
Dating Tokyo: De-alienation of a Metropolis through Intimate Spaces

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In a metropolis, where movement is an inevitable part of everyday life, impermanence and alienation become two of its main characteristics. This is the situation in technologically oriented Tokyo, one of the world's biggest and most populated cities. The metropolis is fundamentally structured by flows that cause fleeting encounters between people and their environment. But as big and dynamic as the city is, Tokyo is also well known for the fine thread of much of its urban fabric, and for the unique qualities and human scale of its small, intimate places. The purpose of this article is to identify and typologically classify intimate spaces of everyday life in contemporary Tokyo and to interpret their key spatial characteristics. Focusing on the Taito Ward, an old downtown area, the article uses theories of play and activity to explore the tangible and intangible elements of the lifeworld. It applies visual methods to investigate concrete spaces in the ward where diverse personal possessions, as valuable traces of daily activity, can be found by recognizing their critical spatial characteristics. Subsequently, two main types of intimate places are identified: utilitarian (purpose-ful) and decorative (purpose-less). Their presence is common in leftover (or shared) spaces, typically on and along the paths and footways located between the low-rise buildings. The discussion concludes with suggestions of how to discern such meaningful places with the application of a Geographic Information System (GIS) to support their emergence and flourishing through planning and design practices.

Keywords: Urban artefacts, personal belongings, public space, visual ethnography, play.

Introduction¹

Recent trends in theories of place, place attachment and home have focused on practices and habitual activities as processes that structure the environments we inhabit (Dovey 1985, Cresswell 2013, Pred 1984, Blunt 2007, Werner et al. 1985). If these concepts — fluctuating, transient, and structured by flows (Sassen 2005) — arise from the reiteration of individual and social practices (Pred 1984), how important is the actual engagement with the physical environment in a contemporary city? This is one of the questions this article explores in the case of Tokyo, a city of conflicting realities with living spaces paradoxically small in an overall bigness (Radovic and Boontharm 2012) and a city that generates solitude² despite an undeniable crowdedness (Genda 2013, Miyazaki 2010). A dissonant image of the metropolis is most apparent in alleyways³ of traditional *shitamachi*⁴ districts. Commonly translated as downtown districts where the slow pace of life in quiet residential neighbourhoods are

¹ We are grateful to the anonymous reviewers for *Urbanities* and the Board for their comments and feedback, which have contributed to improve the final version of this article.

² As an extreme example, *hikikomori* is an individual who has remained at home for six months or longer without interacting personally with anyone outside the family. These people have no friends and are isolated from society, even though they may be living in the middle of a teeming city. Source: <https://www.nippon.com/en/column/g00455/> (accessed on 05.02.2018.)

³ The *roji* can be described as a mostly narrow and winding alleyway or neighbourhood unit in traditional wooden low-rise neighbourhoods, which no car can enter, and which are only wide enough to allow one person to walk or cycle through (Imai, H. 2013).

⁴ *Shitamachi* literally means *lower city* and is associated with the common people's culture before the Second World War, the area for lower class people in a low-lying part of Tokyo that was prone to flooding.

juxtaposed with large-scale buildings. They keep their own separate logic and rhythm — unhurried, intimate and deeply personal.⁵ Focusing on the dialectics between big and small, slow and fast, permanent and temporary, this research investigates the concrete urban situation of an old downtown area of Tokyo and its common spaces that abound with personal possessions and attest to the rich practices of everyday life. In Japan, temporary elements of urban space are called *afuredashi* (Sand 2013). Some of these elements are signs or symbols that help us navigate through the complex multi-layered and multi-levelled realm; some utilitarian, others purely decorative. Whether or not they are attached to nearby shops or houses, they often accommodate domestic items commonly kept inside the house. Blurring additionally the border between public and private space, they become a spatial extension of the home. A walk through these areas reveals the unforeseen face of the giant: the one that is fragmented across the city and wears the face of an individual, of a citizen, of a person engaged with it. The strong presence of Tokyoites' personalities in their physical absence is reflected in the abundance of belongings exposed to our sight.

In contemporary society, whether in public or in private space, the meaning and value of objects change as a result of the increased use of technology. With this dramatic change, the roles of (personal) objects (again in both private and public spaces) observed in this study, as well as their general physical and functional presence in urban environments, have also continued to change (Whincup 2004).

Some of the questions this research opens are:

1. What are the typical spatial relationships in which personal belongings in urban spaces of Tokyo appear? Are there specific spatial and architectural characteristics that afford⁶ a higher number of personal belongings (and, therefore, the possibility for meaningful engagement with immediate environments)?
2. Which meanings become associated with these personal belongings exposed to public view?
3. Would it be possible to identify and assist the emergence of places with similar, positive characteristics through specific planning and design practices?

In order to answer these questions, detailed fieldwork was conducted with the application of visual methods. Personal belongings and possessions found in semi-public and semi-private spaces were photographed, mapped, and discussed. Spatial characteristics of the areas where artefacts were placed were then imported into a GIS and areas with similar spatial characteristics were located.

⁵ Many scholars support the view of Tokyo as a 'city of neighbourhoods' (Imai 2017).

⁶ An affordance is what an environment offers or provides; it includes all transactions possible between an individual and their environment (Gibson 1979: 56-60).

