

The 'information city' as management apparatus

Kashiwagi Hiroshi

Translated by
Lynsey Clark

Abstract: During the 1980s, Tokyo saw a change in its pattern of development, from the wholesale rebuilding of actual neighborhoods to the manipulation of the visual environment and of the information provided thereby. Understanding cities as an apparatus or control system designed to manage the production and consumption of individuals, this article explores the significance of this shift towards the design of cities as a medium for information. Typified by the development of Shibuya, in the south-west of Tokyo, dominated in large part by the Parco department store, the city not only provided information, but itself became information and thereby a commodity to be consumed, evident in the emergence of magazines that constituted it as such. Cities thereby changed into an apparatus that sought to manage the totality of an individual's desires, also prompting a turn to semiotics as a way of comprehending the information city.

Kashiwagi Hiroshi teaches the history of modern design at Musashino Art University. He has curated and published extensively in the field, including *'Shikiri' no bunkaron* (2004), *Modan dezain hihiyō* (2002) and, in English, 'On rationalization and the national lifestyle: Japanese design of the 1920s and 1930s', in Elise K. Tipton and John Clark, eds, *Being Modern in Japan: Culture and Society from the 1910s to the 1930s* (2000). Lynsey Clark studied history and Japanese at the University of Sheffield and received an MA in translation studies from the University of Leeds. She currently works as a Japanese and Korean to English translator in the field of intellectual property. This essay was originally published as 'Kanri sochi toshite no jōhō toshi', in Kashiwagi Hiroshi, *'Dogu to media' no seijigaku*. Clark's translation was originally published in *Japan Forum* 23(2) 2011 and made possible by a generous grant from the Nippon Foundation. It is published with permission of the author by arrangement with Miraisha, Tokyo.

A managed space for production and consumption

For the last few years, up until 1984, the fall in the amount of large-scale urban development and redevelopment taking place in big cities like Tokyo has been striking. The reasons for this are clear. First, there is the fact that the amount of space that can be developed or redeveloped has decreased. Second, and I will come back to this later, even if 'hard' development and redevelopment, involving large-scale civil engineering work, takes place, it is becoming increasingly difficult for that to bring about the actual revitalisation of a city. (I will discuss below the transformation from machine cities to computerised cities, but we are now gradually becoming aware of this phenomenon.)

Redevelopment from the latter half of the 1960s resembled a surgical procedure, carried out to revitalise a city's potential as an area for consumption when that potential had been lost. These days, however, such re-vitalisation is becoming possible through the manipulation of information – through 'soft' means, rather than through 'hard' redevelopment. In other words, it is becoming clear to everyone that by giving a city's image a make-over you can revitalise its potential as an area for consumption.

This is not to say that large-scale development has ground to a complete halt. For example, a new business complex is due to be completed in September 1984 in Yurakucho, Tokyo, on the land where the Nichigeki theatre and the Asahi Shinbun offices used to be. Alongside this, plans are surfacing for the redevelopment of the area around the east exit of Yurakucho station. Last year, the Nihon Keizai Shinbun, under the title 'Yurakucho reborn', reported on this as follows:

Construction of the new business complex on the site of the Nichigeki theatre and Asahi Shinbun offices began this month. The land was blessed before the work began and construction is proceeding well, aiming for the building to be opened in a year's time. Amongst all this, concerns have arisen in relation to the re-development of the area to the east of Japan National Railway's Yurakucho station. This is an area which has always experienced difficulties, due to local opposition to re-development of the area. Now the concern is that if the area is left as it is, it will see even more of a decline in prestige and get left behind other areas. Next year, once again, the city of Tokyo will consolidate its re-development plans for the area and will create an urban-area development association, which will be in charge of implementing the plans.

(Nihon Keizai Shinbun 16 November 1983)

The area to the east of Yurakucho station is home to shack-like structures housing drinking places, pachinko halls and the like, which sprang up during the reconstruction after World War II. If cultural centres, which are currently popular, art galleries and large commercial buildings such as the Seibu department store are constructed next door, we can see how in comparison the shopping district around the east exit of the station will drag down the overall area. It seems that revitalization with soft information manipulation alone is impossible.

