

displaced.tokyo



*The aim of this work is to present a specific condition of modern cities, without any presumption of judging, stating what's good or bad, or again, proposing any solution. The chapter about Tokyo is mostly a collection of impressions, sensations, feelings that have been accompanying me during the two separate periods I had the chance to spend in this City of Contradictions. I am not expecting to convince anyone about anything, I don't have this kind of goal. What my work wants to point out - the fate of contemporary metropolises - is partly based upon existing theories and studies, but has a strong personal component. I hope the Reader, and Watcher, will enjoy this peculiar formula of work I am proposing.*



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*abstract*

The phenomenon of urbanization has become, in the past decades, a major issue in the global economy. Huge masses of people have been moving at a high rate to the urbanized areas. Cities, in order to satisfy the demand for spaces, are in constant evolution and expansion. This phenomenon demands architects and urban planners great caution and understanding of it. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the condition of modern metropolises, by taking as test subject the city of Tokyo, probably Today's biggest and most advanced urban agglomerate in the World. The work hereby proposed, is an investigation on a specific thematic that affects most of the urban territories: the relation between spaces and their uses. In this research, Photography has been used as added investigative device. In particular, the thesis is focused on the distinction between the *designed use* of a space, meaning the use expected by architects and planners, and the *actual use* of it, meaning the use that people, living the city, do of it. Tokyo represents, in this sense, an extremely interesting case study for different reasons: first, the contradiction between the absence of an urban plan, as the city grows like an organism, spontaneously, and the design of specific spaces of the city, extremely normed and defined, not leaving any space to spontaneity in their use. Second, the absence of public spaces as Western culture defines them, due to an extremely privatized society, as Japanese society is. The structure of the work is based on two distinct moments of it: a theoretical part, with both an objective description of the city and a subjective one, based on the months I spent living there; and the photographic corpus. The photographic research is structured into five 'chapters'; each chapter represents a *dimension* of the city, meaning a peculiar characteristic that can be recognized in most of the big cities of the World. It is an experiment of re-construction of the image of a personal city, a reflection of the idea that in order to survive in such a metropolitan jungle, the inhabitants have to build their own cities in the city, with spaces they specifically design, even though not physically, for themselves, according to their needs and will, cutting them out from the material city.

## 1. *introduction*

1. Franco LaCecla, *Contro l'urbanistica*, Giulio Einaudi editore, 2015

2. Livio Sacchi, *Tokyo-to: Architettura e città*, Skira, 2004

The condition of contemporary cities represents a crucial theme in the modern theory of Urbanism and Architecture. Cities are experiencing, especially in the last times, a constant and inevitable growth, that is being the cause of a widespread phenomenon of annihilation of the human dimension<sup>1</sup>. New York, London, Paris, Singapore, Beijing, day by day are rapidly growing, leaving behind this process of inhuman development, the condition of each human being inhabiting them. Urbanists, architects, planners, they all lost track of the ancient concept of *urbe*, they over-design areas that won't let no man dwell them, anesthetized and aseptic zones (one cannot refer to them as places, meaning *loci*), that give everyone the sensation of never actually be part of them, of losing their souls and their minds in a turbid loop of lights and ads and glass and steel.

There is all this, and then there is Tokyo.

Tokyo represents the *unicum*, a rare beast, an unprecedented example of something that never existed before, but will probably be everywhere in the future<sup>2</sup>. Or not. Tokyo cannot be referred to as a city, intended in the ancestral concept of *urbe*; it is an agglomerate of unmatched elements, a mass, rapidly and constantly feeding itself, destroying and rebuilding the idea of itself, a soul-less entity that will never be anyone's home but will always be a place that suits everyone.

The purpose of this work, is to analyze the condition of contemporary cities, architecture-wise, but also from a social point of view; meaning how the city, more specifically the *forma urbis*, the shape of the city, resulting from several processes that took place during centuries, millenniums in some cases, of stratification and superimposition of different orders, influences the life of human-beings inhabiting them. A concept that captured my attention, once I started experiencing that cities, and Tokyo especially, are nowadays happening to forget the fact that they were meant for humans.

While giving a first glance of theory and research through a theoretical treaty, the second part of this work will be completely devoted to an ensemble of pictures taken during two different periods I spent in Tokyo.

The concept behind this organization of my work, a theoretical part and the use of Photography, indirectly descends from Roland Barthes, who easily captured my interest: a photograph always represents something that's happening at a specific time, in a specific place, and that won't probably come back ever again. When looking at a photograph, it's almost like looking into the eyes of the dead<sup>2</sup>. It's a vivid and clear image of something that existed only in a specific place and time.

I found an immediate link and inspiration to develop this work. I was looking for something that could help in analyzing a place involved by a fast-paced, non-stop phenomenon of evolution, from a city of men to a city for machines; and it was something that was going to be dead in few seconds: freeze that moment, somehow, or it will be gone forever. That is when it struck me, and when Photography showed itself in all its essence, a gateway to the world of what is dead. Death is a condition of still life, where everything appears clear, motionless, decomposable in all its single, peculiar components. That is what, in my personal view of the cities of today, is missing, the capacity of taking time to stop and observe this continuous stream of informations and developing process, to understand reality in all its shades. It seems like everyone is trying to feel alive by simply never stop creating, designing, building, doing, without really knowing what is necessary and what is not.

My intent is to be the one who stops, stares, and tries to understand each step of this process, and mainly the result achieved in the end of it.

The choice of Tokyo as case study for this work, happened because I found this *megalopolis* to be the most interesting in order to

3. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, The Noonday Press, 1989

4. Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes, camminare come pratica estetica*, Einaudi, 2006

understand the derive of modern cities, seeing it either as a model for future developments all around the world, or as a unique case that won't repeat itself anywhere else, due to a combination of specific conditions of time, space, history, culture. Tokyo has already been recognized as a unique case study, but I feel like Photography has never been really used in the way I have been trying to use it to describe all the *phenomena* that constantly redesign the shape of the city.

The starting point of my research is the consideration of Tokyo as *City of Situations*. From this point on, I tried to look at each single aspect of it, to create some sections, and analyze it from the interior; a violent process of dismemberment.

In developing this work, with a base that derives from the education and the studies achieved, I tried to become a *flaneur*, the errant man, wandering through the nameless streets of the city, observing as *homo ludens*<sup>4</sup> the happenings around me, experiencing and capturing specific moments of a living creature, devouring its past and present with mechanic fauces. I wanted to interpret the city by getting lost in it, by losing tracks of time and space, but at the same time trying to freeze them, and picking them up back in different conditions. It is an oxymoronic process.

I am not trying to give any kind of judgement; this is not a work that ends with statements such as 'this is good/this is bad/this is the solution'. The starting point is a subjective consideration based upon existing theories that captured my attention. Its main purpose though, is to be an objective research, or better, an experiment on this *sui generis* world, called Tokyo.





2. *contesto*

1. Livio Sacchi, *Tokyo-to: Architettura e città*, Skira, 2004

Having a clear image of Tokyo, is somehow an unsatisfiable request. One can never expect something like this from this city, due to the fact that it has no clear image of itself. But, in order to have a better understanding of what will be said in the next chapters, and the stories that will be told in the photographs, it is helpful to have few informations about how Tokyo became what it is today, its history, its urbanism, its life.

### History

The original name of Tokyo, was *Edo*, Japanese word that means estuary, a clear reference to its location in the point where the *Su-mida* river flows into the sea. The ancient *Edo's* urban system, has mysteriously survived through the ages; I said mysteriously, because in Japan, it has always been a common practice to constantly demolish and rebuild every single piece of the cities, a practice derived from a culture that is based on the concept of *ephemeral*. Historically, the city was divided into urban hierarchies, that reflected the strong social hierarchies that always characterized ancient Japan: on the *Yamanote*, the high city, there were the residences of the high classes, *daimyō*, *hatamoto* and *samurai*; while the lower classes, such as merchants, farmers, shepherds, servants, were located in the lower area of the city, the *Shitamachi*, where the rivers and canals flowed, and where the swamps were. And, as will be explained in one of the following chapters, this urban structure has been mainly preserved. This preservation though, that, as said before, is somehow quite unusual for such a culture, is only a ghost: it is hidden underneath different layers of a conspicuously invasive new, that distracts the observer from its comprehension.

To analyze Tokyo's urban growth in the XX century, there are events in its history, and in history of Japan, that can not be skipped: the first one is the advent of *Meiji-jidai*, the Meiji Era. Japan, both due to its geographical condition of being an island and to its culture, has always been characterized by a strong isolation; this characteristic is

«The urban landscape has not been weighed down by the past, because here, the past can not pile up. In this transitory landscape, human traces date back to few decades, maximum»

-Fumihiko Maki-

visible also these days, in the era of globalization and capitalism. With the *Tokugawa* period<sup>2</sup>, that reigned until the mid of the XIX century, this isolation was strong. In previous eras, there have been brief contacts with the 'european civilization' (especially the Portuguese, in the XVI century, left few permanent marks on Japanese culture), but the first, real, and most influencing contamination by the western world, happened in 1853, when commodore Matthew Perry, of the US Navy, attacked the Edo bay; the shōgun surrendered, and signed the *Convention of Kanagawa*<sup>3</sup>, that ended two centuries of national seclusion. In 1868, a golpe took down the *Tokugawa* domination over Japan, and the *Meiji* era started, an era of renovation, of opening to the world, and, consequently, of social, cultural, and urban changes.

The second event, a tragic one, is the *Kantō daishinsai*, the Great Kantō<sup>4</sup> Earthquake, that in 1923, demolished Tokyo, and many cities in the surrounding area, and killed more than 140'000 people. Japan is one of the most seismic areas in the world, being located in proximity to three tectonic plate boundaries. Slight, seismic activi-

2. The *Tokugawa bakufu*, was the last military feudal government of Japan. It took over in 1603, with the election of Tokugawa Ieyasu as shōgun; it ended in 1868, when the Tokugawa family was overthrown after the *Boshin war*.

3. *Kanagawa Jōyaku*, Kanagawa Convention, was a treaty signed between the USA navy commodore Matthew Perry, and the shōgun Iesada Tokugawa, in order to open the harbors of *Shimoda* and *Hakodata* to the commerce with the United States, to guarantee shelter to american survivors of shipwrecks, and, finally, to impose the presence of an american consul in Japan. It is the first Japanese act, even though forced, of opening towards the rest of the World.

4. *Kantō* is a geographical region, in the main island of Japan, *Honshū*, where the Greater Tokyo Area is located.

ties, take place almost on a daily base; at least once every century, one major earthquake happens, bringing destruction and death. Also due to this peculiar, geographical condition, Japanese population, through centuries, developed a strong, aesthetic concept, the *wabi-sabi*: this two words can be hardly translated as 'sad beauty' but the general idea can be resumed in the acceptance of the transience of things. This vision of things, is applied to all the fields of life; also in architecture, where it is translated into a constant process of demolition and reconstruction of buildings; an idea that is in contrast with the conception of architecture in the western world, as a permanent mark of Men, built to resist through times, and witness the past for the future generations, a symbol of what is gone.

The terrific destruction that followed the Great Kantō Earthquake, gave the occasion for a total rethinking, and consequent reconstruction, of the urban structure of Tokyo, with the creation of new security measures for buildings and streets in the city.

The last, but probably the most important event for Japan to become what it is today, is World War II; the defeat, the destruction caused by the bombs, the dishonor. General dissatisfaction, large mass suicides, contestations against the government, that bowed its head in front of the American invaders. Japan, with great difficulty, but also with great honesty, recognized, and accepted the failure of the military campaign. But again, the peculiar conception of life as transient, as ephemeral, the destruction has been seen as an occasion for a re-launch of Japan. All the resources devoted to the military effort, were relocated onto the empowerment of the industrial and productivity sectors, and this, somehow forced, policy gave the start to Japan's climb to the top position of world economy.

Alongside with the economic policies, Japan needed to redeem its image in front of the rest of the world, and started a campaign of opening towards the western cultures, brought on through several acts, the most representative of all being the

Olympic Games of 1964, to be held in Tokyo; for the occasion, major urban and architectural interventions were assigned to the most influential Japanese architect of the time, Kenzō Tange.

So, architecture, in this process of opening, had a major role; books and magazines were being translated in english, and were featuring projects from all around the World, in order to become global institutions, internationally seen as main voices. Big projects were commissioned to international architects, and Japanese architects started to be recognized as main figures also in the western World.

As said in the beginning of this chapter, Tokyo does not have a clear image of itself. The reason for this, is that it is a place under continuous evolutions. The image of the cities is something that mostly depends on velocity. Asian cities in general, they live at a different pace than any other city, feeling somehow the need to gain back the time they lost in relation to the rest of the World. Tokyo, in this context, has another speed; I would not be able to say if it is faster than other asian capitals, but it is like it moves in a fluid that has almost no friction; it swallows up all that is laying on the way to its constant ascension.

If we were to find a concept capable of describing Tokyo, and the society that inhabits it, this would be *liquid society*<sup>5</sup>, a theory, developed by the polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, referring to the actual state of modern society, the relations among individuals, the weight of capitalism and globalization, on a society that is constantly 'liquefying', transforming its solids, meaning institutions and traditions built in the past through long processes and great conquests, into fluids, immaterial, insignificant.

But this idea of liquidity, can also be used as a metaphor for the way Tokyo grows and develops; almost like water, flowing through a tube that constantly, and suddenly, changes its shape, its diameter, its direction, and adapting to it at an amazing speed.

5. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid modernity*, Polity Pr, 2000







I think that to really get lost in a place, either a city or a space in general, one has to know it first. But I also stated that Tokyo, in this sense, as in many other senses, is contradictory, because one gets immediately lost, without getting the chance to know it. Or better, to really get to know Tokyo, one needs to really get lost in it first.

But given the fact that I want the Reader to get lost in Tokyo without actually going there, in order to understand my work and to develop his or her own idea about the city, I have to try to give a description of it, a description that adapts to the thematics I am going to talk about.

### Physics

The first approach to Tokyo, as a traveler and as a Reader, is inevitably physics. Still sitting on the plane seats over Tokyo, at night, one can already have an idea of what it is going to be like: a plain of lights, extending to the remote, dark thresholds of the sea.

### *The wards*

Tokyo is made of many cities in one. I would say it is not even considerable as a city in itself, but more like a container, a vase, where many different creatures, each one with its own soul, live altogether, in a traditionally Japanese harmony. Tokyo contains in itself, legally speaking, 23 *Tōkyō tokubetsuku*, special wards, each one with its own set of laws and administration; despite this freedom, every ward has to refer to the central government of the metropolitan area of Tokyo, that includes in itself also the area of *Tama*, the core of the old city, east of the actual core of Tokyo, with its 26 cities, three districts and one village, and several small islands in the Pacific, the *Izu* archipelago, and the *Ogasawara* islands.

After World War II, following the expansion plans, Tokyo absorbed also big parts of the surrounding prefectures of *Kanagawa*, *Chiba* and *Saitama*, giving life to what is known as the Greater Tokyo

6. Rem Koolhaas, *Junkspace*, Quodlibet, 2006

7. Fran Tonkiss, *Cities by Design, The Social Life of Urban Form*, Polity Pr, 2013

area, a huge megalopolis inhabited by more than 35'000'000 units.

This peculiar spatial and administrative organization, is totally perceivable when walking from place to place. One can really sense the differences from ward to ward, in terms of activities, services, and architecture and urbanism. *Shinjuku*, for example, has its own peculiar soul, different from *Shibuya*, or from *Ueno*. One can sense it from the atmosphere: there are areas with a more local attitude, such as *Koenji*, or *Azabujuban*, and places where the Bigness<sup>6</sup>, as Rem Koolhaas would define it, is overwhelming, such as *Chiyoda*.

Sometimes, the gap between a fully urbanized area, with skyscrapers and highways hanging over the heads of the pedestrians, is sudden, shocking, and terribly fascinating.

As anticipated, differences between wards of Tokyo, sometimes, are clear, especially in terms of activities related to each one of them. One could say that Tokyo has a strongly pushed zoning policy. Some areas are characterized by specific services one can find in them. A strong example of this peculiarity, is given by *Akihabara*, a ward located in northern Tokyo, famous for its shops and restaurants. It is also known as Electric Town, because, since post World War II, it became the reference for electronic gadgets and devices. Today, it is probably the major shopping area, worldwide, for electronic goods.

