Battlefield Tokyo: Space, ritual and the right to the city

Submitted to the “Teaching 3.11: Issues, Materials, Pedagogy and Research” conference by Love Kindstrand, Graduate Program of Global Studies, Sophia University.
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Introduction

In the aftermath of the 3.11 disaster, hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets in protest against corrupt legislators, a genocidal energy industry, and the structural violence of the capitalist state. A new generation of protesters are excavating and resuscitating a marginalized legacy of street politics in Japan.
In this course, we will seize on this opportunity to explore alternative trajectories of urban history in the geographical context of Tokyo. This journey, guided by a theoretical understanding of the politics of everyday life and the social production of space, will take place within a city that is at once both the stage for, and the stakes of, contentious street politics.
This course attempts to bring together the theoretical and methodological concerns of urban anthropology, critical geography and the history of social movements with an eclectic potpourri of activist literature and other media. Our mission is to collectively sketch an alternative history of social space in urban Japan through the metaphor of the street as a space for public culture. We will attempt to read the facades of Tokyo as mediatized surfaces, interrogate the dreams, desires and conflicts projected, and ask what happened when they went dark after the triple disaster. We will also look under the surface at the mechanisms of violence and exclusion inherent to the production of capitalist space. Our study of urban spaces will reveal the parallel processes of different, ongoing crises.
Alongside and together with contemporary activist voices, students will be able to read and rediscover, through the post-3.11 experience, a history of contested space and urban contentious politics. Starting off in the trauma of disaster, we will explore a series of moments and movements in Japan’s history of urban protest, simultaneously acquiring the necessary tools to understand this history. Finally, we return to a discussion of post-3.11 Japan as a biopolitical moment.
Week 1: Disaster

*Through poetry, literature and music, we will explore the cultural reverberations of the triple disaster - shock, despair, grief and anger.*


**Supplementary readings:**


Week 2: Resurgence of popular protest

*We immerse ourselves in the outburst of popular dissent invading the public consciousness, in which the all-pervading threat of nuclear radiation and the looming collapse of a particular way of organizing power relations intersect not in nihilism, but in a widespread recognition of the precarization of everyday life and an irrefutable sense of political urgency.*

- Movie: Radioactivists or *Chinmoku shinai haru.*

**Supplementary readings:**

Week 3: Carnival

This week, we examine the nexus of protest and festivity in a reading of pre-Meiji urban social movements, appropriating Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque as a critical tool to compare past and present.


Supplementary readings:


Week 4: Marginalized bodies: Caste and outcast(e)

We approach the city from a different and perhaps unexpected angle, by looking at its processes of excretion and expulsion. From there, we excavate taxonomies of filth and purity in search of connections between past and present.


**Supplementary readings:**


**Week 5: Multiple modernities: Walking the city**

*We start off in Japan’s “era of popular violence,” posing vital questions about the space and politics of everyday life while exploring a much-neglected history of political dissent.*


**Supplementary readings:**


Week 6: The right to the city? Contesting postwar urban regimes

After the war defeat, Tokyo rose from the ashes in a flurry of construction, raising new concerns about private and public, as well as demands for social and participatory space.


*Supplementary readings:*


Week 7: The city from below

*Turning our attention to Tokyo’s watering holes (sakariba) we employ the concept of urban dramaturgy to examine struggles over definition of the urban and its spaces.*

• Galbraith, Patrick W. 'Akihabara: Conditioning a public otaku image,' in *Mechademia* 5.

**Supplementary readings:**


**Week 8: After the bubble: Withdrawal as resistance**

*This week's readings bring together various assemblages from post-bubble Japan's rich array of autonomous movements, forcing us to reexamine issues of identity, affective labor and reproduction among Japanese urban youth.*


**Supplementary readings:**

Week 9: Marginalized bodies: Homelessness and the re-appropriation of space.

This week's readings represent different perspectives on the social production of space, juxtaposing the “double bind” of urban homeless caught in the commercial spaces of the metropolis and the politics of representation of marginalized and disenfranchised groups.

- Movie: *Shibuya Brand New Days*.

Supplementary readings:


Week 10: Emergence and ritual: Rediscovering the city

The dawn of the 21st century witnessed a new paradigm of street protest opposing imperialism and capitalist expansion, rekindling demands for truly public urban spaces; compositional experiences vital to the current movements against nuclear power.


**Supplementary readings:**


**Week 11: Democracy**

*We return to the post-3.11 moment to locate and examine different and conflicting conceptions of democracy, in the de-nuke movement and beyond.*


**Supplementary readings:**


**Week 12: Reproducing the common**

*From our discussion of democracy we turn our gaze towards issues of representation, as well as impulses of (self-)discipline and punishment, in the reproduction of activist commons.*


• Excerpts from TwitNoNukes. Demo e iko! Tokyo: Kawade Shobo, 2011.

Supplementary readings:

Week 13: Creating spaces
The final week is dedicated to attempts, within recent de-nuke movements and elsewhere, to create less ephemeral spaces of protest in affective solidarity with similar endeavours across the globe. For the concluding discussion, these struggles bring us back to the central questions of this course: what, and whose, is the urban?


Supplementary readings: