

30 Heads: E-mail with Sachiko Hirose

Currently (at the time of this interview) you are visiting in Japan for a Safer Sex event with a short appearance to give a visual clip on NYC HIV/AIDS street report, and you sound very positive about your desire to live in Japan again. You have lived in U.S.A since the late 80s. Now you visited a gay community center there, participated in a party to promote safer sex, and by strange “human links,” you met Japanese people who are eager to see North and South Korea to be one again. (Ei)

I have spent twenty out of thirty three years of my life in the U.S as a legal alien. Even today, I still do not possess a green card. Since my mother's illness and death (1997), and since I have started a health awareness project QQ* for youth in Japan (2002), I have made more frequent trips to my home country. In New York City, I have recently moved into an all-Japanese living situation after 16 years of not really interacting with any Japanese people at all.

This most recent trip to Japan has really exposed me to a layer of young, fun, people. I had felt this change in atmosphere in Japan since my trip back there around 1995.

It is definitely the recession and maybe also the big earthquake. The energy there was fresh and vibrant, something molting, yet I still observed it as an outsider. I was always an outsider in Japan, perhaps because I left when I was too young to forge my own identity. I'd never felt comfortable. All my trips there, I spent feeling grossly alienated, awkward and physically and mentally bound by something.

Something broke down during this trip. Is it just the spring weather? The event was completely un-pedantic, the crowd was totally chill, so very fluid. From here, I met more people, and the human links continue to grow. As I was growing up in Japan, I was not strong enough to resist the social inertia then and I didn't have the personal microenvironment that made me thrive. Finally, I have come to an age where I may be more open to exploring Japan after kicking myself off my personal mono-rail that I'd followed. While the words may be poorly chosen, the need to have fun that comes up over and over again amongst the younger Japanese really or at least personally is about listening to one's gut feeling and going with it. It is fun when one pursues something that they believe in, and humor and laughter definitely add more life to whatever that one does. I'm finally gluing back my brain and my heart and my gut. It's not really that I'm reinventing my former image of Japan, but Japan is

reinventing itself on some level, and I am personally open and in resonance.

Now you are back in New York, and it was a week ago that you were in Japan. We continue this interview in Uptown near where you work. So how has your week been, since you've come back to New York?

I haven't had a normal week. On call the night after I arrived, away at a celebratory event, with a deadline today...haven't slept very much between the deadline and jet lag. What was funny was I realized how tired I was to represent my nationality, or how I had been playing the role of a nice Japanese girl as seen from a western perspective, with all its connotations, all my years here. I didn't realize it was affecting me so much.

It was a lovely time, a really happy occasion, and there were these thirty, thirty-one Buddha heads on the property. I don't know. It was strange. That made me feel really complex, you know. This just made me feel like... And of course, I'm the only non-White person there. I was the Japanese, or worse, oriental representative. The dinner table discussion on what is the best language included, Anglo-Saxon and Romance languages only. My objection was washed over. I feel so hypersensitized to this type of situation after all my years here, and I'm angry that I have become this way, and I get angry when I find myself in this situation, or angry at people who don't understand how I feel if I express any of it. No one wants to hear anger. Anger always pushes people away rather than opens people for discussion.

The owner of the heads wanted to import and sell them, then he ended up liking them so much, with each face different, he decided not to sell them. He has lots of land. So, he decided to sprinkle them through the woods.

In effect, I ran away from one set of expectations (Japanese society) and learned to play another set of expectations (U.S. perspective, with racial issues and all). They are no different, really. They are different, yet the same. It was latent, my anger of how the U.S. affected me. I couldn't put a finger on it for the longest time. It felt like there was some superiority there, just assumed, sub-conscious. As if I'm liked for not who I am, but what I represent, something that is comfortable for how the western (white) historical-social-racial structure is set up. (...and there was somewhere a comment that day about how there wasn't silk in Japan in the 1960s, whatever happened to the silk road??? It's 20 years of tiny accumulations like this.) I've been told "Oh, you are not so Japanese."

That's why we like you." Kind of offensive. I mean. It is very offensive.

I think even if one weren't a religious [Christian], if a person went to a property (how about, a Japanese garden, or in Afghanistan), and saw thirty virgin Mary's (or Jesus') heads scattered around, they'd feel... something...