

LOG

onroad impressions, confessions and observations

Andrew Garton 11 april - 21 june 1994

singapore, phnom penh, bangkok
ho chi minh city, hanoi, jakarta
manila, beijing, nanjing, kunming, prague

LOG1.....	2
saturday 23 april, 2.30pm - phnom penh, cambodia	2
sunday april 24, 10:30am	4
monday, april 25, 12.10pm	7
LOG2.....	7
saturday april 30, 1am - ho chi minh city, vietnam	7
sunday, may 1, 8am	9
sunday, may 1, 10.30pm	11
monday, may 3, 10.35pm	14
may 3, 12.25pm - hanoi, vietnam - army hotel	15
may 4, 12.40am	15
may 7, 8.20am - somewhere between hanoi and ho chi minh city	16
LOG3.....	17
preamble - 4 june, prague, czech.	17
tuesday may 10, forgettable hotel - jakarta, indonesia	18
may 11, better hotel, makati - manila, philippines	19
may 12, dark-time	19
may 13, 6pm, beverly hills deli	19
may 14, late, xiyuan hotel - beijing, china	20
may 14, later still	20
may 15, 10:30pm - big day out!	21
may 16, 8.20pm, revolving resturant, xiyuan hotel	23
may 18, another marble hotel, nanjing	25
may 19	25
may 20	26
LOG4 - days of forever past!.....	28
19 june, frankfurt	28
globe cafe, prague.....	31



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LOG1

saturday 23 april, 2.30pm - phnom penh, cambodia

i've lost my notebook. the one liz gave me before i left brisbane. sorry, liz. in the frenzy to film the landing, fill out the transfer documents and control the rush of being in a new place i'd left it in the plane.

its a bitch! i'd had notes from meetings as well as thoughts and impressions on the trip thus far. not much, but enough to fret about. its the first time i've lost anything whilst travelling so i guess i could count myself lucky.

theres so much to say thats already been said. we're all aware of the impacts of over-development, colonialism, western media and market based economies on the 3rd world. its all there to be seen and i've seen alot of it. traffic jams, foul air and desperatly poor people. its hard to not be scared when all around you seems to be spiralling down a sewer. so, rather than repeat whats been said far better than i could i'm just going to write what comes into my head whenever it happens, however it comes.

i'd wanted to start writing from the moment i'd left but it was impossible. lisa got me to the airport in one sound, sane piece. i hit the plane and just phased out on a couple of movies. i'd been booked into business class. the headphones were superb and between prokiev and the LCD screen anchored to my most comfortable of seats, and the generous servings of gin i drifted in and out of sensory gluttony all the way to singapore.

once off the plane i was met at the departure lounge by a hired driver. from the moment between hearing my name over the din of new arrivals information started in on me. i took to it like sarte to debaouvour, like mickey mouse to mini, like ren to stimpny!

phnom penh is anethema to singapore. singapore is an economic rationalists dream (and heres where i crave my notebook cause i'd had some interesting thoughts on this). its a text book success. its safe to walk through at night, streets are clean, the buildings are cleaned along with everyones brain. someone said, in singapore you can think, but you can't speak.

people are encouraged to be "kind" to each other. at the airport one is greeted by attendants wearing badges declaring that (damn that notebook!)... well, i forgot. i wrote it down, but... anyway, it said something about caring being of an "encounter of the 1st kind". these and other slogans of the same nature are all over service areas in shops, taxis and malls. so, if theres so much niceness around to be had, why weren't people smiling? perhaps they were all shopped out.

theres a lot of shopping going on in singapore. shopping centres the size of cities overwhelm consumer passion. i saw more people wandering around these vast marble and electric canyons, being dazzled by neon than by the opportunity to spend. there didn't seem to be a whole lot of buying going on. as i wandered the shopping malls i kept asking myself, wheres the passion, what turns these people on? in a public toilet a sign informed me that if i don't flush i'll be fined Sin\$150. i didn't flush.

the bangkok consumer is a different sort of person. when you arrive in the city a couple of dominant billboards greet you. as a local i'd get the idea that with AT&T i get access to the rest of the world. this sounds kind of neat, but then i'm told that life would be pretty funky if i'd have sexy company, sculptured western features and a bottle of chevis regal to mix it all around with. so, i'm getting the idea that life here is pretty smooth and that all i need do is connect to my comms device, cruise the world and water down the buzz with my fave bottle of scotch. wrong!!!

bangkok is in serious trouble. consider the following:

drought: water is being rationed in some of the rural areas. bangkok is sure to be hit soon. when it does the only solution, as the dams are the lowest they've ever been, is to bore for water. but the city planners (if there were any) never considered the shifting water table. if you were to bore for water in and around bangkok, and its there to be had, parts of the city would collapse into the earth. no kidding!

the sinkings begun: parts of the city are already on their way down. the cbd water supply sees to it that many buildings sink 4-5cms a year. approaches to bridges are buckling, steps to larger buildings are hanging in mid-air and water-pipes are twisting and breaking in some areas. foundations for major constructions rest on bedrock. below that is the water-table thick with sand. as the water is drained the sandbed is unable to sustain the weight of the bedrock. but still the thai build. bangkok is only one foot above sea level. if global warming don't drown it, perhaps blind commerce will.

intense commercial development: the outskirts of bangkok are ringed by massive construction of multi-story glass-tiled buildings (totally unsound for local climate) and expressways. the commercial centre is being drawn out of the city in a bid to alleviate the congestion there. good luck, bangkok!

international trade agreements: in an already financially stressed community international business interests are being invited to plunder thailands market opportunities.

no clear workers rights: when construction workers can only afford to wear thongs and rags whilst hauling up the countries economy their conditions can only be seen as being exploited. i saw several whole families, women and children, young and old, working on a building site one mid-evening: mixing cement, pouring it, shovelling sand and rubble and scrambling up and down scaffolding. it was scary.

shit shit air: i almost fainted one afternoon from it.

the intolerable traffic (the 1st decision to build a mass-transit system was 23 years ago), and the declining indigenous fish market: a japanese fish introduced into thai waters is eating up indigenous stock. "sustainable development", bereft of local knowledge doomed to fail from the beginning.

the thai government has alot of money. why they don't invest in long-term planning and development is anyones guess.

sunday april 24, 10:30am

its 36 degrees c.

i'm travelling with jagdish parikh. i met jagdish online about three years ago. we'd been exchanging information and comments on low-cost networking models for south east asia. i'd found a paper published by the hong kong based asia monitor resource centre on non-government networking in the region and i wanted to communicate with the authors. it didn't take long to be led to jagdish who'd been one of the two principle authors.

when i sent my first email to him he was working with a uruguay based organisation, ngonet. we quickly discovered a common voice. i was doing research for an aidab (australian international development aid bureau) funded study on non-government (ngo) communications in the asia pacific region. jagdish had done extensive work there.

in 1992 we finally met at the united nations conference on environment and development, rio de janeiro, brazil. from there we went on to collaborate on various initiatives, meeting again in manila and kuala lumpur.

its now after breakfast and we're waiting for a driver to take us around the city. i read some of last months wired and got to thinking about singapore again. despite the sterility, its pretty neat place - i get off on neon (!) and buildings that reach so high they seem detached from their foundations. its a cubists dream somehow. but it takes the cabbies to keep ones feet to the ground.

i met two cabbies that weren't afraid to speak their mind. not like in 88 when i was last there you couldn't find a single person willing to say anything against the government. one guy talked about the goods and services tax that was recently introduced and how a referendum demonstrated the populations protest against it. they were ignored. one driver suggested that the gst would work in singapore cause people will accept what ever conditions they are expected adhere to. they won't question, just submit to them.

