A Critical Study on Tokyo: Relations Between Cinema, Architecture, and Memory

A Cinematic Cartography

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Abstract
This paper investigates relations between cinema, architecture, and the city of Tokyo. First, it discusses the role of cinematography as a medium for reading a city. Movies are considered as a mobile cartography that can be used to travel through the city. Second, it discusses the architectural relationship between memory and Tokyo, and the roles played both by the presence and absence of ruins in the works of architects Isozaki and Rossi. Third, it discusses a film catalogue that represents the most important moments of Tokyo's 20th century architectural history. After a screening of almost one hundred movies related to Japanese society, forty were chosen because they related directly to Tokyo. They were classified as representative of some important moments of Tokyo's 20th century urban history. Finally, this paper argues that in defining a cinematic history of Tokyo, some constants emerged: the architecture of Japan's capital city, as seen through movies, is a realm of mutations in a perpetual state of change.

Keywords: cinema as cartography; Rossi and Isozaki; ruins and rubble; memory and monuments; movies about Tokyo

1. Introduction
In this paper, Tokyo is viewed through the camera lens. Cinema is intended as a cognitive tool used to study, discover, and understand aspects of the relationship between space and collective memory, and architecture and society. Cinema is not just an invention of modernity but is one of its most peculiar expressions, being the first media that mixed space and time.

Movies are a kind of cartography that can be used to travel through the city. Cinema has the ability both to read/record a city, and to tell/emit about city images, and by doing so, cinema is strongly involved in the city image identity process of construction/destruction. If it is possible to reflect on the sign system expressed by a movie, then it is possible to perceive a movie as an ontology by which one can discover an aspect of a city, a landscape, an environment, or a story.

In trying to define a possible cinematic history of Tokyo, some constants emerge. The architecture of Japan's capital, as seen through movies, seems to be a realm of mutations in a perpetual state of change. Tokyo shows an incessant flow of construction and destruction: a history of amazing efforts directed at the construction of a futuristic city. On the other hand, there is a history of Tokyo in which natural disasters or human will have conspired in the destruction of the city. The author refers to an aspect of the city made not just by solid material but also by immateriality. If, concerning construction, it is possible to refer to futuristic ideas, utopian dreams, and astonishing technique when destruction is discussed, the reference here is to a history made not by ruins, but mainly by rubble of no value. To define the relationship between architecture and memory, it becomes fundamental to differentiate what is a ruin and what is rubble.

First, this paper discusses the role of cinematography as a medium for reading a city. Second, the author discusses the architectural relationship between memory and Tokyo by analyzing the works of architects, Arata Isozaki and Aldo Rossi, whose works are related to architecture and memory. Finally, a film catalogue that ideally represents the most important moments in 20th century architectural history in Tokyo is discussed.

2. Cinema
2.1 A Modern Cartography
According to Marshall MacLuhan, cinema was first called bioscope — from the Greek word bios, which means life — because it showed life movements in visual terms. It is because of the existence of an intimate relationship between life, cinema, and the city, and collective memory, moving images, and architecture that the author argues that cinema is not just a way to represent connections between life, the city, and architecture; cinema is a cognitive tool by which to live modernity, and the metropolis is a product of modernity.

In the existent relationship between cinema and the city, a new way for reading space appears. This new
way to read a city is possible because a movie is a sort of cinematic map. Movies are a kind of cartography we stand before, or rather, we travel through.

It is possible to experience reality both directly and indirectly, and both personally or through the use of media. It is possible to know a place without physically having been or going there.

2.2 Inhabiting Cinema

As Walter Benjamin states, thanks to movies we have the possibility of reconfiguring the image of the most awful and boring places of a city: we may walk with interest among a city's ruins.

"Our taverns and metropolitan streets, our offices and our furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling." 

