokel type Japanese guys in our hotel I wondered how *they* ever find anything, and it occurred to me that they must simply ask instructions every block or so. The Japanese always seem ready to help each other, there are, for instance, so many staff always in restaurants and stores, like two or three times as many as back home — reminiscent also of the way there were like seven different guys working as “manager of HARP.” The Japanese overemploy so that everyone can get lots of help and service, they give it to each other and they get it back. Generalities, perhaps false, but it’s fun to try and see patterns here. One of the mysteries guidebooks and more experienced visitors mention is that there are effectively no usable addresses, houses in a district being numbered according to the order in which they were built, and many of the streets really not having any name at all. How can such a system work? It works if you think in terms of moving along like an (here’s that impolitic word again!) *ant*, rubbing feelers with the ants you encounter, getting bits of info as you need them. Given the city as a hive-mind extended in space and time, you need only keep asking it where you are and how to get where you are going, and it will tell you. You just feel-feel-feel your haptic way. As opposed to the can-do Western approach where you get a map and fix your coordinates and set out like Vasco da Gama, or like an instrument-navigating airplane pilot, and reckon your way to your goal, all by yourself, not asking for any help.

At breakfast on the 15th floor there were two halves, Japanese breakfast half where you could get “rice set” including rice, boiled fish, miso soup, pickled vegetables, or American half where you get eggs. We opted for egg. The music in the Japanese half was a recording of a cuckoo, on the American side, Muzak. Great mushroom omelet, though. Looking out the window through the Saturday morning rain, we could see into a building with a many-desked office. The guys in there were doing calisthenics together, just like Japanese workers are so often rumored to do. It’s healthy, natch, and perhaps a way of bonding — “we all did the same motions at the start of work.”

In the morning paper, I read that one of the biggest gangs in Japan, their like Mafia, is called Yamaguchi-gumi. Such a sweet-sounding name for a gang . . . like the Little Kidders.

The National Kabuki Theater is in the Ginza, so we walked up there to see if we could get in. Good fortune. They had an 11:00 AM matinee with easily-bought inexpensive tickets to sit in the highest (4th floor) seats. And a booth selling boxed lunches! Audrey got two octagonal wood boxes with sushi in them, even though we weren’t hungry, the box appeal was irresistible. So there we were in the highest row, with Japanese all around us. There’s a really pronounced dearth of other Westerners here — often as not there are in fact no others in sight (save at American breakfasts). Incredible, really, the depth of U.S. ignorance of Japan — before coming here I didn’t even know the name of any of the parts or sights of Tokyo. Anyway, up in the highest row of the Kabuki we sit, looking down at the not-really-so-distant curtain which has two flying cranes sewn on, and numerous bamboo trunks, pictures of them I mean, very Japanese style, beams

overhead with some slight decoration on them and light wallpaper with a meandering parallelogram design. Rows of red paper lanterns here and there on the sides. Then it starts. There were four scenes with men, a boy, and two “women,” though in kabuki the women are played by men, who are called “onnagata,” as opposed to “tachiyaku,” who act male roles. It’s such a sexist society the women can’t even be actresses, man, it’s wife or geisha and nothing else. The kabuki was like theater, not like opera, with no singing, although if a group laughed, they’d kind of chorus the laughing, and in the big emotional scene after her son is murdered, the mother’s sobs were like, Audrey said, an aria. I opened my box lunch and ate of it, also drinking of my canned soft drink: Oolong Tea. The box was covered with paper with large elliptical pastel polka dots. The best food in it was a little sweet yellow rubbery dough cup holding a sushi of rice and salmon eggs. Another good thing was a single stray green pea. At the peak of the kabuki play’s action (it lasted an hour in all, though if we’d stayed there would have been a whole second number of dance) the younger brother goes and shakes the older brother, who is lying in bed asleep. The older brother jumps out of bed, knifes the younger brother in the stomach, delivers a speech (probably about why it is “right” to be doing this, the prick), and then knifes him again, killing him, and bringing on the mother’s “aria.” Last time anyone wakes *that* guy up.

