Tokyo, the movie

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Abstract: This article traces the representation of Tokyo in Japanese cinema from the 1930s to the 1990s. It argues that there is no recognizable image of Tokyo, but the centrality of the city to the Japanese cinema has transformed the metropolis into a system of representation. The apocalypticism of Tokyo is traced back to the pre-cinematic, pre-modern combustible city of Edo, through its twice-over destruction in the twentieth century, and linked to the dominant genre of science-fiction *anime* film of the present. I argue that the ritualized destruction of Tokyo has become the ground for the discursive city that has no referent. Between these two outer historical limits of the pre-modern and the technologically out-of-control city we find the classicism of the studio period of Japanese cinema, followed by the 'New Wave' depiction of urban space. If the former transformed the city into a network of discrete villages separated by liminal transportation links, suburban wastelands and dangerous nightlife, the latter addressed the loss of identity and disorientation produced within urban space. While Japanese filmmakers have always been drawn to Tokyo as a production site and as a narrative site, they have also transformed it into a virtual city that is constantly reproducing itself as a discursive system.

Keywords: Tokyo, modernity, apocalypse, urban space, history, film, *anime*

In his *Empire of Signs*, Roland Barthes describes Tokyo as a city with an empty centre. The Emperor's palace, which occupies the geographical centre of the city, is surrounded by moats, walls and forest. In Barthes' words, it is 'a site both forbidden and empty' (1982: 30). In his semiotic analysis of Japan 'as a system of signs', the perpetual detour of traffic around this central forbidden zone becomes emblematic of the empty Japanese subject. The lack of street addresses, and the dependency on small maps to find places in Tokyo, likewise leads Barthes to observe that 'the address not being written, it must establish its own writing' (1982: 36). Barthes' observations may be couched in a particular modernist Orientalism that finds difference inscribed in everything Japanese, and yet there is a certain truth to his description of Tokyo as a discursive zone. A brief overview of the representation of Tokyo in cinema may help

to bring a more historical perspective to the sense of Tokyo as a system of representation.

To begin with, think how many movies have Tokyo in their title: *Tokyo Olympiad* (*Tokyo orinpikku* 1965), *Tokyo Drifter* (*Tokyo Nagaremono*, 1966), *The Tokyo Trials* (*Tokyo saiban*, 1983), *Tokyo Decadence* (*Topāzu*, 1992) and *Tokyo Fist* (*Gozen no boxer*, 1996), to name but a few. Ozu Yasujiro alone made five films with Tokyo in the title: *Tokyo Chorus* (*Tokyo no gassho*, 1931), *Woman of Tokyo* (*Tokyo no onna*, 1933), *An Inn in Tokyo* (*Tokyo no yado*, 1935), *Tokyo Story* (*Tokyo monogatari*, 1953) and *Tokyo Twilight* (*Tokyo boshoku*, 1957). More recently, a plethora of *anime* films and TV series either include Tokyo in their titles, or are set in fantastic variations of the city.

For all that Tokyo may be the centre of the Japanese film industry, few films are actually shot on location in Tokyo. Both Kurosawa Akira and Ozu, for example, built elaborate studio sets for their many films that are set in the city (Richie 1986a: 74). An imaginary Tokyo has come to stand in for a metropolis that has few distinctive landmarks and no familiar skyline. And this imaginary city plays a central role in the narrativization of the great social shifts of twentieth-century Japan. The history of Tokyo is very much bound up with Japanese modernity, and the fact that so many movies are set in this urban space is not unrelated to its history. Donald Richie suggests that, insofar as it is in a perpetual state of construction, Tokyo 'is an illustration of itself – a metaphor for continual change' (1986b: 94). As a culturally specific encoding of urban space, Tokyo in cinema constitutes an imaginary place, constructed according to terms of fear, desire, fantasy and nostalgia, rather than those of architecture and urban planning. It is partly the tendency towards formal stylization in Japanese cinema that has rendered Tokyo an exemplary virtual city, and partly its particular urban cultural history. It is a surprisingly short distance from the narrow streets of old Edo to the cybernetic space of contemporary *anime*.

