

Оригинални научни рад
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RE-SCRIPTING THE CITY: TOKYO FROM UGLY DUCKLING TO COOL CAT

Abstract: Tokyo's insertion into the ranks of world economic and cultural centres alongside New York, London and Paris was both sudden and dramatic. The mechanics that gave rise to the material transformation of the city are by now well known. Little, however, has been said about the discursive process that saw Tokyo re-scripted as one of the world's 'capitals of cool', an enduring change that resisted the long economic downturn. This transformation has been facilitated through the use of a series of images and metaphors that appear and reappear in textual descriptions. In this article, I re-create the play and counter-play that lies behind these metaphors, and in doing so group them into three overall tropes: Tokyo as city of villages; Tokyo as city of transience; and Tokyo as textual city. I argue that each of these tropes can be read as a 'positive' equivalent of a previously (and sometimes contemporaneously) existing negative counterpart and that in each of them lies a reference point to the Other of Western cities. Tokyo, I conclude, stands re-scripted as an exemplar of a new *sui generis* urbanism.

Keywords: Tokyo, urban, image, metaphor, representation, landscape

Then we were in the haze of Tokyo encroaching like a huge brown fungus on the countryside The capital sprawls over an area of 221 square miles. In a taxi we drove for longer than an hour through dingy, grimy, colourless streets Battered wooden houses lined the litter-strewn streets with a grey dusty wall. No building for many miles stood higher than two storeys, and what colour there was came only from garish advertisements. Even the ideographic lettering had little charm, formalized for simplicity in signwriting.

(Crewe 1960: 1)

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Tokyo, whose population of well over ten million makes it the world's biggest city, is really a vast conglomeration of villages and towns. The first impression one receives is not so much of a city as of some huge, shapeless industrial suburb, extremely ugly and noisy with the presence of one of the world's most charming and attractive peoples.

(Kirkup 1966: 1)

The unusual happiness that one experiences walking down a little street in the immense city of Tokyo has this as its source: being there, in that place. . . this is truly to live.

(Berque 1982: 145)

Let Tokyo be a globe divided into segments: noisy city, dense city, machine city, messy city, post-industrial city, everything city, turmoil city, compulsive city. Then the globe's in-world is the silent city, timber city, immortal city, mandala city, meditative city, essential city, transcendental city, absolute city, soul city, reflective city.

(Fawcett 1986: 191)

From place to place, in the vast 'village' of Tokyo, vitality and activity electrify the streets to make this one of the most exciting cities in the world.

(Shinohara 1997: 253)

Tokyo was once the world city that everyone loved to knock. It was a world city (Hall 1966), because of its size and the restive energy of the Japanese economy, but it was ugly duckling among world cities. It was featureless, drab, grey, polluted. The images that were transmitted from the Japanese capital were those of traffic police wearing face masks and platform attendants pushing commuters onto jam-packed trains. What is worse, there was an underlying feeling that Tokyo was inscrutable, undecipherable, perhaps even meaningless and alienating. Then, a different interpretation started to surface. Tokyo became energetic and dynamic, multifaceted and beguiling. The daytime drabness had given way to the exotic promise of night. It is as if we had moved from the world of moral modernists to pre-modern postmodernists.

Tokyo had changed, as all cities do, but with greater rapidity. Equally, and more significantly, the ways in which the city is represented have changed. While these changes are in no sense exclusionary – there are plenty of accounts of the city today that paint it in monochrome shades – they represent much wider shifts in understandings of cities and of urban life. These shifts are underpinned by socioeconomic change. Gone are the spaces of the Fordist city; gone are the jobs of the Fordist city; and gone too are the cultures of the Fordist city. The consequent pain felt in the cities of the United States has been memorably chronicled by Robert Beauregard, whose book begins with the words 'I grew up as the cities were dying' (1993: 1). But, even as Beauregard was growing up, other writers were seeing new and different possibilities in the city. Jane Jacobs' (1961) vision, for all its flaws, is a powerful redemptive story. Some ten years later, Jonathan Raban opened up new urban worlds that sparked the imagination precisely because he described the excitement inherent in the impossibility of a total apprehension of the city: 'It is precisely because the city',

he wrote, 'is too large and formless to be held in the mind as an imaginative whole that we make recourse to irrational short-cuts and simplifications' (Raban 1988 [1974]: 168). At roughly the same time that Raban was writing, Italo Calvino (1997 [1972]) was composing his lyrical poem to the infinite possibilities of *Invisible Cities*.

These new representations of the city found an initial expression in a more general reappraisal of the city and of urban life. People's spatial practices changed. They moved back into inner-city areas. They celebrated the diversity of people and cultures that cities make possible. Political leaders sought to leave their mark on cities through *grands projets* of various shapes and kinds, marking, for example, the millennium. All of this served to re-inject prestige into cities, to make their central districts alive with spectacular monuments and diverse happenings. Architects ceased to be urban *bêtes noires* and became prophets and soothsayers and then the ultimate urban brand names. Alongside them come a whole host of architectural critics and commentators, academics, planners and others whose writings contribute to a new outlook on the city. These are the people who, borrowing and adapting the terminology of Peter Rimmer and Kris Olds (2001: 141), I will refer to here as the urban image makers. Urban image makers have been particularly active in the context of Tokyo, where they coalesce into a number of groups. One group consists of those who are professionally involved in urban spatial practices: architects, architectural critics, planners and officials; alongside them come those with a commercial interest in urban regeneration including politicians and developers; while a third group is formed by people whose cultural capital rises with a re-casting or re-scripting of the city, including fashion designers, publishers, events promoters and the like. Finally, and overlapping with the above, there are the commentators, critics and academics who are paid to reflect on the city, whether in books, magazines or lecture halls.

