



東京  
画像  
**TOKYO**  
images

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# PURPOSE

foreword

**TOKYOimages** documents my day-to-day experiences in Tokyo with words, sketches and photos from August 28th until September 12th. It is a personal diary that takes the reader through the process of translating a foreign urbanity into images, by movement, observation and interaction within the urban texture.

The reasons for travelling back to Tokyo are many. First of all I wish to get deeper in touch with the current atmosphere of the city. How does it feel to live in such a dense place? Who are the people who inhabit the urban villages? Has Tokyo changed since I left after the earthquake in March 2011?

Tokyo is claimed to be a three-dimensional city. Extreme density causes a multilayered distribution of infrastructure and activities, with solutions that only appear when space is scarce. Does this mean that Tokyo already is “hike-able”? Do people use

the urban space differently than we are used to in Western cities?

I want to face and test these presumptions that I, and probably many other people, have about Tokyo. I already know the city quite well, after have lived there for a year. Therefore it will be a good opportunity to measure the city’s flux. How does Tokyo change over time?

By walking, bicycling, hiking, commuting, sketching and talking to people, I wish to experience and interpret the pulse of the city in a new way in order to get a more nuanced picture of Tokyo and how its citizens use the city.

During my stay I will meet old friends, professors, fellow students and young architects, who will hopefully assist me in my effort to interpret the city and enrich my travels.









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# ARRIVAL

august 28th

I arrived at Narita International Airport early in the morning, after a long flight from Oslo. The blue, ragged carpet was still covering the floor in the customs, accompanied by the sign welcoming me to Japan. Everything seems to be the same, at least at first glance.

By following the clearly marked directions I quickly found the right train that was heading to Asakusa. Narita is situated in a rural area outside the urban rim, which makes the gradual transition from a green landscape to a vivid cityscape very smooth for newcomers. The new Tokyo Sky Tree appeared in the horizon, raging over the dense low-rise roof tops.

After arriving at the hostel I started to explore my closest surroundings to locate the basics; a ramen shop and a convenience store. It was fairly easy, as long as you know some of the urban patterns and can read the signs. My Japanese is not particularly good, but the words I forgot seems to return due to the surroundings that are linked to my memory.







- L. Subway entrance at Asakusa.
- TR. Asakusa new skyline.
- BR. Potted plants occupy the streets.

# MACHI AUKI

august 29th

Machi Aruki means “city walk”, an expression often used when you stroll around the city with the purpose of sightseeing and reflecting on the things you see, thus an obvious way for me to start the day.

First stop was Tokyo’s newest attraction, the Tokyo Sky Tree, located in Sumida-ku, east of Asakusa. It is a 634 meter tall television tower, erected in a quiet, low-rise district. I guess the area will undergo massive development because of the completion of the new super attraction. Some changes were already visible, under and around the tower there was a huge shopping and souvenir center, accompanied by well planned green walkways along the channel, and an escalator (and stairs) leading up to the 5th floor to the Sky Tree entrance. Most people chose the exterior escalator, transporting them like on a conveyor belt.

It was still quite early in the morning, so the queue for the tower was at a minimal, barely 20 minutes to wait. I was gently guided to one of the elevators, that lifted me smoothly with maximum speed of 60

km/h. It was one of the most comfortable elevators I have ever experienced.

When doors opened and the view was revealed, the crowd I was accompanying expressed a clear “sugoi”, meaning awesome in Japanese. They love to be surprised. The view was extraordinary, giving a 360 degrees panorama over the vast city. You can even spot Mt. Fuji in the distance if the weather permits.

I learned that the height of the tower, 634 meters is historically related to Tokyo. When the numbers are written as MU SA SHI, they pronounce Musashi, the former name of Tokyo before the Edo-period.

The rest of the day I spent in Ueno and Asakusa, checking out the main temples and tourist attractions. In the evening I joined a group of foreign tourists who spoke enthusiastically about their first impressions. I feel more calm and less excited than them, but it is important be aware of the excitement foreigners have for Japan.



- L. Tokyo Sky Tree seen from the streets.
- TR. Sumida River seen from under the highway.
- BR. Exterior stairs that blend into the building facade.











# OKUYAMA LAB

august 30th

Today I first went to Roppongi, an important hub on the inner side of the Yamanote line. Here you find wide streets and highrise buildings such as the Tokyo Midtown and Roppongi Hills. I found a green building (pictured) that allowed me to hike eight floors and gave me a nice view accompanied with plants growing on the fence. The joy ended when I came to a locked gate at the top level.