### *Infrastructures*

There is one way, let's say a device, that is the most useful in order to understand the city of Tokyo, both physically and spiritually: the infrastructural system. Infrastructures, and especially the mobility system of Tokyo, are one of the clearest images of the city, the image recalling collectiveness, the city as it was imagined<sup>7</sup>; it is the binder between the single parts of the city, otherwise unbound and non communicating. After World War II, the plan for the reconstruction of Tokyo was





to develop an advanced infrastructure network, based on railway system and on the construction of new streets and highways that could connect every single part of the city, and the city with the surroundings and other main cities, in the most efficient way possible. As in many other aspects, also in the infrastructure system, Tokyo is a city of layers. From the underground to the over-the-ground level, streets, railways and highways interweave one with other, creating an intricate network of movements, with different velocities.

The metro system of Tokyo is one of the most complicated, and most extended in the world. Using the subway, for a foreign visitor of the city, requires a high capacity of adapting and understanding directions, lines, connections. This non-linearity of use, derives from the fact that in Tokyo, the light railway system is controlled by several different private companies, such as *Seibu*, *Odakyu*, *Tokyu*, *Keyo* for the suburban area, *Toei* and *Tokyo Metro*, for the subway in the actual borders of the city; each one of them has different tickets and prices. The reason behind the privatization of a public service such as the subway and metropolitan trains, dates back to the immediate Post-war, when Japan was trying hard to come out of the mud, starting its ascent to become the top economic power in the World. The subway system was first introduced in Japan in the early 1920s, with a single line connecting two of the main areas of the city, Asakusa and Ueno. As it started growing and expanding, the War kicked in, with the devastating results it came with, and this inevitably blocked the development of the subway network. By the 50s though, as Japan was recovering and speeding towards the future, the construction of the subway in Tokyo, seen as crucial in the evolution of a metropolis aiming at becoming one of the main productive poles in the World, started again, but the National central government was not able to sustain all the necessary expenses, as many others were needed in that moment. So, private companies took over, relieving the government from the organizational and monetary expenses. Also, private companies owned subway lines (as still some of them

were managed by the central government) proved to be way more efficient, making big profits, and re-investing them on the development of the lines and trains, making the lines more and more efficient. This choice proved to be successful, and guarantees nowadays probably the most advanced subway system in the World, an essential device for such a city as Tokyo.

The Government of the Metropolitan area of Tokyo manages, partially and not in economic terms, the main subway lines of the city, but private companies have the biggest share of power in their administration.

For example, most of these companies are owned by financial groups, holding department stores, hotels, construction companies; this peculiarity led to the concept of stations not only as places for transportation, but as collectors of activities, including restaurants, hotels, shopping malls. It is not rare to see people going for shopping in Shibuya station, or in Shinjuku.

The highways crawl across Tokyo as big snakes, in the thick forest of towers. The cars and trucks speeding on them, hiss over the heads of people walking on the ground. Sometimes, they get down, and intersect with the low-speed channels of the city.

The streets in Tokyo deserve a different analysis, due to the extreme diversity that characterizes them. First, it is helpful to understand what the Japanese conception of the street is: especially in modern times, streets are considered exclusively for their functionality. In Tokyo, streets are nothing but devices that ought to take people from one place to another, usually being one place home, and the other the workplace, and they have to do it as fast as possible. Streets don't have a beginning or an end, they are not defined, so they don't have names, but an alpha-numerical system of classification, extended also to blocks and wards. The diversity I have cited before, was referred to the typology of the streets, and how they suddenly change. One street can go from having

three lanes to being a one way single lane road, with holes, dirt, no lights, and small houses, two floors maximum, pressed-up one against the other, forming a compact front almost falling over the street they face.

### *Topography*

A common condition that Tokyo shares with many contemporary metropolises of the world, is represented by the so-called urban gaps. When walking through Tokyo, as in many other big Asian cities, this aspect looks emphasized. The urban gaps are the most characterizing element of the urban shape of Tokyo, if there is actually one: one can walk around a small, local neighborhood, like Azabujuban, and after few steps, find himself, or herself, in a jungle where sequoias are huge skyscrapers, lianas are highways and electric cables, where the never-ending flux of people and cars absorbs the spirit. Both visually and physically, experiencing gaps might result disturbing, astounding, and at the same time extremely fascinating.

The topography of Tokyo has severely influenced the city and its development in the directions of the space. Geographically, as anticipated, Tokyo is often divided into *Shitamachi*, the lowlands, and *Yamanote*, the highlands<sup>8</sup>. During the Edo period, this topographical distinction was the base for the physical representation of a social hierarchy: in the highlands, there were the villas of feudal lords, *daimyo*, and warriors, *samurai*. On the lowlands, the common people had their modest houses. In modern times, this clear scalar distinction between shitamachi and yamanote has been maintained, both for a strong attachment to a glorious past, and to stress the typical topography of Tokyo. Nowadays, in the lowlands lay the houses of people. While climbing up the hills, one can sense immediately the scalar transition, finding all the high-rise skyscrapers of the city.

This physical transition has hard-to-define consequences on the visi-

8. Various Authors, *Tokyo Totem*, Flickr Studio, Monnik, 2015

9. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Polity Pr, 1992

10. Koji Nakashima, Representing Nature and Nation, in *Nation, Region and the Politics of Geography in East Asia*, Toshio Mizuuchi, 1999

11. Yoshinobu Ashihara, *Hidden Order: Tokyo through the Twentieth Century*, Kodansha International, 1992

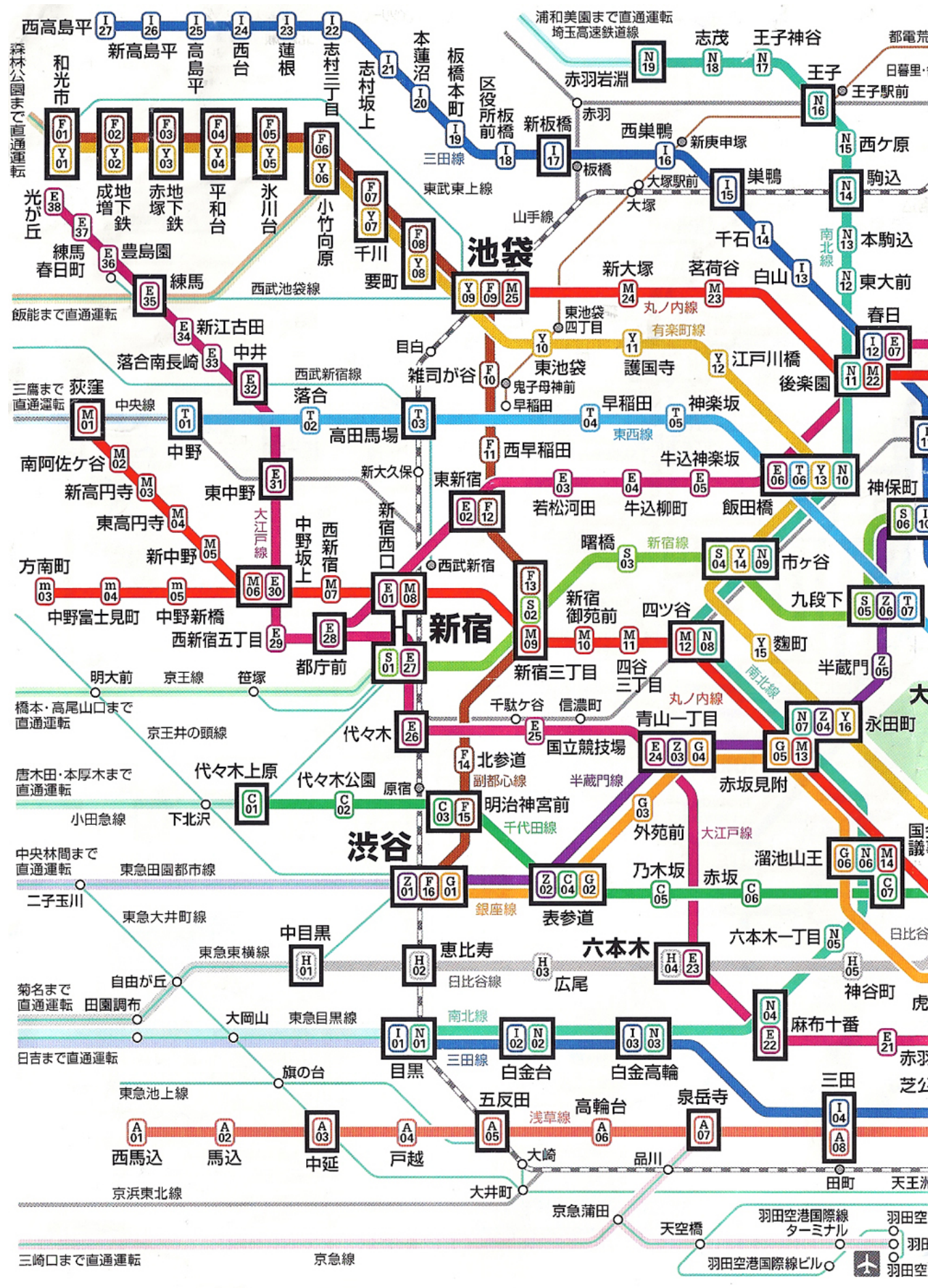
tors: the main sensation is confusion, disorientation. A sort of dizziness pervades the visitor, deriving from both visual and auditive, sudden change. The body is under constant stress in Tokyo, and needs time to get set to this peculiar condition of the city. Problem is that, once acquainted with a certain scale, the switch is behind the corner. One can never get used to Tokyo in this sense.

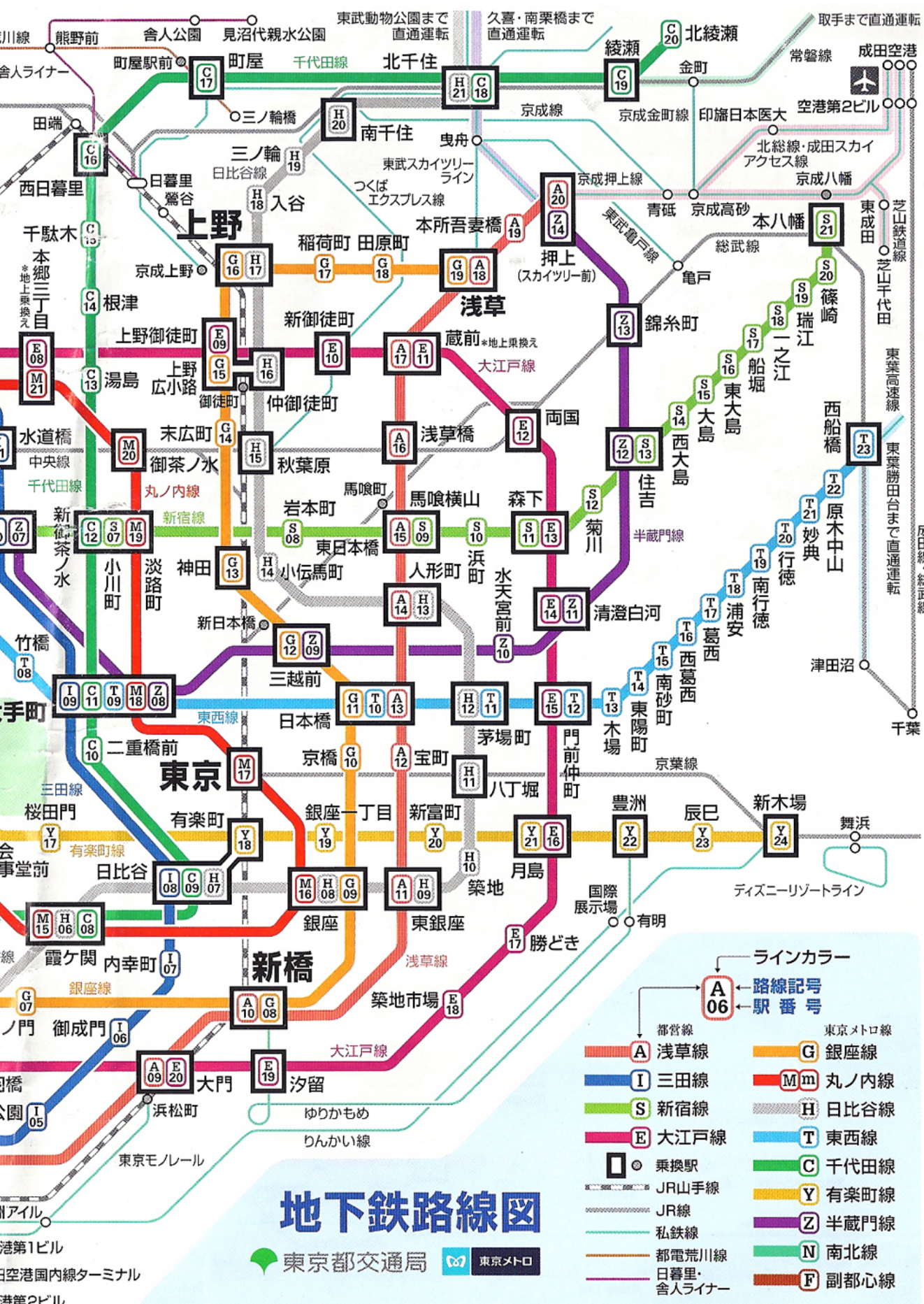
#### *Public spaces*

Jürgen Habermas states that in Europe, public spaces as we see them today, are 'representational spaces', spaces for the people to take part into public decisions regarding the city; descending from the greek agora, and from romans forum, modern public spaces still preserve that kind of inclination<sup>9</sup>.

In Japan, what left me puzzled first place, was the almost total absence of such spaces. The real point of this matter is that public spaces exist, but the Japanese conception of them is slightly different. First, there has never been the need, in Japan, for representational spaces, for spaces for public decisions to be taken by common people, being the Japanese society a extremely hierarchic society, where decisions were taken exclusively by the emperor, and by high political charges. Spaces considered as public, as pointed out by Koji Nakashima, in Japan, are not spaces for decision-making processes, but gardens and parks, such as *Meiji-Jingu gaien* or *Ueno-koen*, representing the 'non-political nature and political nation'<sup>10</sup>.

Tokyo, and Japan in general, is a largely privatized society. Yoshinobu Ashihara gives an interesting interpretation of Tokyo, in this sense: he describes the city as a huge house, remarking the privateness of it, where houses of the inhabitants are bedrooms, parks are family rooms, office buildings are parlors and harbors and airports are the entrances<sup>11</sup>.





# 地下鉄路線図

東京都交通局 東京メトロ

- ラインカラー
- A ← 路線記号
  - 06 ← 駅番号
- |            |         |
|------------|---------|
| 都営線        | 東京メトロ線  |
| A 浅草線      | G 銀座線   |
| I 三田線      | Mm 丸ノ内線 |
| S 新宿線      | H 日比谷線  |
| E 大江戸線     | T 東西線   |
| 乗換駅        | C 千代田線  |
| JR山手線      | Y 有楽町線  |
| JR線        | Z 半蔵門線  |
| 私鉄線        | N 南北線   |
| 都電荒川線      | F 副都心線  |
| 日暮里・舎人ライナー |         |

### *Toponymy*

12. Fosco Maraini, *Ore Giapponesi*,  
Corbaccio, 2014

Names of places, tend to reflect specific characteristics of the places they refer to, either physical or 'spiritual'. And in Japan, things in this sense do not differ. The cities, are named after events that historically happened there, or after their role in the Country, or again, after their physical characteristics. Tokyo, for example, is composed by two words, *tō-*, which means 'east', and *kyō*, meaning 'capital', and got this name when it became the imperial capital, during Meiji Era, while before it was called *Edo*, meaning 'estuary', due to its location on the outlet of the *Sumida* river.

This way of naming cities, is extended to all the 'places' in Japan. Parks, gardens, plains, mountains, rivers, forests. Every element of the World, both natural and artificial, has a soul, has a meaning, is important, and it has a name<sup>12</sup>.

In the city of Tokyo, the wards, indicating not only jurisdictional entities, but also physical beings, with their own borders and characteristics, have names referring to their 'role' or to their appearances.

*Shinjuku*, one of the main wards in Tokyo, where the Metropolitan Government offices are located, was founded, in the XVII century, as a station along one of the five main roads in ancient Edo, the *Kōshū Kaidō*, and since then, it always maintained this role in the city. The name is composed by two words, *shin-*, meaning 'new', and *juku* or *shuku*, meaning 'station', or 'inn', anyway indicating a place where to stop, to rest, during a long trip. So, literally, Shinjuku stands for 'new inn', or 'new station', and still nowadays it maintains this name, and this peculiarity, being one of the main stations in Tokyo.

The name of a place, is where the soul of it resides and survives across ages. We remember cities, civilizations, people, through their names, bypassing time and space.

13. Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*,  
The Noonday Press, 1992

A case where the story told by the name of a place regards its spirit, is the one of *Chiyoda*, the 'empty center'<sup>13</sup> of Tokyo, location of the imperial palace. Chiyoda can be literally translated into 'field of a thousand generations'. In this name, there is both a reference to its physical characteristics, and to its spiritual ones, being it the residence of the imperial family since Tokyo was named capital of the empire.

These were just two examples of how names of places in Japan have an enormous impact on the idea, on the image that those places inspire. But, as usual, the story behind names of places, has a controversial turn-up. As much as things, including places, have a soul, streets don't.

Following a law created in the post-war, the address system of Japan, with very few exceptions, has totally changed, assuming an anonymous conformation. The streets, the neighborhoods don't have a name, the piazza does not even exist, and so to orientate inside a city, the main resources are given by metro stations, famous buildings, shops, malls. In Tokyo, this element contributes in creating that feeling of total annihilation of the single human being, pushing you far and far away from anything or anyone around you.

This is another reason for one to not have to know Tokyo in order to get lost in it.

The address system is very efficient, in terms of productivity and speed of the transactions in the city. It is a reversed system, if compared to the western one, that starts from the bigger scale, the city, and ends with the smaller scale, the building, or even the apartment.

The streets, as said, have no name, but are indicated by numbers, as blocks and buildings. Only few main streets, in Tokyo, following the process of 'westernization', acquired a name, like *Roppongi-dōri*, the avenue that crosses the center of Roppongi, one of the most active areas of the city.

Again, Japan reveals itself, to the eyes of western people, in all its controversy; places, they have souls, they are alive, and the names reflect their spirit, carry it on through ages. But streets don't 'deser-

ve' names, being them undefined<sup>14</sup>, constantly changing, and being only devices, channels for the transition of people from one place to another, from home to work, and vice versa.

14. Livio Sacchi, *Tokyo-to: Architettura e città*, Skira, 2004

«...the largest city in the world is practically unclassified, the spaces which compose it in detail are unnamed. This domiciliary obliteration seems inconvenient to those (like us) who have been used to asserting that the most practical is always the most rational. Tokyo meanwhile reminds us that the rational is merely one system among others.»

-Roland Barthes-

15. Chie Nakane, *La società giapponese*, Tokyo, 1978

### *Community*

Tokyo lives on a (un)stable balance between destruction and reconstruction; it undergoes a constant process of evolution, of revolution of the laws that define it, and only the Japanese can survive these changes, thanks to their 'de-centered psychology', typical of the 'mollusk society'<sup>15</sup> they live in.

In Japan, the structure of the society is based on a vertical organization, founded on a principle of seniority. This system helps in defining the roles, both in life and work, without the need of checking the actual reliability of a member of the society; there is no chance of faking age. But when it comes to the smaller scale of a group, as groups are the base of the society, and of working activities, an informal organization prevails. Every member of the group has to be capable of substituting each other, there is only a formal hierarchy, but it is the group, or at a bigger scale, the community, that has more importance than the single. The idea behind this concept of 'mollusk society', is that the energy, or amount of work, produced by the group, is much bigger than the one produced by the single. The single, then, is left out, and this concept reflects on the general structure of the whole society.

### **Ephemera**

Japanese culture has always had a strong influence on my way of thinking and, especially these last years, I have been feeling very close to their idea of the ephemerality of things in life. This interpretation of life has always been part of their culture, and extended throughout the centuries, to all the possible fields of application, from philosophy, to architecture. In order to have the clearest image possible of Tokyo, because it represents a strong component in the interpretation of the city. But it is better to take a step back, and try to understand what this way of thinking consists of, where does it come from, and to what

extent it has influenced, and still influences, the everyday life.

The 'culture of ephemerality', as I would call it, is mostly based on two key concepts: *mono no aware*, 'sensitivity to ephemera', and *wabi-sabi*, 'imperfect, impermanent and incomplete beauty'. *Mono no aware* is an expression presumably from XVIII century, coined by thinkers from the *Kokugaku*<sup>16</sup>, such as Motoori Norinaga. It indicates the consciousness of transience of things in life, and it is translated into a constant state of melancholy, of sweet sadness.

*Wabi-sabi* is an aesthetic, the typical Japanese beauty based on the acceptance of impermanence. *Wabi-sabi* has had influence on many aspects of life, especially on art and architecture. One of the most commonly known application of this aesthetic, is the art of repairing porcelains, through the use of gold.

These two concepts, basic for the general culture of ephemera, descend from buddhist theories, imported in Japan in the VI century by the Chinese. The expression they come from is *anitya*, impermanence, in Japanese translated as *mujo*.

How this philosophy, this state of mind, can be useful to have a better understanding of Tokyo, and of its dynamics? Again Ashihara, gives another interesting interpretation of Tokyo, defining it an 'amoeba', an invertebrate being, capable of adapting to the sudden and constant changes of the contemporary world. The idea of transience of things, in this sense results helpful, it helps in not creating any attachment to things, to buildings, to predetermined orders, to structures, at least in a physical approach. The spirit of ancient Tokyo still lingers over the modern city, but the visitor won't perceive it visually, but in the small things, the 'hidden order' of the city.

16. *Kokugaku* was a philosophical and philological school of the Tokugawa period (1603-1868), that based all its work on redirecting scholarship onto Japanese classics, instead than on the dominating Chinese culture.



3. *state of the art*

1. *'Ho scoperto che questo mezzo meccanico, freddo come dicono, permette di rendere delle verità che nessuna altra tecnica può rendere'*, Mario Giacomelli

2. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Polity Pr, 1989

3. Gabriele Basilico, *Architetture, città, visioni*, Bruno Mondadori, 2007

### *Why Photography?*

It is a means to let other people see the things the observer sees, the way he or she sees them. It is a way of representing reality, or better, one of the realities<sup>1</sup>, one of the infinite possible. It is a contradictory device; it is a subjective operation of representation of the World, but with the 'presumption' of giving an objective image. It is a document. It is an image of mortality<sup>2</sup>, of specific, non eternal moments. In history, it has had the most disparate uses: science, war, art. Nevertheless, Photography is more like a device to bring justice. Bring justice to what is already there, the World. Executioner, accused, camera.

Paradoxically, subjectivization, though, is the key brick: point of view, color or black and white, tones, light. The light. It is an interior exercise; better, an exercise of internalization of reality. A long process, infinite, a constant research<sup>3</sup>.

Since its beginnings, it was clear, to everyone, the extreme power, and infinite potentialities, of Photography; so clear, it immediately arouse suspicion, astonishment, fear. And nowadays, despite technology, and despite everyone now owns, or has the possibility to own, a camera, it still looks like a frightful device, both ways. The one who is in front of it, afraid of becoming visible, immortal somehow, of putting his, or her, soul in front of the others; and the one who is behind it, terrified by what the shot is going to show, of which reality is going to be revealed to the eyes of the observer.

### **Leaves**

When I found out I was going to Tokyo, I knew that somehow I had to prepare myself, in order not to be totally drowned. I was fearing the impact with the tidal wave. I felt like I had to be ready to document, like I had a chance of getting out of it unscathed. But, as usually happens, fear goes along with excitement; I was about to witness something

bigger than me, bigger than everything I have ever seen in life. And Photography felt like the only way of recording sensations, interpretations, the only way of stopping time, and try to decipher the genetic code of that 'chained beast'<sup>4</sup>, ready to devour everything around.

But as I landed, I suddenly understood there was nothing I could do, I just had to let myself go.

«In India, nothing to see, everything to interpret, Henri Michaux said. In Tokyo, I thought: everything to see, nothing to interpret.»

-William Klein-

Tokyo has the capacity to always surprise the visitor. Werner Bischof, in 1951, went to Tokyo, under commission of Magnum Photos, to collect pictures of the aftermath of World War II, an event that brought great destruction and desperation to a whole Country, and that, in his opinion, had inevitably, and negatively, affected Japan<sup>5</sup>. What he found, instead, was a Country, united in rough times, working hard to build from nothing one of the biggest economic powers in the World. He witnessed the start of the ascent. There are themes, when confronting with the reali-

4. Haruki Murakami, *After dark*, Einaudi, 2008

5. Werner Bischof, *Tokyo 1951*, Magnum Photos, 1951

6. William Klein, *Tokyo*, Crown Publishers, 1964

7. Elliott Erwitt, Hiroji Kubota, *Japan*, W. W. Norton & Company, 2005

ty of Tokyo, that no one can escape, let alone a western observer: chaos, hidden orders, solitude, contradiction. What I found as a constant in the works seen, is that they all represent Japan, inevitably, from a personal point of view, or at least, whatever the premises, they tend to put a glance of interiority, especially in the images they reproduce.

In 1961, escorted by a group of government officials, William Klein visited Tokyo, a city that left in him, and on his future works, many indelible traces. For Tokyo, and Japan in general, those were the roaring years; Japan was on the verge for the ascent, those were the years of the first ever Olympic Games to be held in an Asian country, and Tokyo was on the way to become what it is today, a city constantly evolving. After the first days, when he had to stick to the rules the officials imposed him, Klein was able to escape, and drown in the many faces of the chaos of Tokyo; he met the main characters of the underground art movements, and had the chance to capture many images of the unknown Tokyo, or better, of the Tokyo that no politician wanted to show, closing the work with an emblematic picture of a demonstration against americans<sup>6</sup>.

Japan is a *land of contradictions*<sup>7</sup>, and Hiroji Kubota knew it. During the three years he spent travelling throughout his homeland, he captured the many contradictions of this hard-to-read Country.

A land not blessed by Nature, in terms of resources, but inhabited by people capable of making beauty out of what they have.

Japan offers so many keys to be read, so many shades. And Tokyo embodies them all.

Kubota, whose work has been recognized worldwide throughout the years, was able to collect all the aspects of his own land, with images able to move spirits, to represent reality, to make understand that beauty is in many places, many things.

In the rice fields, and in their workers; in the huge skyscrapers of the cities; in the (rare) demonstrations; in the festivities; in the neon lights; in Nature.

Another aspect that characterizes, voluntarily or not, most of the works about Japan, is the solitude and alienation, something I felt, and suffered, particularly when living there. In this sense, the work by Sirio Magnabosco is eloquent. It is not entirely set in Japan, but in public spaces of big cities of the World, giving a good spark for this work. In this work, the photographer captures people 'in-between a state of consciousness and dreaming'<sup>8</sup>. The collection is wide, and not all the photographs connect directly with the case study of Tokyo; but still, most of them depict situations I have witnessed, or lived in first person; people lost, physically in one place, but moving with their minds, escaping the fast pace of their lives.

### The work

In the chaos of Tokyo, a hidden order is recognizable, deriving from perfection of nature. Tokyo is an organic city.

The reigning disorder, in the urban system, is the result of the application of the growth rules of nature<sup>9</sup>.

Contradiction is what mostly jumps to the eye of those who look at works about this fantastic land, because it inevitably is what the camera captures. This work I propose, is a work on contradictions. It investigates the condition of contemporary metropolises, by analyzing a unique case, that incarnates at the highest level possible the peculiarities of big cities of a World that is under a constant, and unstoppable process of urbanization. It is a document, that witnesses an evolution, a non linear process, with all its paradoxes. A tale of a City that lives a dichotomy, between control and spontaneity. Controlled zoning, spontaneous growth. Controlled lives, spontaneous manifestations of humanity.

To testify the contradiction, I adopted the technique of the *dowser*<sup>10</sup>, eyes behind the camera, expecting the unexpected.

8. Sirio Magnabosco, *A Series of Unexpected Meditations*, 2007-2010

9. 'Japanese cities are like villages that have grown naturally from the power of nature', Arata Isozaki

10. Gabriele Basilico, *Architetture, città, visioni*, Bruno Mondadori, 2007

11. Gabriele Basilico, *Architetture, città, visioni*, Bruno Mondadori, 2007

To really find something meaningful for the research, it was necessary to accept that it would have been something not directly visible to the eye; an eye used, at the point, to the differences between western and Japanese culture. I had to be able to recognize the variations on the theme, the accidents, the short circuit in a system perfectly oiled, where unexpected situations are hidden by the massive movements. And to look for these peculiar situations, time was needed, patience to observe, incessantly, things and facts happening around, moving with the camera, choosing points that could prove to be the best seats, and observing, awaiting.

But, going around, walking, even without directly operating, has been mainly useful to understand that a work on Tokyo, needed to be focused on specific places, specific situations that could represent the themes chosen. So, taking the cue from Gabriele Basilico, who described the work of the photographer as an operation of *acupuncture*<sup>11</sup>, I chose five points in Tokyo, that looked crucial for my research. Photography can be seen as the work of a doctor, who needs direct experience on the body, but also experience from previous bodies he has seen, in order to understand the points of interest, to analyze and get to the correct diagnosis. A slow process. In the same way, in order to understand the dynamics of a city, or a place, the photographer needs to have had previous experiences, in order to know what to look for, or how to look for something, to know the points to touch.

The locations I selected (*Senso-ji temple, Mori Tower, Shinjuku, Shibuya, Ueno Park*), are all representing different thematics: religion, finance and administration, leisure time, transportation, nature. This is the background for a further analysis of these places.

4. *errare*

The previous chapter was useful, as said, in order to give to the Reader, a glance of what Tokyo, objectively, looks like, an idea of the city, of its shape, of its soul. But now, it is time to approach the actual work on Tokyo, a work based on personal experiences, on living the city from the inside, but always, inevitably as the outsider. I would like the Reader to feel as much as possible as I felt during my period there, and for this, I would like to introduce the 'device' I used to approach Tokyo: the walk, an extremely powerful means to explore, to take measures, to understand, to know.

Since the origins of human kind, wandering has been the primordial way of shaping the territory. The act of walking is the first human gesture each one learns in the first place; it is our way to get possession of what surrounds us, and helps us create a symbolic world of our own, made of signs, sounds, sights, that help us orient into the vastity of space.

It is an act of ancestral strength, and finds its roots in history, mythology, and religion. The figures of Cain and Abel give us a starting point in the analysis of it: the two brothers, first among humans, sons of Adam and Eve, are mostly cited when talking about fratricide, betrayal and haughtiness. Nevertheless, it is interesting to analyze what these two characters (belonging to all the main western religions) really represent. It is known that Cain was meant to be a farmer, while Abel was to become a shepherd. In this neat distinction between the roles of the two brothers, it is also clear the difference, intended in a spiritual way, between them. Being a shepherd has a tacit meaning: it involves being a roamer, a man mostly wandering through nature, followed by his creatures (which also reconnects to the figure of Christ as shepherd of men). The act of walking through nature intrinsically involves an artistic act, an operation of shaping territory and nature. Abel inevitably represents the figure of a lighthearted connoisseur of the world that surrounds him, being given of this chance, in opposition

to the sedentary life that Cain was meant to live, due to his job of farmer<sup>1</sup>.

This is extremely interesting, especially considering how the image of the wanderer has evolved through centuries.

The primordial architects were men, walking through valleys and forests, tracing paths, and, at a certain point of history, establishing dots in the landscape, placing motionless objects, ancestral architectures. Human beings used to be roamers in the first place; this was both a way of defending themselves from wild creatures, and of discovering and understanding the spaces they roamed through. Walking has been the first way of inhabiting planet Earth.

Explorations never stopped, even when life became sedentary. Among all the mythological characters that authors brought to us, the most interesting, and somehow human, we can find, is *Ulysses*. He is the Man among gods and semi-gods. After the war, he travelled the world, as no man ever did before. As wanderer of the known and unknown, he always represented the figure of the man thirsty for knowledge, smarter than anyone, capable of the most amazing deeds. So once again, comes back the image of the walking man as free man, acknowledging the unknown world.

Then ages passed, but walking has always been the primary resource for moving in the space; neither the advent of technology in the end of XIX century made the act of walking obsolete. Indeed, it is witnessed a re-emergence of it. A reinterpretation of the walking man; de-ambulation made as art. In this, it is crucial the contribution of artistic avant-garde movements, such as Dadaists, looking for a new form of expression, and recognizing in strolling around the city such a great potentiality for this achievement. This was the first time that the primal act of walking was used with an artistic goal, not as a simple source of inspiration (the best way to know the world and be stimulated by it has always been the slow and calm ob-

1. Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes, camminare come pratica estetica*, Einaudi, 2006

servation of it), but as art itself, making it not the medium, but the exitus.

