• Soon we're driving up along two lane winding mountain roads, up through endless feasts of green, with the turquoise river below. Patrik sees a red fox and a monkey watching us from the top of a tree. Then a stop at "1,300 rice paddies mountain" where people still plant and harvest rice the traditional way as the incline is too steep and the plots too small for modern machines - unbelievable!

rice seedlings ready to be planted

• Then a quick lunch/dinner right on the river where we're looking out over people digging little pits in the river bed's gravel which then fill with hot water from the underground springs, and in minutes they're lying in their own Jacuzzis, looking out over the mountains.

• And then a quick stop at the Kumano Hongu shrine, almost 2,000 years old. We are overtired, overshrined, and have no expectations of anything except polite attentiveness. We walk through the gates and are completely, totally overwhelmed with this deep settledness, a kind of quiet that is unimaginably lovely. The thick sloping cedar bark roofs are mesmerizing in their soft/strong timeless sensuality. And then quick off to Naomi's parents' inn in Yunomine, Japan's oldest hot spring resort, 1,800 years old. Just time for a quick good-bye to our remarkable hosts and then off to a quick sulfur hot spring bath and to bed.

keeping a roof on in Yunomine

boiling eggs in the hot spring in town

Hongu to Takamatsu

• After an early morning walk through Yunomine, where the street is filled with old people in their yukatas walking to the public bath, and an amazing breakfast at the ryokan (miso soup, rice, pickles, fresh bamboo root, seaweed, fabulous smoked fish, tofu, scrambled egg and tea) we head off to the Hongu Shrine again to absorb more of that deep settledness – just can't get enough of it – and the entryway for us seems to be through the cypress bark moss-covered 1,000 year-old roofs.

• Thirty seconds before the bus arrives, we run across the road to get some green tea ice cream from the vending machine in the shrine parking lot (what better way to return to the 21st Century) and we're off to Tanabe. Darn, fluorescent lights. But Nori has written in our notebook, among other critical Japanese communications, the following: "Excuse me, sorry to disturb you, but I was wondering if you could help me. This person has a serious allergy to fluorescent lights (like these) and I was wondering if there was any way you could turn them off." Patrik goes up to the young driver the next time he comes to a stoplight, shows him the book and voila! The lights are off. Praise the Lord. It's a wonderful drive, back through the gorge, then through all these little villages. At Tanabe we transfer to the train – with a twenty-minute wait, Sara goes foraging for bento boxes. Nothing. And no grocery stores or Lawson's, just Japanese sweets and clothing stores and a Pachinko parlor with young Japanese women in tight t-shirts and high heels….

• And then a three-hour train ride along the coastline. We stay glued to the window, searching for every traditional building we can find. We have found an English Japanese newspaper with international news on pages 9 & 10: in addition to the main articles of the war, there are the obscure human interest stories – a North Dakota congressman is having a sex-change operation, an elephant is being painted white in Germany, and an identical twin from Canada who had had a botched circumcision and was raised as a girl until his father told him after which he became a boy, just killed himself. And Doonesbury! A brilliant one about Cheney's draft deferments. And then we arrive in Takamatsu, take a taxi to our hotel which the Japan Asian Cultural Council office has booked for us. It's a tatami room grand style – three times the size of our apartment in NYC, and we are ready to settle in.

• The next morning we take a train to Yashima (20 minutes) to visit the Shikoku Mura Museum – 26 traditional houses and buildings were relocated here from across the island, each built 100-400 years ago, in a cleverly landscaped park. We've been to museums like this in Korea, Switzerland, Romania, and Wales, and are thrilled to have discovered this by chance in our guidebook. And what a fabulous beginning – a replica of the Iya Valley's Kazura-bashi, a suspension-bridge made of woven vines. This one is reinforced with steel cables, but was designed and constructed by the vine bridge builders of Iya who rebuild it every three years, as they still do in their native villages. We walk across it and wish we could walk to work this way every day!

• And then to the country Kabuki Theater. Unbelievable- the farmers of Shodo Island must have seen a Kabuki performance on a trip to the mainland and were "bitten by the bug," as our literature recounts. They built this charming all-wood theater complete with a revolving stage. Productions were staged twice a year, probably right after rice planting in late spring and right before harvest in early autumn.