Something that comes to mind when I walk through the streets, is that you can hardly sit down anywhere without having to buy a coffee in order to get a seat and free wi-fi. Everywhere there are billboards, lights, commercials and information. To foreigners who don't understand Japanese, it is hardly more than visual impressions which don't give much information. It can be very confusing to your way around sometimes.

After some time in Roppongi I went to Tokyo Institute of Technology to meet my former professor Okuyama Shinichi and the students in his laboratory. There where many familiar faces, but also new members that where eager to greet

me. Professor Okuyama invited me to his office next to the of the laboratory where we had a chat. I had prepared some questions and topics that I wanted to discuss. I first showed him the map of Yoyogi Park that I had drawn, and he immediatly points at the Yoyogi Gymnasium, by Kenzo Tange, and tells that it was designed to placed in a direct line, peripendicular facing the meiji jingu shrine, Tokyo's most important Shinto shrine. It is an invisible line he says, but very important symbol. He explains that Yoyogi is a western style park, and its kind is not a typical place to Tokyoites, even though many young people use it today. Public space in Japan is first of all the narrow street, not the open space such as a plaza or a park. For instance there is basically no public green area, but instead private greenery ensures a healthy environment.

He then explains about the "Hokusho Tengaku"; Pedestrian Heaven, a street that is closed of from cars every sunday, in crowded places like Ginza or Shinjuku. In this way, pedestrians occupy the streets once again. "You should consider the impact of the individual beeing when you design."





L. A easy accessible and hike-able building  
in Akasaka. Restaurants in 1st-3rd floor.  
TR. Okuyama Laboratory members  
BR. Sashimi arrangement









# SCRAP MATERIALS

august 31th

After an advise from Taka-san in Okyuama lab I went to north-east Ikebukuro to check out some interesting urban villages. He claimed that the area was very confusing in terms of activities. There is a lot of highly developed entertainment zones and highrise buildings mixed with residential low rise wood buildings. It also has a large population of chinese and koreans, making it a cultural melting pot in a rather homogeneous city.

The outskirt of Ikebukuro is fairly unknown for tourists and I get intrigued by all the exterior stairs that can be climbed. After a quick count I estimate that about 50 % of the stairs are accessible. Although it is very fascinating to climb some stairs and get a nice view, I feel like trespassing private property. There are not many who use the stairs, which I feel is a bit strange. The stairs that are mostly used are the ones on the metro stations.

One thing I saw in Ikebukuro that made me think was a huge pile of wood from a demolished house. Tokyo is probably the city in the world with the highest buildin/demolishing rate per year, which means tons of potential recycable material. I

wonder where all the scrap material goes? Can it be recycled or reused? Because the lifespan of wooden buildings are about 20 years, I guess the wood will be in a relative good condition like the pile I found today. Maybe I can be something I can use in my project? I will later check out an office called 403architecture in Hamamatsu that deals with exactly these issues of resuseable material.

Later that evening I met Osawa Koichi, my former Japanese teacher. He invited me to a fine tempura restaurant where we had a good conversation about Japanese culture. Osawa has studied art of tea ceremony and ikebana (flower arrangement), important disiplnces in Japanese tradition where arrangement, aesthetics, colour, taste and performance are very important. He is very concerned about the harmony of contrasts. For instance the harmony of colors on a plate of tuna sashimi, and the way the bitter.

Although it might not be related to architecture, I believe the Japanese culture has a certain awareness to its surroundings and things, that we lack in the western world. The fragility of harmony.





- L. Stacks of material outside a wood workshop.
- TR. Piles of beams and pillars from a demolished building in Ikebukuro.
- BR. Folded straw mats used as curtains.

# TOKYO AQUA BAY LINE

september 1st

I have escaped Tokyo's urban jungle to get a distant view from Chiba prefecture and the Boso Peninsula and to see Tokyo from afar. The density is much lower here, mostly two/three story residential houses with larger gardens. Inbetween the houses there are pockets of farming lots, growing corn and vegetables. The coastline is covered by industry and gas production, and marshland.

In Sodegaura I could climb a small hill where I could see the Tokyo Skyline far across the bay. Here one could see the Sky Tree.

