

Japan Study Abroad Program 2013
The Urban Morphology of Kyoto and New Orleans
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Lost and Found, and Lost

Just as our too brief stay in Tokyo went by with haste and a marked efficiency, our group left Tokyo behind aboard the Shinkansen, the bullet train, which carried us away with the same haste and efficiency.

I am quickly lulled to sleep by the quiet hum of the sleek white behemoth carrying us in her belly. Suddenly, awake, we are at our stop, Kyoto Station. Quickly, I grab my backpack and hurry out after the group, still groggy, rubbing much needed sleep out of my eyes. Out of the station, a few of us go to the Post Office, which very conveniently offers the best exchange rate. Upon arriving back and preparing to board the subway: Alarm. Where is my sketchbook? Where is the bag, which holds all of my methods of documentation? I search frantically in my backpack. I run back to the Post Office. It hits me. I have left my clear plastic bag full of the most sentimental of my belongings on the Shinkansen. Despair.

I was very frustrated at myself for being so foolish, when I had been so careful up until this point. I was also sure that it was lost. As our schedule dictated, we would have another few fast paced days ahead of us. Thanks to Professor Tsubaki, I was able to place a call Japan Rail at 4:30pm. I gave my information. At 5:00 the bag was located, at Shin Osaka station, the end of the line. The next day with Professor Tsubaki's assistance in communication, I retrieved all of my lost and found items:

One grey sketchbook. 5" x 8.5"
One red sketchbook. 3" x 5"
One book on Kazunari Sakamoto.
One black canvas roll-up pencil holder.

Lost and Found.

The air was still hot and clothing still stuck to your body if you dwelled outside too long. The school year was starting and New Orleans greeted back the sea of students with open arms. This was not a remarkable day to start with, just another day of classes.

The wind opens her arms to me in a smooth embrace. I pedal harder, relishing the warm air and the tall oaks. A quick sprint, and I arrive at the building I have come to call home over the past three years. Just in time. I run up the steps. Open the door. An hour and a half later, a history of architecture class like any other has come and gone.

Two of my classmates and I go to get lunch. I reach into my back pocket to pay for my chicken shwarma wrap. Alarm. Where is my wallet? I

check my bag. Not there. I probably left it at home, that's happened before. I relax, and eat my meal thanks to a friend's generosity.

At home I look and look. No wallet. I take to the street. The wind opens her arms to me again, though I feel a distinct uneasiness and mistrust in her presence. I scan my previous route thoroughly. No wallet.

Over the next few days, I walked the route a few times. Even before I filed a police report, I knew there was no hope. My wallet had fallen out of my pocket during the fateful bike ride, never to be seen again.

Lost.

Losing and regaining my belongings made me think about the effectiveness of public transportation and how that is tied to the idea of individual responsibility, duty to society and others, and trust in infrastructure. Why are the trains on time in Japan, yet everything seems to run late in New Orleans? Why is it that when you leave something in a cab in a relatively small city as New Orleans, most likely it is gone, yet you leave a plastic bag on a train in Japan, and it is found, categorized, added to the records of every station, and easily reacquired?

In New Orleans, I had no expectation that I would ever see the wallet again. I expected someone might have picked it up, taken the cash, and trashed the wallet. Its fate is still unknown. Generally, I try to have faith in humanity to do what is right, yet different people of different cultures have different allocations of trust and varying levels of social responsibility.

Despite its abundance of live music, despite its vast array of artwork, and despite its thriving tourist economy, I personally do not have a lot of faith in the police and in the governing and regulatory infrastructure within which our city exists. There are steps being taken to reform the historically corruption-filled police force, such as the consent decree signed last July to reform the department, but the issue goes deeper than this. There is a lack of faith. With a lack of faith comes a lack of effectiveness. It would seem that by having faith in the system, the system works. If no one stops at traffic lights, no one uses their blinkers, and everyone speeds, accidents are more prone to happen. If people do not trust the police force to be effective, non-discriminatory, and free of corruption, they may not utilize that public service, or may take advantage of its failings. If this trust was present, the wallet may have been brought to a police station, and if the police lived up to that trust, I may have recovered it.

In Japan, there appears to be a large amount of trust put in public infrastructure and the rules and regulations which make it work. At the subway, people queue up quietly, waiting for the train to arrive precisely on schedule. The driver is fulfilling an obligation to the passengers, while the passengers are being respectful of each other, all promoting the effectiveness of the public transportation. Walking on the street, if the crosswalk sign turns red, people stop. Many times, I observed people waiting dutifully as no cars came down a tiny alley. While it may seem insignificant, each person who follows this law reinforces the civility of the community. Even small things contribute. There are vending machines scattered across the cities we visited, yet the same is not true for bottles and cans. There seems to be a strong sense of responsibility to others and to the overall order and effectiveness of daily life.

Exploring New Orleans and Japan, I experienced many differences and similarities. Through losing and finding my belongings lost on the Shinkansen, and losing my wallet on the bike ride, I recognized the importance of social responsibility and trust in public infrastructure as significant differences between Japan and New Orleans. New Orleans could learn from the efficiency and effectiveness of Japan, however, there is a certain bohemian spirit which lives in New Orleans and makes it the city I love.

As I step off the plane in New Orleans, I am awash with emotions. From the quiet whisper of the river in Kyoto, to the mix of chaos and order in Tokyo. All of my memories race vividly to my mind's eye as I flip through the pages of my small red sketchbook, where I recounted by daily interactions. I already miss the wonder of century old temples and shrines as my grey sketchbook opens my eyes anew.

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