

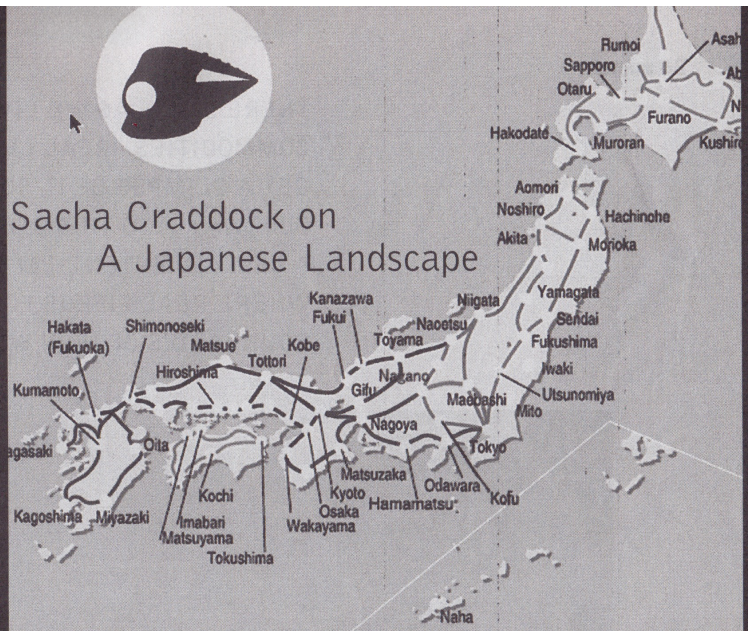
Glimpses...

Very close, no real open vistas, everything up close - nothing extending or going on for ever. No in-between dullness, no vague patches or wasted hinterland.

The 002 bullet train is to make its last journey; amateur photographers cluster at the cone nosed front covered with ceremonial cloth. The city continues, never really running out of steam, never getting lower in density or changing pace. Groups of skyscrapers, tangled chunky roadways, high buildings, low buildings, with little differentiation between housing and office. Deep harbours give way eventually to an obvious river. An obsolete mechanical crane is unusually festooned, overgrown with white fluted flowers. Little is unused or abandoned, however, as a result of neglect; the crane would have been replaced in a quick turnover. With no wasteland or warning the country announces itself in the shape of a field.

A deep green, yellow on top, rice field with fine raised edge is positioned in a fraction of space, next to the farm with blue opaque shiny roof tiles and elaborate pointing. A small, circular graveyard with post shaped engraved stones sticking upwards. Past the covered golf range, white cranes knee deep in water, a pergola, shrine, combi store, and flapping Hyundai flags outside an agricultural garage; go past the exacting, relatively modest scale of individ-

Sacha Craddock on A Japanese Landscape



A coffee shop, food stall, and sake shop selling the local sake for which it is famous. Regions are distinctly cherished, characteristics enjoyed; 'easy going', 'punctilious' he or she comes from somewhere else, maybe not so far down the line, and so is used to the heat, cold or drink. Town, city, temple, are not necessarily decorous, the gap between old and new immaterial in this strangely anti-retrospective culture.

But then the mountain is there still, outlined, and the shift is pictorial flattened out and fully extended. The eye moves from the familiar textbook

AWAY SOMEWHERE THE OUTLINE OF IMPENETRABLE MOUNTAIN LEADS DOWN TO HERE AT THE BOTTOM; TO TOWNS, FIELDS, HILLS, ROADS, PEOPLE, FLOWERS, BICYCLES AND VERY NEW CARS. NOTHING IS WASTED, NOTHING IS OLD AND SO THE PATINA OF UNDISCOVERED, AGED, COLLAPSED COUNTRY VERSUS SHINY NEW CITY DOES NOT EXIST. IN FACT THE COUNTRY WORKS LIKE THE CITY, TO SUCH A LEVEL OF INDIVIDUAL PITCH THAT THE DUSTY, CRANKY, DESERTED CHARM OF TOURISTIC DREAMS IS ABSENT. OLD OR NEW, THE BUILDINGS LOOK ALIKE.

ual, cultivated rice fields densely established on rare patches of flat countryside in a country dominated by bubbling volcanos and extended cities.

Working towns, working cities, working countryside; everything working. Not much hanging around, a sense of purpose and ceremony leaves the extended lunch break unthinkable. Agriculture retains the romantic importance attached to it by all nationalistic nations. Japan uneconomically insists on maintaining total independence in rice production, she remains self sufficient and as rice is served three times a day that means a lot.

The landscape is caught up close to where you are. It can be read like a map, and is different in the way it is there, highly detailed, with a fantastic range of scale throughout. Away somewhere the outline of impenetrable mountain leads down to here at the bottom; to towns, fields, hills, roads, people, flowers, bicycles and very new cars. Nothing is wasted, nothing is old and so the patina of undiscovered, aged, collapsed country versus shiny new city does not exist. In fact the country works like the city, to such a level of individual pitch that the dusty, cranky, deserted charm of touristic dreams is absent. Old or new, the buildings look alike.

Towers seen through the visitors section of glass railway station wall, small industry on the edge of a small town, seen also in the posters featuring the left to right movement of a train through snow, steam, green, red, autumn, spring, countryside. The country does not exist without the train, in photographs anyway. Waving children, small stations, whistles, spas, a whole multifaceted, autonomous Japan, hardly visited from outside but that still uses itself for holidays.

crag of romantic Japanese calligraphy, down, down, down to the very close hovering of a double winged dragon fly. The detail of the country mirrors that of the city. High, then down, very low, to the functioning vending machine that glows by the very small doorway, plants in pots, then up, up again to the height of the building behind and in-between. Functions are not separated out except for the sometimes unfair distinction between home and work, men and woman, and for the salary man who comes home drunk from a drinking session using a taxi and driver whose life depends on it.

The road extends to the spluttering and shifting live mountain. Inns every now and then. Visitors like inmates shuffle in specially provided outside shoes and yukata, a robe with hotel insignia. There is little to do but bathe in sulphuric hot water in either the single sex or mixed pool. A real walk in the country is quite rare and specifically for the rambler. Turn right and find that a new road is being built in the middle of nowhere, the public works scheme maintains high employment. The new road follows the fierce tumbling mountain river. Past the bulldozer and the portacabin with gumboots with the separate big toe, past the cables and harnessing of the constantly changing hillside and a snake moves fast in the heat across the newly dried white cement road. Nobody, anywhere, but than a traffic jam across the side stream, two women with appropriate walking gear give way to a very small Caterpillar machine that brings a huge tree trunk in its scoop. A shrine with crocheted red baby clothes, fresh water to drink and the promise of a strange thatched roof further on.