After the conversation with Okuyama sensei, I keep thinking about the relationship between public and private. How can I maintain the subtle balance between the two? When I walk in the residential neighbourhoods I feel that I trespass the private border sometimes, although no one reacts actively.

When I arrived in Shinagawa, one of Tokyo's business districts, I stumbled upon an interesting object: A bike-elevator. It was frequently used by the salarymen, who just placed their bike on the track, swiped their card, and then the machine transported the bike down into the ground.







L. Tokyo Bay Aqua line bridge.  
 TR. Tokyo seen from across the bay.  
 BR. Bicycle elevators in Shinagawa.

# HIKE-ABLE HOUSING

september 2nd

People say that Tokyo is a three dimensional city. What does that mean? Okay, there is a lot of tall buildings, walkways over and under ground level, exterior stairs and funny multi-level solutions because of lack of space. Do people think about this every day when they go to work? Do people think of it as a hike-able city? As I see it, the infrastructure hubs (metro/train) are where people use vertical movement the most and not in exterior stairs in condominiums. But some chose to live in dwellings that has hike-able features, in terms they deal with verticality.

One example that I visited today is House NA, designed by Sou Fujimoto. The client wanted to live as a nomade in the city, therefore the house is separated into multiple smaller floors or steps that pulverises the definition of spaces like living room and kitchen. You constantly have to hike between the floors, almost like living in a tree.

Another hike-able dwelling example is Tokyo Apartments, also by Sou Fujimoto. Here he illustrates the idea of living on top of each other; individual buildings stacked together, where you have to climb the others roof to get to your home.







L. House NA.  
TR. Temple garden.  
BR. Elevated shrine over a path.

# ROOFTOP HIKING

september 3rd

If you ask an experienced hiker about what he/she enjoys about hiking, the answer will probably include; nice view, beautiful natural scenery, exercise, social bonding, thrill and excitement and so on. There are many reasons for hiking in nature, and some hikers are more extreme than others.

Today I met Kenji Takahashi, an architecture student at Geidai University who is writing his thesis on a similar topic as myself. He researches how one can take advantage of a neighbourhood's local attributes and expose them on different levels. I challenged him to join me for a rooftop exploration in the historical Yanaka district, and together we climbed stairs and ladders that we could access. We found many hidden places with interesting spacial qualities and views. Some places we managed to jump to the next roof and climb down a different stair, and some roofs only needed a small ramp to be accessed. I personally find it really thrilling to be able to move in the city like this, to be able to use your senses and abilities in a bit more advanced manner than just walk on a flat concrete floor.

On top of the water tank on one of the rooftops we found inscriptions from a couple, and some remnants of anime toys scattered around. I guess it is a secret playground or meeting spot for someone in the neighbourhood. It had a really nice view to the nearby graveyard where the Tokugawa family is buried. Kenji thinks there should be a forest tower in the graveyard. There gradient from forest to city is very nice from this view, because they have about the same height.