All four of these groups have contributed to the comprehensive re-scripting of Tokyo. Of the 1980s, the architect and critic Yatsuka Hajime commented that 'one of Japanese post-modernism's most characteristic phenomena is the amazing amount of books about the city by authors from various fields and disciplines; each seems to compete with the others in finding new ways of "reading" the city' (1990: 39). The French geographer Augustin Berque also noted the copious recent historiography of the city, which he tied clearly both to the ever growing concentration of capital and resources around Tokyo and to a burgeoning discourse around ideas of Japanese difference, or *nihonjinron* (1997: 97). As Berque observes, from the early 1980s on, the large bookshops all had shelves of books on Tokyo and its history. In its size, prominence and variety, this literature served to build up a new face for the city, one that was fragmented, self-referential and insistent on the city's difference. That it was so successful is a reflection in part of the role of Tokyo's urban image makers.

The re-scripting of Tokyo reflected the new economic and moral climate of Japanese dominance. It replaced a different sort of hegemonic vision of Japan's capital city. This was Tokyo as capital of a rapidly growing national economy in

which economic growth had been prioritized over considerations of quality of life. Tokyo was archi-representative, one might say, as a translation of the Japanese word *daihyōteki*, of Japan as developmental state. It was in a rush, mass-produced, polluted, materialistic, soulless. The literature on the city was sparse. Travel writers like Quentin Crewe (1960) tended to move on quickly to Kyoto. The academic literature (there was little if any middle ground), whether Japanese language or not, was more likely to issue from a positivist political economy perspective, examining small-scale manufacturing (Takeuchi 1978) or urban social pathologies (Wagatsuma and De Vos 1984). While this mode of reflection and interpretation did indeed continue, it came to be drowned out by the celebratory noises of the urban image makers.

A number of genealogies can be constructed of the recent historiography and literature of Tokyo. While it is not the intention here to pursue this line of investigation, it is worth attempting to sketch the main contours. The 1960s and 1970s saw an unparalleled amount of scholarly research on Japanese urban history, with, as one of several high water marks, the publication of five volumes on the city of Edo (*Edo chōonino kenkyū*, Research into Edo commoners, edited by Nishiyama Matsunosuke). A similarly rich catalogue of historical enquiry opened up new understandings of the city's more recent history. At this stage the scholarly literature in English was extremely limited. In the 1980s, however, a number of new directions emerged. In the first place came a process of popularization within the Japanese-language literature, culminating in the publication of two encyclopaedias, *Edo gaku jiten* (Dictionary of Edo Studies, 1984) and *Edo Tōkyōgaku jiten* (Dictionary of Edo Tokyo Studies, 1988), which re-presented much of the main thrust of the scholarly work in easily accessible chunks. Second, a number of architectural historians, together with their students, began a process of reassessment of the peculiarities of vernacular architecture (Fujimori Terunobu at Tokyo University) and of the continuities of spatial structure in Edo-Tokyo (Jinnai Hidenobu at Hosei University) (Sand 2001). Their works found their way onto the bookshelves and the imaginations of the reading public and were picked up by the visual media. Other academics too were writing for a wider audience composed for the main part of Tokyo residents who were beginning to feel pride in their city. Third, a number of foreign writers, most of them more or less Tokyo residents themselves, opened Tokyo up to a new audience. Two reflections on the history of Tokyo by Edward Seidensticker (1983, 1990), who had translated some of the major works of Japanese literature, were soon rendered into Japanese. Finally, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government itself was implicated, sponsoring, for example, the publication of a new journal, called *Tōkyō-jin* (Tokyo people), aimed at promoting a positive, cultured image of the city, and funding the construction of a huge new museum dedicated to the city's history (Machimura 1998; Sand 2001).

Tokyo became the subject of a vast range of celebratory literature both in Japanese and in English, much of it tending, inevitably perhaps, to be self-referential. The urban image makers – maybe they should be seen as urban

myth-makers – were various, and included advertising companies such as Dentsu and magazines such as the English-language *Tokyo Journal*. In this article, I will focus for the most part on the work of architects and architectural critics, of academics, and, most importantly, of an assorted literature by journalists and freelance writers, produced primarily in the 1980s and 1990s. Two aspects of this body of work are of particular interest. In the first place, it reflects material changes in the city and in Japan's spatial economy but in general remains coy about drawing any links with these changes. During a period that coincides more or less with the 1980s, an extraordinary centripetal movement of capital and of entrepreneurial activity to Tokyo took place. The material products of Japan turned Tokyo into a Mecca of international consumer culture. As the software of popular Japanese culture was added to the superior quality of its electronic and other products, this fascination grew, especially among Westerners. The economic factors that lay behind the newly found fascination for Tokyo as emblem of all things Japanese were largely ignored. This infatuation with the potential of the city, on the one hand, to convey symbolic meaning and, on the other, to produce profits as if from the conjuror's hat led to a denial of the monotony of the landscapes of everyday life and the drudgery of attendant activities.

Second, there is a dense interplay, as well as differences of emphasis, in the representations of Tokyo produced by visitors and residents, and by Japanese and non-Japanese writers. Similar themes, images and metaphors are picked up and exchanged. The English-language writing on the city feeds off the Japanese accounts, which themselves have fed off English-language accounts. But each act of adoption is also an act of adaptation and absorption. There are inevitably significant differences of emphasis. Japanese writers appear particularly desirous to place Tokyo within a theoretical framework that sees the city as postmodern but linking back to the pre-modern. This is a point made for example by Yatsuka: 'As most other aspects of post-modernism in Japan, the post-modernity of contemporary Japanese cities is inseparably entangled with the country's pre-modern urban conditions' (1990: 39). Jinnai is another to cherish the idea of the city as post-modern. This insistence is perhaps not surprising. After all, it reflects the wider parameters of debates about the meaning of modernism and postmodernism. If modernism in cities is shown through strong lines both spatial and temporal, a substantial built form, a preoccupation with infrastructure, a concern for social pathologies, then postmodernism is reflected in flow, in memory, in reference, in text, in inchoate patterns, in chaos. 'Postmodernism, therefore, destroys historical narratives as chronology and sequence, and promotes a depthless synchronic collage that juxtaposes past and present moments in a fragmented city' (Crang and Travlou 2001: 163).

A majority of the texts drawn on in the following discussion are written in English and published by American or British publishing houses. This is so in part because of greater familiarity with these texts (which include a number of personal contributions) and in part because it is not the intent here to be encyclopaedic. But, in broader terms, this bias reflects the inevitable desire to

place Tokyo within a worldwide roll call of lustrous cities, an initiative that is more fully reflected in existing English-language discourse than in Japanese. Given that the parameters of this discourse on cities is set within a largely English-language framework (even allowing for the fact that leading architects, planners and image makers are themselves drawn from a variety of countries), it is not surprising that so much of the literature that re-scripted Tokyo did so in English. A further result of the dominance of English in general as well as the bias of this article in particular is the squeezing out of accounts in Chinese, Korean and other non-hegemonic languages (even the one script quoted below from the Italian – Sacchi (2004) – has been translated into English). We are left, regrettably but perhaps inevitably, with a further reinforcement of the West vs. Japan binary.

The purpose behind this article, then, is to reflect on the metaphors used by urban image makers – largely in written texts – in their re-scripting of a city, in this case Tokyo. I use the terms trope and metaphor interchangeably here, although strictly speaking a trope is a figure of speech of which one example is metaphor (Duncan 1996). I have gathered the tropes together into three overarching clusters: Tokyo as city of villages; Tokyo as city of transience; and Tokyo as textual city. Each of these tropes can be read as a ‘positive’ equivalent of a previously (and often contemporaneously) existing negative counterpart. Tokyo as city of villages was originally (is also) Tokyo the unplanned metropolis, chaotic, cluttered, incoherent, without meaning, without a moral sense of order. Tokyo as city of transience is a city without history, prey to regular disasters, diseased city. Tokyo the textual city is a babble of disjunctive signs, all facade and surface, and plagued by a pervasive rampant consumerism. None of these tropes is unique to Tokyo. London, for example, has also been on so many occasions seen as a city of villages (Smith 1988). The city as text is a familiar recurrent metaphor (King 1996). But each has a particular resonance, induced in part by repetitive use, in the context of Tokyo. Tokyo city of villages is spontaneous, dynamic, flexible, a city with its own hidden order. The city of transience is also a city of water and flows, of process, memory and movement, a city of networks, both futuristic and virtual. The textual city is both a discursive space and a space for episodic narratives. It is, so we are led to believe, a city of hidden depths behind the surface screens.

Each trope carries with it a historical referent. The city of villages crops up in references to Edo times, when the city was the headquarters of the Tokugawa shoguns and *de facto* capital city, when the back streets where the commoner classes lived are sometimes considered to have had a village-like community feeling to them. Tokyo as city in which life is transient relates emphatically back to the notion of floating world, the Buddhist-inspired vision of a world in which life is fleeting and therefore the moment should be grasped and enjoyed. Tokyo as a textual city evokes the past in a different way. The associations here are based on resonance (*hibiki*). When history has left nothing standing from the past it is to the names of places that one turns for historical meaning. Place names become metaphors for something else. As the urban image makers drew

up their new vocabulary for the city, official representations tended to retain their original, modernist tone, the two often existing in ironic counterpoint. Thus in official publications from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG), the emphasis remains securely on planning and plans. The future of Tokyo the unplanned city is carefully wrapped up in official plans and planned growth. The emphasis in official TMG publications is not so much on Tokyo as a futuristic city as on Tokyo as a city of the future (for some time, the future was represented by the twenty-first century).

In re-casting images and re-scripting representations of a city like Tokyo, the relationship between the domestic and the international plays itself out at various levels. In the first place, accounts of the city – especially those penned by Japanese writers – represent the city in terms of a Western Other, either a broad undefined Western urban Other or more often than not a totemic Western city such as New York, London or Paris. For example, the architectural historian Jinnai Hidenobu starts his seminal work *Tokyō onokukan jinruigaku* (1985) (translated as *Tokyo: A Spatial Anthropology*, 1995) with the words: 'Not long ago I made my first visit to the United States and was astonished by what I saw. New York, which I had always taken to be at the vanguard of contemporary civilization – and in a sense a model city for Tokyo – is in fact made up of old buildings' (1995: 1). More specifically, one can find in each of these three tropes a reference point in the Other of Western cities. Tokyo is a city of villages in contrast to the monolithic and totalizing cities of the West. While Western cities are zoned and formal, Tokyo is a jumble of functions and goods for sale. Tokyo is a city of transience and flux, as against Western cities, which are built of stone and enshrine their memories in monuments. Tokyo is a textual city where Western cities are architectonic and three dimensional.