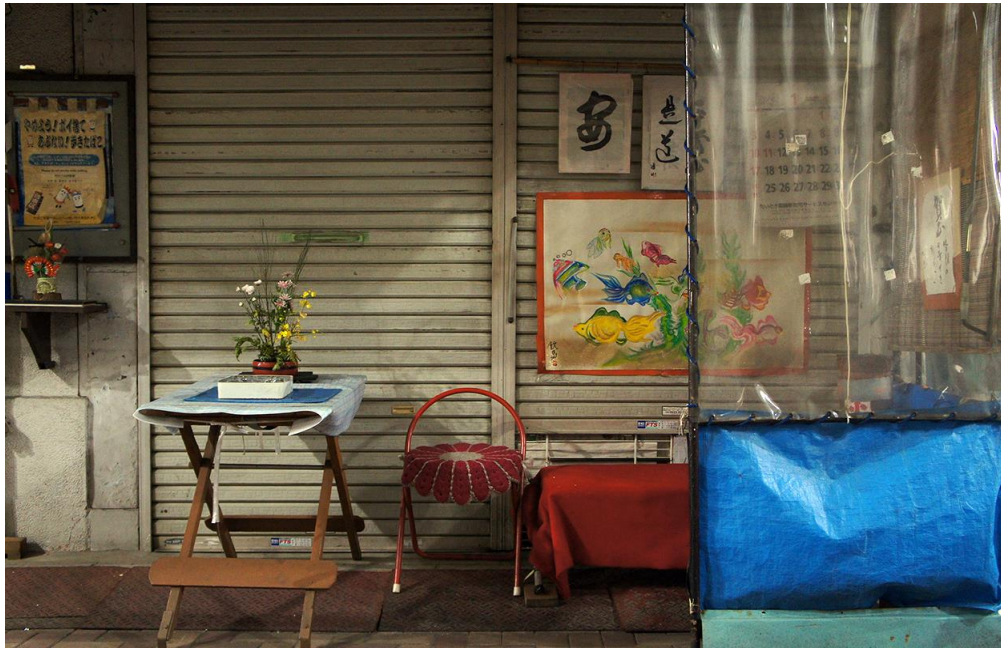


Figure 1. Personal Belongings in an Appropriated Space (Source: Vedrana Ikalovic)

The Taito Ward was explored as one of Tokyo's typical downtown precincts exhibiting distinct *shitamachi* characteristics and exposed to relentless transformation.⁷ The construction sites in Taito are significantly and constantly changing the ward's image and although the meanings, which these elements hold, remain decidedly personal and individual, they are the agents in the production of a sense of community and identity on the neighbourhood scale.

The methodology for this research combines qualitative and quantitative techniques, and is suitable for multidisciplinary studies of urban spaces in rapidly changing metropolitan landscapes. It is also a way to support the emergence and flourishing of intimate places through planning and design practices.

Theoretical Concepts

Traces of Play in a Lifeworld

In order to establish a connection between objects, playful activities, and spatial characteristics of the selected area that accommodates them, three theories were applied. Firstly, as a setting for activities, the concept of the lifeworld that traces and exposes parts of everyday environmental experience and within lifeworld, the concepts of rest, movement and encounters (Seamon 2015). The photographed personal possessions were further classified and re-interpreted as urban artefacts or as objectified human needs (Leontyev 2006.). These objectified needs are forms of play and hobbies, such as gardening and flower arranging, are the most intimate manifestations of play in public spaces (Sutton-Smith 2009). Through these

⁷ According to the proposed Land Use Plan over 80% of the Ward, which currently accommodates small industries and low-rise residential units, is planned for commercial land use with a high building coverage ratio (BCR) and floor area ratio (FAR).

concepts, the connection between a subject (an individual) and object (an element in public space) was established and intimate places were further explored from the spatial perspective. Characteristics of the structures surrounding them were mapped and discussed in relation to the personal possessions.

Lifeworld and Rest

Restlessness in a contemporary city, which comes along with the necessity to move, is changing lifestyles of urban dwellers and the character of public space (Simmel 2012, Dovey 1985, Deleuze and Guattari 1998, Lash and Urry 1994, Green 2002). Activities like sleeping, eating and putting makeup on in the train and changing clothes in parking lots are all common behaviours linked to the urban (and metropolitan) lifestyle that force one to move. Time-space relationships are changing, distances shrinking and consequentially intimacy, privacy, comfort and other attributes of home are gradually being displaced in the public sphere (Rybczynski 1987). These 'taken-for-granted patterns and contexts of everyday life through which the person routinely conducts his/her day-to-day existence without having to make it an object of conscious attention' (Buttimer and Seamon 2015: 149), phenomenologists call natural attitudes or the unquestioned acceptance of things and experiences of daily living (Giorgi 1970). In 'A Geography of Lifeworld', David Seamon uses three primary themes to uncover and reveal the wholeness of everyday life experience: movement, rest and encounter. Movement signifies any spatial displacement of the body initiated by the person himself or herself; it is an action made by the body. Rest is an experiential structure within a network of places an individual is familiar and comfortable with or a 'geographical world extending beyond the dwelling-place' (Seamon 2015: 70). Its specific physical extent and boundaries are not the concern as much as the overriding experiential structure, which makes them possible. An encounter is any situation of attentive contact between the person and the world at hand. Exploring the nature of encounters leads us to better understand how human beings attentively meet the places, spaces, and landscapes that inform their surroundings.