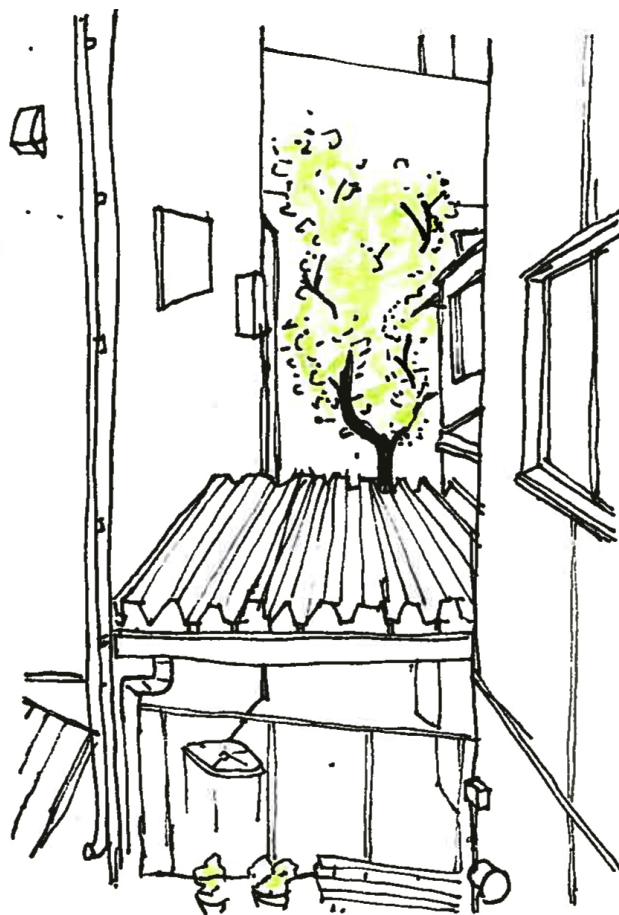
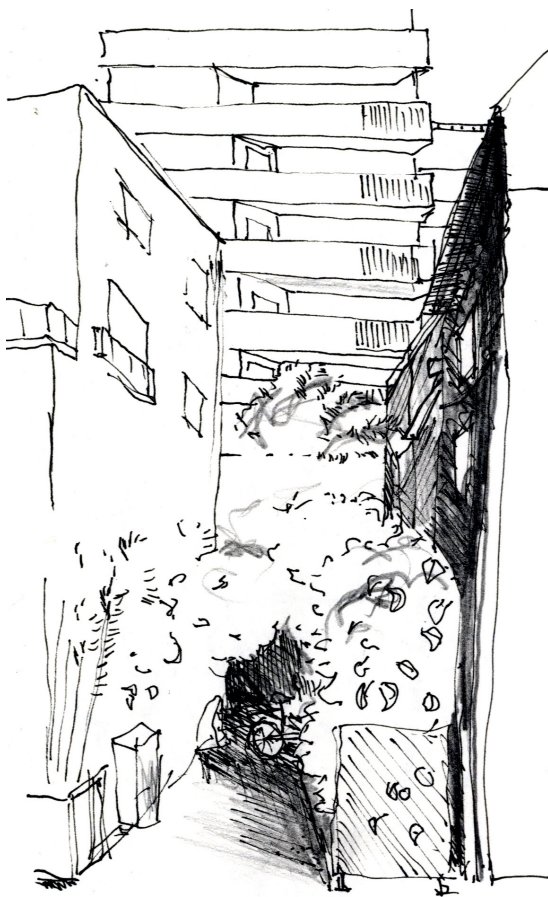
Kenji does not like very tall buildings because they stop the view, but he is not afraid of heights. Tall buildings should be permeable he claims. Highrise also reduce the walk-ability experience of the ground. You might say that the ground is devalued for the price of high land utilization. I asked him what he thinks a japanese would do if he has the chance to climb a stair that might give him a benefit: "If we can climb it, we will climb it". He thinks people would seek the roof if there is some kind of activity there. He mentions that in anime, the roof of elementary schools often plays an important role in the plot, as this is where the key characters will meet.



- L. Hiking to the top of a building in the Yanaka district.
- TR. There we spotted and overgrown roofgarden.
- BR. Abandoned wooden building. It had a note telling the owner to call the government.









# EXPLORING BIKE-ABILITY

september 4th

Today I rented a “mamachari” bike, a cultural icon said to be the Japanese equivalent of the family station wagon. Everyone seems to be using this kind of bike everywhere, and I even saw mothers carrying three children on the bike.

To ride a bike in Tokyo is a fascinating way to experience the patterns of the city, to feel topographical changes and see diverse urbanities gradually changing. Every movement leads you through new, exciting sequences of different cityscapes and environments.

Tokyo is not a bike-city like Copenhagen with its numerous roads for bikes and so on. You mostly have to use the same road as the cars, or in the pedestrian lanes (which mostly are crowded). But there are for instance bike elevators for multiple level parking over or under ground and special conveyor belts in steep stairs that eases the use of bikes.

I am amazed how easy it is to cross central Tokyo relatively quickly. There are maps everywhere, and just followed stations and landmark buildings. It is easy when you can memorize the metro map, if not you can seek help at the local koban (policebox).