In general the instances where the image of an area for consumption can be improved with just soft information manipulation are those where the area in question is in the position to send powerful information. I would like to look now in more detail at the redevelopment of the area around the east exit of Yurakucho station as this area shows characteristics typical of the problems that have faced cities from the period immediately after defeat in World War II through to the present day.

The weekly news magazine *Shukan Asahi* was quick to publish an article on this redevelopment:

The focus of the redevelopment is on the shopping district to the east of the railroad and Yurakucho station: an area filled with low-rise wood-frame houses remaining from after the war. The City of Tokyo first announced its plans in 1947. Since then these plans have been brought up again and again but those with rights to the land (landowners, as well as housing and land leaseholders) have failed to reach an agreement and the discussions are still ongoing.

The Tokyo City Planning Office stated: 'The principle that land is bought through governmental pressure is outdated. From now on work will go ahead as more of a privately-led initiative, focused on a redevelopment association consisting of landowners and leaseholders. If the demolition of the Asahi Shinbun offices and the Nichigeki theatre goes ahead, even the local shopping area will not be able to stand by and do nothing about their area.'

(*Shukan Asahi* 3 October 1980)

As I mentioned above, the purpose of urban redevelopment is to revitalise a city's potential as an area for consumption. It should be mentioned once again that urban redevelopment with that purpose began in the second half of the 1960s. Most urban redevelopment before then can be better described as 'slum

clearance'. In other words, the main purpose of most of the urban redevelopment that took place soon after the war was the re-allotment of land plots so that the authorities could manage the areas more easily than when they were run-down slums. Also, we can say that the majority of that first urban redevelopment was forced and somewhat careless, so it is difficult to expect particularly sophisticated management from most of those plans. For example, we should perhaps cast our minds to slum clearance in the area around the 'Mammoth police box' in Sanya. Even now there is still unrest in the area that cannot be controlled by the authorities. The area to the east of Yurakucho station is a rare example of an area that did not undergo governmental urban redevelopment in the form of 'slum clearance' in the period shortly after the war. However, now that it has become essential to revitalise the area as a place for consumption, the landowners and leaseholders see that there is no choice but to carry out what I am calling 'slum clearance'. This kind of slum clearance is certainly, as the Tokyo City Planning Office says, a privately-led initiative. However, private enterprise slum clearance can proceed smoothly as it does not have the forceful element that is present when land is bought as a result of governmental pressure. Thus we can say that the redevelopment of the area around the east exit of Yurakucho station is symbolic of city management systems becoming more delicate.

Putting aside for now cities that have arisen naturally, planned cities function as an apparatus, which manages and organises our production, consumption and all our daily activities. That characteristic is certainly even more intense in modern planned cities. In general, plans are a function of a larger control system. There is no way of realising plans in places without control systems. So naturally, planned cities are managed areas where control systems are functioning. The most controlling systems of modern times are the economy (and economics). This means that cities that have grown as a result of modern urban planning are areas that manage all our daily activities based on market economy systems.

The first time following the Meiji period (1868–1912) that cities in Japan became a problem was in the 1920s. The problem was that of housing: namely that there was not enough housing to accommodate the enormous influx of labourers who came from farming villages to the cities due to the economic growth following World War I. Thus at first the cities became the object of plans that aimed to maintain their productive potential. In a system of market economy productivity (labourers) equals instant spending power (consumers). From that point on, urban planners, having realised this dialectic relationship between production and consumption, planned cities as spaces in which to maintain this potential to produce and consume.

A space that maintains this potential to produce and consume is also one that organises the link between production and consumption. This trend rapidly became a concrete reality, peaking around the time of the Tokyo Olympics. Of course this process also included slum clearance. In these cities, planned according to economic systems, Japanese production and consumption expanded without limit, which is why we refer to that time as 'the period of rapid economic growth'.