another driver, a malay born indian, used to be a policeman when the british had the colonialist edge. he was pleased to see them go, but had little good to say about the current government. he was particularly keen to tell me about the government

working subversively in their own interests by encouraging extensive trade and real estate opportunities with the chinese. end result -> huge increases in real estate and thus higher rates of inflation. millions of singapore dollars have gone off-shore into china to ensure chinese investments that will ultimately provide some sense of security from the emerging thai markets.

this same driver was disappointed by the lack of bone in the international media to cover such issues. i suggested that occasionally some journalists do cover asia issues well, but asian governments interpret them as critical which obviously influences what gets aired. he agreed, and added that in most cases the media just doesn't want to be seen disturbing potential market opportunities for both itself and the 1st world.

media is the 1st world. its 1st world culture, predominately american, colonising the minds of all peoples. no one is to be spared. for instance, cnn IS everywhere. bangkok airport had cnn monitors all over the place. yesterdays screens were dominated by nixons death. so what! people are dying in the most horrendous conditions everyday. at least the bbc reports we receive here via satellite remind us of the legacy of watergate.

whats suprising about the world news services is the paucity of information from asia. its as if nothing's happening here. and they have the courage to call it, world news.

the strongest argument for public access to information is to enable individuals to choose the information thats important to them. if they've only cnn and other services like it, jagdish says that people will start believing that whats happening down the street doesn't matter.

11:30pm

the driver never arrived. i didn't think he would as i was certain he was arranged to meet us 2morrow morning, but jagdish was certain it was 2day. oh well. we took breakfast with an idrc person at the california cafe. a bohemian style of venue amidst the clutter and rubble. mostly frequented by ex-pats they served up a menu of mixed american and cambodian cuisinne. i wanted to sit there a few hours. its been a few weeks now since i was last able to take in the world in with only my brain for company. its one of those many privilages we have. we can time out and not worry about where the next meals to come from.

time out for cambodia is a series of atrocities wrenching apart refined moments in history. i was exposed to two 2day.

at the museum for crime i came one step closer to my father, being directly immersed in cambodias recent bloody history. four long buildings in a "u" shape are open to the public as a reminder of times not so long gone. the museum was pol potts interegation and execution camp. what has been left behind is almost pretty much what had been found when the khmer rouge were forced out of phnom penh. tiny cells contained a single wire framed bed with shackles to hold down the doomed at their hands and feet. i walked through one room and then another and another...each room contained a

large photo of someone found in a wretched state in them. it was shocking. one photo showed a fairly stocky man shackled to a bed with the skin on his face torn off.

women and children met the same fate. doused with cold water, fingers clipped, whipped by chains and electrified wire and forced to remain quite during the ordeal. insane. the violence exhibited here screams at you from the walls and faces of those held here. several rooms were devoted to shots of hundreds of people taken prior to interrogations or executions. i felt compelled to photograph and film as much of what i saw. if these images can shock enough people to ensure this sort of insanity, and the violence against humans now stops then its worth the pain in me it took to document them.

why did this experience bring me closer to pa? cause, he saw much of this shit for real. for at least the first 21 years of his life, living as a refugee in europe and surviving a world war and all that went along with it was no party. i think thats what caused him so much anguish. here was an expressive man, perhaps even an artist locked in a pain that he carried to his grave. we've got it so good.

more than 50% of the population here owns a gun. ak-47s, hand-grenades, land mines and other foreign weapons can be bought at a store not far from the airport. jagdish asked this morning, what can become of a country when children are brought up with these things? right now the khmer rouge are striking border villages. enough just ain't enough.

after leaving the museum of crime we took a couple of "cyclos" to the other side of town to check out the royal palace. cyclos are three wheeled cycles with shaded seating and a single guy peddling from behind. a bit like a surry. we wanted to see the palace cause the king of cambodia had returned after years abroad. we saw news footage of him and he looked like a pretty groovy sort of guy. definatly someone happy to be back amongst his people. he'd left cambodia for fear of his life, but returned just recently to work towards peace in his country. in fact he's been able to initiate talks with the khmer rouge which commence this week.

the palace was closed so we headed to the national museum. here i wandered for about an hour amongst 1000 year old, mostly sandstone, carvings of buddhist and hindu deities. what struck me was that at one point i suddenly became aware of all these deities with their eyes closed. throughout the entire museum these figures appeared as if time had just stopped and they closed their eyes, not to the horror, but to something they could see that we couldn't. the khmer had created a very sophisticated culture that existed relatively peacefully from the 9th to 12 centuries. then things went awry and much was lost in the preceeding years to all manner of colonialism, both from within and out the country.

perhaps one day the khmer deities will awaken from their reverie and bring into the world that which keeps them in such a state of peace.

monday, april 25, 12.10pm

we're sat at the foreign correspondants club after a hectic morning. we've had 6 meetings booked for today. so far we only managed one. the first had forgotten about us. the 2nd was quite interesting and ran over the following two meetings. prior to lunch i went into the australian embassy and had to muscle in a meeting for 2morrow morning.

below the club the meekong river shifts gently in the heat. half a dozen local boats cruise by. i wonder what sort of information would these people need. nothing more than indigenous knowledge i suspect. i wonder just how our work would help these people. the NGO presence here is huge. they're working with the government to aid in building up the countries infrastructure. perhaps as NGOs get access to email the positive results of their use of it would cascade towards cambodian nationals.

email is a means to an end. you participate in a process, much like warhol or melbourne's cyberdada crew. David Cox describes it as viewing (or purchasing) the process - not a unique, finite product. though the process itself is unique.

the nets like that - defined by language and the will to communicate it offers a unique matrix of conduits, each a layer of given or taken information sucking and exhaling at each end of it.

LOG2

saturday april 30, 1am - ho chi minh city, vietnam

we arrived yesterday. flying into the former saigon was terrible. as we descended images of bombs exploding the ground, defaulitation and burning kids running from US torched villages ran through my mind. they came like a torrent over and over again. text from joseph conrad's, "heart of darkness" scrolled bottom up, brain-page by brain-page as if the mekong were a tributary into the net. i couldn't believe i was coming to this place.

IDRC had booked us into the most expensive hotel in the city. a single night was worth more than both our per diems (allowences) put together. we stayed one night. our hosts, the centre for science & technology information (CSTI), booked us onto another hotel which we moved into today. the empire is a government run hotel found in the midst of the cities busiest prostitution markets. nice place. but we're only minutes from the centre where we'll be spending the entire monday at.

last night i took to the city square. culture shockville! it was pumping. motorised life streaming in and out of the square in all possible directions. motor-bikes, 75cc in almost all cases, are the favoured transport. bangkok has a pretty amazing bike culture - bikes ooze through every opening in the traffic. here, cars are in the minority.

two t h i n g s caught my eye:

1. huge fonts. yeh, big big font servers fashioned into billboards hung to any available building space. every major company in the country must be there.
2. street kids. there's plenty around. you've got to persistantly ignore them otherwise you'd be easily over-run. its hard. it was bloody hard to ignore one girl, at least 4 years old, tapping on my leg. i was being haggled by a cyclo rider at the time. i looked down. what looked up was a disaster. one eye was fused shut and pussy. the other had tears running from it. she was crying. her right arm had a horrendous scar. she hadn't been washed ever by the sight of her. i couldn't believe what i was seeing. like all the kids she pointed to her mouth, then her belly. i turned to the cyclo guy and asked him if there was a place where she could be fed. he laughed and continued to promise me the ride of my life. i just walked away.

after i'd walked about 5 metres i stopped and looked back. she was running alongside a fairly well dressed middle-aged guy towards me. i thought, shit! i'd done something way bad there by leaving like that. but they turned into a shop where i saw her hand him some money. a poverty pimp!!! i wanted to sick up. soon a couple of other kids entered and pretty much went through the same scenario. a young woman traditionally dressed stood at the front of the store smiling as if it were a demolition sale or something. when she noticed me standing there all twisted up, i moved on.

