Tokyo Public Space Networks at the Intersection of the Commercial and the Domestic Realms

(Part II)

Study on Urban Content Space

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Abstract

The domestic qualities that Tokyo offers to accommodate urban nomadism are found not only at the interior scale of the dividual space studied in Part I, but also in urban exterior spaces. This paper examines the functional features of these exterior spaces, created by the aggregation of 'zakkyo buildings'. Both cases, interior and exterior are classified as 'content space' due to their commonalities. 'Content space' is presented as a valid design paradigm that, however, must be considered within its specific socio-cultural context, examined in this paper using the theory of liminality.

Keywords: dividual space; zakkyo building; content space; liminality

1. Introduction

This study builds on a previous research paper on the hybridization of the public, domestic and commercial realms in a series of interior spaces in Tokyo, coined 'dividual space' (Almazán and Tsukamoto, 2006). All of them are public establishments that offer domestic-scale rooms, while charging the customer based on small units of time. Inside these rooms there are multiple choices for activities, media and equipment. It was argued that the appeal to customers is not based on the scarce spatial qualities of these establishments, but in the array of contents available for individual use.

Dividual space was shown not as an isolated fad, but as part of a wider trend to make use of the city for activities traditionally related to the home. This phenomenon, as it exists in Tokyo and other metropolises, was described as fragmented urban life or urban nomadism. The expansion of the domestic realm not only addresses the emergence of small scale rooms in the public realm (one of the characteristics of dividual space), but also 'domesticity' in a broader sense, a set of certain characteristics that creates the feeling of 'at-homeness' in the city. In order to show this process in Tokyo, this paper postulates a general paradigm of 'content space' as the concrete means in which the merging of the public, commercial and domestic spaces is taking form.

The same methodology will be followed as the previous paper, from now on referred to as Part I. A set of definitions will be established to build a conceptual framework that can be substantiated with specific study cases. Emphasis is given to small but focused extreme cases that reveal meaningful information. This methodology does not aim to develop statistically valid samples or predictive theory. Instead, this study-case-based research is carried out in the hope of offering in-depth knowledge and a set of advanced and useful images, concepts and theoretical frameworks.

2. Definitions

2.1 Domesticity

In large contemporary metropolises urban nomadism and increasing social mobility raise questions of the meaning of 'home'. As discussed by Rybczynski (1986) the idea of 'home' is a cultural artifice which in the West emerges with the development of the bourgeoisie. Rybczynski shows that the range of attributes embodied in the home –privacy and intimacy, comfort, convenience and efficiency– were gradually acquired by the domestic space in different historical periods. This paper adopts the above mentioned set of four abstract attributes to define 'domesticity', which can be spatialized in ways different from the Western bourgeois home.

In fact, Ashihara (1989, p.45) affirms that the Japanese attitude towards the home can be compared with that of Westerners' towards the bedroom. He suggests that "each house in Japan is a private bedroom" in concluding that the city has become part of the domestic realm, wherein: parks become "family rooms", office buildings become "parlours" and airports and harbours become "entry ways". This metaphor suggests that, what in the West is considered 'domestic realm', in Japan can be spread out in different

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urban spaces.

2.2 Content space

The previous paper drew a parallel between architecture and media theories to introduce the concept of 'content' and its clear distinction between a neutral outlet and the information and services offered through it. By generalizing the conclusions extracted from the study of dividual space, a paradigm of 'content space' can be established and characterized as follows: 1) Immersion in contents. Space is filled with a myriad of contents that stimulate the individual's attention and distracts him from considerations of the architectural qualities of space. 2) Convenience. Contents can be easily accessed and used. 3) Multiple choice. Contents are presented in a great variety that creates the attractiveness of freedom of choice.

The analysis presented in Part I demonstrates that dividual space can be considered as 'content space', in this case content consisting of exchangeable items such as furniture, game devices, audiovisual and printed media. A similar arrangement is found in the hundred typical Tokyo apartments documented by Tsuzuki: tiny spaces crammed floor to ceiling with stuff such as electronic gadgets, clothes, books, CDs and kitschy collectibles. Tsuzuki affirms that many people in Tokyo prefer these cramped places to the larger apartments they could afford in the suburbs for the same price, since people want to live "close by their favourite bookstores and boutiques and restaurants and watering holes" (1999 p.18). Both the stuffed interiors and the lifestyles of their inhabitants show a clear preference for living close to multiple and accessible contents. This shows an urban dimension of 'content space' that will be addressed later through the analysis of one vernacular commercial building type: the so-called zakkyo buildings.