The city as media and information

It was in the 1960s that so-called 'image advertising' became truly established in a wide range of media. What is special about image advertising is that it gives us a message that has absolutely no connection with the purpose (or use value) of the commodity it is advertising. This kind of advertisement first appeared in the 1920s and by the end of the 1960s most advertisements were of this genre. I find it hard to believe that there was no connection between these facts: that it was beginning to be common for adverts to disseminate a message with no relation to the actual usability of products; and that there was beginning to be a reduction in hard urban development (or redevelopment) based on large-scale engineering work.

As I mentioned briefly at the beginning of this article, one of the reasons for this reduction was the fact that the amount of physical space had decreased. However, a more important reason was the fact that it had become possible to revitalise – or perhaps manipulate – cities as spaces for consumption, and of course also as places of production, through the manipulation of soft information. When advertisements first moved away from the actual instrumentality of products, every single thing and expression could become an advert, and the city, as well as being an enormous advertising expression in itself, also became an apparatus for advertising.

We can see this by just looking at the way in which Koen-dōri and Supein-dori (Park Road and Spain Road), home to the Parco department store in Shibuya, Tokyo, have somehow become forms of advertising information. When a city loses its potential as an area for consumption that ultimately means its potential as a place for production has weakened, although these days the sites of production and consumption do not have to be in the same area of a city. Cities used to need to undertake hard redevelopment in order to be capable of maintaining, controlling and managing consumption and production. However, when advertisements were freed from the actual uses of their product (although of course essentially they are never really freed) cities no longer needed to carry out hard redevelopment.

Of course we cannot say that there was no longer a need to carry out any redevelopment at all. To be more precise, the revitalisation of the sites of production and consumption in a city became possible by understanding that every single thing present in a city was a message forming the city's image and by intentionally manipulating them. For example, although I do not have the figures to hand, one can imagine that simply naming various roads in Shibuya Koen-dōri, Supein-dōri and Faia-dōri (Fire Road) increased the area's potential as an area for consumption.

Parco's Masuda Tsuji has said:

Now the area of Shibuya is widely known as a source of information. Everyone expects to find something new when they go to Shibuya. People who want to find the information they're after on their own, happily take the trouble to go out and look for it.

(*Shitsu-nai* October 1983)

The background to comments like this is that there is an awareness, which first appeared at the end of the 1960s, of the concept of the city itself being media and message. This awareness comes from practice, especially in terms of the urban strategies of companies in the 1970s, of trying to continually revitalise cities as places for production and consumption.

Strictly speaking we should say that, from the moment the city itself became both media and information, its nature changed and it was no longer simply a space in which to maintain production (productivity) and consumption (spending power). The city became an object of consumption, as media and information. If we walk around Shibuya, then just the act of walking around the area immediately becomes an act of consuming the city as information.

We can also say that at the same time as the city became an apparatus for advertising, it became a commodity. Although he is coming from a slightly different angle, Masuda has remarked as follows:

Every two weeks a mini trade fair is held at the SR6 building in Parco, seeking to become 'the Harumi of Shibuya' [referring to an area of Tokyo where many exhibitions and conferences are held, trans.]. We have done this in order to capture the desires of this generation as quickly as possible. Although it is small it is bringing in the visitors just as we hoped it would. We make use of real samples, catalogues, posters and videos to send out information.

Before doing this, I investigated the influence of the flyers and posters pasted on the walls around Shibuya. As I expected, the response was promising and I realised that this could be good business. First I decided to sell the walls around Parco. In other words I used the walls as a resource. I set the annual target for income from the walls in Shibuya alone at 200 million yen [approximately \$840,000], and now we have almost reached sales of that level. Everything has to be paid for: posters and graffiti [!], manufacturers' things and amateurs' stuff. I think it is more enjoyable to see walls with posters on them than empty white walls stretching into the distance. As a result of all this, the amount of information in the area around Parco has increased.