Movies allow us to experience the city and its spaces, both existing and lost. Cinema is a device that allows spectators to travel through images of the past, present, and future of a city; viewers travel through the memory of a city by experiencing both what it was and what it may become in the future. German director Wim Wenders argues that architects and directors share a common goal and responsibility, and that people, in fact, inhabit the inside of both movies and architecture. And, according to Wenders, cinema must be considered architecture, as a place to temporarily reside.

3. Memory and Architecture

Among people who have tried to define the relationship between memory, architecture, and the city, we find architects Aldo Rossi and Arata Isozaki. However, first, the author will define the relationship between memory and Tokyo.

3.1 Fragility of Memory

What kind of analogy can be made between images generated by the mental geography of the memory and the real geography of architecture? What is the role of monuments in urban experience? Already, Roland Barthes has talked about how experience in Tokyo is linked to the fragility of memory and the ability of its inhabitants to find their way in a system that develops at a speed our memory cannot immediately sustain, except by updating its own operating system.

The experience of the Japanese city is related to memory, even a short-term memory made by events, fragments, and collages. This is unlike western cities, which are made through continuity and uniformity. While in Europe a building is made to last forever, in Japan it is made to last for a defined period of time. This method of constructing and thinking about the city is more related to fluidity and movement than to permanence and monuments.

In considering architecture analogous to human memory, what contemporary spaces of the city correspond? Victoria Meyers argues that if memory is considered a mirror of contemporary life, it may try to communicate that human beings are losing access to memory, due to the fast pace of modern living. However, perhaps human beings are just losing access to a deep memory related to archetypes and they are experiencing a sort of mutation, a paradigm shift toward a new condition. Human beings are losing long-term memory but in exchange are receiving a new kind of knowledge. This new knowledge develops itself by different modalities: a brand new simultaneous way of recording and memorizing, in which each image recorded is superficial and fleeting.

It seems that in this first stage of globalization, in order to have a planetary collective memory, human beings cannot have either deep memory and deep roots or common monuments and history. Paradoxically, the only possible monuments are fleeting ones.

3.2 Memory and Architecture for Isozaki

In his unpublished autobiography, Arata Isozaki reflects that on August 15, 1945, the day Japan surrendered, the sky was blue and clear. He was in the middle of his youth, and he felt that an era was at an end, though he did not have any idea what Japan could expect in the future. However, he knew what he was surrounded by:

"I just knew that the noise ceased. It was a moment of absolute quiet. For all my youth, until when I started to study architecture, I constantly found myself faced with destruction and the elimination of physical objects that surrounded me."

And from that moment, Isozaki thought about an architecture that could not be touched or be caught, a blur architecture to be used to shape the city; a city that on a daily basis, deals with fluxes, fragments, and rubble. At the beginning of his career he was trying to come up with an interpretation of space, time, and matter (intended as architecture and the city), supposing all of them as metaphors.

"For me space is equal to obscurity, time is equal to term (eschatology), and architecture and the city are equal to ruins and ashes. It is impossible to shape obscurity, a term, or ruins, because they are diametrically opposite to socially accepted concepts as transparency, progress and construction, and also because they are surrounded by an air of bane."

All of these metaphorical images are tied to that memory of total tranquility he has of the day Japan surrendered, when everything seemed to have stopped for him. Isozaki also tried to define what a ruin is; he tried to define the process ruins are defined by. Being an era of transition towards a society where media has already been integrated into the architecture of the city, he argues that in order to understand the new matter of which the city is composed, we have to look no
more at what makes it solid but, instead, at what gives fluidity to the city.

"Ruins are revealed by a process of construction and modification. During the war, many Japanese cities lost their own shapes, and after which, cities were quickly filled in by buildings that from the start looked like ruins without any visual order."

Steel and concrete were mixed with advertisements, neon lights, and poles. Cities lost their solid substantiality behind aggregations of glowing neon light and superficial elements. According to Isozaki, cities began to transmit to us their meanings more by using semiotic codes than by out-and-out solid shapes; the city now is in a fluid condition, invisible, and virtually simulated by the codes that fill it in.