Tokyo as city of villages – Tokyo unplanned city

The most persistent cluster of metaphors surrounds the idea of Tokyo as something smaller than the sum of its parts, Tokyo, in other words, as a city of villages. There are many ramifications to the trope of Tokyo as a collection of villages, some of which are examined, in a historical context, by Henry D. Smith in a recent essay (2006). Here perhaps we see most strongly a temporal dynamic at play. The negative attributes from which this set of tropes derives were widely observed in the postwar decades. Few were the visitors who failed to comment on the city's unconscionable size. But it was not just its size that shocked. The city was amorphous and inchoate. The houses were small and ugly (famously and tellingly dismissed as rabbit hutches, *usagi goya*, in a European Commission report). The tangle of overhead wires exacerbated the impression of untidiness and the lack of aesthetic harmony. This was a messy city full of clutter. Nor was there much green space; too few parks for children to play in. The roads were congested and the trains impossibly crowded. As was comprehensively reported in an OECD (1986) review of urban planning in Japan, Tokyo was a city fundamentally lacking in amenities, and, as Jan Morris lamented, all Japanese

cities lacked such basic amenities as parks and squares (Shelton 1999: 9). The critic Takashina Sh-uji writes in terms of 'buildings huddled haphazardly together in an inchoate, focusless vista extending as far as the eye can see' (Takashina 1987: 4).

The city sprawls in all directions because it lacks any evidence of an overall plan (Mansfield 1998). It is a city without master plan, an anarchic, amoebic city without structure. The scene was set for this interpretation of the city by Roland Barthes, when he called Tokyo a 'city with an empty centre', where 'the streets . . . have no names' (1983: 30, 33). Tokyo, it could be said, has no deep level of meaning like a Rome or a Jerusalem. It has neither the civic resonance and moral compass of Rome nor the transcendent religiosity of Jerusalem. It has none of the gravitas of a Western city like Paris or New York. It does not share Paris' intimations of eternity, as the architect Ashihara Yoshinobu reminds us (1989: 97). There is no whole to make up the sum of its main parts (Jinnai 1997: 13). There is no possibility of making sense of this vast city. 'People do not and cannot have', wrote the architect Maki Fumihiko, 'an image of today's megalopolis in its entirety' (Popham 1985: 55). It is a jumble, a maze, a labyrinth. This was the litany of complaints that was levelled against Tokyo on a fairly regular basis. Tokyo was indeed the ugly duckling among the world's major cities.

Tokyo, it might be thought, remains chaotic and, if anything, even harder to negotiate than it was a few decades ago (take the complexity of the metro system as an example). But it is represented in different ways. We (meaning here Westerners) are for a start adjured by Ashihara to see Tokyo in its own terms. We must first understand and relate sympathetically, not, revealingly, to the city builders – for who precisely are they? – nor to individual architects because this was not an urbanism of individual aggrandisement, but to the overlapping layers of different architectural styles and the different materials that have characterized Japanese cities. Then our eyes are opened, and we can appreciate the city in different ways. Tokyo, Ashihara argues, has a 'hidden order' (*kakureta chitsujo*), and Ashihara ends his book with the following words: 'The qualities of a city like Tokyo that is parts-oriented to begin with, although appearing chaotic and lacking any principle of order, may at last be appreciated in the coming age' (1989: 149). It is not only the case that Tokyo holds a hidden order, but it actually functions with exceptional smoothness. This is a point emphasized by the architectural critic and journalist Peter Popham in his book *Tokyo: The City at the End of the World*: 'For a city that is routinely described as chaotic, Tokyo has a remarkably strong and simple structure', he writes (1985: 93), and elsewhere, 'This city is a piece of machinery unrivalled in history for size, complexity, precision' (1985: 15). It has to operate with mechanical precision or otherwise it would come to a grinding halt, and this is a reflection of a highly ordered and indeed a hierarchical society, one in which there is no place for chaos.

The city without master plan but with a hidden sense of order abides by natural laws. There may not be many parks, but up and down the streets of the

city people place potted plants outside their homes, and the shrines that are scattered around the city provide plentiful islands of verdure (Jinnai 1987: 27). As Popham (1985: 44) suggests, Jane Jacobs would have approved. The amenities are all the more valuable for being spontaneous, improvised, unplanned – natural. The back streets of the city appear to follow a natural path, as you would expect in a rural setting rather than the largest city in the world.

They are, it would seem, like village lanes, with Tokyo the great unplanned sprawl no less than an agglomeration of villages (Jinnai 1987: 7). This is perhaps the most insistent of the many tropes that have been used to characterize the city (Popham 1985: 55). Tokyo is as a consequence a place of pluralities, lots and lots of places congealed together, '*des villes nomm'ees Tokyo*', to quote the title of an anthology of essays on the city edited by Philippe Pons (1984). 'Tokyo is a collection of village-size neighbourhoods', writes Donald Richie (1986: 92). The spaces that these neighbourhoods contain are asymmetrical, narrow, labyrinthine (Sacchi 2004: 229), cosy and intimate, ever ready to surprise. We find this metaphor of the city as a collection of villages in the depictions of Meiji Tokyo written by the Victorian travel writer Isabella Bird. We find it 100 years later reappearing as a *leitmotif* of much writing on the city. 'Tokyo is often called an agglomeration of villages', writes Jinnai Hidenobu. 'Numerous localities of distinct social and physical character have formed in Tokyo, each defined in part by the natural landscape. In each of these areas a symbiosis of the community and the local shrine may be seen that is based on the spatial model of the rural village' (1987: 7). Henry Smith provides a genealogy of the image of Tokyo as a series of villages, showing in particular how this interpretation of urban life was reinforced through the work of a number of leading sociologists such as Fukutake Takashi and Ronald Dore at a time, in the postwar decades, when the state was orchestrating a modern and much larger-scale approach to collective living in the city (Smith 2006). This metaphor was applied with a renewed enthusiasm but a somewhat different connotation in the 1980s and 1990s (Bestor 1989). It was now used less to denote the type of society that was to be found in Tokyo (and other Japanese cities) and more to the subjective 'feel' of the largest of Japanese cities, Tokyo. The stitching together of these villages was stressed. 'Rather than a feeling of integration', Jinnai notes, 'the independence and completeness of each part is noticeable; all together form the whole. For this reason Tokyo has been called a "mosaic city" and a "collage city"' (Jinnai 1987: 7).

