

## Narro ergo sum

1982, the end of June, three weeks before my birthday; a wild guess: Niigata. I could effort a travel outside Europe for the first time. Japan was a 'terra incognita' and I could not find rational motives to visit the country.

The airport did not match with my assumption, that I easily could obtain a detailed map of Niigata ken. The hall was almost empty.

The only connection with the world was a bus to the center of the city. A bookshop had a Japanese map only. Near the station I asked a man, a teacher, how to walk out of the city. My question made no sense to him. He asked me where I wanted to go. I made clear that I just wanted to walk out of the city. We produced an exemplary miscommunication. Somewhat disappointed or fed up he pointed at the nearby viaduct and indicated that after this I had to turn somewhat to the right, which I did.

Awful.

It got darker as the evening started, a light drizzle began, the city only slowly 'disappeared', may be also because I walked not too fast with my 25 kg. rucksack, filled with some ten books, a habit which I kept over the years. Then flooded rice fields surrounded me. To make matters worse thousands of baby frogs on my small road made me move like a ballet dancer to avoid stepping on those lovely, energetic creatures. Being exhausted by an intensive year working and the long flight from the Netherlands, not seeing any dry square meter to put my tent on, I felt hopeless and depressed, asking myself why I decided to be here.....

[.....]

Three weeks later I was still alive, even in a far better shape, more or less following the only lead I could think of with my unreadable map: a river.

After my first desperate day in Japan and after a comatose sleep, some

inhabitants of the small hamlet where I finally arrived in pure darkness, stole my heart in the very morning, forever.

Three weeks walking and finding my way is a long time. All my clothes were extremely dirty and badly stinking. Kitakata came in sight. It was my birthday and a hotel was a no brainer as well as an incredible wealth. A stationery manager helped me to make Japanese name cards, find a laundry [ I still feel my embarrassment when the owner of that laundry took out my clothes one by one: the odor.....!!!], gave a roundtrip in his car, brought me to another friend who managed a hair salon [he closed his shop immediately and his female staff prepared drinks and snacks], ordered another friend, salesman of caterpillars, by telephone -as I understood only later- to buy a French camping gas set and finally invited me for a sake presentation of 'the five tigers', sake producers, the same evening. I could not have been more happy.

That night I got my first introduction to manifold sake's, cold and warm.

[.....]

I walked, climbed, read books during my rest periods so that I could some of them send back soon to my Amsterdam home by 'funabin / insatsubutsu', camped at river- and sea sides, on open fields, in forests, sometimes even in a park, for instance on indication of the station master of Chiba 'eki', sometimes simply on a bench outside or on the hot sand of a beach without a tent at all. Every so-and-so I renewed myself in a youth hostel, where the young population surprisingly arrived by motorbike, car or train, having reservations, or in a public bath 'en route', an 'onsen' or a 'minsku'. I absorbed anything as it crossed my path.

Though I only had a yearly 8 or 9 weeks academic summer holidays available, I enjoyed Japan step-by step, year-after-year, from the most northern- to the most southern island.

Many times I was asked a wrong type of question: "Which place in Japan is the most beautiful?" Japan has so many incomparable beauties for who is able to see, the tiny moments as 'sakura' blossoms, the impressive alps, other

landscapes, coastlines and cultural assets.

[.....]

Then, unexpected, may be somehow not unaware of the consequences, we met short at a nondescript beach, my spouse and I. Without memorizing our encounter in my diary, every detail is engraved in my mind and soul as it was, she confessed years later, the same for my wife. The level is beyond my tools, words. The days later I stayed alone at a beach some kilometers further on, just listening at the breaking sounds of the waves day and night, without knowing anything in a sort of empty, silent mood. Now I know, that we recognized each other without words; it was as if my wife waited for me.

[.....]

After three month of intensive looking around in various 'ken', we found some 1000 'tsubo' neglected, terraced rice fields -again unexpected- . Without a deliberation, only giving each other a glance of understanding, we made the decision. I caused a heart attack to an architect from Tushima, who understood English, by stating, that I would not be a regular obedient client, but his 'sparring partner'. It has been said, that my style and character resembles the character of Tosa [Kochi]. The three of us cooperated intensively, a local well maker dug two 10 meters deep wells, which provide us now with a tasteful, healthy water. Intensive groundwork was done; we had to make our own road, up.

.....

After a first no, we finally could make a start with the construction of our house; how exciting. First a huge rock of around 50 ton had to be installed in the middle of the future living room. Our house was built around this rock. On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007, I made a speech on the occasion of the more than 100 'tsubo' roof being completed, the 'muneage shiki'. In that speech I memorized the moment of a really rescuing Japanese word: TENTO.

>>"T E N T O.....

echoed the inhabitants of a hamlet in the immediate neighborhood of Niigata city relieved:

T E N T O !!

At my first evening in Japan I looked for a small space for my tent to spend the night, but all flat fields were flooded. Desperately I entered a tiny, dark shop and after a while a most old female owner appeared. She looked at me and burst out laughing. Nobody of the inhabitants, who gathered in the mean time, understood what I wanted, until.....after tenth of desperate minutes, the old woman spoke the first saving Japanese word, which -since then- I never forgot anymore."<<

Finally I arrived after a long journey. In 2008 we started to live in rural Shikoku, Kochi ken, where food is delicious and healthy. That same year brought us an honorable award, a first [golden] architectural prize for the design of our new house, our 'tento'. We changed the original mono-culture of rice growing into the opposite: a biotope with a large variation of trees, shrubs and plants. Of the thousand 'tsubo' we are responsible for, we made a truly beautiful Japan. We live amidst nature and silence, together with frogs happily jumping around, birds singing their aria and warmhearted neighbors.

Our extraordinary roof not only protects us against sunshine and rain, but is a daring movement in light grey, reflecting the colors from the sky, lifted by the dark brown walls of the walls visible from the public side, especially at night. The form makes our 'tento' part of the surrounding nature, our wish.

[.....]

Our life's future was a 'tabula rasa'; we could never surmise where we are now, so happy with each other. My love does not want our intimacy be told in public, whereas I would like to shout from the roof how happy I feel and why. Still I have one intimate problem, which I did not yet share with her; I feel shy.

Statistically I will die before my wife will pass away. That's fine with me and no reason for mourning, on the contrary. But ...if....reincarnation proves to be a reality, I like to ask my wife to meet again and tell me where and when. A date.

The title is a competing variation with Rene Descartes' "Je pense donc je suis" [Fr.] or in Latin: "cogito ergo sum", I think, therefore I am.

The title says, I narrate, so I exist.

[.....] every day brought and still brings new stories. Even within those stories are 'crossings', which led to a myriad of other stories, too many to be told. However some have to be told as an omen of our existence.

See: Google: Landhuis in Sakawa.