• Then past a "wild boar fence" in which the stones were fixed in place with mortar mixed with pine needles, and then to an ordinary farmers' dwelling from the Edo Period (1600-1867.) Yoiks, what a hard life. The rice they grew was either sold or paid out in taxes; barley and vegetables were the daily fare here. The next house from the early 1700's has a bark steamer for papermaking- wow! Imagine a 1950's beauty shop hairdryer made of iron about six feet high and four feet in diameter that's rigged on a pulley system and can be raised and lowered over a cauldron filled with mulberry branches which sits on a pot over a fire pit, forming an efficient steam box, "Hand-made Japanese paper (washi) is famous for its strength and durability. Since no chemicals are used in its manufacture, it will not discolor or decompose with age. In olden times, Japanese merchants kept their precious records in account books made of washi. These could be thrown down a well in case of fire and hauled up later without damage." There are old photographs on the wall- any thoughts that this might be easier work than rice planting are soon discarded. And then past sugarcane presses and lighthouses and tea rooms and another bark steaming hut. And then to the late 18th Century residence of Master Kume: "Among his many accomplishments, Master Kume helped develop the growth of salt making. A master of navigation, he also invented the naval canon, pistols and an air circulating fan." And on to a rice storehouse: "Rice production was figured in units called 'Koku' – about five bushels – the amount of rice needed to feed one person for one year." And then to a soy sauce warehouse – wow! And on and on through 26 buildings. Here is their website if you want to give it a try: http://www.shikokumura.or.jp/

straw bark steamer hut

storage jugs for soy sauce

ancient boat

• And then back to Takamatsu to Ritsurin Park, the largest formal garden in Japan, built over a period of 100 years beginning in the early 1600's. A bit too manicured for our taste, but a heron saves the day as we watch him successfully catch his dinner. We walk past a waterfall with this sign: "During the Edo period, the water for the Okedoi-taki Waterfall which flows down the stone wall had to be brought by workers halfway up Mount Shiun. The water was stored in a barrel of water (oke) that was poured every time the lord walked past."
The Waterfall flows from 10:00am - 3:00pm."

carp feeding in Ritsurin Park

• Patrik says, "Let's hope he noticed."

• The following morning we are off to the Noguchi Museum, something George Kochi from the ACC has highly recommended and has arranged a private tour for us, given by the manager herself, a wonderful woman who had known Isamu and told us some fascinating things about him. This was Noguchi's private workspace for twenty years or so and includes 150 sculptures, many of which are unfinished. We like the unfinished works the best and are fascinated with how many different projects he had going at the same time. And he worked with stone from all over the world – Indian granite, Brazilian basalt… and this place was set up here both for its (then) remoteness and for being in a village of traditional stone cutters. These are the men who make the lanterns and cemetery markers and are used to working with the kind of hard stone he preferred to work with. The women are the polishers – and in the workroom you can see and feel the numerous grades of polishing stones. In his residence there's a hanging bamboo sculpture of multiple parts that turns out to be a Balinese mobile/marimba. Ms. Ikeda lets me play it for a few minutes and I am in heaven. Then finally some tea and sweets in the attic of their office – a wonderful old rice storage building. We are left alone in this wonderful space, Sara rolls around on her head and gets a wonderful idea for the new piece which, if it works, you will recognize at their next NYC season at the Duke, March 16-20, 2005. The phone rings – it's Sara's mother! Calling from Myrtle Beach just to say hello. It's a fantastic connection and we find out that Paul's cat might be pregnant - again. And then back to the hotel, pack up our luggage and off to the train for Matsuyama.

Matsuyama

• We arrive in Matsuyama, it is raining cats and dogs (a favorite expression of our 1978 Polish translator) and take a taxi to the business hotel Nori and Ritsuko have booked for us – cheap, clean and small enough to feel like we are on a ship. While Patrik unpacks the computer and lights, Sara turns on the television. Well, well – there is the governor of California in some movie, but what an improvement: he is speaking Japanese! He's still unbearable, so we switch channels: a program teaching Japanese sign language, and two entertainment shows with guys in drag - but not super drag, just looking normal, but wearing women's clothes. Very exaggerated reactions and extreme acting, everyone pretending to have a boisterously wonderful time, and then the samurai drama which has been on every time we've checked the television, and a cooking show.