The natural pulses of energy that charge through the city give it an unusual sense of dynamism. The hidden order is a highly flexible one (Shelton 1999). The apparent chaos gives rise to a sense of creativity (Shinohara 1997). Tokyo is 'an extraordinary – perhaps the most extraordinary – shop window of contemporary architecture' (Sacchi 2004: 223), an 'immense whiteboard' (Mansfield 1998) for the world's best architects, who have the freedom here that stems from an absence of overarching urban style. They are released from the bonds of controls and regulations. They have the room for manoeuvre bestowed by liberal patrons.

This has made of Tokyo in the last quarter century something of a stylebook of contemporary architecture and design. 'Tokyo's more experimental buildings', writes Stephen Mansfield, 'are radical implants into the fabric of the city, design catalysts that can also be read as discourses on aesthetics and the role of modern architecture' (1998: 37). In envisaging the city as a field of creative energy for city-builders, both Sacchi and Mansfield recognize that the distinguished contributions intensify the feelings of general chaos in the overall townscape. So many of Tokyo's 'designer buildings' respond to the visual chaos of the city by accentuating it in a carefully crafted and consciously disjointed reflection.

While Tokyo appears unplanned, it possesses a hidden sense of order, but this is the order of fragmented unity, village-like areas stapled together, possessing a feeling of chaos that many architects have found inspiring but that ordinary inhabitants can find hard to negotiate.

City of transience – city of perpetual destroy and rebuild

The second overarching trope is that of the city of transience, a city of perpetual destroy and rebuild. It is hard to find an account of the city written over the last fifty or so years that does not direct the reader's attention to the insubstantial, unreal, superficial qualities of the city. It is, writers agree, like a theme park or a stage set, ready to be packed up, folded away and moved somewhere else (Richie 1986). Botond Bogner, for example, writes of the city's 'theatrical insubstantiality' (1990: 14). All those facades that cover an entire building appear to be nothing more than facades, revealing only the deeply destabilizing nuances of the term facade itself. It is a cliché of the city, one that is hard to ignore, that in Tokyo of all cities there is nothing that is old. This is remarked on both by non-Japanese and Japanese writers, often through comparison with European cities (and, as we noted at the outset, with New York too). The corollary of being a city without old buildings is that Tokyo is seen as a city without history, and yet the associations are historical: the fires that regularly ravaged the city were known as *Edo no hana*, 'the flowers of Edo'. But this is of course the city of Godzilla, of disasters of every kind, and of ritualized violence that appears to stand in complete contrast with the Tokyo of intimate spaces and village neighbourhoods. As Catherine Russell writes, 'The extraordinarily rich imagery and detail of Japanese *anime* have effectively created another Tokyo, one that is continually reproduced only in order to be destroyed again and again' (2002: 221). 'As a cinematic city,' she continues, 'Tokyo lends itself both to utopian fantasies of a pre-modern space associated with old Edo and to a dystopian apocalypticism of ritualized destruction' (2002: 223). It is the violence of the transition to modernity that Russell sees as being central to representations of the city on film.

This picture of Tokyo as place of ritualized destruction can be converted into a series of related images clustered around the ideas of transience and impermanence, of processes and flow and of invisible city, virtual city, futuristic

city. At the heart of this set of images lies the discursive link that we have noted drawn by many writers between the contemporary city wearing a postmodernist garb and the cotton garments of Edo. Indeed, what we see here is a vision of Tokyo as synecdoche for the whole of Japan and, as Carol Gluck (1998: 274) has argued, not so much a postmodernist space as a space that stands outside the modern post-modern binary as trans-modern space. The first and fundamental reference here is to *ukiyo* (floating world), the central metaphor both of Edo period popular literature and of so many contemporary reflections on the city. References to the floating world carry connotations not only of transience and impermanence but also to the *carpe diem* culture enshrined within the moats of the licensed quarter, Shin Yoshiwara. Philippe Pons (1988: 84) sees this hedonism as a vulgarization of Buddhist ideas of impermanence. Along with this attachment to the world of ephemeral pleasures comes an attachment, not to property, but to money, a sense (still according to Pons) of 'this-worldly mysticism' allied to devotion to work. This lies behind the image of the Edokko, son of the city, fun-loving, brave, brash and spendthrift, a figure even more central to urban myth-making in Edo-Tokyo than the Cockney is in London (Smith 1979).

Once a city of water (Jinnai 1985), Tokyo today is formed of 'liquid space' (Sacchi 2004: 226). It is a city of flows, first and foremost flows of people. A central instance here is perhaps that of the giant intersection outside Shibuya Station, where the change of traffic lights releases a tidal flow of pedestrians that begins with a hurried ripple, gathers force, becomes an irresistible surge and then ebbs away again only to resume a couple of minutes later. These are not only flows of people but also of trains along the railway lines and cars on the overhead expressways (Popham 1985). At the intersection of these flows stand the central nodes represented by the stations. These 'spiritually empty' centres, according to Roland Barthes, have formed the centrepiece of much writing on Tokyo (Burgin 1996), their cornucopian multi-functionality matched only by their architectural opaqueness ('a train can open onto a shoe stall', wrote Barthes in his *Empire of Signs*). In front of the stations, the open spaces are seen as equivalent to a European square or piazza (Bognar 1997: 29).