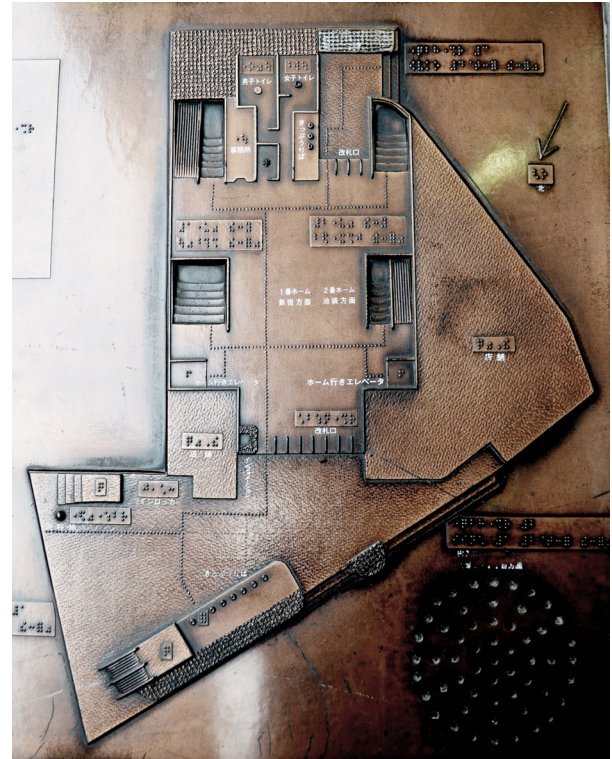
- L. Quiet, small street where it is easy to get around by bike.
- TR. Mamachari bike with a basket.
- BR. Biketrails along the green channels.



# HISTORICAL WALKS

september 5th

During one of my bicycle trips i stumbled upon a map showing a suggested historical and cultural walk, that could take me to various sights in the area. Apparently there are ten of these routes all over Tokyo, a total of over 200 km of pathways. I decided to follow the Otowakonane walk, the one I found, but it lead to some challenges. First of all the map was mostly in Japanese, so I could not understand any of the sights. Second, it was very difficult to find the way. Nothing really told me that I was following a historical path. I tried to research it on the web, and I found (with help from Okuyama lab members) a complete map of the routes. It seems to be a city organization that initiated maps to be distributed along the paths to encourage people to walk more and enjoy their environments. It would be interesting to do a project inspired by the Norwegian Tourist Road Projects in a urban setting. Would it be the same? I learned that you can get much information from the name of the place when you translate it. For instance Fujimibashi means the places where you could see Mt. Fuji. For instance Fujimigaoka; Fuji-viewing-hill.



A relief map that indicates stairs and edges.



- L. Historical path with no trace of history.
- TR. Map of a historical and cultural walk in Asakusa.
- BR. Historical path with no trace of history.











# YOYOGI INTERVIEWS

september 6th

First I went to Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art to check out the architecture exhibition, where I got a lot of input from up-and-coming architects. It seems that Japan really cares about their future generation of architects, who seem to be more aware and adaptable to future scenarios.

Then I went to Yoyogi Park to interview people about their park behaviours. I had invited my friend Mai Matsuoka to help me translate the interviews. We started to walk around noon, and many people were having lunch in the park, both salarymen and families. Yoyogi park is in fact a western style park, made public in 1967, in terms of the freedom and vastness presented to you. One can walk freely on the paths or the grass, doing whatever one wishes. Many people use the park to perform hobbies, meet friends or exercise; activities that their small dwellings prevent them to do. Some travels from the suburbs just to hang out with friends that lives on the opposite side of the city.

It is an important place, especially for the young population who tries to adapt the western ideals of leisure and fun.





- L. Historical path with no trace of history.
- TR. Map of a historical and cultural walk in Asakusa.
- BR. Historical path with no trace of history.



# STREETS OF ASAKUSA

september 7th

What if I choose Asakusa as my main focus site? For instance could the historical and cultural walk be an interesting starting point for an increased experience of a larger area. Anyway I decided to follow the Asakusa historical walk from Ueno, through Nakamise street and Sensoji temple over to the Sakurabashi bridge, 3,5 km long. It was a bit difficult to find the way, even though the maps where quite good.

Asakusa is a traditional neighbourhood known for its many temples (teramachi), entertainment and shopping streets. Sensoji Temple attracts hordes of tourists, and the narrow shopping streets are always crowded during the day. On the other hand it is a very flat area, in terms of infrastructure and topography. Maybe an elevated infrastructure could ease and improve the experience of the area? From the river you get a good view of the Sky Tree. The bridges have become “Skytreemibashi”. People love to take photo of it. It has almost the same effect as the “Fujimibashi’s” (Mt. Fuji viewing spots.) This quality is enhanced in Asakusa Cultural Center where you spot them both.



Asakusa Cultural Center by Kengo Kuma



L. Narrow sidestreet with a public toilet.  
 TR. A chef in the kitchen of his restaurant.  
 BR. Historical temples in Asakusa.