The scenery was a really authentic-looking Japanese house, so much better than, for instance, the “Japanese” set in the production of *M. Butterfly* we saw in SF last winter. It was just so fuckin’ authentic. Another cool thing was that, Macbeth-like, the climax is taking place during a storm, and they had really good thunder sounds that I could tell came from an incredibly experienced Japanese thunder master shaking a big piece of special kabuki thunder metal, as opposed to playing a track on some sound-effects CD. Good lightning effects against the house’s translucent windows too. One last interesting feature were the “kakegoe,” which are special shouts and whoops which certain audience members give at crucial moments, like when an actor first comes on they might shout his name, or at the end of a scene they shout something, but never shout at a wrong or intrusive time, of course, being into the *wa* and the Zen and the group mind as they are. “You go on and yell something,” I whispered to Audrey, and next time somebody yelled like KAGU-WA, after the mother did her aria, Audrey yelled KAGU-WA too. Later, telling Audrey’s cousin Zsolt about it, I exaggerate and say that Audrey stood up and yelled “right on!” in the middle of silence.

We took the subway up to Akihabara, which is supposed to be this big electronics market, but couldn’t find any action near the subway stop. Saw a man on a bicycle delivering takeout food, which was a tray held up on one hand with a covered dish and, get this, two covered dishes of *soup*. Soup on a tray on a bicycle. The dish-covers were like the top of an oatmeal box, i.e. a disk with a half-inch of cylinder sticking out, looked like black leather, like a dice-cup.

So got back on the Hibiya Line to Ueno Station, where there’s a godzillion people in the street. Saw a guy buy a dose from a “One Cup” sake machine and chug it, this right outside the pachinko parlor where I lost another five bucks. They even sell fifths of whiskey in the vending machines, I’m not kidding. My initial pachinko win seems to have been a fluke. Looking at the balls in this place, I realize they all have the same character on them, a number 7 in this case, so maybe in each place there is a like cattle-brand symbol on their balls so you can be found out if you sneak in your own balls.

Before, I'd thought it was a different symbol on each ball, like names. We went into Ueno park, and saw a lovely Shinto shrine, someone playing nice flute off in the trees, people pulling a cord hanging down in front of the temple to rattle a bell up in the eaves, a way of getting the notice of the gods. Like the other temples, this had a "backwards" swastika on it, oriented in effect so that it was "rolling" to the right. I remember from my childhood year of boarding-school in Germany a kid saying, "*die Hackenkreuz rollt links,*" a wiry, high-cheekboned kid with a deep, bossy voice, he was also the source of the rule, "*die Kaffeemuehle dreht rechts,*" which was used to determine the order of play in card and board games, "the coffeemill turns to the right."

A group of schoolboys stopped us in the park with the same "May I speak with you" English-practicing routine that schoolgirls had pulled on us in Asakusa. More bizarrely, a team of three twenty-year-olds stopped us, one with a video camera, one with a mike, and one (a woman) holding a placard with four cartoons of incidents in the life of Momotaro who is, they assured us, a well known Japanese character. They told us the action in the first and third frames and we were to fill in descriptions of what happened in the second and fourth frames. In the first frame Momotaro is born, his father found him when he cut open a peach. (Hiroshi later tells me that "momo" means "peach" and "taro" means "first born son.") In the second frame two demons steal money from the parents. In the third frame Momotaro and his three friends — a dog, a monkey, and a crane — sail to the island of the two demons. In the fourth the monkey and the dog kill the two demons while Momotaro and his dog look on, and his parents bow to him. Then they gave us two postcards and they didn't ask for money or try to get *anything* from us, though of course they had videoed our answerings. Was it an art project, a sociology study? Will I ever know?

Anyway we went across the street to the Tokyo National Museum, and went into the main building. They had a bunch of 7th century Buddha statues, then some 13th century ones, then a room of "enlightenment instruments" that depressingly reminded me of *auugh* dental tools (last night's gum-cutting only made it hurt more today, of course), things with prongs on the end to pluck out evil, then there was a room with some really great looking pipes, like dope pipes with real long stems decorated amazingly, one finned, one polka-dotted, then a room with helmets, one in the "unusual hairstyle" fashion, with a fake ponytail and mustache of like boar's hair — what biker wouldn't want to have that! — then some sword blades, then a door that went out in the back yard, and we could read the Japanese for it, the three characters were the lambda, the double psi, and the square: IN OUT MOUTH. Then there was a room with old firemen's clothes, one with a really cool demon face on it I tried to sketch. Back outside we walked through a neighborhood with nothing but motorcycle things: new and used cycles, tires, leathers (Japanese motorcycle leathers, man, is that kinky or what?), then got the subway back "home."