The twice-over destruction of Tokyo in this century may partially explain the peculiar features of a city that is exceptionally hard to navigate and penetrate. Both the reconstruction after the 1923 earthquake and the rapid post-war reconstruction overseen by the American Occupation authorities produced a haphazard sprawl of quickly built, functional structures. In the latter half of the century, the economic acceleration of the post-war boom has produced a famously over-crowded urban environment. Although there are some fabulous examples of modern architecture scattered around the city, it is not a particularly beautiful metropolitan space. In the uneven and unplanned transformation of Edo into Tokyo in the Meiji and Taishō periods, the views of Mt. Fuji and Tokyo Bay were obliterated. Monumental space is reserved and contained within temple enclosures; thus, as Jinnai Hidenobu puts it, 'Tokyo has turned itself into a city of only mid-range views, uniform and without complexity' (1995: 127).

One of the most striking features of contemporary Tokyo is the multiplicity of huge video screens on downtown buildings. These are featured in some of the

most innovative documentaries on Tokyo, by non-Japanese directors such as Bill Viola, Chris Marker and Wim Wenders. Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1982) and Wim Wenders' *Tokyo-ga* (1985) both linger on the video culture that pervades the city. Wenders' camera travels through the streets, framing the TV monitors mounted in cabs against the streaming neon; Marker scans the crowds of kids gazing at huge video screens in Shinjuku and Shibuya. Bill Viola's tape *Ancient of Days* (1979–81) includes a remarkable sequence that begins with an image of Mt Fuji, but gradually pulls back to reveal that this pastoral image is being projected on a downtown building. He then zooms in slowly to the shops and crowds below the digital billboard, peering into the depths of a shadowy television store. For these filmmakers, Tokyo is the epitome of an image culture that they seek to pene-trate with their own cameras. Their status as outsiders is confirmed by the plethora of signs that constitute a dynamic, spectacular and emblematically 'modern' visual field. The unintelligibility of Tokyo for these filmmakers is due not only to the difference of language, but also to the destabilization of viewing positions in an image-saturated environment. Only when Wenders finds Chris Marker drinking at a tiny bar or when we recognize Viola's own images projected from the giant screen do they succeed in penetrating the facade of images which is Tokyo.

The omnipresent projection of advertisements and music videos in the various city centres suggest how the city is a screening space, a discursive site – an imagin-ary city. Architectural critic Vladimir Krstic has described the plethora of elec-tronic screens in Tokyo as 'the final dissolution of urban space'. Drawing on the post-modern theory of Virilio and Baudrillard, Krstic argues that these simulation machines constitute 'the rupture of the vanishing point', taking us back, once again, to the empty subject-position of post-modernity. The dissolution of archi-tectural volume; the blurring of the real and the simulated; these features threaten a 'final eclipse of the real' (1997: 39). While this apocalyptic end of urban space is a provocative interpretation of contemporary Tokyo, Krstic's analysis is like Roland Barthes' in its voiding of the lived history of Tokyo. In fact, Tokyo is historically configured as an unstable urban space, one that was traditionally immersed in representation, and is resigned, in a sense, to a perpetual apocalyp-ticism.

Edo, Tokyo and Japanese modernity

The apocalypticism of modern Tokyo can be traced back through the city's history to the 'flowers of Edo' – the fires that regularly swept through the urban enclave. As Darrell William Davis explains, the fires in the old city were not only destructive, but 'disruptive of social hierarchies and bureaucratic procedures . . . The flowers bloomed not only in heat and light, but in large brawls as well, because neighbouring gangs of firefighters often clashed over jurisdiction, resources, and postconflagration disputes about responsibility' (1997: 92). A

garrison city, Edo consisted of the high city where the *daimyō* built their resi-
dences, and the low city, or *shitamachi,* which consisted of the entertainment areas
and homes of merchants, artists and peasants. One particular district, known as
Yoshiwara in *shitamachi,* the setting of licensed pleasures and decadent aesthet-
icism has become symbolic of 'old Edo'. Known as the floating world, its resi-
dents cultivated an attitude of resignation to a life of enforced inactivity, in which
aesthetics and erotic indulgences provided the only imaginary escape from a very
restrictive and repressive social structure. 'The flowers of Edo' is a term that
perfectly captures the era's ambivalent combination of Buddhist asceticism and
aesthetic pleasures. Eventually the new culture that evolved in this sanctioned site
overwhelmed the dominant moralistic authoritarian culture and ushered in the
transition to modernity.