In this city of flows, crowds gather at various specific points, points of concentrated flux known as *sakariba*. Various Japanese and Western historians, sociologists and geographers have placed the *sakariba* at the forefront of their interpretation of Japanese urbanism. Philippe Pons (1988: 115) has stressed the role of the *sakariba* as a space beyond social division, one in which 'popular' and elite culture mingled. Henry Smith has written about the fluidity of the *sakariba*; he refers (1986: 27) to the Sumida River as the greatest *sakariba* of them all. The analogy with water and with a flow of people introduces a temporal note. This temporal quality has been underlined by Augustin Berque: 'The term *sakariba* ... has a strong connotation of passing time. ... The *sakariba* are an ephemeral concentration of the urban, nomadic city centres' (1993: 114). The concept of *sakariba* has been the subject of several studies by Japanese writers.

The geographer Hattori Keijirō makes a point of declining to define the subject of his book: 'If we try to establish a theoretical definition of the *sakariba*, the more we try the less sense there is, and the interest is halved' (1981: 158). In his study of Tokyo *sakariba* of the last 150 years or so and of the historiography of these places, Yoshimi Shun'ya (1987) avoids a space-based definition and stresses the activities that go to make a *sakariba*. They are, he writes, events (*dekigoto*) with spectators as actors. The place (*ba*), in other words, could be anywhere. What matters, what makes it flourish (*sakari-*), is what happens there. The same point is made in different terms by Henry Smith, who writes of modern Shinjuku that the district is structured less by its buildings and streets than by the activities of the people who move around it (quoted in Pons 1988: 308). The *sakariba* indeed is a central organizational concept in the cultural geography of Japanese cities, and this is reflected especially in the Japanese-language literature.

Tokyo city of process and movement (Bognar 1997: 9) is, first of all, a city in which the intangible quality of memory supersedes the physical presence of monuments. When fires have been so frequently responsible for mass destruction and any building over thirty years old is treated as unusually even peculiarly old, it is little wonder that the city is celebrated for the immaterial qualities of memory transmitted through stories and urban myth rather than any grandiose statement that it might make through imposing monuments. Second, Tokyo is seen as a city of physical movement, a city through which people walk. The references here are not to the classic Benjamin notion of the *flâneur* but to a more literal reading, which sees Tokyo as a 'happening city' (Bognar 1997), a city through which an 'unusual happiness' is experienced, 'walking down a little street in the immense city of Tokyo' (Berque 1982: 145). This is the city of the outdoor salon. Donald Richie entitles one of his essays on the city, 'Walking in Tokyo' (1986). To walk the streets of Tokyo, he writes, is to become a spectator (1986: 91). Again here the resonances are strongly historical. The doyen of Edo historians, Nishiyama Matsunosuke (1974), saw Edo in terms of a distinctive urban culture of movement (*kōdō no bunka*).

Tokyo transcends time; it is a city both of its own past and its future. 'It is a surprisingly short distance', writes Catherine Russell, 'from the narrow streets of old Edo to the cybernetic space of contemporary *anime*' (2002: 212). Tokyo as a city of the future is a vision inherent in the continual construction of buildings that extend its own vocabulary as well as the conventional idiom of a wider urbanism. The vision of a futuristic city was set out in the 1960s by the Metabolist group of architects, which included Kurokawa Kishō and Isozaki Arata. Corbusian in scale, their designs for new cities rising out of the waters of Tokyo Bay were nonetheless infused with a spirit of fantasy and adventure. The response in terms of actual new construction in Tokyo might be thought of as pallid in design terms but something of the futuristic boldness has been transferred into the many projects that sprout like sci-fi satellites along the waterfront.

Alongside Tokyo as futuristic city sits a parallel vision, of Tokyo as virtual city. Indeed, this virtual city, celebrated in the novels of William Gibson and in

Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, 'has become a cliché for futuristic, cybernetic space' (Russell 2002: 212). This is a theme treated by Vladimir Krstić, who sees the city's giant electronic screens as a dissolution of space, an 'electronic hole' (1997: 38) without spatial boundary. The virtual space opened up by screens on the body of buildings is expressed in an urban territory that lacks materiality and a sense of permanence, but one that is flexible and dynamic. This makes it a supremely susceptible vehicle for the electronic information flows that govern human activity and shape the contemporary world. It is a centre for the flow of information in a world of invisible, intangible and instantaneous communication. It is a city that has developed 'by way of a "fuzzy logic"' (Bognar 1997: 9). It is indeed a city in which each new layer of technology is heaped on top of an older layer, a city that is bound first by the visible carriers of electronic communication and then by the invisible information flows contained within them.

How should this city of regular destruction and renewal be understood? Is this a city without history, a city that has no fear of the future because it has no past? Or is Tokyo peculiarly and keenly in touch with its past and able to project past into present and future? By linking a postmodernist Tokyo to a pre-modern Edo, commentators are able to propose the idea that the contemporary city is a reflection of a time in the past when Japanese society was developing untainted by outside (and more specifically Western) influence. In two different critical comments on this discourse, Carol Gluck suggests that 'Edo became tomorrow' (1998: 275), while Machimura Takashi argues that a 'retreat' to the future' has served to hide the 'negative aspects' of urban change (1998: 188). The indulgence in metaphors of transience and flux creates an urban landscape that is unsettling, destabilizing, for people whose primary struggle is that of everyday survival.