3.3 Rossi and a River Made of Images

It is a fluid condition that Aldo Rossi tried to describe and attain in his research. He assumed a displacement of the relationship between mental and physical space had occurred; geography of memory doesn't match any more exclusively with personally experienced geography. This means that today it is absolutely normal to know images of a place even before visiting it. Images have undergone a process of shifting: an image before belonged to a space, or perhaps to the memory of a person. But now images have passed from being linked to a space to being able to be sent anywhere. According to Seungkoo Jo, there are different levels of image diversity and it is not just the case that Aldo Rossi was particularly interested in collages and fragments without taking much care of the project's scale and surrounding context. Actually, he was focusing on the relationship between memory and the city.

What kind of effect is produced by one of Rossi's most representative projects, "Teatro del Mondo"? Freely floating through Venice's canals, this wooden construction had the power to dissolve its static position. It created a new correspondence with both an ever-changing space and an ever-changing memory.

People who encountered "Teatro del Mondo" experienced a different city; a city where it was impossible to avoid a continuous comparison between adopted positions in space and in the mind. It was architecture that proved how fragile the experience of what is supposed to last forever might be. Perhaps images are not just an exterior matter but also interior. In Rossi's architecture, the relationship between memory and architecture is fragile, ever changing.

3.4 The Pure Time and Memory of the City

According to Marc Augé, there is a substantial difference between rubble and ruins.

"Rubble accumulated in recent history is not as ruins born from the past. There is a big difference between the historical time of destruction and pure time. A time I call time in ruin. The ruins of a time that had lost its history or that history had lost."

In fact, the pure time that ruins show is as the aura of things. As Walter Benjamin argues, it is an apparition of a thing that is far in time but close in space. Augé understands that the aura is not related to history but to a "ruinous" time experience. It is as though the past enters the present by subtracting itself from history. By experiencing ruins, it is possible to feel this kind of oblivion of history that provides a chance to rethink about a new life beginning. Related to the city of Tokyo, these words help to explain the difference of perception that is required to experience a city where movements are more important than monuments in determining its identity. Tokyo is a city where the average life of a building is 25 years, and where its citizens negotiate its different times and spaces on a daily basis. The short life of architecture in the city interweaves a recent past with a fluctuating present. The memory of the city exists within each person who lives and moves through it, more than in its ruins or buildings.

4. Film Catalogue

4.1 Tokyo as a Cine-city

Tokyo, seen as a cine-city, seems to show more evidently a characteristic that it shares with all big cities: the impossibility of understanding it all at once, of applying any system of measurement. Moreover, this city is used as a setting for many movies produced every year in Japan. When the floating image of the real Tokyo is mixed with its corresponding cinematographic image, it really appears as a kaleidoscopic city made up of infinite temporary cities, in a state of constant flux. The following catalogue is an attempt to show one of its aspects.

4.2 Study Methodology

After a first screening of more than one hundred movies related to Japanese society, forty were chosen because they related directly to Tokyo. They were classified as representative of some important events in Tokyo's 20th century urban history. Among these events are: the Great Kanto Earthquake; post-war changes in values and the need for new spaces for a changing society; brutal transformations due to the 1964 Olympic games; massive infrastructure and the first construction of skyscrapers; Tokyo expansions before the burst of the economic "bubble"; projections of what the city would be in the future; "pixelization" of today's reality.

4.3 First Half of 20th Century

"Dear architect, I am writing you to inform you of how matters stand in Tokyo. The city is razed to the ground, only heaps of rubble emerge from the flat surface. The citizens who survived the earthquake and the subsequent fires live in total destitution. However, among all those disasters there is good news: your Imperial Hotel stands majestically, as one of the few buildings in the city to resist."
### Table 1. Architectural Events and Movies on Tokyo

