

OXBOW / Tour Diary/ Japan: 1999 (Niko)

A few years ago a friend told me how a young kid had come into his record shop and asked for a particular Black Flag recording. "You know the one," the kid said, "I heard it on the radio. It goes: 'Ride the bus, I'm gonna ride the bus.'" After a while my friend realized he was asking about the song "Rise Above," with the lyrics: "Rise above, we're gonna rise above." The guy had got the words wrong. Like all of us, he heard the lyrics that made sense to him - words are kind of an aural Rorschach that way. Perhaps he couldn't quite get all the way to Rise Above, and "ride the bus" was good enough. That's the way it is, sometimes you rise above and sometimes you ride the bus.

But the goal is to rise above. To transcend the mundane. To get the hell out of your little head and see the rest of it and become part of the bigness of the world, and beyond. How to get there? Or rather, how to leave here?

Simple methods, interrelated and overlapping: drugs, sex, religious ecstasy/meditation. For me one of the best ways is through music. Sometimes, by listening to music; more reliably through playing music. Recently I had the chance to go to Japan for the first time and play a short tour with my band Oxbow. The time we spent in Japan was simply delightful - literally, filled with delights. As it was new to me, the joy of playing and the experience of simply being there became the same in my mind. Through music, a place fixed in my mind, infused with the ecstasy of transcendence. Because of this I was reminded how similar and fluid some of the methods of transcendence are.

In thinking about the experience of playing while there, I was struck again by the physical toll that is exacted upon my body by our music. At the end of the tour I half jokingly express that I feel as though I have been to see a Dominatrix. That is, how I imagine I might feel after a good session of having someone beat me up in a sexual context. However, this is not just a flippant remark. At our best, the communication, tenderness, sharing, give and take of physical intimacy, is also part of the joy of playing Oxbow music. The giving away of everything, holding nothing back, the loss of inhibitions and the fearlessness, the freedom and wildness and the disconnection with reality that are all part of good sex are also part of playing Oxbow music. The nasty rutting sweaty simplicity of fucking, and the beautiful disintegration of 'self' and communion with what for lack of a simpler term is commonly referred to as 'God,' are at best a part of the experience too. Perhaps these are things best left unsaid...

But my body shows signs of wear. Blood, cuts and abrasions on my fingers and hands and forearms from the strings, wood and metal of my guitars; red, swollen bruises on both my hands from knocking and pounding on the guitars every night; a bruise on my left middle finger where I crush it suddenly without thinking between my guitar and a speaker cabinet one evening; a sizable bruise on my right hip from repeatedly knocking

the guitar against it; bruises on my knees - I guess from falling to them in front of my speaker cabinets; and fingernails cracked and split from contact with the strings. These physical results of playing our music are related to the lack of inhibitions and withholding of nothing I was talking about above, but also are the result of more mundane, non sexual things. Like simply, a physical interface with an instrument where the limits of skin, bone and muscle are reached before the limits of sound. That is to say: my damned flesh gives out before or during the shaping of the sound, and the result is cuts, blood, and bruises.

I feel like a teenager, examining my body in wonderment as it changes: "How did this happen?"

Japan is a beautiful wound from which I will not recover. I can not wait to return.