Elements found in alleyways (personal belongings and other arranged small objects) define places that are the extension of home into the public realm. Photographs of these 'extended homes' present residents' natural attitudes and their unintentional involvement with taken-for-granted places are traces of their playful activities. Further analysis of the physical environment containing different amounts of personal belongings reveals causal relationships between the physical characteristics of the environment and the intensity of encounters.

Solitary Play

The presence of people in public space and their active interaction with it are commonly seen as a social indicator of 'good life' (Bradburn 1969, Diener and Suh 1997) and traces of play in public spaces are a sign of individuals' engagement with the physical environment and its qualities.

'Traces might also be found in trampled paths over grass or gravel, or as evidence of children's *play* in the form of temporarily abandoned toys. Traces could be

tables, chairs and potted plants left outside in the evening, which indicate a quarter where residents confidently move their *living room* into public space and leave it there. Traces could show just the opposite: hermetically sealed shutters and bare porches can indicate a quarter with no signs of life.’ (Gehl and Svarre 2013: 30) (emphases added)

Play is an ambiguous phenomenon studied mostly in the context of entertainment and in children (Bateson 1955, Judd 2002, Nasaw 2012, Marcus 1974). In this study, Sutton Smith’s list of activities that are identified as forms of play is applied to the exploration of public space⁸ (Sutton-Smith 2009). The focus is on solitary play and private possessions, which are traces of solitary play in public space. The solitary activities include hobbies such as collections, gardening, flower arranging and handicrafts. Only subjective play or mind play (such as dreams and reveries) is more private. In this sense, a public area that accommodates solitary play becomes a place with a high level of intimacy or intimate space. In dense urban environments and contemporary cities solitary play is extrapolated from the inside (of the home) to the outside (the city), or rather to the border between inside and outside, to interstitial places, which are an extension of home. It has characteristics of both public and private because the activity itself is solitary but it occurs in a public space, out of the home. The person, or subject, is exposed through the traces of their activities and objects visible to others. These traces could be, for example, in the form of a small ensembles of tables and chairs surrounded with flower arrangements; washing machines, clothespins, hangers and laundry on clotheslines; baskets, brooms and sponges in the vicinity of water pipes and basins or collections of toys. Left or arranged in public space, these private possessions and personal objects become veritable urban artefacts and solitary play becomes the most intimate form of play, leaving tangible traces in the urban environment.

Objects as Urban Artefacts

The conceptual distinction between the universe of people and objects has had an impact on material culture studies, commonly populated by anthropologists, archaeologists, psychologists and sociologists (Knappett 2002). This study explores this relationship from the urban perspective, through the relation between subject and object, where the object is something in the subject’s environment that represents the satisfaction of a particular need. Activity is what mediates between the subject and object; it is a human need that forms the structure of activity and the objects themselves are the products of activity. Tangible traces of

⁸ Among the presented list of activities, mind or subjective play (dreams, daydreams, reveries playing with metaphors) is mostly private. It is followed by solitary play (hobbies, collections, gardening, flower arranging, handicrafts etc.), playful behaviours (playing tricks and playing around), informal social play (joking, parties and leisure), vicarious audience play (television, film, concerts and theatres), performance play (playing music, being an actor and play voices), celebrations and festivals (birthdays, weddings and carnivals), contests (games and sports) (athletics, gambling and physical skill) in addition to risky or deep play (caving, rafting and extreme games). Contests and deep play are mainly public.

activity in a form of privately possessed appliances, small architectural elements, personal objects etc. were therefore observed as artefacts, as objectified human needs (Leontyev 1977, 2006).

Observation of ‘inexplicable protuberances and concavities connected to buildings and streets in the city’ (Suzuki as cited in Sand 2013: 88) occurred in Japan in the 1980s. Observationists of the Street Observation Society were looking for and interpreting traces of others’ interventions in the planned regularity of Tokyo. Members photographed uncommodified objects that are referred to as *bukken*⁹ and saw themselves as bringing to light an urbanism already latent (Sand 2013). By simply recording, classifying and describing their discoveries, the observationists left the city itself as the primary frame, suggesting the potential existence of innumerable similar instances of the same classifications and schemes that archaeologists interpret — fragments for what they suggest of the whole to which they once belonged, not for the intrinsic interest or beauty of the fragment itself (Sand 2013).

The object made by some unidentified person or by natural accident, incidentally found, photographed and interpreted was significant for the exchanges or transactions rather than for the sign of use value. With a similar approach, this research observes and examines spatial characteristics of settings that accommodate objects placed by unidentified individuals. It discusses the ambience of the setting and level of intimacy created through the exchange between subjects, objects and play. It proposes a combined methodology for their further exploration and integration of planning for valuable and meaningful (irreplaceable) environments.

Public Spaces and Lifestyles in Tokyo

Extrapolation of home into the public realm, which through appropriation accommodates domestic activities, is not a novelty in Tokyo. Exploration of urban lifestyles tends to emphasize the ideas of nomadic life and use of various public and commercial facilities as extensions of domestic functions¹⁰ (Caballero and Tsukamoto 2006, Ashihara 1989, Yūko and Yokokawa 1995). These facilities provide spaces with attributes usually associated with home — privacy, intimacy, comfort, convenience, efficiency and self-expression (Rybczynski 1987, Sixsmith 1986).