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金龍



# 403ARCHITECTURE

september 8th

Today I went to Hamamatsu city to meet the guys behind the young office called 403architecture. I have been very curious to meet these guys, to learn more about their methods since their architecture represents a new direction that has abandoned the long desired white cube in favour for a more sustainable approach in terms of material use. They do community projects where they locate and reuse scrap material and process them in 1:1 together with the clients for a most optimal result. The traditional, vertical hierarchy between architect and client is changing to a more horizontal layout where both parts have an equal benefit of a cooperation.

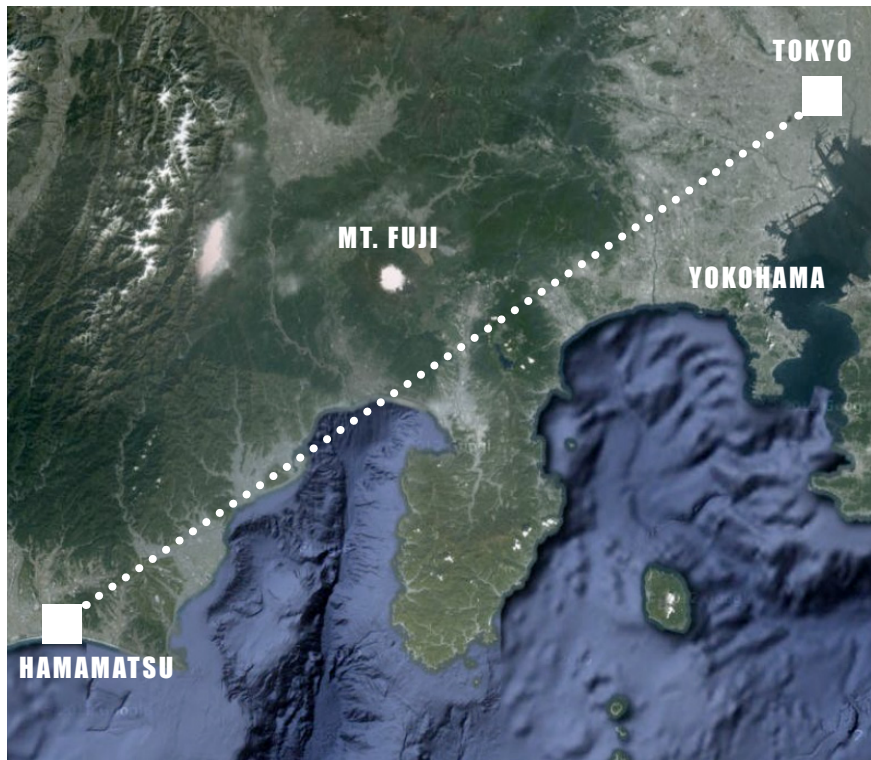
Takuma-san explains their philosophy where the flux of things is the most important keypoint in their architecture. The opposite is static, something that does not change. He says that concrete is a very static material, while wood has more flux. "You also have to be in flux yourself. By changing my environment I change my mode of thinking. We explore the possibilities of materials not in the sense of the future functional potential of attributes

like strength, insulation, and soundproofing but in the sense of it being present in the material at this moment".

On the evening Takuma invited me to a rooftop barbecue, organized by his friends. They set up a temporary fabric roof, covering the food area, and put up chairs, tables, a pool and lights. It was good space, and interesting for me to see how they use the rooftop. "We don't have any formal permission to use the roof, but as long as you follow the social norms and clean up your mess, no one will react to it", Takuma says.



"Wall of Zudaji"



- L. Distance from Tokyo: 2 hours by the bullet train.
- TR. Homemade office and apartment interior.
- BR. "Floor of Atsumi", 3000 pieces of recycled wood.





Rooftop barbeque in Hamamatsu







# OMOTESANDO DORI

september 9th

Omotesando street is one of the few western type boulevards with tree rows along the sides. Here you find flagship stores of all the main luxury brands and expensive cafes. It creates an international atmosphere, which is not typical Tokyo. People are dressed in fine clothes and pretends to know how to behave in western streets. Takuma told me that Japanese planners has attempted many times to implement western urban ideals such as the plaza and the cafe, but people don't know how to use it. Even though they have the crowd potential, plazas are usually empty. But there is no plazas in Omotesando street, but also no public furniture such as benches and trashcans. Takuma claims that it is because of complicated buerocratic processes in the planning regulation concerning the definition of a street. Efficient movement and flow has traditionally had an more important role in the forming of streets; flux instead of static.