On the subway there was a teenage boy, and Audrey said seeing him made her miss our son Tom. For a fact Tom has the same skin color as the boy, and the boy's lips and hands looked like Tom's too. It's funny to be so old, or such a parent, that now teenage boys seem cute and touching. Got a couple of beers from a sidewalk machine, came up to the room to write, wrote this down, and now I'll move back up into that stuff they call real time.

June 1, 1990, 'Round Midnite. Dinner with Hiroshi.

'Twas a most mellow and emotionally salubrious fest with my translator Hiroshi Sakuma and his wife Miyuki (Me + You + Key, she explained). Hiroshi came into the city and took us out to his neighborhood by cab (an unbelievably high cab fare, which he paid alone) where we ate at his favorite restaurant. "It's low tech," he kept saying. He's been eating there every Saturday night for 10 years, he and Miyuki, the little building was a country house someone took apart, no nails involved!, and brought spang into Tokyo. There was a bar there with folks eating at it, a short bar, and a tatami room, and our room, with benches, and that was the size of it. The place is called Kappa-home, the kappa being an imaginary beast of Japanese legend.

Miyuki is a modest wife with a tentative smile; she met Hiroshi at an SF convention when he was at the University of Tokyo and she in high school. He has a ponytail, like the Kabuki guys, traditional though uncommon these days. The historical oscillation of ponytails in and out of fashion in Eastern and Western cultures. The ponytailed men in the Kabuki had seemed to have the tops of their heads in front of the ponytail shaved, though on looking closer, I'd noticed that one of them actually had a cloth cover on the front of his head that only made it look shaved. Audrey hadn't noticed the cloth and insisted the guy had really been shaved. We asked Hiroshi and Miyuki about it. Turns out an old-time ponytailed merchant might wear a cloth over the front of his head instead of shaving it, but if it's a colored cloth it means you are a *pimp*. Was the guy in the Kabuki this morning supposed to be a pimp? I'll never know.

The food was outrageously wonderful, the freshest most incredible raw seafood you can imagine, including whole, raw, sweet-tasting squid, and some mysterious white slices of . . . what? Hiroshi explains, "This is the liver of a kind of fish. It tastes like cheese. The fish lives very deep in the sea; he is so large and jellylike that you cannot hold him in your hands. The fishermen hang him upside down and the liver falls out of his mouth." Kind o' sets your mouth to waterin' don't it? Audrey liked the liver and the squids a lot. Two other good things were the tempura egg-plant and the raw abalone.

Before we started the sake, the server-woman brought out a big tray with lots of little stoneware cups, all different, and you pick the sake cup you want. Hiroshi's cup was a silver one brought special to him as a regular client. The sake came from a big white cask with a big ideogram on it.

About the food, Hiroshi said: "We've been eating exactly this for 500 years." The Kappa-home seemed very together, the people happy and relaxed. A seventy year old lady at the bar was drinking and eating, and I instantly imagined her USA counterpart as some shrill, bleached crone of a barfly.

Hiroshi was proud of his translations of the neologisms in *Software* and *Wetware*. He coined the word "*kune-kune*" to stand for "wiggly," for "stuzzy" he invented "*rin-rin*," and for "wavy" he used "*nami*" — as in tsunami. "How's the surf, dude?" "Nami, dude. Way rin-rin."

June 5, 1990. The Big Buddha.

Sunday, cousin Zsolt and wife Helga took us sightseeing, we got the train down to Kamakura to see a Zen monastery and the Daibutsu (Great Buddha). The monastery was woodsy, be-templed, tourist-thronged. I saw one monk-type guy, with just the great huge grin you'd hope for. I felt some inklings of peace there, looking at a hillside, at a little

Zen shrine, at a perfect arrangement of a flower and a few weeds, feeling once again the unity of all things, the loss of body outline, me a jelly pattern in a sea of sensation.



Rudy and Sylvia in Japan, 1990.

The Daibutsu is about sixty feet tall, he was cast in bronze pieces and assembled about 1300. In 1495 a tsunami came a kilometer inland and trashed his temple, but he's still there. You can go inside him, he has big doors for air in his back. His head has knobs on it standing for hair. His expression is marvel of disengaged compassion.