Tokyo the textual city – Tokyo city of semiotic babble

A third set of images represents the city as text, both semiotically rich and opaque, and its urban landscape as a language game. The multiplicity of signs, in their confusion of scripts and their frequently idiosyncratic use of English, suggests to Donald Richie a 'semiotic babble' (1986: 91), part of a wider picture in which 'Japan is a kingdom of kitsch and Tokyo. . . its capital' (1999: 64). In this representation, Tokyo is a highly textual city, a discursive city, a city of narratives and metaphors (Russell 2002; Waley 1992). Within what Russell calls the 'discursive zone' of the city, space has an episodic quality. 'Tokyo is a place-by-place,' writes the architect John Thacker. '[Y]ou have no sense of travel between points' (quoted in Shelton 1999: 63). Roland Barthes had expressed the same point when he wrote that this was a city never experienced twice in the same way (1983: 36).

The city is a text, and urban landscape a language game – 'the city as streaming text', in the words of Stephen Mansfield (2005: 20). It is first a city of signs and screens. The signs cover entire facades of buildings and become

themselves screens, so that buildings no longer have discernible walls but instead have scripts and letters. Botond Bogнар, in his review of contemporary Japanese architecture, has captured this aspect in the following terms:

Alongside, over, and within architecture, one finds a forest of non-architectural elements so thick that it sometimes covers up or even replaces architecture entirely. If one were to characterize this encounter with the environment, one could do so by referring to the pervasiveness of signs, symbols, billboards, and supergraphics, as a kind of progressive anarchy.

(Bognar 1990: 14)

The designers and builders of the contemporary city, led by a number of celebrated Japanese and international architects, have accentuated Richie's semiotic babble through their stylistic eclecticism, their delight in the non-contextuality of the Japanese urban landscape and their indulgence in the language game, seeking new styles, but in fact only adding to the 'urban Babel' (Bognar 1990: 18).

Two aspects of the city as 'a sea of signs' (Yatsuka 1990) have drawn particular attention: the first is the fantasy world that is created at night by a landscape of buildings lit by brashly coloured neon (Popham 1985). The second sees the signs as an extreme and ubiquitous invitation to consume, to the point where eventually the city itself has become the primary object of consumption. Tanaka Yasuo shows in his commentary on the febrile consumerism of 1980s Tokyo, *Nanto naku kurisutaru* (1981), how personal identity is shaped and elaborated by the adept choice of district for different activities. Bognar draws the links between the chaotic semantics of Tokyo streetscapes and the urban environment as object of investment and speculation: 'The megalopolitan marketplace is restless and anxious to gobble up all things, especially easily identifiable styles and products in order to convert them into marketable images' (1990: 18). Signs are reduced to advertisements, writes Bognar, and unified value and preference systems are created within consumerist society (1990: 17). The enticement to consume is all-pervasive. It is as if the whole city were a marketplace. The scene of such fierce and constant competition for the customer's attention, visual and sometimes aural, is unlikely to produce a tranquil, readily definable order; nor will it add to the city's clarity.

Ironic though it may be, a city with so much to read on its streets is hard to decipher (Waley 1992: 15). But, as Jinnai (1995: ix) reminds us, if you can read Tokyo, you can read any city. The greater the attempts to make the city legible, the more confused it all seems to become. Alongside one map and one board goes another intended to clarify the first but tending only to obfuscate its message. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government attempts to make the city easier to negotiate by including signs in English, Chinese and Korean, but this only adds a further floor to Tokyo's Babel. The challenge has been set; this is a city notoriously hard to read, and has become therefore, as we saw at the outset, a city of many texts, each of which seems to be 'competing with the others in finding new ways of "reading" the city' (Yatsuka 1990: 39). Indeed, this is a city for which each person is constantly writing a new text.

In this textual city, where script is everywhere, place names are paramount. As Roland Barthes wrote:

This sound of the place is that of history; for the signifying name here is not a memory but an anamnesis, as if all Ueno, all Asakusa came to me from this old haiku. . . (written by Basho in the seventeenth century):

A cloud of blossoming cherry trees:

The bell. – Ueno's?

Asakusa's? (Barthes 1983: 42)

In an urban landscape of particular textual richness, place names are charged with special symbolic significance, and have occasionally become the object of acrimonious dispute. Historical association adds to the potency of the place name as symbol: Yanagibashi, Sendagi, Kagurazaka, Fukagawa, Honjo, Koishikawa, these names all speak ineffably of an era, a style of life or a group of writers that are no longer with us. This is a city of resonance, of association, a city in which memory is locked up in place names. The power of the commercial consumerist script that frames the city means, however, that the associations of the names of Tokyo's more fashionable districts – Roppongi, Aoyama, Shibuya – are no less potent for lacking the patina of age. The cachet that place names hold is available to the property agent as it is to the travel writer. The intangible world of association and evocation can be transmuted into an invitation to exploit the prestige value of a name in order to destroy and develop and make money out of the urban terrain.