In Omotesando street you find individual buildings that tries to implement attractive spaces on the exterior in forms of stairs and ramps, for instance the GYRE building by MVRDV. I think it is mostly

out of commercial purposes, because they often leads to shops or restaurants. Perhaps people with less spending power will be more reluctant of hiking to these places?

After a stroll in the big shopping streets I went back to Yoyogi Park for the third time, discovering the lively atmosphere on a Sunday afternoon. The park was really crowded today. People come to play music, rest, have a picnic and many other kinds of activities. The cool thing is that everyone walks wherever they want. It is not like a Japanese garden where you have to follow the designated route. Everybody can find their own space. I am really fascinated about the park, and one can spend hours just watching people and rest. It is interesting how it is contrary to Tokyo itself. In a Norwegian city you always see the mountains in the backround, but here you can see buildings like mountains in the backround of the park,. It contiuesly reminds you that you are in a big void in the city.

It is also a park that will transform into a huge evacuation area with designated water supply in small bunkers around the park.



- L. The hike-able GYRE building by MVRDV.
- TR. Rooftop shopping center in Omotesando main street.
- BR. Takeshita Street in Harajuku is always crowded.









YANAKA DISTRICT



YOYOGI PARK



# OKUYAMA FEEDBACK

september 10th

I went back to Okuyama Laboratory to discuss some of the things I had discovered, for instance the ideas of revitalizing the historical and cultural walks with a new program. They were a bit critical, because the new function of such a walk should be clearer. Who am I designing for? Visitors and tourists or the people living in the community? Or both?

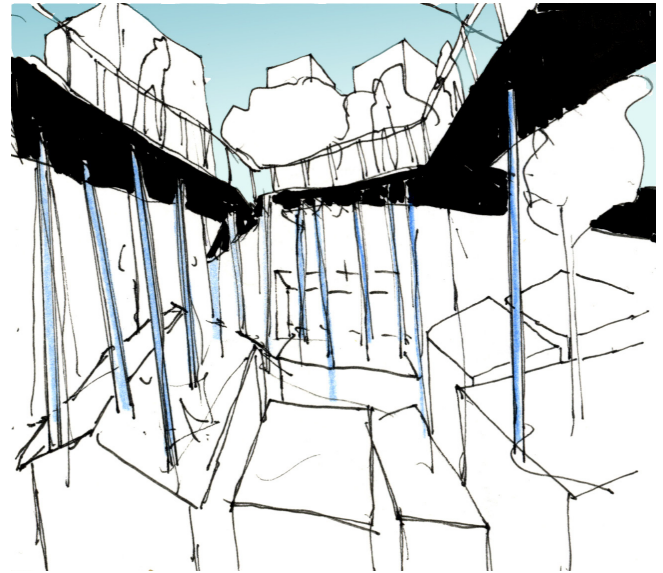
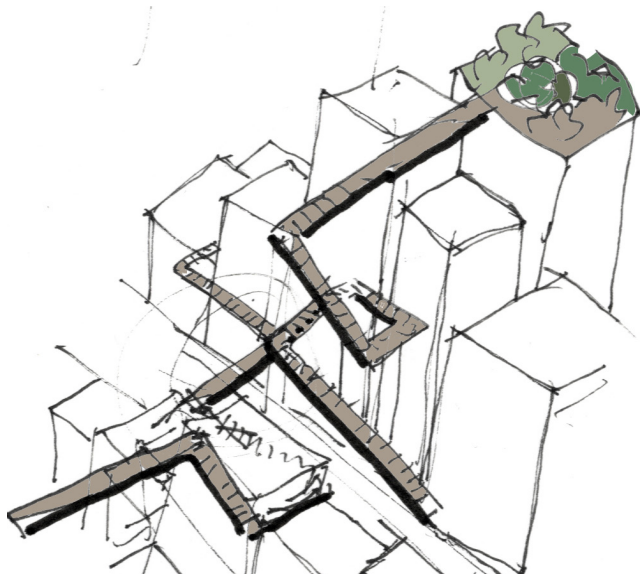
The idea of using Asakusa as a site is a good idea they think, although Kengo Kuma has already done a project in this category with the Asakusa Cultural Center. "Maybe you can combine the built resources and activities that are already there in a new way?"