2.3 Commercial scenographic space

The gradual commercialization of public space in post-industrial cities is a widely known process, which has lead marketing techniques to shift their focus from the items on sale to the setting of the sale; from merchandise to the experience of shopping. Chung (2001) offers a genealogy of types of shopping buildings that shows the gradual evolution towards the production of urban spaces based on shopping as its main social activity and the sculptural effects of architecture as the main source of spatial stimulation (see Table 1.). This trend leads, on one hand, to the gentrification of existing downtowns with scenic qualities. On the other hand, to a recreation of a full range of plazas, promenades and other traditional

| Table 1. Evolution of shopping space from focus on merchandise to focus on the setting. (Summarized from Chung 2001) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Social or consumer trend       | 1950s | 1960s | 1970s | 1980s | 1990s | 2000s |
| Shopping typology             |        |       |       |       |       |       |
| Indoor shopping centre        | Suburbanization | Anti-commercial-ism | Social demand for quality of life | Reurbanization |
| Big-box store                 |         |       |       |       |       |       |
| Office buildings along main road |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| Residential                     | Train Station | Subway Station | Department Store |
| Amusement quarter            | Office buildings along main road | Subway Station | Department Store |
| Love Hotel area               | Office buildings along main road | Subway Station | Department Store |
| Department Store             | Office buildings along main road | Subway Station | Department Store |
| Train Station                 | Office buildings along main road | Subway Station | Department Store |
| Department Store             | Office buildings along main road | Subway Station | Department Store |
| Subway Station               | Office buildings along main road | Subway Station | Department Store |
| Area of cheap bars           | Office buildings along main road | Subway Station | Department Store |
| Area of expensive bars       | Office buildings along main road | Subway Station | Department Store |
| Amusement quarter            | Office buildings along main road | Subway Station | Department Store |
| Love Hotel area               | Office buildings along main road | Subway Station | Department Store |
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Fig.1. Shopping-entertainment centre (left, Odaiba's Decks), theme-park like shopping centre (middle, Odaiba's Venus Fort) and new scenographic space (right, Roppongi Hills) in Tokyo European urban forms and an emphasis on an aesthetic of tidiness and unifying design.

Klein (1999) compares this scenographic urban space with the 17th and 18th century European baroque cities, though it must be said that, unlike the religious or political motivation of the historical baroque period, the new scenographic developments are overtly commercial in orientation. According to Klein, architect Jon Jerde's conspicuous shopping malls epitomize the characteristics and global pervasiveness of this scenographic trend. In Tokyo, the trend is visible in most inner-city redevelopment projects fostered by the Law for Urban Renaissance, including two extensive urban designs by Jerde. This trend shows a renewed concern for exterior space, but has often been criticized for leading to sterile simulacra of public space that lack the vitality of the authentic city.

3. Study Case I: zakkyo Building

This chapter is the first step in clarifying the manifestation of content space in the urban scale. The so-called 'zakkyo buildings' contain many dividual establishments and have a pervasive presence in the train-station commercial districts of Shinjuku and...
Shibuya, which are the biggest clusters of dividual space in the Tokyo 23 Ward area (see Part I, Fig.1.).

The characteristic arrangement of train-station commercial districts has been modeled by Cybriwsky (see Fig.2.). According to Cybrinsky, these are "epitome districts" of Tokyo, where "one can see the bigger place in compression or in miniature" (1991 p.151), whence we can expect to generalize the conclusions extracted from the study of epitome districts to wider areas. Cybirsny's original model shows hatched areas –love hotels, amusement quarters and areas of cheap bars– and referential buildings – station, department stores and new office towers– within an undetermined zone for "retailing" depicted in grey. This model reflects a cognitive map of the area, where only the most referential elements are depicted. However, within the undetermined retailing area there are many anonymous zakkyo buildings which play a fundamental urban role, as will be argued later.