• We take the next day off to catch up on business and go to Dogo, 2 km away by 1940's streetcar (one of the few things the Americans didn't bomb) which is a 3,000 year-old hot spring housed in a marvelous 1890's Japanese "Victorian" building. We are told we can get a private room which we interpret as a private bath, but no – it's a private changing room with a private hostess who escorts us to our separate public baths and then serves us tea and sweets afterwards in our private room. The water is fabulous – really hot and pure and supposedly very healing.

• As we are leaving, Patrik notices old photographs on the walls and says, "Look what we missed!" And there is the old public bath which it turns out we paid extra NOT to use. We each duck into the "people's baths" for a quick peek and they are magnificent – old stained-glass windows, beautiful old tile, with ornate sculptures in the middle of the bath, and the old changing room is swarming with middle-aged people, all naked, holding up these little towels which everyone uses both as a washcloth, a drying towel (you squeeze it out after your bath) and a modesty guard. Next time.

• And then back to the hotel for more work, leave a birthday message for brother Jon, and to bed.

• Next morning we meet Saori (a dancer/teacher/choreographer from Matsuyama who took our Kyoto workshop and organized today's Matsuyama workshop) and she takes us to their new studio – a lovely two-studio building with wood floors and natural light - NYC could use more places like this!

• We teach a three-hour class to around sixteen people and many of them are really good dancers/improvisers/choreographers. They all seem very open, enthusiastic, receptive, responsive. It's a little rough going with the pseudo-translator who is an American karate teacher who doesn't think any translation is necessary – after all, dance is a universal language! – which is true, of course, but…. It gets better after getting worse, and by the second hour he is really engaged and his intelligence has increased considerably. By the end of class we really like him and wish he could translate more for us in the future. We head back, eat/work/rest before going out to dinner with Saori and Joyce, Guy Yarden's wife who's here on a nine-month grant.

Last day in Kyoto

• We take the train back to Kyoto for 2 nights before heading to Tokyo. Kyoto! We love it here. We want to stay here. Before spending the day shopping for presents, we must have our first Kyoto "kaiseki" dining experience in Nakamura-Ro – next to the Yasaka shrine at the edge of Maruyama Park, right next to the oldest tea house in Japan. We are the only ones in the lovely restaurant and they are willing to turn off all fluorescent lights for us. We sit in a large tatami room, facing a wonderful garden of green. It's raining, and everything is alive, quiet. An old lady brings our plate – this is one of these multiple taste experiences – Kyoto cuisine is known for its subtlety and use of natural ingredients. Lovely.

• Next we meet Akiko at the Kyoto Arts Center, say hello and goodbye to Sara's favorite building, repack our suitcases at JCDN, and say hello and goodbye to Seiko and Ayaka, and take Nori out to dinner at the fabulous Tofu restaurant. Eight different splendid courses – all tofu variations. He tells us about the "bad" news: Omi-san's new space in Maebashi is not yet finished, so we need to cancel the three-day workshop. Good news: Nori thinks Omi-san is very interested in producing a site-specific community project with us in the future and recommends going there for one day to meet with him and research potential sites. Good news: JCDN is growing, expanding into so many visionary projects that it needs to double its staff to handle the extra work load. Bad news: until they can double their staff and get the new system organized, they can't handle new projects with us, although they would love to. Good news: we each have gotten more new ideas for dances, videos, and projects in these last two months here in Japan than we have in the last two years in the US. Bad news: there is basically no money for dance in Japan. Good news: everyone in Kyoto loved our work – the professional dancers, the community participants, the staff, the producers, the audiences. Bad news: noone in the history of the Kyoto Arts Center has ever applied for a second artist residency grant, and there is no grant for creative projects. Good news: we can try. Good news: we love Kyoto. Very sad news: this is our last walk through Maruyama Park. Very sad news: this is our last night sleeping here, our last morning being woken up by the crows.

