



When West Marries East.

Commuting

One more day passed away
Just like all the others
Under the lost sun
In clouds of thoughts
Just like all the others
After evening bath
Go to bed
Just like all the others
Tomorrow back to work
Just like all the others
Meanwhile nothing to regret
Is it really all the same?

On one of those deep mid-winter mornings when the sky is lifeless grey, when Income Tax has been declared and a customer's Annual Report translated to English has just been accomplished, I feel that distance and time involved in life here are closing in on a life without beginning or end, no fear of being without security blanket of a spiritual path I need to quell. A total openness, a sublime change of attitude; bathing in the bright light without shadow, warm, loving and pregnant with fearless generosity but not long enough to hold on to; except then that remaining insight, a dormant small Satori awakened with a lower case s.

It is then that in the returning mood of making up balance sheets, juggling with the figures so they reflect a realistic image of a foreign self employed for the tax machine to crunch, I hear my father say "Il y a plus en vous", which should translate to 'there is more in you' in English. All standing on the platform of Ushihama station waiting for the 9:01 train to take me to work.

When after years of accelerating 'Sturm und Drang' in which I wanted it all, the best, all of the best and that all of the time, naturally mind writes cheques the body finds difficult to cash in on; I got it all in the late 60s. Now having the best of the East and the best of the West, leaving greed suspended between want for more in spite of being full and rejection; is it that what I wanted?

Good three minutes ago I was walking past the machine tool manufacturing plant that oozes the same chemicals used in the rusty treadmill factory 'Lamitref' in Belgium where I used to work as a gatekeeper with Etienne as co-worker. But then I realized I wouldn't make it careering to the 9th Gate book there, where no man has ever left moon-boot prints before, the one connecting heaven and hell, and I shortly after set out into a world over land and sea travel, leading me to Japan and get the lay of the land a year later. A something that oozed charm like some kind of addictive incense when I lived in the Flemish country side for the first time; the boondocks, a triangle between the 'Schelde' a major river and joining tributary, with bridges so far apart that the locals on bicycles and scooters preferred paying the Siddhartha ferry man to the civilized world. Commuting was less of a luxury then, especially in winter.

How nice that in my world of sense perception, smells and sounds are a familiar universe of uncensored, un-taxed freedom.

The DC 10 propeller driven cargo plane above, the throttles throbbing, circling Yokota American Air Force base on a morning training mission leaves me hanging in the air somewhere in my early adolescent years of spying around Antwerp's Deurne Airport next to which I grew up. Life is a waiting room...

On the train I look out for that path through the high stalks of dry grass blades that I once did with my dad here. I smell my nest, my home with the same intensity though it was autumn at the time.

The taste of the smell inside lingers on. Is this the youth of age as my dad calls it in his touching birthday wishes to me for passing the 50?

Some things have since changed indeed, the green enclave across from our apartment building where the owner of the machine tool manufacturing plant used to live also long disappeared, along with the path through the patch of land under dry grass. Still the overwhelmingly present feeling of the experience that that was where I hunted imaginary rabbits on the domain of my uncle Guillaume and his wife, with Jackie, later my dog remains. I always found it a pity he hadn't a horse stable like the multilingual business associate and blue-blooded friend of my dad's. Denmark later made up for that.

When the train crosses the bridge over Tamagawa Josui canal, I realize this is Japan worthy of a postcard. The drooping branch of a pine tree over the clear water and all that should go with it on a postcard is there, carps swimming, ducks peddling; the first bit of snow falling from a pine's bunches of needles. This is the view my wife and I gladly share, every morning, throughout the four seasons, she passes quite a bit earlier though, so I'm ever late for leaving her a message on the tree as in 'Shamans' Japan saying 'I love you Dear'. But then again we have telephone answer machines and email and the mobile telephone epidemic that has spread and affected young and old. The high-tech fast track; they already talked about the bombardment and overload of information 25 years ago.

Here on Chuo line, the central gateway into Tokyo I see these mobile phones have build-in walk-man functions, headsets and colour designs changing according the season. We can access our music library at home, and after having made a moody choice page through e-mail and decide to answer the one to Lovely Rita: nothing can come between us -with an attached picture, made with the handy zoom on the spot. And spot the spot with the help of some satellites onto a map of the deep sea green customized display; even send the shot of the spot on spot. We're not far from being able to check the fridge on the way home to see if there is enough milk for tomorrow morning; all on that finger horny gadget, the centerpiece of the gold rush mentality. I also succumbed. After the my first mobile phone purchase we saw two teenage girls on a bicycle; the one in the back talking to the one in front over the Keitai... as this latest virus is called here.