They explain that Asakusa is presently very two-dimensional, but has a tradition of highrise, being the site of Tokyo's first skyscraper with an electric elevator. It was destroyed in the Great Kanto Earthquake because it was made of bricks. Now it is a popular viewing spot for Tokyo Sky Tree.

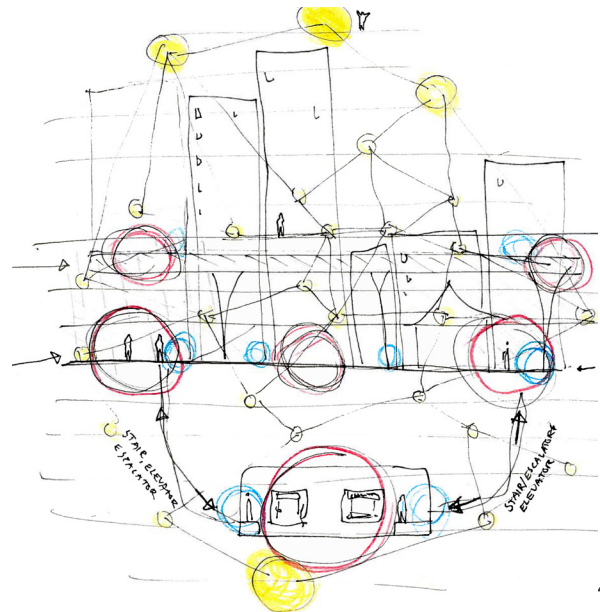
I personally find Asakusa very interesting, but is it a representative area for Tokyo? Can concepts developed here have a value for other

neighbourhoods? This is what I wish to achieve. It is important to take care of the special relationship between private and public, and also consider small spaces and voids for possible intervention instead of large scale projects. It has given me many things to think about.

After the laboratory meeting I went out with Ryoichi Inamochi and Shikasho Takashi, both phd. students from Tokyo Tech. Ryoichi is now working in a studio in Kanagawa University, under a former classmate of Prof. Okuyama. He has been involved in some of the 3/11 restoration projects, where the reality is a totally different one than in the regular studio. I am impressed by Japanese architects who constantly are aware of the fact that the scenery, either natural or built, outside their window can disappear the next day. Nothing is presumed to stay forever. A disaster can happen anytime, but still they maintain focus on the present and the daily life.



FOREST TOWER  
↓





# LAST DAY

september 11th

Sitting on a bench next to Sumida I watch the joggers that exercise along the riverbed and try to reflect on my experiences the last weeks. Soon I will be leaving Tokyo again, and I think distance is what I need to reflect and think creative on my project. Tokyo is a difficult and complex puzzle that is always changing. I actually expected it to have changed more since my last stay, but the urban patterns and behaviours are more or less the same. Fundamental value changes takes longer time than the cosmetic look. But I did find some small hints suggesting a more sustainable lifestyle, for instance posters telling you to save electricity, vending machines with solar panels and stairs counting the loss of calories per step. Then there was the dim light in the train stations, where half of the elevators were shut down to save energy. I didn't see any of the anti nuclear power demonstrations, but I got a sense of a stronger community spirit.

The relationship between private and public has been constantly on my mind. I feel that it is easy to cross private boundaries, since they basically are being pushed onto the street. I think it can be a

quality that makes Tokyo a lively and comfortable city. For instance the amount of private greenery in form of potted plants that intrudes the streets and roofs. People care about their environments, even the smallest space or gap can be turned into a quality.

To understand a city you can read, analyze maps or talk to people, but most important is to achieve a lived experience. For me as a foreign visitor it is not only to translate the language, but also interpretate a foreign urbanity. Some places gives me association to spaces in Trondheim or my hometown, because it is where I have most of my lived experience, but still there are many places that are unknown to me. Yesterday I discovered a restaurant just next to the hostel, because I just stopped by coincidence to read the sign. And also new landscapes and sceneries appears everyday. The city is in flux.

I have in fact discovered that there are far more nuances among Japanese contemporary architects, from various generations. This diversity is healthy.



- L. A stair in a shopping center that tells you the amount of kcal lost per step.
- TR. The metro encourage you to save electricity.
- BR. Elevator that has been stopped to save electricity.