We arrive in Tokyo

• On the 2 1/2 hour train ride to Tokyo, we find the very last two seats available. Upon arriving we take a quick taxi ride from the station to Ginza Yoshimizu (with a woman driver!), Yoshimi-san's new all natural, all organic ryokan in the heart of Tokyo. It is beautiful. She held an architectural competition for creating an environmentally sound, chemical-free building constructed with traditional materials. It's remarkable – organic tatami in all the rooms, the walls made from a mix of plankton and charcoal that absorbs humidity and odors, organic futons, blankets, sheets. No fluorescent lights. A macrobiotic organic restaurant serving delicious food (including marvelous fish, which the chef shops for each morning at the famous fish market, a 15-minute walk from here). Yoshimi-san says she always thought of Sara as she was building the place, which also has a small performing space in the basement where we'll be giving our presentation. The floors are all bamboo which is heavenly to walk on, and the sparse furniture is all antique wood. There are two baths on the top floor, one of stone, the other of cedar, with specially filtered water.. Check it out online: www.yoshimizu.com

Sara gets a lesson in all natural plastering

• Next day Yoshimi-san treats us to our first Kabuki performance, only five hours long!! (God help us) We arrive at the wonderful old theater, just three blocks away, and it's a circus inside. The halls are full of food stalls, souvenir shops, and even places that sell clothing and purses. It turns out you can bring food into the theater, which everyone does. Not just the Japanese equivalent of popcorn, but entire meals of sushi. It's like Japanese music hall – unbelievable costumes, marvelous colors, incredibly ornate sets, scores of performers, all very broadly acted with lots of mime. It's an inherited system, so unfortunately many of the actors and dancers are not great, but it's a fabulous, unforgettable spectacle. Our favorite moment comes when all the evil foot soldiers sashay in and form a Martha Graham-type semi-circle around the hero, all in a deep second plié with their arms outstretched, backs to the audience. The hero then takes out his huge (HUGE!) sword and "beheads" them all, they round over so you can't see their heads. At the same moment each one lifts a previously hidden square of bright red fabric, attached to their collars, symbolizing the blood where their heads used to be; then they sashay off. And then one of the "invisible" squatting stage hands shakes out a piece of fabric and out roll a dozen heads on a string!! Wow, 500 years later, it's still terrific. Then intermission where Sara stands in line for the ladies room with a California Elder Hostel woman who says she also was a dancer – tap, jazz, modern, Tahitian – with a company that performed where?: at the Elks Clubs. Maybe we have a future after all. Act II Sara finds very confusing until Patrik explains (during the next intermission) that this wasn't Act II at all but a new play altogether, the second of five! Sara's favorites are the kimono-clad women-men. Such beautiful colors! Pastel variations we never see now.

Tokyo Interview

• We begin the interview even though the translator, Yoshimi-san's friend who has just returned from the U.S. to work as a director of Japan Public Television, has not yet arrived. It's a woman staff writer for a daily Tokyo newspaper who writes 1-10 stories/week. We ask her about the percentage of women working in journalism today – 2-3%. So, we say, you are a pioneer. It turns out she knows more English than she originally let on… we think. We talk not only of our work and the regular questions of how did we meet and what is our message to Japan, but of our perceptions of the different "tuning" of Japanese culture to time and space and energy, of how we are affected by Japanese sense of design. As we dive into thinking/feeling/talking in simplified English about Japanese sense of space that has such a different relationship to in and out – that they feel in and out simultaneously and not the Western either/or separation – whether that be in their traditional architecture or in their praying (ringing those huge Shinto bells, standing, palms together, out in the open park as throngs of people walk past their focused stillness) or in their dancing, … and there is Yoshimi-san running in and out of the room, opening the door, closing the door, opening the door, closing the door, and Sara is going nuts, feeling each change as utter disruption, and then she realizes the philosophical irony of it all. Sort of. Then Hiro finally arrives when the interview is almost over, but it is worth the wait. Somehow the focus has shifted and we are now interviewing him. He was in New York City for two years, arriving shortly before 9/11 and seeing it all from his apartment on Franklin Street. So we bond immediately. We ask him what he would ideally like to do at the television station. "Make programs that tell Japanese people what was and is really going on in their government and in the world." This information is very controlled, he says, and when he was in the U.S., he learned so much from the nation. At first we think he is saying the "country", but he explains, no, the magazine "The Nation"! And we tell him that Sara's brother writes for the Nation, and he is so excited and he talks to everyone about how fabulous the Nation is for maybe 15 minutes. Wonderful. At Yoshimi-san's insistence, we shift rooms to the downstairs performsnvr space, say goodbye to the reporter, and continue to visit with Hiro. He talks about the different ways Japanese and Americans think, and how that manifests in language. And about his great-grandfather who translated Shakespeare and Goethe into Japanese, wrote Kabuki plays, and then began to explain how the Japanese language has changed since WWII. With regional dialects so different from each other, the unifying language (which is now Tokyo dialect) was then the classical style found in Noh and Kabuki. Not only were the accent and vocabulary different, but the grammar – in the written form, a "sentence" might go on for six pages. He said the form, whether written or spoken, was much closer to poetry than anything else. It's all fascinating and we are totally exhausted and say goodbye, but right then two American women are ushered in by Yoshimi-san – the more the merrier as far as she (with the limitless energy and no differentiation of in and out) is concerned. Staying here for a couple of days after an MRI conference in Kyoto, they are actually great, all geared up for tomorrow's day which will begin with a 6am trip to the fish market and end with a Sumo wrestling championship. We stagger to our rooms, to the bath, and to bed.