The railroad track into Tokyo is pretty straight. But the wireless demand threatens to create spectrum drought. Nothing has changed under the lost sun. Is there a life after the Dot? Think about it, dot.com, dot.wine and dot.god. And all those twenty-somethings, going to change the world with the billions of dollars they raised, claim the explosion at hyper speed is comparable with the Cambrian explosion, when an incredible array of life forms suddenly appeared on earth. We-wait-and-see, 543 million years later, also noted that the Cambrian explosion led to one of the greatest extinction periods too. Already Internet luminaries have cut 99% of the flowers we saw in the dot.com bloom. And the spawned strange new life forms of business could well be extinguished at warp speed. Still the dot. coms would have plenty of stories to tell.

I keep on seeing the most stunning things in Japan but on the Chuo line I don't expect déjà vûs.

There he is, sitting warmly wrapped up, half asleep, letting his husky head lean towards at one time left and then right again, dozing without letting go completely as some women do on the train when they comfortably make use of my shoulder to the point where I feel, I am in for schmoozing. Sturdy, hands shovel shaped after manual labor of at least 30 years in a hang-over from last year, blue baseball cap quite matching the colors of his outfit, traditional wide legged working pants, except then that embroidered 2 line-text on his baseball styled cap saying 'Vatican Library Collection'. The pitch perfect blows my mind; two far-flung fantasy worlds, west and east happily married. A hidden meaning between the privatized lines?

It is true that of the 30.000 plus seasonal suicides yearly, a considerable number use the Chuo line as a means of departure from this world of living memories. Seeing the head of a middle aged salary man as they call white collar workers here roll of the beaten track from an incoming Tokyo bound train is particularly inspiring. As in movie memories I still feel like vomiting in the slip of time. Places & faces, as fearful as can be in a burning pool of pus and piss, fathers and mothers, new and unborn babies and other anti-oxidant needy incarnated creatures are all

rusting and rotting to death beyond the grasp of love of an immaculate caring mother or blissful sex with the same. Was it not Churchill who when showing up late at a parliamentary meeting in a record hangover was told he was drunk by a female MP replied: "That may be so madam but tomorrow I will be sober and you'll still be ugly".

The houses passing my train window, hulled in grey just like they did a decade ago when I finally made it back to Japan, have nothing exciting, they hibernate, resting on a gentle slope as one would expect seeing in a fading black and white picture with the yellow corners smearing the whole smilingly to grey, to a life behind sliding paper windows, a shadow play. These are the Japans, not Scotland, weather all the same today, but the islands where in the face of Mt Fuji at sunrise over lake Yamanaka-ko on January 1st, I counted the day as one of those days in the life of foreign residents that have gone into history before me, the one's I've known passing away here and the one's I've read about and identify with in oblivion.

Igor from the Ukraine was never dead serious as I have always been accused of, but he is seriously dead now at 36. His doctor had warned him; he had too little blood in his alcohol circulation. What the heck he responded and said come on man one more for the road. He died dead drunk I would like to imagine, but seeing his fire bleached bones coming out of the incinerator at the crematory certainly brings home the reality of it all...

This reality in stark contrast to the feeling of having once been born in the Himalayas of Nepal, though every one will contend this to be more remote from reality; in fact I come from the Dragon Garden Lane in Antwerp, you know, like Paris in Texas, a real dragon tattooed man.

So I must have participated in a collective Nostra Damus vision then. From my secluded room in the Benchen monastery overlooking Katmandu valley I saw war in full turmoil, with fighter jets and plumes of fire, black snow to follow, it was after all days before the Kuwait war was fought. A war just like all the others. Distressing indeed is the history of all wars wherever fought, West or East and religion alike.

Killing fields that I witnessed in Cambodia, murder and betrayal, political assassinations, royals and imperials not spared; tribes and nomads, no need to go further back to the days they slit throats in the wars the Flemish and the Walloons fought over pronunciation. I tell my students not to worry too much about their pronunciation of English; I learned my lesson after being accidentally born in the result of such mess –not my first choice mind you! In our present days these are just ongoing paradigm shifts they say, tribal wars in Afghanistan as on any of the other 4 continents. Cyber wars too have come to stay. No coincidence, love is all you need, yeah, yeah, it refrains in my ears till my bewildered eyes are fixed on the text above the train window: May Peace Prevail on Earth. I try to decipher the surrounding Kanji to see what the connection is. Too many times I've seen catch phrases that even for American baseball fans are incomprehensible, illegible scribbles: foot, hit, get...