When it comes to public spaces and activities in public spaces, in Tokyo, they are generally contrasted with Western concepts of public spaces commonly used for leisure and socializing (Dimmer 2012, Jinnai 1995). One of the conceptual keywords for understanding its urban space is the term *kaiwai* translated as activity space described and characterized by subjectivity, indeterminacy, and assemblage of individual experiences. As a phenomenon that

⁹ *Bukken* corresponds more closely to the countable concrete noun ‘property’ as it is used in the real estate industry. By the same token, it suggests what legal scholars call the *in rem* character of property: its foundation as a concrete relation between persons and physical things, as opposed to a relation, like a contract, between persons (Sand 2013).

¹⁰ Such as trains, convenience stores, vending machines, noodle shops, public baths, coin washing machines, karaoke shops, love hotels and typically small apartments used only as storage and bedroom.

is more social than spatial, it is constituted by ‘the set of individual activities of people, or the accumulation of devices that trigger a set of activities’ (Ito as cited in Sand 2013: 32). The concept of *kaiwai* characterised Japanese urbanism through ways in which ordinary people appropriate space spontaneously and the kinds of places that accommodate and lend themselves to this spontaneous appropriation (Sand 2013).

Such places are customary in downtown areas of traditional Tokyo districts (Bunkyo, Arakawa, Taito, Sumida and Koto) where the character and overall atmosphere remains relatively unchanged despite damage caused by major historic disasters such as the Kanto Earthquake in 1923 and the Second World War, and despite relentless industrialization and modernisation of the city. The atmosphere of Edo is still present in these districts where Japanese historic landscape and cityscape continue to be preserved and maintained. Their main quality is in an overall network of narrow streets, paths and footways; the spaces for (individual) interactions where everyday life occurs and expresses itself; they are a boundary between past and present and the space that continues to exist as mental space and an alternative landscape of reminiscence (Imai 2013).

The research was set in the Taito Ward, a typical downtown precinct in the centre of the *shitamachi*. Taito is the smallest ward in central Tokyo, covering only 10.11 square kilometre, and the third smallest in a population with 197,977 residents, as of 1 May 2018 (Taito Ward 2018). Population density is 19,582 persons per square kilometre. The location is significant due to its central location since the Meiji Restoration (1868) when Edo’s name was changed to Tokyo and it became the capital of Japan (Figure 2).¹¹

On one hand, it is a dynamic ward, with various industries (i.e. manufacturing, wholesale and retailing) and numerous small and medium enterprises. Such enterprises were, and remain, bearers of a slow-paced life style: most of the buildings accommodate small businesses, and the second floor still tends to be used as a living space with no separation between the dwelling and working places. However, the number of such establishments has decreased; as have the number of employees. The declining birth rate and problems associated with an aging society have caused discontinuation of successors, and affected the population of the Ward (Taito Ward 2018). The ratio of younger people to the total population is constant while the proportion of elderly residents is gradually increasing.¹² An increasing number of high-rise buildings and the constant influx of people also affect the pace of life and traditional patterns of engagement with the environment.

On the other hand, the location of Taito is distinctive because some of the most visited tourist spots are in its immediate vicinity (Figure 2). Asakusa area with 1400-year-old Sensoji

¹¹ For disambiguation: the Edo Period is the period between 1603 and 1868 and Edo City’s name was changed to Tokyo in 1868 when it became capital of Japan and the Emperor as well as the seat of Government moved from Heian-Kyo (modern Kyoto).

¹² Based on the records from 2009 to 2013, the trend of long-term population decline will continue, as will a smaller birth rate and aging population. However, in Taito, the number of residents will continue to increase because of the influx of people, both foreigners and Japanese. It is expected to reach 200.000 by 2024 (source: Taito Ward 2018).

Temple, Tokyo Skytree,¹³ (the tallest building in Tokyo and the second tallest tower in the world) and busy Akihabara station and its shopping district specializing in electronic goods (considered to be an *otaku* hotspot)¹⁴ are all within walking distance. Ueno Park, which is located in Taito Ward as well, is the second biggest urban park in Tokyo and the most visited in Japan. It is home to various museums (Tokyo National Museum, National Museum of Nature and Science, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Shitamachi Museum) and other cultural facilities. The majority of public spaces in the Taito Ward are near these busy and bustling landmarks.