3.1 Meaning of the term 'zakkyo building'

The term "zakkyo" literally means "coexisting miscellany": a haphazard assortment of heterogeneous elements existing together in the same place. Referred to buildings, the term addresses multi-tenant buildings containing a mixture of offices and recreational establishments. Unlike the large plots of department stores and office towers, developed by companies with the economic capacity of gathering several properties together, zakkyo buildings typically occupy preexisting narrow plots, manifesting a slender and high shape popularly known as 'pencil buildings' (Encyclopedic sources: Digital Daijisen 2001 and Japanese Wikipedia 2006).

3.2 Review of previous studies on zakkyo buildings

While Japanese sources on zakkyo buildings focus exclusively on the topic of disaster prevention’, some comparative studies in English, mostly by Western commentators, address architectural and urban issues. Zakkyo buildings are compared with a vertical street (Shelton 1999 p.96); this is a spatial arrangement hardly found in Western cities, where commercial establishments occupy either the street ground level or are located within the confines of shopping centres. Popham highlights Minoru Takeyama's Ichibankan building as an example of multi-story bar buildings in Shinjuku's Kabukicho, comparing it with an "up-ended Golden Gai alley" (1985 p.111).

Three shortcomings have been detected in the review. First, there is no systematic description of the legal framework, which in fact literally shapes these buildings and determines their characteristics. Second, there is a bias towards focusing on the building façade, either celebrating it (Shelton 1996, Richie 1999) or denigrating it (Kerr 2001, Ashihara 1983), but no description is given on how these buildings collectively create urban space. Third, there is a lack of analysis on the social meaning of these buildings. Only a Japanese author, Ashihara, postulates a kind of cultural Japanese "lack of concern" for exterior space that creates "unsightly building exteriors" (1983 p.20).

Fig.3. Summary of regulations concerning outdoor advertising on buildings located in commercial districts (shogyo chiiki)

3.3 Characteristics of zakkyo buildings

This chapter aims to overcome the first shortcoming. In architectural regulations, the term 'zakkyo building' is not employed. The nearest term found is 'fukugō yōdo' (multi-purpose or multi-use), as they are called in disaster prevention regulations (Tōkyō-to Bōsai Kenchiku Machizukuri Center 2006) or land use official classification (TGM 2001). Nevertheless, unlike 'multi-use' complexes or mix-use towers, zakkyo buildings are not multi-functional, since they do not contain spatial variety. Rather, they consist of a stacking of similar spaces, occupied by a miscellany of diverse 'contents'. The following list aims to unveil the tacit commonalities attributed to the so-called zakkyo buildings.

1) Central location. Zakkyo buildings appear in areas where urban ordinance permits commercial use, especially in those areas specifically designated as 'commercial district' (shōgyō chiiki). A strong presence in train-station commercial districts, they are typically located in front of the station squares (eki-mae hirōba) or in front of major roads (omote-dōri). The plots in these locations, highly visible within the city, are allowed higher floor area ratios and more building height by architectural regulations.

2) Public use. Zakkyo buildings attract a considerable influx of people due to the public character of the establishments they contain. These 'contents', temporary interior settings that tend to change often include dividual space (except love hotels), other establishments offering cozy domestic-like environments (izakaya restaurants with private rooms), together with offices and a series of socially tolerated but hidden contents such as cabaret or 'hostess bars' (for a sample of common uses see Fig.6.).

3) Maximal generic loft space and minimum interior circulation. In order to optimize benefits from the rental income, buildings make use of the maximal floor area ratio within the maximal volume permitted by the regulations. The space created is generic unpartitioned loft floors that permit maximal customization by the tenant. Indoor staircases, corridors and lobbies are reduced to the minimum necessary.

4) Profusion of display. While the back façades are
utilitarian surfaces with attached installations, the main façades (in front of the main road or crossing) show a profusion of advertisements, either of the contents of the building or of an adjacent one. Advertising is arranged so that it is visible from four different points of view, or visual ‘catch basins’: rooftop billboards can be seen from distant locations, such as train platforms, station squares or near major roads; protruding billboards are designed to be seen along the street; attached advertisements are organized to be seen from the front of the building. Finally, the entrance level is also covered by information of the building’s contents. All these billboards are regulated by a local Tokyo ordinance (TOAA 2005) (see Fig.3.).