later in the evening i returned to the square to capture it on vid. did a lousy job. still getting used to the machine. but i had a great time bouncing about and through the lawless traffic still trying to get over the fact that i was in vietnam.

all the architecture in the square is european. the peoples committee building looks like it could've been built by the french. i know nothing about architecture other than what i like, and what i don't. some of these buildings i like. they're inviting, spacious. they don't impose themselves on people. many of them, as in phnom penh, are draped with fairy lights giving the whole square a dream-like feel.

on the way back to the hotel i walked through the centre of the square. an attractive, well dressed young woman got up from a bench, walked towards me and just slung her arm around mine and said hallo. whats with this? i asked pointing to her arm. she just smiled and kept walking with me. i thought, perhaps she wants to get away from some guy and any minute now the square's going to be a mess of bodies. then a filthy, bedraggled guy, about 20, turned up from nowhere and asked me whether i wanted a girl. this guy was her pimp??? this face from a trash-can with a black rat for tongue was *her* pimp??? while he gave me a rundown of services i peeled her arm (it felt like a birds wing - delicate and soft) off mine and again, just walked off. i hated myself for doing it - i couldn't get over the fact that this young shit was a pimp, and, and...

anyway, i hadn't got a few metres further when a group of teenage kids, all smiles and gouchy clothes approached me. they asked could i load their camera. they seemed

nice enough. about 3 girls with their boyfriends out for a lark. i loaded the camera, gave it back and was about to walk off when one of the girls wanted a photo of her taken with me. sheesh!!! the camera didn't work. oh oh! i stuffed it somehow. i couldn't tell if they were pissed off, or what. i tried to explain in broken english that i didn't know what was wrong with it. they eventually walked off. THEN, this guy wanders up trying out his english. he needed a bath real bad. but he seemed nice enough so i stuck around.

he'd had one year only of schooling. he earns about 15 000 dong (US\$1.50) a day apparently peddling people around the city. this gets him his food at the markets and thats about it. we talked for around 15 minutes when this other guy shows up. he wasn't as friendly looking. he just glares at me like i killed his mother, or something. the other guy continues to talk. he tells me he's 28 and that he's from a family of 7. a third guy turns up. suddenly i'm surrounded. i look across the square to where the police are and they're asleep. shit! i tell the first guy that i don't like this and want to know whats going on. he tells me he has an english teacher. all three of them are shorter and lighter than me. i figured that if if they went for me (i had my camera bag slung around my neck) i could easily fight my way out and wake the police at the same time. i decided to just walk off. as i did, the other two guys split almost immediatly whilst guy number one walked with me. he said, "sorry but i got something to tell you. i give you massage for one hour for 15 000 dong." shit!!! not interested, mate. "i take you round the city and give you massage. safe and clean. very clean. i can also do for you..." look pal, i'm not interested. we pass a couple of policemen. they look on amused. "you meet me here tomorrow night?" no!. "you meet me at this corner". NO!! he stopped and watched me walk off.

its by no means a unique story. this sort of thing happens in just about any city. its happened to me plenty of times. but whats different here is that this lot were all so poor you wonder whats kept them alive. the only person that appeared on top of it was the pro with wings for arms. what price freedom!

sunday, may 1, 8am

yesterday was independence day. the city, if not the entire country was out celebrating. probably the last independence day free of free markets. though the gates have been opened the flood waters of capitalism are yet to rise.

along the roadsides people go about their business as they've done so for perhaps a few hundred years or more. ox are still used in the provinces along with hand-made machinery for all manner of work. bricks and other earthenware are manufactured in a straw and cane industrial area - natural fiber assembliges, the tallest buldings in the provinces, that would burn at the strike of a match. what will become of these "technologies" with the demand for increased productivity? and that increase will come. the desire for the west is strong. but tolerance for the west is tepid amongst some.

saturday we spent the day at vung tau, a seaside town about 100k's out of ho chi minh city. our hosts, CESTI, had organised for miss bui thu hien from "pc world", a popular magazine now translated into vietnamese, to accompany us with a driver and air-con car over the weekend schedule they'd planned for us. we aimed for the beach. my first look at the indo china sea. thousands of people were heading the same direction. motor-bikes laden with goods and people, sometimes four to a single bike. huge buses over-flowing, and the occasional car jostled for space on the road. no marked lanes, no right or left. never mind the danger it was easier to overtake into oncoming traffic. it seemed one required more skill to stay alive than on the road. our driver took more chances in that drive than i've taken in my life. anyway, we got to vung tau thats the main thing. but then we had the beach to contend with.

i'd never seen so many people on a beach. the beach must've been a good 4 kilometres long with about 100 metres of sand for sitting on. we got to a row of deck chairs and sat to watch beach vietnamese style. the kids were the best. their delight at being pushed about by the water was infectious. it was one of the few times i'd smiled on this trip. what a grouch!

as we sat there one by one people came by begging, tugging at our shirts, tapping on my boots, thrusting plastic cups in our face. then others came selling fruit on bicycles and other strange wheeled contraptions. we were bad customers. we bought nothing. people were so dissapointed. foreigners are known for spending lots of money, for buying things, perhaps anything. we weren't good ambassoders for the west.

then very quickly things got nasty. we were beginning to attract too much attention. like bees to honey more and more beggars came to taunt us. most were amputees and very bitter. eventually one by one they left but no sooner had they gone when another arrived dragging himself along the sand. he demanded money. lots of it. he knocked my boots with his cup getting angrier and angrier. he then took to yelling at miss hein accusing her of being a whore and making lots of money off us. then another guy appeared and sat next to me. he made a sound from the the corner of his mouth like a hiss and spit. he didn't ask for money. he demanded it. he didn't like me one bit. the amputee dragged himself behind us and began hitting miss hein with his one good hand. she was getting embarressed and quite upset. i turned and yelled at him, then turned to the other guy and glared at him. i wasn't about to be intimidated. the amputee became so bitter he started throwing sand at miss hein. at that point i got up. the other guy jumped up then left immediatly when he realised i was looking way down at him. a throng of women appeared to calm the whole thing down. we were about to leave when the women brought a man from the car park to drag the beggar away. they apologised and left us with lemonade. jagdish and i wanted to leave but miss hein assured us that everything would be okay. we were attracting attention simply for being foreign and sitting there with our sunglasses and cameras and lemonade. it must've been pretty weird for people around us. we'd become foreign tourists by default of our looks and paraphenalia.

soon after another amputee appeared. he'd no hands and was selling lottery tickets that were wedged between the two stumps of his arms. his face was all mashed up and could've been mistaken for chocolate pudding. these, i thought, are the victims of

vietnams independence. these are just some of the people for whom the west can endear no respect. their loathing for me was undeniable. what could i do? i represented to them all that was miserable in their lives and now i was back to make money off them. i was disgusted and sorry. we left.

sunday, may 1, 10.30pm

counting in the south african elections began a couple of days ago. we're so cut off from western news here (no cnn in this hotel) we've no idea whats transpired. we're missing a significant moment in history.

i'd been trying to understand the differences within the black african movements in south africa. with the elections there and the violence surrounding it its hot converstation where ever we go. last week i asked lisa to explain to me the differences between the ANC and the Incatha Freedom Figthers. she grew up in sth africa and has been living in australia for a couple years. her replies' informative. lisa, hope u don't mind me copying it here :)

lisa writes:

In answer to your question the ANC consists of mostly xhosa people - a tribe whicch originated in the eastern cape - they are supported by a majority of blacks-including zulus and other blacks- as Mandela has become a symbol of the black struggle for freedom in sa. The zulus are the largest black tribe in sa. and originate from parts of natal. Black tribes in sa have a history of great tribal warfare and the zulus were always the strongest black tribe with the most advanced methods of warfare. They had a strong identity and speak zulu which is different to xhosa language. The zulus took over and intimidated a lot of tribes - but this is way back in history.