Representing the city

In recent years geographers and others working in the interface between culture, space and place have attempted to engage with the difficulties of representing (or re-presenting) landscapes, some of which have been more or less urban. This effort represents an important part of the re-sensitizing of geography to the meanings of place in our daily lives but also to the understanding that these meanings are contested and that the contestation is defined variously by political power and economic forces. This task of re-presenting landscapes has seen an emphasis within the literature both on the interpretation of the symbolic manifestations of power in landscapes (Agnew and Duncan 1989) and on the reading of landscapes as texts and the reading of texts to interpret landscapes (Barnes and Duncan 1992). Both of these avenues of research have been pursued in succeeding years, but in neither case has 'the city' been made central to a broader discussion of representation. The difficulties inherent in the attempt to represent the city are acknowledged by Anthony King in his introduction to *Re-Presenting the City: Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the 21st-Century Metropolis* (1996), and the normative assumptions that lie behind the conceptual construct of 'the city' are discussed by Rob Shields in his contribution to that book. Perhaps the most telling intervention comes in a quotation from an essay entitled 'Metropolis: the city as text' by James Donald that marks its first page:

By calling this diversity 'the city' we ascribe to it a coherence or integrity. *The city*, then, is above all a representation. But was sort of representation? By analogy with the now familiar idea that the nation provides us with an 'imagined community', I would argue that the city constitutes an *imagined environment*.

What is involved in that imagining – the discourses, symbols, metaphors and fantasies through which we ascribe meaning to the modern experience of urban living – is as important a topic for the social sciences as the material determinants of the physical environment.

(Donald 1992: 327)

Donald here is writing about the modern city. When we return to Japan and look back, we find a rich tradition of representation of the city, and of Edo in particular. The city was represented in miniature – in mimetic form – through illustrations, *ezu*, that are part picture and part map. Many of these are bird's eye views, *ch'okanzu*, that re-construct the city in such a way that it is spread out in front of the viewer's eyes, and a hierarchy of spatial symbolism is incorporated into the view (Smith 1988). Various texts sought to represent the whole of the city, and in a sense this could be done to the extent that various conventions were observed. A strong sense of convention among authors, illustrators and readers led to a highly developed sense of the unified cultural geography of Edo. This is manifest in a number of topographies and seasonal calendars of the city, culminating in the voluminous work of Saitō Gesshin and Hasegawa Settan, *Edo meisho zue*, Illustrated famous places of Edo (Saitō, Gesshin and Settan 1834–6). The conventions and traditions of representing the city were continued and adapted in the modern period, but the conventions no longer exist that allow for such representations to be meaningful – or indeed to be viable – in the context of the contemporary city.

Maybe it is the lack of convention that encourages the use of tropes and metaphors in scripting and re-scripting the contemporary city. Tropes create a set of conventions; within them, metaphors help people to coordinate, subconsciously perhaps, their impressions, reactions and representations of a city. They are one way of coping with the apparently infinite possibilities of representing, of scripting the city, any city. Thus it is that we find a cupboard full of conventional metaphors for Tokyo, along the lines that we have been reviewing. They relate to each other across the categories that I have drawn to create a sort of Indra's web of cross-referential tropes. Tokyo is flexible and dynamic, with buildings being regularly uprooted to make way for something even newer that accentuates the sense of visual incongruity. It is a city of the fleeting moment, a city of flow and process in which urban development occurs organically. Tokyo is a sea of signs, screens and surfaces with hidden spaces obscured behind the discordant clutter of publicity.

The poetics of metaphors are beguiling, and they play an important part in helping make sense of the city as it is experienced and observed. At the same time, however, the lived consequences of those metaphors tend to be ignored, disguised and obscured. To describe Tokyo as flexible and dynamic is to obscure an understanding of the city as a place of the everyday, where families

must survive economically and socially, where life can be humdrum and dull, despite the architectural baubles and liquid spaces of the urban image makers. It is to ignore the Tokyo of suburbs and sprawl, of schools, supermarkets and daily life-spaces. To see the city in terms of constant renewal is to fail to engage with the consequences of living in an unstable environment, one that is wasteful of finite materials and resources. To revel in the electronic billboards and dazzling neon facades is to ignore the consequences of the extreme commodification of the urban surroundings. This, then, is a partial view, partial to the impressionistic and experiential, not attempting an engagement with structural forces of economic change.

It accords well therefore with the political and moral climate, and indeed the economic climate of the 1980s and 1990s. Japan had become the world's second largest economy; it had become the acme of a world driven increasingly by the semi-conductor. Its products were being recognized not as imitations of Western models but as innovative and consumer-oriented paragons of high-tech production. Its management techniques were seen as manifestly superior in terms of flexibility and inclusiveness. And, even though the economy faltered in the 1990s, the software that underpinned Japanese popular culture was bringing its computer games and *anime* cartoons into homes around the world. This was not the old Japan of temples and geisha; it was not to be sought in the tourist-brochure back streets of Kyoto. This was the brash new Japan that crystallized in Tokyo, whose distinctive and paradoxical urban landscape had been re-imagined so vividly by Ridley Scott in *Blade Runner* (1982). This is the Tokyo whose urban landscape, despite economic doldrums, has continued to re-invent itself in mushroom clusters of high-rise buildings. This is the city in which property prices soared and gangsters (*jiageya*) drove people out of their homes. And this is the Tokyo in which the loosening of planning controls, punctuated by occasional and ineffective counter-measures, has re-written the framework within which new housing is designed and constructed.

It is perhaps no surprise that the re-scripting of Tokyo has been led by architects and architectural critics, supported by travel writers, commentators, journalists. In many tangible and intangible ways they have gained from this process, although there have been some heavy losses too (one thinks of the fate of the general construction companies). The gain has come in part in the currency of cultural kudos. For the postmodernists (trans-modernists?) and the adherents of cultural revisionism built around the idea of Japanese difference, Tokyo is the new archetype – dynamic, flexible, shifting and receptive. For those who live and work there, life may continue to be monotone, uncomfortable and expensive, as it may be anywhere in the world. In this sense, little has changed. What has changed is the framework within which the city is today conventionally represented.

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