The fact that the entire Tokugawa era is referred to as the Edo period is indica-
tive of the role that the city played in the history of modern Japan. Its metro-
politan culture became the foundation of a national culture, as it was the centre,
not only of aristocratic arts, but also of an emergent mass culture. Theatrical,
written and visual arts circulated among and between all strata of the urban social
fabric (Jansen 2000: 159). And yet, three centuries of cultural history have been
more or less reduced to a finite set of images in the popular imagination. Carol
Gluck has argued that 'the invention of Edo' is a constituent element of modern
Japan as its mirror image, a necessary other that lies outside time and history as
a 'frozen national tradition' (1998: 284). Gluck may be referring to Edo the
period, rather than Edo the city, and yet to the extent that her argument is based
on a logic and culture of images, those images are inevitably dominated by the
urban space and urban culture of Edo (1998: 262). She also notes that in the
1920s, with the new mass culture that included the cinema, 'the stock of Edo
images expanded exponentially' (1998: 272). Moreover, in its post-modern
modes, in the cultural logic of a transmodernity seeking out models for a future
not grounded in Western culture or historiography, 'Edo-memory sometimes
eliminated the tradition–modernity divide altogether . . . Edo became tomorrow'
(1998: 274–5). Edo as a combustible city that nevertheless remains static and
unchanging is a constituent feature of the urban imaginary of modern Japan.

Indeed the film industry has been crucially implicated in this reproduction of
Edo as a city outside time. The cinematic preoccupation with the Yoshiwara
pleasure district has made it the prevalent nostalgic image of old Edo in Japanese
period films. Mizoguchi Kenji's narratives about *geisha, kabuki* actors and other
artists are often set in this distinctive setting, even as it began to change in Meiji
and later periods. Every major studio during the classical period of Japanese
cinema had an 'old Edo' set featuring narrow lamp-lit streets laid straight out in
a grid-like pattern, and the distinctive arced bridges that once crossed the many
rivers and canals of the city.[1] As the cultural centre of Tokugawa Japan, the low
city of Edo was itself a site of display and spectacle. *Ukiyoe* in the Tokugawa era
constituted an early instance of poster art – a mass-produced visual culture sold

and displayed in street stalls – that was closely linked to the *kabuki* theatre and the culture of courtesans and their patrons. In other words, the low city of old Edo was essentially a culture of self-representation. Even the expression 'flowers of Edo' provides a visual signifier for a phenomenon of urban crisis, transforming catastrophe into aesthetics.

Jinnai has described the theatre districts of Edo-era *shitamachi* as a 'performative space', 'a cosmology of the fantastic' (Jinnai 1995: 95). The *kabuki* theatres built on the waterfront were thoroughly integrated with the street and the neighbouring teahouses. Banners and signs transformed the whole area into a discursive, playful zone. Even if this particular scene is only occasionally represented in film, as in Imamura Shōhei's 1981 film *Eijanaika* (*So what?*), the cinematic city of Tokyo seems to have its roots in the pre-cinematic culture of the low city of Edo. Towards the end of Meiji, dozens of movie theatres in Asakusa displayed some of the most excessive architectural spectacles of the period, marking the transition to the modern culture of display.

While Edo was imagined as a timeless space of pre-modern Japan, Tokyo quickly became the pre-eminent site of the fantasy of modernity. In the 1920s, as the film industry was solidifying as a viable producer of national culture, it was also tied to commodity culture, Americanism and the *mobo* and *moga* of the period (*mobo* referred to modern boys; *moga*, or *modan gāru*, to modern girls). Harry Harootunian argues that 'the new modern life was figured first in discourse, as fantasy, before it was ubiquitously lived as experience, and its major elements were independent women, commodities, and mass consumption', all of which were to be found in the social discourse of everyday life in the city. The metropolis, he suggests, 'supplied a vast space for discourse to imagine and figure a new form of life' (2000: 13). The city was thus the spatial focal point for contesting visions of Japanese-ness, and indeed it virtually disappears from Japanese movie screens from 1936 to 1946. Within the ideological project of 'overcoming modernity', Tokyo gave way to Edo.