To be zulu is different to being xhosa in terms of culture, clothing, language etc. Ethnic differences rear their ugly heads again and it is not a case of uniting because your skin is black and you have been suppressed for so long. The major problem facing sa in terms of violence at the moment is this major group difference between the zulus and the anc supporters. This would be a difference between: traditional zulus - a lot of whom live in Kwazulu - a declared homeland in the old sa - they have been governed by Buthelezi and have been relatively independent. It is quite traumatic for them to be

suddenly lumped with all the black people in sa - when they know that the anc will win the vote and they will experience a reduction in freedom and perhaps a great deal of subjugation under the new government. Why should they have to give up their independence?

you can't find this information in vietnam. access to it is as mediated here as in any other country, though more so. throughout the past couple of days jagdish and i had been speaking a great deal to miss hien. she's a doctor of medicine, but was unable to complete her practicum studies. so now she works as a secretary earning US\$150 a month. she's saving to buy a water purifier and a new motor-bike. a bright red 75cc honda. it'll set her back US\$2000. she wants it real bad.

miss hien's day commences at 5.30am. she heads to the markets, buys food for the day and returns to prepare it. she then gets to work at 7.30 and leaves at 5.30pm. a 7 kilometre ride back home to prepare food again and do the housework. she'll get to bed round 11.30 with perhaps a short time to herself for some study or reading a newspaper. she looks after her mother, sister and her sisters children. hers is the only salary in the house.

at eight she remembers seeing bodies of dying men, women, children and even babies on the streets of hanoi. she grew up in the last years of the vietnam war when it was at its bitterest. tension between north and south is still evident.

miss hien's ambition is to become a housewife. the "modern way", as she calls it is not her. she prefers the "old way" where a woman is duty-bound to her husband. recently an indian fortune teller told her that she would have children, a husband but no love and hers would be an unhappy life.

she's desperate to get married. we talked about this a lot. she wanted to know what it was like to be married in australia, how much it cost, at what time of year people were married and what kind of gifts were given. she has a dream. it was a hard one to talk about. by the end of the weekend she'd realised that neither jagdish or i were typical of the kind of westerners she'd been exposed to in the past. neither were we typical of the consultants passing through CESTI.

i think she found her perceptions of the US hardest to shake. we told her lots of what wasn't translated across the media. all her information was based on happy happy joy joy propaganda from the US.

here's some of happy happy joy joy of the urban kind. it's a way cool message i got from susan. sorry susan, i had to share it with friends. you know how much information wants to free...

Date: Sat, 23 Apr 1994 20:14:50 -0200
To: agarton@peg.pegasus.oz.au
From: sf15@gtri.gatech.edu (Susan Farrell)

Subject: video and vagabonds

dear andrew,

I've just spent the day sunburning myself while videotaping graffiti, trains, and buildings being demolished or built by large yellow machines. It was great fun! The graffiti is some of the best I've seen. Huge 3D twining letterforms ("aeroglyphix") thrown up on foundation walls for nonexistent buildings in psychedelic swirls and geometric complexities...huge faces showing many emotions, mostly hopelessness,...rabbit, cat, roses, skeletons... cartoons...fire hydrant with face... awesome art. I took a bunch of stills. I can't wait to show you!

The best part was when I met two guys who live in a lean-to in one blasted building. They are de facto tour guides and and wall "writers." They do canvasses and CD covers too, they said, but they live in a cement-block closet. They showed me how to read the words, which are really the "tags" of the artists (nicknames--nommes de guerres--like: base, haze, verse, honer, 23, ryz, red, seven, etc.). They showed me how to tell which tag goes with which piece. (tough when confronted with a wall full of hundreds of names)

I asked them about techniques and they told me how it was all done with spray cans. I was surprised because of the clean lines and smoothly modeled faces they achieve. They said it was cheating to use stencils or cards to shoot over. They showed me their special spray nozzles and which kind were the best. They discussed the aesthetics of having your letters jumbled up and growing out of each other.

I asked about the biggest mystery heretofore for me...how can anyone paint over something that good, over and over again? They said that after a piece had been "up" for a month or three it was "old" and it was time to let go of it. Kinda like an expiration date!

They sometimes get together to paint; they are the "zero crue." They range from teenage to 40-something. They are black, white, japanese, and chinese. They even gave me a phone number for "noah"

in case I want to be in touch. All this and it only cost me \$5 and a pack of cigs!

this crew, it seems to me, is out challenging knowledge, language and literacy. redefining language for themselves, from a language that's been redefined by government and media - a language that no longer belongs to "us" but to those who copyright it, distort it etc to conform, control etc. susan's graffitiists are making sense of all that by taking control of their own expression and by messing with the old. something like that, anyway. anarchy! beautiful stuff. more, please...

monday, may 3, 10.35pm

travesty of travesties. just discovered that i hadn't loaded film into the camera properly. lisa loaned me her camera - a smart, self-contained fully automated olympus. i thought i was getting too much mileage out of this single roll so i ran off about 30 shots in the cupboard. when i opened the piece i discovered to my horror the tongue of the film just hanging out the roll. groan!!! lisa, i should've asked you how to load it...

it's supposed to automatically load but i'd stuffed it. we'd just got back from a trip up the saigon river. no vid, just stills. lost! never there!!! empty moments. a honda ride round the city in the evening. i was sat pillion and reeling off one shot after another handing the camera to jagdish who was sat on another bike to take shots...lost, like dry tears in rain!!! so it goes...

apart from that we'd run a productive workshop at CESTI. they're real keen to be the national internet host for vietnam. but they're going to have to compete with hanoi where their sister ministry has been running UUCP trials with the Australian national university, canberra. there's also a bunch of americans and Canadians actively persuading commitments to establish internet sites in vietnam. sometimes i wonder if it's all a little like pepsi. when the trade embargo was lifted in february pepsi hit the streets within 2 days. under the supervision of international beverages corp. manufacturing plants, already in place, began churning out three beverage labels and massive advertising, mobile dispensers and refrigerators were distributed across country. in ONLY 2 days! mass consumption then closed the loop and hung the noose. coca cola arrived only weeks later to stake a claim on the market.

sunday morning we were taken to an industrial trade fair just out of town. it was so hot that morning i had sweat running into my eyes behind the bangkok specs. faintsville if it weren't for the trees. the two leading company logos seen from just about anywhere were "shell" and "pepsi". intl. beverages corp sells their softdrinks in vietnam for the same price as in the states. it's amazing to have a product you can sell for pretty much the same price the world over. their overheads in vietnam must ensure at least 200% profit over and above their earnings elsewhere. and the vietnamese are mad for cans. full or empty.

around restaurants and even on the river you'll have locals wanting your empties. from the boat on the saigon this evening i saw an elderly woman skillfully manoeuvre her small wooden boat towards this floating restaurant whilst her grandchildren held their hands up for cans. people threw what they had.

we still don't know what the state of the elections are in sth africa.

may 3, 12.25pm - hanoi, vietnam - army hotel

mandela's in. bereft of good news the world looks on with some hope. everyday we grow more a global tribe. perhaps we may even one day shape into being the notion, as i heard someone once say, that what is good for the world is good for my country.

we arrived under an hour ago. i checked into a single room and found CNN. never thought i'd be so eager to watch their world news. it was good to see a few sth african streets mighty with joy. the streets of hanoi are thin tracks flanked either side by massive development. hotels, offices, apartments all shooting up as the vietnamese capital prepares for its future.