Our last night in the hotel room, I found two pay-TV channels of Japanese porno. I remember Martin Gardner telling me that the Japanese don't allow depiction of pubic hair, so what they do in the porno movies is to usually "pixelize" the crotches, meaning that within a disk area, the image is broken into large squares with each square the average of its component pixels. Another, less frequent trick is to shine a bright spotlight on the crotch so that the area "burns out" white in the video. One of the videos was a fake TV show, with the announcers going down on each other, etc. So odd to realize Japanese act *this way*, too, even the little mask-faced women in their beige suits with the big white lacy collars. After watching for awhile, Audrey was asleep, and I went out and got a late-night bowl of noodles across the street, great noodles, though with the loathsome fungus strips in it like in the department store soup. I asked the counter people and they told me the hideous mildew strips are "namma" which is *bamboo!* not fungus at all. They were a great crew of guys, the noodlers, kind of like a WWII platoon in a movie, with a kid that all the old ones talked to, a bony guy with radar-dish ears, a plump weak-chinned one with a mustache, and a busy cook in the back.

The last thing in Tokyo Monday morning, Audrey shopped, and I took a subway to The Tokyo Tower, a truly cheesy copy of the Eiffel Tower, with none of the Eiffel's mass or heart-lifting scale. You take an elevator up 150 meters, and get out, and there is a fish tank with one poor big black carp in it. A fish in a tank in a tower 150 meters above the ground. In my final ride in the subway I'm tired of being the different one, the carp,

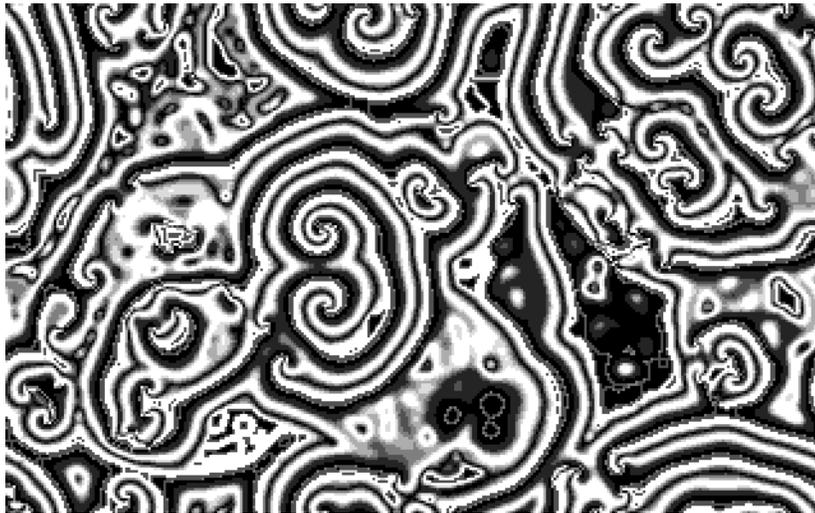
and I'm glad to be going back home to California, back to being a fish in my home sea.

Part II: 1993

August 8, 1993. Hello Kitty.

Three years later we went to Japan again, this time on a kind of tour organized by a Tokyo publicity agency called Humanmedia, who lined up a bunch of lectures, magazine interviews, and book-store signings, all of them for pay — enough so that as well as Audrey, I could bring our eighteen-year-old daughter Ida along on the trip too.

The biggest attraction for me was that *CA Lab* was part of an art show called “A-Life World” at the Tokyo International Arts Museum. *CA Lab* (now called *Cellab*) was nicely installed on ten color laptops resting on a line of music stands, each laptop running a different cellular automaton rule. Some of the rules showed organic pulsing scrolls, some showed tiny scuttling gliders, some showed slowly boiling colors. It was great to see it there.



A Belousov-Zhabotinsky CA rule called “Hodge.” (Generated by *Cellab*.)

The museum was out in a suburban part of Tokyo, and before my talk, I had an hour to kill. Right past the museum was a giant building the size of a baseball stadium, only sealed up, and with fanciful towers on it. “That’s Sanrio Puroland,” Yoko had explained to me. “They are the makers of Hello Kitty. It’s a place for children. Like Disneyland.”

Hello Kitty is the groovy little mouthless cat that you see drawn on so many Japanese children’s knapsacks and stationary. In recent years she’s gotten pretty popular in the U.S. as well. She’s so *kawaii* (Japanese for “cute”). The strange thing is that, as far as I could find out, there are no Hello Kitty cartoons or comic books. Hello Kitty is simply an icon, like a Smiley face.

Outside the Sanrio Puroland, I was drawn in by the crowd’s excitement and couldn’t stop myself from going in, even though it cost the equivalent of thirty dollars. But I knew it was my journalistic duty to investigate.