Informance at Ginza Yoshimizu, Workshop in Yokohama

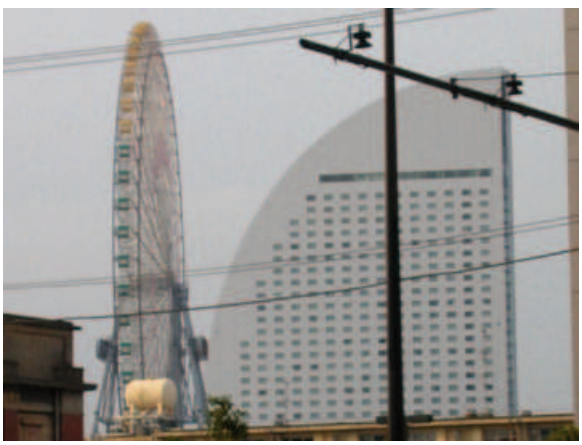
• Even though the performing area is only 15x8 feet, we decide to intersperse our videos with live dancing. We invite Yuka and Nori to join us for a couple of improvisations and start the evening with "Don't Blame Me" from "Partners…". The full house (all 30 people!) looks mainly to be dancers and choreographers in their 20-30's and are extremely attentive and asking interesting questions: do we ever get in trouble with authorities when doing our site-specific performances? How do we find the community people we work with? How does it affect their lives? Patrik tells the story of John Jenkins – how we told Laura Faure, up in Lewiston, ME, at the beginning of our OnSite Performance Network project that we wanted to work with martial artists; 30 people were supposed to show up, and only one did – John Jenkins – African-American five-time world martial arts champion, former mayor of Lewiston and state senator, then working at an insurance company, having left his movement practice behind years ago… and by the end of the two hours, we finally managed to get him moving instead of just talking, and his life and ours were forever changed… Just to watch him begin, bringing his energy into focus, rotating his arms, equaled watching Nureyev from the wings of the Paris Opera. "Praise the Lord!", he shouted as we finished, "Praise the Lord! You have brought me back to myself."

• And then "oishi" (delicious) organic fish dinner with Yoshimi-san, her husband and guest, the hotel staff, and our great translator / former NYU student Michiyo Sato, and to bed.

• Yuka and her dance friend Makoto are waiting for us in the lobby at noon the next morning to escort us to Yokohama for our workshop for 30 professional dance artists, which she has organized at BankArt 1929, a marvelous new arts complex housed in an old bank building. It takes an hour by train to get there – Makoto pulls out his tiny video camera and shows us a video piece he has made called "At the Bar" – a kind of avantgarde Japanese slapstick – and we're there. It's a huge studio with windows on two sides, a great sound system, and a new floor which was just laid down the day before. It's a fabulous class – we've got an excellent translator (who went to Macalester College in St. Paul!) and we're able to really go deep into our warm up – what a joy – and soon they are FLYING, bouncing off the walls. Unbelievable energy, really well trained, excellent concentration, very open. We start the three hour class with Patrik performing his Lot's Wife solo and Sara her Richard solo, then show some videos, and end class with instant choreography quartets. Everyone wants us to come back, teach more, choreograph a piece with them. No problem! And then Ms. Matsue Okazaki, the director, takes us to the second building and we look at the installations – this complex is for both the performing and visual arts – and then out to Yokohama's famous Chinatown with six of the dancers.