A woman wallowing like Indian old rural women at the laundry well, with all the outer grotesque signs of having reached the age of respectability, aggressively pushes her way onto a vacant seat, competing with -these male chauvinist nicotine addicted workaholics with a dangerously low promise- for a place in paradise, a heated seat on Chuo Line, the comfort of Japanese bath, in every one's opinion. O-Furo soaked surrogate, if only I could bookmark this place in heaven; would it all be the same? Would you know my name if I saw you in heaven...?

The announcement of imminent departure of the train is a real time one, from the mike in a living iron fist neatly covered in a velvet white glove; robots in their most humane form or was it the other way around, humans in their robot-like best shape? Chanting the announcement of departure in almost religious tunes. Home is where the heart is.

Passengers come and go, so do thoughts, grey as the return to Europe after my first years in Asia. The ferryboat Dover-Ostend across the Channel to the continent, that time probably sailing at its height in 1975, now simply put out of business by the Chunnel. Grey as the North Sea smelling of maternal rancid Tibetan butter tea and paternal hot Japanese Sake consecutively, the train journey through the grey winter clouded Flanders in extension, grey Sundays back in Scotland to follow, with the only exception of Denmark that I seldom recall other than briskly bright.

The Danes too are a polite and self-effacing lot. They are naturally pleased but also a tad apologetic, carefully disguising any feeling of pride in self-depreciating humor. Sounds very Japanese 'Tatemaie' if you are familiar with this cliché.

Unfortunately in this land of Za-Zen traditions the big shots oppose Za-Zen strategies of cutting through the financial Gordian knot.

Few have heard from the far distant West where in Danish high schools since the late sixties exams and notion of competition were unheard of, which explains the broadband relationships, the multiple fathers and mothers generation friendly freedom, they are oh so free they need to increasingly create additional laws.

There is great honesty though in not being afraid of being trivial. I admit, I am not always where my body is and I do not keep a continuous stream of awareness on my breathing. Ex-pat by choice or chance? A Koan many an English teacher need not solve. It is obvious that nowhere else in the world when speaking a bit of English one is instantly promoted to a status that obliges wining and dining, a Beggars Banquet with a bunch of foreign vagabonds similar to myself, people who need to justify partying the way fish need excuses to swim. Losers, choosers or abusers?

There are always the active housewives who like to gather for late morning tea with the delicacy of the season, and come with stories of their week-end shopping escapades in Singapore, or exchange information about prestigious restaurants in various parts of Japan, or table talk the festival of the day. Obviously more Japanese than English is spoken, so the English teacher becomes more a student of Japanese as the lesson draws to tea time, all students deeply enjoying learning new

terms of food and fest in Japanese and the Kanji that goes with it, rewarding, all things well considered. I can practice and perfect Katakana transliteration for pronunciation of odd English words on the white board, French and German yet with some difficulty. Kanji on the white board I leave up to the students, why put off till tomorrow what you can have others do for you today?

One of the great 5 in Tokyo, Shinjuku station, where the artery of Chuo line constantly undergoes bypass surgery, leaves me at this hour with a grin to the general advice people gave me not to do last minute shopping on Oxford street London at Christmas time. This here is 365 Christmas sort of days a year, Harrods is history considering two million people a day pass through in two, three bursts, an ejaculation tourists better avoid unless they're on a chicane trip. My commuting skills have been greatly enhanced by the platform floor indicators of carriage and door numbers of the train, and maps of the main exits to the four wind directions here and there and in between, with in each direction plenty of pricks to spit you out to the surface or pussies to suck you below if you prefer..., two, three four and more floors deep to temp you, seduce you, addict you to the seventh heaven of money makes the world go round and round, yeah, yeah. Don't take a piece of my pie...

Mejiro station, one more stop to this morning commuter's destiny: computers, debunking the myths of access to the Web in terms of developing a more informed citizenry. Off we go. In this complex world perhaps this is the best skill to nurture after losing the ability of narrowing my selection of contents input that only logically connects and correlates seemingly religious visions. My wife grew up here and not so long ago we met her old school friend Akiko who married in Pakistan. Not just anyone, no, just a blue eyed descendant from Alexander the Great, still living in one of those pockets of William Morris' News from Nowhere' rural Utopia, a slice of Eden. In the prophecy of Gordius the ancient king of Phrygia, the knot was to be undone only by the person to rule Asia. Old Al probably accessed the Salomon file wirelessly when he cut the knot. One of these days Akiko's husband could get the report result of his medical scan beamed from Japan to some satellite receiver disk on top of his barn in Pakistan, if not things had so badly turned out in neighboring Afghanistan. I assume that under torture I also would confess not to be more Belgian than Dane and certainly not more Danish than Belgian.