After this first, innovative way of reinterpreting the idea of walking the city, and the space in general (surrealists made their flanerries in deserted, rural areas), many others started a reflection upon the new discovered potentiality of this basic gesture of the human being: the most famous interpretation of it is, probably, the situationist *derive*, theorized by Guy Debord in his 1955 book *Introduction a une critique de la geographie urbaine*, and completed in 1956 with the writing of *Theorie de la Derive*. In these two works, cornerstones for the newly found idea of walking, Debord poses the foundations for a new way of interpreting the space and its meaning. Through the *derive*, the *flaneur* (as Baudelaire, first, and then others after him, refer to a gentleman who strolls along the streets of the city, observing and feeling new emotions raised by what he sees and tries to understand) operates in order to 'undress' the city, the village, the landscape, apparently without any goal or sense, but instead with a strict and precise order of rules to follow.

Lately, a new movement, descending from the *Internationale Situationiste* of the Fifties and Sixties, referred to as *Gruppo Stalker/Osservatorio Nomade*, rediscovered once again the great hidden power inherent to the act of walking, that combines the artistic goal with social and humanitarian achievements.

In what way, and to what extent, all these theories influenced me and my research? I always felt that in order to really get to know a place, one has to really get lost in it; I know I'm not the first one to say this, and I won't be the last, but for sure, when I got to Tokyo the first time, I sensed that if I was to at least hope to squeeze through the wrinkles of such an overwhelming agglomerate of physicalities, I had to really lose myself in the shiny streets of the metropolis, in the mysterious and intricate world of the underground, and across the halls and the floors of the vertical, constructed communities that infest the many centers of Edo.

## The Experiment

Everything that has been told until now, is the setting for the experiment that will be described in the next chapters, culminating in the presentation of the actual body of the research, the photographs.

But, as it is an experimental investigation, it is necessary to proceed with the description of the three elements composing an experiment: the observer, the device and the phenomenon.

It has been stated before that investigating through photography, as Gabriele Basilico clearly explains, is similar to the work of the *dowser*<sup>2</sup>: first, delimitan area of action, and then, walk around this area looking for water. But the dowser, as the *operator*<sup>3</sup>, has to be trained first; he needs to acquire knowledge, and the experience, to recognize what he is looking for, while on the field of action. For what I was looking for, with this work, the training needed two faces: architecture, on one side, and all the satellite sciences and studies it goes along with, and photography on the other. The final goal, was to try to combine these two fields: what shapes the World we live in, and what helps in depicting and understanding it. In Architecture, the section is the most explicative instrument to describe a building, or an urban structure. So, in my case, I found it to be the best way to operate; I wanted to vivisect the creature called Tokyo, that from the underground, extended to the atmosphere. To the act of walking to understand, to find something, I added a device, the camera, to record and witness what I was trying to explain. To describe technically the device, I quote Barthes: ‘... Photography is at the intersection of two quite distinct procedures; one of a chemical order: the action of light on certain substances; the other of a physical order: the formation of an image through an optical device’<sup>4</sup>. Technology has evolved in every field, and in Photography it is possible to say it has made big jumps forward, with the introduction of digital cameras, and all the devices to work with digi-

2. Gabriele Basilico, *Architetture, città, visioni*, Bruno Mondadori, 2007

3. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, The Noonday Press, 1989

4. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, The Noonday Press, 1989

5. Livio Sacchi, *Tokyo-to: Architettura e città*, Skira, 2004

tal images. But the elements involved in the process of formation of an image will never change: the light, the camera, the object. Photography is universal; it is up to each operator to draw its own part of energy, to put its own interpretation, its own point of view, on the things of the World. It is a violent process, for it fills the sight of the one who looks at a photograph, and nothing in it can be transformed. But the mind is the key to free the interpretation of what is depicted.

Tokyo might be the best example of *City of Situations*<sup>5</sup>. Everything is placed casually, apparently, but following an unknown, or maybe simply undiscovered, supreme order of ideas, that I felt like trying to unveil and understand. According to Purini, in all the cities of the World, one can really get lost only once he or she knows the streets, the places, once there's an act of identification. But in Tokyo, he says, the sensation is different from the beginning: immediately, the visitor is crushed by an incoming and uncontrollable wave of flashing lights, of wild creatures with a soul of concrete and steel, monsters with the face of millions of people reflecting on the glass facades that extend to the limit of the sky. They conquered the ground, with streets and walkways that stretch between the borders of the megalopolis (do these borders really exist?); the underground, with snakes crawling along miles and miles of tunnels, devouring the core of the Earth from the inside. And now they want to build the cities in the sky (Arata Isozaki, with *Clusters in the Air*, and the Metabolists already thought about this in the Sixties). This is what really captured my attention, among everything this Place has to offer to an observer of facts. But I reached this point, where I decided what to experimentally investigate in the world of constructed realities, only by roaming on the streets. While I was lost (and not only *in translation*), I was not trying to oppose myself to this feeling. I wanted to be lost, and among the controlled chaos that surrounded me, I found interesting the idea of looking for an order in the *constructed situations*<sup>6</sup> they created with astonishing ability. Therefore, the second element of the investigation are the so-cal-

led constructed situations, a concept developed as one of the points of the vocabulary of the *Internationale Situationniste*: ‘a moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events’<sup>7</sup>. In Tokyo, as part of the contradictions the city carries with itself, there are many constructed situations recognizable, opposed to the idea of a spontaneously grown urban system. I tried to locate the most relevant ones, for different reasons and with different outcomes, and to analyze them as the result of the development process, leading to the inevitable derive of modern metropolises.

From this point on, as usually happens, a series of unpredictable stimulus came to me, and the work started to enter a more complex road: there was the need to add more, and this addition stood in the idea of analyzing how people reacted to these constructed situations. As will be better explained in the next chapters, this work is set to be a tale of a city, intended as the people living in the physical space, looking for its own spaces.

After all, we are all humans, and we all have primordial instincts. Architects and planners can design and predict as much as they want, but will never be able to control human instincts.

6. Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City*, The MIT Press, 1999

7. *Internationale situationniste*, n. 1, Paris, 1958





chaotic.overwhelming.cryptic.flattering  
slippery.elusive.alive.vertical.layered.complex  
shiny.grey.flashing.reflective.heavy.fast.banal  
s h o w y . t a c k y . k i t s c h  
n o w h e r e . a n y w h e r e . g l o b a l . i n t r o v e r t e d  
b i z a r r e  
c a r t o o n i s h . l o u d . s i n u o u s  
l i q u i d  
s m o k y . h y p o c r i t e . m o d e r n . a n c i e n t  
e p h e m e r a l . b o r i n g . a n i m a t e d  
c a l m . u n f o r g e t t a b l e . f o r g o t t e n . s a f e . d i r t y . d e m o n i c  
a d v a n c e d . t e c h n o l o g i c  
o v e r l o a d e d . r e s t r a i n e d . o v e r - r e g u l a t e d . d e e p . h i g h  
t a l l . e x t e n d e d . f l a t . f r a g m e n t e d . d e s t r u c t i v e . g r o w i n g  
v a n i s h i n g  
c o l o u r e d . p l a i n . g r o t e s q u e . v a r i o u s  
s t r a n g e . e r o t i c  
u n p l e a s a n t . f a k e . l o n e l y  
d u s t y . b i g . l o c a l . h o l y . w o r k i n g . p l a s t i c k y  
f e r r o u s . n a u s e a t i n g  
b e n d i n g . b l e n d e d . r i g i d . c l i n k i n g  
a w a k e . d r y  
p a n t a g r u e l i c . e x p r e s s i v e . w e t  
b l a n k . s p o n t a n e o u s . m a d  
**c o n t r a d i c t o r y**

(LIQUID) TOKYO



5. *(liquid)Tokyo*

### A sense of emptiness

That's what I felt when I left Tokyo the first time, in January. The city fills you up, saturates your emotional vase, with an overwhelming, constant flux of energy, informations, lights. When one leaves Tokyo, especially after a long period spent there, the sensation that your perception of spaces, of life in the cities, has changed, somehow, forever, prevails. The experience that this place of contradictions offers to the visitors, that dare to adventure the metropolitan jungle, is something that no other place will ever offer.

I will not talk about the history of Tokyo, how it evolved, and grew into what we can see today. This is not a didactic work. This is an investigation on the city, a personal view, focused not on a research for ancestral reasons for Tokyo to become what it is today, but on understanding the present situation of the contemporary city, with a spotlight on peculiar situations. There's a reason for me to refer to the case studies I chose - and that will be the main subject of the photographic corpus - as 'situations.' As stated in the introduction to this work, I found to be extremely appropriate, to define Tokyo, the expression *City of Situations*. The idea behind this expression is based on the 'growth diagram' of Tokyo, if we can talk about something like this. Tokyo, briefly, has, basically, no urban planning rules, and this created the conditions for an uncontrolled, spontaneous expansion, along the three (sometimes four) dimensions. This spontaneity reflects somehow what the Situationists were expecting from a city. But as said, Tokyo is contradictory, and as opposed to this condition of unconstrained construction and growth, there are points in the city into which all the functions converge. Accumulations of functions. Cities in the city. *Constructed situations*. And after all this, there is, as usual, the human component. It is commonly known that Japanese code imposes a strict acceptance of the rules of the system, an extreme commitment to the general cause, of the family, of the company, and of the Nation. But after all, we are not machines, we are humans, and as humans we all have natural instincts (most of them deriving from the animal

part of our spirit), including, for example, the will of aggregation. My aim is to tell a story, a tale of a city and its inhabitants, looking for their own places in an unfriendly environment; I want to tell my experience, my thoughts and reflections, developing, in the meantime, this concept, through a series of assertions and hypotheses, that await to be proved wrong, but that can be taken as good, because as I said, Tokyo is mainly a *City of Contradictions*.

### A tale of samurai, manga and Hokusai

During my stay there, I kept for myself a small diary, where I used to collect the impressions I had during my walks around the streets of Tokyo - sporadic, I have to say, the first time; continuous, the second time. I've always been interested in the Japanese culture, and always looked at it with an extreme admiration; I grew up with the myth of the Nature and the Divinities that inhabit it; with the image of the *samurai*, and his code of honor, *bushido*; with the fascination for the oneiric vision of the world in the paintings of *Hokusai* and *Hiroshige*; and with a passion for manga, the famous - and traditional - Japanese comics, filled with (super)heroes, big robots, and nasty and ugly monsters. Of all the things I just cited about what I always loved about Japan, manga culture is what - probably - influences the most today's life in Tokyo. I know this might sound reductive for such a complex culture, or somehow amusing, but it is like this. I am not simply referring to the fact that everyone - and I mean it, regardless of age, sex and status - reads comics. Manga have a proper influence on many aspects of the life of the people from Tokyo, especially those belonging to the new generations (mine included). It is a cultural, but mostly social, phenomenon, with evident repercussions on the population. I have one clear image in my mind, of a Sunday roaming in Odaiba, the main island in the Tokyo Bay area; Odaiba - sometimes referred to as simply Daiba - was built in the XIX century as defense against maritime forces. During the years it evolved, becoming, for example, an industrial zone, due to the presence of the harbor, and, most important, one of the areas for the experimentation of Metabolists (Fuji TV building by Kenzo

Tange is here). One of the best shows that Tokyo has to offer is sunset on Odaiba, as seen from the *Yurikamome*, the elevated monorail that crosses the island. The view of the lights of the factories turning on, the reflection of the red sun rays on the shining glass facades that populate the place.

I was roaming through Odaiba: no one was around, except for small - but numerous - groups of teenagers and university students, dressed up as characters of manga, taking pictures in embarrassing, but extremely expressive, positions, typical from their favorite comics. This represents an extreme case, but one can find the influence of manga anywhere, from the smallest and most insignificant elements, to the greater scale of events. Commercials, advertisements, instructions, signs in the subway. There are specific hotels, where one can rent a room, and get access to an infinite collection of the most disparate manga.

It is better though to proceed with caution and order into this narration, because the themes to talk about are vast, complex, contradictory; they perfectly reflect the city itself.





## Spazi(o)

When I first started thinking about working on Tokyo, I had another topic in mind that captured my attention: the Japanese conception of the public space, in relation to the Western tradition. My first idea was to compare, always through the aid of the photographic means, the public spaces in Tokyo, and the public spaces in Milano, and then analyze the differences, both in the way they are conceived - in terms of architectural design - and in the way people relate to them, how they behave in them and how they use them. So my attention was focused, for a full month, on the observation of the social behavior of the population of specific areas in Tokyo, in relation to the spaces they spent the time in, when they were not in their alienating offices, or in their tiny apartments - things that draw most of the lifetime of an average Japanese man, or woman.

The first thing that stood out to me, was that there's a substantial, cultural difference in the concept of City as we - referring to western people, as still, this cultural separation is strong - mean it. The city of Tokyo is more similar to a living organism, it is in constant growth, and its main goal is productivity<sup>1</sup>. It is like a big factory, where everything is functional, and there is (almost) no room for leisure spaces. What in our western - and Italian in particular - culture is a focal point in the *shape of the city*<sup>2</sup>, *la Piazza*, located traditionally in front of the cathedral or the town hall, a place for commerce, for relations, for loves or fights, a place for spontaneity, doesn't exist in the Japanese tradition. It is a largely communitarian society, whereas community has to be intended as different from public. Each human being has to serve the cause of the Nation, whose supreme value overwhelms everything else.

1. Fosco Maraini, *Ore Giapponesi*, Corbaccio, 2014

2. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *La Forma della Città*, 1974

### Story of a City in search for its spaces

It has been now stated that Tokyo is no place for leisure in public. The cultural absence of the concept of public spaces, such as the *Piazza*, makes it the farthest place, in cultural terms, from the western world. But as said before, people are still humans, and even though usually disposed to follow rules, both written and unwritten, of life in the city, sometimes those natural instinct of human-beings pop out, and one can tell stories of men in search for (sometimes creating out of nothing) their own spaces in the hostile monster called Tokyo.

Despite concrete and steel are devouring day by day the Metropolis, Japanese culture professes a strong relation, based on worship and respect, with nature; while walking, it is not rare to see, right across the street, a blot of green, being it a small garden, or a forest. Shintoism, one of the two main religions in Japan, has a strong component of mysticism in nature: the reason it survives in modern ages, resides in the fact that nature is intended as Universe, which is an entity that includes also the artificial creations of human beings, such as cities. But still, Nature itself has the main role, as *Kami*, the spirits, inhabit trees, rocks, water, sand, wind, fire. Together with forests, rivers remain untouched by humans. And along rivers, is where humans of Tokyo find their spaces, for leisure, training, tanning, picnicking some of them for living, like homeless, usually ghosts in the city. On the way to Yokohama, there is a river called *Tsurumi*; from the train, while crossing the river, I noticed (not like it was unnoticeable) large groups of men, women, children, enjoying Sunday activities on a wide, flat green area, extending on both sides. But that segment of the *Daini-Keihin* line, goes across a suburban, somehow rural, section of the huge metropolitan area of Tokyo. What's more intriguing in this sense, is the area that runs along the main river of Tokyo, the *Sumida* river, that crosses the center of the city, flowing into the Tokyo Bay. It flows into a totally urbanized area, with skyscrapers all around; but still, the two sides of the river host green areas, filled with flowers, gardens, trees, promenades. The times I have been there, not many peo-



Un è capitato spesso  
di perdersi a Tokyo  
in realtà non mi sono  
mai trovato solo sempre  
stato di spesso senza  
nozioni su quali fosse le  
vie di case e di quale  
fosse case ti quarchi  
intorno sei sommerso  
da ogni genere di infor-  
mazione e quando  
di colpo tutto ciò svanisce  
nelle zone morte delle  
città ammetto che ce  
ne siano solo un profondo  
senso di spaesamento  
che va ad aggiungersi  
sommerso al costante  
senso di disorientamento  
facendoti sentire a  
casa

Il modo di vivere gli spazi  
o semplicemente il non  
vivere la cosa quello  
spazio nel tempo interstiziale  
tra la sveglia al mattino  
e il bagno calolo delle  
rice tutto quello che si  
frappone a questi due momenti  
rappresenta la vite degli  
spazi delle città pubblici  
di spostamento orizzontale  
verticale diagonale non  
esiste una direzione e un  
piano unitari Tokyo è  
come una grossa nuvola  
carica di elettroni  
impazziti che definiscono  
lo spazio che occupano  
col loro movimento  
movimento energetico  
lo spazio pubblico non  
è pubblico e non è uno  
spazio è una nozione che  
non esiste e prettamente  
occidentale e summa

ple where around, because of the cold wind that constantly blows, from the sea. Or maybe because in the city, people get lost in the streets, in between the house, the office, the Izakaya (Japanese cheap pub), and don't get the time, or the instinct, to take their minds off the routine.

### Tokyo crossing

There's few things that are not supposed to be on the pages of traveler's guides, but became with time focal points of the Tokyo experience. One of these is Shibuya Crossing, the gigantic, overcrowded crossing in front of the Shibuya station, that appears in every movie about Tokyo, and that is a sure witness of every visitor of the city; but I have the feeling that this single case is just one representation of a widespread phenomenon, which I call *Tokyo crossings*.