The two cities are, however, linked by quite a few discursive tropes, many of which are reconfigured as the predominant cityscape of contemporary *anime*. The visual culture of contemporary Tokyo is marked by two distinctive traits – the heterogeneity of its architectural mix of Western and traditional styles and the extensive signage. Where the former constitutes a discursive text of cultural forms, the latter constitutes a linguistic landscape. The *ad hoc* method of urban planning is described by Jinnai as one-of-a-kind architecture, in which each building is distinctive (1995: 165), constituting a kind of architectural textuality. For Donald Richie, to walk the streets of Tokyo is to become a spectator (1986b: 91). The written signs that dominate the public space need to be linked up with the street art of poster vending in the Tokugawa period, and to the electronic screens of the late twentieth century, to realize that Tokyo has always been constituted as a discursive site, a city that is always producing and reproducing itself as an imaginary place. The role of cinema in this process is, I would argue,

instrumental. But it is not simply because of this excessively linguistic landscape. Jinnai also notes that urban life in Tokyo is not organized by public plazas, but in back-street alleys, more or less invisible spaces leading to tiny shrines and temples 'located in their innermost recesses' (1995: 126).

The village and the city

The predominant imagery of Edo and Tokyo in the cinema of the classical period is not that of discursive heterogeneity, or textual excess. The city is more often rendered as a quiet place of alleys, neighbourhoods and families. The old Edo 'look' is one that is often framed symmetrically, reproducing the architectural forms in the composition of the image. The distinctive narrow streets, small shops, inns and bars, and the street lighting render the city as a kind of interior space. Not only are period films set in these cosy, idealized *shitamachi* neighbourhoods, but also many *gendai-geki* films (films with contemporary settings) of the 1920s to the 1950s continued to use this setting to designate 'Tokyo', despite the fact that few such streets still existed after the war. The streets of Tokyo in the films of Ozu, for example, are always covered with signage, but they are often quiet back streets in *shitamachi*, lined with inns and bars where salarymen stop on their way home. In the 1930s a sub-genre of Shōchiku's films called *Shitamachi* films (Nolletti 1992: 12) were largely shot on sound stages built when the studio moved from Kamata to Ōfuna in 1935. Despite the shift from outdoor to indoor shooting, the Shōchiku films did not lose the Tokyo 'flavour' established at Kamata.

The Shōchiku Kamata films that were shot on location in the city and its rapidly expanding suburbs included comedies, crime films and melodramas, exemplifying the discourse of everyday life noted by Harootunian. The public spaces of Ginza and Asakusa became familiar settings in the Shōchiku Kamata films, which were often contrasted with the private and pastoral settings of the home and the *furusato*, or 'home town'. Tokyo was where young people went and never came back, where family structures disintegrated and traditional values gave way to crass commercialism (Richie 1986a: 69). The *shomin-geki* genre, or 'films of ordinary people', that was developed at Shōchiku Kamata during the 1930s can in fact be understood as a negotiation of the urban spaces of Japanese modernity – homes, offices, streets, trains and the empty lots of a city under construction. Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano has argued that the interaction of the new urban middle class and the Shōchiku Kamata films was a reciprocal one, creating a 'new self-reflexive discourse of the city for the middle-class subject'. Not only was 'the image of Tokyo embedded in such films; the films themselves affected the image of Tokyo in the popular imaginary' (2001: 171).

Different filmmakers use the urban space as a function of their distinctive styles. Ozu's wide-angle lens tends to flatten the urban space into a grid-like design, while Mizoguchi's lateral tracking shots situate the viewer within the 3-D space of the city. In the films of Ozu and Naruse, set almost exclusively in the

Tokyo of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, the small streets are often framed like corridors. The stories of these films often involve the intimate relationships between neighbours, set in the tight domestic spaces of identical homes, which are then contrasted with monumental office buildings dominated by smokestacks and oversized furniture. These family dramas registered the terms of cultural transition and social transformation, dealing with the lives of salarymen and office ladies in a still-stratified and restrictive social hierarchy. The depiction of Tokyo as a modular extension of the home is an important means by which the family drama becomes a social drama. The *Tora-san* series, which began in 1969, enshrined the nostalgic depiction of *shitamachi* as 'home' for three decades, sustaining its virtual presence in the popular imagination.