whats impressed me most about hanoi is the number of trees lining the streets. it makes for a pleasant refrain from the hustling sidewalks of ho chi minh city. apparently theres a great deal of planning going into the cities development. nothing goes up without adequate study and approval. in ho chi minh (or saigon as its still referred to on the streets) its pretty much anything goes where ever theres a space, who ever gets there first. its the money capital of vietnam, driven by strong economic forces pulling it into the global market place. foreign investment is everywhere. here people seem to be less possessed by achievement. its, i'm told, more academic. off-shore business is gaining ground here, though in a more regulated way than in ho chi minh. the trip from the airport with our host from the National Centre for Science and Technology Information and Documentation (NACESTID) was very informative.

may 4, 12.40am

tried to log onto peg earlier. couldn't get a direct line without the most violent line noise chucking me off. tried connecting at various speeds. no go! so, i swaped to pactok but mac woof wouldn't change to dial pulse. gave up on that idea real quick. then i dialled AUSTPAC's international direct dila number. got on but line noise prevented me from doing anything other than churn out curses. this is typical of life on the net from asia - even with a V42bis modem from IDRC.

doh! just tried again thinking i'd get a cleaner line this time of night. no way. theres a local packet switched network set up with technical assistance from AUSTPAC, called VIETPAC. the local emerging Internet host uses it to poll the australian national university (ANU) once a day. they offered a guest account so i may see what

can be done there if i can't possibly get onto peg direct. indo-chinese cyberspace as it is now is sure to cure anyone of their addiction to email.

may 7, 8.20am - somewhere between hanoi and ho chi minh city

you guessed it. no email. though i managed to send a couple of messages courtesy of mr thai from VARENet, the Internet host i mentioned above. they've been donated a couple of sun sparc stations by the ANU and they recently bought a couple of sleek australia made netcom modems. one handles outgoing polls to the ANU (for those interested its a UUCP poll across an full duplex, synchronous X28 connection, the only one in use in Vietnam, once every hour).

she wouldn't have been more than 7. a few people clustered about her while a couple of men hoisted her from off the street. everyone was distraught. they then attempted to put her unconscious body on the back of a motor-bike. it was all i got to see before the driver turned the corner.

they yelled at me as i entered the building site. it was late in the evening and work on the new "international centre" was in full swing. perhaps hanoi's first major high rise. certainly the most modern of buildings to go up in the cbd. workers wore green colonial safari hats for protection. you can buy them from just about any street vendor. i managed to take about 30 secs of footage before the threats wore me out. within moments of leaving the entrance was blocked off with straw matting.

one by one they rode past, racing into the city to catch the early markets. each had as pillion a single freshly skinned carcass slung either side of the seat. one had a leg dragging along the road, its hoof scrapping the concrete, blood trickling down it. type: indistinguishable. the driver laughed hysterically.

the kids were playing badmitton, others soccer. teenagers were practising their kicks and jabs and the elderly swung their arms and stretched their legs. all this activity from one end of a reasonably new road to the next. it was 5.30am. we drove through this dense play, the horn blaring. the driver liked the horn. he used it frequently regardless whether there was anything on the road or not.

4.25pm

170k before we land in jakarta. plenty of turbulence to ensure me that i'm really really flying. ever travelled singapore airlines? man, they lay on a heap of food: duck, rice and steamed mushroom, carrot and cabbage; chicken salad; fruit salad; fresh orange juice; water; red wine; bread; coffee. what, no cake???

so ends my brief romance with hanoi. it would be a shame to see it change with the coming of increased market expansion from the west. surely cars will come and the streets will become a menacing place. so many small businesses thrive on the roadside, and only due to the large push-bike and motor-cycle culture here. you can get your chain greased, your air tubes replaced, petrol, fruit and even your cycle

cleaned should you want it. or, if your hairs' become a hazard you can stop for a cut from one of the many self-styled hairdressers who've hung mirrors from any available wall space. once people begin to lock themselves into cars all this will dissappear and there'll be more people hussling tourists for a bob or two.

mercedes and mitsubishi have established production plants in vietnam. both will fulfill the perceived demand for cars in hanoi and the already "taxed for space" saigon.

ali muzari, writer and presenter of the brilliant BBC documentary series, "The Africans", prothesised that "the temple of privelege will be pulled down to become a shrine to equality". in many developing countries, particularly those of indo-china these temples are yet to be built. but there are fewer opportunities to prevent their encroachment in an environment desirous of all that capitalism is said to offer.

in the more developed of asian countries i get this sense of vast complex cultures being extinguished for the treasures and pleasures of a seductive Troy. but when this Troy burns, who will be remembered for singing amidst its wake? who will be our Nero? perhaps a VR, three-d, fractuled holographic Presley networked to each and every crumbling home by CNN-Net to still the hysteria...

1 for the money
2 for the show
3 to get ready now go kat go...

LOG3

preamble - 4 june, prague, czech.

LOG3 is a long time coming. i'd gotten out of the habit of writing things up. the pace of travel, dealing with different currencies every few days, increasing workload and illness of one sort or another. work had become increasingly demanding so much of my writing and thinking time had become soley devoted to it. i'd also been ill at least four times. in bangkok, jakarta and manila i'd had a recurring stomach problem. through china i was getting more and more exhausted and eventually caught a flu. afterwards i was pretty much out of action for close to a fortnight. now i'm in prague eating assorted cheeses, breads, drinking up the local red and beers. i must be getting better :)

so, LOG3 is pretty much a collection of notes on the last few weeks in asia. nothing detailed. i do want to mention a few things in summary. end of april i did manage to find some interesting places in bangkok. though not until my last night there. i'd stumbled on this funky street with stalls and bars and cafes open till all hours. about 10pm i was poking the camera in and around the place and got to talking to a sidewalk jeweler. it was there that someone called out my name. i turned round and there was richard conrad from byron bay staring me in the face. we couldn't believe it!

he started raving to me about problems he was having with his modem in japan!
sheesh! the net just wouldn't let up.

one night in jakarta i was invited out to a jazz club to see indonesia's hottest guitarist. he played new orlean's style trad. he even played american military tunes. boring! he and his band of fine musicians spent most the entire evening playing requests. even more boring!

i was suprised to see the walled city in manila almost completely restored since the last time i was there (2 years ago). the tourists are coming. in fact, the tourists are coming all over asia. theres no stopping them. they're in prague as well. hordes of them. you can't hear czech in the streets. only germans and americans. the ancient cultures from east to west seem to be sold, turned into zoos in the name of free market.

tuesday may 10, forgettable hotel - jakarta, indonesia

its my brother's birthday and theres not a whole lot i've got to say about jakarta. its rapidly aproaching singapore status. an architect i spoke to admired singapore's "attitude" to development. but when i reminded him that singapore is really just a big city he went quiet. i met so many people who talked about various countries in asia wanting to adopt the singapore model. singapore "works" (and i use that word loosely) cause it ain't got a provinces, 100's of islands and the huge populations odfso many asia countries. it IS just a big city afterall.

having just come from countries such as cambodia, vietnam and thailand where street trade is still a functioning economy i was shocked by the paucity of it in jakarta. the few street vendors that remain push drab trollys. there weren't any of the brightly painted stalls, trollys, carts here. all the colour seemed to have been scrubbed away. they were as dull as the cement being poured over every inch of the city.

the beggars were still there, mostly amputees. they would lay themselves amongst the traffic, on median strips and at traffic lights trying to gain attention. many could've done with crutches, wheel-chairs, prosthetics etc. no one i asked knew if there was any government assistance available to these people.

while jakarta's wealth grows to ridiculous proportions those that are unable to survive as expected are reduced to poverty. you couldn't tell if anyone within in all the air-con, tinted windowed cars in jakarta took any notice of the crumpled, filthy, bleeding beggars. all too easy to ignore the flesh the street still carries.