(*Shitsu-nai* October 1983)

Everything that exists within a city becomes media and becomes 'information'. And, as symbolised by the 'wall-writing' of Parco, the posters posted there, while being consumed for the message they contain, are, if you consider the wider picture, producing Parco's image. I said earlier that the act of walking around a city is an act of consuming the city as information. However, looking at the broader picture, the act of walking around a city also becomes part of the information of that city. In other words, the people strolling around the area around Parco are consuming the concept that Parco is a city, which is information, but are also performing the role of producers of that same concept.

When the city became this kind of space, it changed from an apparatus that simply manages production (productivity) and consumption (spending power) to one that manages our every desire. Every image advertisement can, albeit subtly, actually organise our thoughts and sensitivities and turn all our desires for life and sex into desires to consume. In the same way, cities, having become enormous spaces for image advertisement, also organise our desires. And, because the city has become both media and information, the experience of walking around a city has become equivalent the experience of looking at a fashion magazine or watching a television advertisement. However, despite the fact that the act of walking around a city is no different from consuming other forms of media, we still go to cities. Why is that? Masuda claims:

It is because these days we are flooded with nothing but the same information, somewhat similar to the announcements made by the Imperial General Headquarters during the war. Just as then people would take risks to try to get some different information, now people purposely make the effort to go down to Shibuya and look for information with their own eyes. They would feel anxious if they didn't.

(*Shitsu-nai* October 1983)

If Masuda's analysis is correct then we have to assume that the people walking around cities are suffering from excessive anxiety when it comes to information. I do not know if he is completely right, but I wonder if it is not the feeling of needing to seek a media experience different from that of the print and broadcast media that causes people to walk around cities.

There is something that I should add here. I said that the experience of walking around a city is equal to consuming information from other media, but that goes beyond just showing that seeing information about a city from other sources of media and actually going to the city are the same. From a semiotic perspective, seeing information about fashion in fashion magazines or seeing information about food or interior design is equal to experiencing a city for yourself.

Information-ised information cities

With the advent of the awareness that the city is both media and information, it became no longer necessary to revitalise cities as areas for consumption through hard redevelopment. Manipulating information – and even the people walking in a city are information – generates an image of the city, so by doing this it became possible enough to revitalise the city. However, if awareness of the city as both media and information becomes more widespread, the natural outcome will be a phenomenon whereby new media and information are needed to classify and organise, or to decipher, that information. It is fair to see the arrival of the 'information magazine' *Pia* (launched in 1971), which sees a city as a collection of information and classifies and indexes that information, as something that the era desired and demanded.

Of course many other kinds of city guidebooks had appeared before that. One famous early publication from the Meiji period was Tengai Ishikawa's *Tōkyōgakū* (Tokyo Studies, 1904). The introductory notes read: 'I decided to produce this book having had the experience of failing because I was careless in my city life.' In other words, *Tōkyōgakū* is written by a young person who came to Tokyo dreaming of success but failed, to show those who follow how they can be successful in the city. The book includes chapters such as 'Life in the city', 'Social etiquette', 'Being a good guest' and 'Getting people to trust you'. In these can be seen a view of the city, typical of the era, that sees Tokyo – the iconic city – as the place to search for success. In contrast to these city guides, from the Taisho period (1912–1926) onwards many tourist guides were published in a 'Tokyo – See the sights!' style, and this trend continued for many years. Thus, prior to *Pia*, nothing was published in Japan that treated cities as information. *Pia* took the position that it was up to the reader how to use the fact that the city was

information. And one can say that this position itself corresponded to the view of cities held by people at the time.

The supplement *Zentoshi catarogu* (A Catalogue of All Cities, 1979), produced by the magazine *Takarajima*, is also representative of publications that see cities as information and catalogue that information. Another example was the illustrated magazine for city dwellers Popeye, 'the magazine for city boys', which was first published in 1977. This magazine shared similar characteristics with the other publications, also taking the position of 'what will you do with the fact that cities are information?' You can tell from these examples that in the 1970s, when the awareness of the city as media and information had become widespread, it was not just urban development (redevelopment) that changed, but also publications about cities and the very nature of those publications.