3.4 Standard zakkyo building types

The main architectural characteristics of zakkyo buildings can be easily deduced from the regulations affecting plots in designated ‘commercial districts’. Height regulations determine a maximal virtual volume, from which only small utilitarian rooftop constructions (see Table 2. and Fig.4., A) and rooftop billboards can stand out. The immediate application of these regulations and the pressure to exploit the floor area ratio permitted creates a generic loft building within the maximal volume. In most cases this generic construction is occupied as multi-tenant low-rent office building with a commercial ground level. (Fig.4., B). The zakkyo building results from a gradual vertical colonization by different commercial spaces. The staircase and elevators become an extension of the street; the façade turns into advertisements for the establishments. This spontaneous and gradual colonization forms what will be referred to as the ‘first generation’ of zakkyo buildings (Fig.4., C).

Following this generation, a new series of zakkyo buildings have been consciously designed as such, and specially adapted to house recreational uses. Circulation is often displayed with panoramic elevators; the entrance lobby, wider and more articulated, contains orderly composed information of the establishments inside the building; shops on the first or ground floor and second floor are arranged to be easily visible from the street, billboards attached to the façade and rooftop billboards are integrated into the façade design (see Fig.4., D).

4. Case II: Exterior Space Created by the Aggregation of zakkyo Buildings

To overcome the second type of shortcoming detected in previous studies of zakkyo buildings, the buildings themselves have to be examined within their urban context. Fieldwork has been realized in the two main clusters of dividual space: Shinjuku and Shibuya’. Two areas have been chosen within the retailing area close to the stations, following two criteria: first, to facilitate urban analysis due to their clear spatial boundaries; second, to illustrate the two zakkyo building generations mentioned above. One case is the stretch of Yasukuni-Dōri Avenue close to Shinjuku station, where mostly examples of ‘first generation’ zakkyo buildings gather. The other case, a street bifurcation in Shibuya, exemplifies a clear aggregation of the second generations. Both areas can be described as unsightly and cluttered, but there are less obvious features that contribute to their urban vitality. In the content sections, display elevations and street-level plan, the following features have been observed (see Figs.7.-12.).

4.1 Characteristics

1) Spatialized information. In Yasukuni-Dōri the entire height of each building’s façade is covered with billboards, whereas in the Shibuya bifurcation they concentrate on the lower floors and entrance lobbies. In both cases the array of signboards creates an environment of three-dimensional information, where the newest offers, sales campaigns, and the exact place where they take place are perceived at once.

2) Immediate connection. In both cases the interior establishments can be quickly accessed once the billboard is seen from the street. Most of the buildings shown have only one establishment on each floor which is directly connected to the elevator lobby. The size and disposition of displays, the lack of interior circulation, the density of elevators and staircases

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Fig.4. A) Maximal volume permitted by slash line regulations in an area designated as "commercial district" (plot coverage ratio 80%, FAR ranging from x% to y%). B) Typical generic loft building, generally used for offices. C) First Generation of zakkyo building: public establishment instead of offices and press of advertisements. D) Second generation of zakkyo building.
enables even the higher floors to be successfully connected with the street, as demonstrated by the presence of establishments with large public influxes, such as izakaya bars and restaurants.

3) Pedestrian density. Several ways of increasing pedestrian density can be found in the ground floor plans: there is no movement between buildings (no elevated walkways), circulation is left outdoors, the street is lined with entrances, stairs and elevator lobbies. The construction of elevated pedestrian walkways, as a means to distance pedestrians from vehicular pollution has often been criticized for killing the street life. According to Alexander et al. pedestrian density is not the only factor in creating a lively urban space but it "does give a reasonably crude estimate of the liveliness of a space" (1977, p.597). The aggregation of zakkyo buildings successfully exploit their full height for public use, increasing the pedestrian density of the street.