my room in the police run hotel stank. really!!! it hadn't been used in ages. and hadn't been cleaned either. had to get things repaired like the hot water and air con and lights. they ran a vacume cleaner over the carpet but left the bathroom in a totally unsavoury state. the contradictions begin behind the flash facades.

you only have to step outside of jakarta to discover indonesia's still a developing country. you could be forgiven for forgetting when surrounded by outrageously dominant (and ugly) architecture and the pace of growth evident in the rate at which concrete is being poured in jakarta.

hmmm, actually i didn't get to see much more of jakarta. got sick. but i did get to visit the palatial offices of indosat. they're using micro-wave links to wire up the 1000s of islands that make up indonesia. they're dynamic, enterprising but rigid on pricing. they knew very little about email.

may 11, better hotel, makati - manila, philippines

the nets following me. on the flight into manila there was a young couple behind me having an intense discussion about transfer protocols, packets and fibre networks.

once off the flight i was amazed by the number of people carrying laptops. whats going on? one person after another had these things slung over their shoulders.

oh, when first leaving australia i was sat next to an executive from british telecomm with whom i had a long and exciting talk about public access networks and packet switching. the latter topic wasn't so stimulating but it was interesting to hear how much hope BT was placing on its rescue by extensively developing its packet services. and it turns out BT are major sponsors of the developing countries component of the Internet Conference this june.

may 12, dark-time

ugh! i'm sick. just got back from a jazz club where they didn't play any jazz. but i did get to catch up with a friend whom i'd met last time i was in manila. i downed a margarita whilst my stomach play-acted an espresso machine.

theres a pool here so i've managed to get in a few early morning laps. actually, swimming here is a bit disconcerting as the pool is next to the hotel restaurant. as people take their breakfast they seem to have nothing better to look at then me snort and wheez my way up and down and up and down and breathless.

may 13, 6pm, beverly hills deli

its becoming harder to find asia. harder to focus in on textures unique to the various cultures one knows are there. i think my personal mission to something of the encroachment of technology on asia is quickly failing. one needn't go any further than singapore. being confined pretty much to CBDs they now blur into each other. capitalism pours concrete over culture then drags whats left from out of its rubble to

the city fringes, to the slums where a third world still exists. its there that the impact of nylon, dallas, CNN and milo is best articulated.

each of the cities i've been to thus far - hanoi, ho chi minh city, phnom penh, bangkok, jakarta and singapore - could soon become pressed plastic replicas of the west, the US in particular. some may not like the american's but they sure want to look like them.

take a look at the beverly hills deli, just round the corner from the new orlean's hotel, up the road from burger king not far from KFC's and closer still to the open air catholic church where a woman recites a prayer alongside a taped sermon in a thick american english accent thats amplified throughout greenhills shopping centre, and pounding the glass i'm safely sat behind. i walked hard to find a cafe. this was the best i could do. geared for fast food, high turnover trade i rebelled by sitting on a glass of wine for an hour. the waiters were definatly nervous about me cause they wouldn't stop asking if there was anything else i wanted.

taking a look around this cafe you'll see that its adorned with typical hollywood kitsch: paintings of fabulous stars such as bogart, monroe, flynn and john wayne. milan kundera said in 'the unbearable lightness of being', "in the realm of kitsch, the dictatorship of the heart reigns supreme." these people truely love the states. perhaps so much their logic, or rather their identity is blinded by their passion for it.

may 14, late, xiyuan hotel - beijing, china

oh my god, i'm in china! w o a h ! i'm spinning out on some kind of euphoria. but wait a minute. whats this? UNYSIS, IBM and Salem!!! from the airport to the hotel the first billboards i see...america is here! damn!! i was hoping to see advertising i couldn't read therefore to me it wouldn't look like advertising so i'd not get so hung up about it.

on the air china flight to beijing it seemed that everyone sat round me had a laptop running. one guy was playing tetrus, another solitaire. i wasn't sure what the others were doing. i was updating a spreadsheet. something is definatly going here. is this a peek at the global village, or the global market place?

may 14, later still

its my sister's 30th birthday. i can imagine a raucous night being had in hobart.

egads! theres 11 million people in beijing city. yet, for some reason it reminds me of canberra.

i'm sat up in a 22nd floor room overlooking the city. an expensive room but i'd got it for US\$40 a night. apparently its a VIP rate set aside for guests of the Chinese government. gulp!!!

i checked in and found this cute piece waiting for me:

via <susan.farrell@gtri.gatech.edu>

COMPUTER VIRUSES RAMPANT IN ASIA

One consequence of the high rate of sharing and pirating computer software is turning up in increasing numbers in Asia -- computer viruses that destroy or alter data. A U.S. antivirus company estimates the number of global viruses at 3,500 and says the total doubles every 10 months. A study conducted a year ago found 32% of computers in China were infected, 10% in Thailand, 12% in Hong Kong and Singapore, and 10% in Taiwan, compared to 6% in the U.S. and Japan.

(Wall Street Journal 4/29/94 A11)

may 15, 10:30pm - big day out!

still sick, but now excruciatingly homesick as well. for a couple of weeks now i've dreamt so much about my parents, and my brothers and sisters. i rarely ever dream of them.

morale is slipping a bit too. we should be taking a break from it now. by the time we get to singapore we'd have been on the road 45 days straight. burnout i'm afraid my be on the back of this golden tiger. and if not burnout then perhaps severe MSG overdose. damn hard to get any food without it. harder still is trying to explain what it is to locals who don't know it as MSG.

online i find some solice in my onroad companions. theres been lisa winter, david's nerlich, cox and blair, susan farrell, nilefa oszoy, eli wong, ian peter, pang, param, oysim ochin, rob garnsey, robyn ord, and henry "hank" bull who've been here for me everytime. and of course you've all been tremendous morale boosters as isolation seems to be something i've had to deal with here more and more. (incidentally, both henry bull and david blair aren't recipiants of LOG). okay, thats it for the open heart surgery...

after wanting to see the great wall since seeing photos of it in a readers digest magazine about 20 years ago i'd finally got to fulfill my childhood dream. but what a let down. the great wall was not so great. in fact it seemed merely to be a platform for tourists get pictures of themselves in front of other tourists in front of other tourists in front of something 5700 kilometres long, that had taken one million people to build over thirty years commencing in 721 BC. certainly well before america was invented!

of change in such terms. we've come to expect change to occur, even demand it, withing days, weeks, a few months. but a century? thats unheard of.

may 16, 8.20pm, revolving resturant, xiyuan hotel

i'm feeling better. i took myself out and upstairs to dinner to celebrate.

"sir, fish special. shrimp, turtle...all swim in water now". er, no thanks.

theres a strange sense of vertigo when spinning at snails pace atop the 26floor of one of beijings most prestigious hotels knowing that all around you, as far as the eye can see 14 million people are going about their business. strange.

reminds me of the gravitron in sydney's defunk luna park. pa, or vuttie (pronounced futtie), as i called him then took me there one time. i must've been 9. the gravitrol was a large cylinder lined with rubber. people would press themselves against sides of the cylinder as it spun. it'd spin very fast. the floor would drop away and you'd be stuck there able to move you're body into shapes and everything. i threw up. needless to say the gravitron did to my spew what it did for everyone else. it stuck to the sides but not without gushing across onto a woman screaming next to me. vuttie looked pale from the observation deck. i was taken straight home.

things have changed. the gravitrons' gone and i'm getting a round the blook tour of beijing whilst dining. and i plan to keep my food down. besides, theres no ferry floss on this round-a-bout.

this mornings workshop sprouted some interesting information. heres an extract for a paper i'm writing to present at the INET conference in prague.

Lets start with the bad news first. I'll give you some examples of situations we encountered that would provide you with an indication of the diversity of constraints imposed on potential users and network developers.