Inside the huge sealed building it smelled like the bodies of thousands of people — worse, it smelled like diapers. Lots of toddlers. I was the only Westerner. The guards waved me forward, and I went into a huge dark hall.

There was amplified music, unbelievably loud, playing saccharine disco-type tunes, with many words in English. “Party in Puroland, Everybody Party!” Down on the floor below were people in costumes marching around and around in the circle of an endless parade. One of them was dressed like Hello Kitty. I couldn’t pause to look at first, as young guards in white gloves kept waving me on. I wound up and down flight after flight of undulating stairs, with all the guardrails lined by parents holding young children.

Finally I found a stopping place down near the floor. In the middle of the floor was a central structure like a giant redwood, bedizened with lights, smoke machines, and mechanical bubble blowers. The colored lights glistened on the bubbles in the thick air as the disco roared. “Party in Puroland!” Hello Kitty was twenty feet from me, and next to her was a girl in gold bathing suit and cape, smiling and dancing. But . . . if this was like Disneyland, where were the rides?

I stumbled off down an empty hall that led away from the spectacle. Behind glass cases were sculptures of laughing trees making candy. And here were a cluster of candy stores, and stores selling Hello Kitty products. I felt sorry for the parents leading their children around in the hideous saccharine din of this Virtual Reality gone wrong.

I made it back out into the fresh air and walked back to the “A-Life World” show. After the stench and noise and visual assault of Puroland, I couldn’t look at the weird A-Life videos anymore. But the realtime computer simulations were still okay. They were really alive, they had their gnarl and sex and death.

That evening, Mr. Arima, Mr. Onouchi, and Mr. Takahashi treated us to a great dinner in a Roppongi restaurant. These were the guys from Humanmedia organizing my gigs. Mr. Arima delivers one of his rare English sentences, “Mr. Onouchi is a heavy drinker.” Mr. Onouchi snaps, “I don’t think so,” and a minute later knocks the sake bottle off the table. Mr. Arima’s hair is wavy from a perm, and there are white cat hairs on his green suit. Sometimes he wears gray pants with white lines on them. When you talk to him, his lips purse out, and if he smiles, one dancing front tooth is at an angle. His oval-lensed wire glasses slide down on his nose. He’s cute and touching. The dinner featured a soup called Frofuki Daikon, or steambath radish.

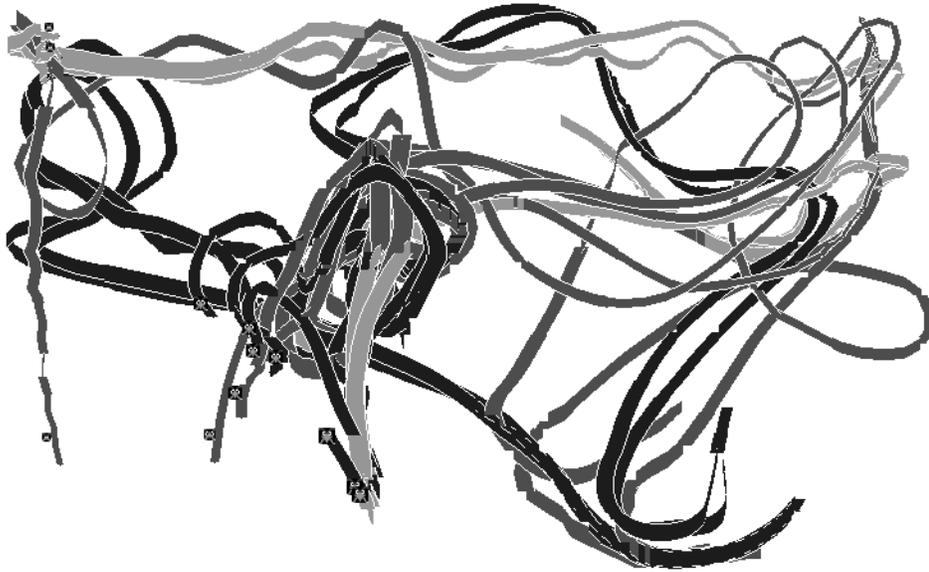
After dinner, Audrey, Ida and I walked around; this is the hippie part of town, the only place you see Westerners. On a big video screen over the street there is the music video of Billy Idol’s song “Cyberpunk.” In front of us, men in white gloves are digging a ditch and putting up little flashing lights. Billy’s chest bursts open and shows wires. The men in white gloves gesture, waving on the passersby.