Truth is, this is not a phenomenon restricted to Tokyo. The idea behind this typology of crossings was developed in Canada and the US, in the 40s, and it is called *pedestrian scramble*. The concept is to freeze the car traffic, coming from all directions, in a specific node of the streets system, recognized as a critic point for the pedestrian's traffic of a city; in this way, people moving by feet are allowed to cross the road following any trajectory, in total safety, and maximizing the time for their movements.

It is a device used worldwide, but still in Tokyo it is largely used in many parts of the city, as opposed to other cities, where it is focused in one nodal point. This fact derives from the multi-centered nature of Tokyo: Chiyoda, Shinjuku, Roppongi, obviously Shibuya, and other wards, are all crucial nodes in the traffic system of the city.

As stated in the previous parts, Tokyo is the *City of Situations*, because of the spontaneity of its growth. And spontaneity is the main characteristic of the crossings throughout the whole city. What strikes me the most, is that this spontaneity is not structural; it depends on the crossing itself, on its composition, but it is mainly caused by human behavior, and by the need

of looking for the fastest route possible to get to a specific point. If one had the possibility to record every movement of each human in the space, in between the borders of the crossing spots in Tokyo, the resulting diagrams would be amazing. People simply follow their instincts, and for those 30 seconds, necessary to get from one side of the road to the other, they seem to forget any systemic rule, any behavioral code, any regulation, and just cross as fast as they can, caring only not to cross paths (and possibly hit) people standing in their way. The crossing points resemble, both physically and functionally, the grinds of the big Tokyo machine.

### **Pachinko!**

#### *The horror.*

One of the distinctive traits of Tokyo, are the sounds. While walking through the streets of this big machine, there is an amazing variety of noises, most of the time disturbing noises, of huge screens with eloquent advertisements of phone companies, from the cars and trucks speeding on the highways that run like veins through the body of this big monster, from policemen warning you not to cross the street with the red light on, from vendors, restaurants, kids, groups of teenagers, music in the mall, giant robots, karaoke, sports' fans, honking cars, rolling bikes, chats, guitarists, dogs, trains, the subway, airplanes. But if it was to be said one, representative noise of Tokyo, the most disturbing and the most distinctive, it is *pachinko*. *Pachinko* is a slot machine-type game, that started its diffusion in the immediate Postwar. The period is not casual: pachinko serves as means to forget, nowadays as when it was invented. Postwar for Japan has been, probably, the most traumatic era of its history, and the population needed something to keep their minds busy. The trauma of such a resounding defeat pushed the people to extreme acts: in front of the Imperial Palace, there is a vast void, where people used to gather for celebrations, or to show support, during World War II, to the military effort; after the loss, and the Bombs, it became the place for contestations, and for mass suicides, an expiation for the humiliation of the de-

feat. *Pachinko* was one of the ways for the government to make people forget, and maybe to make themselves forget. Since its birth, it has always been associated to *Yakuza*, the (in)famous Japanese criminal association, born itself during those harsh years. But, despite its illegality, also *Yakuza* was supported by the government, for its help in resisting to the American invasion, as it was considered at the time. In any possible way, Japan was trying to survive to the hardest times they had to face.

Sliding doors. Several long aisles. Lines of comfortable seats. Stewards and hostesses. Alien faces staring impassibly at metallic balls dancing behind glass. A terribly deafening sound. When the doors open, even by simply passing in front of a pachinko parlor, there goes the roar of those soul-eating machines. 'Professional players'<sup>3</sup>, as they enter the linear rooms with loads of cold coffee and food for long, alienating sessions, look like ghosts; they move from one machine to the other, from parlor to parlor, seeking luck in this diabolic game. It won't bring them any glory, or money, but what they are looking for, and will always be looking for in those metallic, tiny balls rushing and rumbling through the vertical mazes, is a little relief from the schizophrenic life of the big metropolis. What amazes me, is that those huge, linear corridors, they are miniaturized, enclosed reproductions of the city: noisy, shiny, alienating.

### **Tokyo metrò**

Tokyo is a Universe. One, undefined, limitless place, many distinct, but intertwining worlds. There is the World on the surface; there is the World on the sea; there is the World under the surface. Beneath the ground, life has its own course. I firmly believe that one could live underground for years, as a whole, complete city system is developed there. When entering the subway stations, one can see banks, konbinis, cafes, restaurants, shops, postal offices, police stations, disposed along corridors extending almost all across the surface of the City on the ground. An intricate system of passageways, stairs, rails, generates an alternative reality where people can live on for years, without seeing the light of sun, getting tanned by the fluorescent lights of the lamps.

3. Wim Wenders, *Tokyo-Ga*, 1985

In Tokyo, there is no place you can not get lost into, and the underground makes no exception. Meeting there, for a gaijin, is almost as hard as meeting on the surface. The presence of the free wi-fi, makes it though one of the most popular meeting point for young bloods, without necessarily having to use the trains to speed across the long distances of the City. It is not rare to find students, either alone or in groups, with their eyes fixed on led screens, chatting, laughing, reading comics, waiting for someone, for something to happen, or simply waiting. The train comes; they don't jump in, they just don't care about what's going on around them. I have been part of this phenomenon myself several times; once, I took part to a small architecture competition with a group of friends, on a Sunday. Without a mobile internet connection, and no place to go, we decided to get into the subway, because the wi-fi there is free, and the deadline was at a time when everything around us was closed. We sat there, and with our laptops on the ground, completed and sent everything just in time. Around us, people came and went away, without noticing, as it is not strange to see this kind of things. Tokyo is a big Universe.

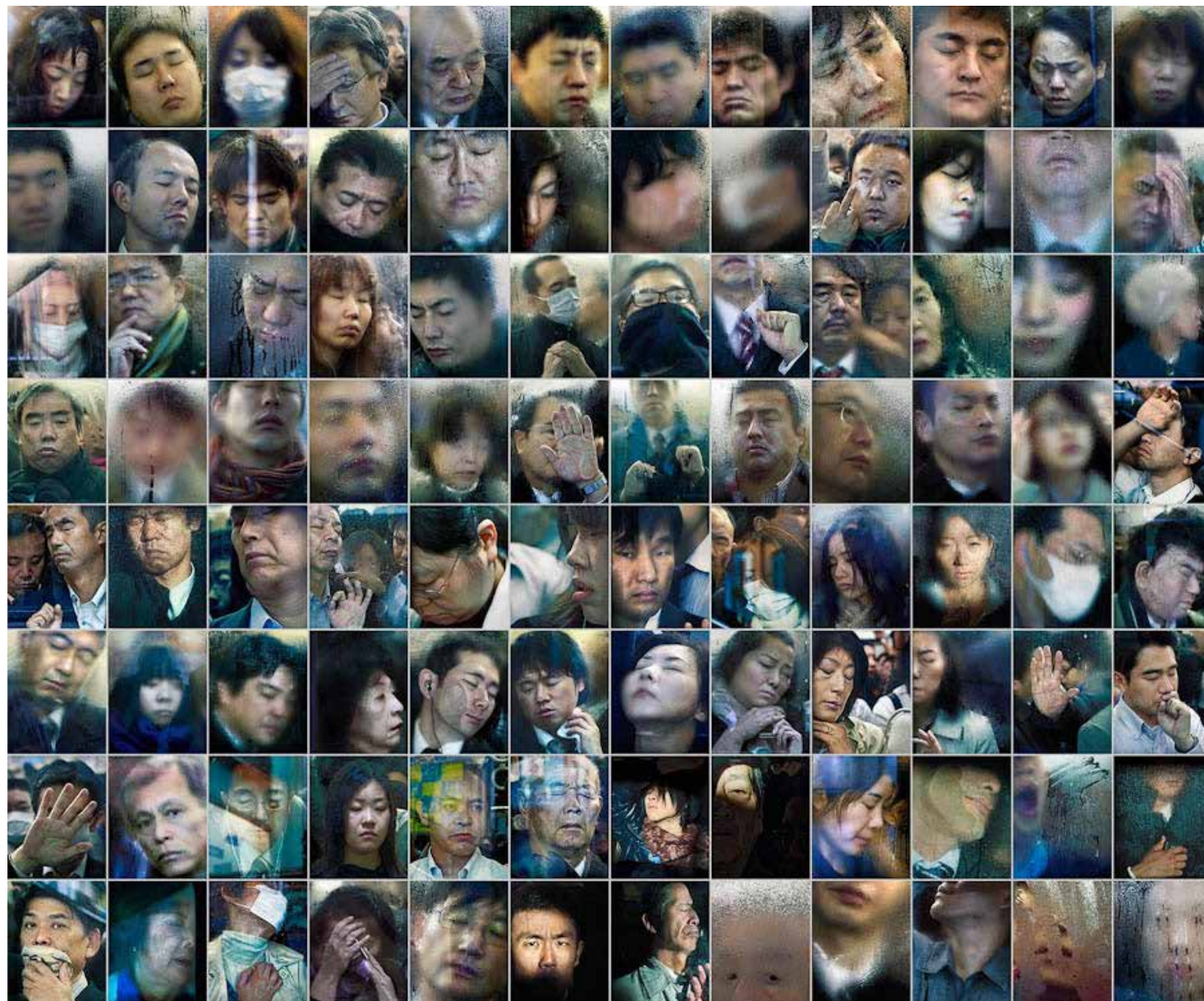
*Alienation in Tokyo - or how the single sacrifices its singularity for the bigger cause*

4. Monty Python, *Life of Brian*,  
1979

*Robots.* This is how I would describe the *Tokyotishes*, the people of Tokyo. It might sound banal, but that's exactly the idea that I, and many visitors before me, got of this amazing humans. When one walks around the city, the only thing he or she sees, is small human beings, running incessantly from one place to the other; there is almost no interaction with what surrounds them. They rush along predetermined circuits, they pack into subway trains, voluntarily or not, one can never tell. The moment they encounter an interruption, it is short circuit. Sparks come out of their heads, they need a reset, get back on tracks, and keep on going their way as soon as they can. There is no time to stop, to observe the world around, to understand what is going on.

Tokyo never sleeps, and the effects are visible. It is a tired city. People developed a mechanism called *multiphase sleep*; whenever there is a break (usually depending on subway's time of arrival, or transfer times on the subway itself), they close their eyes, and rest.

In the subway, it is not rare to sit among twenty people sleeping at the same time, both standing or laying on the seats. It is a tired city. With the rhythms they have to stand, would be strange if it was not. But the incredible amount of people living and working in Tokyo, creates a constant reflux, they are like waves: once one retires to the sea, there is a new one incoming, taking its place, and one can never tell if it is the one he or she saw before, or a new one. So the city never stops, as this is the image they want to give of it. A never-ending, process of growth everyone has to take part to. A monster devouring fields and lives, and everyone has to 'pay homage'<sup>24</sup> to it, to devote himself to this bigger cause, at any cost. The highest sacrifice a human can pay for something, is the total annihilation of the self, and that's what I feel people in Tokyo do, day by day. The bigger cause of the City and, by reflection, of the Nation, is too big, and doesn't leave any space to the development of the singu



*Tokyo Compression, Michael Wolf, 2010*

larity of each human being. Aliens is what they look like. When staring onto the glass facades, when looking out of the windows of the trains, when walking in the rain, when crossing paths with other people, when waiting in one of the infinite lines, take a look at their faces.

### Contatto

I am here writing as a traveller of the world, with no homeland. But I can't avoid making an exception for this paragraph. I was born in Italy, and as Italian, I carry with me a whole behavioral system based on the culture I was raised with. Several things in my way of approaching the others depend on this; a rich vocabulary of hand gestures (as Bruno Munari states and explains in his book), the physical and the eye contact, almost an unborn need, that helps in the definition of what we want to say, how we want to say it, and who we are saying it to. Japanese culture is poles apart in this sense. The physical contact is avoided as much as possible, sometimes becoming embarrassingly excessive, but in many situations is inevitable. The eye contact is non-existing. Staring at someone is considered as impolite, so whenever walking on the streets, one will see people turning their heads on the other side, embarrassed, and also a bit concerned. Both during informal chats with friends, or business meetings, the one who's talking will rarely stare into his or her interlocutor's eyes, and the opposite won't happen likewise. It is not part of the Japanese culture, and will never probably be. I used to spend a lot of time on the streets, simply observing life around me, taking shots of what was happening around me; it takes time, and attention to small particulars, so it wasn't rare for me to stare for an hour to one area with apparently no interest at all, but waiting for something to happen. Those times, people passing by around me, just stared at me as if they would stare to the weirdest monster they have ever seen, sometimes laughing, sometimes trying to catch what I was staring at, sometimes simply curious. The moment I turned my head towards them, they would flee, embarrassed, not because of my aspect, or because of me scaring them, but because they re-

cognized they were doing something against their cultural mindset. But I was able to notice something I would like to talk about in this paragraph. Kids. They live with spontaneity, their minds have not already been 'corrupted' by the handcuffs of Japanese mindset and culture . They do what they feel they want to do, whenever they want to, and they stare at you, interacting, not afraid of doing it, impatiently waiting for your response.

### Reflections on death

I have always looked at it from the height, repaired by the thick glass of one of the many towers that infest Tokyo, but never found the time to get into it. Or the force. But I always had the will: so during my second experience, I decided it was the right time to enter it, the cemetery of Aoyama. As one looks at it from the Mori Tower, where I actually used to have a look at it, what he or she perceives at first is a huge, green area, resembling a park. At a second sight, one can see clearly that it is not a park like others, but it is filled with grey, cold stones, all almost piled up one on the other. The Aoyama cemetery was erected on a piece of the lands owned by the Aoyama family, one of the richest and most important families of the Edo period in Japan. It is famous for three reasons, mainly: foreigners' graves, cherry blossoms, and Hachikō, the faithful dog, who awaited at Shibuya station for nine years for his dead owner to return, whose grave is placed in this cemetery, finally reunited with his beloved friend.

The access to the cemetery is very sober: a simple metallic gate accessible from a sidewalk. No monumental entrance, no stone, no decorations, and no access open space. Once entered, there's an immediate sensation of peace, given mostly by the fact that many trees populate the land, screening a bit the sounds of the city. The lack of monumentality of the entrance is covered by the (exaggerated) monumentality of some of the graves. But the thing that struck me the most is that this City of the Dead, a supposedly peaceful, ordered place, is nothing but a reflection of the City of the Living; not distorted, not upside down, but a clear, definite reflection. First of all, it is overcrowded, both by living and dead, living not ne-