Walking the street to Waseda Study Overseas Centre offices in Ikebukuro, up-town Tokyo for those like me, coming from the boondocks, the window cleaner mystic from Copenhagen turned stylish commuter has a different set of mystic tools up his sleeves. CD Rom's instead of wipers, Hyper Text Marked-up Language HTML for the initiated, in full ornate, tie and cuffs in place and the acidy drizzle burning the eyes, Java script humming:

Fingerprint, Labyrinth
One two three
Who is free?
Everybody now:
Step inside, never mind
Four five six
Who eats kids?
All together now:
Seven mile, never smile
Up and down
Who looks brown?
Here we go once again...
Stonehengebrick Laymenstrick,
One more time
Who's giving a dime?

My dad is right: my logic is preposterous. Passing the Nichiren Zen school temple to my left, it is most enlightening to discover that the attempt to liberate oneself from and eradicate all traces of origin whether it be from the heritage of the Dickens of the Flanders, Ernest Claes, incorporating and emanating people eating their heart out with chagrin, stubbornly attached reactionaries to self-pity but only projecting a damned stiff grey vision, or Soseki Natsume's greyer than grey bottom line of despair novels or -the DNA family -? - turned out: these are the things that never changed. I'm still a run away from home; learned early is learned well, what is learned in the cradle is carried to the grave. Luck follows the fool, on the hill or not, substitute parents to adopt, giving them what I couldn't offer my own let alone be one for children craving it; ultimately seeking approval for being a good guy not the one they doomed to the galleys. But all to no avail.

I semi-professionally prostitute myself, prostrating for the benefits to return to me magically as some sort of black mail, narcissistically humble but boasting of padded achievements, instead of being a humble person radiating a high level of personal realization.

"Il y a plus en vous" ...as my dad used to say. I sing "Nationality, give it up!" in several languages! Just ask a copy of Kai Becker's CD Mad Dr K.

But at this W.S.O. office Java is not everyone's cup of tea and I am not exactly what I spam, though I seem to have enough opportunity clicks; troubleshooting, my sort of computer game. Cyber wars have come to stay, whether within the establishment of supernova Bill Gates or S.F. underground hackers long after the capitalist system collapsed.

So far I have been spared with my small LAN network of only 15 hooked up computers that I try to administrate, but I do receive alerting messages of guys telling me there is one broken link of the 1274 in the Website that I commercially maintain. I am furthermore and kindly offered software to trace such and so, as Spider software monitoring traffic on the Web, able to penetrate firewalls, crack

codes and a click away could leave a self multiplying virus name tag on someone's cookies, should you want a pass time, for hackers with number crunchers PC's may be, but not for me.

On the 40 km way back home to West of Tokyo, the East has once more been fertilized by millions of gene determined creators, spewing forth, and now, all reproducing in a reverse order, sperm seeking a propagation of the living machinery where people almost run on time as trains do with the accident rate of human error still far higher.

Stretching the time without beginning, before catching the commuter train home I give in to the relentlessly returning temptation of slurping a 'Tempura Soba' at the station's fast food noodles shop; as Belgians would devour their sack of 'Pommes Frites' or Danes would swallow take-out 'Smørrebrød' or 'Pølse' by the mouthful.

Do in Rome as the Romans do. But when ordering this succulent smelling soy sauce based buckwheat noodles soup topped with a conglomerate of deep fried vegetables and fishy crumbs, standing shoulder to shoulder with exclusively men's folk, the elderly Japanese woman servant momentarily freezes. In a slip of time her dumbfounded eyes read: You?, Kentucky Fried Chicken looking man, as I probably look in her eyes with my whiskered white side burns, no, this is for Japanese...

She serves the bowl routinely apologetic to this impossible west matches east nevertheless. Next time she might react much in the same way as the station Kiosk clerk overcame my first order of one cup Sake 'hot-to de' hot please. Now that I have the exact 230 yen, for that one cup of hot fluid silver ready, she looks cool at me, thinking I know you. If that's what you want that's what you get or was the latter reading my own grey thoughts?

Every station has its own tune and more often than not I see dozers waking up from a universe with more than one window open on Karoshi, or death by overwork, get off in the last second deeply in sync with the melody of the station at heart.

Home is where the heart is.

Where is the time when going to work felt like going on a bloody Hollywood holiday? This time as today when finding my reading glasses to figure out what the surrounding article next to the picture of the Buddhas carved out of a rock mountain in Bahmian is -Afghanistan caught in my eye over the shoulder of the man taking my sight of the pretty soon spouse-to-be is all about, I am a drifter again.