| Periods | Most Important Architectural Events | Movies |
|---------|-------------------------------------|--------|
| 1900-1945 | -Westernization of Japanese Architecture. -Great Earthquake of Kanto. | 1) Burns, K. and Novick L. (1988) *F. Lloyd Wright*, USA. 2) Ozu, Y. (1929) *I Graduated, But...*, Japan. 3) Ozu, Y. (1932) *I Was Born, But...*, Japan. 4) Takahata, I. (1988) *Grave of the Fireflies*, Japan. 5) Yamanaka, S. (1937), *Humanity and Paper Balloons*, Japan. |
| 1946-1959 | -Post War Reconstruction. -New Urban Lifestyle. | 6) Kurosawa, A. (1960) *The Bad Sleep Well*, Japan. 7) Ozu, Y. (1955) *Tokyo Story*, Japan. 8) Sargent, J. (1977) *MacHurt*, USA. 9) Suzuki Seijun (1966) *Tokyo Drifter*, Japan. 10) Yamazaki, T. (2005) *Always Sunset on Third Street*, Japan. |
| 1960-1979 | -Olympic Games. -Massive Infrastructure. -Covering of Water Canals. -Futuristic Theories on the City. | 11) Hasegawa, K. (1976) *Youth To Kill*, Japan. 12) Hasegawa, K. (1979) *The Man Who Stole The Sun*, Japan. 13) Noda, M. (2003) *Tokyo Vein*, Japan. 14) Omori, K. (1991) *Gojira Tai Kingu Gisora*, Japan. 15) Yoshinaga, N. (2002) *Parasite Dolls*, Japan. 16) Wenders, W. (1985) *Tokyo Gru*, USA, West Germany. |
| 1980-1999 | -New Towns Foundation. -Skyscrapers Construction. -Social Structure Changes of Tokyo as a Global City. | 17) Hagenberg, R. Neubert Karl, (2001) *SurFACE*, Japan. 18) Ichikawa, J. (1995) *The Tokyo Siblings*, Japan. 19) Iwai, S. (1998) *Shigatsu Monogatari*, Japan. 20) Mitani, K. (2001) *Minna No Ie*, Japan. 21) Okawara, T. (1999) *Gojira ni-sen Mireniamu Ie*, Japan. 22) Ootomo, K. (1998) *Akira*, Japan. 23) Satoshi, K. (2003) *Tokyo Godfathers*, Japan. 24) Takahata, I. (1994) *Pom Poko*, Japan. 25) Tsukamoto, S. (1988) *Tetsuo I Zawa Mon*., Japan. |
| 2000-on | -Tokyo Planned as a Futuristic Global City. -Projections of What the City Would Be in the Future. -"Pixelization" of Reality. | 26) Akeyama, I. (2005) *Himikoto*, Japan. 27) Anno, H. (2004) *Shiki Jitsu*, Japan. 28) Arakaki, S. (2004) *Apple Seed*, Japan. 29) Iida, J. (2003) *Dragon Head*, Japan. 30) Ishikawa, H. (2002) *Tokyo Sora*, Japan. 31) Kiriya, K. (2004) *Casshern*, Japan. 32) Moon-Saeng, K. (2003) *Wonderful Days*, Korea-Japan. 33) Nakano, H. (2001) *Stereo Future*, Japan. 34) Ootomo, K. and Morimoto, K. (1995) *Memories*, Japan. 35) Oshii, M. (1995) *Ghost in the Shell*, Japan. 36) Oshii, M. (2003) *Tokyo Scanner*, Japan. 37) Satoshi, K. (2003) *Tokyo Godfathers*, Japan. 38) Takekuchi, T. (2000) *Wild Zero*, Japan. 39) Teraka, O. and Ootomo, K. (2001) *Memoporisus*, Japan. 40) Yamakawa, G. (2001) *Tokyo Genshatsu*, Japan. |

Arata Endou wrote these words to Frank Lloyd Wright, to inform him of the situation after the terrible earthquake of 1923. The city was almost completely destroyed, and the legend that the Imperial Hotel was the only building to resist the earthquake was born. In the imagery of the documentary, "Frank Lloyd Wright" by Ken Burns, it is possible to ascertain the effects of the earthquake on the city. It is a fundamental moment in the transformation from city to metropolis. Reduced to a clean slate, the former building materials of paper and wood were replaced by new materials that made it possible to introduce new town planning systems.