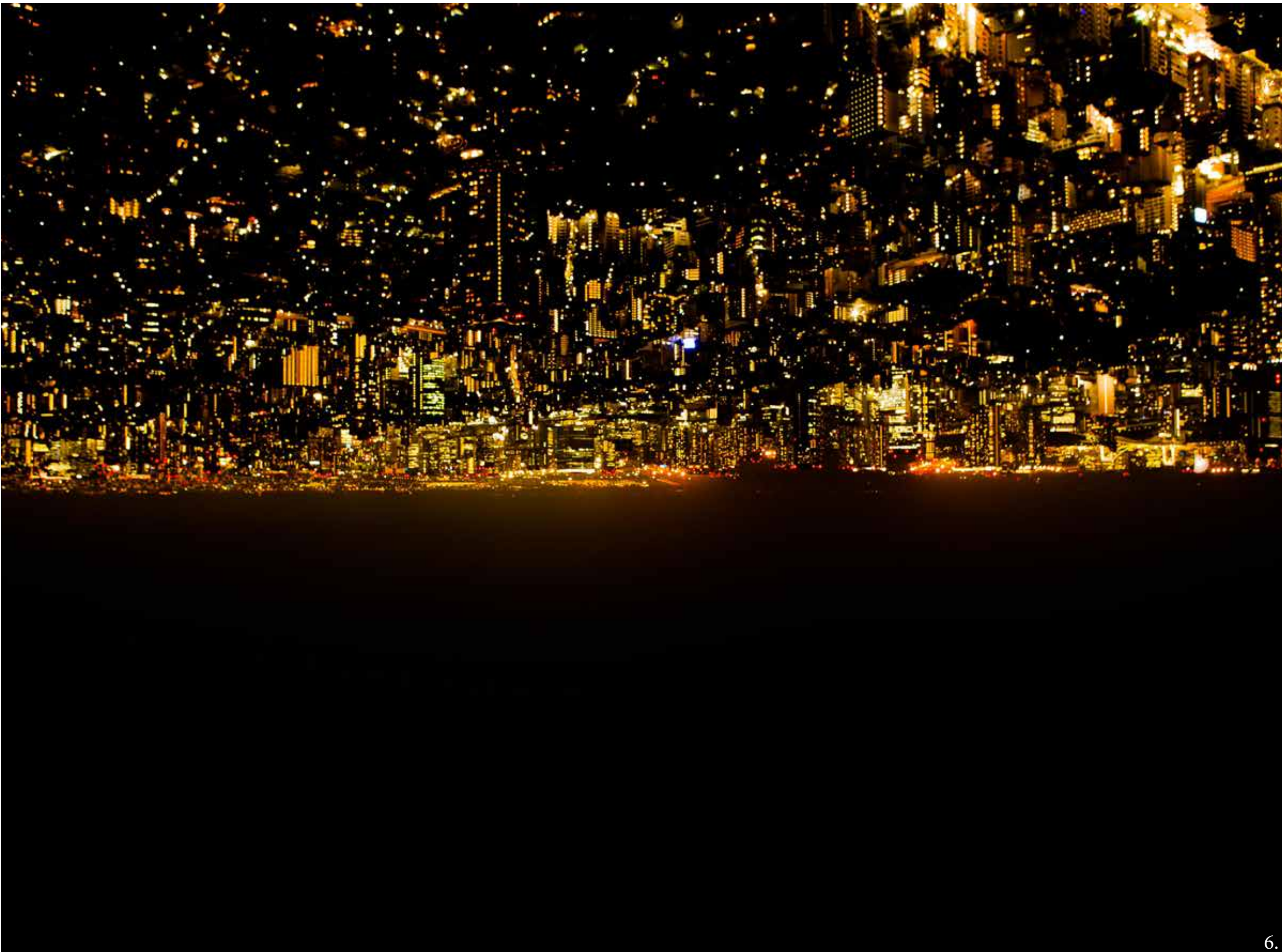
cessarily paying respect to the dead, but also taxi drivers looking for a peaceful place to get some rest, dog owners having a walk with their pets, parents with kids on bikes. There is a road, an actual one, for cars, that crosses exactly in the middle the cemetery. It is clear that the city cannot stop its flow, not even for those who seek peace after a chaotic life. The second thing is that, despite an initial will of giving an order by designing a grid to define each plot of land, the graves started to overlap one on the other, due to a lack of space, or a disordered mind. Exactly as in the 'real' Tokyo, the towers, the monuments to the dead, are disposed following no order, or an order of chaos, giving the same sensation of disorientation; sensation emphasized, once again, by the language. The stones are engraved with Japanese characters, and one loses itself not only in the world of chaos, but also in the world of signs, meaningless for those who are not initiated to Japanese writing and reading, like the one who's writing, and probably the one who's reading. In the pamphlet by Ettore Sottsass, *Foto dal Finestrino*, at one point the author shows a picture of a cemetery on his way to Merida, in Mexico; the small text that follows describes it as an ideal city, that the living designed for the dead; they wanted to give the dead the city that they won't ever have in the physical world. This clearly does not happen in the Aoyama cemetery. But I have been visiting several other cemeteries in Tokyo, and there is something that needs to be said. Every single one of them, gave me a feeling, that peaceful calmness I was not looking for in the city; but once found, I felt relieved. It was like a natural, physical and mental response to the overexcitement of life surrounding and embracing me, sometimes against my will. In those fields, covered with stone and wood, I found something that the city of the living never gave me, something that's meant to be given only to the dead, in the rumble of Tokyo.





### L'alba dei tempi

There it was, in front of my eyes, the image that struck me the most, on my last day. The City, closer to a legendary monster than anything else in the known World, now appeared in front of me, in all its horrible, terrifying beauty. Tokyo at night shows herself, she gets out of the ever-present fog that hides her during the day, puts on her best and most sparkling dress, and her most brilliant diamonds (or trinkets), for the epiphany to the astonished and confused visitors and spectators. The best seats for the show are probably on the last floor of the Mori tower, that suddenly becomes theater instead of being part of the exhibition. People look at it, stare at the glowing beast, and there go flashes, 'selfies,' *wows*, *oohs*, and all the imaginable signs of astonishment and admiration for being witnesses to this unique spectacle. The City at night becomes the sky, flashing with red lights of the towers, shining with the yellowish lights in the houses; even the smallest ones can take part in the show. While staring at it, I had the clear feeling that I was attending the Dawn of Time, only upside down: the dark Sky, saturated with brilliant stars, over the plain, dark, infinite stretch of the Earth. But Earth here is the Sky, and Sky is the Earth.





U S E R . M A N U A L

### *Analysis of the condition of contemporary metropolises*

#### Tokyo as case study

It represents an advanced phase in the evolution process of the big metropolises of the world; it incarnates all the problematics of the city, and it reached this stage thanks to its velocity, and to its organicity.

#### Analysis of the Contradiction of Tokyo

Organic urban structure, spontaneous and uncontrollable growth *as opposed to* creation of constructed situations, spaces where the use is designed and defined.

#### Analysis of the dichotomy between spaces and their uses

Understanding what a space is designed for, what are its characteristics, and how people relate to it, both in a conventional and an unconventional way, in their reference system.

#### Choice of the locations

It is based on the idea of 5 possible *dimensions* that define a public city anywhere in the World. Tokyo has then conjugated these characters, according to the needs of the modern Japanese society inhabiting the city.

#### Representation of the exceptions

The actual use that people of Tokyo do of the spaces granted by the city, despite the expected uses for each specific space.

#### Construction of an image of the City

As Tokyo is a City of Infinite Cities, it is necessary, in order not to drown in it, to build a personal image of it, made of several, in this case 5, dimensions.

#### Taming the City

The construction of an image of the city, is the final phase of the process of *taming* the City. As the Fox explains to the Little Prince, taming means to establish ties, and in Tokyo this is the only way of approaching it, creating images, finding the spaces, or rooms, for unique uses, in the Infinite House that is the City.

#### What is the city but the people?

6. *acupuncture*

“Architecture is the simplest means of articulating time and space, of modulating reality, of engendering dreams”

-Ivan Chtcheglov-

### 5 dimensions of a public city

As said in the introduction to this work, one of the main goals is to analyze the condition of modern metropolises, by studying what I figured out to be the most explicative case in this sense: Tokyo.

The peculiarity of Tokyo, as of many other Asian cities, resides in the velocity of the processes that characterize it; a velocity that brought it to be the most advanced city in the World, on one side, and the most chaotic and unique, on the other. Being Tokyo such a ‘rare beast’, makes it an extremely interesting case study, but also, somehow, a bet, meaning that there is no certainty in the fact that every metropolis will resemble Tokyo in the future, as well as there are good chances that it represents the inevitable outcome of the incessant urbanization process that characterizes the World of today.

But, being such a unique case, other than inspiring new means of investigation, to understand the unusual processes and events that define the city, makes Tokyo, on the other hand, a case that requires great caution, and an oculate choice of what to investigate, of what might turn out to be useful in order to get to the (un)expected results, without the risk of getting lost throughout the myriad of possible elements and interpretations lying over and underneath the surface of such a chaotic mass.

That is why, there has been the need to select peculiar circumstances to investigate; selected situations that could give a clear view upon the thematic that characterize, and have characterized in the past, every city.

In this sense, being Tokyo a test subject to understand the dynamics of the evolution of the cities today, I chose, again following the idea of Photography as *acupuncture*<sup>1</sup>, several focal points.

The resulting choices, can be seen as the outcome of a process similar to what, in informatics, is called *data mining*, a process applied to huge databases, that helps in retrieving what, technically, are called *nearest neighbor to a query hyperplane* (NNQH). For mortals, it is a process, based on specific algorithms that belong to the probability theory, that helps retrieving useful data for a specific query, without exhaustively scanning the database<sup>2</sup>.

Even though it is a method usually applied to informatic databases, it can be easily, and appropriately, applied to an urban system, and especially to a system such as Tokyo. An almost infinite database, that collects new data on a daily base, by constantly demolishing and re-configuring the idea of itself. In such a complex environment, with all its superimpositions, its evolutions, its specific dynamics, the chances of getting lost amidst the endless informations are very high, and the query might turn out to be non-productive.

It was necessary to focus on characters, or dimensions, that belong to many cities in the world, but that in Tokyo are conjugated following unique dynamics, deriving from the Japanese cultural and social set, that brought to unmatched outcomes: *religion, finance and administration, leisure time, transportation, nature*. These five dimensions are traceable everywhere in the world, as they are part of what defines a city. Every city has a financial center (*Mori Tower*), an area for leisure activities (*Shinjuku*), nodal points in the transportation system (*Shibuya station*), a religious pole (*Senso-ji temple*), and natural areas (*Ueno park*).

Let us consider them as colors, part of the general tone of the city, what happens when we turn them off? The city, inevitably, changes

1. Gabriele Basilico, *Architetture, città, visioni*, Bruno Mondadori, 2007

2. Grauman K., Jain P., Vijayanarasimhan S., *Hashing Hyperplane Queries to Near Points with Applications to Large-Scale Active Learning*, University of Texas, 2010

its nature, changes its general tone-set, and has to re-invent itself. In Tokyo, apart from the fact that each of these characters has several manifestations (clear reflection of the ‘mollusk society’, see ch. 3), turning one of them off would create imbalances anyway; but it is also necessary to take into account the inclination to re-configuration, that would probably lead to an immediate replacement of the missing part.

But how can photography depict the circumstances I have been talking about? What had to be the object of the photographs, in order to understand the evolution of the city in these peculiar situations? To solve this dilemma, and to create the base of this research, the work *Milano Downtown* came to help, both from a theoretical and a practical point of view.

As stated in the introduction chapter, the analysis of Tokyo is focused on the contradiction between two focal aspects of the city: on one side, the *organicity* of the urban structure, its spontaneous growth, deriving from its nature-based system. On the other side, the *constructed situations*, meaning spaces specifically designed for certain activities, where an overreigning, defined order is clearly visible, and where people living these spaces have clear directions to follow in order to accomplish their tasks or fulfill their needs; spaces where nothing is left to casualty. And the device of photography has been useful to depict these peculiar phenomena.

But again, what to show? What had to be the object? In this sense, *Milano Downtown*, and in particular the photographic research conducted by Giovanni Hänninen as introduction to the theoretical research, has been a main influence. It might be now interesting to understand in what sense this research can be considered as follower of the line traced by *Milano Downtown*, with all the differences between the case studies chosen, and the thematics represented.

*Milano Downtown* analyzes five subjects, that represent criticisms in the political and urban management of the city of Milano; five

projects of re-qualification that needed to be at the center of the debate for the urban transformations and the future of the city<sup>3</sup>. In a similar way, one of the purposes of this work is to create a debate about five criticisms, the five dimensions of the public city in Tokyo, recognized as focal points in a city considerably based on privatization.

As Ivan Chtcheglov states in its *Formulary for a new Urbanism*<sup>4</sup>, Architecture is ‘the simplest means to modulate reality’. This statement turns out to be very representative of the whole work, because it has been the spark to understand a phenomenon of contemporary cities: the *dichotomy*, in designing a space, between the expected use and the actual use, or ‘informal’<sup>5</sup> use of the space itself.

The contrast between these two concepts, is proper for every city: there are two ways of using a space that live contemporarily in it; one is the expected use, the use that the architects define in the design process of it, creating an order that orientates the events that take place there. But at the same time, there is a superior order of events, that take place according to the needs of people that live the space, the actual use of it, which is based upon the instincts, the necessity, the will to take back the space to do whatever of it. Somehow, it is the interpretation of it as a *situationist space*, re-connecting the singular case to the widest phenomenon of *situationist city*.

If this is the premise, that is understanding, through photography, the relation between the expected uses of a space designed for the city, and the actual use that people do of it, it becomes clear why there was the need to choose peculiar situations, with physical characteristics specifically designed, in order to find out the exceptions, and to understand the dynamics of these spaces, the way people actually relate to them, and take possession of them.

‘*What is the city but the people?*’, asks Shakespeare in his *Tragedy of Coriolanus*, through the voice of Sinicius<sup>6</sup>. The question now changes: instead of *what*, it be-

3. Massimo Bricocoli, Paola Savoldi, *Milano Downtown*, et al. edizioni, 2010

4. Ivan Chtcheglov, *Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau*, 1953

5. Fran Tonkiss, *Cities by Design. The social life of urban form*, Polity Pr, 2013

6. William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, 1605-1608

7. Gabriele Basilico, Stefano Boeri, *Sezioni del paesaggio italiano*, Art&, 1997

8. Gilles Clément, *Manifesto del Terzo paesaggio*, Quodlibet, 2005

comes *how* to show this dichotomy? How can I represent, physically, what has been stated in theoretical terms? In this case, another previous work came to help. *Sezioni del paesaggio italiano*<sup>7</sup>, has been maybe the main influence for the physical production of the research, starting from the formula that has been used.

As stated already, the section in architecture is an extremely helpful device in order to understand the dynamics of a building. And it can be reported in the field of photography, not only on a material way, meaning the visual approach to the space, but also in a conceptual way. To dissect means to dismember, partially, something, in order to understand the internal system, its network, its operating principles. In photography, there is not necessarily a practical parallel with the architectural section, but conceptually speaking, most of the time a photograph is a section; it is a deeper view into a peculiar, physical or sociological phenomenon, that is taking place in a specific place at a specific moment.

In the case of *Sezioni del paesaggio italiano*, the highlighting of the condition of suburban areas in Italy, takes place after a process of representation of analogous cases. Differences come out from similarities. This research, by contrast, is based on the representation of distinct cases, with different characteristics, but still, the idea of the sections to show the dynamics of each case is very strong, as the exceptions that take place following human behavior, become visible only when one is able to be *inside*, to live the space that is being represented.

#### *A City of infinite Cities*

Quoting Gilles Clément: 'The Third Landscape - an undetermined fragment of the Planetary Garden - *designates the sum of the space left over by man to landscape evolution - to nature alone*'<sup>8</sup>.

On a different plane, this process represents the formation of urban agglomerates, meaning both cities and cities in the city.

Let us consider a reference system made of three different environments, the City, the Wood, the Sea; each of these environments has its own inhabitants, whose natural place is the one they live in.

Citizens are meant to live in the City, and nowhere else; in the Wood they would be eaten by Wolves, in the Sea they would be eaten by Sharks. Wolves are meant to live in the Wood, as everywhere else they would be either eaten by Sharks, or hunted by the Citizens; Sharks are meant to live in the Sea, as only there they can survive. But if a fourth element enters this system, let us call them Non-Citizens, they wouldn't fit in any of these places; but they would find their own place in the intersection of the three environments, an intermediate space, where they would be able to build their own City. In this leftover space, Men would be able to create their own reality, capable of fitting their own needs for survival. It is a spontaneous process, at the base of the formation of urban agglomerates.

Similarly, people in Tokyo cut out their spaces in a City that represents contemporarily the three hostile environments of the previous example, and create their own Cities in the City, as instinctive survival tool.

As stated, the goal of my work is to represent the city of Tokyo through 5 dimensions, 5 typologies common to every city in the World. But the real deal of this work, is the construction of a process to build the image of my own city. Tokyo is made of many different cities; the visitor, as well as the inhabitant, has to create his own reality, in order not to drown in the ocean of blinding lights, obscure signs, crawling pathways. I wanted to tell the story of my cities in Tokyo, physical spaces, whose substantial, composing, matter, though, are the people, creating their own reference systems, their own sets of uses of the space, their own small cities. It is a City of infinite Cities, each one representing a personal interpretation.

This process is spontaneous, uncontrollable, and controversial, but an unavoidable tool for the survival in Tokyo, as in many other cities; on a larger scale, it is the process of creation of all the urban agglom-

merates.

In modern day society, moving from place to place has become a common practice; it is a World where fast and sudden changes constantly take place, a *liquid world*.

In Tokyo, this sensation of not feeling comfortable is emphasized by the physical places for dwelling, houses and apartments, for two reasons: either they are too small, with thin walls, never giving a feeling of real safety and privacy; or they are too far away from the working place, a common condition for people in Tokyo, due to the extension of the suburban area. These two factors push people to live outside their doors, to live the city, and to find in it those small spots of intimacy and comfort, their own rooms in an infinite house.

As protective shield against the feeling of loneliness and non-belonging to any place we visit throughout our lives, we developed a strong inclination to find our spaces of an ideal home, in the spaces of the Cities we visit; in a hidden spot in the park, in an ice cream shop behind a corner, among the bookshelves of an old library. We tend to re-create the image of the City according to our needs, our reference system, which is different for everyone.

«To establish ties?»

«Just that,» said the fox. «To me, you are still nothing more than a little boy who is just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you. And you, on your part, have no need of me. To you, I am nothing more than a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you *tame* me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world...»