China. Two exceptional impediments to networking both locally and internationally. access, and regulatory processes.

(1) Access

A number of funding agencies have provided computers for research purposes to 100s of institutions in China. Most are under lock and key. Computers tend to be centralised. Researchers have limited access or none at all with computers ending up on only the most privileged of desks.

Local area networks are only available to the highest level of professors. those doing research cannot get access to these networks.

Chinapac, the local packet carrier, seems to issue accounts to only those it wants to. Some users are by-passing Chinapac all together and going international via Osaka, Japan and Hong Kong.

There is now a link to Stanford University via Beijing but again access is limited but due to regulations. Cristina Vasconi in a recent trip to China discovered the following regulations which we had confirmed time and time again.

(2) Regulations

Regulations signed by the Premier Li Peng on February 18, 94 put computer information networks under the supervision of the Ministry of Public Security. They read:

"The goal of computer network security work is to protect such important areas of as national affairs, economic and defense construction and advanced scientific technology."

"Any organization or individual may not use computer information systems to engage in activities which go against the national or collective interests or violate the legal rights of citizens."

These regulations require:

- any system linked to international networks to be registered with state security departments
- computer networks to submit to police inspection
- There is also talk of all data destined to leave the country via international gateways having to pass through Chinese Customs! In a tiny office somewhere a group of Chinese Custom's officers will go slowly mad trying to monitor ever byte going off-shore.

To add to this we dined with people building China's national financial and foreign trade networks. We got to talking about public access networking. They said, "We're building a national public access network." This sounds good, we thought. "Everyone will be able to use it to deposit and withdraw money from. Its called, Golden Card. Theres also Golden Bridge, Golden Gateway and Golden Duty. We have nice names for networks in China."

computers are expensive here. approx 20 000 yen for a 386. roughly US\$2000. customs charge a huge levy on computers so people seek them abroad. the people who came to todays workshop all said that networking was very important for china but basic computer knowledge was poor. that it was in most instances too soon for networking as there would be so few people able to use it. getting handles on current s/ware, chinese character implementation and finding enough phones are present priority needs.

may 18, another marble hotel, nanjing

we're eating big. the chinese aren't shy about food. it just keeps coming. one plate after another. these are a generous lot.

just so i wouldn't forget i made a list of five feature meals all had in nanjing. lets start with this evenings gastronomical fair.

starters:

cucumber
cabbage with chili
salted duck
baby corn
mystery noodle
raw prawns
spicy mushroom
main:

two soups
steamed prawn
spicy beef
frog (introduced cuban species. i didn't eat the frog)
baked fish
beancurd
fried potato
fish cake
abalone and mushroom
steamed bread
chicken soup (took 3 hours to prepare)
drink:

three glasses of coconut juice
during this meal we talked with our hosts about religion. we were told that there are "three [principle] religions in china: buddhism, christianism and muslim. but, most of the time theres no religion at all."

may 19

i woke early. i'm 32. there are 30 million people living in poverty in china. the young look towards america. traditionally birthdays are celebrated by eating noodles. noodles are symbolic of longevity. but more and more the young want cake. one person remarked that many asia countries are experiencing a form of "mental rape".

the hotel staff suprised me with a cake. there was a knock on the door. i opened it and two women sang happy birthday and handed me a cake with so much cream on it my arteries hardened merely at the sight of it.

i was taken to the wild horse resturant for lunch by my new nanjing friends from the science and technology commission.

main:

chicken and cashew nuts
duck liver
spicey mushroom
pig stomach and capsicum
fish and mushroom
squid
spicey beancurd
chili and bean curd soup
drink:

1 long-neck of warm singapore beer
needless to say i didn't eat all that was offered.
the best thing about my birthday in nanjing was receiving this message from akira, my daughter via nilufa:

> Happy Birthday dad.
> I love you!
> How are you?
> What is your favorit T.V. show?!
> From Akira XXXX
> P.S. Will you send me a letter?

may 20

todays lunch consisted of:

main:

iron plate beef
chicken
chili cabbage
eel
yuxiang pork
beans
asparagus
egg and vegetable soup
drink:

endless cups of green tea
two shots of sorghum wine (52% proof)
we finished off lunch by devouring my birthday cake.
after a rest we headed for an early dinner at the hotel. we were guests of the
technology commission. they'd invited a number of dignitaries. we weren't warned. i
wore my bright leafy green shirt and a hat thinking we'd be with our funky young
friends. it turned out just fine. i think they getting to expect "eccentric" consultants
from the west. this dinner was by far the most extravagant.

starters:

seaweed (tied in bows), chili and almonds
spicy mushroom
pork
salted duck
bamboo
steamed celery
prawn
vegetable mix
main:

steamed prawn
squid and sweet pea
sweet yam
frog and mushroom
corn cake with coconut centre
pidgeon with salted fish
baked fish
steamed sweet bread with coconut centre
winter melon
chicken soup
fried rice
fresh fruit
and endless beer
may 21, dizzy in nanjing

lunch was my last big meal before i got sick and spent the entire duration of my stay
in kunming in bed.

Mains

qiaoer vegetable
chinese spinach and mushroom
soy bean chicken substitute
vegetarian chicken
vegetarian duck
kao fu (like soysausage)

roasted nuts
tofu, yam, beans and cherry
green vegetable soup
drink

mango juice (tasted like apricot)
chung hua beer
postscript

china was like 1950. i know its a strange thing to say, but to me everyone and everything in the three cities i visited seemed to come straight out of the 50's. you'd be hard pressed to see anyone wearing a pair of jeans.

most of my clothes are made in china but bought in australia. i'd hoped to find some cheap. but cotton was nowhere to be found. nylon was in. every clothing store looked like Best and Less throwbacks. perhaps all the 100% cotton garments are made solely for the west and all the nylon gets imported from the west. in some ways another example of the east going west as the west goes east.

muss es sein? zweifellos, ess muss sein!

LOG4 - days of forever past!

19 june, frankfurt

the last of all LOGs, for this trip only that is, is rounding up. i'm sat in frankfurt airport. in 24 hours i'll be back in australia. due to unforeseen circumstances i've cut cut my trip back. its unfortunate.

leaving prague was hard. i'd become accustomed to my lifestyle there. and i had only just started to make friends. despite the tourists i came close to the heart of prague. becoming more elusive i'd say its to be found amidst the humor of its artisans and the popular red, frankovka. i can vouch for its propensity for illuminosity. at 2 dollars a bottle i need not say just how much passed my lips. i only regret being unable to bring a crate of it back.

a short LOG you'll find here, mostly impressions and prose.

much of what had transpired for me could be encapsulated in the following text. both pieces inspired me to film, photograph and gather as much imagery of stone as i had time and energy for. i hope to cut it all into a short film with the text as voice over. the imagery would be cut very hard and fast leaving the editing to create movement and the text and score to bring out the melancholia.

...

something about the drama on prague's streets that intruiges me. the unsung stone heros and heroins labouring under their sandstone burdons, and those saints raising their fists to the world. its as if their world now goes largely unnoticed. i've found myself drawn to them, befriendng and confiding in them. a few mornings i've got up quite early to spend time with them, to know and video tape them well before the tourists wake.

the diff between the statues i'd seen here and those of cambodia is that in prague they're active and intergrated into the world around them. the cambodians were silent, engaged in a deeper, more far-away quest. the czech's reach out the world, greet it, take its weight effortlessly, do battle and offer beauty. the cambodians have left the struggle, seeking peace for an awakening a long time coming.

god's tears europa june 4, 1994

I uphold the world
I raise my fists
I turn the key
I fight for you
I die for you
I long for you
God's tears Europa

Take the weight, the weight
I know no pain
I take the pain
You open the doors
fill our streets
with glassy eyes
with glassy hearts
looks as though they're here to stay
I take the weight
Hose me down
I shine for you
God's tears Europa

I uphold the world
I raise my fists
I turn the key
I fight for you
I die for you
I long for you
God's tears Europa

Still the pain
I face the world
know me
know me

know me
know me
Forget me not
Forsake me not
Carve me out
I stand by you
Carve me up
I stand by you
Would I leave
God's tears will fall, Europa.

valentin cafe, prague.