4) Economy of agglomeration. The gathering of similar establishments that the content section shows (cluster of moneylending businesses, izakayas, treatment centres, etc.) indicates a successful economy of agglomeration, which permits higher degrees of desirable commercial cooperative competition between businesses that have to compete against each other but at the same time benefit from their closeness. This degree of agglomeration cannot be achieved with the traditional European model of residences and offices in the upper levels, with the ground level alone for commercial use.

5) Urban 'content space'. Summarizing the analysis, both cases can be described as urban 'content space', defining 'content' at the urban scale as services or activities that can virtually occupy any generic structure by means of slight interior arrangements (e.g. most of retail, office and recreational activities found in both cases). Both areas provide an immersion in fast and conveniently accessible contents, which offer lots of choices and diversity.

4.2 Comparison with the commercial scenographic space

Unlike recent redevelopment projects in Tokyo, which follow the model of 'commercial scenographic space', urban 'content space' is visually fuzzy and lacks scenic unity. This can be attributed to urban ordinances, which regulate each independent building, but do not contain any regulation to treat buildings as a part of an overall urban composition. This is also due to the profusion of displays, that hide the building's profile behind an array of billboards and signs. In any case Shelton shows that both the lack of emphasis on a "collective built form" and expression of "contents over setting" are not a product of modernization but traditional features of the Japanese city (1999 p.88). It can be added that in fact, these contents-oriented features are also found in other Eastern Asiatic cities. Two paradigms can be traced concerning the relation of space and use, and the relation of part and whole. The Western approach is based on the notion of 'function' – use is spatially expressed– and 'complexity' –the whole is an intricate association of related parts; the Asiatic one relies on 'contents' –use is independent from the container– and 'coexisting miscellany' (zakkyo) –the whole is an assortment of various elements just put together.

The urban liveliness found in the contents-oriented case studies suggests a way to build economically viable urban space different from the model of commercial scenographic space. Regardless, the successful application of this alternative paradigm must take into consideration the very specific social-cultural context from which it has emerged.

5. Content Space: A View from Liminality

This chapter overcomes the third shortcoming detected in previous studies on zakkyo buildings: the explanation of their social meaning. An explanation

Table 2. Summary of architectural regulations affecting zakkyo buildings in designated 'commercial districts' (shōgyō chūki) in the Tokyo Metropolis.

| Plot coverage ratio | 80% |
|---------------------|-----|
| Height limitations  |     |
| Floor area ratio (FAR) | from 200% to 1000% |
| (If the width of street the building faces is less than 12m, a new FAR applies if it is more limited: new FAR= street width (m) x 0.6) |
| Total height limitation | Not applicable |
| Front road slash line  | Distance | | |
| | FAR≤400 | 20m |
| | 400<FAR≤600 | 25m |
| | 600<FAR≤800 | 30m |
| | 800<FAR≤1000 | 35m |
| | Angle | Vertical 1.5; horizontal 1 |
| Adjacent plot slash line  | Distance | 31 |
| | Angle | Vertical 2.5; horizontal 1 |
| North side slash line  | Not applicable |

Fig.5. View of Yasukuni-Dōri northern side

Fig.6. Bifurcation in Shibuya (view towards west)
based on the idea of 'absence' of Western attributes (absence of concern, absence of urban unity, etc.) is not capable of grasping the 'presence' of other qualities, which might not exist in the West. This quality has been detected by examining 'content space' from the point of view of the theory of liminality. The term "liminal" (from Latin *limen* 'threshold') relates to an intermediate state condition described by anthropologist Victor Turner in his study of rites of passage (1967, p.93) as a period during which the individual's identity dissolves and self-understanding and behaviour relax. During this state, normally accepted differences between the participants, such as social class, status or identity are deemphasized or ignored, and form a special type of community that Turner called *communitas*.

In Western cultures pilgrimages, carnivals and market places were examples of liminal events. In feudal Japan the tea room was a space where the elites could leave behind their weapons and symbols of power to become just a person enjoying tea. The farmers achieved a similar state during festivals, which allowed them freedom from the tight feudal rules (Kimura cited Heffernan 2006; Varley and Kumakura 1995 p.95). Public baths too were places with a strong degree of liminality, created by the unifying experience of sharing the same bath (Clark 1995, p.114).