Something else to which we must pay attention is the intellectual situation that appeared alongside this phenomenon of the city being seen as information and catalogued. This was the trend in semiotics to decipher the city as a kind of metaphor. This leads to the city becoming a metaphor for all things and occurrences, giving the impression that by deciphering cities we can decipher the essence of people and society. Cities and semiotics have become fashionable because they have shown us, with clarity, how to decipher the concept of the city as information, a concept that has become complicated and difficult to know how to interpret. However, I would like to add something that demands careful attention in the semiotics of many cities.

As Roland Barthes has already pointed out in 'L'ancienne rhétorique' (1970) most modern semiotics is simply a retracing of Plato's binary opposition. In other words, even to use typically Japanese comparisons in order to decipher cities, such as front and back (*omote to ura*), purity and impurity (*hare to ke*), light and darkness (*hikari to yami*), is ultimately nothing more than to retrace Plato's binary opposition. To make matters worse, these days we focus semiotics only on the city that we can understand through Plato's binary opposition and ignore other aspects that are hard to understand or, conversely, we arbitrarily praise what is essentially failed decoding.

Despite this, the reason that such semiotics of the city are in fashion is because there is a desire for someone to explain clearly the concept of the city as information – a concept that has become too complicated for people to decipher. It seems that the way the magazine Popeye organises and presents to us the concept of the city as information on a popular level and presents it to us and the way bad semiotics decipher the same concept according to a principle of binary

opposition, as phenomena of the same moment, are in some ways on the same wavelength.

Incidentally, you can easily imagine that the magazine *Pia* uses computers and other electronic media in cataloguing information. At present, even if it is produced using electronic media, the information aspect of 'cities as information' can be accessed (consumed) by the end user only through print media in the form of a magazine. However, as everyone is predicting, in the near future the end user will be able to get (consume) the information aspect of the city as information as it is – as electronic media. So we can say that this aspect of information will come to be consumed through cable TV, the Captain system (videotex) and all the other forms of so-called 'new media'. Once that becomes a reality, will the city not, once more, become something different again?

The city used to be simply be an apparatus with which to manage production (productivity) and consumption (spending power), but from the moment that it was first affirmed as information it switched to being an apparatus with which to manage all of our desires. I have already touched several times on the fact that, due to this change, cities no longer require much hard development (redevelopment) with large-scale civil engineering works. I would dare to say that, in the near future, if we assume that the information aspect of the city as information will be directly consumed via electronic media, then the coherent, unique area known as a 'city' will no longer be needed at the level of perception. What will be needed are networks, although of course this is only at the level of perception.

Therefore, it is hard to deny that the space of the city, which is already becoming an object of nostalgia, with its backstreet drinking places and ramen shops, may exist simply as a place in which to fulfil our nostalgic needs. If it gets to the point where we can consume every kind of information from fashion and food to visual entertainment and can do everything from home shopping to home banking through the vacuum tube of the television, it will no longer be necessary, at the level of perception, to have actual cities. Similarly, whether you live in the centre of a city or in a far-out area, the information that is sent out electronically will be the same, so that differences in where one lives will, at the level of perception, cease to exist. If this does become a reality, cities as such will no longer be needed and so the way in which electronic media are formulated (or re-formulated) will become the most important aspect of urban planning. This means that cities will become nothing more than simulacra.

Despite this, even more than at present, the city will become a form of media that finely manages and organises our lives, managing production and consumption

as well as the desires that motivate them. This also means that today's electronic media, known as new media, will turn all of us individuals, one by one, into data, at the same time as sending us all sorts of information directly and controlling our sensitivities and thoughts. It is a fact that our cities are about to welcome in a new era. However, as has been the case until now, modern cities will continue to manage our lives. The most important issue for us will therefore continue to be how to break through and destroy this management and control.