-Le Petit Prince-

When the Little Prince met the Fox, on Earth, he asked her if she wanted to play with him, but was surprised by her answer: 'I cannot play with you, I am not tamed'. In the words of the Fox, taming means 'to establish *ties*', in order to become unique one for the other. In such a multiple reality as Tokyo, with infinite Cities in one City, each human being, has to transform it into something unique: it is a process of taming, that aims at creating a small, singular reality where to fit into, without getting lost, where to feel somehow comfortable, *at home*.

In this sense, it turns out to be useful to quote, again, Yoshinobu Ashihara: 'The City becomes a mammoth cluster of 'bedrooms' - he refers to the houses of people as bedrooms - interspersed with 'family

9. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Il Piccolo Principe*, Newton Compton, 2015

10. Yoshinobu Ashihara, *Hidden Order: Tokyo through the Twentieth Century*, Kodansha International, 1992

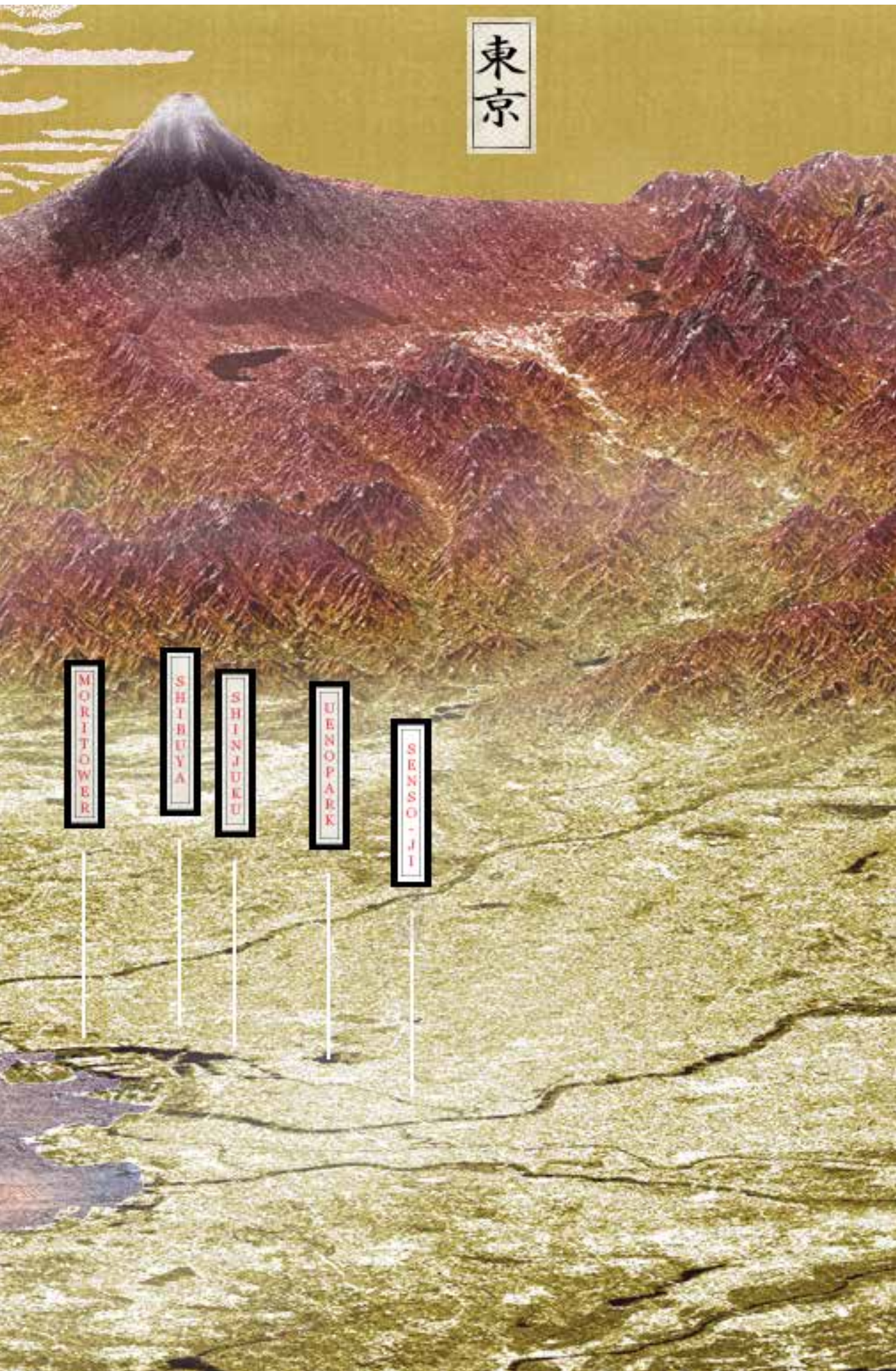
rooms' (parks), 'parlors' (office buildings), 'entryways' (airports, harbors), and the like'<sup>10</sup>. He basically describes the city of Tokyo as a house. So, it is possible to say that Tokyo is an *infinite house*, and people in Tokyo, in order to tame it, have to find their own places in it, their own rooms.

The creation of my image of Tokyo, made of the 5 dimensions, 5 cities I depicted with the 5 photographic sections, is an attempt to *tame* Tokyo, to find personal Cities, or Rooms in the Infinite House. And these Cities are not physical entities. The materiality of the City, the Architecture, is the setting, the scenography, and it tends to drive the uses of the spaces made of it; but truth is, it is the people and the uses they do of these spaces, that define them. By creating their own Cities, they reflect their choices in terms of the uses on the space itself, and create a personal reference system, which inevitably, though, influences the user itself. It is a mutual interrelation, a non linear process, that finally comes to the definition of infinite variations on the singular idea of the City; infinite as infinitely different are the interpretations of each inhabitant of the city, but still belonging to the 5 dimensions that characterize the public city of Tokyo.

I found myself in the situation of looking for places I could feel like being home, not necessarily succeeding. But still, looking for those exceptions, for glimpses of humanity, in places where a rigid reference system was imposed by Architecture and Urban Planning, brought me to understand that in order to feel comfortable I needed to build my own City, and I found this City in the behavior of human beings, of people living the spaces. The dimensions I chose are 5, and as said these are the characters I looked for in Tokyo, the Cities I built myself; but there is only one common variable to all these different Cities; human beings.



東京



MORITOWER

SHIBUYA

SHINJUKU

UENOPARK

SENSOJI



photographs



shibuya

### *Shibuya Station*

When watching a movie, short or long, about Tokyo, there is few things that it will show to observers; one of these things is, for sure, Shibuya crossing, the big grind of pedestrian Tokyo. Shibuya crossing has become now more an attraction, but still it is the external manifestation of an area where transition represents the main characteristic: I am talking about *Shibuya station*. Shibuya station is one of the main transportation hubs in Tokyo, with several subway lines, bus lines and national train lines departing from here. It is not a place where people usually stop, meet, chat. It is movement, transition, orderly chaos; stopping there, is not conceivable. But, as already said, many of the private companies owning the suburban train lines, are financial groups holding many services such as restaurants, shops, and general commercial activities. As a result, train stations are usually transformed into actual commercial centers. The spirit of places always remains though, and in Shibuya, staying still was always a controversial behavior, because it is a place of transition. The transition is in the people passing by, but also in the city. This is the place where I most sensed the idea of constant reconfiguration, where the sudden and 'violent' chan-

ges in the urban conformation were tangible. Trains, buses, taxis, all concentrated in a small spot in Tokyo, contributed in keeping this image of a moving city.

There is a story, about Elio Fiorucci, I once was told by a good friend of him, who went with him to Tokyo few times. Fiorucci was passionate about Japan, and he often went to Tokyo, both for business reasons, and to find inspiration in the people of the city, and in the city itself. One of his favorite spots was Shibuya Station, where he used to spend entire evenings, sitting on a corner on his own seat, observing people rushing from place to place. This story was useful for my approach with this place, but it also gives an idea of what Shibuya Station is, and how hard it is to find spots for stopping and observing, for waiting.

It is paradoxical to think that this is the place where the dog *Hachikō* waited his owner, and friend, *Hidesaburō Ueno*, for 9 years to come back, despite his sudden death during one of his usual travels.

I was looking for the exception, for people taking back possession of their place in the city, for people standing still, waiting, subverting

the imposed chaotic order; when these unpredictable and rare situations were manifesting in front of me, it looked like I was almost staring at ghosts, shadows lost in the crowd.

People rushing for their trains, or buses, could almost bypass the bodies of those who stopped there, like they were holograms, non physical images. I spent entire days, observing humans running incessantly, and waiting for them to stop, but this never happened; it seemed like those singularities waiting there, have always been there, motionless, static, rooted to the ground.

t r a n s i t o r y  
l i v e s . o f . t h e . e p h e m e r a l  
m o v e . a n d . d i e  
s t o p . a n d . b e . a l i v e  
l i k e . g h o s t s  
i n . t h e . l i g h t  
a . p r e s e n c e  
a l i v e  
o b s e r v e s