August 9, 1993. Shape Culture.

The next gig was in Osaka, home of my then-favorite band Shonen Knife, not that we saw them. Once a *Mondo 2000* interviewer asked Shonen Knife if they were like Hello Kitty, and the answer was, “No, Hello Kitty has no mouth. We have big mouth, we are *loud*.”

My talk was for something called the Society of Shape Culture, which turned out to be just what they sounded like: people interested in unusual shapes. They were big buffs on the fourth dimension. They wanted to know what shape I was hoping to see

when I programmed my *Boppers* program to show artificial flocks of birds, and that was, really, the right question, as it was exactly the beautiful living scarf shape of a flock that I'd wanted to see so much that I slogged through all that code.



A simulated flock of birds. (Image generated by [Boppers](#).)

I used my color laptop at all of my Japanese demos, showing up with my “axe” and plugging in to whatever kind of display amp they had. At the Shape Culture demo there was a nice big projection screen, but it was keyed to work off a computer in a back room, and when I wanted to change my images, I had to leave the dais and go into the back room, still talking over my remote mike.

After the Shape Culture talk, we all sat around a table made of five pushed-together tables after my talk and drank beer and ate sushi that they brought. There was a Buddhist monk yelling about the fourth dimension and showing off his wire models of some polytope, he had four of them and said one was point centered, one line centered, one face centered, and one solid centered. Nobody could understand the details, but the shapes were great. Another was an origami master. Another a maker of paper hyperspace models. Many of them interested in mysticism. It was a wonderful feeling, a magical afternoon.

Everyone introduced themselves after we'd been eating and drinking for awhile at the Shape Culture luncheon. A heavy student with thick glasses says, “I am a graduate student and have not discovered anything yet.” He smiles and rubs his hands as vigorously as if he were washing them. “But I want to!”

August 10, 1993. Dinner in Kyoto.

We move on to Kyoto for a signing in a bookstore. The evening of the first day in Kyoto we have the best dinner of all. It's raining due to what the papers called “Typhoon Number Seven.” On the way to the dinner, we see a haiku out the taxi window:

In Kyoto a woman in a green kimono walks on clogs in the typhoon rain.

We use new-bought umbrellas to wind down the back streets to the restaurant which is known to our host Mr. Mori from his having gone to university in Kyoto. A plumpish juicy woman in a brilliant blue kimono serves our dinner. She comes in to the room and kneels right away, somehow making me, pig that I am, think of a porno video, only this isn't porno, she's the dignified wife of the owner/chef. I'm excited to see this strange, immaculate woman kneel. She has a mole on her face somewhere. Her lipstick is fresh and bright red. She smiles and speaks to us in English. She is proud of the room we are eating in, her husband the cook is also a carpenter, he built this room, the air smells like incense from the fresh wood. On one wall is paper printed in clouds from a sixteenth-century wood-block. Mr. Arima and Mr. Mori order hot and cold sake, plus an endless stream of big Sapporo beers. The cold sake comes in beautiful glass bottles that are shaped like two spherical bulbs, the top one smaller than the bottom one. The glass bottles sit in chipped ice and have vines around them. The hot sake is in raku. You always have to pour for other people instead of taking for yourself. Ida keeps Mr. Arima's glass full and starts giggling. Mr. Arima eventually leaves to go to the bathroom. When you go to the bathroom you put on special shared slippers that are out in the hall, toilet slippers. Ida and I have a running joke that one of us is going to goof up and come back into our shoeless tatami dinner room wearing the toilet-slippers with two meters of toilet paper trailing from the heel.

August 11, 1993. Fever Powerful.

Outside our hotel in Kyoto is a pachinko parlor designed like a classic Greek temple, the archetypal house shape: a nearly cubical box with a single peaked roof. It is all glass, and the roof is broken into squares with colored lights that march across in patterns.

One of the pachinko games has a little video screen that shows a girl who eats a fruit and gets big and strong and then the words FEVER POWERFUL appear across her. The name of the machine is Fever Powerful. On the top of the machine is a picture of Fever Powerful on her back, arching her pelvis up, with her boobs sticking out, she looks like she's fucking.

August 13, 1993. Zen rock garden.