The term has been transferred into the field of urban studies by Zukin and Shields with different interpretations. Zukin's "liminal space" is defined as the places where markets encroach upon culture (1991 p.269). Closer to Turner's original definition is Shields' concept of liminal space: places for pleasure where social rules are relaxed. He illustrates this in his analysis of Brighton's Seaside Resort during the Victorian Era. If London was the space for discipline, work and industry, Brighton's beach was a liminal space for disorder where the constraints of social position and order could be temporarily suspended (1992 p.73-105). Due to the difficulty of determining what is urban "liminal space", this paper will only employ the established anthropological concept of liminality.

5.1 Liminality in individual space

For sociologist Hidenori Kimura the anonymity of *Manga Kissa* provides a liminal state: the user can ignore the social rules of self-presentation and be absorbed in internet, gaming or reading; but, at the same time, he can satisfy his "timid desire to belong". For him, *Manga Kissa* plays for current young generations the same role as the ancient tea room or the festivals once did, they "fulfil a deep and persistent cultural longing" due to Japanese tight social norms: "The Japanese system of competition for education, career and social esteem forces young people to obsess over self-presentation" (interviewed by Heffernan 2006). In his view, *Manga Kissa* creates a *communitas* of content-absorbed individuals that share a tacit deal to ignore self-presentation. The liminality of traditional public baths is kept in their contemporary urban...
versions –Kenkō Land or ‘Saunas’. Similar degrees of liminality can be found in the implicit social contract embedded in the Karaoke space, where one's pride and image is not compromised by the quality of one's performance. Participants immerse themselves in music and images and support each other's performance no matter how well or badly they perform (Man Kong Lum, 1998). Finally, love hotel areas, hidden behind tall buildings or in intricate back alleys, are a case very similar to Shields' "space for pleasure", where society collectively suspends their moral norms.

Nowadays many 'contents' do not necessarily require physical space (e.g. Karaoke on mobile phones, wireless internet, etc.). But in spite of the extent of these technological developments, physical space is still needed to provide the social experience of liminality.

5.2 Liminality in content urban space

Dividual space provides a collective immersion in contents space and a collective suspension of
judgement or concern regarding the individual's self-presentation, which also affects how much importance is given to the building's appearance.

Shelton (1999 p.66) describes three types of relationship between building and the street: the first is the common Western monumental attitude: urban regulations establish block geometries and guidelines for façade composition; the second is an introspective attitude, the building shows no display of architectural front towards the street; the third is integrative, the building becomes part of the street by blurring the limits between interior and exterior and displaying its contents. Zakkyo buildings show both an introspective and an integrative street-to-building relationship. They stand on major city locations and contain public venues, but their interior lobbies are reduced to the minimum. Their contents are overtly advertised, but remain hidden behind the opaque surface of the billboards. There is a collective implicit agreement that zakkyo buildings are exempt from architectural self-presentation decor: they can skip the display of the façade and embellishment that 'serious' buildings exhibit (brand boutiques, administration buildings, department stores, office buildings, etc.).

6. Conclusions

In Tokyo, domestic qualities can be found in commercial establishments (dividual space) but also in exterior spaces. Both cases reveal a characteristic spatial arrangement that has been coined as 'content space'. The exterior spaces formed by zakkyo buildings are examples of urban content space with domestic qualities: conveniently located, they provide comfortable and efficient access to a myriad of contents. Intimacy is created by its liminal character: self-presentation is disemphasized since the façades that surround the individual do not upstage him or her. façades might be described as "unsightly" but their low visual profile serves to discourage social pretence.

Content space appears as an emerging multi-scalar paradigm that includes dividual space, private apartments rooms and exterior spaces. Unlike Western emphasis on function and complexity, this paradigm shows a spontaneously emerged miscellany of coexisting contents, which provides an alternative design approach for commercial space. However, its application to a different socio-cultural context should not be literal, since content space is a specific modern response to a persistent Japanese cultural longing for liminality.

Part I examined a series of interiors; this paper focuses on function and complexity, this paradigm shows a spontaneously emerged miscellany of coexisting contents, which provides an alternative design approach for commercial space. However, its application to a different socio-cultural context should not be literal, since content space is a specific modern response to a persistent Japanese cultural longing for liminality.

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