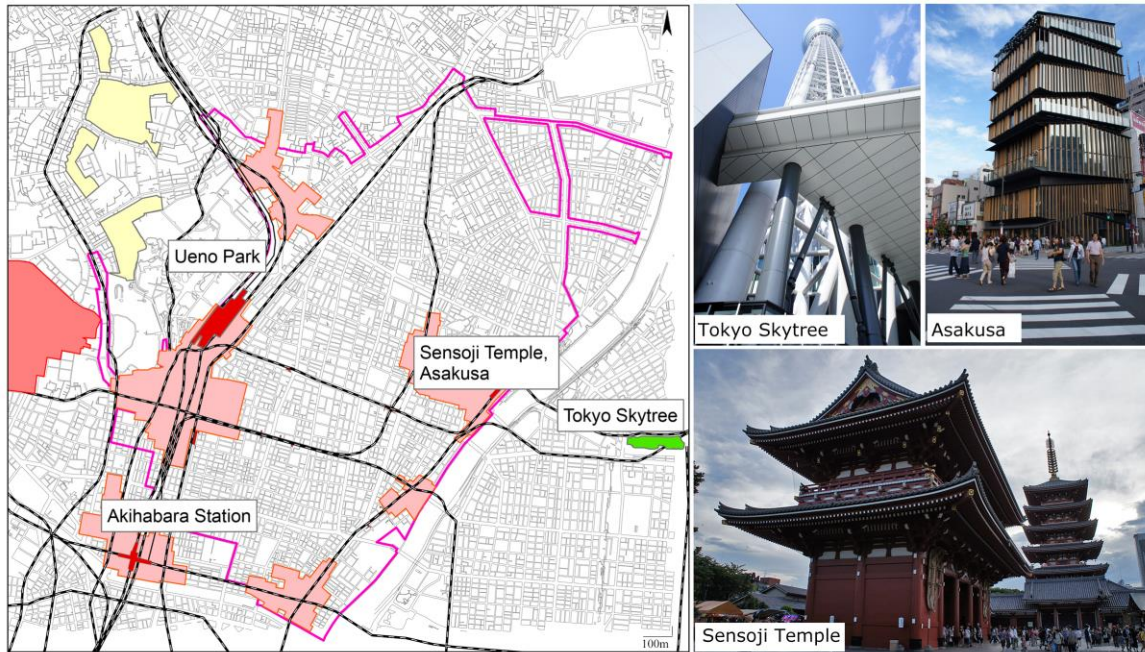


Figure 2. Big Taito. Left image: Map with the position of the Landmarks. Right images, Landmarks: (A) Tokyo Tower; (B) Asakusa Tourist Center; (C) Sensoji Temple (Source: Vedrana Ikalovic).

This friction (between small, slow, permanent and big, fast, temporary) makes the ward unique. It is the place where ‘bigness’ and ‘smallness’ meet the dynamics of constant physical transformation. Taito is big, Taito is small and Taito is (constantly) ‘under construction’.

Methodology

Chaplin writes, ‘[...] social scientists who are also skilled photographers aim to produce images which have both documentary reach and aesthetic quality, these can — in combination with verbal text — generate a type of social science understanding which is very rich [...]’ (2002: 179). Scientific disciplines, like cultures, are not static but dynamic entities, continuously changing and developing (Pardo and Prato 2016). One of the fundamental

¹³ Three and a half years after opening, Tokyo Skytree was visited by 20 million people. Source: <https://japantoday.com/category/national/tokyo-skytree-visitors-top-20-million-3-12-years-since-opening> [accessed 18.05.2017]

¹⁴ *Otaku* is a Japanese term for people with obsessive interests, commonly in *anime* and *manga*.

components of cultural (also sociocultural and urban) anthropology is ethnographic fieldwork that usually includes participant observation and interviews. Ethnographic methods, however, include a range of other research techniques and approaches. Among them, visual methods are commonly used in studies to document various aspects of contemporary urban settings. Visual methods have been marginalized as being subjective and unreliable but since the 1980s images have started to become acknowledged, accepted and regarded as a meaningful element of ethnographic work (Niskac 2011, Pink 2013). Knowles and Sweetman (2004) provide an elaborate genealogy of visual methods through the use of photography and numerous texts reflect upon them (for example, Spencer 2010, Margolis and Pauwels 2011, Krase 2012, Banks and Zeitlyn 2015).

Commonly, subjects of photographs in urban settings are people and their behaviours observed in relation to others and the environment (Whyte 1980, Gehl 2011). In this research, photographs were used as a form of data to identify the intersections between people and their environment and to illustrate the general from the particular. Through the inventories of static characteristics and properties, the photographic images served as points of access to the social world, which they also archived (Knowles and Sweetman 2004).

Walking, as a metaphor for reading (De Certeau 1984), remains the best way to capture the contents of daily life placed in shared spaces (like extended homes). Street observation in Taito Ward started as study of ‘inexplicable protuberances and concavities connected to buildings and streets in the city, which, while purposeless, have been beautifully preserved’ (Sand 2013: 88). The streets of the ward’s commercial area (classified in Japan as ‘urban roads’) were photographed during five consecutive days in July 2016. The routes were mapped and recorded in order to geo-reference the photographs.¹⁵ Taito’s 3-chome block,¹⁶ with the highest number of urban artefacts, was then selected for the final stage of this research. The gathered visual data was used for interpretation and definition of spatial characteristics of intimate spaces. The intimacy of shared spaces was explored through the presence of elements commonly kept and used inside the house, in the privacy of the home (Collier Jr 1995). Focusing on daily domestic activities (Ahrentzen et al. 1989; Oseland and Donald 1993), the elements were defined through their placement in rooms of an archetypal house plan, such as living room, dining room and bathroom (Monteiro 1997). Figure 3 includes a complete list of urban artefacts, rooms of an archetypal house plan, examples of solitary play, and attributes of the home, which lead to the definition of types of intimate places and their characteristics.

¹⁵ With the ‘Map My Walk’ application, available on AppStore and GooglePlay.