The movie studios moved from Tokyo to Kyoto. It was no longer possible to shoot historical movies in the capital, due to the lack of sets. Only productions featuring modern images of Japan could be shot in Tokyo. In the 1930s, about 500 movies a year were produced in Japan; these record numbers were second only to the American movie industry. On the contrary, in 1945, only 16, the lowest ever, were produced as a result of the war. At the end of the war more than three million inhabitants of Tokyo were homeless and 70% of the dwellings had been destroyed. This was not rectified until the 1960s. The city unconsciously became accustomed to movement, which has become part of its identity.

### 4.4 Rivers of Water and Cars

Tokyo is a city built on water par excellence, built at the confluence of four rivers. During the preparations for the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games, numerous canals were silted, and many thoroughfares and highways were built on top of its rivers. Once, rivers of water crossed the metropolis; today, rivers of cars pass through the city. In "**Tokyo Vein,**" one gets the opportunity to glide on the waters of the Kanda River, underneath the Metropolitan Expressway, a true artery that passes through the body of the city, conveyor of enormous quantities of goods. The documentary offers a melancholic trip through what is bound to become, sooner or later, a layer of the city's history. It is also an attempt to remember that one of Tokyo's identities has been partially lost.

### 4.5 Futuristic Projects

Kenzo Tange and Kisho Kurokawa planned to expand the capital by building thousands of hectares of artificial islands in Tokyo Bay, based on the concept that land should be produced, rather than reclaimed from Nature. As in architecture, in Japanese movies there is no lack of visionary urbanization programs.

Futuristic projects for Tokyo Bay made Japan known across the world as a land of experiments. Japanese movies owe a lot to that great visionary ability, which has undoubtedly provided inspiration as far as the construction of the movie image is concerned. In movie imagery, Tange and Kurokawa's projects are not just accepted, but tripled in size. As depicted at the beginning of "**Akira,**" Tokyo becomes a landscape of...
what the animated movie presents as an immense Neo Tokyo built on artificial islands.

In fact, the urban expansions are, on the contrary, directed towards the interior. Not even the hills that form the borders of the world's largest industrialized metropolis are safe. The story is told in "Pom Poko", by Takahata Isao, which features a close-up of a hill eaten by an enormous bulldozer that suddenly, with a kind of automatic reduction in size, becomes no bigger than a caterpillar on a leaf. The bulldozers feed on nature: when big, they eat hills, and when little, eat leaves.

4.6 Superimpositions of Levels and Feelings

In the 1960s, the Kajima Corporation invented an earthquake-proof pillar system, and Tokyo began to reach for the sky above it. In "Sur/FACE," by Roland Hagenberg, we see images by Kisho Kurokawa, who quotes Le Corbusier. What Le Corbusier predicted with his system of standardized Domino pillars, Kurokawa has realized with his Super-Domino structures. He projects his towers upwards, in an attempt to create at least a piece of the utopian Helix City envisaged years before, which has in the meantime been concretized by the images of Rintaro's "Metropolis." Rintaro's movie shows superimpositions of levels and infrastructures, with completely robotized spaces but very humanized feelings.

Similar humanized feelings can be found in movies such as Ishikawa's "Tokyo Sora," Iwai's "Dragon Fish," and Anno's "Shikijitsu." In these movies the memory of Tokyo is within each person who lives and moves through its flow. It draws mental landscapes that change the way humans relate to each other and to the world. The superimpositions of levels and infrastructures happen both in the spaces of the city and in the inner selves of its inhabitants.

4.7 Datascape, Image, Resemblance

The movie "Tokyo Scanner," directed by Mamoru Oshii, is a kind of bird's eye view that traces a spiralling path above the city. The spiral is the form of the city when it changed from simple Edo to Tokyo, the capital. The shots change continuously, from small to large scale, with sudden changes from large aerial views to shots where one can see the faces and hear the voices of the people in the crowded intersections of the city.