Back in Tokyo, we hit a high point, a visit to the most famous Zen rock garden of them all, Ryoanji, raked gravel with fifteen rocks grouped something like:

2 2
5 3
 3

Ida saw an ant on the edge near us, then I saw a dragon-fly landing on the other end, and then later, alone, I saw a skinny Japanese lizard crawl under the biggest rock of the 5 group. The world's most enlightened lizard. To put my head into the head of that lizard — this is a durable enlightenment trick that the rock garden has now given me, this is something that I am bringing home with me to mix into my visions, a life as the skinny lizard under the Zen garden rock. There seemed to be quite a space under the big rock, it looked like a lizard-sized cave, plenty of room in there.

The rock garden was up against a wood building, an empty Zen temple with three empty rooms with tatami mats on the floor and faded ancient Zen landscape paintings on paper leaning *no big deal* against the walls. Around the corner from the rock garden was some moss with diverse mushrooms under trees, around the next corner was more moss and bamboo and a fountain trickling through a bamboo pipe into a round stone with a square hole in the middle. The four Japanese characters on the fountain said “I only learn to be contented.” Audrey liked the fountain best, she bought a little metal copy of it. Getting up from looking at the rock garden for the third time I had a line of sight through the plain wood temple to see Audrey stepping barefoot down to the fountain and washing her hands, and then stepping up onto the old rubbed wood temple floor and moving her body in such a perfectly Zen and perfectly Audrey way, I saw the cuteness and wonder of her motion. “Yes, I’m stepping up from the fountain onto the smooth wood deck. This is me! Me the exclamation mark, me the same as ye.”

The garden has been there for maybe six hundred years. People only started noticing it in the 1930s. The clay walls around the garden have a messy fucked up pattern, with one piece of wall quite different from the others. The Japanese like asymmetry.

After the rock garden we had lunch in a Zen teahouse near the rock garden, two Zen monks there eating also, big Japanese guys with burr haircuts and gray robes; the lunch was a pot of warm water with slabs of tofu, and strainers to fish your slabs out to put in a little pot that you pour soy sauce into. Some veggies on the side: a few beans, a piece of eggplant, a pickled pepper. We sat on cushions on the tatami mat floor by a slid-open paper door, outside the door a little pondlet with miniature trees and big carp in the pond. One of the carp jumped halfway out of the water. “Did you see that?” I ask Ida. “Yes!” says Ida. “That right there happening was a haiku!” We all felt very happy and high.

August 15, 1993. The JAL warning film.

Back in Tokyo for a last day, in the morning through a hotel door I heard the sound of a woman’s voice in sexual ecstasy. “*Hai, hai, hai!*” In the breakfast room, the couples look like high school students. “*Hai*” means “Yes.”

We make one last run to the Ginza. In the basement of the Tokyo department store, a plump girl leans over her soba noodle soup. A single noodle dangles from her lips, swaying as she sucks it in.

Everywhere there are the voices of the “Good Dolls,” the breathless childlike voices of the Japanese advice women. The best Good Dolls run the elevators in person in the department stores. Their motions are a beautiful dance, with their white gloves they make the virtual moves of pulling the doors open. We’re tired of the voices of the Good Dolls, but in even in our last bus to the airport to leave Japan there is a Good Doll voice. It’s like in the movie *Alien* when Sigourney Weaver escapes into a lifeboat ship . . . and there’s an alien in it with her. What if when I get my car at the airport back in SF there’s a Good Doll voice in it?

On the plane back: the eager violence of the unfolding inflatable slide that pops out of the airplane in the instructional video JAL shows us. When we near the shores of Californee, JAL shows a short film about AIDS and a long film about drugs. Close shot on an apple. A big syringe injects narcotics into the apple. Close on a Japanese girl lying on her stomach on a towel at the beach. A hand moves into frame holding the apple.

English translation of the voiceover: “They may ask you if you want to have fun or if you want to have a good time. They will not mention drugs. They will offer you something that looks harmless, but it is drugs.”

When I got to my car at the airport it looked wonderful.

“I’m Rudy’s,” it said so I could hear it. “I’m Rudy’s car. The old red Acura.”

“You?” I said. “It’s you? Thank you, my dear faithful hound. Thank you for having continued to exist. We have been in Asia for very long.”

“Get in and drive me home,” said the car. “And next week you and me are going to start commuting to work again.”