¹⁶ In Japanese Ku is a ward, Chou is a district, Chome is a block. [translated by the author]

URBAN ARTEFACTS	ROOMS OF AN ARCHETYPAL HOUSE PLAN	SOLITARY PLAY	ATTRIBUTES OF HOME	TYPES OF INTIMATE PLACES	CHARACTER OF INTIMATE PLACES
waterpipes	storage	handicrafts	efficiency	maintenance	utilitarian
basins					
buckets	attic	gardening	convenience	storage	
baskets	garage				
brooms	hall	flower arranging	comfort	utilities	
toys		balcony	hobbies		privacy
umbrellas	kitchen	collections		intimacy	
flowerpots	living room				
table	bathroom	collections	intimacy	decoration	
	chairs				bedroom
washing machine				painting	
laundry					
clothespins					
clotheslines					
hangers					

Figure 3: List of Urban Artefacts, Rooms, Solitary Play and Attributes of Home, and Types and Character of Intimate Spaces (elaborated by Vedrana Ikalovic).

The focus of visual analysis is on the intended purpose of private possessions and, despite the capability of photographs to generate multiple meanings, the ambiguity of meaning between picture maker and picture viewer is therefore diminished (Barthes 1978, Hall 1966).

The spatial characteristics of the surroundings (such as the scale of buildings, their functions, characteristics of paths and walkways, etc.) were then imported as factors into a GIS. The clusters of places that accommodate small buildings along narrow streets within the Commercial Land Use of Taito Ward were mapped with a Hotspot Analysis tool, which calculates the Getis-Ord G_i^* statistic where features with either high or low values cluster spatially. Finally, results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses were compared and discussed.

Analysis and Discussion

The urban roads and buildings on their sides create diverse ambiances and afford different types of activities.¹⁷ But despite an apparent intensity, the quality and meaning of the

¹⁷ Urban roads in Japan are functionally classified into main arterial roads (primary distributor), arterial roads (district distributor), sub-arterial roads (local distributors) and access roads. Main arterial roads (primary distributor) give priority to automobile transport for regional and intercity services over long distance; arterial roads (district distributor) form the basic urban structure and provide services for major intra-urban traffic between the city and adjacent area; sub-arterial roads (local distributors) provide services to the generating traffic to/from arterial roads; and access roads which form the urban block and provide direct access services to/from building sites (JICA 2007).

activities that take place in main or arterial roads are low comparing to those on paths, and footways. Even if there is no apparent activity in those areas, objects and elements are ever-present, as their trace and evidence.

From the viewpoint of the concept of play in public space, people spend most of their time on the smallest of streets. Given the number of artefacts and their character, these places are considered to be the most personal and the most intimate open places in Taito and they are the places of play that accommodate solitary play (arranging, gardening, collection etc.) without exception.

The results of visual analysis

While all four types of urban roads exist in Taito Ward, the most significant in terms of presence of urban artefacts are alleyways. On Taito-3-chome block specifically, a significant number of photographed urban artefacts are distributed along the paths and footways (or rather within shared intimate spaces), and hidden among the clusters of characteristic low-rise buildings. According to the activities, they are a result of the spaces that accommodate urban artefacts. These are divided into two categories, utilitarian (purpose-ful) and decorative (purpose-less). Both categories simultaneously derive from, and accommodate, solitary play and are thus mostly private; while only some of them afford informal social play (joking, parties, and leisure). The main differences between the proposed categories are: (1) utilitarian places accommodate but do not actually afford activities while decorative ones do (especially those of arrangement) and (2) utilitarian places are less intimate than decorative places.

Urban artefacts and their characteristics are visually presented in Figure 4 and transactions between the subject and object are further elaborated within each category.



Figure 4: Urban artefacts (elaborated by Vedrana Ikalovic)

Utilitarian (or purpose-ful) places are places that support utilitarian, practical actions and those that afford and accommodate movement (hobbies, handicrafts, flower arrangement,

maintenance, etc.). Three types of utilitarian places are recognized: places for storage (keeping items), places for maintenance, and extrapolated fragments of home (domestic devices kept and used out of the dwelling). Places for storage and maintenance are commonly located along the paths connected to the access roads, while fragments of home are inside the block, along the narrowest paths.

(a) Storage or ‘place to store’ is defined as a common space where people keep useful objects, tools, equipment and other small items commonly stored in a garage or attic. Sometimes they stockpile furniture or industrial machinery in commercial areas and small houses. Two types of storage were defined according to their relationship with the building: vertical storage (attached to the façade of the building) and horizontal storage (on the ground). The vertical objects were distributed in form of shelves and horizontal ones were divided into compartments. Solitary activities related to storage of handicrafts. Because of the items they stored, attributes of home that are attached to it are privacy, efficiency and comfort.

(b) ‘Place for maintenance’ is a common space equipped with elements used for cleaning and maintenance of public spaces. They accommodate small basins with water pipes, buckets and brooms; and are designed and planned in recent apartment buildings as well as in older buildings. In some cases, they were designed as small cleaning units and in others they were subsequently attached to the house. Spatially, they are on the private property but, depending on the size of lot, the leftover of the building footprint and its connection to the street, they are used for the cleaning of public space too. Inside the house these elements are commonly kept in a bathroom or in storage. Solitary activities related to maintenance are flower arranging (watering flowers) and characteristics of home attached to it are efficiency and comfort.