People and houses are scanned, and data screens representing the images are superimposed. The images of the city somehow change from figure to data, in an attempt to decipher the meaning of something we know to be more than mere images. They represent a possible ontology, a way to understand a society better through its movies. The metropolitan life presented in this documentary becomes fluctuating data that may be scanned: a kind of simulacrum of pixels.

Mamoru Oshii is a director to whom work is a continuous challenge, who explores the limits between traditional movies and animation films. Oshii asserts that animation is playing an increasingly important role in movies, and that all movies are becoming "animations." But apart from the movies, this "densification," this infiltration of animation, is also happening in our everyday urban experience. Oshii defines this factor as "animelity."
Utopia, viral phenomena, and robotic dreams all combine to serve as scenario in his "Ghost in the Shell." The technological imagery of the metropolis is carried to extremes. The fascinating atmosphere of "animelity" makes its presence felt. The movie includes a sequence where one of two heroes of the film disappears due to a mimetic device, and becomes the very image of the city in which she finds herself, to fluctuate in the void, invisible as she has become part of the image of the metropolis.

4.8 Dynamics of Tokyo Urban Life

However, according to director Yasujiro Ozu, nowhere are values lost and sacrificed as badly as in the metropolis. Ozu tells the story of how urban identity is lost, replaced by a metropolitan one. His masterpiece, "Tokyo Monogatari," centre on the contrast between two different viewpoints: those of fathers and sons who no longer identify with the same lifestyles; and also between two different spaces: the city and the countryside. In his movies Ozu shows the menace of the city and the prevalence of an insane, but apparently normal, way of living.

When Wim Wenders visited Japan in the hope of returning to the locations where Yasujiro Ozu had shot his movie, he found condominium golf courses, a life-size copy of the Eiffel tower, wax reproductions of dishes served in restaurants and, above all, Pachinko halls, crowded with the inhabitants of the city. The German director realized that the inhabitants were under hypnosis, under the spell of Pachinko. The people seemed captivated by the rolling balls, by the music they create. He perceived that Pachinko is closely related to the changes in the city. In fact, the marbles roll without allowing one to choose their direction, casually, like the lives of the citizens in the metropolitan labyrinth. The metaphor of Pachinko becomes a way to express the dynamics of Tokyo urban life in its first stage as a global city. Wender's "Tokyo Ga" wields a special charm in the parts where it performs the role of an abstract diary of Tokyo, where it captures disconnected images of what was, and to some extent still is, the modern exoticism of Japan. It shows how our perspectives and horizons are changed by Tokyo's incessant flow.

5. Conclusion

To paraphrase Marc Augé, we could say that the Japanese capital will never produce ruins, but only rubble. The difference is fundamental, as rubble appears to foreshadow a nation without ruins, without history that buildings can tell, where time will be cancelled, and that will therefore no longer have any history. While it is impossible to feel any ties to rubble, one may feel attached to ruins. Tokyo would, in fact, find it hard to rediscover its identity on the basis of the idea of monuments in the way the Western city does, simply because it is not producing, preserving, or discovering cultural monoliths (ruins) to which it may be anchored. For Tokyo, it is easy to re-configure its own system without concern for any relation with the past. It seems the Japanese capital cares more about the history of the future than the history of the past, and this is very unique.

According to Philippe Pons, the Japanese city is a positive state of mind and Tokyo is in a state of continuous change that makes it possible for it to synchronize with changes in time — a time that manages to shake off its own rubble, because it predates it. Tokyo shows one of its identities in the transformation of a continuous movement, not in the permanence of a monument. Tokyo is like "space-making software" in constant configuration, in a perpetual mutation.

Tokyo is a realm of movements — those of crowds, of neon lights, of architecture, signs, and new styles. These give the city one of its predominant characteristics: fluidity. This is the same fluidity that makes one think of cinema as a modern cartography made of rivers of images that allows one to travel through a unique metropolis made of a plurality of space and time.

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