Even by the 1950s, the urban imagery of *shitamachi* had already become a nostalgic fantasy in Naruse's water-trade films *Bangiku* (*Late Chrysanthemums*, 1954) and *Nagareru* (*Flowing*, 1956). In the post-war period, when the *shitamachi* was no longer recognizable, other small neighbourhoods were explicitly depicted as nostalgic places, where a sense of community persists within an otherwise oppressive urban environment. Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (*Tokyo Monogatari*, 1953) and Kurosawa's *Ikiru* (To live, 1952) are perhaps the best examples of the post-war saga of humanist redemption set within a burgeoning heartless urban environment. In both films, made just after the US Occupation, American 'democracy' has bred a culture of individualism, selfishness and greed that has absorbed most of the younger generation. The park that Watanabe builds in *Ikiru* recreates a home-like module within a menacing framework of highway overpasses and industrial buildings. Hara Setsuko's character Noriko in *Tokyo Story* lives in a run-down apartment building that nevertheless harbours a communal environment of neighbourliness. Not only do these films depict small-town neighbourhoods deep inside the threatening city, it is as if filmmakers have imposed a formal order onto a metropolitan space that, outside the cinema, is extremely chaotic and unplanned.

Tokyo is often described as a network of villages, and indeed it is a city with many centres linked by subways and rail lines. Suburban neighbourhoods are also depicted in the studio era as village-like communities, blurring the distinction between public and private space. In becoming home-like, this imagery effectively negates the idea of the city. The cinematic transformation of Tokyo into villages in the cinema of the 1950s was a means of possessing and controlling an urban scene that was rapidly spinning out of control. As omniscient as the sight of laundry indicating the stability of domestic form in Japanese cinema is the imagery of trains taking commuters back and forth from offices to suburbs. A rich imagery of transit, with trolleys, subways and trains in constant movement, renders the city a place of transition, instability and flux. Between home and office, the intervening space is depicted in films like Ozu's *I Was Born but . . .* (*Umarete wa mita keredo*, 1932) and *Ohayō* (*Good morning!*, 1959) as a bleak landscape crossed by train tracks and telephone poles. If Edo was originally a city

integrated into a natural landscape of water and low hills (Jinnai 1995: 18), modern Tokyo is a flat place. The formalism of the classical cinema accentuates the sense of flat planes and surfaces, extending even to the landscape of suburban space.

The home-like enclaves within the metropolis are often contrasted to the decadent nightlife of the post-war city, laced with jazz music and English language signs, as Tokyo became the site of a loss of traditional values. In films like Kurosawa's *Ikiru* and Mizoguchi's *Street of Shame* (*Akasen chitai*, 1956), the even lighting of Edo-era Yoshiwara gives way to the dynamic glare of neon. Once again, the urban space is most often designed in studio sets, perhaps because of Japanese directors' notorious desire to control all aspects of their films.

Metropolitan anxieties

Although Ozu and Naruse regularly incorporate sightseeing tours of Tokyo (and Osaka) into their films, these instances of location shooting were the exception to the rule in the 1950s, and are in fact framed as precisely that – adventures outside the studio. It was not until the New Wave movement of the 1960s that location shooting was more routinely integrated into Japanese narrative film. Tokyo is represented in this period as a crowded, homogenizing scene, in which characters struggle to find an identity that is not imposed on them by the techniques of national culture and mass media. Domestic architecture becomes identified with suburban sprawl and cramped communal living. The 1964 Olympics may have put Tokyo on the map internationally, but Ichikawa's documentary *Tokyo Olympiad* (*Tokyo Orinpikku*, 1965) begins with a wrecking ball, denoting the violence implicit in the modernizing process. As early as 1956 in *Punishment Room* (*Shokei no heya*, 1956), Ichikawa Kon locates the violence of disaffected youth in the decadent and violent setting of Tokyo's bars and back alleys.

In the New Wave cinema Tokyo becomes a site of alienation, where social decay breeds loneliness and crime. Hani Susumi's *She and He* (*Kanojo to kare*, 1963) strongly evokes an Antonioni or Pasolini landscape, featuring an apartment block looming over a huge empty lot. Characters on the margins of society meet there, children play and sexual desires are interminably deferred. Ōshima Nagisa's *Cruel Story of Youth* (*Seishun zankoku monogatari*, 1960) opens with a rape on a log-boom in Tokyo bay, shot in a vivid colour scheme of blue and orange; the film ends with the same couple breaking up on a crowded street that fades into an unfocused blur of coloured lights setting off their fatal despair.

Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, Tokyo was transformed by new highway systems and new 'modern' architectural spectacles such as Tokyo Tower and the Olympic stadium, sites that were soon dwarfed and swamped in the sea of skyscrapers. New mapping systems were introduced that overlaid street and place names with new ones. Thus, the metropolitan space of Tokyo became in many respects unrecognizable (Yoshimoto 2000: 318). Imported imagery and

cultures also transformed the visual field into a multi-lingual and diversified environment. In Teshigahara Hiroshi's *The Ruined Map* (*Moetsukita chizu*, 1968) and *Face of Another* (*Tanin no kao*, 1966), this new metropolis is explored as a psychological space in which the disorientation of the urban space is mapped onto narratives of identity.

And yet, even in these New Wave films, cinematic form is imposed on the urban space. To be sure there is far more documentary-based location shooting than there was during the studio era; yet filmmakers are rarely content to leave the referent alone. Freeze frames, tricks with focal lengths and formalized frame compositions tend to disrupt the documentary setting, rendering the city, once again, a discursive, representational space. Suzuki Seijun's *yakuza* films counterbalance location shooting with highly stylized interior sets, in which acts of violence take on heightened emotional weight. Even Kurosawa's noir-ish *gendaigeki* are set in studio sets of a generic, darkened city that are more like psychological spaces than familiar urban locations.

One exception is Kurosawa's *High and Low* (*Tengoku to jigoku*, 1963), set in the city of Yokohama. This film uses the panorama of the cityscape as a scene to be investigated and interrogated. In one spectacular scene, a kidnapper is caught by a police trick involving a chemical that burns in a distinctive colour planted in the ransom bag. A sudden burst of pink smoke in this black and white CinemaScope film suddenly appears in a cityscape seen from the rich merchant's home at the top of the hill. We are thus able to read the city as a system of signs, and the police can locate the junkie-criminal within the otherwise impenetrable urban sprawl. As Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro has noted, *High and Low* engages directly with the questions of urban space as a system of representation, rendering the changing landscape of the city as an allegory for 'the space of the Japanese nation'. As a port city, Yokohama is 'situated at the margin of society'. Its 'existence is dependent on a complex interaction between the inside and outside of a nation-state' (2000: 325). In the 1960s, and still today, Yokohama is a far more cosmopolitan city than Tokyo, and acts as a kind of buffer zone between Tokyo, as the national capital, and the outside world.

The Japanese film industry went into a serious slump throughout the 1970s and 1980s, offering only a handful of art films within the industry's full-scale turn towards video pornography and music videos. One of the most interesting films of the 1980s is Morita Yoshimitsu's *Family Game* (*Kazoku geemu*, 1983), which is set in an apartment complex in Tokyo Harbour, possibly one of the many buildings constructed on new landfill islands. Morita's characters subsist in an industrial landscape, updating the open suburban space of Ozu's *I Was Born but . . .* as a bleak panorama of oil-storage tanks and factory chimneys. The pressures of the boom economy of the 1980s are felt by a family trying to place their sons in a top high school. Morita accentuates the cramped quarters of their apartment by flattening the space. His wide-angle lens and framings are at once a homage to Ozu's characteristic *mise en scène*, but also a bleak commentary on the decay of

social values. It is the cityscape itself that is the strongest evocation of the twilight of the nation in this film, and the sense of impending doom seems to emerge from the city itself. There is no village life, no community, no corridor in this Tokyo of the 1980s.

City of crisis

The critical discourse on cities and cinema tends to revolve around the uncanny layering of meanings built up in urban structures (Donald 1999: 69). However, in Tokyo, the process of cultural renewal, re-invention and regeneration has been so violent, indeed apocalyptic, that there is little by way of ruins, little evidence of historical process. Everything is always already new. Both Edo and Tokyo have been constitutive of Japanese modernity, and the city continues to push a kind of moving edge of modernity and technological innovation, a process which involves the ongoing re-invention of the past as well as the future, as it is not surprising that Tokyo figures prominently in post-war science-fiction film, as it has become the emblematic site of accelerated progress, crumbling under the weight of its own success as a capital of the industrialized world. Since the release of Honda Ishirō's *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* (*Gojira*, 1954), Tokyo has undergone a ritualized form of cinematic destruction. As the locus of so much science-fiction fantasy, Tokyo has become a pre-eminent site of out-of control technology, overwhelmed by an accelerated modernity that seeks its own denial or overcoming in apocalyptic histories of the future.