(c) ‘Extrapolated fragments of the home’ are utilities and appliances commonly kept in a hallway or in the bathroom (such as washing machines and shoeboxes). In some cases, they are planned and designed to be kept and utilized outside in a supporting infrastructure. This is common for group (or collective) housing and, in this case, elements are accessible from the ground level, but are elevated and separated from the street. Activities that take place in those areas create a home-like atmosphere (doing the laundry for example). Attributes of home attached to the ‘extrapolated fragments of home’ are intimacy, privacy, and efficiency. Visually, with the abundance of residents’ personal belongings (in this case hangers, clotheslines, clothespins etc.), the cityscape becomes appealing and lively.

Decorative (or purpose-less) spaces are those for hobbies such as gardening, arranging or decorating, handicrafts, and painting. All three concepts that reveal lifeworld — movement, rest and encounters — are associated with them. Purpose-less actions afford social activities, interaction, and they change visual features of the place.

(a) ‘Arrangements’ are ambiances with furniture (or improvised furniture) that afford socializing and usage (by others, including passers-by). They complement social activities lacking in other public spaces (stationary activities such as sitting, talking, etc.). In some cases, they are extensions of small shops or restaurants. Whether publicly or privately owned these small public spaces create local atmosphere and abound with personal belongings and

objects with meanings. Chairs and tables with flower-vases and paintings on walls are elements usually kept in a living room or kitchen (Figure 1). Furthermore, because of the spatial characteristics they can accommodate only a small number of people, which creates an intimate atmosphere. Physical attachment to the dwelling and interaction with owners adds to the domestic feeling. Solitary activities that take place in those ‘open living rooms’ are flower arranging, socializing and hobbies. Attributes of home associated with them are those of comfort and intimacy.

(b) ‘Decoration’ is a collection of various decorative items in shared space without specific use, left at the visitors’ disposal: a form of transaction or an exchange between the residents and observer. In a spatial sense, a collection of small items is usually attached to the building and situated close to the openings (doors and windows), sometimes to the fences and placed on the flowerpots or even air conditioners. Those ambiances are results of hobbies and arranging. Commonly, these decorative elements can be found in all rooms.

(c) ‘Painting’ is an action of changing the façade and changing the two-dimensional image of the place. It is an artistic expression, or self-expression, often noticeable from a distance. Similar to decorating, it is subjective play that does not afford further use. Spatially, it is two-dimensional, ‘flat’, and adds to the architecture and aesthetic appeal of the place, which contributes to its identity and authenticity. Solitary activities necessary for the creation of those ambiances are handicrafts. Inside the home these activities commonly take place in a hobby room (if existing) or in a garage. Paintings are usually applied to shutters or walls therefore this kind of activity is rarely possible inside the house.

Following the analysis and classification of urban artefacts, spatial characteristics of ambiances that accommodate them were analysed. The focus was on the relationship between the alleyways and buildings surrounding them.

Figure 5 shows the network of paths and footways and height of the buildings they are attached to. The urban artefacts are present in all paths, but the level of privacy is changing with the scale: the smallest and narrowest paths accommodate the most intimate personal belongings usually kept in bathroom or bedroom (such as laundry, slippers, etc.) while access roads accommodate useful objects kept in garage or storage (such as buckets, brooms or tools).



Figure 5: Paths and Footways in Taito 3-chome that accommodate personal belongings (elaborated by Vedrana Ikalovic).

From the visual analysis of intimate spaces, it is concluded that:

- The intimate shared spaces occur along the paths and footways that are within blocks, elevated and separated from urban roads.
- Personal belongings are left and arranged within clusters of detached low-rise buildings along the border between the path and the building or between the clusters of buildings.

The combination of these two types of elements (narrow paths and low-rise buildings) is denominated as ‘clusters of smallness’.

Spatial analysis in GIS

In order to map ‘clusters of smallness’ in GIS, a Hotspot Analysis tool, which calculates the Getis-Ord G_i^* statistic where features with either high or low values cluster spatially, was applied. The tool operates by examining each feature within the context of neighbouring features. A feature with a high value is interesting but may not be a statistically significant hotspot — to be a statistically significant hotspot a feature will have a high value and be surrounded by other features with high values as well. Features in the ± 3 bins reflect statistical significance with a 99% confidence level; features in the ± 2 bins reflect a 95%

confidence level; features in the ± 1 bins reflect a 90% confidence level, and the clustering for features in bin 0 is not statistically significant. In Figure 6 the hot spots (light grey) and cold spots (black) reflect statistical significance with a 99% confidence level (± 3) and the clustering for features depicted in grey colour is not significant.