BankArt 1929, Yokohama

giant Ferriswheel in Yokohama



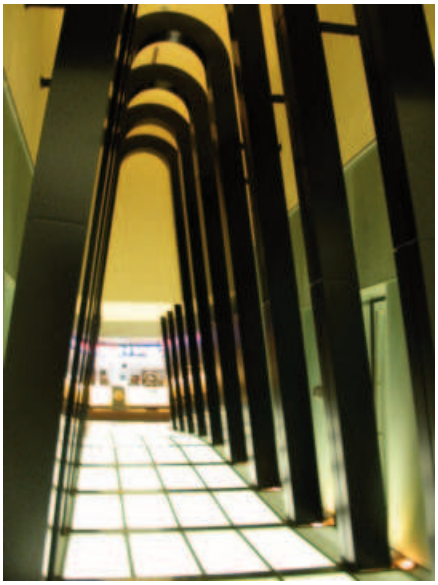
• Yokohama was one of the five treaty ports open to foreign trade in 1858, and until the great earthquake in 1923, which killed more than 40,000 people, it was the main conduit for new ideas and inventions into Japan – photography, ice cream, the first bakery, brewery, and railroad. Their Chinatown is immense and wealthy, with unbelievably ornate buildings. We go to a little dumpling shop and perfectly cram into a free table in the back. No fluorescent lights, Patrik covers the dangling bulb with Sara's scarf – wow – an evening to enjoy with no glare. We ask the dancers how they make a living, as they only get paid for performances, not rehearsals. One is a stage manager; another a part time computer programmer; one works in a convenience store (how many hours do you need to work to get by? 30 hours/week – how much do you get paid an hour? ¥ 950, less than $9); two more work part time in arts organizations (How much do they make an hour? ¥ 800!); another wanted to be a graphic designer, went to the university. He works 14 hours/day. The people who work full time at BankART sometimes put in such long hours they sleep there. So it is actually even more difficult to be a dancer in Japan than in NYC.

• Walking back to the train, we pass an ice cream shop which has black sesame, kiwi, mango, and cheesecake flavors – Patrik offers to buy cones for all, and another party erupts on the street. It's lovely to see how much they all enjoy each other. The women's energy with one another feels very familiar but the men have a gentleness as they joke around that is new to us. We all say goodbye and we rush back to the hotel, once again way past our curfew.

• We seem jinxed here in Tokyo. We get up at dawn to go to the fish market – we walk and walk, it's twilight zone – finally someone tells us – CLOSED! What is going on? Our guide book says that it's open every day except Sundays and holidays.

• We go to Kim Itoh's rehearsal (many of his dancers have been taking our workshops; great atmosphere; very similar to the way we work), and from there to the Mori Center. Patrik is learning how to navigate the subway system which Sara considers to be a Herculean achievement; it takes us 1 1/2 hours to get there. This is the new, hot building in Tokyo. We walk around the complex for 20 minutes and finally find the entrance to the museum. It's 4:30, it closes at 5pm, but sorry – not allowed in. But it's the MoMA show!

• Oh well, Patrik notices a movie theater with the new Coen Brothers' film showing with subtitles. It's starting in five minutes, we pay $ 15 per ticket (normal Tokyo price!) and hear more English than we have in two months. What cinematography! That opening sequence is to die for. And the music! But the rest of it…



inside the movie theater

outside the movie theater

Mori Building at dusk

• Next day we give our final video lecture at the Art Studium at Kinki University. This is supposedly a very progressive art school – architects, museum studies people, artists of all kinds are in the audience. They are so quiet we can't tell what's going on inside of them but when it's time for the Q&A, their hands shoot up, and after 30 minutes they're still going strong, and so we all adjourn to the nearby Chinese restaurant for another two hours. This has got to be the NOISIEST restaurant we have EVER been to in our entire lives. It's packed with salarymen and women letting loose. We are asking the students about their lives and dreams – one happens to be in the NYU Performance Studes PhD program and recognizes Liz in the videos. Oy vey, what a small world. It's really quite wonderful. We end up taking the train back with a young artist who tells us, "your way of making art, of thinking about space, very Japanese. Where does it come from in you? And somehow we are talking about Meher Baba and Buddhism and Shinto energy, and the atmosphere becomes lovely, lovely on the fluorescent train with gold velvet seats this time. Priceless, precious; could this moment last forever?