The Asahi Newspaper is in Japanese and my Kanji not adequate enough to distinguish these times of organ donors when one asks oneself "How dead is dead enough?" and "How right will the doom-and-gloom party turn out even when no green light is given and we push ahead with cloning and gene therapy, distant robot assisted surgery, to the limit of imagination and beyond", I am not to say - will there be a gold pot at the end of the wireless digital rainbow? -

And these times when the Taliban wreak havoc in Afghanistan, in that dessert of human compassion, off we go... I do recall these fierce medieval warrior looking Afghan men, Tower rifles hanging loosely over their shoulder. I once bought a fur coat from them to send to the woman of my dreams in Japan; it reached.

I am obliged but sad that we haven't managed to develop decent standards of respect for human efforts to signal greatness. At least it is comforting that in the Laos civil war following the Vietnam doped-out war when I traveled with my then-to-become wife to the last paradise of Luang Prahbang, the Almighty's governing teaching of natural cause and effect was not received as venom to the communist Pathet Lao. But it stays hard to imagine what kind of threat some Bahmian Buddha images, sixth century sculptures can pose, so that they have to be exterminated with tanks spelled without 'h'. Many a madman's deed has been committed in the name of any Draconian religion, Mao, his vision and his clique setting mass hysteria in motion comparable with it no different. It is the kind of thing that makes me thankful that art-thieves often get to old relics first (if yet they do take them apart with chainsaws). I was one of them, bringing the blessing deprived artifacts smuggled out of Tibet over to the West.

I suppose I am remarkable at trying to surpass the disorganization of a world with free trade but with no solid ground under my rolling feet.
Living landscapes! Off we go...

We all know that centuries of arranged marriages, imposed traditions and sexual slavery in one form or another not to forget manipulative religions in all times and cultures around the world won't change overnight if that's what's bothering us in the cyber world. I am not setting the standards of morality, putting law and order into sexual behaviour as if it were only allowed within a certain framework of borderless-ness; provided this is in conformity with the general consensus stretched to the limit. Strictly & abstractly speaking I guess I am still within the adult consent broadband of giving green light to the red light area; with the haunted look of a man for whom self-immolation is no longer a pose but a compulsion, driving myself to succeed while relishing defeat and then say I failed to eradicate the sense of shame upon failure and profligacy on the way back home after setting sail into a postwar 20th century tale of imperialist adventure and capitalist enterprise, who started off?

The Enron debacle? The Salt Lake Winter Olympics? Off we go; the axis of good crossed evil. I am so touched, the bouquet of deep blue mini lilies, the few orange roses sparsely, with small yellow flowers' twigs held up like a proud prick on his way to propose, eyes dreamy then flashing briefly with more meteoric brilliance than words can tell. Mind now focused, next meeting with his timeless match could not possibly wait for comet Halley's return or Tanabata, the star lovers, who could not see on that grey rainy day.

Will you marry me and spent the rest of our grey days in flower sheeted beds together? Oh yes, this man in the aesthetic zenith of his approach at a decent hour of the evening when trains don't smell yet like a watering hole at 4 in the morning, when the cleaners tidy up Cornucopia, the horn of plenty, tells the world decisively I am on my way.

Clearly I see my own innocence, the time when my being in this country, my half-dream and full-life flowed Tama river back upstream along Chuo line to lines meaning GO-ZEN (Japanese for in the morning) and go GO-GO in the evening (go-go for evening in Japanese) and I was on top of the down under where I wanted to bury myself were I not to propose to you dear, as a natural result of the equation that needs no explanation. Why did I marry you in the first place?

Romance and Glamour? Ownership versus leased access? Reciprocity? You name it; why did we marry? Out of love? Sympathizing compassion? Rejoicing? Out of opportunity, gratefulness, remorse? May be to remove remorse? Remorse of failure, to shape us an ideal identity?

Non, je ne regrette rien, ni le mal ni le bien. I join the majority against Tolstoy's 'Happy families are all alike, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way'. I am indeed a cross-grained sort of chap. Tolstoy was completely wrong. Unhappiness has a lot more similarities, there is much more variability among happy people. I've been raised Buddhist. Oh Dear, be my woman, be my friend. You've kept in first position of my top 20 click-hit-list. And of new and old friends, surviving family and acquired acquaintances over the years, you're the one to dance with, without humiliation nor being put out for it, it's just wonderful to be home. Home is where the heart is.

Gerrit Slembrouck. Valentines Day, February 14, 2002