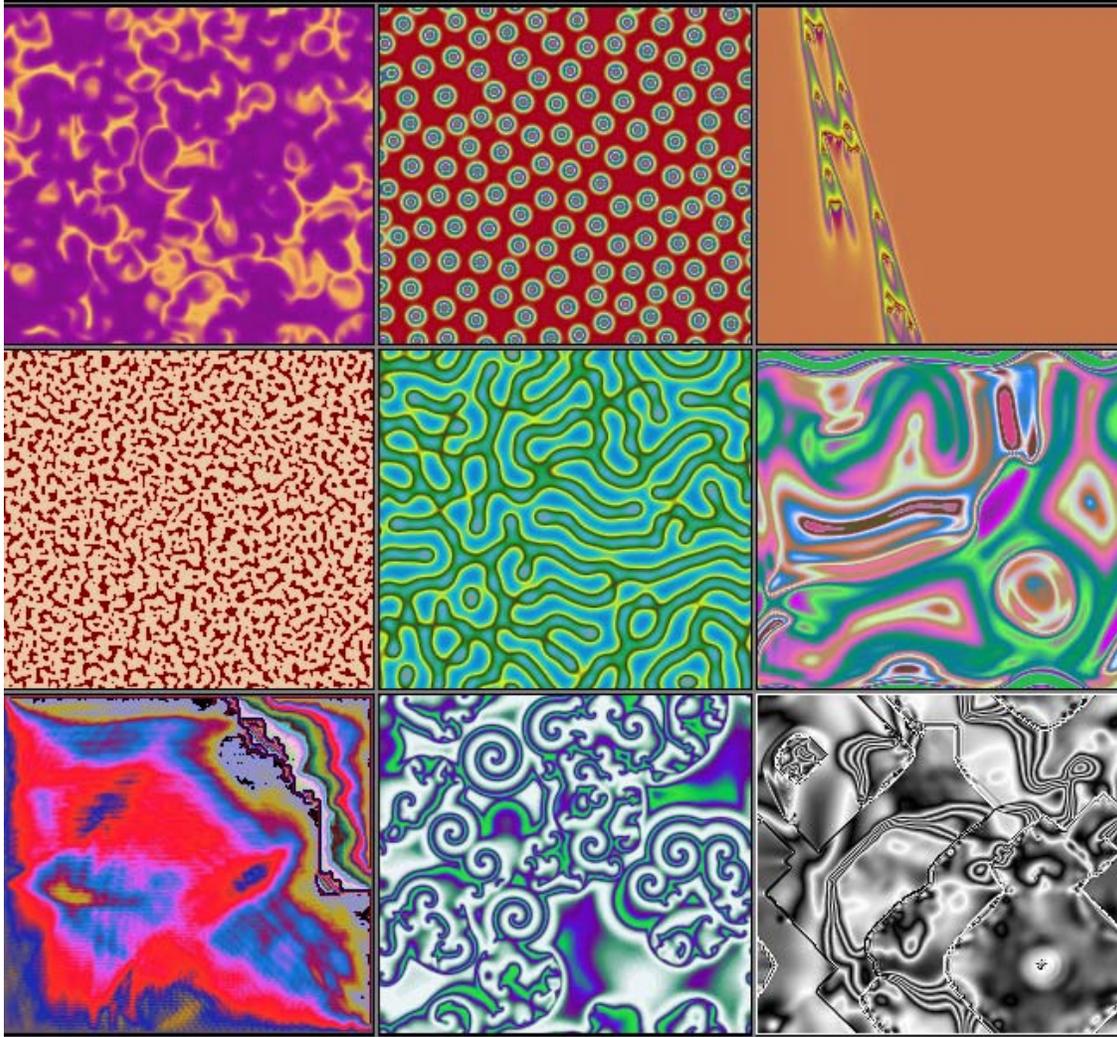
Part III: 2007

October, 2007. “Everything Is Alive” in Kyoto.

I was in Kyoto in 2007 to give a talk called “Everything Is Alive” at a conference. Rather than writing up travel notes for this trip as an essay, I posted them on my blog in five installments, starting [at this link](#).

By the way, regarding Cellular Automata, I’ve designed a package called [Capow](#) that is in some ways better than *CA Lab* (also known as *Cellab*).

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Gnarly CAs. (Image generated by [Capow](#)).

Acknowledgements

Parts I and II were written in June, 1990 and Fall, 1993. Part I appeared in my collection, [Transreal](#), WCS Books, 1991, and Part II appeared in the magazine *Axxess*, #8, Summer 1994. Parts I and II appeared as a combined piece [Seek! Selected Nonfiction](#), (Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 2000.)