   Tsukamoto Shinya's *Tetsuo* films depict Tokyo as a machine in which people have been so thoroughly fused with the industrialized metropolis that they have become cyborgs, subsisting within a world of high-tech detritus. Many of the nihilistic *yakuza* films that have been some of the most famous Japanese exports of recent years are set in a kind of underbelly of Tokyo's industrialized inner parts. In Tsukamoto's *Bullet Ballet* (1997), as in his earlier *Tetsuo: Iron Man* (1989), Tokyo has become an organism in which people are linked by fluid bonds of technologies. The interconnectedness of subways, highways, tunnels and telephones is enhanced by streams of unfocused light and a throbbing techno beat. Cell phones in crowds are emblematic of the physical density of people, the ongoing alienation within the urban organism and the intensity of everyday life. Smoke and steam, trademark *noir* features, are supplemented in *Bullet Ballet* by dripping water as the characters pursue each other through a network of abandoned canals and sewage drains. Tsukamoto also throws in sequences of archival imagery of violence: war footage, soldiers, collapsing houses and pistols firing suggest the way that the characters' environment is heavily laden with imagery of destruction. Only at the end of the film does a cityscape appear against which the characters can be framed, but of course this is the apocalyptic finale, when everyone dies. The romantic coda set against the skyline can be read only as a deeply ironic dream of the city's own twisted imagination. In *Bullet Ballet*, Tsukamoto himself

plays the male lead, but the female lead played by Mano Kirina looks like a figure from *anime*, with big eyes, square shoulders and an exaggerated figure. I would argue that most of the contemporary *yakuza* films need to be read against the dominant genre of *anime* in which Tokyo has become synonymous with the virtual space of computer-generated imagery.

The extraordinarily rich imagery and detail of Japanese *anime* have effectively created another Tokyo, one that is continually reproduced only in order to be destroyed again and again. It is against this dominant image of cyber-space that the violence of contemporary Japan is played out. *Doomed Megalopolis* (*Teito monogatari*, 1992), *Patlabor* (*Kidō keisatsu patorebā*, 1990), *Bubblegum Crisis* (*Baburugamu kuraishisu*, 1985), *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998), *Tenchi in Tokyo* (*Shin Tenchi Muyō*, 1997), *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995) and *Akira* (1988) are all set in Tokyo – or in a city formerly known as Tokyo. *Akira*, one of the earliest to 'animate' the metropolitan environment, re-invented the city along the lines of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, the German film of 1926 that depicted the city as a multi-layered gothic labyrinth of towering skyscrapers and subterranean spaces. Where Lang's film employed novel special effects to create a three-dimensional environment, Ōtomo's neo-Tokyo exploited the potential of *anime* to create a similar metropolitan space. This fantastic gothic cityscape recurs in numerous subsequent *anime* movies and series, depicting the city as a kaleidoscopic, fragmented and labyrinthine space dominated by backdrops of towers. This urban landscape tends to be further characterized by the reflective surfaces of corporate buildings, contrasted with the detritus of urban decay.

Many metropolitan-sited *anime* are set in a not-too-distant future in which Tokyo as we know it has been destroyed, and is replaced by neo-Tokyo (*Akira*) or Tokyo-3 (*Evangelion*) or Mega Tokyo (*Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo, 2040*). The city is thus imagined as infinitely collapsible and re-invented, and the new versions are under constant attack from various species of alien and supernatural enemies. In conjunction with the defence forces arrayed against these invaders, the city becomes an organism fighting off viral infections, an urban body pulsing with light, sound and surface. The characters populating these organic machine cities may be drawn from the cultural repertoire of late twentieth-century Tokyo, but their city of the future recalls the pre-modern origins of Edo as a castle town or fortified city.