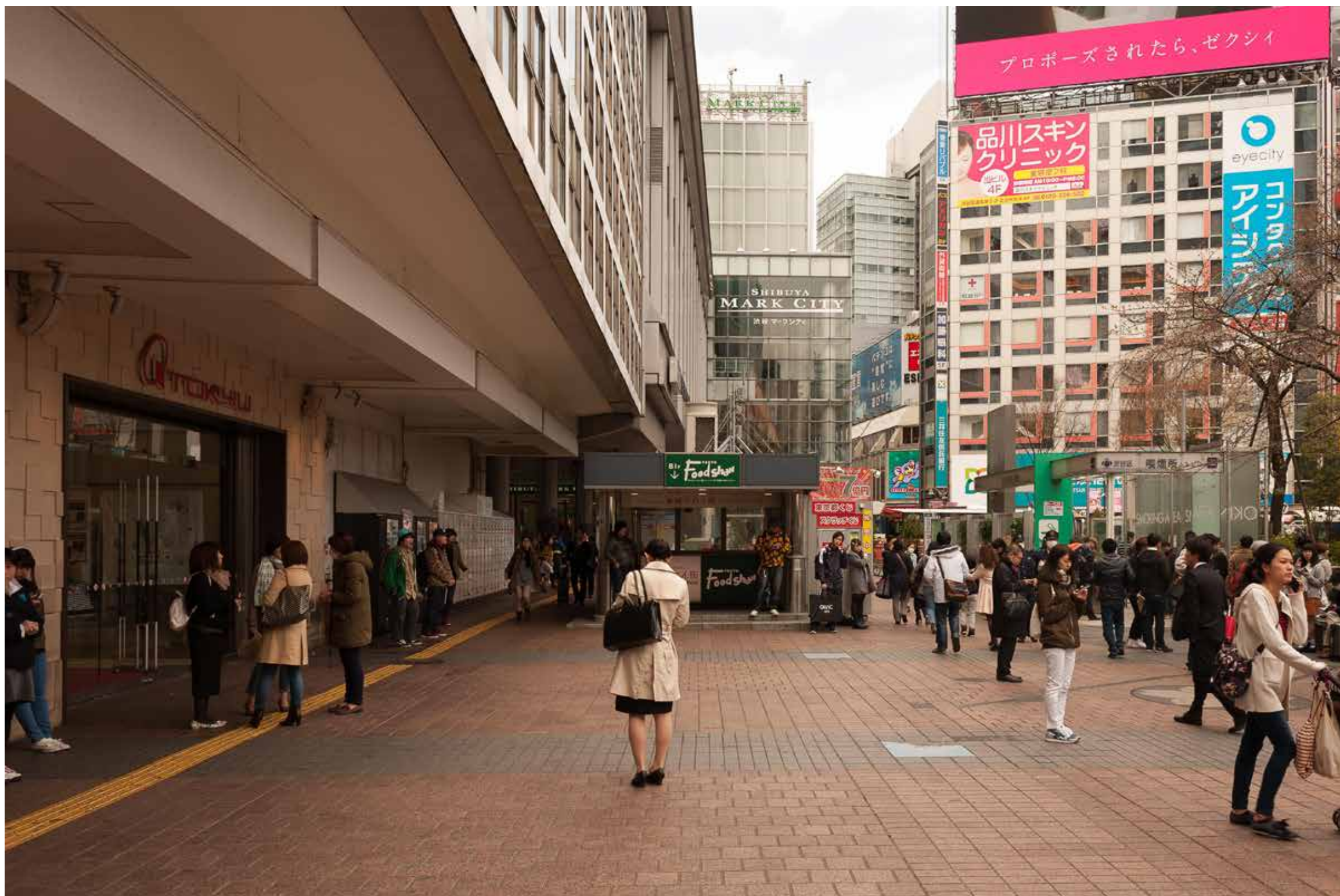


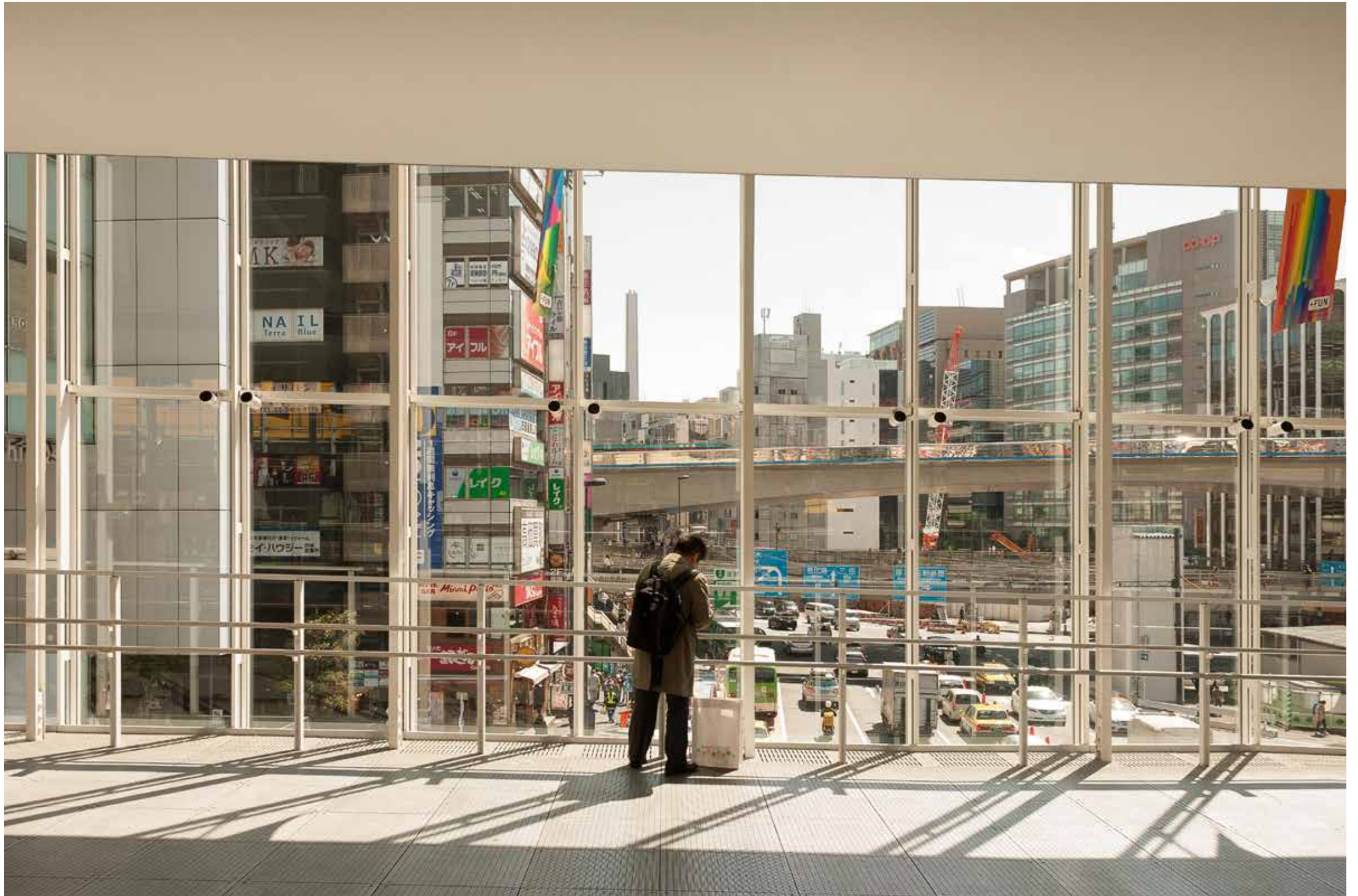
















玉川改札  
Tama-gawa Entrance  
玉川改札口 大塚/有楽町線

渋谷駅  
Shibuya Station

JR  
JR東日本

→

JR  
きっぷ  
うりば  
Ticket Machine

指定席券売機  
指定席券売機

休日おでかけ  
週末パス





直進

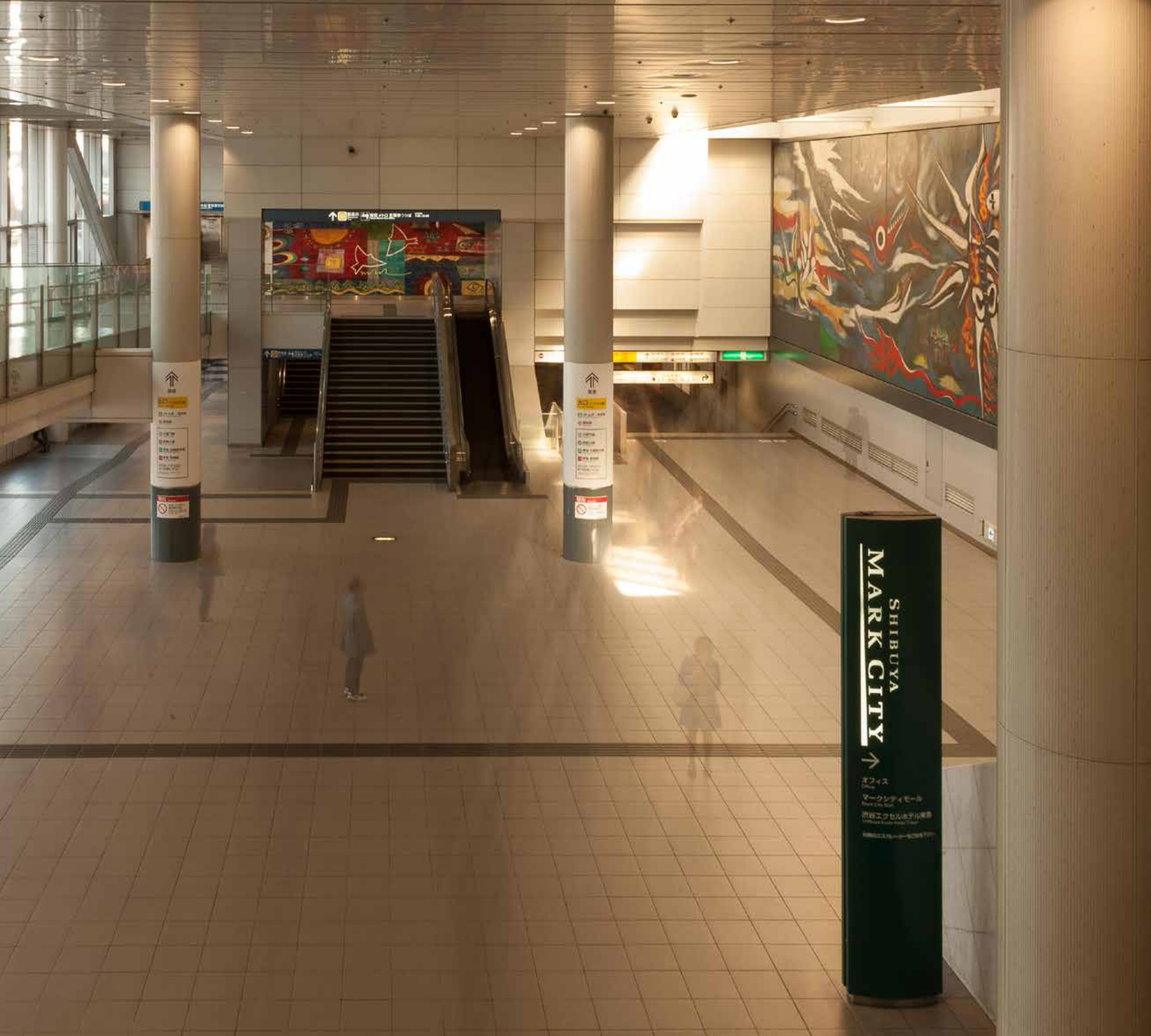
ハチ公方面  
HACHIKO

山手・埼京線  
Yamanote, Saikyo Line

有楽町線  
Yamanote Line

丸の内線  
Marunouchi Line

丸の内線  
Marunouchi Line



↑  
上  
エスカレーター  
エレベーター  
案内所  
改札口  
乗降口  
出口

↑  
上  
エスカレーター  
エレベーター  
案内所  
改札口  
乗降口  
出口

SHIBUYA  
MARK CITY  
↑  
エスカレーター  
エレベーター  
案内所  
改札口  
乗降口  
出口



shinjuku

## *Shinjuku*

*Shinjuku* is one of the 23 wards of Tokyo, and it is the center of the administration of the city. Its roots date back in Edo period, around year 1700, when a “new station” (as *shin* means new, and *juku* means station) was created along the *Kōshū Kaidō*, one of the five main highways of that era. So, *Shinjuku* has always had a big role, witnessed, nowadays, also by the presence of the Metropolitan Government of Tokyo. Again, a controversial element in Tokyo: an administrative entity, a symbol of the order of the city, enhanced by the austerity of the building that hosts it, by Kenzō Tange, on one side; and, on the other side, the ‘entertainment industry’, offered by the many leisure activities that populate the area. In fact, since it has always been a crossroads for travelers, *Shinjuku* hosts, still today, a great number of *izakaya*, Japanese traditional and cheap taverns, with typical Japanese food and drinks, derivation of the old conception of the area. But, apart from that, *Shinjuku* has also the highest concentration of *pachinko* parlors, and *love hotels* are still one of the main attractions, both for curious visitors or regular clients. I felt like it was possible to define *Shinjuku* as a recreational area of Tokyo, an area of ‘perdition’, of binges, bets, and sex. And that is the

interpretation I tried to give of this area, both through the choice of the subjects and the way of representing them. But still, it preserves the idea of being a transition area, as many areas of Tokyo, in never-ending movement.

The first impact with the area, and with what one is going to face, happens getting down in the subway station. *Shinjuku* is the most crowded train station in the world, registering an average of 3’600’000 commuters every day. It is a ridiculous amount of people, but the most amazing thing is that, apart from the stations and its surroundings, this crowd is not even noticeable, due to the extension of the area, and to variety in terms of density.

Tokyo, as stated also in the previous chapters, is a city of gaps, sudden, unpredictable changes of scale, resulting in disorientation and confusion for the visitor. The spaces, and the sounds characterizing them, are a physical representation of the velocity of this city, constantly evolving, reconfiguring, with no problems in leaving behind the old. But still, some areas preserve the spirit of times passed, if not visually, in terms of functions, and of how people see those areas.

Shinjuku is an agglomerate, a shapeless mass of buildings colliding, that in some specific parts find a little bit of air, by spreading on huge plains, almost deserted, that give the sensation of confusion cited before; one can pass from a super high-density complex of buildings, to a 15 meters section road, with a highway on top, and surrounded by gigantic towers of glass and steel, in the range of 50 meters.

While walking around Shinjuku, I found myself lost in time; turned my neck, and the skyscrapers disappeared, the sounds of the engines vanished. I jumped into a compact, high-concentration built up area, filled with taverns and pubs, mainly offering traditional, Japanese street food, and while walking through the narrow alleys of this zone, it felt like the noises of the city, klaxons, whistles, big screens, music, were totally obliterated, and replaced by frying pans clinking, steps, innkeepers' shouts, drunk customers chats. There were not many foreign visitors, so it looked like the time stopped for a bit, and traditional Japan could take over the chaos of the modern city.

a d v e r t i s i n g . p a n e l s  
l e d . l u m i n o u s . d o t s  
f l a s h i n g . l i g h t s  
i n . t h e . b u r n i n g  
n i g h t s . o f  
b l i n d i n g  
s o u n d s  
e a r n . y o u r . o w n . r o o m . i n  
o b l i v i o n



















出口専用

TUC  
3/27

やきとり  
タロー

肉巻き

飯足料理  
あくが

会







sensoji

### *Senso-ji temple*

Located in *Asakusa*, an area in northern Tokyo, it is one of the biggest temples in Tokyo, and the oldest. The choice of this spot, depends on the contradictory atmosphere that surrounds it. In my ideas, I wanted to choose different location, each of them characterized by a peculiar theme. Senso-ji temple represents, obviously, the theme of religion and sacrality. It has a great meaning for the people of Tokyo: during World War II, the temple was destroyed almost completely. So, the actual temple is nothing but a mere reconstruction, 'how it was and where it was', a typical way of conceiving restorations in Japan. And because of this, people find great inspiration in the temple itself, being it the symbol of rebirth and peace. But, alongside the sanctity and holiness of this buddhist complex, a series of leisure, parasite activities grew up, living on the extreme visibility that the site has, for both foreign and Japanese visitors. The most famous, and relevant example of this situation, is the *Nakamise-dōri*, a shopping street, extending from the subway station to the temple, leading the visitor through an infinite series of commercial activities, selling food, goods of any kind, souvenirs. The *Nakamise-dōri* was built in 1885, and it became immediately a great attractive pole of the

city. It represents a good example of the adaptive capacity of the Japanese society, the 'mollusk society'; seen the potentiality of a place with such an enormous amount of daily visitors, they recognized, back in the days, the chance of making a profit out of it, something a bit controversial if related to the buddhist way of life, but still, very smart. There is no clear distinction between functions and roles.

This setting, represented to me an interesting connection with the idea of the people taking back possession of their spaces in the city. Somehow, the sacrality of a place, is something that, being recognized along the ages, is imposed to the newest generations, something that is common sense, and one grows with the idea of that specific place being sacred and untouchable. And the respect for sacrality in Japan, as in all the buddhist countries, is extremely strong. But in this case, population overcame the common sense, and started, even though in a previous era, thinking about their own place in Tokyo, regardless of what they were told to do. Apart from the *Nakamise-dōri*, commercial activities grew all around the temple, such as a small amusement park, located 200 me-

ters from the main building of the complex, masked behind a temple-like entrance; or worst, *pachinko* parlors right behind the temple, in a parallel street, leading to it. A situationist area, where activities grew spontaneously, based on the necessities of the people. This gave me a mixture of opposed sensations: confusion, annoyance, peace. Visitors around me, behaved as if they were in a theme park, not in a holy place; but among them, monks, and devoted believers, went around in a state of calmness, repeating mantras.

d e s e c r a t e d  
s a c r a l i t y  
o f . t h e  
r e l e n t l e s s  
l o t u s . f l o w e r  
f l o a t i n g  
t i m e l e s s l y  
a m i d s t . d u s t . a n d  
g o l d

















浅草寺  
寺務所

参拝証を  
提示下さい

Shōsoji Temple

法要時間  
10時00分  
10時30分  
11時00分  
11時30分  
12時00分  
12時30分  
13時00分  
13時30分  
14時00分  
14時30分  
15時00分

絵馬展・庭園拝観  
入口はこちらでは  
ありません。













uenopark

### *Ueno Park*

As told in the previous chapter, the relation of Japanese people with nature is worship, adoration of the divinities inhabiting the trunks of the trees, the stones, the raindrops, the soil, the blades of grass. And as said, this worship translates into an extreme respect for nature, manifesting into preservation of naturalized areas of the city, creation of artificial green areas, covered with trees and small water ponds. Among the main green areas of Tokyo, a special mention needs to be given to Ueno park, in North Tokyo.

*Ueno Park*, to me, was relevant for three things: the Western Art Museum by Le Corbusier, the homeless colony, and the *hanami*, the celebrations for *sakura* (cherry trees) blossoming.

The objects of my research there, were mainly two: the first one is the extreme, functional and physical stratification of this area. Once again, as in Mori Tower, there is a contamination by the underground world, that enters straight away in contact with what is over the surface. So, this is the first layer. On top of it, there is of course the street level, for wheeled means of transportation. But pedestrians, can't seem to

find, once again, the space destined to them: in order to get a slow flux channel, they needed to lift the pavements, and create an over-the-ground layer, where the only circulation admitted is by walking; a plot of walkways, stairs and squares, all linked one with the other. Then, the layer of the actual park, with museums, green areas, sanctuaries. A layer for the train station. And on top of everything, the highway, with speeding cars and trucks, just few meters above the heads of the pedestrians. So, my first goal for the representation of this area of the city, was understanding how these layers were interconnected, how clear was the separation, and try to depict them through general overviews, capturing the whole, the complexity, as much as possible.

The second point of the work on Ueno Park, was, more than anywhere else, understanding the ways people tried to take possession of their own spaces. I was lucky enough to be able to be in Tokyo during *hanami*, which is a period of celebrations; to me, it was more similar to a general folly, like it has lost the traditional meaning, probably due to the globalization of the phenomenon, and to the modern interpretation of this

happening, by the young generations. But this period gave me the chance of witnessing people trying as hard as they can to find places for celebrations, where these places were not expected to be (it is weird that this happens in a park, probably the closest place to situationist ideas). The clearest manifestation of this, was in the picnic areas, more similar to parking lots, traced on the asphalt of the central boulevard, under the cherry trees. Behind a line made of those red and white bands, usually seen around building sites, hundreds of small groups of people, young, old, sitting on tablecloths on the ground, enjoying company, friends, chats, alcohol, food, and paying tribute to this manifestation of Nature.

m e s m e r i z e d . l o o k s  
g e n e r a l . f o l l y  
c o l o r s  
i n . t h e . g r e y e s t . m a t t e r  
a i s l e s . o f . g o d s  
d e a f e n i n g . a p e r t u r e s  
a m o n g . q u i t e . t o n e s  
o n . a . w h i t e . c l o u d  
s u s p e n d e d















TOMB OF SHOGUNAL BARRONS  
解脱会

親・子・孫  
一つになれる解脱会

安心と歓喜と希望の  
生活を実現する解脱会

上野に











moritower

*Mori Tower, Roppongi Hills complex*

When roaming around Tokyo, it is not easy to orientate, mainly due to the lack of names of the streets. A common way, both for visitors and dwellers, is to look up to the sky, not looking for stars, but for skyscrapers and towers. But as for many other reasons, also in this sense Tokyo is misleading. Many resemblant buildings populate the city, confusing whoever dares to adventure this urban jungle. In this, a big part of guilt belongs to the *Mori Towers*, that infest the skyline of Tokyo.

Minoru Mori was considered to be one of the most influential men in modern Japan. He was the owner of the biggest real estate agency in Tokyo, and CEO of the Mori Building company.

As permanent mark of his own empire, he spread around Tokyo a series of towers, with a giant Mori sign camping on top of them; these towers collect several functions inside them, mainly residential, but also offices, restaurants, and shops. They represent small vertical universes, cities in the City. The most famous of these buildings, is the one that's part of the *Roppongi Hills* complex, in Roppongi, one of the central areas of Tokyo, mostly known for pubs, restaurants, discos, and shopping. The fun area of the City.

In Roppongi Hills complex's Mori Tower, people might never get out in the sunlight and still get all the functions of an urban living organism: direct connection with subway and road level, offices, shopping mall, restaurants, banks, hospital, a hotel, residences, a museum, a sky deck observatory, even a heliport. From bottom to top, one is able to trace several sections, all with different results in terms of contents. It is a vertical universe, a perfect representation of the concept of constructed situations, a place of many places, built in order to direct people towards specific uses. The main sensation inside the complex was of extreme alienation; surrounded by all kinds of people, from families to business men, no one seemed to be able to interact with each other. In front of the main entrance (even though it was not clear if it really was the main one), *Maman* by Louise Bourgeois creates a great point of attraction for visitors. Behind it, a long bench is usually occupied by people standing at 2 or 3 meters one from the other, there is no interaction at all. There is also a spot where benches are disposed in circles, in order to create an interaction, but this does not happen: people either sit there alone or in small isolated groups, bent on their laptops or smartphones. Once ente-

red the complex, there are multiple atmospheres, mainly due to the presence of different functions all in one place. The area of the offices, is cold, detached, while the area dedicated to restaurants, for example, is smoother, and one can slightly notice it also from the tones of the lights. But, in general, it looks like being constantly in a spaceship, in outer space. And from the top of the tower, where the observatory deck is, it actually looks like looking at the whole world from above; a field of flashing lights limited only by the dark sea, but giving the impression of infiniteness.

i n . t h e . b e l l y . o f . a . s p a c e s h i p

a s e p t y c

w h i t e . l i g h t s

a l i e n . f a c e s

m u l t i l a y e r e d

e l e c t r o n i c . w a v e

l o s t . c o s m o n a u t

s i n g u l a r i t y

i n . o u t e r . s p a c e







MOBI TOWER  
OFFICE RECEPTION

エレベーター

エレベーター





















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