Two clusters were significant in Taito (Figure 6). The clusters of Taito 3-chome block that were observed and studied with the application of visual methods were clusters with 99% confidence levels. Application of the software is therefore useful for the recognition of potentially significant intimate spaces and clusters of buildings that afford appropriation places that accommodate activities and solitary play. An identical analysis could be applied to other Tokyo wards (at the ward scale), in order to identify places with similar qualities. Furthermore, it would be possible to input additional spatial characteristics as factors (such as the height of the buildings, length of the sidewalks, buildings footprints, and so on) to refine the results. Depending on morphological characteristics of concrete wards, the analysis would be done at the ward scale, or at the finer scale of individual blocks and clusters.¹⁸

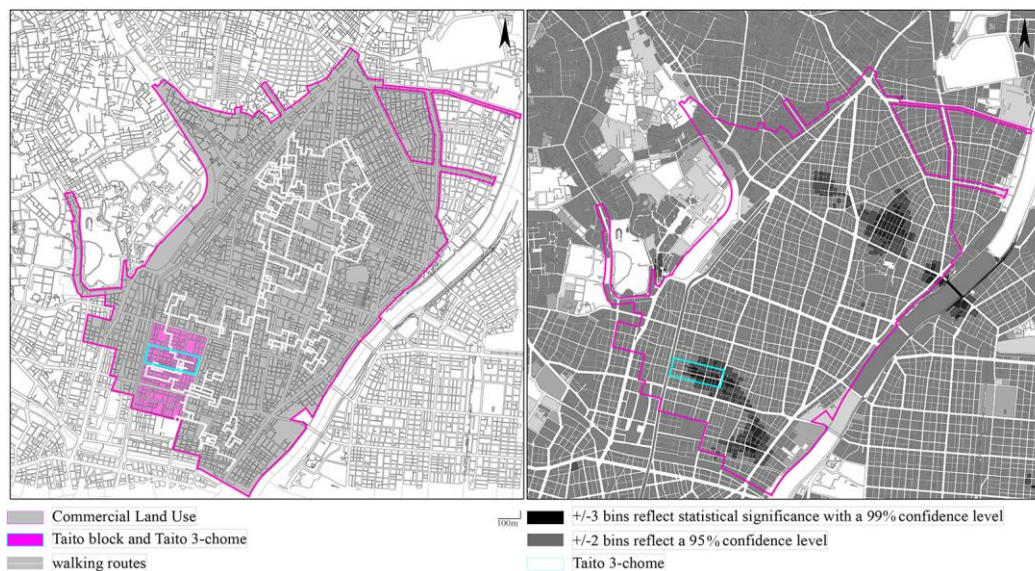


Figure 6: Results of Observation (left illustration) and results of Hotspot Analysis (right illustration) (elaborated by Vedrana Ikalovic).

Summary and Conclusion

As we walk through the narrow paths and footways, where the smallness and slow pace of life coexist next to the images of constant transformations, dramatic physical change and the large size of the most visited tourist attractions, the abundance of belongings exposed to our sight tests our sense of comfort. We are constantly crossing an invisible border between belonging and not belonging. These places of interaction between self and other, between subject and

¹⁸ Sizes of Tokyo Wards vary significantly. As an example, Setagaya ward covers 58.08km², its population is 900,095, density is 14,414.34. It is approximately five times bigger than Taito in both area and population.

object, and between the individual and their physical environment were explored in this research from an urban perspective, with the application of theories of play and activity.

As a distinct downtown area with a strong dual character, the Taito ward and its intimate places were explored with the application of visual methods. Photographs were used for the analysis and study of meaning and purposes of personal belongings extrapolated from the intimacy of home into the public realm. The intimate spaces defined from the data collected in the Taito 3-chome block are divided into (1) utilitarian (purpose-ful) places that support but do not afford activities and solitary play, and (2) decorative (purpose-less) places that accommodate solitary play and, in some cases, socializing. Within utilitarian places are 'places to store', 'places for maintenance' and 'extrapolated fragments of home' and within decorative places are those of 'arrangement', 'decoration' and 'painting'. Spatially, both utilitarian and decorative places are physically attached to low-rise buildings and set out in leftover places, between the footprint of the buildings and narrow paths next to it. Combinations of these two characteristics were denominated as 'clusters of smallness' and were used for a Hot Spot analysis in GIS, which recognizes features within the context of neighbouring features. The two sets of data were then overlapped and it was evident that clusters of low-rise buildings with small footprints identified in GIS were those with the highest number of personal belongings identified by observations. It is, therefore, possible to recognize and select areas and blocks with the potential to afford solitary play and activities with the application of software.

In Tokyo, a city where movement and speed of life are challenging traditional definitions of engagement and place attachment, these spatial conditions have an irreplaceable value. They afford opportunities for encounters and complement existing socializing public spaces of the Ward. Furthermore, residents directly participate in the creation of 'charming' and 'beautiful' cityscape both individually and as a group through their habitual actions. However, places with a high number of urban artefacts are those that are under the threat of urban redevelopment as space for new high-rise offices and residential complexes increasingly appear inside the remaining *shitamachi* neighbourhoods.

This research highlights the complexity, feasibility and importance of ethnographic visual studies in contemporary urban settings that help us understand our urban world (Pardo and Prato 2016). Qualitative and quantitative methods are seen as complementary and the proposed methodology suggests how to embed intangible spatial qualities of fragile urban environments into regulatory and executive documents. It positions the quality of the urban environment ahead of economic growth (or, at least, next to it) in a technologically oriented environment and metropolis, which is essentially unsustainable. Urban dwellers, as social agents, are recognized as bearers of (cultural) sustainability through the creation and modification of their spaces (Krase 2012, Sorensen 2009). Their active, but informal, participation is one way to move towards desired spatial qualities and tolerance of already existing meaningful environments.

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