It is significant that even in those *anime* that are set in an ostensible present-day Tokyo, such as *Tenchi in Tokyo* and *Serial Experiments Lain*, the city is nevertheless haunted by supernatural forces and figures. In *Doomed Megalopolis* the ghost of the past is explicitly thematized as a repressed historical memory. If Godzilla represents a post-nuclear mutation, the continuing presence of monstrous fantasy figures in urban *anime* suggests that the combustible city is haunted by an irrepressible memory. The fantastic metropolis of *anime* may be the realization of Ōshima's famous dictum to 'banish green' from the movies, along with its connotations of nature-worship and nationalist sentiment (1992:

208). And yet, even in the absence of natural phenomena, the demonology of traditional Japanese folktales and fairytales is alive and well in the urban jungle. Perhaps these supernatural elements signify the return of the repressed natural environment that has disappeared into the urban sprawl and post-apocalyptic landscapes of *anime*.

The metropolitan space of *anime* is only one more variation on the way that the city of Tokyo has figured in the discourse of Japanese modernity and, as with previous incarnations, the imagery prefigures the reality. The 'Waterfront Sub-centre' called Rainbowtown that has recently been developed on the landfill islands in Tokyo bay seems to be modelled on the fantasy cityspace of *anime*. On the other hand, while Tokyo is a perpetually futuristic city, it is also a site where the failure of memory is frequently dramatized. The ruined buildings that prolif-erate in the sci-fi city are often Roman ruins, symbols of historical decay that have been borrowed to stand in for imagery of memorialization. A collapse of historical time is often created by mixing imagery from different phases of the city's past. For example, the urban space in *Patlabor* is carefully and lovingly rendered as the quiet place of villages and corridors familiar from the studio-era films. Overhead electrical wires strung between poles in *Serial Experiments Lain* likewise evoke a pre-digital urban space, even while both these series are also rich in high-tech futuristic imagery and effects.

Tokyo, the virtual city

The continual oscillation in *anime*, between aerial views of the city and the pedes-trian's view from the street, is consistent with the dissolution of perspective associ-ated with the city-as-screening space. If the 'true architecture' of contemporary Tokyo comprises 'computer links, information flows, networked images and disembodied voices', Tokyo, according to Ken Hollings, 'won't become decentral-ized, it will dematerialize itself instead. . . . *Anime* has transformed it into a place made out of pure velocity' (2000: 10). As Tom Looser notes elsewhere in this issue, the 'superflat' surface aesthetics of *anime* eliminate the unified subject-position typically implied by the eye of the camera. The urban setting may no longer serve as a 'central grounding, or anchor of identity', but, given its repre-sentational history, one wonders whether the urban setting of Tokyo ever really did provide such grounding (2002). This does not mean that the modern Japanese subject is 'empty' or that there is no modern Japanese subjectivity, but it does suggest that the representation of Tokyo in the cinema has been, and continues to be, a discursive means of destabilizing and thus shifting the spatial configur-ation of modern Japanese subjectivity.

The temporality of Japanese modernity is given spatial expression in represen-tations of a city that resists iconic form, producing an equally resistant subjective space of inhabitation. It is a mistake to give in to the rhetoric of apocalypse and forget that Tokyo is also a place where people actually live. Its cyber-culture may

have been heavily influenced by William Gibson (Tatsumi 1996), and yet the depiction of urban space in the fantasy films of the last ten or fifteen years is also grounded in the particular history of Tokyo. This is a city that has never been, perhaps cannot be, represented as *an image*, but is deeply implicated in the production of discursive space. It is a representational process, and an ongoing representational practice. As a cinematic city, Tokyo lends itself both to utopian fantasies of a pre-modern space associated with old Edo and to a dystopian apocalypticism of ritualized destruction. The perceptual technology of cinema has embraced Tokyo, not as a recognizable image, but as a formal process of framing and organizing historical imagination. In the virtual city of Tokyo, the present tense is unrecognizable, because the city has no referent besides its lost past and its borrowed future.

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Acknowledgements

Note

1. In this article I am using the term 'classical period' to refer to the Japanese cinema that was produced between 1925 and 1960 within the industrial mode of production as it has been described by Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie in *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry* (1982). In this sense it is interchangeable with the 'studio period' and is roughly analogous to a similar period in American film history known as 'Classical Hollywood Cinema'. Although there are many problems with this categorization in both the American and Japanese contexts, it is intended here simply to demarcate a period in which a small number of studios produced a large number of films. In the Japanese case, except for the fifteen years of the Pacific War, the Japanese industry competed with the American in the Japanese market.

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