G o n e 2 S t o n e

I came out of Wall. Perhaps off it. I don't know.

It may have been any wall. Keeping something out, something in. Now I'm free of it. But was I meant to be kept in or out?

Straddling the top I now see both sides of Wall and neither appears different. The people there look and act the same as the people here. But neither side sees me. I know I'm here because I feel the sun warm my skin as it must theirs.

I climb down and touch the Wall. The stone is warm where I'd left it. I don't know why I'm now here nor why I was there. I remember rain, cold, snow and the touch of a thousand or more hands. Everyone must like the Wall. They like to feel the coarse stone. Perhaps they wish to remember when they too were of stone. Now as I look into those faces they indeed are from stone, but expressionless stone - no warmth, no cold, just stone. Perhaps they've gone back to it but remain doomed to flesh. And now that I'm off stone I must walk amongst these faces, these faces with eyes that don't see me.

I leave the Wall and take cobble-stoned steps into the passages amongst the faces that don't see me. There are some who stand by and watch the passing faces I've joined. Theirs is a glance I do catch. They too must be off the Wall, I think. But I don't remember them. Perhaps they don't know me either. Yet we look each other through.

The sun that warmed my skin is now gone. Stars have replaced it. The streets are lit. I'm still walking and stone is everywhere. Occasionally I'll touch it. When I do I remember everything. But only glimpses of everything in smells and wonder. Its enough.

I go on for days like this, familiarising myself with this place. As come to know it more I find I'm walking the same streets. I can't get lost. In stone there are a thousand landmarks.

I find the knowing of this place and that comforting. Everyday I feel more and more secure, more at home. Home? I stop. I've not been looking for home. But then I don't know what I've been looking for. Perhaps a world beyond the Wall. But now it seems there's no outer wall, no beyond. Just inside.

I return to where I came. I touch the stone and its cold now. I feel it radiate through my hand. I press my body to it, but there's no warmth to be found. Touching, pressing, touching, pressing - cold through and through.

I turn slowly to face my new world, to accept my new world and find I'm surrounded by the faces. They all see me now. I press my back into the Wall. I feel it give way to me. I press myself to it. It makes to break so I raise my arms to take its weight. The Wall drops to my shoulders. My muscles strain. I will not be crushed. I look up out from under my burden at the faces to find they've been replaced by another set of faces, then another, and another and so it goes. I take the weight knowing now we have all gone back to stone.

globe cafe, prague

time and time again i thought of my family living and surviving here in europe. the following story was told to me by mother's partner.

The second of world wars had begun. Europe became an old map. Martin was 16 and three months. He'd crossed the Yugoslavian border into Hungaria with nothing more than a pair of slippers, a singlet, ski pants torn patched up with potato sacks.

Having found safe passage he began running the border, taking those that could pay, barter in clothes, a ruble, or whatever out of Yugoslavia. In this way he got together a reasonable wardrobe and reputation.

One of the people he had helped was a woman who, whilst being led to Hungaria, had been separated from her daughter. All she knew was that Eva had been taken to a partisan camp somewhere in Yugoslavia. With a photo of the girl she interrogated anyone. Eventually, two young men recognised Eva and told the mother where she could be found. She approached Martin and asked whether he would find Eva and help her escape from Yugoslavia. He did. But not without some trouble.

Back in Yugoslavia he located the girl and arranged for a horse drawn cart to collect them at night. It would take them to where Martin knew the border could be run from. The partisans had towers and soldiers just about everywhere. There was a curfew. Martin had found a hole in their balloon.

The cart didn't arrive. As it was getting late, Martin started out to search for it. He left the girl with some of her relatives whom she was trying to convince to join her. They were uncertain of this 16 year old and not likely to trust him.

Under a sky all bruised and heavy he took to the country on foot along roads flanked with hay cocks. Landmines had been buried beneath them to discourage burning.

He was soon stopped by partisan soldiers. They asked where he was going. He said he was looking for his mother. They didn't believe him. They tied him up and beat him with their rifle butts. They beat him senseless then dragged him back to a camp. Their commander then got Martin to show him where he had been arrested. He did so bleeding all the while. They believed he was out to burn the hay. They asked why he broke the curfew. He replied that he worked during the day and couldn't afford to lose the job. They beat him again.

A horse-drawn cart arrived with a strange man and Eva, upon it. They asked the partisan's whether they had seen a boy out looking for his mother. The man went then onto explain that the boy had a job and would spend his nights looking for his mother. Martin was held up to them, then all three were taken back to the camp.

Martin was astounded. He'd never met the man nor had he told his cover story to anyone. In fact he'd made it up as he went. At first light Martin and Eva awoke. The man and his cart were gone. They fled and survived.

Twenty-five years later Martin was reading Stern which reported on the anniversary of one Eva and her husband. They'd met in Germany after Eva had fled across Yugoslavian border. Martin wrote to her and it was indeed the one and the same Eva. In 1980 Martin visited her. It was quite a reunion. In 86 he went to visit her again. Unfortunately, this time her husband was dying from MS.

So it goes...

every street corner, every stone, every face and every wall i took in as i would air. i immersed myself, my brain and all into this place. one evening i was to take some people to a jazz club. it was well into the Internet conference and people were going crazy not have had a good dose of fun. by the time everyone got themselves together i was leading over twenty people. well, sort of. i'd told them where to find the place so i became more or less the default tour guide should anyone get lost. as i'm not comfortable in large groups i left them on the tram and took another route. by chance i discovered another jazz club and hunkered downstairs led by the serpentine melodies of a sax. i went "splat" straight to the ceiling and stayed there for at least three hours. it was the hottest music i was to hear in prague.

the sax player i'd seen with another outfit a couple of weeks ago and he wasn't anywhere near as good. here he could rage and rage he did. there was a disconcerting manner about him though. he'd solo mostly with his eyes open staring the audience through. when done he'd check us out for an applause.

yet to bombard prague, to rape its space is wholesale advertising. the metro is best. you can wait for a train with only your thoughts and the cool air. your mind is your own, your thoughts are your own. the walls are free of someone else's hold on you.

all too often we find language distorted by advertising (and i'm being general here). words take on an identity outside history, outside meaning where communication becomes marginalised.

y o u t a k e m y w o r d s
y o u s t o m p t h e m o u t
c r u s h t h e i r p l a c e
r e p l a c e t h e i r
f
a
c
e

you know what i mean? in some places you can't ask for lemonade cause they don't know what it is. but ask for sprite and your thirst is quenched.

talkin bout messing things round i met a guy who works on the cartoon series, renn and stimp. he'd said the creater of the series was seriously into messing with peoples heads. apparently the episode featuring "powdered toast-man" burning the american constitution was banned in the states. frank zappa was the voice of the pope who clung to powdered toast-man's buttocks as he was flown to safety. i believe it was zappa's last recorded word before he was whisked off into the unknown. so it goes...

one afternoon
dog barking savagely
could be heard for blocks
up that steep passageway a bird lands on a fence
i swear it turns its head following me as i pass
an insect rattles in its beak
ahead of me a young woman carries a tiny dog in a plastic bag
over the fence i see the barking
a short stump nosed boxer
a white hose thrashing in its mouth
he snarls and barks at it.
the bird cocks its head and clamps down on the insect
the bagged dog leaps out with the woman running after it
something reminds me of my childhood... a smell
then its gone... flowers perhaps